Title: 'Rivers of Ink': Searching for Authentic Representations of the Holocaust – Words, Pictures and the Stories they Tell

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'Rivers of Ink': Searching for Authentic Representations of the Holocaust. Terry Devlin

The Holocaust haunts the European mind, and its reverberations continue to this day. However, for those of us who were not there, all our knowledge, understanding and experience of this event is expressed in representations of one form or another. We need to understand how these representations operate and how they impact on our sense of the event.

The Holocaust is confused with other, similar programmes run by the Nazis. It is frequently seen as a new kind of evil, or a special case in the terrible history of human violence. However, we must be wary of how we designate it. The evil at the heart of the Holocaust is profoundly human. Any other categorisation risks making it seem non-human and therefore beyond the world ethical evaluation.

Representations are texts like any other, and so operate in contexts. Using Derrida, Zelizer and Benjamin, forms of representation are explored. We seek an authentic representation of the lived experience of the Holocaust. There is a discussion of authenticity and how it can operate differently for different cohorts of people. There is also a discussion of the critical demands that seek to limit how we discuss or what we say about the Holocaust.

The thesis considers the nature of factual, fictional and photographic representations. Each is subject of a critical appraisal that discusses their modes of operation, and how these impact on the representations they offer. Examples are explored to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches, which includes a discussing of gendered suffering and the dangers of falsifying what happened.

No one form of representation is sufficient to represent the breadth and scale of the Holocaust. The only way to measure the authenticity of a work is against a context of other works and other formats dealing with the same issue.

Declaration of Originality

Declaration: I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and does not contain the work of any other individual. All sources that have been consulted have been identified and acknowledged in the appropriate way.

Signature of Candidate:

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Terry Devlin

Date:

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Acknowledgements

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Dedication

For Ben and Kate, and especially Harri

For my parents and my sisters, without whom… etc.

Rett Syndrome is a genetic mutation that leaves its victims, almost all female, multiply and profoundly disabled. Even though it is a rare condition, simple arithmetic suggests that some 300 girls and women with this condition died at the hands of the Nazis. I do not know their names, but I remember them.

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"If all the trees in the world became pens and all the oceans turned into rivers of ink, one could not write down and fully document what happened in the Holocaust."

Ya'akov Silberberg

Survivor of the Birkenau *Sonderkommando*

Introduction

At the time of writing, it is the seventy-eighth anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex, when elements of the Soviet army arrived at the camp complex in South West Poland and found some seven thousand emaciated prisoners abandoned as the Germans fled west. Auschwitz-Birkenau was not the first concentration camp they liberated, or even the first death camp, but it does mark the point where Auschwitz begins to haunt the European mind, something that continues to this day. The 20th century was the bloodiest in human history, but, even in a century marked by world wars, atomic weapons and famine engineered for political purposes, the Nazi assault on the Jews of Europe is, for many, the nadir of human activity. The nature, scale, aggression and cruelty of the programme has given pause to anyone who would describe or understand it.

The Nazi assault on the Jews was not the first attempt at genocide, it was not even the first German attempt at genocide, a dubious honour that belongs to the Herero people of what is now Namibia, who German colonisers attempted to wipe out in 1904. There have been similar efforts by others both before and since, for instance the Armenian or Rwandan genocides. In each case, one group of people attempted to annihilate another group in its entirety. However, the Nazi programme seems different, even among other mass murder events. William Reich notes that what makes it special is not the cohort of victims:

> A Jew who was killed in a gas chamber as part of an extermination program to kill all Jews was no more dead than was a non-Jew who was killed by a bullet because he or she was a political opponent of the Germans; and the death of the Jew was no more tragic than the death of the non-Jew. (Reich 2005)

In other words, this genocide would have been terrible no matter who the victims were.

The difference was that the first death was part of a ferocious, total, systematic and industrialized program of genocide, the most ferocious that has ever occurred, and the latter death was part of the savage brutality of Nazi Germany. It was the totality and intent of the first process that made it unique, and that the world must understand, in order to understand the nature and possibilities of murderous racism and genocide. The second process, alas, the world has seen all too much of; the Germans, during the Second World War, brought that process to a high pitch, but it wasn't a unique one. The difference isn't in the death; it's in the context and intent of that death. (Reich, 2005)

The Nazi project was on an enormous scale, coupled with a modern technological and administrative infrastructure, and was conducted with relentlessness, right up to the final days of a war that was clearly lost. In Saul Friedlander's judgment, it is:

an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits' ... the most radical form of genocide encountered in history: the willful, systematic, industrially organised, largely successful attempt to totally exterminate an entire human group. (Friedländer, 1992, pp.2-3).

In other words, the very extremity of scale, of cruelty, of relentlessness, both its apparent rationality and simultaneous irrationality, pushes this mass murder programme into a category at the very limits of our experience and understanding.

How then should we interpret this extremity? For Reich, this event is:

unique in that a society that saw itself, and was universally seen, as the crucible of some of the greatest achievements in human culture focused its powers of organization and modernity on the systematic task of exterminating an entire people. (Reich, 2005)

This turns the focus onto the perpetrators of the Holocaust. Somehow, the Germans of the mid-century are different from the Turks who murdered the Armenians, or the Hutu who killed the Tutsis. We expect more from a culture that is a cradle of the Enlightenment, a philosophical and cultural movement identified with, in Anthony Pagden's words:

an exalted view of human rationality and of human benevolence, and with a belief,

measured and at times sceptical, in progress and in the general human capacity for self-improvement. It has been broadly understood to stand for the claim that all individuals have the right to shape their own ends for themselves rather than let others do it for them, and--which comes to much the same thing--to live their lives as best they can without help or hindrance from divine decrees. It has been seen as the source of most modern liberal, tolerant, undogmatic, and secular understandings of politics, and as the intellectual origins of all modern forms of universalism, from a recognition of the essential unity of the human race and the evils of slavery and racism, right through to the humanistic sentiments behind 'Medecins sans frontieres.' *[sic]* (Pagden, 2013, p. viii)

Pagden's description seems to be remote from the world of Nazi Germany. Does this undermine the value system of the Enlightenment? Surely we must doubt such an exalted view of rationality and benevolence? For George Steiner this is the case. 'We come after' he writes in his 1963 essay, 'Humane Literacy', 'and that is the nerve of our condition' (Steiner, 1969, p. 22). That which we 'come after' is 'the unprecedented ruin of humane values and hopes by the political bestiality of our age' (Steiner, 1969, p. 22). We are cursed with the knowledge 'that a man can read Goethe and Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning' (Steiner, 1969, p. 15), and this knowledge 'presses on the brain with a new darkness' (Steiner, 1969, p. 22).

This new darkness is a force that undermines 'the hope, grown almost axiomatic from the time of Plato to that of Matthew Arnold, that culture is a humanizing force, that the energies of the spirit are transferable to those of conduct' (Steiner, 1969, p. 15). George M. Kren concurs that it has:

destroyed the Enlightenment view of fundamental human goodness and potential perfectability. Even though few recognize it as such, the Holocaust was a transformational event that has radically altered the world. The demonstration that what was hitherto regarded as unthinkable could happen has eroded trust. The old image of human nature has been basically altered, though most continue as if nothing had happened. (Kren, 1988, p. 40)

Hannah Arendt recognises an energy that usurps the dignity of our culture:

> We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape from the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain. (Arendt, 1973, p. ix)

For Joseph Bronowski it demonstrates 'arrogance ... dogma, ignorance' (Bronowski, 2011, p. 337) while for Hugh Trevor-Roper, it exposes:

> the fragility of civilisation, and the ease and speed with which, in certain circumstances, barbarism can break through that thin crust and even, if backed by power and sanctified by doctrine, be accepted as the norm. (Trevor-Roper, 1991, p. x)

For Emil Fackenheim, it sets a deadly precedent because 'minimally, what became real at Auschwitz was always possible, but it is now known to be so. Maximally, Auschwitz has made possible what was previously impossible; for it is a precedent' (Fackenheim, 1985, p. 510). In addition, Steiner notes:

> We are post-Auschwitz homo sapiens because the evidence, the photographs of the sea of bones and gold fillings, of children's shoes and hands leaving a claw mark on oven walls, have altered our sense of possible enactments ... the skin of our hopes has grown thinner. (Steiner, 1969, p. 194)

From this, it is clear that what happened at Auschwitz and in thousands of other locations across Europe that fell under the sway of the Nazis was something that shakes our view of ourselves as civilised human beings. Unfortunately, almost every conflict features massacres. From Sabra and Shatila to Srebrenica, from Nanking to Hama, some human beings have a marked tendency to kill people whom they dislike and all of their families too. However, those of us in the enlightened Western world are supposed to be beyond such things. Even allowing for the occasional failing, a My Lai for instance, the notion that a developed nation state would embark on such a programme of

murder seems unthinkable. However, history shows that not only was it thought, it was made actual in the real world with very real-world consequences.

This attempt to annihilate all the Jews of Europe has many names. Omer Bartov, in *Murder In Our Midst, The Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation* (1996), describes some of the problems when naming this Nazi programme of murder. He notes that the term 'holocaust' is the most commonly used descriptive word in the English-speaking world, and refers to it as 'highly evocative' (Bartov, 1996, p. 57). It has not always been the chosen word. Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1984), for example, does not use the term. The episode of the Thames Television series *The World at War* (1973) dealing with the programme of annihilation was named 'Genocide'. The term 'holocaust' begins to achieve usage around the time the NBC television series of the same name (1978) and grows with Martin Gilbert's *The Holocaust - The Jewish Tragedy*, first published in 1986. Unfortunately, it is also terribly trivialised. Nowadays, any bad thing is a 'holocaust':

> For example there are websites for the Waco Holocaust, the Abortion Holocaust, the Kashmir Holocaust, the Bangladeshi Holocaust, the Hindu Holocaust, the Taiwanese Holocaust, the Assyrian Holocaust, the Greek Holocaust and the Kirishtan Holocaust of Japanese Christians. We have already seen references to the Whale Holocaust and other environmental disasters. And the term is now being used in truly absurd cases – for example, the Herbal Holocaust, a website condemning the Food and Drug Act of Canada by an organization seeking to protect the use of the marijuana plant ... and the Chicken Holocaust, cited by those who protest the ways in which chickens are being processed by the poultry industry. (Reich, 2005)

Undoubtedly overused, however it would be a mistake to see this as an uncontested term. Bartov notes that it has a connotation of sacrifice 'without specifying who sacrificed whom for what' (Bartov, 1996, p. 57). Film maker Claude Lanzmann, utterly rejects this notion of sacrifice: 'To reach God 1.5 million Jewish children have been offered? The name is important, and one doesn't say "Holocaust" in Europe. This was a catastrophe, a disaster, and in Hebrew that is shoah' (Rohter, 2010), and indeed

the word 'shoah', which can be rendered into English as 'catastrophe', is the Modern Hebrew term that is often used.

Other languages have different words. German's '*Judenvernichtung*' is literal, meaning 'destruction of the Jews', though it has a troubling historical context given that precisely the same term was used by the Nazis. '*Génocide*' in French reflects a cautious legalistic detachment, which might reflect some ambivalence about how the Occupation unfolded in France. For Bartov, these variations in name reflect something deeper:

> I would argue that the names given to the Event (itself a term employed by one scholar loath to use any other) are of some importance. A multiplicity of names for an event, an object, a phenomenon, may signify a confusion as to its essence, an unease with its presence, fear and anxiety at calling it what it really is. (Bartov, 1996, p. 57)

While noting the contested nature of the term, in this thesis the word 'Holocaust', capitalised, will be used. This decision is taken for pragmatic reasons only, as it is the most common term used to describe the attempt to murder the Jews of Europe. It is worth noting that Auschwitz has become a synecdoche for the Holocaust. For those who see the horror of the Holocaust in its modernity, Auschwitz is emblematic. In a perversion of mass production, many thousands of people were removed from their homes and property, and brought to a central location, often hundreds of miles away. They were selected according to economic criteria, with those whose work could provide value being preserved for a time, while the rest were murdered efficiently and their few remaining possessions and even body parts were recycled for other uses.[1] This quintessentially modern approach is:

> not the dark side of modernity, some aberration of a generally salutary process; rather, it was and is inherent to it, a perpetual potential of precisely the same energies and ideas, technologies and ideologies, that have brought about the 'great transformation' of humanity. (Bartov, 1996, p. 4)

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[1] It is tempting to trace elements of Fordism here. While the assembly line approach is reminiscent of the techniques of mass production, it is difficult to recognise the elements of mass consumption and Ford's notion that workers should be paid enough to allow them to purchase the goods created implicit in the concept.

However, while this might seem like a brutally rational system, and it does describe the process at Auschwitz-Birkenau to some degree, it is too limited an understanding of the Holocaust. Birkenau only came on stream in 1943. By then, fully three quarters of the people who died in the Holocaust were already dead (Snyder, 2010, p. 383), and most of these had been shot.

There is little particularly modern about mass shootings. The process was slow and deliberate, often carried out with appalling cruelty. People were marched to forests or ravines near their homes; they queued to be shot in their tens, hundreds, and sometimes thousands. Parents were shot in front of children; children in front of their parents. At times people were locked into barns that were set alight. There is little difference between these killings and the Hamidian Massacres in Anatolia fifty years earlier, or the Hutu ravages in Rwanda fifty years later. There is nothing inherently modern about these events. They are atavistic in the extreme. Patrick Desbois, a Catholic priest who has been identifying massacre sites in the Ukraine for many years now, records how, often, the first indications of such events are bullet casings or cartridges:

> The Germans did not use more than one bullet to kill a Jew. Three hundred cartridges, 300 bullets, 300 people executed here .... That day in the restaurant we counted 600 cartridges ... that constituted proof of this Shoah by bullets. No gas chambers, no automation, no so-called 'mechanisation'. A man assassinating another man. (Desbois, 2009, pp.76-77)

The distinction is important. The combination of killing facility with concentration camp at Auschwitz was unique, and, terrible as it was, it does not come close to the totality of the murderous programme. As Timothy Snyder points out 'the most efficient shooting squads killed faster, the starvation sites killed faster, and Treblinka killed faster .... Auschwitz is the coda to the death fugue' (Snyder, 2010, p. 383). That deadly fugue played out in overlapping phases as the hydra-headed monster learned and evolved. It began with mass shootings, and then suffocation with carbon monoxide was tested in vans at Chelmno, and implemented in the so-called *Aktion Reinhard* camps, before poison was used at Auschwitz. Along the way, many were lost to casual cruelty, starvation and disease. As the war came to its conclusion, the final phase consisted of forced marches towards

the centre of Germany, ahead of the advancing Allied armies. Countless thousands were beaten, starved and shot in the process. Already on the verge of death after incarceration in the camps, many were barefoot, and none had winter clothing. There is nothing modern at all in these Death Marches. They are uncomplicated acts of brutality.

This, then, is the second reason that the Holocaust haunts our consciousness. It is not alone that an attempt was made by a modern, apparently civilised society to murder an entire cohort of people, but that it did so with a mixture of primitive savagery and modern technology, and all of it enabled by the administrative infrastructure of government. Any attempt to understand what went on must address the complexity in the modalities of murder. It must include the apparent anonymity of the factories of death, but also the intimacy and physicality of placing a rifle to the nape of a child's neck and pulling the trigger. It must reflect how the perpetrators learned and strove to be more efficient, not only in the layout and structures of the camps, but also in how gunmen learned that a bullet in the neck creates less splatter and so is tidier, for the killer, than a bullet to the head. It must be comprehensive enough to include both the casual and institutionalised cruelty of the process. It must combine an understanding of this simultaneously modern and atavistic programme. It needs to consider who committed the crimes, how they did it and it must also remember the millions of innocent victims.

All of the foregoing demonstrate the importance of exploring and understanding what happened in Europe during the years of the Nazi regime, and this is the focus of the first chapter of this thesis. It will seek to identify that cohort of killings that belong to the Holocaust and why they are different from other aggressive killing projects the Nazis embarked on. It will also explore some contemporary readings of the Holocaust that attempt to place the atrocity in an ethical context and examine what implications these readings might have for our understanding of the Enlightenment.

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Everything we know about the Nazi attempt to annihilate the Jews of Europe, we know through representations of one form or another. If, as Walter Reich asserts, this campaign represents the '*tremendum* of human experience' (Reich, 2005), then the importance of these representations cannot be overstated. It is vital to understand how the process of representation and transmission works. However, this is a complex process. In the Preface to his *The Holocaust,* historian Martin Gilbert recounts how he journeyed to Poland in 1959 and, with some difficulty, made his way to the remote village of Treblinka. From there, he hiked through the forest until he came to a clearing. This was the site of the infamous extermination camp, named for the nearby village. He noticed the earth was grey rather than brown. 'Driven by I know not what impulse, I ran my hand through the soil, again and again. The earth beneath my feet was coarse and sharp: filled with the fragments of human bone' (Gilbert, 1990, p. 17). However, when he next visited the site, in 1980, he found himself unable to repeat the gesture. 'In the years that had passed I had learned too much of what had happened there' (Gilbert, 1990, p. 18). The very soil had come to represent 'the torments inflicted on my fellow Jews' (Gilbert, 1990, p. 18).

These fragments of bone and ash are artefacts of mass murder, killing on a truly breath-taking scale. As representations, they belong in a special category. Their meaning is the inversion of the perpetrators' intentions. Created in the process of killing, insofar as they were designed at all, they were designed not to communicate. On the contrary, the aim of those who created these remnants was to remove meaning from the artefacts and, in so doing, to erase the memory of these crimes, and the knowledge that once these people lived, laughed and were loved, before they were murdered. Though mute, these artefacts betray the intentions of their authors. To the perceptive viewer their presence in the soil acknowledges an absence.

Some 250 kilometres southeast of Treblinka, lies the Ukrainian town of Bakhiv. In his *The Holocaust by Bullets,* Patrick Debois notes the grave of approximately ten thousand murdered Jewish people close to the railway line. He tells of finding a woman's gold ring. 'She must have thrown it away in desperation, so that the Germans wouldn't get hold of it. I picked it up' (Desbois, 2009, p.

198). This gesture of taking the ring into his hand, he asserts, unites him with her gesture of throwing it away, and in a museum, the ring will be 'the only trace of this unknown woman' (Desbois, 2009, p. 198). This ring, perhaps created for a wedding, representing love and commitment, is now transformed by events. It has acquired a meaning beyond itself and beyond its original author's intention. In the first example, the grounds at Treblinka, the meaning of the artefact is the inversion of what was intended. In the second, the woman's ring, the meaning is transformed. The soil of Eastern Europe is littered with such artefacts.

This thesis is focussed on a third category of representation, namely the deliberate and intentional representations of the Nazi attempt to murder all the Jews of Europe. Here the creator intends to represent what happened, and to communicate to those who were not there, something of the nature of the experience. These include testimony of survivors, of perpetrators, of bystanders, of rescuers and of liberators. Historians, novelists, poets, painters have all had their say. We have documentaries, high dramas and low-grade exploitation movies and even, betimes, comedies. Memorials have been created, and museums have been built to house artefacts and commemorate the terrible events. Like the gold ring in Desbois' hand, they all speak to us of more than themselves. They reach out to us with news of the terrible things that have happened. They each represent an act of commission, omission or an absence: they speak of failures and successes. They each carry a symbolic load greater than themselves. This is the focus of the second chapter, which explores what we mean by representation. This work is informed by readings of Jacques Derrida, Barbie Zelizer and Walter Benjamin. This includes a discussion of the nature of text and reading, and the instabilities built-in to that process. It explores the nature of authenticity, as what a reader seeks is an authentic representation of the experience of being there, as the events of the Holocaust unfolded. It also considers important questions about the ethical issues arising from the act of representation, in the particular case of the Holocaust, including Adorno's well-known assertion that poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.

The subsequent chapters will explore the possibilities and limitations of historical, fictional and photographic representations, and will seek to identify their potential for offering this authentic representation that we seek. This will include a discussion of the nature and sources of historical writing, and its relationship with oral testimony, diaries and memoirs from those who were there. It will consider the potential and limitations of archival sources of data, and this includes a discussion of gendered suffering during the Holocaust. The potential that fiction offers for falsifying the experience is discussed, but equally, the potential of fiction to offer a sense of the lived experience is also subject to examination. There is also discussion of some film works, including *The Grey Zone, Schindler's List, Train of Life* and *Son of Saul,* as well as an exploration of how, on occasion even austere non-fiction works, such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* uses quite artful cinematic techniques to amplify the narrative of the film. In considering how photographs offer a sense of being there, the discussion offers an investigation of the limitations of photography as testimony and evidence. The notion of a photograph as an incomplete utterance is discussed, as is the necessity of understanding the contexts of photography because of its polysemous nature. Even though photography seems to offer the possibility of firm evidence, the chapter explores how careful selection can be used to avoid telling the whole story. This is done through an examination of the photographic record of the Lodz ghetto that we have from various sources. There is also a discussion of how the design of information boards at the Birkenau memorial makes powerful use of photography to bring the memory of those who died to the forefront of the visitor experience.

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On the seventy-eighth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Guy Verhofstadt, former Belgian Prime Minister and a senior member of the European Parliament tweeted 'Today we remember the victims of the Holocaust. This tragedy was the worst example of what extreme nationalism can lead to. The European Union was created to ensure this will never happen again' (Verhofstadt, 2018).

Unsurprisingly, with Germany at the heart of it, the legacy of the Holocaust is carried into the European Union. As recently as 2004, Poland's President Kwasniewski recognised explicitly the suffering of Polish Jews during World War Two, acknowledging that some of this was at the hands of other Poles, and not just Germans.[2] President Iliescu of Romania, in 2005, admitted what his predecessors had continually denied, namely that the Romanian state also persecuted and murdered Jews. Both of these admissions came about as a requirement for integration with the European Union, causing historian Tony Judt to comment that 'Holocaust recognition is our contemporary European entry ticket' (Judt, 2005, p. 803). His point is clear. The new Europe has been built from the ashes of the old one and remains 'forever mortgaged to that past' (Judt, 2005, p. 831).

The terms of that mortgage reach not only into European legal systems, where concepts like genocide and crimes against humanity never existed before, but also, as Judt points out, into areas like 'moral standing' (Judt, 2005, p. 804). 'To deny or belittle the *Shoah* – the Holocaust – is to place yourself beyond the pale of civilized public discourse' (Judt, 2005, p. 804). He argues that part of the very definition of being a European today is to accept that the Shoah occurred, and that 'the recovered memory of Europe's dead Jews has become the very definition and guarantee of the continent's restored humanity' (Judt, 2005, p. 804). Implicit in Judt's concept of Europe's 'restored humanity' is the notion that, for a time at least, this humanity was lost. For Judt this represents a challenge to the architects of the new Europe.

Three factors make a critical appraisal of our representations of the Holocaust more important than ever before. First, the survivors are now elderly and already many have passed away. The point will soon arrive when none will be left, and their voices will be stilled. Allied to that is the development of a pervasive popular culture, which often offers inaccurate versions of events, and which serves for many people as a primary source of knowledge about the Holocaust. Finally, there is now, for the first time since World War Two, a significant rise in what are commonly called

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[2] It is worth noting that at time of writing (February, 2018), the current Polish government is attempting to roll back some of these admissions through legislation.

'populist' movements and political parties both in Europe and the United States. Under their banner of 'fake news' they exploit the imperfections of representation. Therefore, we need a critical awareness of the messages we are being sent and of their method of transmission. There is little of benefit in the Holocaust, and the news it brings us about the nature of humanity is not good, but if we are to learn from the errors made, then the least we need is a clear understanding of what happened. That understanding can only begin with an awareness of the possibilities and limitations of our representations.

Chapter One: Europe after Dark

People feel compelled to study the Holocaust. Some, for the best of reasons, need to understand how it came about, so that a recurrence might be prevented. Some are drawn to the pornography of numbers and the horror and cruelty that it contains. Some find redemption in the stories of survival against the toughest odds. For these reasons and more, people are compelled to look into this darkness. However, when they do, they see different things. While to some degree this is an inevitable consequence of the distance of history, it is not the only reason. The Holocaust is a concept with porous borders. People differ about who the victims of the Holocaust were, though almost everyone accepts that the Jews were the primary targets. It seems odd to say 'almost everyone', but the Soviet Union, as long as it lasted, ignored the Jewish identity of the bulk of the victims. It did not suit their narrative. Others seek to include every civilian that was killed during the war; for them, all the victims of the Nazis were part of the genocide. It is not unusual to hear of six million killed at Auschwitz, but only about one sixth of the victims who died were killed at Auschwitz, and most who died were dead before it even began its terrible work.

Some feel a need to interpret this process, to mine it for what it has offer those who come after. It would seem that something this big, this lethal, must carry a message of some kind. There is debate about the evil that is at play in the Holocaust. Is the horror so great that we need new concepts to understand it, as this event is so other, so different? Others see it as undermining the core values of Western culture. That the assault on the Jews is driven by the Germans, regarded as among the most advanced cultures in the world, seems to shake the foundations of rationality and the Enlightenment. For some it is an inevitable consequence of modern life.

However, in his book *Bloodlands*, Timothy Snyder is unequivocal: 'Europe's epoch of mass killing is overtheorized and misunderstood' (Snyder, 2010, p. 383). Snyder's focus is broader than this thesis, being concerned with not only the depredations of Hitler, but with those of Stalin too. Nevertheless, his point is equally applicable. There is significant confusion about what the Holocaust

was and because of that, some of the theoretical responses are of uncertain value. This, in turn, has significant consequences for representing the Holocaust. Therefore, this chapter will explore some of the confusions that arise, as well as some of the more common theoretical responses. This is neither a history nor a work of philosophy, but it will borrow from both fields of study as it requires. Regrettably the primary aim can only be to identify common issues, and not necessarily to resolve any of them. However, even identifying them has value, if only to expose the inherent complexity of the Holocaust.

The chapter will begin by considering the historical event that was the Holocaust (there will be explorations of the historiography in chapter three); it will explore who the victims were, and some common confusions that arise. It will offer a very brief summary of the three major phases of the killing. Then, it will move to explore some theories of evil, drafted in the shadow of these events, and some implications that such explorations might have for our ideas of modernity, and for our concepts of Enlightenment. Finally, it will consider some of the key factors that underlie the appalling atrocity that is the Holocaust.

It must never be forgotten that this is an atrocity. What happened is horrifying, and this horror is a vital part of the truth of the Holocaust. These are real events that were perpetrated by real people on other human beings. In *Preempting the Holocaust*, Lawrence Langer argues that those who write about the Holocaust can be categorised as either 'literalists' or 'exemplarists' (Langer, 1998, p. 9). Exemplarists he defines as those who approach the horror of the Holocaust 'paradigmatically, through exemplary rather than literal memory' (Langer, 1998, p. 9), and seek to '*universalize* the event … implicating all of humanity as potential participants' (Langer, 1998, p. 9) [*emphasis in original*], and to use this view to seek some kind of meaning from the atrocity. 'This impulse towards universalization … infiltrates vocabulary itself', he writes; 'nowhere is the poverty of words more evident that in the attempt to portray the deeds of the Germans and their collaborators through expressions like "deep revulsion" and "human cruelty"' (Langer, 1998, p. 20). When we meet phrases like these, Langer suggests that we juxtapose episodes of atrocity with these phrases and ask ourselves

what they 'can possibly mean, for the victims or ourselves, in its presence' (Langer, 1998, p. 20). Against this, those he calls the literalists 'feel no impulse, not the slightest, to reclaim meaning from Holocaust atrocity or to embrace a Lincolnesque rhetoric seeking to persuade us that "the horrible experience of the camps will have not been in vain"' (Langer, 1998, p. 10). Instead, Langer argues, that any attempt to understand what happened 'remains flawed unless it works *through* and not around the details of such moments as these, refusing to pre-empt them for the sake of a larger ideal' (Langer, 1998, p. 21). In other words, the Holocaust must be allowed to speak for itself, it is not a metaphor; it is not an echo-chamber for speaking to ourselves. Any understanding must be rooted in the text of these events, not in an extrapolation from them.

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Violence was the Nazi *modus operandi*; death was their stock-in-trade. They killed those who opposed them in Germany of the 1920s and 1930s. They killed their own who, like Ernst Röhm, outlived their usefulness, or, like Rommel, who they suspected of disloyalty. They killed soldiers who opposed them in the countries they invaded, and then they killed the civilians there as well. They killed men, women and children who were in the path of their armies, they bombed cities indiscriminately with attacks on Guernica, Warsaw, Rotterdam, London, Coventry and more, a whirlwind they reaped in the destruction of their own cities. Once they controlled a territory they killed prisoners of war, they killed resistance fighters, they killed people who they suspected of resistance and even people they feared might be sources of resistance. Then they killed more civilians, for minor infractions like theft, or sometimes for no discernible reason at all, like the massacre at Oradur-sur-Glane. They killed in reprisal, famously in the case of Lidice, but more routinely in thousands and thousands of round-ups and public executions. It went on to the very end. After Hitler killed himself, the Goebbels murdered their own children. With the Russians already in Berlin, Nazis were still shooting detainees in the city's prisons and hanging people from lampposts on its streets.

They killed the very young and the very old, they killed males and females; they killed people of all religions and none. They killed and killed and killed. They planned to kill even more. Had they defeated the Soviet Union and taken Moscow they would have embarked on a programme to clear all the local populations between Germany and the Urals. This was to be the *lebensraum*, the living space required for the Germans. The local people were to be either directly murdered or enslaved and allowed to die through labour, starvation and deprivation. The Nazi regime manufactured death on a breath-taking scale.

A civilian joined the cohort of Nazi victims in a variety of means. Some died as a result of deliberate action, for instance when they chose to resist. More died by bad luck, the cruelty of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, for instance when a bomb fell or a round-up was ordered. That said, if a person could escape the notice of the Nazis, with a little bit of luck along the way, survival chances were quite good, especially the further west one lived in Europe. However, there were three groups of people who became victims quite irrespective of their actions or fortune. They were killed only because of who they were: these were the disabled, the Gypsies and the Jews. These were the victims of three separate but interrelated killing programmes.

The Nazis began by first killing the disabled and the mentally ill. Called the T4 programme, after Tiergarten Straße 4, the address in Berlin from where it was administered, this programme continued throughout the war and even, astonishingly, beyond it. Lynn H. Nicholas reports that as late as May 29th, 1945, some three weeks after the German surrender, a profoundly disabled boy, Richard Jenne, aged four, was killed by a lethal injection administered by a nurse who had previously done the same to some 211 other children (Nicholas, 2006, p. 19; Ost, 2006). The only reason they died is because they had profound physical or learning disability, or sometimes both. The death toll is thought to be around some two hundred thousand utterly defenceless people who posed no threat whatever (Gallagher, 2004, p. 205). It should be noted that the people murdered in this programme were primarily German. The *Porajmos* (from the Romani word for 'devouring') refers to the attempt

to murder the Gypsies which claimed in the region of some two hundred thousand victims.[3] Again, these men, women and children posed no threat. They were not armed. They were killed because of their ethnicity.

Of all the murder programmes, the best known is the Holocaust, an attempt to murder some eleven million Jewish people. This programme of murder was less than successful, but still appallingly lethal. Between 5.5 and 6 million people died. In the case of the disabled, most were murdered by asphyxiation or lethal injection. The Jews and Gypsies were murdered by shooting, asphyxiation or poisoning, others were allowed to die through starvation and deprivation. All three groups were selected for death 'on the basis of their biology' (Friedländer, 1997, p. 124) alone. This is what distinguishes them from other victims of Nazi murder. There was nothing they could do to change their status as targets for annihilation. They were marked out for death simply because they had been born.

This does not in any way diminish the loss of any other victim of Nazi aggression. Everyone who died is equal in death, but if we wish to understand the specifics of the murder programmes, then we need to consider this cohort apart from the very many others who died. Only the disabled, the Gypsies and the Jews died because of *who they were*, not what they did or even where they happened to be.

The programmes are closely related. Many of the people who designed and administered the Holocaust and the *Porajmos* were first involved in the T4 programme, and it proved to be a training ground for them. The *Porajmos* was built on the same laws and decrees as the Holocaust, used the same techniques and even the same facilities. Sometimes Jews and Gypsies died side by side. None of these people represented any threat to the Nazi government or state. The vast majority of these people had no significant assets worth stealing, or that could not have been stolen without killing them, as these people were unarmed.

But for all that they had in common, it is worth noting that there were differences too. These

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[3] See (Lewy, 2000, pp.223-224) for a discussion of these numbers.

differences demonstrate that Nazi policy was neither monolithic nor definitive. In the bizarre logic of their racial laws, anyone who had three or more Jewish grandparents was marked for annihilation. However, they were unable to decide what to do with people who had only one or two, and so such people had a chance of survival. On the other hand, a person with only two Roma grandparents was more likely to be killed. In short, the pure Roma had a better chance of survival than a pure Jew, but a half-Jew had a better chance of survival than a half-Roma.[4] It is also worth noting that the Roma were never central to Nazi ideology in the way that the Jews were. The Jews were always the core target for annihilation.

If the cohort of victims is diverse, so too is the cohort of perpetrators, though it may be all that they have in common. James Waller, in his *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing*, writes:

> most of the perpetrators of the Holocaust and other cases of mass killing and genocide were extraordinary only by what they did, not by who they were. They could not be identified, *a priori*, as having the personalities of killers. (Waller, 2002)

Reserve Police Battalion 101, a detachment of some 500 'men who, before the war, had been professional policemen as well as businessmen, dockworkers, truck drivers, construction workers, machine operators, waiters, druggists and teachers' (Reich, 1992) between them, were responsible for the deaths of some 83,000 men, women and children. Christopher Browning chose the simple descriptor *Ordinary Men*, as a title for his book about their activities with good reason.

Waller identifies four strands that combine to create genocidal killers. These are Ethnocentrism, with an implicit or explicit xenophobia; a culture of moral disengagement; a culture of cruelty which offers tacit or actual approval for escalating violence, and finally, the dehumanisation or social death of the victims. These are closely interrelated. The Germans were repeatedly told that they had a right to take other people's land simply because they were more deserving. Nazism from its earliest inception was violent, first in street brawling and ultimately escalating to war. The Nazi

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[4] See (Bauer, 2002, p. 62) for more on this absurdity.

world view was profoundly based on the idea that the strongest survive and prosper. The social death of the Jews in Germany was first achieved by exclusion and boycott, then later, after ghettoisation and deprivation, they really did begin to look different from their well-fed tormentors. Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka (who oversaw the deaths of some 800,000 people), described to Gitta Sereny how he saw these victims:

> 'Cargo,' he said tonelessly. 'They were cargo.' …
>
> 'When do you think you began to think of them as cargo?' …
>
> 'I think it started the day I first saw the Totenlager in Treblinka. I remember Wirth standing there, next to the pits full of blue-black corpses. It had nothing to do with humanity – it couldn't have; it was a mass – a mass of rotting flesh … I rarely saw them as individuals. It was always a huge mass. I sometimes stood on the wall and saw them in the tube. But – how can I explain it – they were naked, packed together, running, being driven with whips like …' the sentence trailed off. (Sereny, 1983, p. 201)

For Stangl, they lost their humanity before being killed. On another occasion, Sereny asked him what part of Treblinka he disliked most:

> 'The undressing barracks,' he said at once. 'I avoided it from my innermost being; I couldn't confront them; I couldn't lie to them; I avoided at any price talking to those who were about to die: I couldn't stand it.' It became clear that as soon as the people were in the undressing barracks – that is, as soon as they were naked – they were no longer human beings for him. What he was 'avoiding at any price' was witnessing the transition. (Sereny, 1983, p. 202)

Stangl could watch the victims disembark, watch them being driven naked into the death chamber, watch them die but could not watch them undress. He was unable to watch them remove the trappings of their lives.

Moral disengagement is a factor in authoritarian cultures. Ervin Staub notes that societies or organisations that indulge in genocides are 'characterized by strong respect for authority … [which]

makes obedience to immoral orders by authorities more likely' (Staub, 1999, p. 184). The problem with authority is that it removes moral agency. Once moral authority is based outside the individual, when it is something offered by a God, or a State, then it removes moral autonomy from the individual. It also becomes very easy to corrupt an entire population simply by corrupting the source of moral authority.

Not everyone who fell foul of the Nazis was caught up in the Holocaust. The concentration camps are one of the more common points of confusion. While these facilities were an integral part of the Nazi system of control, as Snyder points out, the concentration camps were 'not usually a step in a killing process but rather a method for correcting minds and extracting labor from bodies' (Snyder, 2010, p. 381). In other words, these were prison or internment camps and, later in the war years, work camps. The Nazi regime imprisoned and enslaved an immense number of people. Their targets included political opponents, resistance fighters, and people they considered to be 'anti-social', a designation that could include 'homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and common criminals' (Gill, 1989, p. 21), or even 'deviant youths and refractory workers' (Wachsmann and Caplan, 2009, p. 2). In the main, the people incarcerated in the concentration camps were not Jewish or Gypsy, and while immense cruelty was visited on their inmates, the concentration camps had little to do with the Holocaust:

> Camps were more often the alternative than the prelude to execution …. Under German rule, the concentration camps and the death factories operated under different principles. A sentence to the concentration camp Belsen was one thing, a transport to the death factory Bełżec something else. The first meant hunger and labor, but also the likelihood of survival; the second meant immediate and certain death by asphyxiation. This, ironically, is why people remember Belsen and forget Bełżec. (Snyder, 2010, p. 381)

Jean Christian Wagner points out that about 1.65 million people were sent to concentration camps by the Nazi Regime (Wagner, 2009, p. 127), and approximately one million of them died, 'the overwhelming majority … from 1942 onwards, a phase in which forced labour in the armaments

industry became the defining characteristic of camp imprisonment' (Wagner, 2009, p. 127). This was largely murder by labour, deprivation and disease. Most concentration camps did not have gas chambers (and some, such as Ravensbrück, only acquired them as late as January 1945). It was not unusual for people to be sentenced to detention in concentration camps and, at the completion of the sentence, to be released. On the other hand, the camps at Bełżec, Sobibor and Treblinka were quite different. Most of the people who were sent to these camps were dead within hours of arrival. Along with the facility at Chelmno, these were killing centres. Their purpose was solely murder and the harvesting of any valuables that could be recovered from the victims.

However if there is confusion about concentration camps now there was then too. The camp at Majdanek, in Lublin was atypical, as it was attached to a concentration camp and was also in an urban area. However, the primary source of confusion arises from the facility at Auschwitz. This was a vast, hybrid facility, part concentration camp and part extermination factory. It comprised three major camps, at Auschwitz (the German name for the Polish town of Oswiecim), Birkenau and Monowitz, and some 40 or more sub-camps. Of these, only Birkenau was also a centre dedicated to killing, the others were forced labour camps. Even more confusingly, even Birkenau was a hybrid. Therefore, there were two possibilities at Auschwitz. The trains arrived at Birkenau, and the infamous selections on the ramp decided the fate of those who would die very soon and those who would be sent to labour, either in the Birkenau camp or one of the other camps in the complex.

Snyder describes several reasons for the confusion between concentration camps and the Holocaust. As the war entered its final phase, and the Germans abandoned camp after camp in the face of the advancing allies, they drove their occupants towards Germany. Inevitably the camps there became massively overcrowded, and the collapsing Nazi state had no ability to manage or feed the inmates. Starvation and disease took their toll, and the prisoners began to die in large numbers. It was these prisoners, in the main not Jewish, who were liberated, and whose piteous images were captured by the newsreels. As the story of the Holocaust began to receive attention, these images were merged into an inaccurate narrative. A second reason for the confusion is that those Jews who were sent to

concentration camps and not murdered outright were among the Jews who survived and were liberated. Therefore they had the opportunity to tell their stories, which were of their experiences in concentration camps. The people who were sent to Treblinka did not, in the main, survive to tell their stories. This is why Primo Levi, survivor of the camp at Auschwitz-Monowitz, wrote:

> We who survived the Camps are not true witnesses. This is an uncomfortable notion which I have gradually come to accept by reading what other survivors have written, including myself, when I re-read my writings after a lapse of years. We, the survivors, are not only a tiny but also an anomalous minority. We are those who, through prevarication, skill or luck, never touched bottom. Those who have, and who have seen the face of the Gorgon, did not return, or returned wordless. (Levi, 1989, p. 64)

The word genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer working in the United States during the war. In his *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944), he describes how he coined the term 'from the ancient Greek word *genos* (race, tribe) and the Latin *cide* (killing), thus corresponding in its formation to such words as tyrannicide, homicide, infanticide, etc.' (Lemkin, 1944, p. 79). He defined genocide as follows:

> a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group. (Lemkin, 1944, p. 79)

It is clear that the slaughter of both Jews and Gypsies falls within this definition, however, the victims of the T4 programme were not selected based on any of these criteria, but because of their disability only.

Of these killing programmes, the Holocaust, or attempt to annihilate the Jews, has attracted

the lion's share of attention since the end of the war. Given the relative lethality of it compared to the others, this is unsurprising. Further, the disabled are often invisible and voiceless, and the Gypsies, being stateless, lack the kinds of infrastructure that might allow them to articulate their story to a world-wide audience. However, what must be recognised when discussing the Holocaust is that it is not an island unto itself, but, in part, grows from the T4 programme, and, in part, facilitates the *Porajmos*. With the creation of the State of Israel, and its willingness to pursue perpetrators and put them on trial, Jewish voices have been empowered to tell their stories in ways other victims have not. The Jews suffered terribly, and deserve to have their suffering remembered, but we must not forget that among the disabled and the Gypsies they had cousins in suffering.

Each of these killing programmes was instigated and facilitated by the Nazis, but the actual murderers were not only Nazis and, indeed, not only German. Among the roll of the infamous are people from each of the countries that the Nazis overran, as well as those who fought alongside them, such as the Romanians. In fact, the massacre of some 40,000 Jews at Bogdanovka in December 1941, is probably the single largest mass murder outside of a dedicated killing centre. It was perpetrated by Romanians. That said, there is little evidence of Italian involvement, so it is dangerous to make generalised assumptions about Fascism. The anti-Semitism of the Nazis is a peculiarly German one, and not shared by the Italians.

Often the Nazis facilitated and encouraged pogroms, sometimes drawing on latent anti-Semitism within the local populations. There is a long history of anti-Semitism in countries like Poland and the Ukraine, for instance. In the East, where the arrival of the German armies seemed a liberation from Russian domination, volunteers were forthcoming. The key fact remains, however, regardless of where the individual perpetrators were from, the Holocaust was a Nazi project from beginning to end.

Before completing this discussion of the victims of the murder programmes, it is worth exploring one of the more controversial areas in their history, namely the accusations of acquiescence and collaboration. In his introduction to Miklos Nyiszli's *Auschwitz A Doctor's Eyewitness Account*,

Bruno Bettleheim makes the following extraordinary statement:

> Strange as it may sound, the unique feature of the extermination camps is not that the Germans exterminated millions of people … What was new, unique, terrifying, was that millions, like lemmings, marched themselves to their own death. This is what is incredible; this we must come to understand. (Bettleheim, 1960, p. 6)

It is difficult to imagine a more overt attempt at victim blaming.[5] Further, it is astonishing that, in the multitude of facets that the Holocaust presents, it is only this that Bettleheim finds to be 'unique'. However, in the years immediately after the war it was a common enough accusation:

> In Israel and many other places there was a persistent *leitmotif* when the discourse turned to Holocaust survivors: Why didn't you resist? Why did you comply with the orders? There were fifteen thousand prisoners and a couple of hundred guards. Why didn't you revolt? (Lipstadt, 2011, p. 79)

The fact is, of course, that many Jews did resist, as the revolts at Sobibor, Treblinka and those among the *Sonderkommando* at Birkenau, as well as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, attest. Many Jews also were part of partisan groups. That said, the vast majority of the victims seem to acquiesce in their fate, and this is what prompts the question. However, it is a false question and one that takes only a moment to dismiss. What resistance was possible? In the event of a mass escape, where could the escapees go? They were trapped hundreds of miles from safety in an area utterly in the control of their enemies. Even in the mass breakouts from Treblinka and Sobibor, almost all the escapees were captured and killed. If one or two escaped then reprisals meant fifty or a hundred died. Who could live with that on their conscience? On top of this, the people who arrived at the death facilities were often starving, some having endured months or even years of deprivation, then were crammed into overcrowded trains for days. Their ability to resist was eroded. They were families with elderly relatives and infants. They had no weapons. How then to resist? The question also assumes that the victims knew for certain what fate awaited them. This is not the case. Few knew, even if many

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[5] Of course, Bettleheim had a track record in victim blaming, as his now discredited (and possibly falsified) work on autism demonstrates.

suspected, but most simply could not believe what they were facing until it was far too late for them to do anything about it. And even then, they did resist, and many were shot resisting at gas chambers doors. It is worth remembering, for comparison, that Walter Lacquer estimates that some thirteen thousand Russian soldiers were incarcerated at Auschwitz. Only ninety-two survived to be liberated in January 1945 (Lacquer, 1997). If these trained fighting men could not find the ability to resist, what hope had these transports of thousands of families?

For many trapped in the Ghettos, the aim of the Germans seemed to be deprivation and not annihilation. For these people there was hope. Further, heroism and resistance come in many forms. At the Eichmann trial, Zivia Lubetkin-Zuckerman, who fought in and survived the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, recalled:

> the 'strong young' German guards and the 'cruelty' they directed 'against helpless people.' But then she added something that expanded the traditional concept of heroism. Initially, Jews in the ghetto thought that the Germans' objective was to 'degrade … depress … starve us.' By closing all educational institutions they would 'change us into a nation of slaves, ignorant people, lacking culture.' At that point, they decided to 'develop a spirit of revolt …. When I say 'revolt' I do not refer … to a particular rebellion but rather to preserve the human, social, and cultural character of the youth. (Lipstadt, 2011, p. 82)

For many Jews faced with the dehumanisation of the Nazi policy towards them, rebellion lay in preserving their values and culture under the most extreme duress.

In any occupation there will be collaborators. Sometimes these people are fellow-travellers with the occupiers, who share their beliefs and politics. Some will be people trying to profit or even just save their own skins. More likely there will be more people who collaborate to try and maintain some semblance of order and the routine of daily life. When considering the issue of collaboration, it is important to bear in this in mind. In the ghettoes, what passed as civic society were the *Judenräte*, or Jewish councils, and the Jewish police. These organisations are often seen as deeply collaborative, and therefore a betrayal of their own people. However, as with everything else, the truth is more

complex. While in some cases, the Germans demanded that the *Judenräte* select people for transportation to the East, as the euphemism put it, in most cases they did not. Instead, the Germans just arrived and took people away. Notwithstanding the occasional profiteer, most of the people in the Jewish administrations were in a deeply uncomfortable position as they, in the most part, were trying to alleviate the suffering of their people. However, of the Jewish police, this is often not the case and they are recognised has having taken part in round-ups. That said, in some ghettoes they were a focus of resistance. That is why, in the case of both the *Judenräte* and the Police, it is important not to generalise.

Needless to say, there are many other issues and perceptions that might be explored, however the aim here is to demonstrate the inherent complexity of the Holocaust at every turn. Not every death inflicted by the Nazis was the same, and not every facility operated by the Nazis was the same and there are subtleties even in this most unsubtle of human events. In his introduction to *Preempting the Holocaust* Langer refers to the commonly used metaphor of the Nazi 'killing machine' 'because it supports the idea of mass murder as a bureaucratic enterprise, bolstered by the image of industrial efficiency that dominates so much of twentieth-century thought' (Langer, 1998, p. xii). However this metaphor is undermined, Langer argues, by details such as:

> the repeated breakdown of the killing facilities in a death camp like Belzec; by the flawed design of the mobile killing vans used at Chelmno and in Yugoslavia; by the initial failure of the brick in crematorium chimneys in Auschwitz; by the unreliability of engines from downed enemy planes as a source of carbon monoxide for the gas chambers at Treblinka; by the constant problem of the disposal and 'redisposal' of bodies. (Langer, 1998, p. xii)

The reality of this machine is more prosaic. Creaky and unreliable technology breaks the illusion of automation, and drags the engineer out of the shadows, tools in hand. The human beings behind the process are pulled into focus by these details. The history of the Holocaust is not a calm production line of people waiting, lemming-like, to march themselves to the gas chambers, but instead a history of fear, despair, humiliation, starvation, thirst, pain and grief. These details are important to remember

when it comes to representations of the Holocaust.

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It is difficult to define a starting point for the Holocaust. It is arguable that it can be dated from the Nazi accession to power in 1933, and that is where Martin Gilbert begins his account in *The Holocaust*. Certainly, it was the beginning of a long process of exclusion of Jewish people within Germany, and there were occasional murders. Once the Germans invaded Poland, there were killings, including mass killings. However, it is with the invasion of the Soviet Union that the most vicious wave of killing begins. From here, three main phases can be identified. In this first phase, people were murdered very close to home. They were taken to local forests, ravines or beaches and were shot, their bodies falling into pits that frequently they dug themselves. Sometimes they were forced to lie in the pits to be shot, packed onto the bodies of those who preceded them. The Germans even devised a system called a *Sardinenpackung* to maximise the occupancy of the graves.

It is difficult to characterise the cruelty inherent in this process. Those who were to die knew what awaited them. They sometimes queued for hours. There were also moments of shocking intimacy. During the massacre at Jósefów, Poland, the Jews were brought from the village to a local forest on trucks. At the unloading point, they were paired with their killer and then walked deeper into the forest to be murdered. One murderer reported how, as he walked with the mother and daughter he was assigned to kill, he 'began a conversation with them and learned that they were Germans from Kassel' (Browning, 1998, p. 67). Having thus made their acquaintance, he made them lie on the ground and shot them, one after another. He did not recount which he killed first. On the other hand, Rivka Yosselevska, from the village of Zagrodski, recounted her experience of seeing her father, mother and sisters naked and shot before her eyes, her sister having begged for her life. Then it was time for her and the child she was holding:

'Whom shall I shoot first?' We were already facing the grave. The German asked,

'Whom do you want me to shoot first?' I did not answer. I felt him take the child from my arms. The child cried out and was shot immediately. And then he aimed at me. (Gilbert, 1990, p. 421)

Yosselevska survived being wounded and buried alive. More than 1,300,000 others did not. This is not the only occasion on record where that choice was offered. Ya'akov Gabai, a member of the *Sonderkommando* at Auschwitz told of how a young woman with a two-day old baby arrived at the crematorium and, for one reason or another, was not included in the gassing. She sat, with her baby, chatting with the prisoners:

We sat in front of the furnaces. Next to us sat a Dutch SS man, a rather nice, likable guy. He also listened in. When the story was over, he stood up and said, 'Very well, we can't sit here like this forever; now it's death's turn.' She was asked what she preferred, that we kill the baby first or her. She said, 'Me first. I don't want to see my child dead.' Then the Dutchman stood up, brought over the rifle, shot her, and threw her into the furnace. Then he picked up the baby, bang-bang, and that was that. (Greif, 2005, p. 193)

The second phase was when people were entrained and brought to sites like Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek, and Birkenau. Death was by an evolving variety of means. Vans were used with their exhausts piped into the back; specially built chambers fed with exhausts from various diesel engines were also used. Finally, in Birkenau, poison was used. With the exception of Birkenau, as discussed, these facilities were not camps, just transit points on the way to death. The only people imprisoned there were the minimum required to staff the killing process. People arriving at these places were not tattooed with numbers; not registered as detainees; not issued uniforms. They were stripped, shorn and killed as soon as possible after arrival.

Unlike the enormous complex at Auschwitz, Treblinka was about six hundred by four hundred metres in area, divided into two main sections. The 'lower camp' was where the victims arrived and were undressed, with the women being shorn of hair and searched for valuables. Then, naked, they were driven along the 'Road to Heaven', a pathway about ten feet wide encased in barbed wire to the

'upper camp', where the killing chambers where. There they waited their turn. During the winter months it was bitterly cold. 'The feet of the children, whose skin was softer than that of their parents, would sometimes freeze to the hard ground, and they would have to be ripped up to be moved to the gas chambers, their skin and blood sticking to the frozen earth' (Newman Smith, 2014). After being murdered, this is also where the bodies were disposed of, first by burial, and then later, the dead were exhumed in an attempt to hide the evidence, and along with the more recent victims, cremated. All of this work was done by Jewish prisoners, called the *Sonderkommando,* themselves marked for death when that work was done. In the first two months of operation 'the Germans deported between 254,000 and 270,000 people to their deaths in Treblinka' (Winstone, 2010, p. 214). Between July 1942 and August 1943 more than 800,000 people were murdered at Treblinka. 'Only *fifty-four* people are known to have survived' (Evans, 2001, p. 132) [*emphasis in the original*].

The numbers who died in these killing facilities are truly horrendous. Something in the region of one million people were killed at Birkenau alone. It is this phase of the Holocaust that has led to much theorising based on 'the systematic transportation, selection, dispossession, killing, and distribution of requisitioned personal effects that leaves us uncomprehending, not of the facts but their implications for our own society and for human psychology' (Bartov, 1996, p. 67). It is this organisation of mass murder into a kind of production-line that reverberates with many commentators.

The final phases of the Holocaust occurred as the advancing armies, especially the Red Army in the East, began to liberate camps and killing facilities. The Germans drove the prisoners into the interior, partly to hide their crimes, partly because the prisoners still had utility as slaves, or even because Himmler believed that they might be useful as hostages in negotiations with the Allies. These prisoners, who had experienced years of maltreatment and malnourishment, dressed in rags and often with no shoes, were marched hundreds of miles through winter weather. If they failed to keep up they were shot. If they fell and did not get up, they were shot where they fell. Sometimes they were just murdered anyway. Celina Manielewicz was marched with some seven thousand others towards the

Baltic Sea, where she survived being machine-gunned and then thrown over a cliff into the frozen sea (Gilbert, 1990, pp. 779-781). Even those who did survive the marches found themselves in camps that were overcrowded and beyond the capacity of the collapsing Nazi state to manage. Hundreds died every day. The dying continued for weeks after liberation, and upwards of 250,000 people, Jews and other victims of the Nazis, were lost (Bauer, 1983, p. 2).

The bare facts are clear. The mass murder programmes targeted the disabled, the Romany and most especially, the Jews. Vast numbers of people where driven from their homes to nearby woods and ravines and shot to death. Others were suffocated in vans or crude gas chambers, while still more were killed on death marches by shooting, or worked to death, or starved or allowed to die from disease. The many and varied ways that death was inflicted are important to recall. The Holocaust may represent a low point of modernity, but even if that is the case, it is not the full story. Machines do not ask 'Whom do you want me to shoot first?' There is little especially modern in shooting, starving or working-to-death, and we must be wary of basing our understanding of the Holocaust on a skewed or limited selection of data. Somewhere between 5.5 and 6 million Jewish, and hundreds of thousands of Gypsy and disabled people died. These numbers mask terrible moments of fear, days of horror and week upon week of appalling cruelty. The Holocaust demands that we try honour those who died by at least constructing a comprehensive understanding of what happened to them.

<p style="text-align: center;">***</p>

So far the discussion has aimed to demonstrate the complexity of the Holocaust as an historical event. This complexity offers the context in which an examination of possible meanings derived from these events might begin. First among these contexts is to recognise that the Holocaust was a human event. It was conceived, planned, executed and performed upon human beings by other human beings. It is neither an act of the divine nor of the satanic, for if we allow such agencies a role, then the moral implications of the event are diluted. There was nothing natural about this catastrophe. As it is the

work of human beings, then the responsibility for what happened lies squarely with humanity. As a human event, it is necessarily a moral one, subject to moral judgements. Therefore, it is best to state overtly, in the most basic terms, the moral code from which any judgement or opinion might flow in the context of this essay. G. J. Warnock is compelling in his *Contemporary Moral Philosophy*:

> I believe that we all have, and should not let ourselves be bullied out of, the conviction that at least some questions as to what is good or bad for people, what is harmful or beneficial, are not in any serious sense matters of opinion. That it is a bad thing to be tortured or starved, humiliated or hurt, is not an opinion: it is a fact. That it is better for people to be loved and attended to, rather than hated or neglected, is again a plain fact, not a matter of opinion. (Warnock, 1967, p. 60)

This is pragmatic moment. Even in the absence of a theoretical framework, some things are just obvious. Following Warnock, this thesis will offer no proof or supporting evidence for the assertion that the conception, process and result of the Holocaust was a bad thing. It is presented as a plain fact, one that offers no viable alternative. Derived from this, then, is the simple assertion that human beings have the capacity to do bad things to other human beings. This might be called 'evil', and the term used as defined by Claudia Card, who sees it as:

> a harm that is (1) reasonably foreseeable (or appreciable) and (2) culpably inflicted (or tolerated, aggravated, or maintained), and that (3) deprives, or seriously risks depriving, others of the basics that are necessary to make a life possible and tolerable or decent (or to make a death decent). (Card, 2002, p. 16)

While accepting that the term 'evil' is contested,[6] this definition is robust enough. It matches the historical facts of the Holocaust as they are known. It was perfectly clear that the programme would lead to harm, that it was deliberately inflicted by moral agents and that it was designed to make life unbearable, and then impossible. From this, it follows that if the Holocaust is the work of human hands, and if its badness or evil is a plain fact, then the evil that it represents is a very human evil.

Traditionally, evil has not always been the province of humans. In the Judeo-Christian

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[6] For a summary of these contests see (Calder, 2014).

tradition evil is often a force from elsewhere, channelled through humans. Hannah Arendt points out:

> Evil, we have learned, is something demonic; its incarnation is Satan, 'a lightning fall from heaven' (Luke 10:18), or Lucifer, the fallen angel ('The devil is an angel too'—Unamuno) whose sin is pride ('proud as Lucifer'), namely, that *superbia* of which only the best are capable: they don't want to serve God but to be like Him. (Arendt 1981, p. 3)

But if we are to accept that responsibility for the Holocaust rests with humanity, this epic and other-worldly conception of evil will not work. We need to seek our understanding within humanity: it is an evil of human scale that we need to understand.

Many writers have attempted to grapple with the nature of the evil that resides in the centre of the Holocaust. For some, it requires that we have a separate category to define the awfulness of it. This leads to concepts like 'extraordinary' or 'radical' evil being used to describe the genocide. Radical evil is a term borrowed from Kant, though it must be said that his conception is difficult and unclear. Writing in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he posits the notion that humans have a propensity to evil. That said, he is unclear about from where this propensity arises, and how such a propensity sits with what Richard J. Bernstein calls 'the most dominant theme' in Kant's moral philosophy, which is that humans 'are ultimately solely accountable and responsible … for the actions they perform' (Bernstein, 2002, p. 28). It is difficult to see how, if one has an in-built propensity, that one can be entirely accountable for the decisions one makes. Unfortunately, similar issues arise when commentators try to develop this idea of a new evil to describe the Holocaust. As early as 1950, Arendt is describing a concept of 'absolute evil', which she defines as one that cannot be 'deduced from humanly comprehensible motives', is a characteristic of the final stages of totalitarianism, and 'without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil' (Arendt, 1973, pp. viii-ix). However, she later developed her thought, as she revealed in her correspondence with Gersholm Scholem:

> I changed my mind and do no longer speak of 'radical evil' . . . it is indeed my opinion

now that evil is never' 'radical', that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimensions. (Arendt, 2007, pp. 470-471)

This is a significant change in her thought, moving from an evil that cannot be understood ('deduced from humanly comprehensive motives'), to one that has neither depth nor unworldly elements. It connects with other developments in her thought, as shall be seen below.

However, this notion of an evil that is beyond human capacity to understand, or at the very least, one that is in a new or different category from others, is not uncommon. For instance, Kenneth Seeskin sets out to describe a new category of actions that are separate from 'ordinary' murders:

> On the surface, it might appear that radical evil is merely an extreme form of evil *simpliciter* — that the difference between them is one of degree rather than kind. But the truth is that the two are incommensurable and, therefore, cannot be viewed as endpoints on a single continuum. (Seeskin, 1980, p. 440)

He goes on to suggest that the archetypal person exercising this radical evil is the psychopath, one who is 'simply in love with the suffering of innocent people' (Seeskin, 1980, p. 443), and suggests that this was the 'dominant personality of Nazi Germany' (Seeskin, 1980, p. 443), and specifically speaks of the 'demonic sadism' (Seeskin, 1980, p. 444) of Eichmann. Seeskin develops his notion by asserting that it 'cannot be made worse by addition or repetition' (Seeskin 1980, p. 447), a thought he develops as follows:

> Normally, we have no trouble agreeing that it is worse to commit two crimes than to commit one .… It is worse to knock someone unconscious than to slap him in the face; worse to steal millions of dollars than to steal pennies .… But surely the Holocaust would have been no better if one less person had died and no worse, if one more. (Seeskin, 1980, p. 447)

He also asserts that radical evil cannot be justified by the notion that it might lead to a greater good, and finally offers his opinion that 'radical evil, unlike any normal transgression, cannot be forgiven — even by God' (Seeskin, 1980, p. 448).

These ideas are problematic in a number of ways. His notion that perpetrators of radical evil

are psychopaths is significantly at odds with most commentary on the perpetrators of the Holocaust. As noted previously, the strongest evidence is that most perpetrators were quite ordinary people. While this does not preclude the possibility that there were psychopaths among them the fact remains that scholarship points in different directions. The simple arithmetic of the idea that one more death would not make the Holocaust any worse seems common-sense, but it also bears an unfortunate irony. This approach takes no account of the victims. While at the distance of history, it might seem unimportant to us if the dead numbered six million or six million and one, for those who were actually there, the Holocaust would certainly be worse had one more person died, most particularly for that one person. So, from the point of view of the victim, yes indeed this evil can be made worse by addition and repetition, just like any other. Again, on the face of it, the idea that a radical evil is one that cannot lead to a greater good seems reasonable, but the notion that it is something that even an omniscient God cannot forgive seems illogical. Even leaving aside the unknowable options of a possible deity, there are still issues with this formulation. At heart, the quality of being 'forgivable' is not a characteristic of a transgression but is actually a gift of the transgressed. For instance, each and every day spouses transgress in ways that some partners find trivial but others find unforgivable. On such things marriages fail and lawyers profit. However, it begs a question: when an act is described as 'unforgivable' is that a permanent designation? If, over time, the wronged spouse comes to a degree of equanimity, and finds forgiveness within, does the act now become less than radically evil? Does it return to the category of 'evil *simpliciter*'? That seems unlikely. Perhaps, as often happens in the case of the Holocaust, words which are used to express horror, such as 'unforgivable' or 'indescribable', should be taken as measures of extremity rather than literally.

In a similar vein, Paul Marcus and Alan Rosenberg are also concerned with evil, and explicitly state that 'the old categories of evil are deeply flawed' (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 216), and therefore we need 'to evolve new concepts of evil that will help illuminate the Holocaust and give us a language and a sense of moral anchoring in an ethically indifferent universe' (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 216). They characterise older versions of evil, dating from the Enlightenment, as

rooted in failings of character and offer examples such as greed, pride, envy and so on. Later psychological views suggested aggression as neurosis. However, 'these views of evil fail to explain the systematic, rational, technologically implemented destruction of millions of people in factory like buildings functioning in a highly cost-effective manner' (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 216). This can only be described as 'a new category of evil. By radical evil we mean evil that cannot be explained by any of the already mentioned conventional human motives nor understood by applying our well-tried modes of analysis and interpretation' (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 216).

Unfortunately, this is a negative definition: 'Radical evil' is 'not ordinary evil', and it can be recognised when a phenomenon is inexplicable. However, this begs a rather obvious question that if over time and after diligent study, a person becomes capable of explaining what happened, does that mean the Holocaust is no longer radically evil? They continue: 'Radical evil like the Holocaust is transformative by the very fact that it is viewed as an awesome anomaly and should require a rethinking of our basic assumptions' (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 216). Here again, it is the point of view of the observer that categorises this as an 'awesome anomaly', rather than any quality inherent in the event itself. This turns the focus back onto the subjective view point: an event is radically evil because 'we' do not understand it, it is an anomaly because it is beyond 'our' experience. However, from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, with all that is known about the Armenian, Burundian, Cambodian, Rwandan and even Yugoslavian crimes against humanity, how much of an anomaly is the Holocaust? Not that these events are the same: each has its own unique characteristics, they vary in lethality and extremity, but they are all demonstrably of the category of genocide, as defined by Lemkin, above, and also by the United Nations. So it is, unfortunately, difficult to see the Holocaust as an anomaly, though it is certainly awesome in its lethality.

They move into even more difficult terrain later:

> Finally, the evil of the Holocaust has also strongly highlighted another issue in need of philosophical analysis, namely, the problem that in a world that is based on the belief that man is a creator of his own values, the judgment of what constitutes evil is ambiguous at best. We do well to remember that Hitler's government can be regarded

as legal, at least in terms of how it was instituted. As grotesque as it may be, the truth is that those who abided by the laws of the land committed no blameworthy acts, since what constitutes a criminal act is violation of the law. (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 217)

This is problematic in one core way: they continually confuse 'crime', a legal construct, with 'evil', a moral one, as though these are somehow the same thing. It implies that legality and morality are synonymous, which they certainly are not, as the rather obvious case of slavery demonstrates. Yet they insist: 'the truth is that those who abided by the laws of the land committed no blameworthy acts, since what constitutes a criminal act is violation of the law' (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 217). 'Blameworthy' is a moral judgement; 'criminal' a legal one. Covetousness is regarded by the Decalogue as blameworthy, but it is not illegal. Taking a car not your own for the sole purpose of bringing a critically ill child to a hospital is certainly illegal, but who would call it blameworthy in the circumstances? There are many acts that could be characterised as blameworthy but not criminal, and vice versa. To assert that a legal construct removes any possibility of blame is difficult to characterise as anything but an undergraduate failure to grasp the difference between law and morality.

For Marcus and Rosenberg, the core issue here is:

> the problem of ethical relativism. If, as modern man seems to believe, neither God nor Nature can generate for us an unambiguous and coherent set of values and we are left to create them, must we suppose that the moral must yield to the legal? (Marcus and Rosenberg, 1988, p. 217)

However, there is no reason to assume that 'the moral must yield to the legal' at all, even if we live in a world of ethical relativism. As asserted above, some things are obviously bad. There is no good version of torture, no circumstances where torture is acceptable. Even, as sometimes suggested, in the ticking bomb scenario, where a person is believed to hold life-saving information, the torture victim cannot be relied on to tell the truth, for he or she will say anything to make the pain stop. As Jean Améry learned through being tortured himself, a tortured human being is robbed of their

personhood: 'frail in the face of violence, yelling out in pain, awaiting no help, capable of no resistance, the tortured person is only a body, and nothing else beside that' (Améry, 1998, p. 33). Even in a world of ethical relativism, there is still some firm ground.

Further, the presumed opposite, ethical certainty, is absurd. God(s) and Nature have had thousands of years to generate 'an unambiguous and coherent set of values', yet neither has ever managed to do so. Even the best efforts have been managed (or mismanaged), to produce everything from peculiar dietary restrictions and strange underwear, to terrorism. There is a strong ring of truth to the axiom that people never do evil more cheerfully than when they do it in the name of religion (even if this is based on a mistranslation of Pascal). The problem is not religion, however, but one of moral agency. As suggested before, once moral authority is based outside the individual, in an authoritarian setting for instance, then it becomes very easy to just obey those orders, regardless of what they instruct you to do.

There are many other examples of historians and philosophers grappling with the nature of the Holocaust, and seeking to identify the enormous failing that simply must underlie it. However, the danger here is to fall into a kind of theoretical trap. The debate between evils, radical or simple, risks losing sight of the reality of the Holocaust. This is why Langer, quoted above, reminds us that such concepts need to be tested against actual incidents to see what meaning, if any, they might carry. Are some evils worse than others? Consider the following examples. In the first, a member of the Polish underground, Jan Karski (in his *Story of a Secret State*), reports how he was smuggled into a transit camp at Izbica Lubelska. Here, the ground was 'completely covered by a dense, pulsating, throbbing, noisy, human mass. Starved, stinking, gesticulating, insane human beings in constant, agitated motion' (Karski, 1944, p. 208). These people had been in the camp for up to four days without food or water. Obviously, this is evil. Eventually, they were forced onto a train of freight cars each of which might carry 'eight horses or forty soldiers. Without any baggage at all, a maximum of a hundred passengers standing close together and pressing against each other could be crowded into a car' (Karski, 1944, p. 209). However, the Germans had other ideas, and using whips and rifle shots

they forced another 20 or 30 people into each car. There was nowhere for these extra people to go except on top of those already boarded. So they climbed on the poor souls already within, 'clutching at their hair and clothes for support, trampling on necks, faces, and shoulders, breaking bones' (Karski, 1944, p. 210). In this way 46 freight cars were filled in a process that took three hours to complete. Again, this is obviously evil. Karski continues:

> My informants had minutely described the entire journey. The train would travel about eighty miles and finally come to a halt in an empty, barren field. Then nothing at all would happen. The train would stand stock-still, patiently waiting while death penetrated into every corner of its interior. (Karski, 1944, p. 210)

This process could take 'from two to four days' (Karski, 1944, p. 210). This is another terrible evil; however, there is more:

> The floors of the car had been covered with a thick, white powder. It was quicklime. Quicklime is simply unslaked lime or calcium oxide that has been dehydrated. Anyone who has seen cement being mixed knows what occurs when water is poured on lime. The mixture bubbles and steams as the powder combines with the water, generating a large amount of heat … The moist flesh coming in contact with the lime is rapidly dehydrated and burned. The occupants of the cars would be literally burned to death before long, the flesh eaten from their bones. (Karski 1944, p. 210)[7]

Words strain to capture this evil, as reported by Karski.

However, compare it with this incident, reported by a German army photographer, which occurred in Kovno, Lithuania:

> A young man – he must have been a Lithuanian – . . . with rolled-up sleeves was armed with an iron crowbar. He dragged out one man at a time from the group and struck him with the crowbar with one or more blows on the back of his head. Within three-quarters of an hour he had beaten to death the entire group of forty-five to fifty people in this way …. After the entire group been beaten to death, the young man put the crowbar to one side, fetched an accordion and went and stood on the mountain of

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[7] It is worth noting that this is not the only incident reported where the Nazis used quicklime, for instance see Theo Richmond's *Konin, A Quest* pp. 452-453.

corpses and played the Lithuanian national anthem. (Klee and Burnstone, 1991, p. 31)

It is not any easier to articulate the evil in this moment either. Each of these incidents is horrendous. Each of these incidents is undoubtedly an act of evil by the perpetrators. Are we really to choose between them for the title of 'more evil'? Because if we do select one as more evil then we, *inter alia*, designate the other as 'less evil'. What is clear is that all belong to the category of 'evil' as defined by Card, above, as acts reasonably foreseeable and culpably inflicted to deprive others of the basics to make a life possible or a death decent. It is undoubtedly true that death by crowbar was quicker than death by quicklime, but that is only to compare ghastly efficiency, and not evil. It is equally true that the slow painful death of some five thousand five hundred people in forty-six rail cars near Izbica Lubelska is a more lethal incident than fifty poor souls in the square in Kovno, but is lethality therefore the measure of evilness? If so, the massacre at Babi Yar (some thirty-two thousand dead over two days), is some six times more evil. Several hundred men working relentlessly over two days to shoot thirty-two thousand people is evil, there is no doubt. The volume of blood spilled is appalling, the amount of suffering inflicted is immeasurable, and our minds are shocked at the sheer scale of the atrocity.

However, once stripped of issues of scale, are these incidents really more evil than Erna Petri, wife of a Nazi official in the Lviv region, herself a mother of two small children, who, while out one afternoon, came upon six Jewish children who had escaped from a transport. They were terrified, dressed in rags and starving. She took them to her home and brought them food from her kitchen. Then, mindful of orders that any escaping Jews were to be shot, she brought them into the woods. There, she instructed them:

> to line up facing away from her, in front of the ditch. She held up the pistol about four inches from the first child's neck and shot the child, then moved on and did the same to the second. After she shot the first two, 'the others were at first shocked and began to cry. They did not cry loudly, they whimpered.' Erna would not allow herself 'to be swayed'; she shot 'until all of them lay in the gully. None of the children tried to run away since it appeared that they already had been in transit for several days and were

totally exhausted'. (Lower, 2013, p. 132)

Is this any *less* evil than Babi Yar? Less lethal, true, but that is a ghastly league table and one that offers no insight only numbers. It is impossible to choose between a woman who will shoot six children one by one, in the back of the neck, and a young man wielding an iron bar, or between either of those and the person who dreamt up the macabre scheme of coating overcrowded railway cars with lime. Each of these incidents is horrific; each is appalling; they vary in their particular horror and in their lethality, but do they vary in their evilness? It seems clear that each belong to the category of evil and that to grade them further is in their 'evilness' is impossible.

Finally, as Lawrence Langer writes, 'as long as we regard the Holocaust as an "exceptional action" instead of naming its specific inhuman content, we face the danger of losing contact with its reality' (Langer, 1998, p. 9). By this he means that there is another conceptual danger with concepts like 'radical evil'. If the Holocaust belongs in a category that is so markedly 'other' in its nature, then such 'an awesome anomaly' (to borrow Marcus and Rosenberg's phrase), rather than being radical, is precisely the opposite. Instead of causing us to re-evaluate all that we know, it changes nothing. It becomes an outlier, something of little relevance to the everyday, and outliers seem like aberrations, of arguable relevance to the rest of the dataset. It is a paradox that these writers, motivated by a desire to integrate the reality of the Holocaust into the conversation and debate of everyday life, instead push it into a backwater, where it might be conveniently regarded as terrible but not really relevant.

Notwithstanding the very human desire to particularise the evil of the Holocaust to itself, there really is no need to do so. The ethical failure that is the Holocaust can be characterised in regrettably simple terms. At its most basic, it is a breach of both the Golden Rule that exhorts us to treat others as we would be treated ourselves, and of Kant's Categorical Imperative. While the implications are truly enormous, the essence of this is uncomplicated: for Kant, we should 'act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature' (Kant 1785, p. 31). The notion that the strongest must oppress the weak is a lot less attractive when it becomes clear that you are not as strong as you thought you were. While both the Categorical Imperative and the Golden Rule are first and

foremost norms for individual morality, they both scale very well. To murder someone is a clear example of a breach of both. To murder many offers multiple examples of the same breach. Similarly, to order the murder of a person, or multiple persons, or to enable these things to occur all reflect the same basic breach. This breach does not change with numbers, though it does surely get more shocking and more horrifying. However, this simple approach has a purposeful corollary in that it leads us to see past the generic abstraction of words like 'genocide' 'Shoah', or 'Holocaust', and to recognise that each begins with a murder, the killing of a man, a woman or a child, and that killing is performed by another human being. This is the core of the Holocaust; this is both its moral and historical heart

Whatever kind of evil it might be, others have explored the idea of the Holocaust in relation to modernity, on the assumption that it is somehow inextricably linked with the genocide of the Jews. For Omer Bartov, the Holocaust is a product of 'a momentous idea' (Bartov, 1996, p. 3), that is wholly in keeping with the twentieth century's 'characteristic impatience and pragmatism' (Bartov, 1996, p. 3). This idea is the 'concept and practice of industrial killing' (Bartov, 1996, p. 3). He defines industrial killing as the:

> mechanized, rational, impersonal, and sustained mass destruction of human beings, organized and administered by states, legitimized and set into motion by scientists and jurists, sanctioned and popularized by academics and intellectuals. (Bartov, 1996, p. 3)

According to Bartov, the American Civil War begins this era, but the idea of industrialised killing, and hence, the Holocaust, cannot be understood without referring to 'the first truly industrial military confrontation in history' (Bartov, 1996, p. 4): World War One. It was here that the concept of mass killing, executed by states, as well as the 'technological and administrative means for actually organizing such vast operations' (Bartov, 1996, p. 5), were learned. In that technological advances and industrialisation made the killing of the World War One battlefields possible, this mass slaughter is a quality inherent in modernity, and not just an aberration. Further, he contends, that the Holocaust

was a 'militarized genocide', carried out a quasi-military environment with 'uniforms and barbed wire, watch towers and roll calls, hierarchy and order, drill and commands', and he further contends that it was 'made all the more effective both by killing all those targeted for murder and in being safe for all those who carried it out' (Bartov, 1996, p. 5).

It is difficult to assess Bartov's formulation. There are elements of value within it. For instance, the Holocaust was administered by a state, and could not have been carried out without the resources of command and control that comes with a central administrative structure. Without that kind of infrastructure, it would be impossible, for instance, to entrain all the Jews of Salonica and bring them to Auschwitz for murder. It is also true that some scientists, jurists, academics and intellectuals played cheerleader for the Nazis, and some, more disgracefully, for the killing programmes. However, it is unlikely that their opposition would have made any difference. They simply would have been swept aside.

Further, much of this can only refer to a limited sub-set of the killings of the Holocaust. It cannot apply to the shootings, nor the Death marches, nor those installations which were used solely for killing, such as Treblinka. It might, in some way describe the installation at Birkenau, but only for those actually admitted to the camp, rather than those slated for immediate destruction. For these, the ultimate victims, there were no roll calls, uniforms or drill. It will hardly be surprising that these facilities were run in a military fashion, given that they were managed by the SS, an organisation run on military lines and a military force in itself. While it is true that Birkenau offered a safe place for the perpetrators to work, this is hardly noteworthy. It seems obvious that any massacre of unarmed civilians by an armed force presents the same opportunity.

This leaves the notion that this form of mass killing is somehow an inherent quality of modernity. As discussed, the centralised command and control capability of modern states is essential for any large scale, multi-year project. It is also required for any project that reaches beyond the local. For instance, the transcontinental highway system in the United States would never have happened without the Federal government to drive it forward and manage it. It seems unsurprising, if

distressing, therefore, to find that these capabilities are applied to the worst that people might do as much as to the best. Bartov takes the notion further though, and asserts that, because we associate technological and industrial progress as bringing improvements to human life, that we have difficulty coming to terms with the fact that it can be applied malevolently as easily as beneficially. He then continues:

> We see genocide as a throwback to another, premodern, barbarous past, a perversion, an error, an accident. All evidence to the contrary, we repeatedly believe that this time, in this war, it will finally be stamped out and eradicated, never to reappear again. Yet even this well-meant urge reveals our complicity in modernity's destructive, unrelenting, intolerant nature. We wish to annihilate destruction, to kill war, to eradicate genocide, by the most effective and deadly means at our disposal. (Bartov, 1996, p. 5)

The argument here is difficult to follow. It might be agreed that genocide recalls a barbarous past, it might be agreed that at the commencement of any conflict it is hoped that, whatever the casualties, nothing like genocide will take place. That said, to talk of annihilating destruction or killing war as evidence of 'modernity's unrelenting, intolerant nature' seems odd. War can be prevented, war can be stopped, suspended, or resumed, but it cannot be killed. Similarly, destruction can be prevented but cannot be annihilated. Destruction cannot be destroyed. Murder cannot be killed. One cannot wage war on terror. These phrases sound impressive but are ultimately meaningless. The desire to 'kill war' is the desire to live in peace. The desire to 'annihilate destruction' is the dream of preserving the best of things. He continues:

> We thus elect to exist in an illusory reality, occasionally jarred by disturbing incidents of *deja vu*, which in turn unleash in us precisely that sense of fear and confusion, that desire for drastic solutions, that anger at a world that refuses to conform to our expectations, that is at the root of modern society's destructive impulse. (Bartov, 1996, p. 5)

Here he seems to say that failure or inability to prevent war or destruction drives people to dream of

'drastic solutions', because the world does not work the way we want it to. There is no doubt that the Holocaust was a 'drastic solution', but it is difficult to see how this has anything to do modernity. People have always sought to solve problems and, as tools have improved, people have attempted to solve problems of a larger scale. The tools of modernity have enabled us to dream of eradicating Smallpox on the one hand, and on the other, of killing entire ethnic groups. The same tools enable us to manage, or to dream of managing, complex but insoluble problems. It is difficult to see that the advent of these tools has driven humans to seek ultimate or 'final' solutions more than before, just made it possible on a different scale.

Rainer Baum, in 'Holocaust: Moral Indifference as the Form of Modern Evil', locates the issue with modernity in a quite specific location. For him, modern work practice removes us from the moral sphere. Modern society generates no demand for conscience, in Baum's characterisation, but places the emphasis on conscientiousness instead. This creates an atmosphere of moral indifference, and that is all that evil needs to flourish. According to Baum, modern work is regulated and assessed by specificity, performance and universalism. By specificity, he means that the contemporary workspace has no interest in a worker apart from his or her skill set. Religious or political views are the business of other spheres of life, a person is expected to carry out lawful instructions even if he or she is opposed to them. For instance, a public servant is expected to implement cuts in social welfare programmes and so remove access to services for some people, even if he or she does not agree with the cuts being imposed. Performance is a measure of how diligently the changes are implemented by the official, not by how generously this is done. Universalism, then, demands that each public official is assessed by the same rules, regardless of their personal circumstances. So, a committed left-winger who vehemently opposes the changes is expected to implement them, regardless, and is to be judged by exactly the same criteria as the committed right-winger at the next desk who supports them. Neither is expected to bring their political or other beliefs into the office. Baum sums it up as follows: 'action in accord with specificity and performance systematically hides the full person in the manifold of roles and obligations. Only the employee-self enters the halls of

labor' (Baum 1988, p. 58). In other words, the moral person, the political or family person, the human person are all expected to remain waiting in the car park.

The effect of this combination of specificity and performance is that coherence with the norm and existing work practices are the path to progress. Creating precedents is frowned upon, personal initiative is very risky. The system is therefore inherently conservative. To introduce moral considerations to a process is to rock the boat. Unless otherwise instructed, moral indifference is the practical and pragmatic way of living and surviving in such a world. This is compounded by the highly segmented nature of modern life:

> This is evident in a plethora of specialized roles and organizations touching on virtually all aspects of life from education to problems of integration managed by the legal and other professions, and from production to administration in the private and public spheres. All such organizations are specialized for managing some particular aspect of life. None, however, is left to address in a comprehensive fashion that fundamental ambiguity and ambivalence that give uniqueness to humans, the need to confront the moral imperative. (Baum, 1988, p. 57)

Therefore, the theoretically amoral employee is executing commands in an organisation that is equally amoral:

> Normally, we are not asked to concern ourselves with consequences of action that reverberate beyond our specific sphere of competence and control. In a complex social order the presumption is that such reverberating consequences will be taken care of by other relevant experts. Whether they actually take care and how well are not our concern. (Baum, 1988, p. 58)

Essentially, modern work practices systematically reduce both the opportunity and the need to exercise moral judgement. Such judgments are the (presumed) responsibility of others.

There is much that is compelling in this characterisation, as far as it goes. It might, for instance, describe the situation of a middle-management purchasing officer who issues invoices for ammunition with no thought, or requirement to consider, who is being shot with those bullets. Equally

it might describe the worker in the factory packing the ammunition into boxes, or the engineer who designs the gun, or the owner of the factory where it is made. Any decision is easy to make if the decision-maker is remote from the consequences, and Baum's argument is that modern life continually promotes that gap between decision-maker and consequence. Where it falters, however, is closer to the front line of decision-making. There, moral decision remains as vital as it ever has. A senior civil servant may decide to cut access to a particular life-saving medical treatment, but inevitably a single doctor is left in the position of choosing between competing patients for the available service. That is a moral judgement. The severity of the condition, the survival potential for each candidate, the number of dependents who will be affected by the decision will all weigh heavily on the decision-maker in this scenario. He or she might also decide to make the decision on purely medical grounds, which, after all, is minimum required. However, to restrict the decision to only that criterion is, of itself, a moral decision.

Turning to the Holocaust then, it is certainly easy for Hitler or Himmler to issue orders and then to be protected from their consequences. It was equally true of the many middle-ranking functionaries in the hierarchy who facilitated the murders. Inevitably though, the process comes to the front line, those men (and sometimes) women with guns in their hands. Some, though regrettably few, actually demurred when ordered to kill innocent men women and children. Christopher Browning records how on the day of their very first assignment, approximately a dozen of the Order Police Battalion refused to take part when the nature of their task was explained to them (Browning, 1998, p. 57). The Battalion commander was visibly distressed but still obeyed orders (Browning, 1998, p. 58). As for the others who did take part, who pulled triggers on children or shoved new-borns into gas chambers, it will require another reading to explain their behaviour. They were not protected from the consequences of their decisions and actions. They saw those consequences every day. They went about their assigned tasks with no protection from segmentation whatsoever. It is difficult to see how Baum's characterisation describes their actions.

However, there are even larger questions about the relationship between the entire Nazi

project and modernity. While Italian fascism is often associated with Futurism, this is not the case with the German variant. For Hitler, Himmler and Rosenberg, the future was the past. They dreamed of a utopia based on an archaic fantasy, as Henry A Turner Jr. describes:

> they prescribed a revival of the cults of soil and sword. They strove, that is, to free the bulk of the German people from the grip of industrial society and return them to the simple agrarian life. Moreover, they strove to rededicate the German people to martial values: to the proposition that war is not merely an acceptable means for the pursuit of political aims, but a positive and essential good in and of itself. (Turner Jr., 1975, p. 121)

The purpose of *Lebensraum* was two-fold. The arable open spaces of the east would allow the German people to be self-sufficient in food. However, self-sufficiency was not an end in itself, but a means to ultimately restoring the German people. Liberated from the need to export goods to purchase food from overseas, the German worker would be free to leave the factories and steel mills and return to the soil. In this way, *Lebensraum* would make possible:

> a significant degree of de-urbanization and de-industrialization. Millions of Germans were to be freed from enslavement to those factories that would no longer be needed to produce export goods required to pay for imported foodstuffs. They were to be liberated from the corrupting, debilitating industrial cities, which, in the opinion of the Nazi leaders, had come to threaten the very survival of the folk … With racial purity thus supplemented by cultural purity, German society would at last be restored to health. (Turner Jr., 1975, p. 121)

For the Nazis, modernity was simply a step on the way to another, pre-modern life. There is a paradox here. The Nazis dreamed of a future that harked back to an idealised pre-industrial past, but they co-opted the tools of the future to try to force this vision upon the world. This is what Jeffrey Herf calls the 'cultural paradox of German modernity, namely, the embrace of modern technology by German thinkers who rejected Enlightenment reason' (Herf, 1986, p. 1). While the Nazis were certainly technologists, there were not moderns at all. In fact, they were at war with modernity as much as with anything. Alfred Rosenberg's speech of March 28th, 1941 is quite explicit about the Nazi relationship

to modern ideas:

> The war which is being waged today by the German armed forces under the highest
> command of Adolf Hitler is a war of an immense reform. *It does not only overcome*
> *the world of ideas of the French Revolution*, but it also exterminates directly all those
> racially infecting germs of Jewry and its bastards, which now for over a hundred years
> could develop without check among the European nations. (Rosenberg, 1941;
> Stackelberg and Winkle, 2002) *[emphasis added]*

The Nazis wrapped themselves in the trappings of modern technology like Autobahns, sophisticated weaponry or the imagined cities that Speer modelled for Hitler, but trappings is all they were: 'It was an antimodern modernism because it was guided by a reactionary ideology' (Bauer, 2002, p. 85). Thomas Mann described it as a 'mixture of robust timeliness, efficient modernness on the one hand and dreams of the past on the other, — in a word, highly technological Romanticism' (Mann, 1945, p. 62).

This version of Romanticism was a peculiarly German version. Unlike Britain and France, where Romanticism was the wellspring of change and revolution, in Germany it was quite the opposite. There are historical reasons for this. In Germany, according to Herf, industrialisation was late, rapid and left the authoritarian structures of the Prussian state intact: 'the bourgeoisie, political liberalism and the Enlightenment remained weak' (Herf, 1986, p. 6). Rather than fomenting revolution, the dominant feature of German Romanticism was a desire to return to a more simple life, and it explicitly rejected the degeneracy of progress and enlightenment. In effect, the revolution German Romantics sought was a cultural one that would restore the nation to some imagined past condition, rather than displace powerful structures. For Mann, German Romanticism was profoundly expressed in 'German Inwardness' or *Innerlichkeit*. In his reading, Mann describes it as:

> a certain dark richness and piousness—I might say: antiquarianism—of soul that feels
> very close to the chthonian, irrational, and demonic forces of life, that is to say the true
> forces of life; and it resists the purely rationalistic approach on the ground of its deeper
> knowledge, its deeper alliance with the holy … The Germans are the people of the

romantic counter-revolution against the philosophical intellectualism and rationalism of enlightenment—a revolt … of mysticism against clarity. (Mann, 1945, p. 61)

It is worth noting how Mann stresses the irrational nature of this Romanticism, and how it is resists the Enlightenment. These are key concepts, as shall be seen.

This irrationalist force is the first part of Herf's paradox; the second part was technology. Technological advance is the direct result of industrialisation and the rationality of the Enlightenment, two forces which were anathema to the brooding mysticism of the German Romantics. Herf coins the term 'reactionary modernists' to describe these paradoxical people. The Romantic strain dreamed of a strong State dedicated, as Turner puts it, to 'martial values: to the proposition that war is … a positive and essential good in and of itself' (Turner Jr., 1975, p. 121), but these reactionary modernists recognised that:

> antitechnological views were formulas for national impotence. The state could not be simultaneously strong and technologically backward … As Joseph Goebbels repeatedly insisted, this was to be the century of *stählernde Romantik*, steellike romanticism. (Herf, 1986, p. 3)

This steellike Romanticism, this marriage of *Innerlichkeit* and modern technology, was the core of Nazism. It was the reconciliation of the rationality of concrete autobahns and steel panzers into a wrapping around:

> a preoccupation with a world of hidden powerful forces beyond or beneath the world of appearances. This was a tradition with apocalyptic visions in which a total transformation of a degenerate *Zivilisation* would occur through sudden and violent change. The *Kulturnation* would emerge through a purifying process of death and transfiguration. (Herf, 1986, p. 15)

For these people, the compromises of politics were weakness. Political romantics, such as Hitler, entered politics to 'save their souls, find a new identity, or establish the authenticity of their commitment, or to re-establish a lost *Gemeinschaft*' (Herf, 1986, p. 14). Politics was about 'absolute ethics rather than a politics of responsibility' (Herf, 1986, p. 14), and it was this absolutist nature that

emboldened both Left and Right and more significantly that also squeezed out the Centre, derided by both extremes as weak. However, it is important to remember that, based on the specific qualities of German Romanticism, the Right, the ultimate winners when Hitler acceded to power, was both profoundly authoritarian and profoundly irrational at its core. 'This combination of technology and irrationalism was not inherent to modernism, capitalism, or the Enlightenment; rather it was a variation that was peculiar to an authoritarian, anti-liberal and enlightenment-less nationalism' (Bauer, 2002, p. 85). It was this irrationality, this preoccupation with a world of hidden forces and apocalyptic visions that ultimately saw the Nazis decide that killing all the Jews would 'remove the two main evils of modernity—capitalism and communism—and bring about the realization of the Nazi utopia' (Bauer, 2002, pp. 85-86).

These ideas and insights challenge Warren Thompson's idea of the Holocaust as an example of what he terms functional rationality 'the thinking tool of technologists, managers, business persons, and bureaucrats' (Thompson, 1988, p. 194). This form of reasoning, according to Thompson, focuses on ends and consequences but 'shuns value questions and ethical considerations … for they only impede solutions' (Thompson, 1988, p. 194). When the Nazis tried to engineer a German utopia, such ethical consideration were left aside and therefore 'its leaders took the nation down the road that ended in a solution called Auschwitz' (Thompson, 1988, p. 195). The problem with this version of the Holocaust is that it is exactly the opposite of what happened. Had the technologists, managers and so on actually been allowed to focus on ends, then the outcome of the war might have been different. There was another force at play, a moral one that pulled the Nazi project into different, irrational, directions. The idea that underlies Thompson's approach is that somehow, the Holocaust was rational if wrong. However, it was not: it was both irrational and wrong.

It is this core of irrationality that challenges those who believe that the Holocaust undermines, or even erases, the achievements of the Enlightenment. However, in making this claim they are confusing the trappings of modernity with actual rationalism. As we have seen, the Enlightenment was never strong in Germany, and what occurred there was not because its ideas were widely adopted

but, on the contrary, largely ignored. It is worth revisiting Thomas Mann on this, where he noted that 'the Germans are the people of the romantic counter-revolution against the philosophical intellectualism and rationalism of enlightenment—a revolt … of mysticism against clarity' (Mann, 1945, p. 61). To be clear, there is nothing pragmatic about fighting a war on two fronts while also massacring millions who might have been put to work in support of the war effort. It is doubly inefficient to kill people who might support the war effort, and to draw resources from the battlefield to do it. It is difficult to discern what Bartov calls the twentieth century's 'characteristic impatience and pragmatism' (Bartov, 1996, p. 3) in this. Quite the opposite, in fact. Modernity offered, at most, tools to pursue their absurd aims, among them the destruction of the modern itself. Their worldview owed far more to the nature of German *Innerlichkeit* than it ever did to reason. As we shall see, had more of the lessons of the Enlightenment been learned, then the outcome of many things might have been very different.

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The other force at work in the Nazi world was the one that arbitrated between the two forks of Herf's paradox of reactionary modernism. Whenever there was a clash between the demands of the irrational and mystic on the one hand, and those of the technological on the other, the deciding factor was always ideology. In his 'Elements of a Concept of Ideology', Malcolm Hamilton defines ideology as:

> a system of collectively held normative and factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or maintain. (Hamilton, 1987, p. 38)

It is impossible to understand the Holocaust without grasping this overarching principle behind everything the Nazis did. Only ideology can explain the irrational and counterproductive behaviour in which they engaged. For instance, the Lodz and Bialystok ghettoes were still in existence in the

summer of 1944, while all the other ghettoes had been destroyed during 1942 and 1943. The local Nazi leadership had pragmatic reasons to preserve these facilities. Among these were an economic advantage, as the Jews produced 'essential goods with a wide profit margin for the Germans' (Bauer, 2002, p. 90), and, on a more personal level, the bribes paid by the Jews kept the Germans in a degree of comfort. Perhaps even more importantly, among the Nazis there was a real 'fear that with the annihilation of the ghetto many of them might be sent to serve at the front' (Bauer, 2002, p. 90). In each case, at both Bialystok and Lodz, 'the decision to mass-murder the Jews in the ghetto was an ideological decision made in Berlin. The local middle bureaucrats would never have made it' (Bauer, 2002, p. 90).

Similarly, only ideology can explain why German representatives in China met their Japanese counterparts to demand the murder of 17,000 Jews living in Shanghai. These people, thousands of miles from Europe and Germany, were in no position whatever to influence anything that happened or might happen in Europe.[8] The Japanese declined. This ideology was created and promulgated by one man, Adolf Hitler. Herf summarises his central importance in everything. 'A fundamental point to be made about National Socialism is that Hitler's ideology was the decisive political fact of the Nazi regime up to the catastrophic end' (Herf, 1986, p. 3).

Ideology does not explain everything, of course, but then no one thing does. However, nothing makes any sense without ideology to drive it forward. At the core of Hitler's ideology was 'a "vast" or "gigantic" conspiracy as the *motive* force in historical events. History is a conspiracy, set in motion by demonic forces of almost transcendent power' (Hofstadter, 1996, p. 29), as Richard Hofstadter defines a conspiracy theory. Such conspiracies are always about to come to head 'it is now or never in organizing resistance … Time is forever just running out' (Hofstadter, 1996, p. 30). Hitler's conspiracy of choice was, of course, anti-Semitism.

'Whatever else could be said about the Jew, he was first and foremost the "other," who had

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[8] For more on this see Rubenstein, R.L. (2008) 'Religion and the Uniqueness of the Holocaust'. In *Is the Holocaust Unique?: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide;* Rosenbaum, A.S. (ed.). pp. 39-46. Boulder: Westview Press.

rejected Christ and revelation' (Friedländer, 1997, p. 84). So writes Saul Friedländer in *The Origins of the Nazi Genocide*. Over time, a more malevolent Jew was imagined, one who was 'demonic … the perpetrator of ritual murder, the plotter against Christianity, the herald of the Antichrist, the potent and occult emissary of the forces of evil' (Friedländer, 1997, p. 84). As early as the fourteenth century, Jews were cited 'as being in league with the devil to destroy Christendom through the plague' (Michael, 2008, p. 72). From there, the notion of the Jew as conspirator becomes deeply ingrained. However, this conspiring Jew is not any old conspirator. His aims are vast. Nothing less than the destruction of entire cultures and religions will satisfy him.

The Nazis believed that Germany and its people were at imminent risk. 'Figures of Germans threatened with sterilization or exterminated and reduced to ashes littered Nazi propaganda' (Fritzsche, 2008, p. 4). Nazism saw itself as defending Germany and Germans against all-comers, but the primary enemy were the Jews who, Hitler believed:

> were the main carriers of capitalism in Wall St. and the City of London as they were of Bolshevism in Moscow; and since in his belief in the legend of the 'Jewish World Conspiracy' they would always block his path and pose the most dangerous enemy to his plans. (Kershaw, 2006, p. 10)

Therefore they were 'revolutionary agitators as well as capitalists, which means that all the different phobias were reduced to a single common denominator' (Bauer, 2002, p. 266). According to Stephen G. Fritz, Hitler's version of anti-Semitism posited Jewishness as 'a parasitic force, working from within to undermine and destroy the superior culture' (Fritz, 2011, p. 23), and as such represented 'an imminent, existential threat' (Fritz, 2011, p. 24), while they simultaneously constituted part of a supra-national 'political entity, a hidden force that had started World War I, engineered the German defeat and humiliation, and ruined Russia and was now intent on exterminating Germany and the Germans' (Fritz, 2011, p. 24). This, in turn, created a strange politics that was 'premised on both supreme confidence and terrifying vulnerability', another paradox that gave rise to 'continuously radicalized Nazi policies' (Fritzsche, 2008, p. 5). For Hitler, 'everything was reducible to two

unambiguous possibilities: *utopia* or *perdition*' (Mandel, 2002, p. 275). This is what empowered them to be so violent: 'National Socialism was as murderous as it was … because it saw itself to be the specific resolution of German history in which an imperilled people tried to make themselves unassailable' (Fritzsche, 2008, p. 5). Allied with Herf's assessment, above, about the centrality of Hitler's ideology to the Nazi state, then the risk posed to the Jews becomes clear.

However, it is not enough to assume that this was simply a top-down initiative. Like almost everything else discussed, it was more complex than that, a complexity caused in no small way by the nature of the Nazi government. Ian Kershaw characterises the Nazi administration as 'fragmented' and lacking in basic co-ordination 'to such an extreme degree that the overlapping, conflicting, and sometimes outrightly contradictory spheres of authority can be aptly depicted as "chaotic"' (Kershaw, 2000, p. 80). This chaos was compounded by Hitler's 'idiosyncratic style of rule' (Kershaw, 2000, p. 84). For instance, Gertrud Schlotz-Klink, head of the Nazi Women's Bureau, described how to get decisions from Hitler:

> Hitler did not make decisions on paper. I did just what all the other leaders did. When I wanted something, I spoke to Hitler. Or rather, I listened patiently as he rambled on and on. Eventually, he would get tired, usually after about an hour. Then, when his energy was spent, he would listen quietly. Then I had a receptive audience. (Koonz, 2012, p. xix)

To prosper in Nazi Germany's higher echelons meant to know how to manage the leader's:

> eccentric 'working' hours, his aversion to putting anything down on paper, his lengthy absences from Berlin, his inaccessibility even for important ministers, his impatience with the complexities of intricate problems, and his tendency to seize impulsively upon random strands of information or half-baked judgements from cronies and court favourites. (Kershaw, 2000, p. 84)

In such a court, as Kershaw puts it, 'ordered government was a complete impossibility' (Kershaw, 2000, p. 84).

However, this chaos was not a vacuum. It operated in the context of the ideology, as expressed

by Hitler. 'Nazi activists at different levels of the regime were adept in knowing how to "work towards the Führer" without having to wait for a precise Führer order' (Kershaw, 2006, p. 42). Throughout his rule, Hitler railed against the Jews, which inspired street level thuggery against them. At times, Hitler toned down the rhetoric, like during the Berlin Olympics, and incidents of thuggery reduced. However, once he returned to his theme, incidents of violence and assault increased again. 'There was, therefore, a continuing "dialectic" between "wild" actions from below and orchestrated discrimination from above. Each phase of radicalization was more intense than its predecessor' (Kershaw, 2006, p. 28). Therefore, the pattern was that a normative ideology was uttered in a chaotic space, the underlings within that space sought to resolve the chaos through initiatives that inevitably grew ever more radical as time went by. The chaotic nature of the space drove that radicalisation. Without firm limits or clear demarcations, increased intensity always seems required.

In January 1939, Hitler made a speech where he warned directly of the annihilation of the Jews of Europe.[9] He called it his 'prophecy' and referred to it as such, both in public and private, more than a dozen times. This repetition served a purpose:

> Without ever having to use explicit language, the 'prophecy', beyond its propaganda effect to condition the general population against humanitarian sympathy for the Jews, signaled key escalatory shifts, acted as a spur to radical action by conveying the 'wish of the Führer', and indicated to 'insiders' Hitler's knowledge and approval of the genocide. (Kershaw, 2006, pp. 30-31)

It now seems most likely that the first mass killings in Poland were local initiatives driven by local commanders with logistical issues. More and more Jewish people were being excluded from Germany and dumped into Poland. The ghettoes were overcrowded and becoming unmanageable. The Nazis in Poland needed a 'solution' and began to create one. As Kershaw writes, 'Hans Frank and his underlings did not need any specific Hitler order. They understood perfectly well what the repetition of his "prophecy" had meant: the time for the final reckoning with the Jews had arrived'

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[9] For an excellent summary of the evolution of the "Final Solution' see Kershaw's 'Hitler's Role in the Final Solution' (2006), from which this brief summary is drawn.

(Kershaw, 2006, p. 35). These first killings took place before the Wannsee Conference, and, in effect, were retrospectively approved and eventually combined into a more coherent series of measures under Heydrich. Meanwhile, the killings in the Soviet Union, now reeling under the German invasion were undoubtedly a top-down project. There is a paper trail and specific orders were issued.

> The official 'Guidelines for the Behavior of the Troops in Russia,' issued on 19 May 1941, demanded a 'crackdown' on four groups: agitators, partisans, saboteurs, and Jews. The 'Guidelines for the Treatment of Political Commissars' of 6 June 1941 specified that captured political officers were to be killed. (Snyder, 2010, p. 182)

The killings were co-ordinated with Army movements, with the killing units working to the rear of the advancing army, and at times, with its assistance. The genocide of the Jews of Europe began in earnest.

Thus, ideology was the catalyst for everything. This ideology was built on a conspiracy theory that had no grounding in any kind of reality. The Jews represented no threat to the Germans or the Nazis, and the fear they felt was entirely imaginary. When the millions were dead, the Germans were not one iota more secure than they were prior to the blood-letting. As Bauer put it: 'in the case of the Holocaust, the ideology underlying the genocide was … pure fantasy' (Bauer, 2002, pp. 266-267). It is not enough to say that millions died for no good reason. They died for no reason at all.

The Nazis left no literary, artistic or intellectual achievements as they had no worthy ideas. They dreamed of reaching the past via the technology of the future. But it was an imaginary past, and it was the pursuit of an impossible aim, so their dream was a contradiction. Their ideology was built on an utterly groundless fear. Given that the Holocaust was built on a foundation of sand, anything that challenged that foundation could have prevented it, or at least mitigated its effects. The failure was to accept the ideology unquestioningly. The sin was to not challenge it at every turn. The tool for these tasks is critical thinking.

In her lectures on Kant, Hannah Arendt gives some consideration to the nature of critical thinking. To think critically is not only to challenge received doctrines and concepts, prejudices and

traditions, but also to embrace other points of view, so that 'one can "enlarge" one's own thought so as to take into account the thoughts of others' (Arendt, 1989, p. 42). It is only by challenging one's inherited learning, and then interacting with other opinions and standpoints, that one can one generate a comprehensive understanding. 'To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting' (Arendt, 1989, p. 43) with other people's feelings and ideas so it leads to empathy and understanding. It is critical analysis that demands that individuals take responsibility for how they receive inherited ideas, and how they are evaluated, rejected or integrated into a world view. Therefore critical analysis demands that individuals take responsibility for their own ideas. Critical thinking rejects blind obedience and encourages humility. It is the very basis of the Enlightenment, and it is not a new idea. In 1784. Karl Leonhard Reinhold defined enlightenment as 'the making of rational men out of men who are capable of rationality', a quality 'Man brings with himself into the world' (Rheinhold, 1784, p. 65). The same year Kant wrote '*Sapere Aude!* Have courage to use your *own* understanding! is thus the motto of the enlightenment' (Kant, 1784, p. 58), [*emphasis in original*].

'Holocaust' is now more than a word, it is a portmanteau that contains an enormous collection of events, actions, meanings and hypotheses. Because it is so large, diverse and varied, because it overlaps with similar and contemporaneous events and because so many people extract so many possible meanings from it, this has implications for how we might represent it. It is clear that while there are metonyms of one form or another, they are necessarily limited. Therefore we need to consider why we want to represent these events to ourselves, and more importantly, what we are hoping to find in such texts.

Chapter Two: Text and Context

Almost from the very end of the Second World War, as the extent and nature of the Nazi assault on the Jews became clear, there has been a demand that we remember what happened. This demand has a dual focus: first that we remember the innocent victims and their suffering; but also, under the notion of 'Never Again', there is a determination that we should learn from what happened and how it happened because this history must never be repeated. Paradoxically, there has also been much discussion that seeks to limit what might be said about the Holocaust. While this is often driven by the best of reasons, including respect for the dead, or from a reluctance to add to the suffering of survivors, nevertheless, it does seem odd that we are enjoined to remember, but only in some specific ways. Further, there are those who would limit not only what may be said, but even who might say it, driven by the conviction that only those who were there can possibly speak of what it was like, and that other attempts to represent the experience are transgressive. In this chapter, we will explore these issues and, in turn, discuss what it is we ask for from a representation of such an extreme experience. To do this we must first explore the nature of representation, and, as each representation is, in itself, a text of one form or another, the nature of text also. Only by understanding the nature of text and representation can we understand how we might reply to concerns about what may and might be represented when exploring the Holocaust.

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The process of representation seems simple enough. One person has something to communicate, they create a representation of it in some form; another apprehends the representation and understands

what the first person sought to utter. In speech, for instance, one has something to say, says it, this utterance is heard by another, and is understood. Unfortunately, it is not necessary to spend very long with that paradigm to see the flaws. Not everyone manages to express themselves clearly, or even to their own satisfaction, not everyone is a good listener. There can be discrepancies at every part of the process, between what a person wants to say and how they say it, between what is uttered and what is heard, and between what is heard, and what is understood. Instead of being simple, the notion of communication presupposes a very rich culture. Naomi Mandel describes this very well:

> 'To speak' implies the presence of a speaker, an audience for her speech (one that shares enough of the speaker's culture to be able to recognize the speaker as such, apprehend her speech, and assess its rhetorical significance), a public arena in which her speech takes place (hence my choice of 'to speak' over the more informal connotations of 'to say'), and the assumption that such speech – by virtue of its presence, its audience, its public context – *does something* (or, just as significantly, valiantly attempts to do something and fails). (Mandel, 2007, p. 38) [*emphasis in original*]

Given that speech is a form of representation, we can extrapolate from this and describe the necessary conditions for a representation.

First, there must be someone to author the word, gesture, or object. Next there must be an audience for that word, gesture or object. However, it is noteworthy that even the concept of audience is complex. It requires that the audience 'share enough of the [author's] culture' to recognise that there is an author, and that the audience has enough in common with the author to understand the word, gesture or object and is capable of assessing the significance of the representation. There needs to be a shared space, a place where the author can create the representation, and where the audience can meet it, hence the process has a public dimension, and finally that the word, gesture or object actually attempts to represent something, regardless of whether it succeeds or fails in the attempt. This is a complex and contingent space, with many dependencies. It would seem that the least complex part is the author, the one with something to say and who makes an effort to say it. What is

authored, the text that is a representation, is a rich and complex space in itself, as is the audience or reader of the text.[10] Who is he or she? Why is he reading this text and not others? What is it that he or she is looking for?

Speaking of the visual arts, Barbie Zelizer offers an illuminating thought, noting that 'each domain of visual representation … translates some aspect of the Holocaust into another code by which it is differently meaningful' (Zelizer, 2001a, p. 2). This is a rich and useful insight that warrants exploration, as it points to both the limitations and the core processes of representation. First, it calls attention to the process of translation, which means that whatever the relationship between the representation and the experience being represented, they are not the same thing: to see a painting of the camp at Birkenau is not the same as actually visiting the site. Visiting the site is more than just a visual experience. It involves other senses: one feels the breeze, hears the hum of lawnmowers, one smells the new cut grass. Viewing a painting in a gallery is different experience, where the sounds and smells are of the gallery and not the camp. Therefore, a painting is already limited by its medium which cannot evoke the totality of the experience. There are other limitations too, because of the act of translation. A painter processes his or her view of the scene, and renders that into paint on canvas, creating a version mediated by the dynamics of the paint, the dimensions of the canvas, and ultimately, the point of view of the painter. To view a painting of Birkenau is, therefore, to experience the point of view of the artist, rather than the experience of the camp itself. Similar mediations exist with photography[11] or sculpture, drama or dance albeit with different dynamics offered by different technologies. However, this is not only true of the visual arts. A sentence read is not experienced in the same way as one heard. The encoding offered by writing has no way to record the variety of inflexion that comes automatically with speaking and lacks the subtlety of speech to amplify or undermine what is being said. Repeated hearings are not the same as the first hearing; one can only hear news for the first time once, the second hearing is heard within the context of the first, and so

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[10] I will use the term 'reader' going forward to include any form of audience for a work, for convenience and to avoid tedious locutions.
[11] We shall explore some of these issues more fully in Chapter Five.

on. We are constantly encoding experience into representations of one form to another. We are, in other words, perpetually translating. This process of translation is complex also. In rendering something that is 'differently meaningful', Zelizer points out that 'each act of representation succeeds by overstating certain aspects of that which is being represented and understating others' (Zelizer, 2001a, p. 2). In other words there is a selection process by the author of the representation. Emphasis shifts, sometimes very subtly, other times less so, as information is privileged or discarded, and the choices made reflect the point of view of the author, and his or her concerns. Therefore, any representation is, at best, no more than an attempt to render the experience into words or pictures or sounds. It is not, and can never be, the experience itself. Because of the limitations of the medium and the mediation of the author, we are always at some remove from the experience.

We can explore this act of translation by the following example. Patrick Desbois recounts his search of a massacre site near the village of Khvativ, in the Ukraine. Using a metal detector, many bullet casings were found:

> When he found the 300th cartridge, I asked him to stop for a while. I was filled with revulsion and discomfort: 'A bullet, a Jew. A Jew, a cartridge.' The Germans did not use more than one bullet to kill a Jew. Three hundred cartridges, 300 bullets, 300 people executed here. (Desbois, 2009, p. 53)

In finding a representation of a dead person in each cartridge, Desbois is translating the spent brass from an inert and decaying residue of gunfire into an active gesture that recalls at whom the gun was aimed, and why the weapon was fired. It is a powerful moment that completely redefines our relationship to the bullet cases. However, it is our relationship to the artefacts that is redefined. The cartridge cases are unchanged. Our relationship to these objects, is, in effect, translated to something differently meaningful because he invites us to view the old metal from a different context. These cartridges cases are a text and he has invited us to read them in a new way.

Text, of course, is a very broad concept. Simply, everything that requires reading to be understood is a text, or, we can say that, as everything requires reading, everything is a text. Jacques

Derrida's assertion that that 'there is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*] (Derrida, 1977, p. 158), at first glance seems like a position of extreme idealism. However, rather than expressing a metaphysical position, Derrida's aim is to demonstrate that a reading is always necessary for understanding of any message. So, rather than suggesting that there are no landscapes, he is pointing out that to understand a grouping of geological features as a landscape requires an interpretive action by the viewer, a reading of the raw data, to interpret it as a landscape. It is in this sense that there is no 'outside-text'. Meaning is not passive, simply lying in wait to be harvested. Instead, it is the result of an interaction between the reader and the text. Reading is a dynamic act.

In *Limited Inc* (1988) Derrida returns to this question of text and clarifies what he meant. 'One cannot do anything, least of all speak, without determining (in a manner that is not only theoretical, but practical and performative) a context' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136). Put another way, he is saying that any utterance in any form directly implies a context made up of, at the very least, that form. Words are uttered in the context of speech. The words spoken are in the context of language. What is said is offered in the context of the dialogue between the speaker and the audience. What is heard is heard in the context of the dialogue between the audience and the speaker. These contexts are, in effect, other texts. 'The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction ("there is nothing outside the text"), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136). It is worth stressing that for Derrida, this emphasis on text and meaning does not in any way 'exclude the world, history, reality' (Derrida, 1988, p. 137). These too are texts and contexts, 'they always appear in an experience, hence in a movement of interpretation which contextualizes them according to a network of differences and hence of referral to the other' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136).

George Steiner offers a similar approach. 'Even substantive remains such as buildings and historical sites must be 'read', i.e. located in a context of verbal recognition and placement, before they assume real presence' (Steiner, 1975, p. 29), he wrote in *After Babel* (1975). His reference to

context is important as it introduces the idea that readings do not take place in a vacuum but are shaped by a multitude of forces. If everything is a text, then text is a vast space where individual items meet, overlap or even conflict with each other. The complexity of these interrelationships will influence a reading, which in turn will heavily depend on the reader, as his or her point of view is also a text imbricated with the text being read.

If everything is text, then before one can begin to read a particular text, it must first be delineated from all the others, or the general text. It needs, in other words, a frame around it to separate it out from its milieu. In *The Truth in Painting* (1987) Derrida discusses the relationship between the text and the frame, in the context of a painting. For him the frame stands out from both the background and the work, but does so in different ways:

> With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall, and then, gradually, into the general text. With respect to the background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background. (Derrida, 1987, p. 61)

However, in that it functions to bridge between the general text and the specific work, it does so at the expense of itself. It is a form that:

> has as its traditional determination not that it stands out but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy … it is a figure which comes away of its own accord [*s'enleve d'ellememe*]. (Derrida, 1987, p. 61)

Marion Hobson elaborates on this when she writes that the frame:

> closes up the artistic work, making it available on the market, liberating its plus value. It is made necessary by an internal lack of determinacy in the work, a lack of certainty about where and whether it needs to come to an end. (Hobson, 2001, p. 146)

To put it simply, given that any narrative can stretch forever into the past and the future, the frame defines the time span. Further the relationship between the frame and the text is 'a push-and-pull

relation between interior and exterior' (Hobson, 2001, p. 147). While a frame may seem no more than a line or edge between a painting and the wall it hangs upon, this edge is not passive but interacts with the work. It gives the works limit, and by defining the limit of the work it defines the structure of the work. Eugene O'Brien summarises Derrida as saying 'the structuration of a work of art is predicated on a framing device which is both part of the work, and at the same time, part of the ground from which that work originates' (O'Brien, 2008, p. 142). O'Brien allows himself 'to extrapolate a little' and builds out to 'the frame of any work of literary art involves the philosophical and epistemological context out of which that work derives, and towards which that work is addressed' (O'Brien, 2008, p. 142). Equally, we can extrapolate beyond literary works and assert the same 'push-and-pull' relationship between any text and the contexts from which it derives.

It is the author of the work who chooses the frame. It begins when he or she chooses the medium, whether it be prose or poetry, music or movement. It is also the author who selects the beginning and end of the narrative, who positions the easel for the painting, who decides where the music begins and ends. Equally, the reader has a role in framing the text, because he or she defines the context within which the text is read. For instance, reading a book for pleasure is different from reading one in preparation for an examination. The book is the same; however, the relationship to reader, the context, is what changes, in this case from 'book-I-want-to-read' to 'book-I-must-read'.[12]

A text about the past, for instance, gains its structure from the frame chosen. First, the specific form, whether in writing or film or museum exhibit, will provide a frame or border. This frame will facilitate how the narrative of the history is uttered and will consequently govern its relationship to other supporting texts such as such as archival material. For instance, the mores of history writing (as we shall explore more in Chapter Three), privilege documentary over oral evidence, whereas, filmed documentary, on the other hand, is often enriched and gains immediacy from oral testimony. Museum exhibits are often a kind of narrative constructed around three-dimensional artefacts. Whether it be an essay, a film documentary or a museum exhibit, it inherits from another frame, which we might

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[12] The importance of contexts when viewing photos is discussed in Chapter Five.

name 'a text of history', the ambition to be a true and accurate representation of the events depicted. These frames, then, are both an enabling and a limiting force. They help decide which items are included, for instance relevant archival material, and which are excluded, such as items without provenance or ones known to be fictional. In this way, it defines the edges of the text. This is the push-and-pull relationship to which Hobson refers. That readers accept these limits and rules, usually without question, demonstrates the self-effacing nature of the frame. Only the study of historiography, the study of the frame itself, brings it into focus.

Representation is a specific sub-set of text and the key factor is authorship. It is not happenstance, but a deliberate act. There is always an author. There is always an intention to designate this text as standing in for another one. This becomes clear even when considering found objects, such as the three hundred cartridges found near Khvativ. Desbois translates these cartridges into a representation using the context of a frame of pre-existing knowledge. The phrase he quotes ("A bullet a Jew. A Jew a cartridge") is a version of a comment made by Otto Ohlendorf, head of Einsatzgruppe D, who said 'There were fifteen-men firing squads. One bullet per Jew. In other words, one firing squad of fifteen executed fifteen Jews at a time' (Goldensohn, 2007, p. 388). In seeking this evidence, Desbois and his team had prior knowledge that this was a probable massacre site. Only with this information can he begin to identify each cartridge with the murder of a human being, as opposed to, say, with target practice. The key factor here is that these objects do not speak for themselves, they are read, and read in a specific context. In essence, Desbois views these artefacts through the frame of his existing knowledge, excludes the unnecessary or unlikely (such as target practice), and from this, he then authors the representation in the found objects, through his reading of them.

Added to this complexity is that even the most apparently stable texts are evolving over time. Any historical text operates not only in the context of the era or events that give rise to it, but also, and simultaneously, within the times of both the author writing it and the reader reading it, which may not be the same. These contexts can impact on the meaning of the text, again illustrating the

push-and-pull relationship between the text and the general. For instance, George Steiner highlights how passing time influences reading. 'When we read or hear any language-statement from the past, be it Leviticus or last year's best-seller, we translate. Reader, actor, editor are translators of language out of time' (Steiner, 1975, p. 28). Steiner's argument is simple enough. Language is constantly changing:

> every language-act has a temporal determinant. No semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. A text is embedded in specific historical time; it has what linguists call a diachronic structure. To read fully is to restore all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent in which speech actually occurs. (Steiner, 1975, p. 24)

It is worth noting how he asserts that a complete reading requires that we restore all that we can of the moment in which the utterance was made. The responsibility to recover the 'all that we can' of the time and the mores of the time of a speech action is key. 'Hindsight gives us knowledge that people of bygone times could not have had. But at the same time it blinds us to their awareness of that past, for them the present' (Lowenthal, 2012, p. 5), writes David Lowenthal as he complains that we tend to see past events through the prism of our current values. In medieval France, pigs were charged and convicted of murder. We might laugh at the absurdity of such a thing, but when we do, it is because our understanding of animals and how they operate in the world has changed. The people who saw animals as legally culpable were not insane, they were quite the opposite, but they had a very different world view, and a very different contextual framework. Unless we understand that view, and so in some way inhabit that context, we risk mistranslating them and in turn, misunderstanding them.

It is important to consider texts in all their variety, not only the history books, memoirs and diaries containing the many millions of words about these events. Claude Lanzmann recounts how he resisted going to Poland while preparing his film *Shoah*, as he felt the actual sites had little to tell him. However, when visiting the site of the Treblinka camp, he was shocked at the proximity of local villages. There are three within a 1500 metre radius of the site:

> Children and teenagers, men and women of all ages lived here and, stopping the car to think, to look … I could not help but think: 'Between July 1942 and August 1943, while the camp at Treblinka was in operation … these villages existed!' …. And I thought: a man who was sixty in 1978 would have been twenty-four in 1942, someone who was seventy now would then have been in the prime of life. A fifteen-year-old boy in 1942 would now be about to turn fifty. This was a shattering revelation to me, a shock born of logic. I have said many times, the terror and the horror the Shoah inspired in me had forced me to banish the event from human history, to a time other than my own; now, suddenly, I realized that many of these Polish farmers had lived through it. (Lanzmann, 2011, p. 597)

To cope with what he had been learning about the Holocaust, Lanzmann had considered it to be 'other', from some other time and other place and other life. However, seeing these villages, and eventually, the sign for the village of Treblinka itself, had a profound impact upon him:

> Treblinka became real, the shift from myth to reality took place in a blinding flash, the encounter between a name and a place wiped out everything I had learned, forced me to start again from scratch, to view everything that I had been working on in a radically different way, to overturn what had seemed most certain …. How could I have thought even for an instant of making this film … without the places that seemed to me exactly as they had been thirty-five years ago, without the permanence that could be read in the stones of every building, the steel of the railway tracks, without the fearsome plunge into the heart of the past I was discovering in these old farms? (Lanzmann, 2011, p. 599)

The memorial at Treblinka was designed in the late 1950s by Franciszek Duszenko, a sculptor, and Adam Haupt, an architect. James Young describes the most common form of memorial in Poland as based around gathered fragments that are 'not recuperated so much as reorganized around the theme of their own destruction' (Young, 1994, p. 185). The memorial is dominated by a large standing stone, about 8 metres high, which Young calls 'a broken obelisk' (Young, 1994, p. 188), split by a deep fissure and surmounted by a capstone that bears a menorah on the reverse, testifying to the particularly Jewish nature of the victims. This large centre piece is surrounded 'by three fields of roughly hewn stones, numbering some 17,000 in total, which stand on concrete bases; the earth

underneath contains human ashes. Inscribed on 216 of the larger stones are the names of Jewish communities destroyed at Treblinka' (Winstone, 2010, p. 228). It is a gesture 'to incorporate stylized versions of the Jewish cemetery' (Young, 1994, p. 186) while also referencing how 'emblems of brokenness have their own history in Jewish funerary tradition' (Young, 1994, p. 186).

When Lanzmann first visited the site, which was before he discovered the proximity of the villages, he tells how he walked among these stones and was unmoved. However, when he returned to film there his reaction was different:

> I filmed the slabs and the stones for days, from every conceivable angle, unable to stop, running from one to another, looking for some new angle … I never had too much, in fact I hadn't shot enough footage, and had to return to Treblinka to film more. I filmed them because there was nothing else to film, because I could not invent, because I would need this footage for when Bomba, when Glazar, when the farmers, or indeed when Suchomel, were speaking. These steles and these stones became human for me, the only trace of the hundreds of thousands who died here. The hard-heartedness I had felt in those first hours on that first day had melted in the face of the work of truth. (Lanzmann, 2011, p. 498)

These stones, both through the power of their attachment to Jewish funeral tradition and through their placement, apparently haphazardly, with different sizes, occasional names and all within the aura of Treblinka, recalled the absent dead for Lanzmann in a very direct way, just as the cartridges did for Desbois. Perhaps the most important consideration in this is the notion of 'aura'. Eran Neumann refers to the 'strong aura of the events' (Neuman, 2014, p. 3) at Dachau, and Lanzmann personalises the stones at Treblinka because these places carry a weight of some kind based on the events that happened there.

Walter Benjamin's specific concept of aura might be of use to understand what is happening here. It is worth noting that when he developed the concept, he was referring specifically to works of art, and was concerned with how the reproducibility of work could affect its essence; however, his concepts are transferable to other fields. Katie Digan offers a useful précis when she summarises Benjamin concept of aura as 'authenticity, tradition or ritual and "distant closeness"' (Digan, 2015,

p. 435). The broader issue of authenticity will be discussed below, but for now, we can consider the importance of tradition and this sense of 'distant closeness' when dealing with historical artefacts. Again, mindful that Benjamin is discussing works of art, we can consider his assertion that 'the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition' (Benjamin, 1936, p. 223), and adapt it to the concept of historical artefacts. These too are embedded in a tradition, which is the history attached to the item, the notion of that to which it has been witness. Treblinka is such an historical artefact; it demands attention not because of where it is, or because of the landscape or physical aspect of the place, but only because of what happened there. This is the core of the aura, this is what is affective, and it requires knowledge of what occurred there. Digan summarises it clearly, when she writes:

> even though a historical artifact is unique and authentic, it is not the material object itself that tells you a story of the past. Rather it is the tradition in which the object is embedded that gives the object its meaning. (Digan, 2015, pp. 436-437)

It is this tradition, this prior knowledge, that causes Desbois and Lanzmann to identify spent bullet cases and chunks of granite with the missing dead, and that causes Neumann to weep at Dachau, as we shall see.

Turning to the concept of 'distant closeness', it is worth noting that there is an ironic edge associated with this. Like the solitary candle on the baby's first birthday cake, it celebrates the arrival of new life, but simultaneously laments that a year flown by already. No matter how close the item is, it is always a kind of embodiment of Derrida's deferral. There is always a gap between it and the event that it recalls or has witnessed. 'The essentially distant object is the unapproachable one. Unapproachability is indeed a major quality of [it]' (Benjamin, 1936, p. 243). The historical artefact creates a desire for that which can never be reached. To visit Treblinka might be to remember the many innocent victims who were murdered there, but it is also to recall how far removed we now are from the terrible things that happened there. This is the pathos of the aura. It causes a longing for a connection with the past while at the very same moment it reveals to us our distance from that very

same past.

The same demands are there regardless of whether the text is in the form of words on paper or in some other form, such as an historical site. The remains of the Concentration Camp at Dachau can seem innocuous when approached by road from the north. An anonymous plain wall might enclose a depot for a shipping company. Within, the grounds are neat and tidy, there is no litter and on a pleasant September morning, it seems a long way from the prison where some thirty thousand people died. Of course, the barracks that housed the prisoners are all gone, even if their foundations are visible as a reminder, and two have been reconstructed in a manner similar to the originals, though they are spotlessly clean and smell of dusty wood. There are many modern intrusions on the site, including:

> four chapels, one for each of the four religions practiced by the prisoners that had been in the camp; a Catholic Carmelite convent outside the camp's northern wall; a memorial for the Jews killed in Dachau; and several other memorials. (Neuman, 2014, p. 3)

So how are we to read this text, as Eran Neuman does, and find something that caused him to 'instantaneously burst into tears' (Neuman, 2014, p. 3) upon entering the site?

There are some clues to the past available, including a museum, and, prominently, a large black metal sculpture that evokes emaciated bodies stretched across rails. However to access a full reading of the text that is Dachau, requires, as Steiner says, that we 'restore all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent' of the text from the past. In other words, to read Dachau we need to know what happened here, and how this place is connected to similar places across Germany, Poland and Eastern Europe, in a chain of suffering and death. Only with this knowledge can we begin to understand and engage with the 'strong aura of the events that took place there' (Neuman, 2014, p. 3). Without knowledge of the events, there is no aura. Neuman's tears were provoked by this knowledge, with the additional, and powerfully personal element, that his father had been

incarcerated there.

The importance of exegesis in reading a text can be demonstrated easily enough. Between 1941 and 1945 Birkenau was a Death Camp. Today it is a meadow, a fence, some ruined buildings, as one character comments in the recent German film *Labyrinth of Lies* (2014). The 'real Auschwitz' (Ricciarelli, 2014) resides in the stories of what happened there. This meadow has meant different things at different times. The current meaning is profoundly influenced by the meaning it had for a brief period during the 1940's. 'Auschwitz' is a text of little meaning without that context. With this context, however, it becomes a metonym for the entire Holocaust in much popular culture.

However, these sites are not static. They are not fixed and locked in time. They are evolving constantly. It is a truism of history that the Nazis destroyed Treblinka so completely that Martin Winstone comments 'next to nothing remained and it was left rather deserted' (Winstone, 2010, p. 226). However, even after all this time, such sites can still be read from new perspectives. For instance, archaeologist Caroline Sturdy Colls suggests that the idea that Treblinka was erased completely might in itself be hindering research:

> The perception of Treblinka as having been 'destroyed' by the Nazis, and the belief that the bodies of all of the victims were cremated without trace, has resulted in a lack of investigation aimed at answering questions about the extent and nature of the camp, and the locations of mass graves and cremation pits. (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 255)

The absence of what she calls 'visible evidence' can lead to a false narrative of what happened at Holocaust sites, and 'Holocaust revisionists have used the lack of *in situ* physical evidence to suggest that the events reported in the historical literature did not occur' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 255). She argues that an archaeological reading of the sites can yield 'considerable information … concerning layout, form and function through the analysis of more discrete indicators in the landscape' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 255). So while a passing tourist can see 'perhaps the most magnificent of all Holocaust memorials' (Young, 1994, p. 186) at Treblinka, reading from a different point of view, Sturdy Colls reports significant evidence of additional burial pits, 'the largest in excess of 34m in length and the

smallest in excess of 10m' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 261), some in locations where they might not be expected, and 'a number of other features recorded in the forested areas of the camp, which were characterized by distinctive vegetation, may represent further burial sites' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, pp. 262-263). This means that the site still has information to yield, and that this can challenge 'popular perceptions … that the victims in the death camps were all sent to the gas chambers following which they were initially buried in mass graves until the development of the crematoria, when they were then cremated' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 261). Instead, she finds evidence to support the notion that 'the sheer number of people sent to Treblinka often meant that chaos, necessity or the sadism of the guards resulted in divergence from a standard method of killing or disposal at various times throughout the camp's operation' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 261). She points out that 'despite popular perceptions highlighting Nazi efficiency, the methods employed, whilst aimed at killing the maximum number of individuals, were also closely related to convenience' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 255) and that:

> an analysis of the purported camp layout in association with witness accounts and other documentary evidence reveals that the nature of killing within the camp was closely related to the location in which it was being carried out, with the methods becoming more systematic as the prisoners moved further into the camp compound. (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 255)

Using photographic evidence, she describes how additional trees have been planted since the end of World War Two, how others have been removed and how the relationship between the memorial and the forest is 'constantly changing' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 283). Sturdy Colls' ground-breaking work shows 'that it is not the case that the remains do not exist, but that they have not been sought', and that her work 'has allowed known historical sources to be revisited and new sources of evidence to be revealed' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 288). It also demonstrates that these texts are not fixed in time and have more than one possible reading. Even after attempts at erasing evidence, 'traces of their existence will survive … as earthworks, vegetation change, topographic indicators and other taphonomic markers' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 255). This demonstrates 'the diversity of the Holocaust

… [and the] variation in terms of the actions and experiences of the victims, perpetrators, bystanders affected by these events' (Sturdy Colls, 2013, p. 256). However, Sturdy Colls' work is a text too, and among the frames that delimit it is a deference to Halacha Law, which forbids the disturbance of burial sites and human remains, and so non-invasive surveys were used and there were none of excavations traditionally associated with Archaeology.

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If the forgoing explorations on the nature of text seem a little esoteric, they are important, vitally so, because, as James Young commented in his introduction to *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988), 'what is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form' (Young, 1988, p. 1). Understanding these texts becomes even more important for those of us who were not there. They are our only access to the events of the past. These carry the story and history, the narratives and images of what happened, along with the insights of those who were there, and of those who have studied the insights of those who were there. Each of these texts are signs whose referents are the events of the Holocaust. However, if the foregoing analysis demonstrates anything, it is that the routes they indicate are not necessarily direct, or even fixed. Each and every sign is no more a gesture towards the route to travel in pursuit of an authentic reading of the Holocaust. That said, there are those who would limit the representations of the Holocaust that we might create. In engaging with these issues the nature of text, that it always involves reading and interpretation, is a key consideration.

Elie Wiesel is unambiguous about the morality of representing the Holocaust, even when compared to other extreme situations:

> the Holocaust is not a subject like all the others. It imposes certain limits …. In order not to betray the dead and humiliate the living, this particular subject demands a special sensibility, a different approach, a rigor strengthened by respect and reverence

and, above all, faithfulness to memory. (Wiesel, 1989)

For him, the Holocaust demands a special sensibility and, most especially, a faithfulness to the past in order not to betray the dead or inflict further pain on the survivors. These are powerful and laudable points of view. In a similar vein, Terrence Des Pres offers three prescriptions that mark the boundaries of what he characterises as 'respectable study' (Des Pres, 1984, p. 217). These 'regulatory agencies influence how we conceive of, and write about, matters of the Holocaust':

> 1. The Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality; as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.
>
> 2. Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason – artistic reasons included.
>
> 3. The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even a sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonour its dead. (Des Pres, 1984, p. 217)

According to Des Pres, the precepts he describes are widely shared, convincing in their authority and accepted 'without question' (Des Pres, 1984, p. 217). (Though it is important to recognise that he offers these as a prelude to a critique of them). The concern about artistic representations in his second regulation is worth noting. Wiesel is nothing if not unambiguous when he writes 'a novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or else it is not about Auschwitz' (Wiesel, 1975, p. 314). Berel Lang is even more explicit. Writing in 1991, he made the following assertion concerning the propriety of representing the Shoah:

> It seems obvious to me that anything written now about the Nazi genocide against the Jews that is not primarily documentary, that does not uncover new information about the history of that singular event, requires special justification. (Lang, 2003, p. ix)

In the introduction to the second edition of *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (2003), his position is unchanged, and he is still speaking of 'a warrant for representation of the Holocaust' (Lang, 2003, p.

12). As we shall see below, for Lang, representation is a particular context, but it does not change what Thomas Trezise calls this 'regulative ideal' (Trezise, 2013, p. 101) that seeks to limit what may be written about the Shoah.

Much of this kind of commentary cites Theodor Adorno's well-known phrase that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno, 1967, p. 33), and therefore any form of artistic representation is an example of *Bilderverbot*, or graven images, and the Holocaust is protected from such things by an implied version of the second commandment. This could be a reasonable summary of Wiesel's position, and also of the earlier Lanzmann position. However, Adorno's utterance is not as unambiguous as it might first appear, and as Elaine Martin argues persuasively, rather than intended to create a 'silence-inducing taboo' (Martin, 2006, p. 2), it was, instead, part of a consideration of 'the moral status of art in the aftermath of the Shoah' (Martin, 2006, p. 2).

Martin situates this apparent pronouncement of Adorno in the broader context of his work. Studied in this context, it is clear that Adorno did not seek to 'cancel the possibility of art after Auschwitz' (Martin, 2006, p. 2), but instead described the 'aporetic situation in which the post-Shoah writer found himself' (Martin, 2006, pp. 2-3). The heart of this aporia is the paradox that it is an injustice to the victims to render their suffering in art, which might cause it to have meaning or even offer pleasure of some kind to the audience, while on the other hand, any art that avoids or elides their suffering is equally unjust. In 'Commitment', one of his *Notes to Literature*, Adorno explores this in some detail. The problem for the artist who wants to respect the memory and suffering of the victims is described when he writes:

> the so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it …. The aesthetic stylistic principle, and even the chorus' solemn prayer, make the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed. (Adorno, 1992, p. 88)

Martin parses this concept of the 'aesthetic styling principle' as a means by which 'the suffering of the victims would be transfigured into an aesthetically rounded narrative' (Martin, 2006, p. 9) which

would offend by 'downplaying the horror of the event' through 'attributing sense to a senseless massacre' (Martin, 2006, p. 9). In other words, to narrate the Holocaust requires a structure or form, as we have seen, where the frame offers limit to the text, and thereby facilitates a formal structure for it. However, as Martin says, 'representing the horror within an ordered and coherent *formal* structure runs the risk of attributing a sense of meaning to the senseless massacre' (Martin, 2006, p. 9) [*emphasis in original*]. The situation is complicated, however, and herein lies the paradox: 'by this alone an injustice is done the victims, yet no art that avoided the victims could stand up to the demands of justice' (Adorno, 1992, p. 88). So it is an injustice to the victims to render their suffering in art, and equally, to ignore their suffering in art is also an injustice.

Adorno directly responded to those who took his words as an injunction against art when he wrote:

> I would readily concede that, just as I said that after Auschwitz one *could not* write poems – by which I meant to point to the hollowness of the resurrected culture of that time – it could equally well be said, on the other hand, that one *must* write poems, in keeping with Hegel's statement in his *Aesthetics* that as long as there is an awareness of suffering among human beings there must also be art as the objective form of that awareness. (Adorno, 1965, p. 110) [*emphasis in original*]

When he refers to the 'resurrected culture of that time', he is referring to the Federal Republic of Germany, more commonly called West Germany, and its 'attempt to normalise the past in an effort to legitimise West German democracy and its "economic miracle"' (Martin, 2006, p. 9). This was anathema for Adorno:

> The idea that after this war life will continue 'normally' or even that culture might be 'rebuilt' – as if the rebuilding of culture were not already its negation – is idiotic. Millions of Jews have been Murdered, and this is to be seen as an interlude and not the catastrophe itself? What more is this culture waiting for? (Adorno, 2006, p. 55)

When he spoke of a hollow culture, it is to this that he was referring, and he continues by citing Hegel and demanding that artists must address suffering. So it becomes clear that Adorno's aim is not to

prohibit cultural responses to the Holocaust, but rather to describe the condition of such responses.

It is interesting to apply this idea to actual cases. Claude Lanzmann criticises *Schindler's List* for daring to represent the Holocaust at all. For him, the attempt to render the Holocaust in art is morally transgressive. This is because it is:

> unique in the sense that it erects around itself, in a circle of flames, a boundary which cannot be breached because a certain absolute degree of horror is intransmissable: to pretend it can be done is to make oneself guilty of the most serious sort of transgression. (Hansen, 2001, p. 133)

How can we view this through the prism of Adorno? The movie, adapted from Thomas Keneally's novel, does exactly what Adorno describes, and transfigures the events into an aesthetically rounded narrative, complete with beginning, middle and end. There is a conclusion: many Jews are saved; the Germans are driven out of Krakow; and Amon Goeth, the capricious Camp Commandant is hanged for his crimes. Even more, in the final sequence of the movie, the actual survivors are paired with the actors who represented them. Together they pay tribute at Schindler's grave. Presented in colour, as a coda to a black and white movie, it has a paradoxical effect. Having travelled the terrible journey of the Jews through the movie, the audience is invited to feel vindicated because the Schindler Jews, have to some degree, 'won', and we celebrate the lives they lived, unlike so many others who were killed. Unfortunately, the accounting thus presented makes no mention of the many people we see killed in the movie, like the child in the red coat or the Jewish engineer shot because she dared to suggest an improvement to a building. So we can see how Adorno's aesthetic styling principle, so important to the success of the film, does indeed downplay the killing and offer some sense to the senseless massacre. Further, we can see in it a specific example of another of Adorno's concerns, what he called the ever-present demonstration of 'humanity blossoming in so-called extreme situations' (Adorno, 1992, p. 88). This, for Adorno, is 'a dreary metaphysics that affirms the horror' by identifying it as 'a "boundary situation", by virtue of the notion that the authenticity of the human being is manifested there' (Adorno, 1992, p. 89). According to Adorno, to find a hero in an extreme

situation becomes a reverse justification for that situation.

In defence of *Schindler's List*, it must be argued that, these objections notwithstanding, it is a very fine and very strong movie and one that attempts to confront the impossible situation in which the characters find themselves. It does so in a very accessible manner, and undoubtedly served to introduce the events of the Holocaust to a new generation in a very vivid way, and as such, demonstrates Adorno's aporia exactly. What the movie tried to do is open to criticism, but equally, failing to make the movie is open to criticism too. What was Spielberg to do? Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, but equally, so is failing to write.

Nevertheless, attempts persist to limit the discussion of the Holocaust, including Lang and those precepts described by Des Pres, quoted above. Often driven by the best of intentions, these limitations can take many forms. For instance, Des Pres, when characterising the boundaries of respectable study, refers to those who place the Holocaust as 'above or below or apart from history'. However, to do this is, de facto, to de-historicise it. What kind of event from the past is not part of history? If it is not part of history is it even real? There is a demand that the facts of what happened should never be manipulated, but as we shall see, to write any history without manipulating facts is impossible. As for Lang's demand that we justify 'anything written' on the topic, it seems reasonable to wonder who might issue such approval and on what grounds. Lang is quite clear that for him, any fictional representation is unacceptable. He writes that 'where the specific historical character of a subject is crucial, the consequence of abstracting from that particularity … is to distort the subject' (Lang, 2003, p. 97). In other words, to present the Holocaust as anything other than a specifically historical event is a distortion, and for Lang, this distortion is inherent in fictional or imaginative work.

To make his argument, Lang needs to eradicate the difference between the literary forms, whether the novel or the poem, and the content or themes of the work. If, he argues, the distinction between form and content is rejected, then the 'formal or stylistic features of a text' (Lang, 2003, p. 83) are as eligible for moral evaluation as the content. 'The literary structure becomes an assertion or idea, an element of its subject: conversely, no longer alien to the "literariness" of the text, moral

meaning becomes part of it' (Lang, 2003, p. 83). Put another way, if one has a message to impart, the choice of speaking it as opposed to writing it (or vice versa), is as much a moral consideration as the content of the message – it is another form of frame. This in turn leads to the idea that some forms of uttering are more morally correct than others. The moral element is key here. There is no doubt that some forms of communication are more appropriate to some forms of message than others. Who, after all, wants news of a bereavement delivered by a singing telegram? However, Lang is going further. It is not inappropriate or upsetting or disturbing: it is a wrong. To understand this argument, it is necessary to grasp Lang's understanding of the Holocaust as a corporate event. The people who were murdered 'do not motivate that act as individuals' (Lang, 2003, p. 93), and in fact, were not murdered as individuals, but as a group. Literature, however, works by abstraction and individuation:

> The turn of a literary figure occurs within a field of alternative possibilities, and the relation of the figure chosen has a generalizing effect … they focus attention on a subject by distancing it from its context, at once singling it out and bracketing its singularity. (Lang, 2003, p. 95)

This means that fictional representations 'personalize even events that are impersonal and corporate', and in turn 'dehistoricize and generalize events that occur specifically and contingently' (Lang, 2003, p. 96). The net effect of this is to 'misrepresent the subject and thus – where the aspects represented are essential – to diminish it' (Lang, 2003, p. 96). Obviously, to diminish the subject is the moral failing.

It is difficult to characterise this as anything but an extreme position, and one that, if it stands, has implication not just for fictional writing but, indeed, for just about any other form of representation. This is because any art form, like literature, is aware of its own rhetoricity and, as Sara Horowitz says, this imposes 'an unwanted (because unreliable, untruthful) structure that occludes rather than reveals lived experience and historical memory' (Horowitz, 1997, p. 18). For Lang's argument to work, then, the Holocaust must be a space where facts exist without any rhetoricity; where facts exist and speak for themselves in some fashion. This is exactly what he asserts:

> One objection to the very possibility of writing about the Nazi genocide is that where the facts speak for themselves anything a writer might then add through artifice or literary figuration will appear as a conceit, an obtrusion. (Lang, 2003, p. 116)

Horowitz characterises this indictment of literature about the Holocaust as 'exemplary rather than exceptional; it constitutes the fulcrum for much of the discourse about the Holocaust' (Horowitz, 1997, p. 18).

To make this charge, Lang posits a difference between 'artifice or literary figuration' and 'facts that speak', as though, somehow, these facts and whatever they might utter can be expressed without either artifice or figuration. As Thomas Trezise puts it, 'the literal or historical representation of the Holocaust is, for him, no representation at all, but rather "the thing itself"' (Trezise, 2013, p. 98). It seems that Lang thinks such a thing is, indeed, possible. Elsewhere he writes that:

> there is a strong sense in which the chronicle of the Holocaust–the rudimentary details of the answers to the questions of who, what, and when–remains at the center and as a test of whatever else is constructed on them. (Lang, 2000, p. 13)

Clearly, for him, this 'chronicle' is a 'historical nonrepresentational representation' that has value because it somehow represents 'the events that occurred without mediation but also without bringing the events themselves once again to life' (Lang, 2000, p. 13). In his view of the world then, there is a canonical list of facts which are recorded somewhere without being represented in any way, and therefore are devoid of mediation. So, for Lang, there is a history of the Holocaust that is not a construction. In one review, he complains of how Peter Novick views the Holocaust '*as* a construct and says little … about the significance of the Holocaust un-constructed (that is, in fact)' (Lang, 2001, p. 150) [*emphasis in original*]. Trezise summaries his position as:

> thanks to a God's eye view of history, there exists a Right Story of the Holocaust of which the many possible figurations amount to little more than cognitive and moral travesties. (Trezise, 2013, p. 100)

Quite apart from the strange locution that gives us 'nonrepresentational representation', this is an

untenable position. If, as we have seen above, everything is text and everything must be read before being understood, so how can these facts be known without some form of expression in words or some other medium? How can that expression not be a representation, a translation into a format that is, as Zelizer says, differently meaningful? Rather than being a 'nonrepresentational' zone, the history of any event is inevitably constructed with artifice and figuration, and as such, is as aware of its own rhetoricity as any fiction.[13]

The inevitable suppression of some information (deemed irrelevant), or privileging of other material (deemed causally significant), risks, at the very least, some form of abstraction and individuation. The notion of a canonical list of a very large number of unweighted and, crucially, uninterpreted facts, recorded without selection and without the mediation of language, is simply impossible. As we have seen above, such a list would be a text like any other, and like any other, one that requires reading and remains prey to all the complexities we have discussed already. Yet this is the yardstick ('remains at the center and as a test of whatever else is constructed on them' (Lang, 2000, p. 13)), against which all representations should be compared. Therefore, the original charge: 'where the specific historical character of a subject is crucial, the consequence of abstracting from that particularity … is to distort the subject' (Lang, 2003, p. 97), cannot be answered, as there can be no such criterion as 'a specific historical character', because the constituents of this character must always be a matter of judgement, and therefore a reflection, not of some canonical 'facts that speak for themselves', but rather of the values and mores of the person making the judgement. As we have seen, facts are. They do not speak. They must be read. There can be no 'Holocaust un-constructed' because even the term 'Holocaust' is a construction. As George Kren points out:

> the word Holocaust does not refer to an event, but is a generalization that unites a variety of discrete events under one rubric …. The unity between these events is a historical judgment, never self-evident, and in the case of the Holocaust always subject to polemical arguments. (Kren, 1988, p. 4)

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[13] This shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Dividing any number by zero always produces the same result.

Combined together, all of these proscriptions on what may be said about the Holocaust become what Naomi Mandel refers to as a 'rhetoric of the unspeakable':

> Auschwitz, in particular, and the Holocaust, in general, are commonly referred to as unspeakable, unthinkable, inconceivable, incomprehensible, and challenging (or forcing us to re-establish, or to rethink, or to acknowledge, or to probe) the 'limits of representation.' (Mandel, 2001, p. 204)

She points out that Adorno is often cited by those who wish to 'emblematize the challenge the Holocaust poses to meaning, to writing, to civilization' (Mandel, 2001, p. 220). When Adorno uses the phrase 'after Auschwitz', he posits the idea that Auschwitz, and by extension, the Holocaust, is a watershed, an epistemological and possibly ontological break with what has gone before. He is not alone in this. George Steiner describes us as 'post-Auschwitz *homo sapiens*' (Steiner, 1969a, p. 194), because the Holocaust, as George Kren's puts it, is a 'transformational event that has radically altered the world' (Kren, 1988, p. 40). For Jean-François Lyotard, it exemplifies the *differend*, when he calls it 'the confines wherein historical knowledge sees its competence impugned' (Lyotard, 1989, p. 58).

As mentioned previously, Mandel explores the very rich concept of speech. Within the process of something to say and someone to whom to say it, she locates the intersection where the act of articulation, the performative qualities of language, a community, and a public space all meet. When we declare something as 'unspeakable', therefore, we 'weld an inability to articulate to the impossibility of communication' (Mandel, 2007, p. 38). This creates 'a crucial challenge to both language and community' (Mandel, 2007, p. 38). There is, she points out, a 'seductive eloquence' (Mandel, 2007, p. 38) in doing this, but it has a paradoxical effect. In doing so, we 'proffer and perpetuate the framework by which the Holocaust is imagined … as posing a challenge to the categories of comprehension that are mobilized to apprehend it' (Mandel, 2007, p. 38). If we situate the Holocaust as beyond speech, then we are, in effect, saying that it is beyond the human: 'we are identifying this action as "inhuman" and hence as inaccessible to human understanding' (Mandel,

2007, p. 39). As discussed in Chapter One, the result of situating the Holocaust in an area beyond the human is to remove it from the arena of ethical evaluation.

Moreover, when we designate something as unspeakable, especially in the case of the Holocaust, we include an ethical injunction, of the kind summarised by Des Pres, as 'admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonour its dead' (Des Pres, 1984, p. 217). This:

> simultaneously describes the limits of our access to the real and proscribes these limits' trespass. Rhetorical production is conflated with objective fact, a conflation anchored by this injunction: not only is atrocity unspeakable, it must remain so. (Mandel, 2007, p. 209)

This 'enables the masquerade of rhetorical performance (evoking the unspeakable) as ethical practice (protecting survivors, respecting the memory of the victims, safeguarding identity, reality, or historical truth)' (Mandel, 2007, p. 209). Put in other words, do not speak the unspeakable lest you offend the memory of the dead and so become 'complicit in the very violence that you … eschew' (Mandel, 2007, p. 209). However, this injunction can reverberate unexpectedly. If speech is a human activity, one that 'privileges the body and its capacity for speech' (Mandel, 2007, p. 218), then the unspeakable does the opposite. It 'maintains the suffering human body under erasure' (Mandel, 2007, p. 218). This can hardly be the intention of those who wish to preserve the memory of the dead and the atrocity of their dying. So we return to Adorno's aporia: to speak of the Holocaust is barbaric, but remaining silent is equally so.

It is important to recognise the *bona fides* of those who advocate the idea that the Holocaust must be protected. They are driven by the third of Des Pres's prescriptions that all approaches to the Holocaust should admit 'no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonour its dead' (Des Pres, 1984, p. 217). The survivors, through growing fewer every year, are still with us, the dead are but a generation or two away. This is still very recent and very raw. Others are driven to protect us from a recurrence, and so there are laws in some countries that prohibit saying certain things about the Holocaust. They are striking if only because it is impossible to think of another event or text in

western history or culture that places the same demands and strictures on those who would represent it. Even the crucifixion of the Nazarene has met with the irreverence of Monty Python. Does the Holocaust really belong in the category of representations of the Prophet?

At first glance, it this might seem an unlikely equivalence. For many in the West, the publication of images of the Prophet is an issue of free speech, and as such the cartoons that have appeared in Denmark, and more recently in France, are perfectly acceptable commentary. However, for many in the Muslim world this is an attack on their personal dignity. This is because, as Saba Mahood points out, for devout Muslims, their relationship with the Prophet is 'an assimilative one':

> Muhammed is not simply a proper noun referring to a particular historical figure but marks a relation of similitude. In this economy of signification, he is a figure of immanence in his constant exemplariness and is therefore not a referential sign that stands apart from an essence that it denotes. (Mahmood, 2009, p. 847)

Therefore, these cartoons were not felt as political commentary, but rather taken as personal offence, and as such could be considered as hate speech. This contrasts with the Biblical figure of Jesus, whose name refers explicitly to a particular historical figure, who was more than human, a deity in fact, and therefore unavailable to a relation of similitude. As both man and god, Jesus cannot be an exemplar in the way Muhammed, a human, is viewed. Therefore, while *The Life of Brian* (1979) might have offended some Christians, because they do not assimilate with the person of Jesus, but rather with his values and what he represents, the offence is not personal in the same way. While certainly controversial, the Monty Python movie was not banned in many countries that do, however, limit speech about the Holocaust. These limits have real and actual implications. For instance, in Germany, an advertising campaign by the 'People for Ethical Treatment of Animals' organisation (PETA) that directly equated the treatment of concentration camp inmates with the treatment of animals under the heading of 'The Holocaust on your Plate', was banned by German Courts (a ruling subsequently upheld at the European Court of Human Rights in 2012), as it insulted the dignity of Jewish people.

Similarly, in Austria, where denying the Holocaust can lead to sentences of up to 10 years in prison, the so-called historian David Irving served 13 months of a three year sentence for doing just that.

In Western liberal democracy, there is a strong emphasis on freedom of speech, though there are variations between those who see it as an absolute, and those with a more nuanced version, who see it as a freedom limited by responsibility to civic, cultural or religious sensitivities. The position of a legal concept such as blasphemy is revealing in these situations. At the most extreme absolutist view, uttering impious things about deities or religious motifs and mores is simply regarded as fair comment. However, even at the other end of the spectrum, concepts which have directly religious overtones, such as blasphemy, are often avoided, and instead we can find laws against 'hate speech'. For instance, in 1991 the Irish Law Reform Commission wrote that they were 'of the view that there is no place for the offence of blasphemous libel in a society which respects freedom of speech' (LRC, 1991, p. 171).[14] Instead, they saw the 1989 *Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act*, which prohibited the publication of anything that would incite hatred on grounds of 'race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, membership of the travelling community or sexual orientation' (LRC, 1991, p. 171), as being sufficient protection against giving offence to religious sensitivities. Put more simply, representations of the Prophet might not be forbidden because they are blasphemous but they could be banned because they might stir up hatred. As Holocaust denial is regarded as a rallying cry for neo-Nazis, it could, in turn, lead to hate speech, and so is banned. In this way, we can find that the Holocaust falls into the same category as representations of the Prophet, in that it is protected by what Eugene Volokh, Professor of Law at UCLA, calls secular blasphemy laws. These are laws that 'prohibit free speech on the basis of some social or cultural taboo that is not explicitly religious' (Brayton, 2012).

However, protecting the Holocaust against those who might deny it can have a perverse effect. Volokh makes an excellent point when he contends that protecting a consensus view from challenge actually undermines it. This is because if the consensus view is constantly challenged but survives,

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[14] 'Blasphemous libel' is the legal term for the more everyday 'blasphemy'.

then we can have confidence in how it withstands these challenges. However, when it is protected we have less confidence because:

> first, we could not know whether the continued consensus stems from scholars' not being exposed to outsider challenges, rather than from its continued scholarly acceptance despite the challenges. Second, we could not know whether the continued consensus is more apparent than real, because scholars who do find themselves having doubts are deterred from expressing them. (Volokh, 2012)

When we put the Holocaust into the same category as representations of the Prophet, we do it a disservice. We should have the confidence that the historical truth is robust enough to resist the slurs of those who would deny it, and also have the trust the rigour of debate will enhance its status and not reduce it. As Volokh says, once we limit discussion about it then we risk undermining the truth of it.

Therefore, while recognising that the enormity of the Holocaust, and the significant challenge to language and comprehension that it presents, and equally, while recognising the respect due to the memory of the innocent dead, we must nevertheless embrace that challenge of speaking about it if we are to understand how it came to be. We cannot allow the Holocaust to be regarded as unspeakable for any reason. We must speak of what happened, and how it happened, and to whom it happened and by whom it was enacted as clearly and unambiguously as we are able. This, and not silence, is how we will protect and honour the memory of those who suffered so much and, perhaps, help avoid it in the future. Michael André Bernstein argues that we have a responsibility to represent the Holocaust lest it should be forgotten. This is because with the passing of the generation of survivors:

> to prohibit anyone who was not actually caught in the Shoah from representing it risks consigning the events to a kind of oblivion interrupted only occasionally by the recitation of voices from an increasingly distant past. Any tribal story, if it is to survive as a living part of communal memory, needs regularly to be retold and reinterpreted. (Bernstein, 1994, p. 45)

Or, as Alan L. Berger puts it, there is a difference between witnessing, which is the task of those who

were there, and bearing witness, which is the task of those who come after: 'the task of bearing witness is a normative element of Jewish existence, Scripturally sanctioned … witness bearing has become integral to living one's life as a covenanted Jew' (Berger, 1990, p. 45). Berger is writing to a Jewish audience, but if what he says is true, then it is difficult to see how that responsibility is limited only to Jews.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

If we may speak about the Holocaust, if we can find these objections groundless, even if well motivated, are we even able to do so? Elie Wiesel admits to no debate about what we are able to represent:

> Auschwitz is something else, always something else. It is a universe outside the universe, a creation that exists parallel to creation. Auschwitz lies on the other side of life and on the other side of death. There, one lives differently, one walks differently, one dreams differently. (Wiesel, 1989)

Having situated Auschwitz, and by extension the entire Holocaust as other, he then draws the inevitable conclusion: only those who have looked upon the Gorgon can describe it:

> Then, it defeated culture; later, it defeated art, because just as no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz. The truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes. Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so. (Wiesel, 1989)

Claude Lanzmann, as we have seen, adopted a similar position, but he moderates his perspective somewhat in his autobiography, where, ten years later he wrote that:

> Jonathan Littell's novel *Les Bienveillantes* [*The Kindly Ones*] … depicts the Einsatzgruppen with a precision that the breadth of my work allowed me to understand …. I found his fictional re-creation of Babi Yar, for instance, of the forced march of

the Jews of Kiev to the ravines of death, utterly convincing, as I did the monologues he attributes to Paul Blobel, one of the two men hanged after the trial. (Lanzmann, 2011, p. 590)

When we consider Mandel's paradigm, that to speak requires a speaker and an audience, specifically one that shares 'enough of the speaker's culture to be able to recognize the speaker as such, apprehend her speech, and assess its rhetorical significance' (Mandel, 2007, p. 38), we might find another response to Wiesel's perspective and to the earlier Lanzmann claim. If Auschwitz was so unique, a place 'on the other side of life and on the other side of death', then how could anyone who was not there share enough of the speaker's culture to be able to apprehend or assess its rhetorical significance? In other words, even if the author can create a representation of this experience, how could any ordinary reader ever have enough in common with the author to grasp what is being described? Taken at face value, Wiesel is writing into a void at worst, or at best, he is writing only to those who have shared his time in this 'universe outside the universe'. In this context, the development of Lanzmann's position is interesting. Littell has had no personal experience of the Holocaust and neither has Lanzmann, but, as a result of his researches for his film *Shoah*, Lanzmann finds this fictional representation of the Babi Yar massacre 'utterly convincing'. He finds authenticity in this depiction that Wiesel could never have done.

Jean Améry is speaking from a similar place when he talks of representing the experience of being tortured:

> It would be totally senseless to try and describe here the pain that was inflicted on me. Was it 'like a red-hot iron in my shoulders,' and was another 'like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head'? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say. Qualities of feeling are as incomparable as they are indescribable. They mark the limit of the capacity of language to communicate. (Améry, 1998, p. 33)

Améry sums up the difference succinctly when he writes that 'if someone wanted to impart his

physical pain, he would be forced to inflict it and thereby become a torturer himself' (Améry, 1998, p. 33). Améry is correct in the strictest sense. How can one describe the particular discomfort of a toothache to someone who has never had one, except by simile? Imperfect as it may be, simile is all we have, and perhaps, when an experience is so different, then we must accept that we can never represent it as it has been for the victim, but that does not mean that there are only inauthentic options available to us. We can still strive to create an experience that approaches the intensity of the original, even if we will ever remain at a remove from it.

When we read, according to George Steiner, we seek 'the most thorough possible interpretation … where our sensibility appropriates its object' (Steiner, 1975, p. 26). We want to know, or understand, or feel what the author is telling us in the fullest way possible. It is worth noting that Steiner, uses the word 'interpretation', which captures the active nature of reading. This is not just looking at words on a page, but actively grappling with them to ingest or makes one's own whatever thoughts are contained therein. A representation invites us to make imaginative leaps, to stretch ourselves to apprehend what is being described. However it is not necessarily a straightforward task:

> Any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance. No two historical epochs, no two social classes, no two localities use words and syntax to signify exactly the same things, to send identical signals of valuation and inference. Neither do two human beings. (Steiner, 1975, p. 45)

This is a key point. Language is, ultimately, personal. Steiner points out that each of us have 'two sources of linguistic supply: the current vulgate … and a private thesaurus' (Steiner, 1975, p. 46). A person's private thesaurus is a combination of subconscious experience, memory and 'the singular, irreducibly specific ensemble of his somatic and psychological identity' (Steiner, 1975, p. 46). This '"personal lexicon" in every one of us inevitably qualifies the definitions, connotations, semantic moves current in public discourse' (Steiner, 1975, p. 46). When we consider the public sphere, the place of interaction in Mandel's characterisation, we find that 'the language of a community, however uniform its social contour, is an inexhaustibly multiple aggregate of speech-atoms, of finally

irreducible personal meanings' (Steiner, 1975, p. 46). This is the chasm between the representation and the reader, namely that each is speaking a similar but not identical language, as each partakes of both the vulgate and the personal lexicon. If this is true of written or spoken languages, it is equally true of other languages, based on gesture, performance or tradition. If dance is a language, then the current vulgate shared between choreographer, dancer and avid enthusiast is unavailable to the casual viewer who attends an occasional performance. Subtlety may be lost, even when general moods may be caught. So too with the visual arts or music. We do not all share in all vulgates equally.

What is clear, from Lanzmann's comment on Littel, above, is that there is a relationship between how much the reader already knows about a subject, and what he or she will find authentic, and therefore convincing in a representation. Elizabeth Scheiber points out that 'readers of Holocaust works usually do not approach them for pleasure or entertainment. Instead, they turn to such works to learn about this dark time in human history' (Scheiber, 2009, p. 4). If this is true, then each work about the Holocaust becomes a kind of testimony, called to bear witness to what actually happened.[15]

It is possible to identify four cohorts of people who might interact with representations of any historical event. First are those who were there; there are those who have a strong family connection to the events described; there are those who study the event and finally there is the casual reader. The first cohort are witnesses. They have direct personal experience of the event as victims, bystanders or even perpetrators. If the event has been deeply traumatic, then the effects can play out in the afterlife of the witnesses, and so impact on their loved ones, who we might term witnesses by postmemory. Postmemory is a term defined by Marianne Hirsch which describes the condition of children of survivors who are deeply affected by the stories and legacy of their parent's suffering because the effect of major trauma can be transgenerational.[16] By definition, both of these cohorts will have a point of view informed by individual experience.

Gary Weissman identifies the next cohort as people who have no direct or familial experience

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[15] It is important to distinguish here between works 'about' the Holocaust and those which are about something else, but set against the backdrop of the Holocaust, which we will discuss in Chapter Four.
[16] We shall discuss this in more detail in Chapter Three.

of the Shoah but who are deeply interested in the topic and have an:

> unspoken desire … to know what it was like to be *there*; in Nazi Europe; in hiding; at the sites of mass shootings; in the ghettos; in the cattle cars; in the concentration camps; in the death camps; in the gas chambers and crematoria. (Weissman, 2004, p. 4) [*emphasis in original*]

He labels these people as nonwitnesses, and while accepting the definition, the term seems limited. A 'nonwitness' describes someone who did not witness only, it fails to capture the desire to witness, and therefore, in the spirit of the term 'casual reader', the phrase 'invested reader' will be used. The invested reader is 'searching for ways to gain access to and "remember"' (Weissman, 2004, p. 5) these events, trying 'to realize or understand the lived reality of the Holocaust' (Weissman, 2004, p. 5). Like the casual reader, the invested reader has no special access the events of the Holocaust:

> we who were not there did not witness the Holocaust, and the … experience of listening to, reading or viewing witness testimony is substantially unlike the experience of victimization …. Rather we are experiencing representations of the Holocaust, all of them created or preserved in its aftermath. (Weissman, 2004, p. 19)

This cohort plays an important role in the discussion about the Holocaust, and in our understanding of it, as it includes people like historians, critics, and others who produce most of the 'educational, scholarly, literary and artistic work related to the Holocaust today' (Weissman, 2004, p. 5). The invested reader is quite likely to seek a broader overview than just the personal story of a single witness.

Finally, the casual reader is driven more by event and occasion. Such an occasion might be the flurry of publicity that accompanies a new publication or movie release. It might be that a journey presents the opportunity of visiting an historical site. For the casual reader, this is sufficient for their interest. As a consequence, their knowledge is general. It is the casual reader who is likely to conflate Auschwitz and the Holocaust for instance, or who might assume that everyone in a concentration camp was intended for death and so on. The casual reader's knowledge will be therefore episodic and

incomplete.

It is, of course, important to remember that such categorisations are inevitably polemical and, further, that the borders that define them are porous. Witnesses or their family members can equally inhabit both the invested reader and the casual reader designations, and, over time casual readers can become invested ones and so on. However, they do facilitate consideration of the different ways of viewing and interacting with representations of history, as each cohort will have different requirements from a representation and different criteria for evaluating it. Equally, each cohort will have very different measures of authenticity.

For the witness a representation will be tested against actual memory, not just events, but sights, sounds and smells too. For instance, Martin Lax, who was imprisoned at one of the Gusen sub-camps of Matthausen, is dismissive of the museum there, which he 'found disappointing as all such museums; they can never capture the essence of what life was like … and gave a false impression of what it had been like to be there' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 77). If the museum failed for Lax, it also failed for his teenage son, Michael, his travel companion. However, as Michael is a witness by postmemory, the reasons it disappointed him were different. Michael had travelled 'hoping to be swallowed up by the camp, to experience what Mattahusen had been for me in 1944. He wanted to become a prisoner, to actually feel the horror I felt' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 74). However, there was no immersive experience available to him. Instead he was 'shocked by the innocent appearance of the gas chamber … surprised by the primitiveness of the crematoria' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 78). Lax summarised his son's reaction as they left. He was 'glad he had come, although the visit had been unlike what he expected' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 80). As Lax points out 'understanding was not something that could be gained from a few dank, decaying buildings' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 80). As the child of a witness, the representation of his father's experience was tested against a desire to encounter something of what the parent went through, but instead the child felt the installation was 'more like a park than a concentration camp' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 73). The parent-child relationship complicated things. This journey was the result of a long-held dream of the son. While he knew that

his grandparents and one of his aunts had died at Auschwitz, 'everything else he had had to imagine' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 73).

This desire to encounter something of his father's experience was a primary motive for Michael. Although Martin avoided discussing the Holocaust with his children, Michael 'later told me there was never a time when it was not part of his consciousness. He has always seen it as an important part of his own history, a history that set him apart as it did me' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 199). A similar feeling is reported by other children of survivors. Deb Filler, a New Zealand-born Jewish writer and actor, recounts how, when she was younger, other children would ask about the numbers tattooed on her father's arm. She tried to explain but they would soon lose interest, 'leaving me to wonder about it myself' (Filler, n.d.). Similarly, Lax reports how his personal history caused his son to feel 'a large measure of guilt toward me – and a large measure of protectiveness' (Lax and Lax, 1996, p. 202). Filler reports similar urges. Her father 'didn't have anybody except us … so I spent a lot of time being many many many people to him, his mother, his father, his aunts and uncles, his cousins, everything he needed me to be' (Filler, n.d.). Also, there was guilt:

> I felt so guilty for not being there, you know, which seems crazy today. Why would anyone say something like that but I think if you interview children of survivors you'll find that's quite a common thing, that the memories are very vivid with some of us – that actually didn't exist. A lot of us say things like 'I'm going back to Poland' [when we've] never been to Poland, going back to the camps – never been to the camps … but it's a very real place … in here [touching her temples]. (Filler, n.d.)

Also noteworthy is her identification with her father's past, and the sense that these places she has never visited are as present to her as are her own memories.

This combination of guilt and protectiveness is recorded in much of the scientific literature dealing with the children of survivors. For instance, Natan Kellermann speaks of 'over-identification with parents' "victim/survivor" status … carrying the burden of being "replacements" for lost relatives' (Kellermann, 2001, p. 4), or Wiseman and Barber report that 'analyses of clinical material suggest that the children's sensitivity to their parents' suffering may lead to guilt-ridden

protectiveness of the parents' (Wiseman and Barber, 2008, p. 6). These psychological energies drive the children to seek, however impossibly, a sense of the parent's suffering, to experience it in some way. However, there is no possible way for the survivor to describe torture to the child, as Améry says, without actually becoming a torturer. Today, Gusen, Matthausen, Dachau, Auschwitz and all the rest are 'differently meaningful' from what they were when they functioned as sites of horror. They do not and cannot offer the experience of the victims. Now they are representations of what happened in these places. The representation is a translation. It is always and ever at least one remove from the actuality.

The invested reader may also seek a similarly immersive experience. Weissman describes this passage from Lax's memoir as an explicit rendering of the same desire to 'become a prisoner, to actually feel the horror' that is the 'unspoken desire of many people who have no direct experience of the Holocaust but are deeply interested in studying, remembering and memorializing it' (Weissman, 2004, p. 4). However, rather than measured against family narratives, he or she might seek something that coheres with the known facts collated from a wide variety of sources. These can include history, memoirs and diaries of the events and all the knowledge acquired from research. Meanwhile, for the casual reader, authenticity may be found when an expectation is confirmed, regardless of its historical accuracy. The casual reader most resembles a tourist, who, as Ning Wang points out, finds authenticity in terms of 'stereotyped images and expectations held by the members of tourist-sending society' (Wang, 1999, p. 335). In other words, a tourist arrives in a country with expectations created by cultural stereotypes. How the actuality of the country matches his or her expectations is the measure of authenticity for the tourist. 'Authenticity is thus a projection of tourists' own beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images, and consciousness onto toured objects, particularly onto toured Others' (Wang, 1999, p. 335). This might explain why, for instance, Nazi Officers in popular culture are often portrayed in similar ways, to match the audience's expectation. The portrayal of Admiral Lutjens in *Sink the Bismark!* (1960) offers an example of this. Played by Karel Stepanek (who was not German but Czech), he is presented as smug and arrogant, yet somehow

insecure. Hurt by past insults, he seeks personal glory and preferment. Often shot in the same frame as a photo of Hitler, his greatest pleasure is when he receives a birthday wish from the Fürher. He is in marked contrast to the ship's captain, played by Carl Möhner, who is portrayed as a decent, apolitical, seaman. This is best demonstrated when, with the ship damaged, Lutjens demands to know when they can put divers over the side to carry out repairs. The captain replies that it will be possible at dawn, should the sea conditions allow it. Lutjens snarls 'I do not care about the sea', to which the captain softly replies, 'I was thinking about the men, sir'.

We can trace this portrayal of the Nazi officer back to wartime, for instance from Conrad Veidt playing Major Strasser in *Casablanca* (1942), through Max von Sydow in *Escape to Victory* (1981), and more recently to Christopher Waltz in *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), and countless hundreds of other movies, both fine and terrible. For the casual audience, this kind of stock character has the advantage of being instantly recognisable and largely predictable, and it matches the expectation of that section of the audience. In a way, there is a kind of relief in this, as we are never asked to deal with the questions of who he is or why he is that way, only the extremity to which he will go in his nastiness. On the other hand, the portrayal of Amon Goeth by Ralph Fiennes in *Schindler's List* makes different demands on the viewer. Goeth gets out of bed in the morning and shoots prisoners at random from the balcony of his villa. However, for all his savagery, he is unpredictable, and that is more discomfiting. During the clearance of the ghetto, he comes upon a Jew who, thinking quickly, claims he was set the task of clearing luggage from the street. Then he clicks his heels nervously. There is a tense silence before Goeth laughs and leaves him to carry on. We do not know who he will shoot next, or even if he will shoot anyone. It is the unpredictability that makes him a compelling and unsettling character. The invested reader is more likely to find Fiennes' portrayal more authentic than those of Veidt or Von Sydow *et al.* For the casual reader, they work perfectly well as they match expectation.

It is clear that pre-existing knowledge has a major role to play in evaluating authenticity. Theo Van Leeuwen, describes authenticity 'a faithful reconstruction or representation' (Van Leeuwen,

2001, pp. 392-393) of something. Therefore, a representation gains authenticity 'because it is thought to be true to the essence of something, to a revealed truth' (Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 393), but if that truth is differently revealed, then the perceived authenticity of the representation will depend on the pre-existing knowledge of the event. In a nutshell, the more knowledge the viewer or reader has of the event, then the more stringent the measure of authenticity applied will be.

The case of Roberto Benigni's *La Vita è Bella* or *Life is Beautiful* (1994) offers an example that can be parsed in multiple ways. Critical opinion on the movie is divided. On the one hand it has won multiple awards and was commercially very successful. On the other hand, Joe Queenan calls it 'morally repugnant' (Queenan, 2008), and according to David Edelstein it 'made [him] want to throw up' (Edelstein, 1998). Even Roger Ebert agreed that it 'softens the Holocaust slightly' (Ebert, 1998). The movie is set, in part, in an unnamed extermination camp. Leaving aside for the moment the merits of the movie, and the moral issues in setting this childlike story in such a location, there can be no doubt that for many viewers, the representation of this installation had some measure of authenticity. We can infer this as without it, the movie could not have worked as a movie for anybody. However, for the more knowledgeable viewer, one who has read Terrence Des Pres's *The Survivor*, and especially the chapter on the 'excremental assault' (Des Pres, 1980, pp. 51-72) on the senses of the prisoners, or Simone Gigliotti's depictions of deportations by train as 'invasions of shit, urine, and vomit' (Gigliotti, 2009, p. 210), the depiction of the camp might simply have been too clean to be to feel authentic. However, that level of historical accuracy does not, in itself, invalidate the experience of the casual viewer, for whom *Life is Beautiful* is authentic enough for the narrative to work. Therefore, it would seem that the same movie can be both authentic and inauthentic depending on the viewer.

This points in the direction of authenticity as a social construct. However, if this is the case, then anything can be authentic, if only someone chooses to believe it to be so. This runs contrary to the common-sense view of authenticity, especially in relation to objects. Humans venerate authentic objects more than facsimiles; we prize originals more than we do reproductions, no matter how

faithful or accurate. There is an undoubted significance attached to recognising an object that has a history. Walter Benjamin describes the aura of originals: 'even the most perfect reproduction … is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (Benjamin, 1936, p. 220). This unique existence 'determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence' (Benjamin, 1936, p. 220). So the aura of an object is more than just its materiality; it includes its history. Siân Jones quotes John Ruskin, the Victorian critic, who speaks of buildings with a 'voicefulness' gained not just by being old, but by 'long been washed by the passing waves of humanity' (Jones, 2010, p. 189). These passing waves of humanity recall Benjamin who sees an essence of an object in all that is 'transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced' (Benjamin, 1936, p. 221); or, as Jones puts it 'the uniqueness and authenticity of a work of art is inseparable from the thoroughly alive and changeable fabric of tradition in which it is embedded' (Jones, 2010, p. 189).

This can be clearly seen in the approach to authenticity in the fields of Heritage Conservation, Archaeology and even Art History. According to Siân Jones, in these fields authenticity is seen as 'integral to objects, and that it is dependent on them being true to their origins in terms of material, design, production and use' (Jones, 2010, p. 198). As a 'measurable objective attribute' authenticity can be established by 'a battery of investigations and tests' (Jones, 2010, p. 198), which can date the object accurately, perhaps even establish its provenance and authorship. This is a materialist perspective where authenticity is objective, a quality of the object, and one which resists the subjectivity of a social construct. While this is a protection against the ultimate relativism of socially constructed authenticity, it is of limited value when used as a measure against non-material things. Meanwhile, a purely social construction of authenticity fails to deal with the actual phenomenon of how humans interact with material objects or places.

From this, Jones suggests a third way of thinking about authenticity that draws from both the materiality of objects as well as the social constructions around them. For her, 'the experience and

negotiation of authenticity also relate to networks of relationships between objects, people and places' (Jones, 2010, p. 183). Speaking specifically of objects, she writes that when people experience objects as authentic they frequently describe them as possessing qualities 'akin to aura or voicefulness' (Jones, 2010, p. 189). However, she emphasises that the effectiveness of the experience is dependent upon 'people's ability to establish relationships with objects, and the networks of people and places they have been associated with during their unique cultural biographies' (Jones, 2010, p. 189). In other words, before someone can experience the authenticity of a Stone Age axe head, they must first be able to distinguish it from spontaneously occurring rocks nearby. With that pre-existing knowledge then 'the authenticity is experienced and negotiated as a numinous or magical quality … linked to the networks of inalienable relationships' (Jones, 2010, p. 199) that the object has been involved with back to the original creator who first fashioned it into a tool. The key concept here is that of the network. The age of the axe head can be dated in a laboratory, however the network of meaning around it, the people who created it, the use the found for it, the events of its history, are not to be found there. Rather, it is the 'inalienable relationships' that are triggered by the object that carries meaning. These are what give us a sense of connection to the past, to the people who made the object and to all that the object has existed through. This is Benjamin's aura, the 'substantive duration, its testimony to the history which it has experienced' (Benjamin, 1936, p. 221).

Turning then to immaterial objects, to such things as anecdotes, memories, and descriptions of past events, can we escape the subjectivity of a purely social construct? First, we must clarify the language around this. There is a difference between perceived authenticity and actual authenticity. This can be demonstrated quite simply by reference to children's books, whose descriptions can seem quite authentic to a child reading them, though rather less so to the adult reading along. The actions and motivations of the characters, the contrivances of the plot seem plausible to the child. The book seems to be an authentic creation, because it matches the expectations of the child and their understanding of the world. This recalls Wang's idea of the tourist as one who finds authenticity in a confirmation of his or her own expectations. For the adult, meanwhile, with a different sense of the

complexities of the world, the work seems naïve. The child perceives authenticity while the parent does not, as each tests the text against their own world view. The difference between the two is, of course, knowledge and experience. While we may laud the child's book for its skill in matching the child's expectations, no adult will argue that it has a more authentic rendering of the world in all its complexities. Over time, too, the child will see this, as over time the child will grow in experience and knowledge, and the book that once seemed so convincing will one day seem inauthentic.

However, the book is unchanged in all of this. It remains precisely as authentic as it ever was. What has changed is the child, and his or her perception of the authenticity it offers. Like the Stone Age axe head, it remains as it is, only the view of it has changed once the viewer has learned to recognise it for what it is. To learn is to partake in the networks of understanding that surround it, to absorb some archaeology or history and so appreciate the value that it offers. Similarly, the process of growing is to partake in networks of understanding, and as the child grows, and embraces these networks, so his or her understanding of the world changes, and this, in turn, changes the yardsticks of authenticity applied. Therefore, rather than being a purely social construct, we can see that authenticity in a text is a product of these same social networks. The variations in perceived authenticity will depend on how fully one embraces this or that particular network. What is undoubtedly true is that the more fully a network of understanding is internalised then the more stringent the criteria of authenticity will be.

In all of this, the text is unchanged. Its authenticity is to be found in the network of meaning around it. This can include other texts of the same era, historical research and witness reports. It is these corroborations (or contradictions) that amplify (or undermine) the authenticity of its report. So a test of authenticity is triggered by the text, but measured against the contexts of the text. This explains why different people can have different measures of authenticity (their level of participation in the network of understanding), and also offers a measure or possibility of objectivity through corroboration via other texts or other networks of understanding. If this is the case, then it allows us to assert that there are different grades of authenticity and that it is possible to describe some reports

as more authentic than others. Therefore, in the case of Michael Lax, disappointed at the museum at Matthausen, because it could 'never capture the essence of what life was like', there is a measuring against a more authentic representation of the past, his own experience. So, too, those who find the world of the camps in *Life is Beautiful* to be too clean, are measuring against more authentic representations discovered through research. For the casual reader, untroubled by deeper knowledge, the movie works perfectly well. Therefore, we can argue that some representations are more authentic than others, and this authenticity is accessed via contexts or networks of understanding around them. Consequently, authenticity lies not only in the perception of an object, but also in the contexts of the perception, and we can summarise that the more elaborate the networks of understanding then the more stringent the measures of authenticity.

This argument from contexts, as we shall see in Chapter Three, echoes Derrida's conception of history, and his similar emphasis on contexts as a tool through which to access some form of objectivity. It is the recurring theme of this discussion of text, representation and authenticity, and it is the recurrence of context in all these considerations. There are no facts that speak for themselves, but there are millions that can be read in a variety of ways, from different points of view. There are representations of these facts that are translations that require interpretation. Context is a way of adding value to the facts we read, of finding more in them that might first appear and is a protection against an endless spiral through subjectivity into solipsism. Equally, context offers a measure to calculate the value and authenticity of these facts. No facts stand alone, but are imbricated with many others, forming a network or web that offers the comfort of coherence. With context we arm ourselves with an awareness that resists stasis and embraces the ever unfolding narrative and our own role within it. We seek confidence in our knowledge rather than an absolute, unyielding truth, if for no other reason than that such things are not available to us. Our task becomes not the achievement of certainty but rather to seek out a path through uncertainty. It is not that we cannot know, but rather that we cannot claim absolute certainty.

In this uncertain world how is an authentic representation of the Holocaust to be found?

Representations of the Holocaust can be broken into two broad categories, which for convenience we can label factual and fictional. Hayden White offers a convenient rule of thumb:

> Historians are concerned with events which can be assigned to specific time-space locations, events which are (or were) in principle observable or perceivable, whereas imaginative writers—poets, novelists, playwrights—are concerned with both these kinds of events and imagined, hypothetical, or invented ones. (White, 1978, p. 121)

Therefore it would seem that authenticity might lie in the factual range of works, including history, testimony, and memoir. These might be published as books, recorded and encoded on video or film, presented in museums. The next chapter will explore the possibilities and limitations of these representations.

Chapter Three: Making History

It is easy to agree with Inga Clendinnen when she writes 'the great enterprise of representing both the span and depth of the Holocaust is best done in writing, and in historical writing at that' (Clendinnen, 2002, p. 181). There is a marked tendency to prefer historical representation of the Holocaust. Barbie Zelizer observes that we have a '"preferred" template' for speaking about the Holocaust and that 'has tended to privilege the factual' (Zelizer, 2001b, p. 2). Factual representation is often seen in contrast to fictional ones. According to Elizabeth Scheiber 'in Holocaust studies, fictionalisation is generally met with mistrust' (Scheiber, 2009, p. 7). James E. Young describes historians as 'especially wary of the potential displacement of hard history by its novelistic versions' (Young, 1988, p. 6). This preference for the factual is easy to understand. The Holocaust is a horrendous event and, we can recall Scheiber's previously quoted assertion that readers 'turn to such works to learn about this dark time in human history' (Scheiber, 2009, p. 4) rather than for pure entertainment. As we have seen, others, from Wiesel to Lang, object to imaginative representations because such things are either impossible or immoral, or both. Each work about the Holocaust becomes a kind of testimony, called to bear witness to what actually happened. Verisimilitude is not enough; truth is demanded.

Clendinnen asserts the particular value of writing because it is 'highly controlled' and 'capable of nuance' while also resisting 'elision or evasion', and the opportunity to read and re-read allows a space where the reader can 'reflect … reject … modify', and therefore opens itself to 'critical evaluation in ways that other modes of communication … do not' (Clendinnen, 2002, p. 181). Once more, it is difficult to argue with this. However, writing, even factual writing, does not occur in a vacuum. While we may be fascinated by history, and not just the terrible events of the Holocaust, there are some very real questions about the status of the information that history offers us about the past. What are the sources of our histories? Do different sources have different value? Is all history

the same? Is it accurate and objective? Is objectivity even possible? Are the aims and ambitions of a historian the same as a diarist or memoirist? After all, they each want to record and interpret experience in some way.

For the layperson, the historian's task seems obvious and can be expressed as in the words of Leopold von Ranke, one of the first to articulate a role for the historian. 'According to Ranke … the historian's job is to present the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen*—as it actually happened' (Shermer and Grobman, 2009, pp. 21-22). In theory, it is all quite simple: just enumerating the facts, 'usually in a chronological order would present a true picture of the past. The meaning of the events would be self-evident' (Kren, 1988, p. 3). In essence, the historian's task is to uncover facts and then present them, and they will, in turn, speak for themselves. However, as we have seen, facts exist but do not speak, and they need to be read to yield a meaning. Therefore, the current consensus is that history is a narrative, constructed by the historian, and as Hayden White says:

> is not merely a neutral discursive form that may or may not be used to represent real events in their aspect as developmental processes but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications. (White 1987, p. ix)

Consequently, rather than uncovering a neutral, objective meaning, as supposed in the traditional view, the historian constructs a meaning and this is, inevitably, an ideological process. If this is so then the written history that Clendinnen asserts is the best way to study the Holocaust, turns out to be a discourse that is necessarily mediated through the prejudices or ideologies of the historian. How then can we trust that it is a true picture of what happened? Or even if, by design or happenstance, it is a true picture, how can we know? When there is no independent canonical version of the past; all we have to compare with are other, equally mediated versions, offered by other ideologically driven historians.

Therefore, the only generalisation available about is that history is constructed on inherently unstable foundations, reflecting the ideologies and prejudices of the historian. However, unstable

foundations or not, what can be said with absolute certainty is that this has never stopped humans looking backwards and trying to make sense of the past. The past often seems to offer the key to understanding the present, and even at times, to foretelling the future. People look to the past to make sense of themselves, as Adam Gopnik puts it, because 'we are far more likely to be made by history than to make it' (Gopnik, 2014). Therefore it is necessary to understand the possible ideologies that might influence a historian at work, and these are not necessarily limited to political values.

Yehuda Bauer uses the following metaphor to describe the work of the historian:

> A historical event is, I think, the result of the convergence of an infinite number of causal chains, the most important ones of which are analysed and examined by the historian, sociologist or psychologist, in the search for a plausible explanation for the occurrence of the event in the first place. (Bauer, 1996, p. 300)

It is a telling metaphor that reveals the innate bias of the historian towards causality as a determiner of meaning, and, therefore, importance. He continues

> Historical events or the processes leading up to them have, I think, significance only in so far as one thinks of them as closed circles. The significance lies in the contribution we perceive, rightly or wrongly, that they make to the unfolding of other events in the chain of human history. (Bauer, 1996, p. 300)

Kren amplifies on this. He explains that historians tend to designate events as important based on how 'causally significant' (Kren, 1988, p. 7) they are. In other words, consequences arising from an event are what lend it importance, rather than the event in and of itself. Bearing this in mind, it is not difficult to see how historians have frequently privileged the occasional events of the elite at the expense of the quotidian of the *hoi polloi*. For many historians, terrible as it was, the Holocaust is just 'another example that history has always produced victims, and Nazism is seen only as another example of a recurrent "inhumanity of man to man"' (Kren, 1988, p. 8). There is a measure of truth in his assertion that 'histories of Europe in the twentieth century assign little space to it, and many textbooks of "Western civilization" all but ignore it …. Its consequences were minimal …. In contrast to other

events that have become significant' (Kren, 1988, p. 8). The end of World War Two was the genesis

of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War. The focus of historical narrative for the next fifty years moved

there. While it might be argued that the Holocaust has a role in the creation of the State of Israel, it is

difficult to demonstrate direct causality. The truth is that the massacre of the Jews of Europe leads

nowhere for the historian *qua* historian. It has many causes but caused little. Perhaps fittingly, it

represents the end of a causal chain.

However, on another question Bauer is explicit:

> The humans involved in the historical event may or may not have thought out the
> reasons for their actions, or they may have reacted unthinkingly or emotionally to the
> unfolding of the event, and for them there is a significance: in so far as they had aims
> or desires or yearnings and these were fulfilled or partly fulfilled or not fulfilled, the
> event has a meaning for them, in relation to their individual lives. But in itself, the
> event is meaningless …. An intrinsic meaning, a significance, a purpose, if you will, I
> cannot see. (Bauer, 1996, p. 300)

Significance, for Bauer, is projected by the actors in the event. The event has no meaning in itself;

any meaning found has been inscribed upon it by the participants. Similarly, those who look back at

historical events to seek an explanation or an understanding of what happened are the ones who

inscribe meaning and significance on historical events. This, of course, recalls Hayden White and his

idea of history as a constructed narrative. Meaning is inscribed when choices are made among the

facts, as White says:

> it is not enough that an historical account deal in real, rather than merely imaginary,
> events; and it is not enough that the account represents events in its order of discourse
> according to the chronological sequence in which they originally occurred. The events
> must be not only registered within the chronological framework of their original
> occurrence but narrated as well, that is to say, revealed as possessing a structure, an
> order of meaning, that they do not possess as mere sequence. (White, 1987, p. 5)

This is, of course, very different to the layperson's version of the historian's task. Rather than

discovering truth in registering facts, an edifice is constructed from the building blocks of data

available, and, depending on the historian, these blocks may be used differently. For instance, Kren offers this example:

> What the so abundant evidence cannot show, what necessarily is inaccessible to direct observations, are the connections that have led to the creation of the concept 'Holocaust.' How 'Holocaust' is defined is a matter of judgment dependent on values as much as facts …. The word Holocaust does not refer to an event, but is a generalization that unites a variety of discrete events under one rubric …. The unity between these events is a historical judgment, never self-evident, and in the case of the Holocaust always subject to polemical arguments. (Kren 1988, p. 4)

So it can be argued, that if knowledge is provisional and unstable, if every experience is an interpretation of evidence, then any version of history is as good as any other, or geography or any other experience. Further, if understanding is subject to the whim of private and subjective interpretation, then every understanding is of the same value, and that means that no understanding has any value. Added to this it is necessary to remember that each text of history is, in some form or other, a representation. We can therefore recall Zelizer's idea that each representation is a translation into something that is 'differently meaningful' as discussed in Chapter Two. So it is not difficult to see history as selections of information rendered inadequately into prose reflecting the baggage of the historian. At any point of the process from the event occurring to the selection of it among others for significance to the translation of it into prose there is the potential for error at worst and debate at best. Different historians can see different significance in different events; some will be good translators, some less so, and all of this is before the reader picks up the text and begins to read through the lens of his or her own prejudgements. This is an unstable and constantly evolving relationship.

To confront this instability it is necessary to move beyond history in itself and into the world of epistemology. For Jacques Derrida knowledge is inherently unstable. There is a *différance* between the moment of an event and the experiencing of it. This deferring can be imperceptible but it is present nonetheless. It is a key concept. If interaction with knowledge is not immediate but deferred, what occurs during that deferral? If the event is processed into language, for instance, so that it might be

thought about, what does that processing involve? In a system where the sign is 'deferred presence' (Derrida, 1982, p. 9), that is, representing something that cannot be immediately apprehended, 'the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both secondary and provisional: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign thus derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence toward which the signing in this sense is a movement of mediation' (Derrida, 1982, p. 9). Mediation is a key word here. There is a presence in every perceptual experience that stands between the event and the perception of it. This presence is the process by which raw data is received from the senses and interpreted into experience. As such, knowledge is always the result of interpretation and so is open to other interpretations or revision. Therefore it can never be more than provisional and thus is unstable.

This provisional status necessarily describes historical knowledge, where the temporal delay is obvious, and the raw data comes not from experience but from oral, written or even archaeological texts. That this process is mediated is obvious. Hugh Rayment-Pickard draws attention to this when he notes how, in *The Post Card* Derrida speaks of 'postal *différence*' and how 'texts from the past are like postcards'. But 'the postal effect', the delay between sender and receiver, means that the intended meaning is self-erasing, distorting and ambiguous. Derrida describes the post card as 'an allegory of all of history' (Rayment-Pickard, 2002, p. 16).

To understand is to identify meaning. To comprehend words, gestures, artworks or historical events is to view them through a prism that makes them intelligible. Passing through the prism, the message is refracted into parts that are recombined within the perceiver's own contexts. Thus, the meaning extracted will depend not only on what is uttered but also on how, and by whom, it is heard. Therefore, the exchange of meaning is fraught with misunderstanding and misapprehension. Even in the best of circumstances, understanding can never be more than provisional and subjective: a best guess at meaning. The unfortunate situation is that knowledge is uncertain and unstable and understanding is doubly so, being based first on unstable knowledge and worked through the uncertain processes of perception. How then is it possible to trust any understanding?

Derrida has a way forward from here. He suggests that rather than seeking truth in an immediate experience of the world, one should explore instead the contexts in which truth happens. These contexts are implicit in everything. 'One cannot do anything, least of all speak, without determining … a context' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136). Context, he argues, can lend value. 'What is called "objectivity," scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe, in a given situation), imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, powerfully established, stabilized or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language) and yet which still remains a context' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136). There is a pragmatic moment here. He asserts that we have a number of working models, for instance scientific method or historical method (to name but two), which are contexts that we trust as being objective. They gain this trust because they have been tested repeatedly over time. That they are rigorously tested offers the possibility of stability and comprehensiveness. This does not infer that these models are perfect, on the contrary, they have been revised many times and might be improved and revised again. This recalls Volokh's speaking of the danger of protecting consensus, rather than allowing it to be contested, as mentioned in the previous chapter. The more the consensus is tested, then the more confidence we can have in it. It is not perfect but these methods, so rigorously tested, offer at least a kind of objectivity. 'We can call "context" the entire "real-history-of-the-world," if you like, in which this value of objectivity and, even more broadly, that of truth (etc.) have taken on meaning and imposed themselves' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136). So, for Derrida, concepts like objectivity and truth have imposed themselves on the context. Put another way, what is important is not so much the point-of-view but the process. Objectivity is best sought in a rigorous and comprehensive process. There may be no guarantee that the process will yield truth or objectivity, but the more rigorous and comprehensive the effort is, the more likely these may result.

None of this, of course, denies the mediated nature of knowledge, and therefore the conditional nature of understanding. However, it does offer the possibility of mitigation. It points towards a process that extends the possibility of objectivity and the potential for understanding. A rigorous process can aim to balance mediation with possibility, conditionality with potential. By

seeking objectivity in the context or process, the subjective point of view can be challenged to be as broad and wide-ranging as possible. This, in turn leads us back to Arendt and her concept of critical thinking, discussed in Chapter One, and going visiting with other people's ideas and thoughts so that we might critically examine both theirs and our own. In this way, reminiscent of Derrida's concept, the subjective can be forced, in Arendt's phrase, to interact with other points of view. It is this process that creates the possibility of expanding knowledge, and in turn, understanding.

<div align="center">***</div>

Clendinnen also speaks of the 'span and depth' of the Shoah, which are imprecise terms, but which suggest that history may have a strength is quantifying and measuring before reflecting upon the vast scale of the episode. To quantify or measure, it needs the raw data of what went on, and this, in turn invites attention to the sources of history. Our sense of the past begins within ourselves, with memory and recollection of past events. Our sense of ourselves is based on recollections of events and experiences. We need a past to tell us who we are in the present:

> Memories help us make sense of the world we live in; and 'memory work' is, like any other kind of physical or mental labor, embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end. (Gillis, 1996, p. 3)

'Consistency of consciousness and a sense of continuity between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, would appear to be integral to a sense of personal identity' (King, 2000, p. 2), according to Nicola King, and that identity 'is constructed by and through narrative: the stories we tell ourselves and each other about our lives' (King, 2000, p. 2). There are two facets of King's assertion worth noting. One is that if our sense of ourselves is dependent on memory, then it makes assumptions about the nature of memory and the kind of access it affords us to the past. The other key concept is the fact that self and identity are constructions, things that are made; they do not

just happen. If indeed we do construct ourselves, then the foundation of the structure is memory.

Memory is a way of maintaining the past in the present. The past is an absolute abstraction yet each one of us feels that it is concrete and real. Our working assumption is that we have a direct contact with our personal history. Our memory seems to be like a video recording of things and places we have seen, of people we have known and of events in which we have taken part or witnessed. It is as if somewhere within our brains there is a storehouse stuffed with videotapes that are our immutable memories. However, if our memory is a video recorder, then it is not a very good one. As time passes, details slip away, sometimes entire events and people get lost too. We can look at an old school photograph and find names difficult to assign to faces, or even, shockingly, that some faces are those of strangers. F. C. Bartlett is explicit: 'remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces' (Bartlett, 1932, p. 213). Instead, remembering involves 'complex constructive processes that are sometimes prone to error' (Schacter, 2012, p. 8), according to Daniel L. Schacter. A memory is assembled from 'fragments of stored information under the influence of our current knowledge, attitudes and beliefs' (Schacter, 2012, p. 8). It is the influence of 'current knowledge, attitudes and beliefs' upon the stored fragments that reveals the constructed nature of our recall. We build our memories of the past through the prism of who we are now. Therefore, as we change, our memories can be reconfigured and reconstructed under the influence of our changing sense of ourselves. We might also alter memories by adding context to them, as we shall see in the case of Mark Roseman's work with Marianne Ellenbogen, discussed below, where memories were subtly altered to add meaning to them. However, we are largely unaware of doing this: 'in everyday social discourse, and in much conventional autobiography, these narratives tend to elide memory as a process: the content is presented as if it is uniformly and objectively available to the remembering subject' (King, 2000, p. 3). Yet again, rather than a firm foundation for our knowledge, we have a 'complex and shifting relationship' (King, 2000, p. 3) with the events of the past.

As memory is closely related to our identity, its importance cannot be underestimated. As

Gillis puts it 'identities and memories are not things we think *about*, but things we think *with* (Gillis, 1996, p. 5) [*emphasis in original*], and that the:

> notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa. The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity. (Gillis, 1996, p. 3)

However, we also operate under other influences, and therefore part of our identity is created by other values that we share with our communities, where by community, we may mean everything from our state and nation to school class or football team. Maurice Halbwachs, who died at Buchenwald in 1945, understood these forces as collective memory, sometimes called 'public' or 'collected' memory. Halbwachs saw it as a social construct based on individual memory that is 'part or an aspect of group memory' (Halbwachs, 1941, p. 53), as we are unable recall our individual pasts without 'discoursing about them', and to discourse means to situate 'within a single system of ideas our opinions as well as those of our circle' (Halbwachs, 1941, p. 53). This is a socially cohesive act because the 'framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances to each other' (Halbwachs, 1941, p. 53). Halbwachs points out that it is not necessary that we actually share our memories, but that we process them in much the same way (Halbwachs, 1941, p. 53). If this is the case, then, for instance, the history taught in schools will have a significant influence on a collective memory, as it leads to generations versed in the same inherited method of evaluating the past. George Lipsitz contends that collective memory is 'a crucial constituent of individual and group identity in the modern world' (Lipsitz, 2001, p. viii), a process that has accelerated with electronic mass media. Patrick H. Hutton sees parallels with Claude Lévi-Strauss' idea of *bricolage*: 'the same artefacts may be appropriated for unrelated purposes in different cultural *milieux*' (Hutton, 1988, p. 315) Nancy Wood refers to 'the notion of "collective memory"' as something that enables the community 'to signal some tangible presence of the past that can be discerned beyond the level of the individual and in specific social *milieux*' (Wood, 1999, p. 1). Benedict Andersen defines a nation as

an 'imagined political community' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). He terms it 'imagined' as it is impossible for any one member of the community to meet every other one, but 'in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' usually based on 'a deep, horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1991, pp. 6-7) quite regardless of the actual prevailing social structures. It is no great leap to see that shared memory becomes a significant element in this horizontal comradeship. However, the specifics of collective memory are vague. Jeffrey K. Olick points out that the term has been used to describe everything from:

> aggregated individual recollections, to official commemorations, to collective representations, and to disembodied constitutive features of shared identities; it is said to be located in dreamy reminiscence, personal testimony, oral history, tradition, myth, style, language, art, popular culture, and the built world. (Olick, 1999, p. 336)

With such imprecision of definition it is inevitable that collective memory is volatile. 'To remember is to place a part of the past in the service of conceptions and needs of the present' (Schwartz, 1982, p. 374) according to Barry Schwartz, In his study of the events and people commemorated in the United States Capitol building, he noted that in the period leading up to and during the Civil War, commemoration focused 'on the denominator of founding heroes' however, once the crisis of the Civil War was resolved, the focus shifted to 'past and present bureaucratic leaders' (Schwartz, 1982, p. 395), that is, to the stable structures that were the legacy of the founders.

As James Young points out, memorials reflect 'national myths, ideals, and political needs' (Young, 1994, p. 1), depending on who is creating them. However, the relationship is reflexive, and that is another element in the volatility. 'Once created, memorials take on lives of their own … new generations visit memorials under new circumstances and invest them with new meanings' (Young, 1994, p. 3). Regardless of the fluidity in the definition, there are forces beyond our personal memories that undoubtedly have a role in how we see ourselves. Concepts like 'nationhood' or even 'neighbourhood' are based on a sense of a shared past, one that influences how we see the world. It allows us feel part of something bigger. As Olick comments:

> The trauma of Auschwitz will not disappear with the death of the last survivor; nor is it carried only through those-mainly their children-who suffered its personal ripple effects: Auschwitz remains a trauma for the narratives of modernity and morality …. It clearly makes both ethical and conceptual sense to speak of that trauma as irreducible to individual and aggregated psychology. (Olick, 1999, p. 335)

'Prosthetic memory', a term coined by Alison Landsberg, describes a form of 'public cultural memory' that 'occurs at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past' (Landsberg, 2004, p. 2) but in a quite specific way. This interface is with 'an experiential site' (Landsberg, 2004, p. 3), that is, somewhere that offers some form of lived experience of the past rather than a narrative only. She suggests that spaces such as movie theatres and museums have the potential to offer these kinds of experience. For Landsberg the key to these prosthetic memories is that they are 'experienced with one's own body … and as such, become part of one's personal archive of experience, informing not only one's subjectivity, but one's relationship to the present and future tenses' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 66). She uses the term 'prosthetic' because these memories are 'like an artificial limb, they are actually worn by the body, these are sensuous memories produced by experience' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 66). She is attaches great importance to the experiential element of prosthetic memory:

> the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics. (Landsberg, 2004, p. 2)

For Landsberg, in a museum, when someone encounters an object from the past, for instance, piles of shoes left by the victims of mass murder, the mimetic facility is stimulated in a kind of inverse way. Unlike traditional versions of mimesis, where one experiences the presence of the other through imitation, in this case one is instead, radically aware of the absence of the other: 'we experience the objects as the sensuous trace of an absence' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 81). The 'prosthetic relationship' is based on a negotiation between the viewer's own 'archive of experiences' and these objects. This is,

however, 'predicated upon the object's indexicality—upon their "realness" and materiality' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 81). 'The same moment that we experience the shoes as their shoes … we feel our own shoes on our feet' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 81). At this point and moment of experiential contact 'an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history' (Landsberg, 2004, p. 2).

In the case of the cinema she offers a reading of *Schindler's List* that focuses on the experience of viewing the movie. She notes that it begins with a thriving Jewish community, prior to the German invasion of Poland. This offers us Jewish people who are not victims, not starving and not dehumanised. This makes the descent into hell all the more telling for the viewer. Because we identify with the characters before they are turned into victims by the Nazis, 'audiences are led to experience the disenfranchisement and to understand the dispossession more viscerally' (Landsberg, 2004, p. 124). She cites one particular moment where a worker, a hinge-maker, falls foul of the capricious Commander Goeth, and is dragged outside to be shot. But Goeth's pistol misfires. The hinge-maker pleads for understanding, he has a valid excuse. However:

> Goeth does not listen. The hinge-maker's inability to defend himself demonstrates for us the absolute unfairness of his position. It is precisely our proximity to him … that forces us to register his fear and the irrationality with which he is treated. Our closeness to him, our mimetically induced relationship to him—makes us feel vulnerable in bodily ways, which make us cringe and wriggle in our seats. Our discomfort derives from the power of the image to move us and to make intelligible and visceral what we cannot comprehend in a purely cognitive way. (Landsberg, 2004, p. 125)

For Landsberg this is just the kind of moment that forges a prosthetic memory. The experience is felt in our bodies ('make us cringe and wiggle in our seats') and that is more telling than simply reading the same passage in the original novel.

These kinds of engagement with objects via mimesis makes empathy possible. Empathy is valuable as, unlike sympathy, which 'relies upon an essentialism of identification, empathy recognizes the alterity of identification' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 82). Therefore, empathy 'is not

emotional self-pitying identification with victims, but a way of both feeling for, while feeling different from, the subject of inquiry' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 82). Landsberg sees in prosthetic memory the possibility of an ethical force. This is because it 'creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the alterity of, the "other."' (Landsberg, 2004, p. 9). In other words, if those who are not Jewish can experience something of the Holocaust, or those who are not Black can have these prosthetic memories of slavery, then we will be more open to identifying with the victims of these injustices and so work to right them.

However, when considering her examples, other questions occur. To stand in the museum at Auschwitz and stare at the thousands upon thousands of shoes can indeed cause this radical awareness of the other to whom she refers. It is almost impossible not to wonder about the feet that were in these shoes, and what happened to them, and to feel a deep empathy. However, if this 'prosthetic relationship' is based on the 'object's indexicality – upon their "realness" and materiality' (Landsberg, 1997, p. 81), then how is it possible to have a markedly similar experience when seeing a contrived work of art using metal casts of shoes, rather than the real thing? For instance, in Budapest, there is an installation, S*hoes on the Banks of the Danube*, (2005) created by Gyula Pauer and Can Togay. It is a simple, but very striking, memorial to the victims of the Arrow Cross militia, who were Nazi fellow-travellers. During the winter of 1944-45, they stood their victims on the embankment and shot them so their bodies fell into the Danube. These rusted casts of period shoes are placed in the positions in which the victims stood, facing the water. Like the display at Auschwitz, there are a variety of shoes: men's, women's, children's, and though there are less, it can certainly be as affecting to the viewer, because, in some ways, they use similar techniques. At Auschwitz, there is an enormous mass of undifferentiated shoes, a huge pile, but inevitably the viewer's eye is drawn to some, at the leading edge, that personalise the exhibit. We notice this shoe, and then this one, and then this one, out of all these shoes. On the banks of the Danube, there are only sixty shoes, so the eye is inevitably drawn to this shoe, and then this one, and then this one. Art, as we saw when talking of Lang's objections to fictional responses to the Holocaust, works by picking one from the field 'by distancing

it from its context … singling it out and bracketing its singularity' (Lang, 2003, p. 95). The curators of the exhibition at Auschwitz use the techniques of art to individuate the victims, and in so doing, distance them from the context, in order to humanise them. Both works invite us to consider the person in this shoe, and then, by extension, all the other people in these shoes.

Figure 1: Terry Devlin.   *Figure 2: Terry Devlin*

In the Hungarian Exhibit at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (in Block 18 of what was the Auschwitz 1 camp), the exhibition there, called *The Citizen Betrayed: A Remembrance of Holocaust Victims from Hungary* (2004), also references shoes on the banks of the Danube:

Figure 3: Terry Devlin

Perhaps then, the power of these works is that they are based on shoes, and their ability to suggest age, sex, class and even sometimes the personality of the wearer. After all, Van Gogh painted many pairs of shoes and boots because:

> shoes have been to all the places and have seen all of the struggles of the owner. To many, Van Gogh's shoes with the worn leather and tired soles represent the rough life of the artist himself and the weathered journey he has endured. (Sonya, 2011)

There may be other considerations at play when we consider the experiential nature of watching a film. As Judith Keene points out 'cinema viewing is a somatic experience engaging the sense of sight and sound and frequently—in happiness, horror and sexual arousal—the body's autonomic, physical response' (Keene, 2010, p. 10), and therefore is an immersive experience, and this can lead to 'an epistemological shift in personal subjectivity or political and social understanding' (Keene, 2010, p. 11). However, this can cut more than one way. If the scene is misjudged and too strong, then the viewer can reject the scene, and by extension fail to empathise. Equally, if the person already has a deeply committed point-of-view, instead of causing change, it can also have the perverse effect of making the person reject the movie and refuse to empathise as it conflicts with pre-existing

long held views. While stressing the importance of the how much prosthetic memory is created because it is experienced physically, Landsberg does not consider the nature and value of emotional responses, or their interconnectedness with physical responses.

When it comes to suggesting an ethical dimension to prosthetic memory, she fails to take account of the fact that these movies and museum exhibitions are created and curated events designed to have just this effect. So, when she asserts that prosthetic memory 'creates the conditions for ethical thinking' because it encourages us to empathise with the other, she is disregarding the alternative, less pleasant possibility: that these moments can also be contrived to do precisely the opposite. As Judith Keene observes 'it is probably closer to the mark to see prosthetic memory as a generic process that might as equally serve propagandists and xenophobes as those who aspire to inclusivity and internationalism' (Keene, 2010, p. 11).

However, perhaps the most revealing phrase in Landsberg's conception of prosthetic memory is that these moments can cause a person to 'suture himself or herself into a larger history' (Landsberg, 2004, p. 2). It is worth noting that the job of suturing is not in the hands of the work, but in the hands of the person viewing it. Ultimately, the person decides to commit to this path, or not. He or she decides to empathise, or not. If the person decides not to commit there is nothing in the experience that can change that. While there may be some merit in the notion that the more visceral an experience is, the more likely we are to remember it, there really is no significant evidence that this decision is any different or more likely in a cinema or museum than it might be in an art gallery or reading a book.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory' can certainly arise from reading a book or looking at a photograph, and she sees no requirement for an experiential element. She began describing postmemory as

> the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created. (Hirsch, 1994, p. 662)

She herself is the child of Holocaust survivors, and she developed this concept in specific reference to children like herself, and their relationship to their parents' suffering, all which occurred long before they were born. These 'memories' are experienced as 'narratives and images' but these are 'so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right' (Hirsch, 2001, p. 9). These postmemories are at both a temporal and spatial remove from the events and places that give them existence. Nevertheless, they are active forces, for, as Hirsch point, 'postmemory seeks connection. It creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall' (Hirsch, 1994, p. 664). It is worth noting that this process of searching and creation make explicit the constructed nature of postmemory, and perhaps recalls Landsberg's notion of the person suturing themselves into a larger history. Michael Rotheberg characterises postmemory as existing in 'a position between the personal experience of memory proper and the impersonal "objectivity" of history' (Rothberg, 2000, p. 189). Postmemory is based on the idea that while the events of the Holocaust may have ended the effect is still real, ongoing and transgenerational.

It is certainly true that major trauma can have transgenerational effects. Damaged adults can, unsurprisingly, become damaged parents. The symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are varied, and often highly individualised, but they can include things like depression, anxiety, and emotional numbness as well as nightmares and flashbacks. These kinds of symptoms can produce parents who range from the neglectful to those who over-parent and attempt to control every area of a child's life. Such things can and do impact on the children as they grow, and so, in turn, the child can be affected significantly. However, it is important to note that the child is not affected by the parent's trauma, but by the symptoms they exhibit as victims of trauma. The child is not, in other words, a victim of Auschwitz, but is a victim of the parent's PTSD. It is a key distinction.

There has been some work which claims to demonstrate that parents can pass on trauma via their DNA. For instance, in 2015, a team lead by Rachel Yehuda claimed they had 'found a genetic explanation for this apparent inheritance of trauma' (Yasmin, 2017). However, this work is controversial, and is open to criticism because of small sample size (only 32 Holocaust survivors, and

22 of their children were studied), a failure to control for social factors, and because of a basic flaw in their understanding of how DNA transmission works:

> While the team studied the children of women who lived through the Holocaust, they would have to study the great-grandchildren of survivors to prove actual epigenetic inheritance from mother to offspring. Why must four generations be studied? Baby girls are born with their lifetime supply of eggs. The eggs that made you were present inside your mother when she was a fetus inside your grandmother. Because a pregnant woman already possesses the DNA of her grandchildren and these genes can be affected by things during her pregnancy, the DNA of the great-grandchildren has to be studied to show that epigenetic changes were passed on across generations. (Yasmin, 2017)

John Greally, Professor of Genetics at the Center for Epigenomics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, referred to the study as the 'over-interpreted epigenetics study of the week … with conclusions drawn based on uninterpretable studies' (Yasmin, 2017). Nevertheless the study generated considerable interest in the media, generating headlines such as 'Study of Holocaust survivors finds trauma passed on to children's genes' in *The Guardian* of August 21st, 2015 (though *The Guardian* did carry a rebuttal on September 11th, of the same year).

Similarly, the concept of postmemory has generated a significant amount of literature in the field. It 'may be valued', writes Gary Weissman, 'for giving a name to the unique familial knowledge of the Holocaust that survivor's children attain by growing up with those who did live this history' (Weissman, 2004, p. 17). However, as Weissman points out, the concept has grown and developed, and now is rather more wide-ranging. Hirsch 'extends the term, making it applicable to anyone deeply interested in 'remembering' the Holocaust' (Weissman, 2004, p. 17). For instance, in 1998 Hirsch wrote that she uses postmemory 'to describe the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents' however, later in the same paragraph, she expands the scope rather significantly. She refers to the work of New York artist Lorie Novak and the Chilean-American poet Marjorie Agosín, neither of whom are children of Holocaust survivors but 'nevertheless speak from the position of postmemory' (Hirsch, 1998, p. 8). How can this be?

Either postmemory refers to the child-parent relationship, or it is 'a space of remembrance, more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification, and projection' (Hirsch, 1998, pp. 8-9). Therefore, it is no longer restricted to the family relationship, but instead describes anyone open to 'adopting the traumatic experiences and thus also the memories of others as one's own, or, more precisely, as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one's own life story' (Hirsch, 1998, p. 9). 'Detached from the experience of being raised by survivors' writes Weissman, postmemory becomes and entity unto itself, a form of collective memory' (Weissman, 2004, p. 17).

It is tempting in the light of this to suggest that postmemory describes the relationship between the horrors of the Holocaust and anyone who has ever seen a movie or read a book, but there are more serious issues arising from this. When she refers to acts of 'identification and projection' she is, with Landsberg and her self-suturing viewer, very far from any version of memory at all. Hirsch attempts to deal with this in an article from 2008, where she agrees that postmemory is not memory, but is rather something that 'approximates memory in its affective force' (Hirsch, 2008, p. 109). She traces it variously to concepts like 'heteropathic memory', and even back to Halbwachs and collective memory. The danger here is two-fold. One danger is that we end up with a concept that is too vague to be useful. Postmemory requires no special relationship to the Holocaust that is not available to those who were termed invested readers in the last chapter. In doing so, she erases the familial border she first noted when she attempted to describe the phenomenon. Therefore she is saying that the experience of the child of a survivor is the same, potentially, as any reasonably well-read person on the subject, and that does not seem right.

The second danger is that prefixing terms like 'collective', 'prosthetic', 'post' and 'heteropathic' onto memory are all attempts to socialise it, and this is impossible. Memory is the exclusive domain of the individual. Crowds do not have memories, neither do cultural or political entities. Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam are uncompromising on this:

> 'Nation,' 'tribe,' 'society' are general names whose sole substance lies in their actual

members who share common myths, traditions, beliefs, etc. This is the only sense in which a nation or a society can be said to exist, but never as a separate, distinct, single organism with a mind, or a will, or a memory of its own. (Gedi and Elam, 1996, p. 35)

There is no gainsaying this. Irish people do not have a 'collective', folk' or 'post' memory of the Potato Famine. There is a history that has been passed down through imitation and modelling by families and the education system. There are traditions that are passed down from generation to generation, things that one generation teach their children, and this can be done deliberately or unconsciously, but one way or another each generation has a role in indoctrinating the next. There is no method by which an individual memory becomes a collective one. There is no brain to store a collective memory. There is no way for individuals to read this brain, even if there was one. It is difficult to disagree with Gedi and Elam when they write of collective memory (and by extension, all the other such formations) that the only:

> legitimate use of the term … is … a metaphorical one, namely as some property attached to some generalized entity such as 'society.' lt has the advantage of being a vivid and illustrative description, but as an explanatory tool it is useless and even misleading. (Gedi and Elam, 1996, p. 43)

When we prefix these terms to the word 'memory', we disguise the nature of what is going on. The notion that someone can receive and feel and respond to someone else's memories is all so very passive. However, as we have seen, there is nothing passive about someone projecting themselves or suturing themselves into a historical narrative. This is someone investing in tradition, in myth or in ideology. We know how these things work, and how they are passed from generation to generation, through education, through narratives and so on. There is little mystery here. Often these people are doing what they are doing for the very best of reasons, but it is important to note that when they do so, it is an overt action. These are profoundly political fields and investing in them is an ideological act. That said, these concepts are not without value. As metaphors they can be telling and evocative; however, they do not explain anything, and, tend to focus the attention on this nebulous concept of 'memory' when the core issue is actually with the individual creating a fantasy for themselves, a

dream that somehow they have a direct connection to the Holocaust.

It is not as if the relationship between history and memory is not complex enough already. It is obvious that survivors or participants of an event can materially affect how the history of that event is written. However, the influence of memory does not end with their deaths. As Saul Friedländer points out in his address to the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, once survivors are gone 'what remains is a narrative — or rather a series of narratives — each socially necessary for a different group and important for that group's identity' (Friedländer, 2014). For him, and this is a perfectly legitimate use of the metaphor, these narratives are a collective memory and 'as long as such collective memory is 'alive', it fosters emotional residues that impinge—often very subtly—on the writing of history' (Friedländer, 2014). The impact of these narratives can last generations. He illustrates this with the example of how the history of the Holocaust has evolved, first in West Germany, and then in unified Germany, since the war. The first generation of historians were all adults during the war, some were Nazis, others, at the very least, right wing conservatives. If not themselves, then it was certainly their generation who carried out the crimes of the Nazi period. As a group 'they were not about to proclaim German guilt' (Friedländer, 2014). They next generation were people in their late teens as the war ended, and 'almost all had been socialized in the Hitler Youth' (Friedländer, 2014). Though young enough not to have had any role in the atrocities, 'their early socialization left traces, identifiable by outsiders but not necessarily by themselves' (Friedländer, 2014). In other words they still betrayed evidence of their indoctrination. Therefore they tended to displace responsibility in a variety of ways. On the right the blame was laid at the door of totalitarianism, thereby asserting an equivalence with Soviet Union, on the left it was blamed on 'a "cumulative radicalization" for which nobody was specifically accountable' (Friedländer, 2014); or, failing that, they asserted that the vast majority of Germans did not really support Nazi ideology and it was all the work of a few extremists. 'Both approaches 'exonerated' the vast majority of their compatriots' (Friedländer, 2014). In Friedländer's summary, it takes until the 1990s, and a new generation of historians, distanced by time and generation from their grandparents, allied with the

new unified Germany, distanced from the Nazi past by the interlude of the partitioned Germany, to create the possibility of a country where 'memory and history could unfold on a more even keel' (Friedländer, 2014).

This begs an obvious question. If memory is so volatile, what credibility can witnesses offer? Before the writing of histories, before even contemporaneous reports, before any other representation there is the event, and then, immediately after, there is the memory of the event and it is from these memories that testimony is built. Working from memory, witnesses report the first and primary incidents of the Holocaust, those individual deaths and incidents of horror or cruelty. These witnesses are the pathway to the 'discrete catastrophe' (Clendinnen, 2002, p. 183) of each individual death, something that can be easily lost in the span of the overarching conspiracy. The many survivors who wrote did so as they felt compelled to record their experience of what happened. Primo Levi refers to 'an immediate and violent impulse' to tell what happened, so strong that it competed with 'other elementary needs' (Levi, 2015a, p. 6). Often they wrote to speak for others no longer capable of speaking. 'Even as I pen my last words, figures rise before me and mutely plead that I tell their stories, too' (Lengyel, 1972, p. 216), is the note on which Olga Lengyel finishes *Five Chimneys*. In the preface to her memoir, *All But My Life,* Gerda Weissmann Klein tells us that she writes to pay 'a debt to many nameless heroes resting in their unmarked graves', because she is 'haunted that I might be the only one left to tell their story' (Weissmann Klein, 1997, p. iii). While the survivors' point of view is limited to their own small part of the whole, David Cesarani notes, 'they were there, so their every word is highly charged', so much so that, 'survivor testimony routinely trumps the dissemination of scholarship' (Cesarani, 2016, p. 4).

However, while there may be much to learn from witnesses, the truth is that for historians the 'vagaries of memory' make witnessing 'inherently unreliable' (Lawson, 2011, p. 272) as Tom Lawson points out. There are two main forms of witnessing: so-called contemporaneous accounts and those recalled later. In the main, for contemporaneous accounts we have a large number of diaries, maintained for a variety of reasons. Often, the diary survives where the author did not. In the other

category, we have the many memoirs written by survivors after the facts, as it were, as well as a large amount of oral testimony collected by various organisations in recent years, often recorded on video.

Historians have tended to rely more on the contemporaneous report of the diarist, who, as James Young puts it, 'wrote from within the whirlwind' and therefore is perceived as being more authoritative than memoirs which are 'texts shaped through hindsight' (Young, 1988, p. 25). People kept dairies for many reasons according to Alexandra Garbarini. Some wrote 'to a specific audience', such as family who had escaped and were now safe overseas. Others wrote 'for the world at large', while still others wrote 'to communicate their anger and desire for revenge' (Garbarini, 2006, p. 9). As well as these private texts with single authors, there were organised efforts to write communal diaries such as Emmanuel Ringelblum's *Oyneg Shabes*[17] project within the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Lodz Ghetto archive. While the immediate and contemporaneous account may be more vivid than others, it is not without limitation. The diarist within the ghetto or camp needed to be aware of 'the consequences their writing might have for the events they were recording' (Young, 1988, p. 26). Ringelblum's diary, for instance, has an obvious lacuna: though intimately involved in the planning of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, he makes no mention of it at all in his diary, for obvious security reasons. Another limitation on the diary is that the point of view is necessarily more limited than that of the memoirist, who has the overview offered by passing time. Writing within communities that were cut off from the rest of the world, these diarists could only suspect the scale and ambition of the German's project.

While memoirs and the later video testimonies may be shaped by introspection, does this make them necessarily more unreliable? Certainly, the passage of time affords an awareness of context, but that might even enhance value. Lawrence Langer sees no problem with testimony collected or recollected after the conclusion of the events. He believes that passing time does not make these memories inherently unreliable, as 'nothing is clearer in these narratives than that

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[17] There are many variations of the spelling of this archive, including *Oneg Shabbat* used by James Young and Yad Vashem. This version is used by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Holocaust memory is an insomniac faculty, whose mental eyes have never slept' (Langer, 1993, p. xv). He is not unrealistic, however, and notes that there are simple and factual inconsistencies, but these are 'human documents rather than merely historical ones, the troubled interaction between past and present achieves a gravity that surpasses the concern with accuracy' (Langer, 1993, p. xv). (That said, Langer notes that the reluctance to explore survivor testimony can be contrasted with the 'fascination … [with] the oral testimony of the perpetrators' (Langer, 1995, p. 182), and he cites Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors* as a case in point). Terrence Des Pres suggests that the experience is so extreme that it 'resists the tendency to fictionalize which informs most remembering' (Des Pres, 1980, p. 29). He asserts that the 'world the survivors speak of has been so rigidly shaped by necessity, and so completely shared—almost all survivors say "we" rather than "I"—that from one report to the next the degree of consistency is unusually high' (Des Pres, 1980, p. 29). Geoffrey Hartman suggests that this is because 'evil is a greater force in etching details on our memory than the good or ordinary life' (Hartman, 1996, p. 135). Perhaps another way to say this is that trauma is the mechanism for the details 'that infuse and individualize their testimony' (Hartman, 1996, p. 135). However, Langer, Des Pres and Hartman are primarily literary scholars, and while their requirements for fidelity to the past may be rigorous, they may not be quite the same as those of the historian.

Christopher Browning is a historian, and mentions two 'public debacles' (Browning, 2010, p. 8) that demonstrate the fragility of survivor testimony for the historian. One was the case of John Demjanjuk, the so-called "Ivan The Terrible" of Treblinka, convicted on the evidence of survivors, but whose conviction was overturned 'when documentation from Soviet archives indicated that he was instead "Ivan the Less Terrible" of Sobibor' (Browning, 2010, p. 8). The other example is the Wilkomirski survivor memoir which was translated into nine languages and won prestigious awards before being uncovered as fictional, the work of a 'highly disturbed' (Browning, 2010, p. 8) person who was not a survivor at all. Perhaps Wilkomirski should have published his efforts as postmemory rather than claiming autobiography. But unreliable or not, testimony is 'emotionally freighted in the study of the Holocaust' (Browning, 2010, p. 8), because frequently, 'survivors have been transformed

into "messengers from another world" who alone, it is claimed, can communicate the incommunicable about an ineffable experience' (Browning, 2010, p. 8). In some cases, to even question such testimony is 'insensitive and disrespectful' (Browning, 2010, p. 8). There is a tendency to read testimony as unimpeachable.

In this context, it is interesting to consider some of the work of Mark Roseman, a historian who was asked to write a biography of Marianne Ellenbogen, a Jewish woman from Essen. Ellenbogen's story is unusual in a number of respects. First, she and her family lived openly in Essen under the protection of the Counter-Intelligence services (the Abwehr) until 1943, when that organisation was put under the control of the SS. At that point, she went into hiding and saw out the war with the help of small, local, left-wing group, the *Bund*, whose members hid her in their own homes at great personal risk. Her parents and brother, her extended family along with her fiancé and his family, all perished. Roseman had two series of interviews with Mrs. Ellenbogen, in 1989 and 1996. Also at his disposal, Roseman had extensive documentary evidence, including:

> the unusually extensive Gestapo records on the family, as well as municipal records of the expropriation of their property. Marianne's personal papers are among the most dramatic of the sources, including two rich wartime diaries, one of them documenting her period underground, and extensive correspondence, including a unique extended correspondence from 1942 between herself and her fiancé, then incarcerated by the Nazis in Izbica. Some wartime correspondence between Marianne and members of the Bund, the group which protected her, also survives, as does the personal diary of Dr Artur Jacobs, the figure behind the Bund. The restitution papers are voluminous, providing a great deal of information about family life before the war and there are also many family letters, including cards sent to Sweden from Theresienstadt and even one from Auschwitz-Birkenau. (Roseman, 1999, p. 5)

These he supplemented with other oral sources including 'personal or expert testimony gathered in interviews, telephone conversations and correspondence, from in the region of a hundred respondents in Britain, Germany, Israel, USA, Sweden, France and Argentina' (Roseman, 1999, p. 5). All of which amounts to a considerable amount of testimony from late in Ellenbogen's life, as well as a very large

array of alternative sources to confirm or challenge the details she provided.

That there are inaccuracies is to be expected, and Roseman examines these across the various sources. He noted that her oral testimony tended to exaggerate in minor ways. So, her father's incarceration in 1938 was remembered by her as being six weeks long, whereas independent sources showed it to be only three weeks. After she fled, the Gestapo held her family in Essen while they searched for her. She remembered that as being a three-week period, whereas documentary evidence showed to be a little more than one week. Like many witnesses, she tended to conflate any uniformed German, whether military, police, even railway officials, into SS men. Her interviews about her time in hiding with the members of the Bund made no mention of her tendency to cause 'something of a ruckus' (Roseman, 1999, p. 6) in the households that shielded her, but which is recorded in her contemporaneous diary and correspondence.

However, along with these minor variations are some more considerable ones. She conflated her account of the last evening she spent with her fiancé with another woman's report of a similar leave-taking. Her testimony of her escape from the apartment, while the Gestapo were supervising her family's arrest, does not tally with the Gestapo's own report. Neither does it match a much earlier report that she offered in the immediate post-war period. This one does confirm the Gestapo version of these events.

As Ellenbogen was never captured or imprisoned, she escaped much of the physical suffering and trauma of most survivors. However, according to Roseman, her trauma was based in 'guilt, above all, guilt inspired by having left her family, and having allowed others to leave her' (Roseman, 1999, pp. 11-12). This is evident even from material in her wartime diaries. Roseman situates these variations and conflations in an effort on Ellenbogen's part to 'impose *control* on memory and the moments that caused such pain' (Roseman, 1999, p. 13) [*emphasis in original*]. In other words, these discrepancies:

> suggested that where her experience had been most traumatic, the trauma resulted in
> an inability to cope with memory as it was, a pressure that led, on the one hand, to an

unwillingness to communicate about it to the outside world, and, on the other, to the process of subtle modification. (Roseman, 1999, p. 13)

Other discrepancies added other insights. She told Roseman that in 1942 she learned that her fiancé 'had been used for some medical experiments and lost his sight' (Roseman, 1999, p. 13), whereas it seems most likely that he lost his sight in an explosion at a munitions factory. She described how her aunt was shot during a Death March just hours before liberation. However, correspondence shows that the woman was shot while ill in hospital, with liberation a more distant prospect. The interesting thing, for Roseman, in these variations, is that by tying her fiancé's fate into the horrible medical experiments, and her aunt's into the death marches, she 'reinforced the meaning of [her] loved one's fates' (Roseman, 1999, p. 17), and so, rather than isolated deaths among millions of others, they become instead, invested in a smaller, less anonymous cohort of victims, and their dying more poignant. This allows us to recall a previous discussion, above, where Schacter pointed out that our 'current knowledge, attitudes and beliefs' (Schacter, 2012, p. 8) act upon our sense of events from the past. It is her current knowledge of the fate of the anonymous millions that push Ms. Ellenbogen to construct something more meaningful for relatives.

Roseman is very clear on the accuracy of Ellenbogen's testimony: 'on the fundamentals, Marianne's memories were almost entirely borne out by other sources. Many things she said appeared, at first, very unlikely but were then corroborated' (Roseman, 1999, p. 10). Therefore any discrepancies 'have to be viewed against the background of this underlying veracity' (Roseman, 1999, p. 11). Roseman concludes that this examination of survivor testimony 'very much backs up the position of Lawrence Langer' (Roseman, 1999, p. 11).

Christopher Browning developed a system for working with survivor testimony, which he describes in the introduction to *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp*, his history of the Starachowice forced labour camp. Starachowice was an example of the 'relatively understudied phenomenon of the factory slave-labor camps' (Browning, 2010, p. 17), which were, essentially, camps built, managed and guarded by private companies who rented slave labourers from the SS. The

absence of archival material offered a significant 'methodological and historiographical challenge' (Browning, 2010, p. 17). How could he write a 'a professionally respectable history' when there was a 'near total lack of surviving contemporary documents' (Browning, 2010, p. 3) His choice was to either base his work almost entirely on 'postwar eyewitness testimony' (Browning, 2010, p. 3), or simply allow this story to go untold.

Browning's approach to this is to 'accumulate a sufficient critical mass of testimonies that can be tested against one another' (Browning, 2010, p. 8). To this end, he gathered some 292-eyewitness accounts given between 1945 and 2008. Some were interviews given to German war crime investigators, others came from museums and video archives as well as interviews that he conducted himself. Almost all of these testimonies were given orally, and so did not involve the 'reflective process of writing and revising for publication' (Browning, 2010, p. 5). His conclusion is striking: 'survivor memories proved to be more stable and less malleable than I anticipated … the usual assumption that earlier testimonies are to be preferred as inherently more reliable and valuable than later ones is not always valid' (Browning, 2010, p. 9). From these 292 largely oral sources, Browning argues that a stable 'core memory' emerges and that by using it, 'reasonable judgements' (Browning, 2010, p. 21) can be made to evaluate individual testimonies.

Of course, there are limitations, and consequently a significant potential for error, in survivor testimony. Browning broadly categorises issues that might impact on a witness or inhibit his or her willingness to share. The first potential issue is repression, as a memory can be too traumatic to recall. Then he uses the term 'confessional' to describe things a witness might recall but prefer to keep secret because they show him- or herself into a bad light. So, a witness might not wish to confess to stealing bread, or abandoning a friend to save themselves. 'Communal' is the term he uses to describe those memories that are shared among the cohort of survivors, but which 'outsiders might not understand and that hence dissemination could be potentially embarrassing or hurtful to certain members of the community' (Browning, 2010, p. 21), for instance, a revenge killing. Lastly he describes as public those memories that are open and shared with all. However, these categories are very fluid. For

instance, passing time might mean that a revenge killing is admitted outside the group, though the perpetrator's name is not used. Later again, the identities of those involved might be shared, especially as they or members of their families pass away.

Nevertheless, when faced with the instability of human memory, the historian frequently favours documentary evidence. Ranke taught young historians how to apply 'proper methods' when researching. 'The young historians were sent to the archives … these sources under sophisticated critical safeguards seemed to guarantee the objectivity of one segment of the historian's work, the establishment of facts' (Breisach, 1994, p. 233). The assumption is that the records of the government or organisation will offer a more accurate report of the state of things. As Hartman puts it, we do need 'the vast paper trail … generated by perpetrators whose triumphalism was at once punctilious and absolute' to allow us 'construct an adequate picture' (Hartman, 1996, p. 134) of the Holocaust. However, we must always remember that this was 'a self-documenting machine, of bureaucratic memos and orders of the day, of railroad schedules and administrative decrees, tons of masking jargon' (Hartman, 1996, p. 134). This has the effect of focussing attention on 'the enigma of the killers and bystanders' creating a 'fascination with evil, power and indifference' (Hartman, 1996, p. 134). The voice of the victim has no place in such file repositories. The victims, in the vast majority of cases, had no opportunity to centrally document their experience and fate, though there are notable exceptions such as the *Oyneg Shabes* project mentioned above. This in no way compares with the vast array of data maintained by any large state-run bureaucracy. Essentially, these reports from the ghettos can be no more than repositories of incident. It requires the meticulously tabulated reports sent back by the killing squads, preserved architectural plans and invoices and requisitions to provide us with the numbers and the modalities of genocide. However, it is only one side of the story.

Further, the archives contain only that which has been first, written down and second, preserved. However, there is no reason to assume that what has been recorded is accurate. Heinrich Böll, the German novelist, points out that:

> after all, there are falsified facts. What cannot be ferreted out is what might be false or

deceptive in an official document that Churchill writes to Stalin or Hitler to Mussolini or whatever, and that is already not true. I suspect that the writing of history is simply burdened with many mistakes of this sort, loaded, as it were. (Willson, 1983)

In other words, even the most diligent archivist might create a contaminated archive because the documents he or she meticulously catalogues and stores may be mendacious in themselves. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the whole story was ever in writing or that it has been preserved. Every archive risks lacunae, gaps in the story that falsify the resource by their absence. These gaps, either of records lost or entries never made, inhibit any attempt to discover the span and depth of the events, as Clendinnen calls it.

The methodology that Browning developed for working with testimony was a response to one such lacuna. It is by no means the only one. If the aim is to chart the span and depth of the Holocaust there is one significant lacuna that is only now being slowly addressed. In 828 pages, Martin Gilbert's *The Holocaust*, published in 1986, mentions rape four times. In all four cases the victims were Jewish women, but in two of the cases the assailants were partisans and a Russian. Therefore, only two of those are references to actions by Germans against Jewish women. Similarly, other learned tomes carry few, if any, references to rape in their indices. Lawson says that 'it is often asserted that the incidence of rape was rare' (Lawson, 2011, p. 296), or, as Joan Ringelheim puts it, reports of such assaults 'are not easy to come by' (Ringelheim, 1993, p. 377). It has long been a truism of the historical record of the Holocaust that rape and sexual assault of Jewish women was 'relatively rare' (Laska, 1993, p. 265). Unfortunately, it seems unthinkable that such an enormous wave of violence could produce so few sexual assaults, especially given that 'in the context of war and genocide, [rape] … multiplies and the number of cases increases drastically' (Fangrad, 2013, pp. 27-28), and that 'rape has invariably been an off-shoot of genocidal violence and even a weapon of genocide itself' (Lawson, 2011, p. 296). How then, could a respected historian like Sybil Milton, writing in 1984, describe the idea that 'Jewish women were forced to serve as prostitutes in the SS bordellos and were frequently raped' as 'a popular postwar myth, sometimes exploited and sensationalized' (Milton, 1993, p. 230)?

There are, of course, multiple reasons for this, and each, in its own way, represents a critique of the way in which history is studied. Alana Fangrad notes that there is little archival evidence of *Rassenschande* or 'race defilement' prosecutions involving sexual contact between German military or SS personnel and Jewish women. Such contact was strictly forbidden and illegal, of course. The paucity of prosecutions has led to an inference that the incidence of such assaults was rare. The logic of that inference is simple: had there been rapes and sexual assaults there would have been prosecutions. As there are no prosecutions recorded in the archives, therefore there were no rapes. Suffice to say, the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Recent research questions this assumption, and this research is only possible now that there are more historians 'who insist that oral testimonies and memoirs constitute a legitimate source base' (Fangrad, 2013, p. 10). So, recent publications such as David Cesarani's, *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949*, published in 2016, contains more than fifty references to rape and sexual assault. Nicholas Wachsmann, in his *KL A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (2015) is unequivocal:

> In recent years, historians have become more alert to systematic sex crimes during ethnic cleansing and genocide, not least by German soldiers in the Nazi-occupied east. Inside the KL, too, some prisoners were raped by SS men, though other forms of sexual abuse were more widespread. Women were frequently molested upon arrival in the camps and during selections, as SS men—who were strictly forbidden to have intimate contacts with inmates—could always claim that they were just doing their job, such as searching for hidden valuables. (Wachsmann, 2016a, p. 297)

In the light of this new research, it is impossible to conclude other than 'Jewish women indeed endured sexual violence at the hands of the Germans', and not only that but it was such a widespread phenomenon it was 'an integral element of the process of annihilation carried out by the Nazis' (Fangrad, 2013, p. 10).

Based on this, we need to consider some questions. Why were there so few prosecutions? Why, even among the very many published eyewitness accounts are there relatively few mentions of rape? The first is, regrettably easy to account for. There were few, if any, prosecutions because the

assailants had absolute power over their victims, which included not only the assaulted woman but others too:

> Though differing in minor detail, three accounts taken together indicate that Kolditz carried out an exhibitionist rape in the Majówka camp. He forced a young woman with whom he had become obsessed to submit to him in plain sight of the other prisoners through threatening the lives of her family members. An act of violent domination over the powerless victim, this rape was also a ritual of humiliation aimed at degrading the entire camp population, which was forced to stand by and witness helplessly. (Browning, 2010, p. 161)

Fionnuala Ní Aolain refers to this kind of assault as 'strikingly public' and calculated to 'demonstrate the humiliation of the loser and the prowess of the victor' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 336) thereby creating a 'community of harm' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 336), including not only the woman herself, but also her family and other onlookers who were rendered powerless to intervene. Who in this community could report a crime? To what authority? These women were voiceless in the Nazi world, as were the rest of their community. Acts of rape could be, and were, followed by immediate murder. In the world of the Final Solution, where all Jews faced a death sentence anyway, there was a 'fertile ground for uninhibited acts of lethal rape to occur' (Fangrad, 2013, p. 66). It was entirely possible to rape and murder a woman with impunity and the assailants took full advantage. As Hannah Arendt puts it: 'Surrounded by a never-ending supply of people who were destined to die in any event, the SS men actually could do as they pleased (Arendt, 1966 p. xxviii). With the victims dead, witnesses muted by fear of retribution and soon to die anyway, there was no one to report the crime, and even if there was, no one was listening.

It is true that there relatively few mentions of rape in published memoirs and diaries. Fangrad ascribes this to 'taboo', though it can sometimes be explained quite simply. In the case cited above, of a very public rape, 'everyone knew about it but no one wanted to discuss it, since the victim was still alive' (Browning, 2010, p. 161), and no one wanted to add to her suffering. Equally, given that many videotaped testimonies are offered in the company of 'a family gathering of children and

grandchildren' (Browning, 2010, p. 157), this can have an inhibiting effect. However, as Fangrad puts it, historians too need to shoulder some of the responsibility as many were 'uncomfortable with the topic' (Fangrad, 2013, p. 9), something corroborated by Browning when he candidly writes 'nor were they topics that I felt comfortable broaching in interviews, particularly with female survivors many years my senior' (Browning, 2010, p. 157). This needs to be recognised as a form of self-censorship, understandable as it may be.

Finally, there is the example of information contained in the archive, but not recognised. Sexual intimidation and assault were part of the daily round, something which becomes obvious with a gendered reading of the modalities and events of the Holocaust. There is some resistance to such a reading. Langer, for instance, sees it as an attempt to create 'a rule of hierarchy in the darkness' (Langer, 1998, p. 58), while others have noted that the aim was to murder Jews, not Jewish men and Jewish women, and that to speak in gender terms is to make invidious comparisons. But the notion that women suffer differently from men is not to assume that they suffer more, or their pain is worse, it is rather to suggest that their suffering is different. The same blow to the torso is felt differently by a man and a woman, not only due to obvious physical differences, but also because that same blow reads differently too. Failing to acknowledge that fact is to fail to acknowledge a significant portion of the suffering of large numbers of the victims.

Of course, this occlusion of women is not unusual in history. Joan Kelly-Gadol is accurate when she says:

> Throughout historical time, women have been largely excluded from making war, wealth, laws, governments, art, and science. Men, functioning in their capacity as historians, considered exactly those activities constitutive of civilization: hence, diplomatic history, economic history, constitutional history, and political and cultural history. (Kelly-Gadol, 1976, p. 810)

The focus of historical study has been on areas where 'women figured chiefly as exceptions' (Kelly-Gadol, 1976, p. 810), and often for exhibiting qualities more often associated with males. Inevitably, the historian's tendency to privilege causality (as discussed above) also excludes much of this detail.

However, Kelly-Gadol asserts, feminist approaches have unsettled 'the notion that the history of women is the same as the history of men' (Kelly-Gadol, 1976, p. 812). This can be clearly seen once we begin to look at some of the features of the Holocaust from a gendered perspective.

Nakedness has a role in much of the horror. Mass shootings were often carried out on people forced to undress first. People were gassed naked. Inductions to camps featured nakedness and intimate searches, as well as the shaving of all body hair, and was a regular feature of daily life there. Ostensibly this facilitated the theft of the victim's clothes and other possessions, but there are also other dimensions to this process. In the *Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi discussed nakedness in a chapter tellingly titled 'Useless Violence':

> You entered the Lager naked: more than naked, in fact, deprived not only of your clothing and shoes (which were confiscated) but also of all the hair on your head and body … public and collective nudity was a typical, recurrent condition and was charged with significance. It was also a form of violence … offensive because of its useless redundancy …. A man who is naked and barefoot feels as if his nerves and tendons had been severed: he is defenseless prey. Clothing … is a tenuous but indispensable defense. Without it, a man no longer feels like a human being. He feels like a worm: naked, slow, ignoble, prostrate on the ground. (Levi, 2015b, pp. 2492-2493)

The forced nakedness was designed to leave the prisoners feeling exposed and vulnerable. If this is true of the men, it is equally true of the women; however, there are differences in how this vulnerability is felt. In either case public nudity was abnormal, but it is impossible to argue with Lillian Kremer when she writes that for women, 'socialized by religious teaching and communal values to be modest', the induction ordeal of forced nudity, aggressive searching of body cavities, removal of hair and delousing was experienced as 'a sexual assault' (Kremer, 2010, p. 178). Margaret-Anne Hutton cites women who speak of being raised 'according to rules of decorum and propriety which harked back to the previous century', and mentions 'many older women had never appeared naked in front of their husbands' (Hutton, 2004, p. 91). It is no wonder then that 'almost every woman telling her story in an interview mentions that she had to take off all of her clothes' (Halbmayr, 2010,

p. 33). This undressing was done in front of armed, male guards, fully dressed, who looked on. Many women mention lewd comments being made. If, as Levi says, the frequent nakedness of the prisoners was 'charged with significance' then such moments created a communication between these men and the vulnerable women that transcended language. In Fionnuala Ní Aolain's words, 'there would have been no confusion between victim and perpetrator over the content of the message' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 326).

However, forced nudity was but one of many such humiliations visited on these women which represented a specifically gendered form of violence. For instance, hair removal also had different connotations because 'for women hair is a symbol of femininity' (Halbmayr, 2010, p. 36). Halbmayr also cites the report of a Czech woman, Libusé Nachtmanová, who noticed that when SS men came into the shower rooms the women, rather than covering their breasts or pubic area with their hands as might be expected, instead used their hands to hide their shorn heads: '"they were more ashamed of the loss of their hair than their nudity", she said' (Halbmayr, 2010, p. 36). Hutton describes how, in French women's testimony, 'the shaving of hair is most frequently represented in terms of an assault upon the deportees' femininity' (Hutton, 2004, p. 92). However, the offence does not end there. Ní Aolain notes that 'the particular act of removing bodily hair constituted an encoded communication of control in that it stripped the women of their sexuality' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 326). Being viewed naked by strangers was one 'crude and effective act of sexual violation' for women raised in a code of strict modesty. Removing intimate body hair went even further, and 'had a communicative value, intimately tied to their sexual personality. Shaving these women was sexual defilement'. Taken together it was 'sexual obliteration' (Ní Aolain, 2001, pp. 326-327). By extension, Ní Aolain points out, the women were not the only victims of this assault. Not only were the nakedness and shaving 'infinitely sexual acts' which served to demonstrate to the woman her 'sexual vulnerability', they were an affront to her community because their 'complete absence of guardianship for her honor' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 326) compounded their humiliation.

Further, violence 'aimed collectively at women and children, and more particularly at women

as mothers' can equally be read as causing 'explicitly sexual harm' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 322). Because the core aim of the Shoah was to destroy a culture and ethnicity, to this end it targeted 'relationships of dependency and nurture' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 323). These roles then (as now) were primarily the responsibility of mothers. Therefore, as happened frequently, when a woman was separated from dependent children, she was the victim of a 'quantifiable harm' that is experienced 'in profoundly different ways than … [by] men' (Ní Aolain, 2001, pp. 322-323). Olga Lengyel opens her account of her time at Auschwitz with:

> *Mea culpa*, my fault, *mea maxima culpa*! I cannot acquit myself of the charge that I am, in part, responsible for the destruction of my own parents and of my two young sons. The world understands that I could not have known, but in my heart the terrible feeling persists that I could have, I might have, saved them. (Lengyel, 1972, p. 13) [*emphasis in original*]

Her guilt is based on a fleeting moment on the selection ramp at Auschwitz. Her youngest son was sent to the left, where, she was assured, the elderly would care for the children. So she sent her mother to the left to accompany the child. In the case of Arvad, her older son, the officer on the ramp told her that to stay with her, the boy needed to be more than twelve years old:

> The truth was that Arvad was not quite twelve … he was big for his age, but I wanted to spare him from labors that might prove too arduous for him. 'Very well,' Klein agreed amiably. 'To the left!'. I had spared them from hard work, but I had condemned Arvad and my mother to death in the gas chambers. (Lengyel, 1972, p. 27)

For Ní Aolain, this exchange is another example of 'an undisputed, unarticulated communication' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 323) between the officer and the woman. Although it took her a little while to understand what became of her sons and mother, once their fates became clear, then the nature of that 'amiable' moment was revealed as 'a physical assault … concentrated on their own experienced sense of being female and aimed at undermining their sexual identity by taking away the ultimate expression of the reproductive self – the child' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 323). In her analysis, Ní Aolain argues that separating mother and child is an attack on the woman's body 'both in its actual and symbolic

manifestations' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 324). It is actual because it targets the product of her sexuality, which is the child; it is symbolic because to destroy a mother and child is 'destroying the future of a people and, hence, the people themselves' (Ní Aolain, 2001, p. 324).

Again, these considerations do not introduce a hierarchy of suffering. To recognise that women and men suffer differently is not to argue that one suffered more. To view the victim experience from a gendered point of view is to enhance our understanding of what went on, not diminish it. Without these insights, Hutton argues, 'we are afforded only a partial view of life in the camps, and large swathes of material are inevitably occluded from history' (Hutton, 2004, p. 104). It should be noted too, that as well as work on women's suffering there has also been recent work on women perpetrators, such as Wendy Lower's *Hitler's Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (2013). If our aim is a history that encapsulates the span and depth of the Holocaust then we need to recognise multiple points of view.

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However, while we might need to recognise multiple points of view, which does not mean that we must attach equal weigh to them all. Not every point of view is well informed or critically constructed. Some stand on uncertain foundations. Some are simply mendacious. Almost as long as history has been written about the mass murder of the Jews there have been attempts to deny that it happened at all. There are a few books and many websites that seek to challenge the historical evidence. Much of it bears witness only to the convenience of copy and paste as the same lies get recycled over and over. That said, if we are to be honest and true to the spirit of history and historical method, then we must admit to the possibility that at some point an alternative reading of the data might become available. If such a thing occurs, then it will truly be a revision of the output of the historical method.

Those who would deny the Holocaust ever happened sometimes reference the provisional nature of historical knowledge, and use this as an occasion to mitigate it (as if, somehow, a death toll

of only two or three million would be more acceptable), or that it was done without Hitler's approval or knowledge (as if that might rehabilitate his reputation). Sometimes the Holocaust is a Jewish plot, or that Germany was the victim of aggression by the Allies and so on. This is neither genuine history nor historiography. These people are not revisionist, though some claim to be. Revision is to work with the facts (even within the limits of that concept, as has been discussed), and fashion a new interpretation from them. Revisionists should not simply deny the uncomfortable facts. Inevitably, their workflow is basic and limited: choose an item from the historical record; attempt to demonstrate that it is not what established history claims it to be; or that is a forgery, or that it lacks consistency with some other presumed fact; and having established doubt then extrapolate.[18] This is done despite, as Catriona McKinnon puts it, our possessing:

> abundant documentary evidence (the Nazis were meticulous record-keepers) and photographs, eyewitness testimony of perpetrators, victims, and liberators, demographic analysis of Jewish and other populations pre- and post- Holocaust, and scientific analysis of the remains of crematoria and gas chambers at various camps. (Mckinnon, 2007, p. 11)

One can add to this evidence the mass graves that have been found throughout Eastern Europe. There have been so-called 'scientific' attempts to argue that gassings could not have taken place at Auschwitz. Using samples he claimed to have recovered from the ruins of the crematoria buildings at Birkenau, Canadian Fred Leuchter produced a report that purported to show that there was insufficient cyanide residue in these buildings for them to have even been used for delousing. However, Leuchter's assessment is profoundly flawed in a number of respects, not least being that killing lice requires 'twenty times the concentration [of cyanide] necessary to kill humans', plus he failed to control for the carbon dioxide exhaled by the victims as they died which 'affects the preservation of cyanide'[19] (van Pelt, 2002, pp. 354-355). These things, and profound concerns about

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[18] We shall examine an example of this in Chapter Five.
[19] There are many detailed readings which demonstrate the fatuous nature of this kind of material. For instance: Deborah Lipstadt's *Denying The Holocaust: The Growing Assault On Truth And Memory* or Richard Evan's *Lying About Hitler: History, Holocaust And The David Irving Trial.*

his methodology remove any doubt about his competence: he didn't have any. This is typical of the inaccuracy, evasions and, as the David Irving trial demonstrated, downright lies, of the deniers.

Apart from the inaccuracies, the real issue with this approach is that demonstrating that people were not murdered with cyanide does not change the narrative to any significant extent. For a start, it does not demonstrate that people were not murdered. A true revision of this history would need to do much more than this. It would need to account for all of the evidence, most especially the missing people, almost 6 million of them, all the mass graves documented by Patrick Desbois in the Ukraine, all the thousands upon thousands of eye witness reports from survivors, bystanders and even perpetrators, the vast amounts of documentary evidence of train journeys, procurement data, architectural plans and so on. Such a revision will not deny any of facts, for they are available in such vast quantities as to be undeniable; but rather, it would construct an alternative reading of them that accounts for their existence and the absence of the victims. Such a reading will explain why trains carrying in excess of 850,000 people were seen to arrive at Treblinka and depart empty. This new reading would then need to explain where these people went, as it is clear that they are no longer there. In the absence of such a viable hypothesis, it remains the case that those who deny the Holocaust happened are, at the least, 'incompetent historians' (Mandel, 2007, p. 39), or we need to draw a firm distinction, in Deborah Lipstadt's words, between 'genuine historiography and the denier's purely ideological exercise' (Lipstadt, 1993, p. 9).

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Feminism has demanded that history listens to a broader range of voices in its approaches to the past. In truth there was no good reason for history not to be inclusive, except that things were always that way, and history is no more immune to habit than any other human activity. Lawrence Langer describes how 'pivotal works … shape habits of mind that are difficult to dislodge' (Langer, 1995, p. 181). He cites the case of the '"blame-the-victim" formula that still haunts us today, in the cliché that

the Jews went like sheep to the slaughter' (Langer, 1995, p. 181). This he attributes to Bruno Bettelheim's assertion that some victims 'regressed to passive and childlike behavior instead of choosing defiant and assertive postures', which was echoed by Raul Hilberg, who declared that 'compliance was an essential feature in the conduct of many Jews' (Langer, 1995, p. 181) in his *The Destruction of the European Jews*. As we have seen, both of these assertions are inaccurate. Equally, Langer is also critical of attempts to find some sort of redemption in the narrative of the Holocaust, what he calls a 'grammar of heroism and martyrdom' (Langer, 1993, p. 163). He locates the origin of this trope in the work of Victor Frankl, who, in his *Man's Search for Meaning*, 'almost single-handedly invented the idea of spiritual resistance' (Langer, 1995, p. 181). This kind of material is familiar from the dust jackets of a thousand and more memoirs, but it also makes occasional appearances in the works of established and well-respected historians. For instance, David Cesarani, in his *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-49*, writes:

> what survivors offer is a wonderful example of how youthful traumas can be overcome …. Inspiring testimony such as this inevitably carries a redemptive message. No matter how unpleasant or unvarnished the content, the age of the speaker, and the courage they show in recalling horrendous times bestows on them a heroic aura. (Cesarani, 2016, p. 4)

Langer focuses on the language of these passages: 'wonderful', 'inspiring' 'redemptive', 'heroic', and finds that these terms are hard to reconcile with the actuality of the Holocaust. They sound desperately hollow when heard against the 'tremendous dreadful lament' reported by Josef Zelkowicz when Chaim Rumkowski announced to the Lodz Ghetto the next stage of their torture:

> They demand its most precious members—the children and the elderly … I never imagined that my own hand would be the one to bring them to the sacrificial altar. In my old age I am forced to reach out my hand and beg you: brothers and sisters, give them away to me! Fathers and mothers, give me your children! [A tremendous, dreadful lament breaks out from the gathered crowd]. (Opoczynski and Zelkowicz,

2015, p. 215)[20]

It is difficult to find redemption or inspiration when you are forced to give up your children to death.

Langer describes how Martin Gilbert's final paragraph of *The Holocaust* does much the same thing:

> To die with dignity was a form of resistance. To resist the dehumanizing, brutalizing force of evil, to refuse to be abased to the level of animals, to live through the torment, to outlive the tormentors, these too were resistance. Merely to give witness by one's own testimony was, in the end, to contribute to a moral victory. Simply to survive was a victory of the human spirit. (Gilbert, 1990, p. 828)

With these words on page 828, writes Langer, Gilbert 'contradicts … almost every other page' (Langer, 1993, p. 163) of the previous 827. For Langer this is an empty rhetoric of redemption that has 'hardened into mythology about human behaviour during the Holocaust' (Langer, 1993, p. 163), a mythology that even a brief perusal of Gilbert's own work will undermine.

However, perhaps Langer is being hard on Gilbert. Perhaps, rather than undermine all that has gone before, Gilbert is simply searching for an ending. The end he seeks is not to the Holocaust, but rather a termination for his book, a signal to the reader that he or she has reached some kind of conclusion to the business of reading. Perhaps he is looking for a note on which to finish. After all, historical writing is still *writing* and in search of readers. It may aspire to historical accuracy, but it does so through literary tropes and styles. Every history book concludes at some point even as history continues on. The historian argues the virtues of selecting this or that end point, but it is the writer who writes to it:

> The Nazi and Soviet regimes turned people into numbers, some of which we can only estimate, some of which we can reconstruct with fair precision. It is for us as scholars to seek these numbers and to put them into perspective. It is for us as humanists to turn the numbers back into people. If we cannot do that, then Hitler and Stalin have shaped not only our world, but our humanity. (Snyder, 2010, p. 408)

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[20] Here I am, of course, simply obeying Langer's suggestion that redemptive concepts be tested against actual incidents (See Chapter One).

Here, Timothy Snyder ends *Bloodlands* by setting us a task. To rescue 'our humanity' we must challenge the anonymity of the victims. That is a writerly device. He prefaces *Bloodlands* with the irony of a young Ukrainian boy looking forward in hope in 1933. The second volume of Saul Friedländer's *Nazi Germany and The Jews, 1933-1945*, opens with the graduation photograph of a young Jewish man taken in Amsterdam, in September 1942. It is, as Hayden White points out, a 'minor event' (White, 2013, p. 223) but one that Friedländer 'claims to have provided his readers with "the quintessence" of that "situation" which he will wish to name as "extermination"' (White, 2013, p. 223). The introduction to Keith Lowe's *Inferno – The Devastation of Hamburg 1943*, opens with a report of a young German boy's 'mixture of awe and elation whenever he saw the fleets of British bombers flying over the city' (Lowe, 2008, p. vii). Those very same aircraft would soon produce a firestorm over his home. To begin with a single individual described in a single moment is a common trope of historical writing. Historical writing is also, in some measure, a literary enterprise, thankfully, as the alternative would make for very dry reading indeed.

Russell B. Nye describes how, in the mid-19th century, both history and literature were thought to fulfil the same role, which was 'to interpret experience, for the purpose of guiding and elevating man' (Nye, 1966, p. 123). As the work of Ranke in Germany was popularised and spread, literature and history separated and went their own ways. The distinction was between those who believed 'that the writing of history began with a theory that might make order out of the course of events' (Nye, 1966, p. 126), on the one hand, and on the other, 'those who believed it began with a gathering of information about events from which certain justifiable generalizations about them might emerge' (Nye, 1966, p. 126). This lead to 'the rise of the professional historian, who conceived of himself not as co-worker of the poet or philosopher, but rather as cousin of the scientist' (Nye, 1966, p. 126). This historian placed all his emphasis on 'facts, facts, facts; he wanted plausibility and predictability, not "philosophy teaching by example"' (Nye, 1966, p. 135). However, divorced though they may be, the break was never a clean one, and some parts of the relationship between history and literature linger. Nye describes three features that they still have in common: the way they use of

language; a shared interest in more than just bare fact; and the notion that both are, at heart, a creative act.

In terms of language Nye asserts that both use:

> language to express what they explain and conjecture, and they use it symbolically, to express more than the words alone mean. The historian, like the poet and novelist, is aware of the metaphoric resources of language, and he draws upon them for both meaning and strength, as the scientist and the social scientist may not. (Nye, 1966, p. 139)

Equally, both seek more than just fact; they aspire to insight into the 'quality, mood, tempo, and personality of life—not just the *fact* of the past but the *feel* of it' (Nye, 1966, p. 140) [*emphasis in original*]. In terms of creativity he notes:

> Something exists, after the historian and the literary artist have been at work, that has not existed before—an insight into human motivation, a metaphor that adds meaning to experience, a reason for an event, a perception of a relationship, a cause for an effect. (Nye, 1966, p. 145)

However, that which is created is where the two ultimately part. Nye calls an historical fact 'an actual past event, tied to a particular plane of reality; it happened, and it cannot be changed' (Nye, 1966, p. 145), whereas a literary fact is 'an imaginative event; but it is no less usable or real for all of that' (Nye, 1966, p. 145). Hayden White characterises the relationship in different terms. For him, 'historical discourse wages everything on the true, while fictional discourse is interested in the real' (White, 2005, p. 147). The true he defines as limited and 'can provide knowledge of only a very small portion of what "reality" consists of' (White, 2005, p. 147). The real, on the other hand:

> would consist of everything that can be truthfully said about its actuality plus everything that can be truthfully said about what it could *possibly* be. (White, 2005, p. 147) [*emphasis in original*]

This, he suggests, might be what Aristotle had in mind when he suggested that poetry and history are complementary rather than at odds with each other. Robert Rosenstone, writing about film as history,

but which is also applicable to any other way of interacting with the past, describes film as 'adjacent to written history' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 22). However, he is frank in his assessment that 'to take history on film seriously is to accept the notion that the empirical is but one way of thinking about the meaning of the past' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 22).

These aesthetic considerations are even clearer in other fields of representation. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* is nothing if not an artwork of history. The tempo is deliberately slow, marking the gravity of the material. Consider the style of interview where we often hear Lanzmann ask a question in French, and then hear the translator render that into the interviewee's language. There is frequently a pause as the interviewee considers his or her response. Then they respond in their own language. After that we hear the translator render it into French (this is mirrored by the subtitling, where only the French is translated for the English speaker). Simply eliding the voice of the translator would shorten the film significantly, but Lanzmann deliberately chooses not to do so. This is an aesthetic decision as surely as his choice to avoid archive footage of atrocities. This laborious process mirrors the difficulty of comprehending the subject matter. The long tracking shots, often from the rear windows of cars, allow time for contemplation or on occasion to build anticipation. This is an artful representation of history.

Daniel Libeskind's architecture for the Jewish Museum in Berlin is designed around a number of void spaces, including one that runs more than 150 metres along the axis of the building:

> In fact, a total of six voids cut through the museum on both horizontal and vertical planes. Of these six voids, the first two are accessible to visitors entering from the sacred and religious exhibition spaces. According to the architect's specifications, nothing is to be mounted on the walls of these first two voids, which may contain only freestanding vitrines or pedestals. (Young, 2001, p. 192)

This is a profoundly aesthetic statement made in a building meant to record history. By interrupting the building with these voids, Libeskind resists 'homogeneous history-housing … [and] never allows memory of this time to congeal into singular, salvational meaning' (Young, 2001, p. 195), writes James E. Young. The effect on the history narrated in the museum is to 'deunify such history, atomize

it, allow its seams to show, plant doubt in any single version, even his own' (Young, 2001, p. 195). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum equally represents an aesthetic in how it interacts with the visitor:

> A large elevator transports visitors to the top floor, from which they work their way down … visitors are at the mercy of the museum and must submit themselves to its pace and its logic as there is no way out short of traversing the entire exhibit; they must wind their way down all three floors. The architecture and exhibition design conspire to force visitors to confront images and objects that in other museums they might ignore .… There are only five places in the entire exhibit where visitors may sit down. The museum is physically and emotionally exhausting and yet insists that one persevere in the face of discomfort. (Landsberg, 2004, pp. 129-130)

These buildings are created to hold history and its artefacts, but do so within the context of an architectural and design aesthetic that is, in fact, a comment on the exhibitions they contain. There will be further discussion of the relationship between fictive and other representations of the past in the next chapter, but for now, it is unsurprising that not everyone agrees with this fluid relationship between the various forms of representation.

The horror of six million deaths begins with the murder of individual men, women and children. In fact, before one can extrapolate to concepts like genocide, before the scale and the nature of the conspiracy becomes apparent, first one person, then another, then another and another must die. 'Let the numbers speak, let the documents and the well-established facts speak,' Aharon Appelfeld, novelist and survivor, was told, to which he replies 'I have no wish to belittle that claim, but I do wish to point out that the numbers and the facts were the murderers' own well-proven means. Man as a number is one of the horrors of dehumanisation' (Appelfeld, 1984, p. 83). 'Genocide' is an abstraction based on the motivation behind a large number of murders. Even the choice of word is a value judgement.

Some writers who, crucially, are also survivors, admit of a more subtle relationship between fiction and testimony. Jorge Semprún, a Spaniard who fought with the French Resistance, though not,

strictly speaking, a survivor of the Holocaust, did survive Buchenwald, and wrote of his experiences through the medium of fiction in novels such as *The Long Voyage*. For him:

> fiction is necessary in my writing—even in my historical memoirs—within appropriate moral limits, because it enables me to explore the full dimension of an event or a moment … In the case of deportation, both Jewish and non-Jewish, it is simply not possible to tell, or write, the truth. The truth we experienced is not credible …. If we tell the raw, naked truth, no one will believe us. (Zanganeh, 2007)

The raw truth is, for him, incomprehensible 'because it was bereft of verisimilitude' (Zanganeh, 2007). Primo Levi spoke in terms of a 'filtered truth' in his interview with Philip Roth. He was referring to his second book, *The Truce*, written some fourteen years after his first, *If This be a Man*. 'It was preceded by countless verbal versions. I mean I had recounted each adventure many times … and I had retouched it *en route* so as to arouse their most favorable reactions' (Roth, 2001, pp. 11-12). Semprún goes even further when he says 'I will always defend the legitimacy of literary fiction in expounding historical truth … I believe ardently that real memory, not historical and documentary memory but living memory, will be perpetuated only through literature' (Zanganeh, 2007).

Where history gains its strength is from the rigour offered by its method, one that is old and and tested but still open to improvement. At its very heart it is built on representations, that is, translations of events into texts that are differently meaningful. No historian can tell the whole story, it can only ever be a version, necessarily involving elision and extrapolation, selection and interpretation. None of these are neutral activities and all inevitably betray an ideology of some form. These considerations do not deny the notion that history is 'best', as Clendinnen says, but do serve to remind us that 'best' and 'perfect' are not the same thing.

Using the literary arsenal in support of writing history should make the experience of reading history more pleasant. However, if writers such as Semprún and Levi admits to using the tools of the novelist to represent the truth of their experiences, do novelists then use the truth to enhance their novels? It is clear that the relationship between history and fiction is not as clear-cut as it might seem at first glance. We have seen some of the possibilities and limitations that history offers in showing

us the span and depth of the Holocaust, but is history the only window into this world? How do fictional responses compare with history, and do they offer any value when in a search for an authentic experience of the lived reality of the Holocaust? Even though the novel and history may now travel on separate paths, nevertheless, they both still aim to interpret experience.

Chapter Four: Stories from the Dark

There are many reasons why an author might choose to set his or her fictional work against the backdrop of the Holocaust. It is an environment rich in hazard, both physical and moral. It abounds in the potential for personal conflict. It offers peril and drama at every turn, and the disinhibition of the perpetrators, along with the piteousness of the victims, offer unparalleled scope for an author to explore and describe not only the very worst but also, possibly, something of the best of humanity. Unsurprisingly, a great many writers have chosen the Holocaust as a world for their work. At time of writing, December 2017, the search term 'holocaust fiction' yields more than eighteen thousand hits on Amazon.com. It is a daunting reading list, in more ways than one.

Storytellers sometimes tell the stories of history, sometimes they create fictions: characters and situations are invented and set in a history of some kind (even science fiction assumes a past for its created worlds). For the novelist, this history offers a frame for the work. It is a shared space between the author and the reader, a repertoire of possibilities and behaviours for the characters and situations of the work. Within those boundaries, the work can play out its narrative. How closely a writer follows the historical record varies from storyteller to storyteller, and from fiction to fiction. Therein lies the problem, of course. We have a very large amount of fiction about the Holocaust and it varies in how closely to follows the historical record. Does this matter? And if it does, why? If our aim is to understand the horror of the Holocaust, can fiction offer us anything of value? Or is the very notion of fictionalising the atrocity an offence in itself?

In this chapter, we will examine Holocaust fiction and explore it to see if it has value in a search for a vivid and meaningful representation of the Holocaust. These works need to be considered on both on their own terms, and against non-fiction representations in a search for validity. While noting that fiction includes drama, a considerable body of poetry, and works by writers like Charlotte

Delbo who mix poetry and prose in a single text, this chapter will focus on the novel and film. This is because these are the dominant forms in the area of fictional works, and they are the ways in which the greater numbers of consumers access fiction about the Holocaust. The quality of these works has a significant bearing on what we think and feel about the events of the Holocaust.

Unlike history, which, as we saw in Chapter Three, 'wages everything on the true' (White, 2005, p. 147), every piece of fiction creates a world unto itself. This world is an imaginary space driven by its own forces and regulated by its own mores. Fictive worlds exploit an unusual quality of a language, which is the ability to continue signification even in the absence of a referent. J. Hillis Miller makes the point that 'words used as signifiers without referents generate with amazing ease people with subjectivities, things, places, actions, all the paraphernalia of poems, plays, and novels with which adept readers are familiar' (Hillis Miller, 2002, p. 17). Of course, this applies to all sorts of signs, and not just to words. The actor's tears in the theatre, and the gunshot in a movie, are equally signs without real-world referents, and are driven by the forces and mores of the fictional worlds that host them. However, this fictive world is not just 'an imitation … of some pre-existing reality but, on the contrary, it is the creation or discovery of a new, supplementary world, a metaworld, a hyper-reality' (Hillis Miller, 2002, p. 18). Erich Kahler agrees when he writes that 'true art is not "mimesis," imitation; it is, and has to be, an act of conquest, the discovery of a new sphere of human consciousness, and thereby of new reality' (Kahler, 1957, p. 151). For Kahler, art exposes 'a layer of existence' hidden from us by 'obsolete forms, conventions, habits of thought and experience' (Kahler, 1957, p. 151). By exposing this layer to us, art 'actually *creates* this new reality as a new sphere of our conscious life' and it is by this means that 'art imperceptibly transforms our life and human condition' (Kahler, 1957, p. 151) [*emphasis in original*].

This is a key insight. Art does not imitate reality but creates a new one, and this new reality subtly changes our existing reality. How does this alteration occur? Hillis Miller offers an explanation: 'the referentiality of the words a work uses, is never lost. It is inalienable' (Hillis Miller, 2002, p. 18), he writes. So, when a novelist refers to, say, the train station at Treblinka, he borrows

the reference from the real world and brings it to his imaginary one. This allows the reader to access the world of the novel, because the reference is shared between the reader and the author. Therefore novels can be full of accurate historical facts, but this data is 'transposed, transfigured … used as a means to transport the reader, magically, from the familiar, the verisimilar, to another, singular place that even the longest voyage in the "real world" will not reach' (Hillis Miller, 2002, p. 20). This, as we saw in the last chapter, is the point where the novel and the historical tract part ways. This is where Nye sees history as 'tied to a particular plane of reality; it happened, and it cannot be changed' (Nye, 1966, p. 145), whereas the novelist does not have to limit him or herself to things that actually happened. When a fiction writer reaches for real-world detail, it is deployed to add authenticity to the fictive universe: 'literature uses such physical embedment to create or reveal alternative realities' (Hillis Miller, 2002, p. 20). There is a loop here. The author borrows these facts to build his universe; the reader, reading these facts in the setting of the fictive universe, brings them back to the world of actuality. However, this is not a neutral process, and there is selection and manipulation of these facts at each step: in effect, the 'facts' that return may not be the facts that were borrowed in the first place. Instead they may be fictionalised versions. Further, the reader's 'beliefs and behavior are changed by reading … we see the world through the literature we read … we then act in the real world on the basis of that seeing' (Hillis Miller, 2002, p. 20). Therefore, with fiction, there is ever a danger that the reader will act in the real world on the basis of inaccurate or fictionalised versions of reality.

This is the essence of the problem with fictional representations of the Holocaust. It deploys history to add authenticity to its fabulous world. Therefore we seem to be at a place where we must then reject fictional representations as simply alternative realities. However, in defence of fiction we might argue that these fabulous worlds can offer insights to history and actuality. In an interview, Hilary Mantel, author of *Wolf Hall*, a novel about Oliver Cromwell, speaks about writing historical fiction. 'You might think that what I'm doing in this book is dubious – it might even be thought reprehensible – yet we can't help reimagine the past; we have no choice' (O'Reilly 2010, p.6-7). Julian Barnes describes literature as 'the best way of telling the truth; it's a process of producing

grand, beautiful, well-ordered lies that tell more truth than any assemblage of facts' (Guppy, 2000). He continues:

> I think I tell less truth when I write journalism than when I write fiction. I practice both those media, and I enjoy both, but to put it crudely, when you are writing journalism your task is to simplify the world and render it comprehensible in one reading; whereas when you are writing fiction your task is to reflect the fullest complications of the world, to say things that are not as straightforward as might be understood from reading my journalism and to produce something that you hope will reveal further layers of truth on a second reading. (Guppy, 2000)

Not everyone agrees, of course, because this history is different from others. 'The literature of Auschwitz is … bound by its historical context in a way that most other literature is not' (Langer, 2004, p. 181), writes Lawrence L. Langer. Elizabeth Scheiber agrees that 'no other literature is as rooted in time and place' (Scheiber, 2009, p. 4). She argues this because the features of the Holocaust such as 'the physical and psychological conditions in the ghettoes and camps' (Scheiber, 2009, p. 4), are without parallel in history. While there have been atrocities and mass murders both before and since, the scale and modalities of the Holocaust set it apart.

There is some truth in this. While the details will vary, the fear and despair of being under an artillery barrage can be transposed from the Western Front in 1914 to the Hurtgen Forest thirty years later. Similarly, the terror of jungle patrols on Guadalcanal is not so very different from that of jungle patrols in Vietnam. While a reader can, and will, compare the soldier's experience in *All Quiet on the Western Front* with the soldier's experience described in *The Naked and The Dead*, there is no frame of reference that compares with Tadeusz Borowski's description of unloading a train at Birkenau or Ka-Tzetnik 135633's description of a camp selection, or how the emptying of the gas chambers is staged in *Son of Saul.* The Holocaust has so many unique features that these transpositions cannot occur. Being immured in Ghettos, systematically starved, entrained in overcrowded cattle trucks, and, ultimately gassed in vast numbers in purpose-built facilities, are not common experiences: each is specific to the Holocaust, and not general to anywhere else.

These unique features, along with the breadth and depth of the atrocity, have implications for the would-be author. 'Holocaust fiction', writes Sara Horowitz, 'goes against the grain', and is regarded 'by many readers as at best a weaker, softer kind of testimony when compared to the rigors of history, or at worst a misleading, dangerous confusion of verisimilitude with reality' (Horowitz, 1997, p. 1). Froma Zeitlin speaks of 'a whiff of suspicion, if not potential scandal' (Zeitlin, 2003, p. 2003) about such efforts. Elie Wiesel's cites Wittgenstein: 'whereof one cannot speak, one must not speak', and continues that 'if this is true of language as a means of communication in general, it is even truer of literature and art that try to describe, without ever succeeding, the final reality of the human condition during the Holocaust' (Wiesel, 1989). George Steiner identifies a different kind of peril. He fears that fiction might be more moving than actuality, and so falsify the suffering of the victims:

> The capacity for imaginative reflex, for moral risk in any human being is not limitless; on the contrary, it can be rapidly absorbed by fictions, and thus the cry in the poem may come to sound louder, more urgent, more real than the cry in the street outside. The death in the novel may move us more potently than the death in the next room. (Steiner, 1969b, p. 61)

Theodore Ziolkowski, offers a similar warning. He cautions against the 'mythification' of the Holocaust, as this process allows us to 'unwittingly evade history' (Ziolkowski, 1979, p. 682). This happens when the event is 'lifted out of its causative nexus' (Ziolkowski, 1979, p. 682) and so becomes a myth or fiction. The danger is that when we read fiction we are not confronting the Holocaust. Instead, 'like Plato's artist, [we] actually confront a literary reflection' (Ziolkowski, 1979, p. 682). Rather than testimony we instead read, at best, its shadow.

We have previously discussed, in Chapter Two, the rhetoric of the unspeakable, a practice that Mandel calls a masquerade of rhetorical performance as ethical practice, one that leads ultimately to an aporia: to speak is wrong, but equally, so is silence, so we shall pass over Wiesel's objections for now. For Steiner the danger of fiction is similar to Ziolkowski's notion of mythification. In each case, they see a danger because fiction exists in a space between the event and the reader, a space

controlled by the author of the work. So, in this respect, what they say is true. The events of the Holocaust are filtered through the imagination of the author, with, as we shall see, quite variable results. However, against this we can argue, as we saw in Chapter Three, that this is also true of historical texts. Between the reader and the event is the report of it, filtered through the agendas of the historian or the memoirist. Whether we read history, memoir or fiction, we are always at best reading a shadow of some form. All our perceptions are mediated in multiple ways.

It is interesting that each of these objections is a moral one. They point to the danger of fiction tricking us in some way, perhaps into a false understanding of the Holocaust. In this we must recognise some agency in the reader, depending on who he or she may be. It seems safe to assume that of the four cohorts we identified in Chapter Two, the witness, the witness by postmemory, the invested reader and the casual one, that the casual reader is most at risk of receiving an inauthentic understanding of the Holocaust from reading fiction, and we shall explore some ways in which this can happen below. Other than that, we can assume that the witnesses and the invested reader approach each work of fiction with a critical eye and an awareness of its possible imperfections.

Perhaps of most interest is the idea, articulated by Sarah Horowitz, of fiction as a form of testimony. It begs a question, of course: how can fiction be testimony? How can something avowedly untrue take on the guise of witnessing? The logic of this argument is that the events of the Holocaust are so specific and our curiosity about them is so intense, that it is impossible not to seek some element of testimony in them. The English playwright Arnold Wesker read William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, and described himself as 'moved, disturbed and grateful' (Wesker, 1980, p. 48). However, what lingered for him afterwards were 'not the book's virtues but its equivocalities …. The holocaust is such an emotional quagmire, I want my feelings to earn their trust!' (Wesker, 1980, p. 48). He posited two key questions about the novel. 'Where are we dealing with fact and where with fiction? Why, in this novel more than any other, do I want to know?' (Wesker, 1980, p. 52). He answers his own question. It is because the Holocaust is different and:

the need to understand *this* unbearable chronicle in *our* century is a burning need ….

> This story requires immaculate handling. We need to know clearly what is being
> placed before us, taken by the hand with great care and sensitivity, and no tricks.
> (Wesker, 1980, p. 52) [*emphasis in original*]

This is not true of other fiction, even wartime ones. One can read Alistair MacLean's *The Guns of Navarone*, or watch the film adaptation of it, and never be moved to question if the story is based on actual events. On the other hand, even in a popular novel like William Goldman's *Marathon Man*, and John Schlesinger's film adaptation of it, when Szell is recognised in the street, and the old lady starts shouting about *Der Weisser Engel*, the reader cannot help but wonder if someone nicknamed 'The White Angel' had served at Auschwitz. As James Young puts it 'writers and readers of Holocaust narrative have long insisted that … it be received as testimonial proof of the events it embodies' (Young, 1988, p. 10).

Therefore, we find ourselves at curious junction where the historian, the memoirist and the novelist all meet. The historian arrives at this point having 'waged everything on the true' in White's phrase, the memoirist gets here by trying to be faithful to his or her lived experience and the novelist journeys here via a fictional creation. Each has a different destination in mind, and each travels with different ethical code, being faithful to their different destinations. If each has different ends, how can they share a testimonial facet? In the case of the first two it is obvious, they aspire to represent actuality. In the third it is not so obvious. However, looking at what they have in common, and not at what differentiates them might be useful. Wesker points a possible way forward:

> It seems that I'm driving myself into the proposition that all reality *can* lend itself to
> recreation through art providing the artist is recreating the most significant elements
> in it. Which of course begs the question: is not one man's significance another man's
> whimper? (Wesker, 1980, p. 54) [*emphasis in original*]

Wesker comes to the conclusion that anything can be represented in art, but with a couple of caveats worth noting. First, the artist needs to work with the 'most significant' elements of the reality, which makes sense, but there are different measures of significance. Assuming, however, that there is enough of a shared sense of significance, then the fiction writer can achieve a plausible sense of

reality. When memoirists and historians write of the most significant elements, it adds a patina of authenticity to their work. As we saw in Chapter Two, authenticity derives from a network of shared understanding, and if the fiction writer can create a world that shares authentic details with actuality, then this fabulous world, and this work, can stand as testimonial to the historical past, even if it is not a perfect realisation of actuality. Put another way: the fiction creator can write him or herself into the history in an authentic way.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

In search of this patina of authenticity, one of the more common features of Holocaust fiction is the claim to truth, at least in some part. For instance, in the Forward to *Block 29: Sabotage at Buchenwald* (1965), survivor and author of the novel, Pierre Julitte, writes 'it is, from first word to last, a true story' (Julitte, 1971, p. viii), though undoubtedly a novel in style. Rhonda Fink-Whitman calls her *94 Maidens* (2012) a 'novel inspired by true events'. Unusually for a novel, it has family photographs appended, which the reader is enjoined to refrain from viewing, until the novel is read, by a 'Spoiler Alert'. Yet these are, apparently, fictional characters in a novel. *The Death's Head Chess Club* (2015) by John Donoghue, contains footnotes (for instance, his first chapter contains six, explaining various details of camp life), and a Historical Note that includes a summary of the history of Auschwitz as well as identifying characters from history who appear in the novel. If this is not exactly a claim to truth, it certainly works hard to set a historical context. A more well-known example might be Jean-Francois Steiner's *Treblinka* (1966). In an Afterword, Steiner describes his research into Treblinka and his interviews with survivors. His American publishers, Meridian, classify the book as 'History/Jewish Studies'. However, Simone de Beauvoir notes in her Preface that Steiner 'has not attempted to do the work of a historian', and 'has not denied himself a certain directorial freedom' (De Beauvoir, 1994, p. xxiv). In his Introduction, Terrence Des Pres notes that Steiner uses 'novelistic techniques' to quite an extent:

Steiner freely portrays characters, reconstitutes conversations, and fills in missing details in order to convey the essential spirit of the events on which the story depends. He also substitutes fictional names to protect the names of survivors (the names of the killers are not changed), and there has been heated debate over particular characterizations. (Des Pres, 1994, p. xiv)

Both Des Pres and de Beauvoir are quite understanding of these liberties. Des Pres remarks that these are not 'serious objections so long as the story as a whole remains true to known facts' (Des Pres, 1994, p. xiv), and, according to de Beauvoir, he would 'have been less faithful to the truth' (De Beauvoir, 1994, p. xxiv) without these inventions. Using Wesker's terminology, for Des Pres and de Beauvoir, Steiner has worked with the 'most significant' elements of this reality.

Of course, this view is not universally accepted. Debates about the relationship between fiction and history, and which might be the most effective way to represent the Holocaust have gone on since the very end of the war. Jorge Semprun reports how, on the day he was to leave Buchenwald, a group were discussing 'how we should talk about all this, so that people understand us' (Semprun, 1997, p. 123). There was a concern that those at home might not want to listen to their stories, and so the survivors worried how best to testify about their experiences. For some, the only way was 'to tell things the way they are, with no fancy stuff' (Semprun, 1997, p. 123). On the other hand, Semprun himself was unequivocal, 'pointing out something that seems obvious to me. Telling a story well, that means: so as to be understood. You can't manage it without a bit of artifice. Enough artifice to make it art' (Semprun, 1997, p. 123). The debate ebbs and flows until one unnamed speaker[21] sums up the situation:

You talk about understanding … but what kind of understanding are you talking about? I imagine there'll be a flood of accounts, their value will depend on the worth of the witness, his insight, his judgment …. And then there will be documents. Later, historians will collect, classify, analyze this material, drawing on it for scholarly works …. Everything will be said, put on record …. Everything in these books will be true … except that they won't contain the essential truth, which no historical reconstruction

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[21] Semprun never names him, but later identifies him as 'a professor from the *Université de Strasbourg*'.

will ever be able to grasp, no matter how thorough and all-inclusive it may be. The

other kind of understanding, the essential truth of the experience, cannot be imparted

…. Or should I say, it can be imparted only through literary writing. Through the

artifice of a work of art, of course! (Semprun, 1997, p. 123)

This notion of essential truth is common in fiction writers. E. L. Doctorow speaks of how the novelist 'hopes to lie his way to a greater truth than is possible with factual reportage' (Doctorow, 2006). Des Pres refers to the 'the essential spirit of the events' described in *Treblinka*. Julian Barnes, quoted above, echoes the unnamed speaker in Semprun, when he speaks of grand, beautiful, well-ordered lies that offer more truth than a chronicle of facts, indeed that tell more truth than any assemblage of facts. Hayden White, also quoted above, reminds us that fictional discourse is interested in the real rather than the true.

History, as noted in Chapter Three, tends to weigh events in terms of their causal significance. Both George Kren, with his comments on events being 'causally significant' (Kren, 1988, p. 7), and Yehuda Bauer who explicitly identifies events as significant based on the 'contribution we perceive, rightly or wrongly, that they make to the unfolding of other events in the chain of human history' (Bauer, 1996, p. 300), make this bias explicit. However, there are other significances and other ways of evaluating events apart from their causal implications. Further, the details of events, the explanation of their sources and their impacts, while undeniably valuable, are limited. As Terrence Des Pres puts it 'statistically the Holocaust is less immediately sickening because less sharply seeable' (Des Pres, 1994, p. vii). To see the horrors of the atrocity, we need witnesses from within that world, a point of view from within the maelstrom. The obvious starting point for such a view is the witness, recording in diaries or narrating in memoirs. However, fiction has its possibilities too, and one of those is the opportunity it offers, albeit at some remove, to achieve a sense of another person's experience.

As quoted above, Elie Wiesel is often to be seen arguing against this possibility, and the often quoted assertion that a novel about Auschwitz simply cannot be a novel, or it cannot be about Auschwitz, would seem to be a very firm statement. However adamant he may sound, Wiesel himself

is not always clear on the matter. Later, in the very same essay, he asserts it is indeed possible to write good fiction about the Holocaust:

> Some writers have shown that this is possible. The subject transformed them into more genuinely intense artists. They are few, but they are there. Thinkers, educators and novelists, they are there and their impact is real. Which proves that even those who have not experienced the event may learn to be worthy of it. (Wiesel, 1979, pp. 239-240)

However, it is a subject that 'must be approached with fear and trembling. And above all, with humility' (Wiesel, 1979, p. 240). For Wiesel, then, fiction about the Holocaust is both impossible and possible, even by those who have not experienced it. If this seems complex, then it no more than mirrors the status of some memoirs written by survivors; not that there is doubt about their overall veracity but, sometimes, there can be confusion about the specifics.

This can be explored through a brief examination of Wiesel's own work, *Night*. Ellen Fine points out that *Night* has been classified as 'personal memoir, autobiographical narrative, fictionalized autobiography, nonfictional novel, and human document' (Fine, 1982, p. 10). Berel Lang places it among 'a considerable number of novels about the events of genocide [that] appear in the fictional guise of diaries, memoirs, autobiographies' (Lang, 2003, pp. 134-135). James Young refers to it as a memoir, and the events it describes as '"facts" which then become the objects of his later interpretive fictions' (Young, 1988, p. 21). Meanwhile Efraim Sicher acknowledges the work's claim to 'its own autobiographical truth', but argues that this 'in no way diminishes the book's power as a novel' (Sicher, 2005, p. xix). David L. Vanderwerken argues persuasively that *Night* is actually an example 'of the *Bildungsroman* turned inside out and upside down' (Vanderwerken, 2010, p. 40). Gary Weissman points out that Wiesel once received an apology from a columnist in *Publisher's Weekly* for referring to it as an 'autobiographical novel'. The columnist claimed his error was based on an entry in *The International Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Biography*. Subsequently, one of the editors of that volume claimed that he 'could cite half a dozen sources, including the *Encyclopedia Britannic*a, "to substantiate that the book is a novel"' (Weissman, 2004, p. 66). *The New York Times*

reports that 'at times over the last 45 years it has been classified as a novel on some high-school reading lists, in some libraries and in bookstores' (Wyatt, 2006). Fine herself adroitly sidesteps the issue. She describes it as a '*temoignage* [testimony], a first-hand account of the concentration camp experience, succinctly related by the fifteen-year-old narrator' (Fine, 1982, p. 10) [*emphasis in original*].

What then, are we reading when we read *Night?* Is it a novel or a memoir? Is it fact or fiction? Ruth Franklin compares some of the detail of *Night* against *All Rivers Run to the Sea* (1995), Wiesel's self-described 'volume of memoirs' (Wiesel, 1995, p. 7). There are significant differences. It is clear that Moishe the Beadle, in *Night*, is a composite of the Beadle and Kalman, who was a Kabalist, while Mrs. Schächter in *Night* is Mrs. Schechter in the later volume, and her premonition is weighted very differently in the narration. There are other details in *All Rivers Run to the Sea* that are simply not present in *Night* at all.[22] Franklin calls these 'moments of artistic licence', a gesture that 'sacrifices literal fact for literary truth', and they demonstrate that Wiesel 'recognizes the memoirist's dual obligation – to the truth, certainly, but also to tell his story … in the most interesting, most memorable, most meaningful way possible' (Franklin, 2011, pp. 77-78).

What is interesting here is that we find ourselves with two writers, one, Semprun, a fiction writer and the other, Wiesel, a memoirist, essentially arriving at the same place via different routes. For all his disapproval of fiction about the Holocaust, Wiesel uses a novelist's techniques to add 'fancy stuff' to his memoir; Semprun avowedly a novelist, uses similar techniques. It is this that allows James E. Young to suggest that if there is a line between fact and fiction 'it may be by necessity a winding border than tends to bind these two categories as much as it separates them, allowing each to dissolve occasionally into the other' (Young, 1988, p. 52). Perhaps then, this dichotomy between telling things 'the way they are' and 'fancy stuff' is a false one.

It seems obvious that any attempt to represent actuality will inevitably involve some artfulness, at the very least, if it is not to be tedious. Sometimes that artfulness can be quite overt both

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[22] See (Franklin, 2011, p. 77) for more.

in intent and execution. Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* eschews archive footage or any representation of atrocity. However, it is suffused with an aesthetic of loss, silence and absence. While factual, and built around interviews as its primary form of narration, Lanzmann's work is capable of generating quite striking images. An example of this can be seen in the sequence dealing with the second phase of the murders at Chelmno, carried out using gas vans. In this phase, the local church was commandeered as a staging area for the Jews awaiting their murder. They were detained within the building, and the vans were reversed up to the door so that they could be loaded in. Thirty years later, Lanzmann brings his camera and Simon Srebnik, a survivor, to that place. It is a feast day and the church is full. Lanzmann sets his camera outside the church door, and locks it off, so that it does not move or draw attention to itself. The local people stand before it, around Srebnik, and talk. As they talk, there are occasional edits to silent faces in the crowd, and most importantly, to Srebnik, himself. As the villagers talk, he remains impassive. Lanzmann allows them to talk at length, relating their memories of the Nazi occupation and the murder of the Jews. Apart from a reference to Jewish gold, there is little of controversy until a Mr. Kantarowski explains why he thinks the Jews were murdered:

> It happened in Myndjewyce, near Warsaw …. The Jews there were gathered in a square. The rabbi asked an SS man: 'Can I talk to them?' The SS man said yes. So the rabbi said that around two thousand years ago the Jews condemned the innocent Christ to death. And when they did that, they cried out: 'Let his blood fall on our heads and on our sons' heads.' Then the rabbi told them: 'Perhaps the time has come for that, so let us do nothing, let us go, let us do as we're asked.' (Lanzmann, 1985, pp. 99-100)

Lanzmann asks for clarification 'He thinks the Jews expiated the death of Christ?' A woman in the crowd responds 'Pilate washed his hands and said: "Christ is innocent," and he sent Barrabas. But the Jews cried out: "Let his blood fall on our heads!" That's all; now you know!' (Lanzmann, 1985, p. 100). Behind her, Srebnik looks downward and folds his arms, then the camera slowly zooms towards him, and he glances at us, then looks away, his silence more eloquent that any words.

The film then cuts to the closed church door from the outside. The camera is now inside a car, looking rearwards. The car sets off to retrace the route of the gas vans. In these vans, the exhaust from

the engine was diverted into the van to suffocate the victims with carbon monoxide. As the car pulls away we see its exhaust fumes, a grey-white plume, clearly in the frame, and intermittently through the duration of the shot, about 90 seconds, the exhaust fumes become visible again. The car drives, and the camera rocks and shakes as it traverses first the paved, potholed asphalt, then later the mud tracks in the forest. The journey ends when we reach a woodland clearing. It is empty and overgrown. We have travelled to nothing. Srebnik paces the open space and finds a rotting shoe.

This 27-minute sequence is as vivid a portrait of erasure as any fiction writer could conjure. This is 'fancy stuff'. Lanzmann allows the people outside the church to expose their latent anti-Semitism through sheer patience. The car journey, complete with exhaust fumes, is rendered self-conscious by imperfection of technique. Most film makers would have rejected this shot because the rocking of the camera pulls attention from what is being shot and instead foregrounds the crudeness of the technology, which is unable to steady the camera. This is precisely Lanzmann's aim. He wants us to notice the motion, wants us to see the exhaust fumes, and wants us to take part in this journey to nothing. It is both document and metaphor. It documents the journey of the vans: this is the route they took, this was the road surface that jolted and jarred the victims as they were asphyxiated. Equally, it is a metaphor: a slow journey to nowhere, an empty overgrown field, and a rotting shoe testifying to the absence of the victims.

So we find ourselves at a point where those who aspire to factual reportage can be seen to work with the skill of the fiction writer. In an effort 'to tell things the way they are' (Semprun, 1997, p. 123), both Wiesel and Lanzmann manipulate scenarios and events to amplify the impact of what they are trying to tell us, and they do so using emotional resonances. It is not all they have in common. Lanzmann, too, is inconsistent on the possibility of representing the atrocity. Writing about the television series *Holocaust,* he is nothing if not unequivocal: 'the reality – a fundamental lie, a moral crime, the destruction of remembrance – defies all attempts to render an account of it' (Lanzmann, 1979, p. 139). He elaborates on this:

> The Holocaust is unique in that it creates a circle of flames around itself, a limit which

cannot be crossed because a certain absolute horror cannot be transmitted. Pretending to cross that line is a grave transgression. One must speak and hold silent at the same time: knowing that here silence is the most authentic mode of speech; one must maintain a protected region like the eye of a hurricane. Transgression and trivialization are the same thing here: the Hollywood/*feuilleton* transgresses because it trivializes, and thereby abolishes the unique character of the Holocaust as the incomparable worst of all crimes. (Lanzmann, 1979, p. 139)[23]

Once again, we find ourselves confronted with the aporia of speaking while remaining silent. However, later, in his autobiography, Lanzmann reverses course. Speaking of Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* he writes that Littell:

> depicts the Einsatzgruppen with a precision that the breadth of my work allowed me to understand. I met, in the flesh, many of the people he writes about, people he had never met; for the others we had read the same books, principally Hilberg, and I found his fictional re-creation of Babi Yar, for instance, of the forced march of the Jews of Kiev to the ravines of death, utterly convincing, as I did the monologues he attributes to Paul Blobel, one of the two men hanged after the trial. (Lanzmann, 2011, p. 589)

How then to resolve these contradictions? These fictions are impossible, immoral and yet also convincing and necessary. It is, of course, arguable that both Wiesel and Lanzmann are simply contradicting themselves, or that their ideas have changed with time. However, there may be more useful way to consider these questions, and rather than discussing the actuality or otherwise of these events described in fiction, it might be of more interesting to explore the authenticity of the representations. It does, perhaps, offer a way to resolve this apparent paradox. Certainly, even a cursory reading might support this view. Wiesel rails against 'cheap and simplistic melodramas' and names, among others, *The Night Porter, Seven Beauties*, the television series *Holocaust,* and *Sophie's Choice*. He despises the tendency to be 'reductionist':

> shrinking personalities to stereotypes and dialogue to clichés. All is trivial and

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[23] Miriam Bratu Hansen cites him as offering a version of this in response to *Schindler's List* in *Le Monde* in 1994 (Hansen, 2001, p. 133).

superficial, even death itself: there is no mystery in its mystery, it is stripped naked, just as the dead are stripped and exposed to the dubious enjoyment of spectators turned voyeurs. (Wiesel, 1989)

He is insulted by the titillation implicit in the:

> sudden explosion of nudity as a backdrop for the Holocaust? What by any rule of decency ought to remain unexposed is exposed to shock the television viewer. Naked men. Naked women. Naked children. And all of them made up with ketchup and paid to 'fall' into the 'mass graves'. How can one explain such obscenity? How can anyone justify such insensitivity? (Wiesel, 1989)

Lanzmann also responds to the television series *Holocaust* (1978). In the afterlife of the genocide of the Jews, this four-part series occupies an unusual space. It achieved very high viewing figures, especially in what was then West Germany, and is credited with significantly raising awareness of the atrocity. In a footnote to his '"Coming to Terms with the Past": Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany', Alf Lüdtke demonstrates the reach of the programme in the FRG:

> More than 20 million citizens watched the film. That was more than 50 percent of the adult population of the country …. The percentage of younger people among the onlookers was remarkably high (about 15 percent of eight- to thirteen-year-olds) …. More than 80 percent of the respondents told the interviewers that in their view the film presented an appropriate interpretation of the situation and living conditions under Nazism …. Among those who had watched the film, votes approving a 'moral obligation of Germany to pay compensation and restitution' increased remarkably (45 percent accepted this line before the broadcasting, while 54 percent of those who had watched it agreed afterward). Also, the statement that all adults during Nazism 'shared at least some guilt' was rated positive by more people after they had watched the film. (Lüdkte, 1993, p. 545)

From this information, he concludes that:

> the showing of the film accomplished much more than the extensive educational activities in schools and in the media had achieved during the previous years. For some

hours or days, millions of viewers implicitly suspended the attitude most of them and their (grand)parents had pursued before 1945: that of bystanders. (Lüdkte, 1993, p. 544)

However, for Lanzmann (and other critics), the series represents 'the ultimate ruse of a history that denies the singularity of the Holocaust in the very moment in which it claims to represent it' (Lanzmann, 1979, p. 138). This version of history is sanitised, for Lanzmann, the characters' Jewishness is erased so that:

> the Jewish victims differ in no way from the spectators or even from their executioners: everything that could make the Jews seem different had been erased in order to make their humanity visible and perceptible. All trace of otherness has been effaced; thus, the Jewish family is 'assimilated,' and most of the actors are not themselves Jewish. (Lanzmann, 1979, p. 138)

But his attack is sharpest when he confronts the inauthenticity of the staging:

> Even in the gas chambers (it takes an iron constitution to dare to represent what occurred there, for no one who went in there came back among us to testify), the American heroes never lose their 'humanity.' They await death, gravely and with dignity, as 'good form' requires. The reality was different: after years of ghettoization, of terror, of humiliation and of famine, those driven into the death chambers by whips and clubs had neither the occasion nor the *sang-froid* to die with nobility. The representation of what really happened would have been in fact unendurable; it would, at least, have never permitted any consoling identification. (Lanzmann, 1979, p. 139)

It is obvious, then, that if Lanzmann finds Littell's representation of Babi Yar to be 'utterly convincing', then it must achieve a considerable measure of authenticity for so demanding a reader. The historical record of Babi Yar is simple enough. For instance, Laurence Rees states the bare facts:

> During the infamous murders at Babi Yar outside Kiev in September 1941, for example, a combination of soldiers from SS police battalions, Einsatzgruppen and local collaborators murdered nearly 34,000 Jews in just two days by shooting them. This was killing on a scale that no death camp ever matched over a similar period.

(Rees, 2017, p. 389)[24]

It is the only mention of this massacre in Rees's book, the most recent major history of the Holocaust. David Cesarani goes into more detail in his *The Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1945* (2016), quoting both Lev Ozerov, a Soviet journalist who compiled a report after the liberation of Kiev, and others, but he devotes little more than a page to it. Richard Rhodes, in his *Masters of Death: The SS Einzatgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (2002) is even more detailed, devoting six pages to it, among other references. He quotes not only Ozerov, but also Dina Pronicheva, a survivor of the massacre. It is Pronicheva's account that is used by A. Anatoli in his novel *Babi Yar,* and this is heavily referenced in D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel.* Anatoli (who sometimes went by the name Kusnetsov before defecting from the Soviet Union to the U.K.), was a child living in the area during the massacre. The first sentence of his novel could not be less ambiguous: 'This book contains nothing but the truth' (Anatoli, 1982, p. 1). When it comes to the period of the actual shootings, he aims for further authenticity by identifying Pronicheva as 'the only eye-witness to come out of it' (Anatoli, 1982, p. 74),[25] and, 'I am now going to tell her story, as I wrote it down from her own words, without adding anything of my own' (Anatoli, 1982, p. 74). According to Karel C. Berkhoff, the version of Pronicheva's account that appears in Anatoli's novel is 'the most frequently cited record of Pronicheva's words' (Berkhoff, 2008; p. 299), although there are some 12 other versions, delivered in other contexts, including at post-war trials. It is to Anatoli's version that Thomas offers grateful acknowledgement in *The White Hotel.*

Littell's version of the massacre coheres with Pronicheva's account in all the major and significant details. His book certainly shows many hours of diligent research. The notices posted, the assembly of the Jews, the barricades and even the beatings administered along the way, are all easily recognisable from other accounts. However, Littell goes further. His is a perpetrator's version, after all. In *The Kindly Ones,* the killers set up an area for eating, a canteen, out of sight of the killing, but

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[24] If this seems brief, it is because the information is delivered in the context of a comparison of the relative lethality of mass shootings and the gas chamber.

[25] This is not strictly accurate. Other contemporary witnesses have also testified, survivors, perpetrators and bystanders.

are dismayed to find themselves offered blood sausage for lunch, having spent a morning shooting innocents at close range. 'Häfner, who had just spent an hour administering deathshots, was yelling and throwing the open cans onto the ground: "What the hell is this shit?" Behind me, a Waffen-SS was noisily vomiting' (Littell, 2009, p. 65). The killers attempt to separate themselves from their appalling actions so that they can eat, but the blood sausage drags them back to the dead and dying. It is a telling detail that is, as Peter Kuon points out, 'historically documented although it actually occurred elsewhere, namely, near the Ukrainian city of Nikolajew' (Kuon, 2012, p. 35).

However, at times, Littell exceeds his sources. For instance, another witness, a Wehrmacht truck driver named Höfer, described how, when the Jews:

> reached the bottom of the ravine they were seized … and made to lie down on top of the Jews who had already been shot. This all happened very quickly …. When the Jews reached the ravine they were so shocked by the horrifying scene that they completely lost their will. It may even have been that the Jews themselves lay down in rows to wait to be shot. (Klee and Burnstone, 1991, p. 64)

Littell's version of the same scene portrays less acquiescent victims:

> Seen close up, things were proceeding much less calmly: the Jews who arrived at the top of the ravine, driven by the Askaris and the Orpos, screamed with terror when they saw the scene and struggled, the 'packers' hit them with iron rods or metal cables to force them to go and lie down, even on the ground they kept yelling and trying to stand up, and the children clung to life as much as the adults, they'd leap up and start running until a 'packer' caught them and knocked them out, often the shots missed their mark and people were only wounded, but the shooters didn't pay any attention and already moved on to the next victim, the wounded rolled over, writhed, groaned in pain, others, silent and in shock, remained paralyzed, their eyes wide open. Men came and went, they shot round after round, almost without stopping. (Littell, 2009, p. 65)

Although fiction, this description of chaos and despair, with terrified children trying to run away, and with vivid accounts of the writhing, rolling and groaning wounded, feels rather more plausible and authentic than the idea that the victims simply lay down and awaited their fate 'gravely and with

dignity, as "good form" requires', as Lanzmann put it. Littel captures the perpetrators' experience as well, as Aue, the narrator, is sent to kill off the wounded:

> To reach some of the wounded, you had to walk over bodies, it was terribly slippery, the limp white flesh rolled under my boots, bones snapped treacherously and made me stumble, I sank up to my ankles in mud and blood. It was horrible and it filled me with a rending feeling of disgust …. I fired almost haphazardly, at anything I saw wriggling, then I pulled myself together and tried to pay attention, but in any case I could only finish off the most recent ones, underneath them already lay other wounded, not yet dead, but soon to be. (Littell, 2009, p. 66)

The cracking bones recall Pornicheva's account. After she fell into the pit she feigned death while an SS man:

> caught his foot against Dina and her appearance aroused his suspicions. He shone his torch on her, picked her up and struck her with his fist. But she hung limp and gave no signs of life. He kicked her in the breast with his heavy boot and trod on her right hand so that the bones cracked, but he didn't use his gun and went off, picking his way across the corpses. (Anatoli, 1982, p. 84)

Littell's description is gruesome and vivid and feels authentic. The key to this authenticity is the detail garnered from research, filtered and enhanced through his imagination. He brings the reader to the scene, and it forces a visceral reaction from him or her. He seems to have actually been there, and through his writing, makes the reader share, empathetically, some of the sensations of those who were there. There are other issues with this novel as we shall see, but it does demonstrate that a significant measure of authenticity can be found in fiction, especially when the author can find a way to work with the 'most significant' elements of the reality, as Wesker put it.

Unsurprisingly, authors who were also survivors offer authentic representations of the Holocaust experience in fiction. They are, at times, horrendous, but equally, they put flesh on the bare bones of history. In *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen,* Tadeusz Borowski's narrator finds his way into a detail working on the ramp at Birkenau. Their job is to unload the trains. He is hoping

to find a pair of shoes for himself. It begins quietly enough, with courteous SS men asking the arriving prisoners to co-operate. Soon this train is emptied and they are sent into clean the carriages. Over the next several pages, and arriving trains, the horror builds:

> We climb inside. In the corners amid human excrement and abandoned wrist-watches lie squashed, trampled infants, naked little monsters with enormous heads and bloated bellies. We carry them out like chickens, holding several in each hand. (Borowski, 1959, p. 39)

An SS man orders that the corpses not be taken to the trucks (and on for immediate burning), but instead handed to the women queueing for those same trucks:

> 'Take them for God's sake!' I explode as the women run from me in horror, covering their eyes. The name of God sounds strangely pointless, since the women and the infants will go on the trucks, every one of them, without exception. We all know what this means, and we look at each other with hate and horror. … A tall grey-haired woman takes the little corpses out of my hands and for an instance gazes straight into my eyes. 'My poor boy,' she whispers and smiles at me. Then she walks away, staggering along the path. (Borowski, 1959, pp. 39-40)

The next train arrives. The narrator speaks with a terrible candour: 'it is impossible to control oneself' as 'brutally we tear suitcases from their hands' (Borowski, 1959, p. 42). Then the tempo increases. He realises some of the people arriving know their fate. He sees a woman trying to save herself by denying her child, 'with the pink cherub's face', who runs after her:

> unable to keep up, stretches out his little arms and cries: 'Mama! Mama!' 'It's not mine, sir, not mine!' she shouts hysterically and runs on, covering her face with her hands. She wants to hide, she wants to reach those who will not ride the trucks, to those who will go on foot, those who will stay alive. She is young, healthy, good-looking, she wants to live. (Borowski, 1959, p. 43)

A Russian prisoner beats her, throws her onto the truck and the child after her. From behind a stack of rails, towards evening, the narrator watches 'the inferno on the teeming ramp' (Borowski, 1959, p. 45). Four men struggle with the body of a large woman:

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> Cursing, dripping wet from the strain they kick out of their way some stray children who have been running all over the ramp, howling like dogs. The men pick them up by the collars, heads, arms, and toss them inside the trucks, on top of the heaps. The four men have trouble lifting the fat corpse on to the car, they call others for help, and all together they hoist up the mound of meat. Big, swollen, puffed-up corpses are being collected from all over the ramp; on top of them are piled the invalids, the smothered, the sick, the unconscious. The heap seethes, howls, groans. (Borowski, 1959, p. 45)

He sees men:

> carrying a small girl with only one leg. They hold her by the arms and the one leg. Tears are running down her face and she whispers faintly: 'Sir, it hurts, it hurts …' They throw her on the truck on top of the corpses. She will burn alive along with them. (Borowski, 1959, p. 46)

Later he sees a little girl, deranged by the 'inferno inside the train', whose 'whining in a faint voice' is:

> hard on the nerves: an SS man approaches calmly, his heavy boot strikes between her shoulders. She falls. Holding her down with his foot, he draws his revolver, fires once, then again. She remains face down, kicking the gravel with her feet, until she stiffens. (Borowski, 1959, pp. 47-48)

He grabs a corpse by the hand 'and the fingers close tightly around mine. I pull back with a shriek and stagger away. … Hunched under the train I begin to vomit' (Borowski, 1959, p. 48). Eventually it is too much for him. He dreams 'returning to the camp, about my bunk, on which there is no mattress, about sleep among comrades who are not going to the gas tonight. Suddenly I see the camp as a haven of peace' (Borowski, 1959, p. 48).

Lawrence Langer writes that 'one test of a literature of Auschwitz is its candor in imitating the atmosphere of moral and physical mutilation that the Germans deliberately created in the camps' (Langer, 2004, p. 182). Borowski more than meets that standard. He confesses that he is enraged at the Jews he is driving from the trains. 'I don't know why, but I am furious, simply furious with these people … I feel no pity. I'm not sorry they're going to the gas chamber. Damn them all!' (Borowski,

1959, p. 40). His friend Henri replies that what he feels is 'natural, predictable, calculated' (Borowski, 1959, p. 40). The calculation is on the part of the Germans. They have tricked these Polish prisoners (Borowski was not a Jew) into complicity, and now they find themselves depending, as Christopher Bigsby puts it, 'on a steady flow of Jews and others to secure their own well-being' (Bigsby, 2006, p. 344). The ethical corruption is clear and built into the camp system. Gideon Greif summarises the moral world of Auschwitz-Birkenau:

> Many former prisoners explained in their testimonies that everyday life in the Nazi camps was based on a total reversal of all moral standards. Power was associated solely with the license to oppress and torture. Values such as mercy and compassion were regarded as extreme, negative, and perverse. There seemed to be no limit to the barbarity and abuse that took place in these camps; unscrupulous human imagination was given free rein. This state of *Umkehrung aller Werte* (reversal of values), which so effectively pervaded and dominated daily life in Auschwitz-Birkenau, affected the prisoner-functionaries in particular. Due to their positions, it became an existential imperative for them, more than for other prisoners, to make some adjustment to the structure of evil. Even people who had no vicious, sadistic, or unscrupulous traits were often dragged into violent and cruel behavioral patterns during their internment in Auschwitz. (Greif, 2005, pp. 52-53)

It is necessary to remember this before we condemn Borowski's narrator or his friend Henri. 'But he knew, too, that his survival depended on the death of others, that a slackening of the killing rate would threaten his well-being and that survival was thus morally tainted' (Bigsby, 2006, p. 347). The description of the unloading is horrifying, and it is one of the facets of the suffering that is easily elided in historian's accounts. For instance, the arrival of a train at Auschwitz is described by Nikolaus Wachsmann as follows:

> Then everything seemed to happen at once. The doors flung open, and SS men and some inmates in striped uniforms hurried the Jews off the trains. To speed things up, they screamed and pushed those who hesitated. There were kicks and blows, though the guards rarely went further. In great haste, the 2,500 or so Jews from Mława spilled onto the platform, clutching each other and their belongings; left behind were the

bodies of old people and children who had been crushed to death during the journey. (Wachsmann, 2016a, p. 154)

While this is terrible in itself, it tells us nothing of the carnage that Borowski describes. The parent disowning a child turns up in other fiction too, for instance, in Ida Fink's story, 'Crazy', a street-sweeper hides during a round-up in a ghetto, and sees his three daughters put into a truck:

> My children were on the first truck, my three girls. I saw that the oldest understood, but the others were crying from plain fright. Suddenly they stopped crying and the youngest, the three-year-old, cried out, 'Papa! Papa, come to us!' The saw me. They were the only ones who saw me in that corner. Doctor! So what did I do? Their father, I came out, ran over to them, and together we … right? No. I put my finger to my lips and shook my head at them they shouldn't cry out, they should be quiet. Sha! The two youngest called to me again, but that one, my firstborn, she covered their mouths with her hand. (Fink, 1990, pp. 108-109)

It is difficult to imagine a greater example of what Langer calls moral mutilation. The physical mutilation is there too. The dead infants, several in each hand, carried by a leg or arm, like chickens brought to market, the whimpering child shot, the disabled girl thrown on to a truck full of corpses. In the midst of it all a small tiny oasis of dignity is found in the form of a young woman whose poise catches his attention. He stares until their eyes meet:

> I look at her without saying a word. Here, standing before me, is a girl, a girl with enchanting blonde hair, with beautiful breasts, wearing a little cotton blouse, a girl with a wise, mature look in her eyes. Here she stands, gazing straight into my face, waiting. And over there is the gas chamber: communal death, disgusting and ugly. And over in the other direction is the concentration camp: the shaved head, the heavy Soviet trousers in sweltering heat, the sickening, stale odour of dirty, damp female bodies, the animal hunger, the inhuman labour, and the same gas chamber, only an even more hideous, more terrible death … (Borowski, 1959, p. 44)

She is waiting for an answer to the question she posed: where, she wants to know, are they being brought? He does not answer:

'I know,' she says with a shade of proud contempt in her voice, tossing her head. She walks off resolutely in the direction of the trucks. Someone tries to stop her; she boldly pushes him aside and runs up the steps. In the distance I can only catch a glimpse of her blonde hair flying in the breeze. (Borowski, 1959, p. 44)

The ramp is so horrific that he wishes for the peace of the concentration camp. The authenticity comes from first-hand experience, and it is impossible to doubt that these things occurred. Whether they all occurred on one particular day, or if they are an aggregate of several days, is of no matter. Borowski vividly captures the moral and physical degradation of human beings. What is of immense value in Borowski's work is not just that he reports the moral inversion of the ramp at Birkenau, but that he demonstrates it, and brings us into that world in a way that mere facts can never do. How are we to condemn the women that will not take the corpses of the infants, or the woman that tries to abandon her child, or the men carrying the disabled girl to her death? If we have a shred of empathy do we not have to ask what we would do in the same circumstances? The only people who come out of this description with integrity are the older woman who takes the corpses of the infants and the young blonde girl. They know the fate that awaits them and rather than make the moral compromises, elect instead to die. Would we have the same fortitude?

There is another place that fiction can take us that history has not considered in its deliberations. If the camps were hell, then, like Dante's *Inferno* there were many circles. In this world of death and disease and moral corruption, there was space for almost any kind of vile behaviour that the human being can imagine. Yehiel De-Nur (variously Dinoor or Dinur), was born Yehiel Feiner, survived Auschwitz, and moved to Israel after the war. He was called to testify at the Eichmann trial. There he was revealed as an author who wrote under the *nom-de-plume* Ka-Tzetnik 135633 (variously Ka-Tsetnik 135633, K-Zetnik). The pen name is derived from the German slang for prisoner, along with his number. At the trial, he explained his choice of name:

This is not a pen-name. I do not see myself as an author who writes literature. This is a chronicle from the planet of Auschwitz, whose inhabitants had no names, they were neither born nor bore any children; they were neither alive nor dead. They breathed

according to different laws of nature. Every fraction of a minute there revolved on a different time scale. They were called Ka-Tzetnik, they were skeletons with numbers. (Bartov, 1997, p. 54)

Hannah Arendt was not impressed. She refers to him dismissively as 'the author of several books on Auschwitz that dealt with brothels, homosexuals, and other "human interest stories"' (Arendt, 1964, pp. 223-224). It is certainly true that opinion on his work is divided. Outside of Israel, he has been largely ignored, and within Israel, opinion is divided between those who see him as a valid recorder and chronicler of the horror, and those who see his work as crude pornographic pulp-fiction. Miryam Sivan refers to a 'dissonance' within Israel between 'some established scholars' negative responses to Ka-Tzetnik's books and the Ministry of Education's 1994 decision to reissue them and make them part of the high school curriculum' (Sivan, 2010, p. 202). There is debate about his quality as a writer, but especially, about the world he relentlessly describes. Dvir Abramovich describes his work as 'semiautobiographical' and made up of works that are 'graphically disturbing confessional pieces … infused with a narratorial and stylistic obsession for outlining the violence, perversion, and bestiality of the Nazi criminals writ large …' (Abramovich, 2002, pp. 149-150). The notion that his work verges on the pornographic is common; for instance Magilow and Silverman refer to his work as 'semi-pornographic' (Magilow and Silverman, 2015, p. 86), David Mikics refers to one novel as 'unavoidably, Holocaust porn' (Mikics, 2002).

There is no doubt that there is a lurid quality to how these books were marketed, certainly in the English versions (which are now long out of print). The Panther Books edition of *House of Dolls* (1959) has a black cover, title in red, author in yellow and, in white it declares 'It shows the depth of bestiality to which the Germans sank under Hitler …'. The Citadel Press version of *Moni – A Novel of Auschwitz,* has a pitch that reads 'Moni was a small boy. His eyes were big and soft as velvet. Moni was chosen by the block chiefs for their sexual orgies: His life depended on his eyes … and his will to survive'. This was not only the case with English versions. Mikics reports that 'for Israeli kids in the '50s and '60s – a rather puritanical era, devoted to the responsible building of a new society – this was exciting, illicit stuff. Often enough, they learned about sex from a novel about a Nazi death camp'

(Mikics, 2002). While definitions of pornography are fluid and subject to change, it is difficult to identify anything directly pornographic in these works. Sivan points out that 'there is not one instance of a graphic description in *House of Dolls* or *Piepel* of genitals or sexual penetration' (Sivan, 2010, p. 209)[26].

Moni, the narrator of *Moni – A Novel of Auschwitz,* has been 'lucky to land a *Funktion'* that gives him access to extra food in a world where 'it's the fat and the skinny. The fat belong to life; the skinny – to death' (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, pp. 39-40). However, he is beset with problems. First, he is unable to put on weight as he has lost his appetite and 'couldn't touch a bite' (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 39). He needs to be fat for his *Funktion* because Block Chiefs 'like a good fleshy *piepel'* (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 26). If he loses his *Funktion,* then 'inside of six hours you're just as hungry as the rest of them. And you know where the hungry go in Auschwitz' (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 41). Also, he has a competitor, and he fears losing his *Funktion* to Lolek. Then there is the problem of carrying out his *Funktion*:

> you're torn between two fears; if you draw out the loveplay, you're terrified at the thought of dozing off in the middle; if you end the petting and fondling too soon, you're terrified at the thought that the Block Chief will croak you for it as soon as he's done. (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 115)

He is coached by his predecessor, Berele: 'I told you not to undress. Just let your hands do the whole job. Franz likes that. Get him hot in all the places I told you. Then he'll go right at you' (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 29). Moni is nine years old.

Moni is a portrait of a child in constant fear. He fears the brutality of his abuser: 'those first nights in the cubicle with Franzl, he hadn't been able to lift a foot afterwards' ((Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 39); he fears the seesaw, where a cane or broom would be placed across his neck and he is be killed by the Block Chief rocking back and forth on it; he fears selection like every inmate, and

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[26] It is difficult at times to keep track of Ka-Tzetnik's works. The English translations of the same novel can turn up in a variety of different names from different publishers. So, while *House of Dolls* has remained quite stable, M*oni - A Novel of Auschwitz* has also been published as both *Piepel*, and *Atrocity*

'that dread, Auschwitz dead, [that] pervades the block. And that is normal' (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 59). Moni is a child torn from his family and security who has become the plaything of monsters. He fears and he sees, he records and reports with no guile. He is cast aside by one Block Chief and so, to survive, seduces another. Again, we remember that he is only nine years old.

He rarely sees Germans. His fears are all about Kapos and Block Chiefs. He witnesses one Jew being hacked to death with an axe, and new inmates being drowned in latrines; he sees Berele seesawed, and Lolek, his replacement raped and murdered, their bodies 'dumped … on to the corpse pile' (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 60). He gives us a vivid insider's view of the Musselmen:

> holding their trousers in their hands, wiping from their nude legs the feces which had oozed out of them on the way to the latrine. In their armpits they hug yesterday's bread ration which they are no longer capable of eating and never will eat. Their trunks are swathed in a motley of tatters and strings – all the wealth they had managed to amass in the course of their Auschwitz life. The spindlelegs jutting nakedly down from the tatterbatch trunks give them the appearance of toy ostriches with tall steel filaments for legs …. Skeletons. Skeletons. You do not see them. Just as you do not see the paper, but the words written on it. They are merely the Auschwitz backdrop against which you see only Prominents. (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, pp. 116-117)

One of the few occasions where a German features in the novel is during a selection, but Ka-Tzetnik's focus is on the prisoners:

> One by one the skeletons made their appearance – pallid, nude. Their naked steps were inaudible …. A human being. There he stands. Bearing his life on his left arm, now. His life and he – shivering, naked. He proffers it to the black SS uniform of the physician of Auschwitz. So much sky pouring in through the gap of the wide-open gate. So much light in the grooves between the skeletal ribs. So much light between his two legs. They stand apart, right and left of his genital nudity, as though nailed to his frame from without. Uncommanded, the skeleton turns about …. He knows that now, thus naked, there is nothing he can conceal. The light of day is upon everything. Instead of mounds of buttock are two rump cavities brimming with light; and a fullness of light in the dazzling emptiness between the legs. His life is ashamed to face him, and his heart twinges with the pity of it all, but he has no solace to offer. Perhaps the

> eyes beneath the SS visor will see his life that way too, and take pity. (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 108)

These men are all alike, there is no way to distinguish them, so survival is on the whim of the SS doctor:

> Thus one after the other they flit by the cubicle window. Naked skeletons. All alike. No telling one from the other. Like threads in some weird weaving machine they file rapidly past the Camp Doctor, in unbroken succession: a naked body arrives – line; he does a circuit before the Camp Doctor – loop; continues out to the main path – line. Thus without letup: line-loop-line. Line-loop-line. (Ka-Tzetnik-135633, 1987, p. 109)

'Ka-Tzetnik lacked utterly the dignified, philosophical seeker's tone of Primo Levi or the heartfelt spiritual intensity of Elie Wiesel', writes David Mikics (Mikics, 2002), and there is truth in this. There is very little abstraction in these works, they are frequently meandering and at time overwritten, but, in so far as such a thing is possible, *Moni* is, in Ruth Franklin's phrase, a 'direct channel' to the camps. This is a world of everyday monsters who rape and kill and victims who die at a whim, a world of savage exploitation and relentless fear. It is an utter inversion of our world.

Even this brief survey offers some examples of how fiction can bear witness in ways that history either cannot or will not. Littel's description of Babi Yar is built on meticulous research, and from this, he draws some of the most significant details and writes himself into a network of authenticity. For Borowski and Ka-Tzetnik 135633, these significant details are available from memory and experience rather than from research, but they use the same technique. From these real-world references they fashion the foundations for their fictional enterprise. It is worth noting that these details are not unusual in and of themselves. They have, if anything, a mundane quality, and therein lies their power. Essentially, they are telling details that might escape the notice of someone who was not there. Entire Jewish communities were entrained and shipped to Birkenau. Inevitably, some of the people in these communities were disabled. So, of course, trains arriving at Birkenau contained disabled people. It is quite obvious if you think about it, though frequently we fail to do just that. We are so preoccupied with the arcane mysteries of mass destruction that we fail to see the

individuals involved, in all their diversity and humanity. Littel's description of walking across a field of bodies, the woman trying to abandon her child as described by Borowski, the blatant presentation of child sexual abuse in Ka-Tzetnik's work are all quite obvious and even likely, if you think about it.

As we saw in chapter two, Berel Lang complains that fictional representations are invalid because they 'personalize even events that are impersonal and corporate' (Lang, 2003, p. 96), and that therefore they misrepresent and so diminish the truth of the Holocaust. However, there is more than one way to the truth, and sometimes the power of fiction is most clear when it does exactly what Lang complains about. Greif tells us that the world of the Holocaust was based on an inversion of usual moral standards. There is ample evidence for this, but it remains an abstraction, and one that we can understand with our intellect. However, in Fink's story the father hides while the eldest daughter saves him at the cost of herself and her siblings. Is this not a perfect inversion of how things should happen? Fiction puts us in the place of the father and shows us the concrete and real (even if fictional) foundations that the abstraction is built on. This is exactly what Snyder asked us to do in the closing paragraph of *Bloodlands,* when he sets us the task of turning the numbers back into people

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Cinematic representation is different from other forms of representation. It offers the illusion of unmediated access to events. We feel that we witness what the camera sees because it functions as our proxy, creating a cinematic present that seems to deny the alterity and pastness of the past. Of course this is false, as every frame of our point of view is the result of the craftsmanship of a multitude of professionals, and often within an imagined narrative. However, cinematic images carry emotional power, reports Lawrence Baron, 'because the images and sounds do not require intellectual reflection to construe their meanings' (Baron, 2005, p. 14); in plain terms: we believe what we see. This effect is amplified because, for most of us, vision is our primary sense and 'hence when the information

gathered by other senses contradicts visual information, the latter overwrites the former' (Vincze, 2016, p. 109). This, then, is the power of the moving image. When there is a conflict between what we hear and what we see, we will believe our eyes before our ears.

Though it often appears quite simple, the cinematic image is a complex entity. The work of designers, actors, cinematographers, writers and directors and more combine in the image. They create a text that we perceive over time, as part of a series of related images that are linked together. Much happens simultaneously on the screen: images, dialogue, music, action, combine in order to create the illusion that we witness. All of this means that the creator or author of the movie, usually the director, has many tools to work with. The inverse is that the degree of verisimilitude required to achieve authenticity is correspondingly higher.

The cinema has not been afraid to approach the Holocaust. Lawrence Baron notes that in the four years to 1949, some 44 'movies on holocaust themes' (Baron, 2005, p. 53) were made. A table in his *Projecting the Holocaust into the Present*, tracks the rate of production over the decades to 1999. It suggests that almost 900 such movies were made in the fifty-five years. As time has gone past, the rate of production has increased, with the greatest number between 1990 and 1999, when some 222 films were released. Obviously these films represent a range of themes, from movies exploring resistance and war trials, survival and neo-Nazis, to ones dealing with the children of survivors. Holocaust movies are not very different from other movies in the most part. They 'adhere to the general principles of dramatic structure where a protagonist negotiates a conflict, and is subsequently compelled to undergo a transformation' (Kerner, 2011, p. 31). Robert A. Rosenstone describes six characteristics of the mainstream historical film. These movies typically offer history as a story, 'a tale with a beginning, middle, and an end. A tale that leaves you with a moral message and (usually) a feeling of uplift' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 7). They present history as the story of individuals, '(usually men) who are already renowned, or … who are made to seem important because they have been singled out by the camera …' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 7). History is shown as 'a closed, completed, and simple past' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 7), and film 'emotionalizes, personalizes, and dramatizes …

it gives us history as triumph, anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering, and heroism' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 8). It offers history as process, a space where issues and themes often treated separately by academic history such as 'economics, politics, race, class, and gender all come together in the lives and moments of individuals, groups, and nations' (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 8). Finally, it shows us the past in operation, where the look of the past is recreated, period clothing is worn and period utensils are used, though sometimes incorrectly, or viewed through the prism of the present, which can lead to a 'false historicity'.

It is arguable that any fictional film about the Holocaust can fall neatly under these characteristics as we shall see. For instance, who can deny the 'feeling of uplift' at the resolution of *Schindler's List*, and the sense that this story is, indeed, resolved and complete. Similarly, the conclusion of *The Pianist* (Polanski, 2002). Both movies select a single character and focus attention on their emotional journeys through 'anguish, joy, despair, adventure, suffering' *en route* to their finish. With both movies, the story inevitably ends with liberation, and the afterlife of both Schindler and Szpilman is of little consequence to the film makers. However, there are some characteristics of the Holocaust film that are not covered in this list. For instance, one common trope in these movies concerns the presentation of the victims, according to Judith Doneson:

> The prevailing vision that informs Holocaust films is rooted in a popular theology that views the Jew as condemned eternally for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah but whose continuing existence is necessary as witness to the Christian doctrine as well as to test the qualities of mercy and goodness incumbent on good Christians. This takes the shape of an alliance of the weak, passive, rather feminine Jew being protected by a strong Christian/gentile, the male, signifying a male-female relationship. It is a generally benevolent symbiotic coupling based on the stereotype of the meek female dependent on the strong male. (Doneson, 1997, p. 140)

This trope is clearly visible in *Schindler's List*, for instance:

> As the saying goes: 'Behind every great man, there's a woman.' And the relationship that develops between Oskar Schindler and Itzhak Stern is effectively a male-female

romance; Stern is to all intents and purposes a 'woman,' relatively soft in demeanor and speech, the consummate domestic running the show behind the scenes, allowing Schindler to don the guise of the successful and philandering businessman. (Kerner, 2011, p. 32).

This same dynamic can be seen in movies as diverse as *Kapo* (Gillo Pontecorvo, 1960), where a young Jewish woman betrays herself to become a Kapo in a concentration camp, but is redeemed when she falls in love with a gentile Russian prisoner; or, *In Darkness* (Agnieszka Holland, 2011), where a gentile sewer worker hides Jews in the sewers of Lvov. More recently in *Denial* (Mick Jackson, 2016), the calm and composed Tom Wilkinson and Anthony Julius are measured British lawyers who effectively parent Rachel Weisz's emotional and chaotic Deborah Lipstadt through the Irving trial.

While some, even the very first, movies have been set in camps, particularly the Auschwitz complex, there has been a demarcation of sorts in that filmmakers have been slow to venture within the crematoria. In this sense, both *The Grey Zone* (2001) and *Son of Saul* (2015) mark a departure from the norms of Holocaust films. They also eschew other common tropes in that the Jews in these films are not passive, and neither of these films have uplifting endings.

In his memoir of his time at Auschwitz, Miklos Nyiszili recounts an incident in which a girl of about 16 years of age survived the gas chamber. This incident plays a major role in both of these movies, and both aspire, in different ways, to offer an authentic sense of life within the darkest part of the darkest place, the crematoria. Neither film is especially accurate when dealing with history. Both borrow Nyiszili's story of the child who survives the gas chamber. In *The Grey Zone*, the child is female; in *Son of Saul*, the child is male. Both movies conflate the incident with the *Sonderkommando* revolt of October 7th, 1944, although the two events were months apart. In Nyiszili's account, the child was shot within an hour of being discovered. In *Son of Saul*, the boy is smothered shortly after being discovered. In *The Grey Zone*, the girl survives beyond the revolt, even if only briefly. Both movies include graphic depictions of the processes of mass murder, including the undressing room, the entrance to the gas chamber and the removal of bodies from the chamber

and cremation. In neither case is this detail gratuitous or prurient; instead, this detail is part of the authenticity of both movies.

In pursuit of authenticity, director of *The Grey Zone*, Tim Blake Nelson and production designer Maria Djurkovic, 'not only consulted the original architectural plans in the Imperial War Museum in London, but also utilised stones from abandoned farm houses to imitate the texture of the original complex' (Bangert, 2008, p. 18). The film was shot on a set that was a replica of two crematoria built to 90% scale. It is difficult not to see this as a kind of defensive accuracy, as if the extraordinary efforts at historical literalness might deflect criticism of the filmmaker's intentions and demonstrate their sincerity. If that was the aim, it was not entirely successful. The critical response was divided, and on quite predictable lines. While recognising the good intentions of all involved, Manohla Dargis, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, declared 'good intentions are as useless as artistic ambitions at Auschwitz, where neither art nor sentimentality has a place' (Dargis, 2002). Scenes are 'horrible to watch and yet nowhere horrible enough', and the crimes that took place there are, 'beyond what entertainment cinema, which demands realism but not necessarily truth, can show us' (Dargis, 2002). In other words, Dargis rejects the movie not for any weakness in the production, but because what it aspires to do is impossible. On the other hand, Robert Ebert reviews the movie and finds the production 'always convincing' (Ebert, 2009), Erin McGlothlin refers to its 'violation of cinematic taboos with its stark depiction of both the operation of the gas chambers and crematoria and the *Sonderkommando* workers' casually brutal treatment of freshly murdered naked corpses' (McGlothin, 2015, p. 323).

László Nemes, director and co-writer (along with novelist Clara Royer) of *Son of Saul*, sought authenticity with a different approach. Rather than create replicas, the movie was shot at:

> an early-20th-century agricultural warehouse outside Budapest, to reflect the place's constant sense of confusion. 'What we wanted was to preserve or reconstruct the logic of space in Auschwitz, which was a factory building meant to kill people, but still a factory,' he says. 'The idea was to make it impossible for the viewer to be able to understand the camp as a single coherent space, so it becomes a labyrinth in a way.'

(Debruge, 2015)

This approach to design is matched in the approach to narrative:

> Instead of a lengthy exposition, he plunges the audience headfirst into the 'nightmare of crime' (as one Birkenau prisoner described it in 1944). We hear sounds of moaning and barking, a sharp whistle, and after the film comes into focus we soon catch sight of Jews being hustled away from a train; they have just been forced out of the dark carriages, apparently, and into a bewildering, terrifying new world, which is filled with cries and shouts, haste and violence. (Wachsmann, 2016b)

Much has been made of the shooting frame of *Son of Saul*. There are no wide or establishing shots. The film opens with an unfocussed shot, and Saul steps into it and gives us something on which to focus. Thereafter, he dominates every frame, we see what he sees, and, perhaps most importantly, we focus on what he focuses on. As Steven Alan Carr put it:

> the film stubbornly asserts a sustained point-of-view, realized in a series of unrelenting hand-held and long-take close-ups that radically destabilize the neatly manicured visual spaces of camps one finds in films such as *Schindler's List* (1993) and *The Grey Zone* (2002). (Carr, 2016)

For the viewer, it is as though we have been dropped into this violent, terrible place, and someone pointed to Saul and said, 'Just follow him', and we do. Saul makes no concession to our presence, he explains nothing, we just follow him. Played by Géza Röhrig, he is mysterious, enigmatic, impenetrable, and our only point of contact. As the place is so terrible, we tend to keep our eyes fixed on him, and so, much of what goes on within the frame is out of focus, because we are afraid to look. The carnage around him, the dead, the dying, the suffering, is all background to him. He has, literally, seen it all before. It is out of focus for him and so also for us. Still, even tangentially, we see things we do not want to see, the space is confusing, the world is incoherent, and it is so very noisy. This disorientation of reality matches the distortion of values that *Son of Saul* captures so very successfully. Some critical commentary has focussed on the inexplicable nature of Saul's chosen task, but to do so is to miss the point. The entire world of the movie is inexplicable to us, trying to arrange a decent

burial for this child is just one more strand that makes no sense to us who follow Saul around, afraid to look, appalled at what we hear. Nemes deliberately avoids exposition. Things happen that are not explained. The night scene features a mass shooting around a fire pit, but why not the gas chamber? We see prisoners trying to break into a building, and do not know why. However, if we know some history, we know that sometimes the numbers arriving at Birkenau were so overwhelming that they exceeded the capacity of the gas chambers, or that sometimes smaller numbers meant that rather than use the gas chamber, the victims were simply shot. Or we may know that four photographs of the murder process were taken from within a building and they survive. Hindsight offers insight. But without hindsight, we do not know if this child is Saul's son, or someone who reminds him of a missing son, or if he just suddenly embraces this task one day. The viewer is dropped into a maelstrom, and our guide is not much interested in pointing the way. We are Dante in the *Inferno,* with a preoccupied and distant Virgil, and there is no Beatrice here.

Again, the critical response has been predictable, and sometimes the same voices repeat themselves. Manohla Dargis, writing for *The New York Times* this time*,* called it 'radically dehistoricized, intellectually repellent' (Dargis, 2015). On the other hand, in *The Observer* Mark Kermode observed that:

> Those dark hours (the film takes place over two days and one night) are as vividly, devastatingly portrayed as anything I have experienced in the cinema; I struggle to remember the last time a non-documentary film proved so profoundly, soul-shakingly distressing. This is as it should be – anything less would be immoral and irresponsible. (Kermode, 2016)

Historian Nikolas Wachsmann, reviewing *Son of Saul*, writes:

> Most post-war films that have tried to capture the Nazi camps have failed, often woefully: scenes 'inside' often warp the camps beyond all recognition, distorted by kitsch, naivety or voyeurism …. *Son of Saul*, by contrast, dares to depict the 'implacable nakedness of the violence' (as Lanzmann called it), and does so to devastating effect. (Wachsmann, 2016b, p. 18)

Stefan Grissemann, in *Film Comment*, rings the usual bell: Holocaust movies render 'the inconceivable palpable, and by doing so they trivialize it' (Grissemann, 2015, p. 29). He goes on to assert that '*Son of Saul* claims to make us feel, hear, and see what really happened in Auschwitz; by this intention alone, it is a work of breathtaking pretension' (Grissemann, 2015, p. 29), before invoking the predictably inevitable reference to '*Shoah* director Claude Lanzmann's ban on images of the Holocaust' (Grissemann, 2015, p. 29). It is unfortunate then, that one of the movie's bigger fans is none other than the same Lanzmann:

> I love it very much … as a film about the life of the *Sonderkommando*, I think it's very good …. It is a most interesting thing. I wouldn't even say that *Son of Saul* is a fiction film. This division between documentary and fiction has to be changed. *Son of Saul* is a fiction in many respects, but the fiction is the truth. (Cronk, 2015)

It is difficult to argue when Claude Lanzmann finds a representation of the crematoria to be authentic.

While *Son of Saul* and *The Grey Zone* are very different films, they have some common features. There is no sentimentality, naivety or voyeurism in these movies. While there is nudity in each of these films there is nothing prurient about it. Axel Bangert notes that filmic representations of naked bodies 'do not reflect any kind of neutral corporeality, but always aim at a certain gesture of remembering' (Bangert, 2008, p. 26), and that therefore how the body is shown is at least as important as what is shown. In chapter three, the role of nudity in the camps was discussed, and was described by Primo Levi as a state 'charged with significance. It was also a form of violence … offensive because of its useless redundancy' (Levi, 2015b, pp. 2492-2493) and so it can be argued that clothing represented an effective power structure in Auschwitz. At the top of the ladder are the uniformed, spruce and clean Nazis. Below them the always scruffy and dirty *Sonderkommando*, dressed in the leftovers of the dead, while below them are the victims. Once they arrive in the undressing space, their fate is utterly sealed, and the process of undressing is the beginning of their dying, of their ultimate descent of the power ladder, and of their transformation into the naked cadavers. This recalls the words of Franz Stangl, commander of Treblinka, quoted in chapter one,

who told Gitta Sereny that he stayed away from the undressing area – 'avoided it from my innermost being' – because, as Sereny summarised it, as soon as the people were in the undressing barracks – that is, as soon as they were naked – they were no longer human beings for him. What he was 'avoiding at any price' was witnessing the transition. (Sereny, 1983, p. 202)

There are no survivors, not among the victims nor among the *Sonderkommando*. The characters are imbued with a sense of fatalism. They know that they have been morally compromised by the choices they make every day. They know that each *Sonderkommando* was annihilated in turn. It is here that these movies approach authenticity, not in their depictions of cadavers or in their accuracy (or otherwise) when depicting the killing process or the architecture of the sets, but in their refusal to erase or avoid these elements. This is the heart of Birkenau, the core truth of it.

Therefore it is arguable that movies that shy away from this effectively falsify the truth of Birkenau. For instance, one of the more controversial elements of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is the scene in the shower at Birkenau. Due to a mix up, some 110 women are sent to Auschwitz, and while Schindler struggles to save them, they are shorn, undressed and pushed into a shower room. We, and they, fear the worst. However, it turns out to be only a shower, and to everyone's relief they simply wash themselves. It is a peculiar sequence, and one that invokes the gas chamber, but then sidesteps it. In the original novel, this is a short paragraph of less than forty words. In the movie, we watch as the women undress, are driven into the shower room, the door is shut and the camera closes in on the peephole. We see the women wait, naked, in agony, and then the water runs. It is difficult to parse why this moment is there at all, and invested with such weight, if not to underline the ultimate hazard of Birkenau, while immediately side-stepping it. This avoidance is to falsify, and in ways, to reject the nature of Birkenau and of what went on there. Unlike the million or so who arrived and never left, that these few women manage to escape (or even, more correctly, are rescued by their gentile saviour), suggests that there was some kind of hope for the people arriving on trains. This is the opposite of the experience suggested in *Son of Saul* and *The Grey Zone*. For these characters hope has long since fled. Also, they are rescued by an external agent, where, for the vast majority, there was no such

assistance even possible. Once a person was selected for death at Birkenau, there was no escape, no avoidance, no help and no future. While this does not say that incident recounted in *Schindler's List* did not occur, if it did then it certainly was a very atypical example of life there. When something is represented by an atypical example, it risks erasing the actuality of the typical, and so becoming a false report. Cynthia Ozick argues this strongly in a critique of some Holocaust novels, as we shall see below.

There is another impact from showing the horrors of the crematoria. Bangert refers to 'the depiction of the dead bodies' impious treatment', and how this causes the viewer to feel 'disgust towards the atrocities inflicted upon the deportees' (Bangert, 2008, p. 28). For us to feel disgusted at how the remains of the victims are treated means that the depiction of the process of mass murder actually humanises the victims for us. Again, this can be illustrated by comparison with *Schindler's List*. The shower sequence ends with the women, dressed again, leaving the building. As they do, they look over their shoulders. There, silently, slowly, queueing for the steps, is another line of men, women and children. The camera pans along them. We see them descend the steps and then the camera tilts upward to the chimney belching out smoke and flames. What is noteworthy is that we know now the fate of the people in this line, but we have no idea or sense of them, of who they are or what their stories are. We know what awaits them, but we have no idea of how they will go through it or of how they will bear it. The effect is to depersonalise the dead. *Schindler's List* gives us a strong sense of the people who survived, of their distress and of their suffering. However, the people descending those stairs in the snow are presented as little more than a collection of coats and hats. By bringing us into the crematoria, by showing us the faces and then the bodies of those who die, even in their nakedness, and by provoking our disgust at how their remains are treated, both *The Grey Zone* and *Son of Saul* maintain the personhood of the dead. We are not allowed to forget them, not allowed forget their frail, terrible humanity. Like Borowski's depiction of the ramp, 'it challenges the widespread image of Jews being murdered as a homogenous and largely passive victim group' (Bangert, 2008, p. 17); instead we witness the horror for each man, woman and child.

There is, of course, no greater depersonalisation of the dead than to forget the lives they lived before they died. Too often our sense of the dead begins with that slow march down those steps to the crematoria and their doom. One movie in particular has attempted to redress this imbalance. *Train of Life* (1998), directed by Radu Mihaileanu, is sometimes compared with *Life is Beautiful*, the Roberto Benigni movie, as both profoundly reference the Holocaust, both were released at around the same time, and both approach the horror from a comic point of view. In both cases, the narrative is within a frame, someone reporting from when the story is over. However, similarities end there. The Benigni movie has already been discussed, at least from the point of view of authenticity. It remains problematic, given that it is a project where the writer-director-star creates a role that allows the writer-director-star to shine brightly and then die nobly. In such a situation, it is difficult to shake the suspicion that the focus of the movie is, in fact, the aforementioned writer-director-star, and that the suffering of millions is little more than a convenient backdrop. David A. Brenner reports that the framing device, which identifies *Life Is Beautiful* as a fable, was added at the suggestion of the Cannes Film Festival, and the version shown at Cannes was 'reedited for the film festival' including the addition of an 'introductory title "This is a fairy tale," and … the framing voice over by the adult Gisoué was also added' (Brenner, 2008, p. 262).

Mihaileanu's film is narrated by Shlomo, the village fool. From the opening 'Once Upon a Time …', it is clear we are in a fable. Shlomo's tale has 'an elaborate plot but a fairly simple premise' (Brenner, 2008, p. 263). He has become aware that the Nazis are advancing towards their village, but he has a plan and convinces the elders of the village to follow it. They procure a train, disguise some among their number as Germans, and put the rest on the train as deportees and head east, towards Russia. Thus disguised as a train bound for doom, they have many adventures, including surviving Communist attempts to blow up the train, and evading Nazis, and ultimately meeting up with a group of Gypsies embarked on a false deportation of their own. Together they head east, toward Russia, Palestine and freedom. It is, of course, an utterly absurd plot, so far beyond plausible that the viewer's disbelief is frequently challenged. However, it is also very clever. The visual style of the movie, using

'unconventional camera angles, the musical interludes and the point-of-view shots from the perspective of Shlomo the fool' (Brenner, 2008, p. 263), gently underlines the obvious fabrications of the plot. We are consistently told in the grammar of the film that this is a fable. Equally though, there are darker moments. For instance, when the time comes for the villagers to board the train and leave, the scene is deliberately staged: a crowd of peasants clamber into goods wagons, carrying their possessions, minding their children, at night, lit by flaming torches, hurried along by men in German uniforms. It is in these moments that the viewer is reminded of what is actually at stake here.

Train of Life is predicated entirely on the final shot. As the train crosses the front under cartoon shellfire we cut to a tight close-up of Shlomo. He narrates for us, telling us what happened to the characters: who married who; who ended up in Israel and who went to America. As he speaks, the camera zooms out a little, we see the rough wooden shed, the barbed wire and the uniform with vertical stripes. We realise that all these people whose resilience and wit and talent we have enjoyed are dead:

> In the event the finale of the film makes clear that what we have seen is merely a fantasy. For the occupants of the train there can be no escape from the camps. At the same time the extent of the horror of the Holocaust is laid bare: the elimination of a vibrant, resourceful community with their dreams, loves and plans for the future. (Steinberg, 1988)

This is a deeply bitter-sweet comedy, but one that celebrates the life, the culture and the music that was lost. It celebrates Jewishness and the culture of the Shetl, and Brenner traces the style and humour to early Yiddish theatre, with some of the same stock characters. It is an example of fiction telling an essential truth, what Julian Barnes calls this 'process of producing grand, beautiful, well-ordered lies that tell more truth than any assemblage of facts'.

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While fiction, as we can now see, offers some possibilities for a valid representation of the Holocaust,

there are potential issues too, and the ways in which fictional representation can falsify the events are many. It is a complicated space. To return to Steiner's *Treblinka*, we have on the one hand, the actualities of history, embedded in Steiner's text. On the other, we have his inventions and interpolations. It is not difficult to see why a novelist might borrow from history, especially this history. It offers the writer a patina of authenticity for their work. On the other hand, the interpolations and inventions risk undermining the authenticity of history. For instance, when Des Pres disregards the inventions 'so long as the story as a whole remains true to known facts', it begs a question: which facts are the known facts, and who knows them? It is true that history and Steiner's novel are in lockstep when they tell us that terrible things happened at Treblinka, and that there was revolt among the prisoners. Does it matter if one reports that a prisoner was killed with one shot or two, or if on a particular day three trains arrived and not four? Probably not, in truth. But these are not the only facts. Sometimes more subtle errors creep in that can have profound implications for our understanding of the Holocaust.

In his novel, Steiner contrives an occasion where one of the SS guards, Kurt Franz, addresses the prisoners. Franz is a character from history. This man existed. In the course of his address, he makes a series of promises to them, including 'that each of you will leave the camp in the condition in which he arrived' (Steiner, 1994, p. 155). He reinforces these promises with his 'solemn oath on my honor as an SS' (Steiner, 1994, p. 155). Franz's nickname was Laika, and Steiner continues:

> Laika liked to talk. On that day he took pleasure in explaining pompously what it meant for an SS to give his word of honor and how valuable it was. To hear him talk, Treblinka was to become an earthly paradise. He promised to organize plays and athletic events, to provide nourishment and even to build an infirmary. (Steiner, 1994, p. 155)

While this may seem an unremarkable moment for the casual reader, for Richard Glazar, one of the very few who survived Treblinka, it was the opposite. In an open letter to Steiner, Glazar focuses on this moment in the novel:

you attribute far too great intellectual thinking and means of expression, when you put such high-fallutin speech into his mouth when speaking to those who, in contrast to you, really did get into the hands of the SS and were considered the worst kind of weed. After reading that passage in bitter mood and wry amusement, it occurred to me: How can this fellow conceivably imagine it all – that an SS-officer would actually have spoken to the Jews in Treblinka, and into the bargain, have given them his SS word of honour? (Glazar, 1968)

If we parse this we can see that, according to Glazar, the characterisation of Franz is inaccurate. Perhaps he was not as eloquent as Steiner creates him, which may be of minor interest. However, the characterisation of the relationship between the Germans and Jews, who were 'considered the worst kind of weed', is more troubling. An SS man did not speak to those he considered vermin, much less offer reasoning for a decision or a word of honour. For an SS man to offer this would be to recognise the humanity of his victims. It would mark them as people worth honouring. This is a core misrepresentation. In the camps, Germans were distant and removed from the prisoners, and most management was done through the Kapos. For a German to directly speak with a prisoner was unusual, to offer him some kind of respect was unknown.

This kind of mischaracterisation is not uncommon in popular fiction set in the world of the camps. Some examples include offerings like *A Murder in Auschwitz* by J.C. Stephenson, or *The Death's Head Chess Club,* by John Donoghue. It is difficult not to admire the understatement of a title like *A Murder in Auschwitz,* but of more interest is the scenario. A Nazi officer has been murdered and one of his SS colleagues is charged with the crime. For the Court Martial, the defendant needs a lawyer. He chooses a Jewish prisoner, who was once a criminal lawyer in Berlin, to represent him. In *The Death's Head Chess Club*, we meet an SS officer arriving at Auschwitz who has been set the task of reviving the morale of the Germans there. This he does, improbably, by organising a chess competition. Also at Auschwitz at this time is a Jewish prisoner, who, by consulting the Kaballah, has never been beaten at chess. Of course, the Jew is forced to play against the SS and, of course, he

prevails.[27]

Reading Stephenson's *A Murder in Auschwitz*, it is not difficult to find minor inaccuracies, although Donoghue has obviously done research. He even includes a helpful list of SS Ranks and their British Army equivalents, the occasional footnote and a historical endnote. However, both books suffer from the same core flaw. Adam Kirsch, writing a review of *The Death's Head Chess Club* in the *Tablet* magazine, is unflinching:

> Everything about this story – its conception, its execution, and its unexamined assumptions – is so obviously wrong that it barely needs to be pointed out …. The idea that the administration of Auschwitz would organize a match between SS guards and Jewish prisoners is so comprehensively absurd, so contrary to everything we know about the life and spirit of Auschwitz, as to render the whole book an exercise in fantasy. In reality, the SS saw the Jews as subhuman carriers of disease and barely interacted with them at all, reserving that task for the prisoners appointed as trusties or Kapos. (Kirsch, 2015)

Change the references from the chess match to those of a Jewish defence lawyer at an SS Court Martial and the same comments apply.

However, this is not just a case of implausible moments or unlikely plots. The real problem is that each of these books falsifies the Holocaust in a very real way. The falsification does not lie in the fact that these events never occurred, they falsify it because they misrepresent the core reason that the Holocaust happened. When Hitler or Goebbels referred to Jews as vermin, they were not speaking metaphorically. For them, Jews really were carriers of disease, both physical and moral; Jews were less than human beings. Hence, for the Nazis, their eradication was not only possible but a necessity. Only when we understand this, do we begin to become able to understand what Auschwitz actually

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[27] There is another timeline in this novel, beyond the scope of this thesis. In that, the two protagonists meet again after the war. Now the Nazi has seen the error of his ways and embraced Catholicism to extent of becoming a bishop. Meanwhile the chess-playing Jewish survivor is bitter and angry at the injustices he suffered. As Kirsch puts it this is 'actively offensive in the way they recycle the age-old equation of Judaism with stubborn vengefulness and Christianity with loving forgiveness' and it's difficult to put into words a reaction to the final scene, where the Jew says *Kaddish* as he spreads the ashes of the (ex-Nazi) Bishop at, you guessed it, Auschwitz. Kitsch is the word Kirsch uses. Somehow it doesn't seem quite enough.

was and what happened there. The notion that an SS man could have a relationship of any kind with a Jewish prisoner is absurd, and when an author imagines a Jew as a legal representative for an SS man, or even something as trivial as chess matches, he or she is mischaracterising that power structure so much that it actually falsifies what happened. It is difficult enough to understand the Holocaust without falsifying the key dynamic.

There are other ways that fiction can falsify the murder of millions. Cynthia Ozick examines two well-known examples of Holocaust literature – Styron's *Sophie's Choice* and Bernard Schlink's *The Reader*. She questions key decisions by both authors: why, she wonders, is Sophie a Polish Catholic? Why is Hanna, in *The Reader,* an illiterate woman? In the case of *Sophie's Choice*, it is absolutely true that Polish Catholics, in their thousands, died at Auschwitz. To make Sophie a Catholic is an authorial decision that 'that by no means contradicts a historical reality' (Ozick, 2006, p. 13). Estimates vary but approximately '75,000 Polish Christians were murdered in Auschwitz, and that is fact enough' (Ozick, 2006, p. 13). Similarly, in Schlink's novel, it is inevitable that there were some illiterate people in Germany, even though 'Germany before the Second World War was known to have the most educated population in Europe, with the highest standard of literacy' (Ozick, 2006, p. 15). Given the almost universal literacy in Germany, and given that approximately 1,000,000 Jews died at Auschwitz, it is clear that both Sophie and Hanna are anomalies. Of course, there is no reason why 'a writer's character be representative of a statistical norm' (Ozick, 2006, p. 13); there is no reason why Sophie should be a Jew or that Hanna should be literate and well-read, or, at least, for Ozick, unless the novel is explicitly about the Holocaust. She does point out that Styron's novel offers evidence of research into the historical record, including:

> exact dates of arrival in Auschwitz, for instance, as when he recounts the gassing of a contingent of Greek Jews, or when he enumerates figures for the Jewish population of Warsaw before 1939, or when he notes that the 'resettlement' from the Warsaw Ghetto took place in July and August of 1942. Wherever the fingerprint of Styron's Holocaust research appears – and it appears frequently and accurately – it points to Jews. (Ozick, 2006, pp. 12-13)

On the other hand, 'his information concerning Polish Christians in Auschwitz is far thinner; it is, in fact, nearly absent … Sophie alone is the detail' (Ozick, 2006, pp. 12-13). Equally, this is true in Schlink's case, when the German population is the best educated in Europe, and when the people who designed and implemented the murder programmes were:

> with only a few exceptions, the members of Germany's political, military, business, and professional elite …. Commanders of two of the four Einsatzgruppen held doctorate degrees; a third was commanded by Ohlendorf, an economist and lawyer. German engineers designed and constructed the huge gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz and the other killing centers. Similarly, they built the so-called euthanasia centers, in which numerous highly educated and trained German physicians, nurses, and technicians participated in the mass murder of tens of thousands of handicapped Germans. At Auschwitz and other camps, German doctors carried out criminal and unscientific 'medical' experiments on Jewish and other concentration camp prisoners and selected hundreds of thousands of Jews to die. Mengele had two professional degrees, an M.D. and a Ph.D. (McKale, 2002, pp. 429-431)

Given this context, it seems unusual to focus on 'an unlettered woman who, because she could not read a paper offering her a job in a factory, passed up the chance and was sent instead to serve in a brutal camp' (Ozick, 2006, p. 15). Of course, as Ozick stresses again and again:

> The novelist is neither sociologist, nor journalist, nor demographer, nor reality-imitator …. Characters come as they will, in whatever form, one by one; and the rights of imagination are not the rights of history. A work of fiction, by definition, cannot betray history. (Ozick, 2006, p. 15)

There are exceptions, however, and she argues that when the intention of the author is to write a novel that:

> is directed consciously toward history, that the divide between history and the imagination is being purposefully bridged, that the bridging is the very point, and that the design of the novel is to put human flesh on historical notation, then the argument for fictional autonomy collapses, and the rights of history can begin to urge their own force. (Ozick, 2006, p. 16)

In other words, if you are going to write a novel about the Holocaust, then you should be true to the circumstances of the Holocaust and reflect the specifically Jewish nature of the event. Ozick charges that Styron's Sophie 'was not conceived as a free fictional happenstance' (Ozick, 2006, p. 16), but designed with another agenda: to create 'an inscribed symbolic figure, perhaps intended to replace a more commonly perceived symbolic figure – [let us say] Anne Frank' (Ozick, 2006, p. 16). It is a bold charge. For Ozick, though, the case is clear. She does not deny that Christian Poles died at Auschwitz, but she declares that 'the ghastly syllables of "Auschwitz" have resolutely come to denote the intent – and the means – to wipe out every last living Jew, from newborn infants to the moribund elderly in nursing homes' (Ozick, 2006, p. 16), and that the defining characteristic of the Holocaust is:

> not the murders alone, but their irreversible corollary: the complete erasure of Jewish academies, libraries, social and religious bodies – the whole vast and ancient organism, spiritual and intellectual, of European Jewish civilization. Auschwitz is that civilization's graveyard (a graveyard lacking the humanity even of graves); and herein lies the inmost meaning of the ideology of the death camp. Auschwitz represents the end not simply of Jewish society and culture, but of the European Jewish soul. (Ozick, 2006, p. 17)

This is the specifically Jewish nature of the Holocaust. She does not deny that Poles died in their millions: 'The German occupation of Poland enslaved, abused, murdered; it was a foul evil; it merits its own distinct history and commemoration' (Ozick, 2006, p. 17), but it was not aimed at murdering every Pole and the complete erasure of that culture. Therefore, she argues, that Styron's efforts to link the two atrocities (the Nazi terror in Poland and the annihilation of the Jewish people), is to obscure the real nature of the Holocaust:

> Sophie, then, is not so much an individual as she is a counter-individual. She is not so much a character in a novel as she is a softly polemical device to distract us from the epitome. The faith and culture of Catholic Poles were not the faith and culture targeted by the explicit dogmas of the German scheme of *Vernichtung*. Styron's Sophie deflects from the total rupture of Jewish cultural presence in a Poland that continues with its

religion and institutions intact. (Ozick, 2006, pp. 17-18)

Ozick is not only one who takes Styron to task. Alvin H. Rosenfeld refers to *Sophie's Choice* as 'another prominent example of the tendency to universalize Auschwitz as a murderous thrust against "mankind"' (Rosenfeld, 1980, p. 159). Rosenfeld charges that it therefore has the effect 'of removing the Holocaust from its place within Jewish and Christian history and placing it within a generalized history of evil, for which no one in particular need be held accountable' (Rosenfeld, 1980, p. 159); moreover, he charges that it is the intention of the work to do so. Styron, in effect, admits this:

> However, part of the contemporaneous mythology is that only Jews suffered the Holocaust, which is simply not true … it minimizes the evil of the Nazi organization and desecration of life to see it only as a fulfillment of Nazi anti-Semitism …. But to say that it stopped there, to say that only Jews suffered, is simply to tell a historical lie. (Meliotes Arms, 1979, p. 9)

In the same interview, he also states 'I do not believe it is true that you can damn a whole nation, Germany in this case, for the concentration camps' (Meliotes Arms, 1979, p. 7). Styron is wrong here, and Rosenfeld expresses it clearly. The Holocaust is:

> the result of particular crimes against particular people …. Hitler was never hesitant to indict that people by name … the crime of the Holocaust did not spread out neatly and evenly among the Jews and Gentiles alike. Most of European Jewry was murdered, and the murderers were European Gentiles, some of whom also died. The extent of the dying and the motives behind the deaths were not equivalent. (Rosenfeld, 1980, pp. 159-160)

Once more it is worth stressing that writing a novel about a Christian at Auschwitz is as possible as any other novel set there. However, if the truth of Auschwitz is that the overwhelming majority who died there were Jewish, and they died there because they were Jewish and for that reason alone, then an author needs to create the circumstance that justifies choosing an atypical victim. Otherwise he or she risks falsifying the truth of what happened there, and that truth is that only Jews were

targeted for being born. Similarly, if Spielberg takes a short paragraph and builds it into the aforementioned shower scene in *Schindler's List*, that *almost* recreates the truth of one million people, but then simply sidesteps that for a story of one hundred and ten people, it profoundly skews our perception of the *possibilities* of Auschwitz.

If Sophie falsifies the victims, then Hanna risks falsifying the perpetrators. *The Reader* is a novel about the next generation, those Germans who were born during the war or shortly after, coming to terms with what their parents did. The parallels are obvious. A teenager falls in love with Hanna, some 21 years his senior, then later, long after the relationship ends, discovers she was an SS guard at a Concentration Camp. As Ruth Franklin comments 'it is hard to think of a more perfect dramatization of Germany's conflicted relationship with its past: at once lover and mother, seductive and nurturing and brutal' (Franklin, 2011, p. 201). When Hanna is on trial for her wartime deeds, the key moment revolves around an incident during a Death March westward from the advancing Russians. A group of prisoners she was guarding were locked into a church one night for shelter. The church was hit by a bomb dropped in an air raid and began to burn. The guards, of whom Hanna was one, refused to unlock the church lest their charges escape. They were under orders not to unlock the doors. So there are a series of contrivances designed to minimise the guilt of Hanna: She was only obeying orders. Even those orders were harmless enough: do not unlock the doors. It is not like she was ordered to herd people into gas chambers. As an added bonus, the church was set ablaze by enemy fire. It really was an unfortunate coincidence of events. Even more unfortunate is the contrivance that she is, as Franklin says, 'an accidental Nazi, stumbling into the SS as a way of covering up her secret shame, which is that she is illiterate' (Franklin, 2011, p. 201). In fact, the novel treats Hanna as a victim of her illiteracy and bad luck. In the novel, Hanna is a strangely passive creature: 'she functions as neither a protagonist nor an actor in the narrative. Rather than possessing and enacting agency in the text, she remains a fixed element, depicted as a product of circumstances' (McGlothlin, 2010, p. 216). Essentially, the unfortunate Hanna is an accidental Nazi who accidentally facilitated an accidental atrocity. The effect is 'a novel-length depiction of a Holocaust perpetrator,

[that] forecloses any significant view of the mind and motives of the person who committed the crimes' (McGlothlin, 2010, p. 217). Franklin wonders if her illiteracy is a metaphor (especially given Germany's very high literacy rates), and her inability to read is meant to symbolically reflect the German population's inability to read the intentions and actions of the Nazis. If this is the case, then, for Franklin, the metaphor fails:

> All the evidence shows that in fact the Germans were not blind or ignorant. They were perpetrators, they were bystanders, they were resistance fighters, they were victims of the terrible Allied bombing campaign; but whatever they were, they were not unknowing. (Franklin, 2011, p. 206)

Ozick is unflinching. *The Reader* is 'a softly rhetorical work that deflects from the epitome. It was not the illiterates of Germany who ordered the burning of books' (Ozick, 2006, p. 18).

If *The Reader* falsifies the perpetrator as inadvertent murderer, then Jonathon Littel's *The Kindly Ones* risks obscuring the perpetrators of the Holocaust by straying in the other direction. His Maximilien Aue is, in Ruth Franklin's description, 'an almost comically obvious figure out of Freud' (Franklin, 2009). In the course of the novel, quite apart from his actions as a SS Officer, Aue has 'sex with his sister, strangles his mother, and ax-murders his stepfather', and then he really gets going:

> As a teenager, he performed an act with a sausage destined for the dinner table that makes Portnoy's liver abuse look like fine dining. As an adult, he turns to anonymous homosexual sex in the belief that being penetrated by men allows him to identify further with his sister, to 'feel almost everything she felt.' Aue's incestuous obsession reaches a climax, if you will pardon the expression, toward the end of the book, when he camps out alone in her mansion in Pomerania and surrenders himself to days and nights of near-constant fantasy and masturbation, fuelled by alcohol and fever. These scenes of depravity are related in unsparing detail. In one fantasy, he and his sister sit at an elegant dining table, eating and drinking their own excrement. In another, he sodomizes her on a guillotine. (Franklin, 2009)

As Jeremy Popkin puts it 'he has revived the caricature of the Nazis as bizarre psychopaths and sexual deviants' (Popkin, 2012, p. 197). The image of the Nazi as sexual deviant turns up in crude

exploitation movies with names like *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) and *SS Camp 5 – Women's Hell* (1976). In these movies the common tropes include:

> sexually perverted, calculating and sadistic Nazi officers, prisoner-of-war and concentration camps, medical experimentation and prisoner rebellions .… In these films that conflate the history of World War II and the Holocaust or that invent new and fantastic histories altogether, Nazis are more caricature than character. (Magilow, 2011, p. 2)

It evolved into a genre nicknamed *sadiconazista* in Italy, a merging of the Italian words for sadism and Nazi. However, the sexually perverse Nazi is not limited to the seedy side streets and back alleys. For instance, Robert Young's *Eichmann* (2007) features a sequence where a fully uniformed Eichmann is straddled by a naked Hungarian Baroness (of all things) who writhes in a more than somewhat unsubtle manner, while he lists the numbers of people he has sent to their death, country by country. Apparently based on transcripts of Eichmann's interrogation, it would appear some artistic licence has been taken.

Perhaps the best known of the *sadiconazista* films is Lilliana Cavani's *The Night Porter* (1974). This film presents, in Elisse Mailänder's words, 'the relationship between a former camp guard and a survivor as a sexual-pathological obsession' (Mailänder, 2011, p. 175), 'while simultaneously depicting such "sideshow perversions" as the rape of a male camp inmate, an ex-Nazi's struggle with his repressed homosexuality, and an aging female collaborator's taste for young gigolos' (Scherr, 2000). It received less than universal acclaim upon release. For instance, Roger Ebert described it 'as nasty as it is lubricious, a despicable attempt to titillate us by exploiting memories of persecution and suffering', and notes that, while some critics have found value in the film, they need to be 'agile enough to stand on their heads while describing 180-degree turns, in order to interpret trash as "really" meaningful' (Ebert, 1975). The iconography of the film is extreme, including what is referred to as the Salomé scene:

> In this scene, Max flashes back to a bare-chested Lucia who appears wearing nothing

but suspenders and black men's trousers. She performs a lascivious cabaret act before a gathering of camp SS guards. A SS officer's cap with visor and facemask perches saucily atop her head. After the performance Max surprises her with a gift of a special sort: the head of a Kapo named Johannes. (Mailänder, 2011, p. 182)

Even those who defend the film as a 'subtle psychological drama' (Mailänder, 2011, p. 186), concede the depictions of 'postwar Austrian society and the "Nazis" are dramaturgically underdeveloped and psychologically impoverished' (Mailänder, 2011, p. 187). Some refer to it as an example of *amour fou,* others are less forgiving. Rebecca Scheer is direct in her response:

> Cavani transforms the memory of the camp into a 'sexy memory,' which, through the depiction of eroticism and the sexualized female body, elicits a reaction of pleasure in the spectator, completely warping the historical facts of the Holocaust: in particular, the fact that the Holocaust was by no means, in any way, sexy. (Scherr, 2000)

The tendency to fetishise the SS is not new. Susan Sontag wrote in 1975:

> In pornographic literature, films, and gadgetry throughout the world, especially in the United States, England, France, Japan, Scandinavia, Holland, and Germany, the SS has become a reference of sexual adventurism. Much of the imagery of far-out sex has been placed under the sign of Nazism. More or less Nazi costumes with boots, leather, chains, Iron Crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, have become, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles, the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism. In the sex shops, the baths, the leather bars, the brothels, people are dragging out their gear. (Sontag, 1975)

The danger with it all is falsification, for, as Magilow says, (quoted above), the Nazis in these works are 'more caricature than character'. The actual make-up of the killing squads was rather more prosaic. Christopher Browning calls his book about one such squad, Reserve Police Battalion 101, *Ordinary Men,* because that is exactly what they were. About two thirds of them were working class. Of those, 'the majority of them held typical Hamburg working-class jobs: dock workers and truck drivers were most numerous, but there were also many warehouse and construction workers, machine operators, seamen and waiters' (Browning, 1998, p. 47). The remainder were lower-middle-class,

'virtually all of them white-collar workers. Three quarters were in sales of some sort; and the other one quarter performed various office jobs' (Browning, 1998, p. 47). Olaf Jensen calls the idea that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were 'pathological killers' a 'myth' (Jensen, 2014, p. 5). Jeremy Popkin summarises that 'the burden of several decades of serious historical research … has been to demonstrate that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were, in most respects, rather ordinary individuals, whose extraordinary behavior can be explained in terms of mundane psychological processes of rationalization, conformity to group norms, and obedience to authority' (Popkin, 2012, p. 199)

Where this matters, of course, is when we consider the moral standing of the Holocaust and its perpetrators. If, like Aue and the Nazis of the *sadiconazista* films, the perpetrators are so other, from a different moral realm, then we can avoid any sense of culpability. These people are not like us, and that is very easy to live with, rather less troubling than the realisation that these people were not only like ourselves, but that had we been in the same situation, a great many of us might well have committed terrible crimes.

Finally, there is a structural tension between a narrative and actuality that can, ultimately lend itself to falsifying reality. As quoted earlier, narratives frequently follow the general principles of dramatic structure. A protagonist faces an issue, overcomes it, or fails to, and is changed in the process. So, each narrative, ultimately, seeks not an end but a conclusion, a resolution where the tensions of the conflict are resolved. Unfortunately, life is not like this at all, and frequently the lives of individuals are terminated before any conclusion is found. During *Son of Saul*, there is a sequence where Saul, accompanied by the false Rabbi, and carrying the child's body, is attempting to negotiate a courtyard space while the *Sonderkommando* uprising is going on. Bullets are flying but somehow he manages to escape with the body. This is then subsequently lost at the river, and he hides with other escapees in a shack in the woods. As he sits there, he looks out the door and sees a Polish boy looking in. They make eye contact, the look holds a moment that suggests an exchange of some kind, and then, for the first time the camera leaves Saul and follows the child as he runs home through the woods. The child briefly meets some German soldiers, but keeps on his way. Then we hear distant

gunfire. Saul fails in his mission, but Nemes contrives an ending where his spirit continues through the child. It is a conclusion, but it is difficult not to think that perhaps a more authentic ending, one more in keeping with the place and time of the movie, would have been if Saul had been killed in that courtyard. However, that ending would have lacked a narrative conclusion and would have been unsatisfying, as it would leave tensions unresolved.

Nelson, in his *The Grey Zone,* on the other hand, recognises this and attempts a different resolution. After the revolt has been put down, the surviving *Sonderkommando* are brought outside and made lie face down on the grass. Then, as some German soldiers, the Doctor and the little girl watch, a guard walks among the prone *Sonderkommando*s and kills them, one by one, with a hand gun. Then the point of view cuts to the girl's view. She looks from face to face among the assembled Germans. They look back at her, impassively. Not knowing what else to do she begins to nervously walk toward a gate in the fence. The camera cuts to a wide shot and we see the Germans watch her go. We cut back to her point of view, and she is walking more quickly; then back to the wide shot, where a German unholsters his side arm; then back to her point of view, running now, towards the gate and the opening and freedom. Then she is shot. The camera tumbles and the screen fades to white. However, rather than leave us with unresolved tensions, Nelson gives her a short monologue from beyond the grave, as it were, in voiceover, as she describes how her body, and the others, were burned. This device of a voice from the dead is obviously a literary trope rather than a historical one, and it reflects Nelson's need to conclude his film, and resolve the tension in the narrative. In this, it is not so very different than the historian's search for a conclusion to his or her history book. As was discussed previously, although history goes on and continues to unfold, the historian, the novelist and the film maker all require an end to the specific work that is not history, but only about history.

Historian Jeremy D. Popkin describes the historical novel as one that:

> deliberately references the interpersonal world of the documented past and invites readers to draw on knowledge from outside the text in critiquing what they read … and we expect the historical novelist to bring this past to life in a way that history itself cannot, and for that reason, we allow the author a certain amount of poetic license.

(Popkin, 2012, p. 190).

There is a dual responsibility here. One is to accurately reflect the documented past, in so far as possible, and this is more than just getting date and times in the right order, but also to be mindful of the cultural dynamics at play, which can be very different from the ones prevailing in the writer's time. The other responsibility is to use that poetic licence to reveal the world of the past and the experience of being there to the reader in so far as this is possible, and in this, the fictional work can add value to the reader's experience, and put flesh on the bones provided by history. If the writer or filmmaker acknowledges these responsibilities then there is every chance that he or she might create an authentic experience, a real sense of what it was like to be there, for the reader.

Chapter Five: Photographing Night

Sybil Milton once estimated that there were some two million photographs relating to the Holocaust in archives in Europe and the United States; however, that estimate pre-dates the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent opening of archives from the former Soviet Union. Suffice to say that now there are an enormous number of images to consider when discussing photography and the Holocaust. These include passport size snaps used for identity cards and prisoner files. There are also photos that document daily life for some Jews during the Holocaust, including those who were incarcerated in ghettoes. Then there are photographs of minor incidents of Jews been harassed, and major atrocities such as mass shootings and the razing of the Warsaw Ghetto. In 2002 Janina Struk searched the internet for 'Holocaust photographs', and found 65,000 hits. A similar search in 2017 finds more than 13,000,000. There is undoubtedly a huge appetite for imagery of the Holocaust. The usual justification for the display of such images is 'that they will help to educate and as act as a deterrent', Struk writes, but she also points out that 'nobody has ever produced any evidence for this' (Struk, 2004, p. 213). She wonders if it is time to 'call a halt to the repetitive and frequently reckless use of these photographs, out of respect for those who died' (Struk, 2004, p. 215). On the other hand, Barbie Zelizer points out that 'images have been particularly instrumental in shaping the act of bearing witness' (Zelizer, 2000, p. 11). Zelizer quotes Julia Kristeva, who wrote that 'the art of the image excels in the crude exposure of monstrosity' (Kristeva, 1987, p. 139). Zelizer also points out that photographs from the liberation of the camps 'helped turn collective disbelief into the horror of recognition …. The power of the image made everyone who saw the photos into a witness' (Zelizer, 2000, p. 14). This is because 'photographs have a swifter and more succinct impact than words, and impact that is instantaneous, visceral and intense …. Lifelike images produce responses to that closely resemble our reactions to actual people and events', according to Vicki Goldberg (Goldberg, 1993,

p. 7).

If our sense of history and our sense of past events is actually a construction, then the photograph is yet another tool we use when we build our sense of the past. According to Mark Moss, 'up until the last few decades, the book and the footnoted article were the main sources of "the past"' (Moss, 2008, p. 171). However, that is changing and now, 'the dominant factor in affecting memory and history today is the visual image' (Moss, 2008, p. 171). Vicki Goldberg points out the implications of this: 'the photograph's unbreakable tie to the reality it represents nominates it to the position of history's proxy; it stands for people as if they were present and for events as if they were still occurring' (Goldberg, 1993, p. 136). In other words, the camera represents the viewer, and places him or her in the action, as an apparently contemporary observer. There are dangers in this, of course. Speaking of family snaps, the historian David Lowenthal points out that over time these images in family albums 'both goad and amend memory, aligning recall with the depicted past' (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 407). Family albums can be treacherous to truth, 'as most photos are staged and all are selected, the family album also deceives later viewers with nostalgic fictions of familial fondness and devoted domesticity' (Lowenthal, 2015, p. 408). Eventually, we risk reaching the point of confusing the memory of a photograph with memory of the event that prompted the photograph. Does the child remember that day at the beach, or is it the photograph he or she is remembering? How can the adult know?

When describing images that made the viewer into witnesses, Zelizer is talking about some of the best-known photographs that are associated the Holocaust. They were taken by liberators who documented what they discovered as they advanced from the west into Germany, and liberated concentration camps. The images were published widely. The emaciated living and the mounds of bodies of the dead have become emblematic of the Holocaust. However, they are not always what they are understood to be. As discussed previously, the men and women in these photographs are often not Jews, but others who had fallen foul of the Nazi administration: political prisoners, resistance fighters, prisoners of war and common criminals are all there. What Jews are present are

those who survived the final phase of the Holocaust: namely, the death marches from the camps in the east. The images are atypical in other ways too. For a start, the presence of the vast numbers of corpses testifies not to the reality of these camps, but to the collapse of the camp system. Driven by the twin concerns of hygiene (epidemics were a constant fear for them), and the need to destroy evidence of their crimes, the SS were constantly agitated by the problem posed by the remains of the millions they murdered. It is only when the camp system collapsed under pressure from the advancing Allies that the remains of the dead were left out in the open, with no effort to dispose of them at all. Rather than representing the day-to-day lived reality of the Holocaust, these photographs represent the reality of the end, of the collapse of the Nazi system. If Auschwitz has become a metonym for the Holocaust, then these images have become a metonym for Auschwitz, and yet they were not taken there, and do not reflect the reality of either Auschwitz or the Holocaust.

However, these images are very powerful and persuasive, and while they present a truth, they are nonetheless read inaccurately.[28] The status of historical photographs becomes important when, as Moss says, images are the dominant factor in creating our understanding the past, because they are ultimately part of how we construct both individual and group identity. If we wish to have identities built on solid foundations, then we need to be sure of the history we learn, and therefore to understand how these visual documents of history work. The common-sense view is that photographs offer an authentic visual record, (even if, in the most part, the images are in monochrome), of what being there looked like. Photographs appear objective, independent of the photographer. However, Ulrich Keller suggests that things might be complicated than that:

> In spite of all its technical accuracy, the camera renders images of much less fixed and unequivocal meaning than we commonly acknowledge. How we perceive and interpret a given photograph is largely a matter of the specific context in which we find it embedded, as well as the specific historical situation in which we are rooted ourselves, whether we are aware of it or not. (Keller, 1984, p. xviii)

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[28] Again, as elsewhere, we will assume that a reader includes viewers, watchers and so on as the as the context requires.

However, if photographs are not fixed and unequivocal in their meaning, then what are we to make of their evidentiary value, where they turn each viewer into a witness, as Zelizer puts it? It is possible to reconcile the common-sense view with Keller's more nuanced perspective? This chapter will discuss the value of photography in our understanding of the lived experience of the Holocaust. It seeks to understand how photography works as a method of communication, and to explore the potential, as well as the limits, of speaking through images. It will examine if, as they often appear, photographs are objective documentation, and if there are limits to this objectivity. Finally, it will discuss the ethical implications of viewing and using these images. The discussion is linked to specific photographic texts. Given the vast array of images available, it is necessary to focus on a few specific photographs which will allow us to interrogate the value of visual representations. These include a well-known atrocity image, photographs of the Lodz ghetto and some images used to guide visitors at Birkenau today. It will also briefly explore the paintings of David Olère, the Polish-French artist who survived the *Sonderkommando* at Birkenau, and consider how his work compares and contrasts with photography.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

A photograph is the result of a process that exposes a sensitive surface to light and then, either chemically in the case of film, or electronically in the case of digital media, the data recorded on that surface is processed into an image. The image will be what was in front of the device at the time. These days photography is pervasive. Police routinely request bystander images after terrorist attacks, and it seems perfectly plausible to read that the 9/11 attacks were the most photographed events in history. Ubiquity, however, is a two-edged sword. The availability of camera phones means that reports of alien abductions and UFOs are at their lowest ebb since the 1980s.

There are different kinds of photograph. Halla Beloff describes three kinds of photography: 'art photography, documentary photography, personal photography', which suggests that

'photographs are about either information, aesthetics or emotion' (Beloff, 1985, p. 1). As ever, such categories are polemical and arbitrary, and the borders between them are porous. For instance, what is personal photography if not the documenting of a life? Any form of photography can have aesthetic qualities and so on. Indeed, Beloff points out that there are few photos that exhibit only one of these qualities, and she asserts that 'the three elements are all present in a good photograph', and this is what makes photographs 'fascinating' (Beloff, 1985, p. 1). The photographs that concern us here are, to borrow from Beloff, those documentary images that 'do what photography can uniquely do – tell us what the world is really like' (Beloff, 1985, p. 100). While the aesthetic qualities of the images may vary, it is as documents, and as evidence of the lived experience, that they interest us.

It is undeniable that we privilege photography over other forms of testimony. Vicki Goldberg reports that 'in 1945 the first written accounts of the camps did not strike people as entirely truthful' (Goldberg, 1993, p. 33). There had been similar reports of atrocities at the end of the First World War which were unsubstantiated, and so these reports seemed to be more of the same. However, the 'photographs conveyed the full extent of the horrors far more convincingly than words' (Goldberg, 1993, p. 33). They seemed to represent a watershed. Susan Sontag, in *On Photography*, describes how seeing these images in the summer of 1945 made it 'plausible … to divide my life into two parts, before I saw these photographs … and after' (Sontag, 1973, p. 15). Goldberg points out that 'even today, when a large audience supposedly "knows" that photographs lie, the most sophisticated observers instinctively believe the camera's report, at least for the brief pulse of time before the mind falls back on its education' (Goldberg, 1993, p. 19). Such is the power of the photograph.

It is easy to say that seeing is believing, but it is more complicated than that. We do not view a painting of a landscape in the same way that we view a photograph of it, no matter how accurately the painting reflects that scene. When we look at a painting we are always aware of the painter, brush in hand, rendering the scene. We never feel that we are seeing the landscape itself; rather we are seeing this artist's rendering of the landscape, and while we may marvel at the accuracy of his or her draughtsmanship, we are always aware that there is a mediating presence between the painting and

the scene, and that presence is the artist. In fact, we may be more impressed by the painting than the landscape and the discussion around such a rendering by an artist will often be more about the painting than the subject. In contrast, looking at a photograph frequently makes us want to visit the place where the shot was taken, to see it for ourselves. We are less likely to marvel at the photographer's skill, and his or her hand seems invisible. A photograph, writes Allan Sekula, seems to offer an unmediated rendering of the subject, which 'elevates the photograph to the legal status of document and testimonial' (Sekula, 1984, p. 5). Raye Farr summarises the power of photographs as follows: 'it is the *images*, whether moving or still, that reach out most directly, that shock and reveal and persuade. It is images that seem most incontrovertible as evidence to the layman' (Farr, 1999, p. 279) [*emphasis in original*].

This impression of photography as an objective and unmediated form of representation is derived from three key characteristics of the photograph, and how it is created. The first is based on the notion that the photographer cannot interfere within the frame. Roland Barthes refers to a photograph as 'a certificate of presence', and asserts that:

> the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself …. It is a prophecy in reverse: like Cassandra, but eyes fixed on the past, Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence. (Barthes, 1981, p. 87) [*emphasis in original*]

Halla Beloff agrees: 'it is a representation that cannot possibly be made, or have been made, without the presence of the matter represented' (Beloff, 1985, p. 2). Terry Barrett refers to photographs having 'a causal relation to the things they picture' (Barrett, 1986b, p. 15), Goldberg summarises the power of the medium: 'bearing witness is what photographs do best; the fact that what is represented on paper undeniably existed, if only for a moment, is the ultimate source of the medium's extraordinary powers of persuasion' (Goldberg, 1993, p. 19), or as Zelizer says 'the photograph makes it particularly easy to suspend disbelief about what is shown' (Zelizer, 2010, p. 2).

Of course, these considerations assume an honesty on the part of the photographer. We assume

that the photograph is a fair attempt to capture the scene; and that the scene has not been contrived in some fashion, or that the image has not manipulated after the fact to significantly alter the photograph. It is true that current technology allows for significant amounts of fakery after the fact of shooting. Therefore, we must add the caveat that if the scene is deliberately staged, or if there is significant post-production manipulation of the image, then the resulting photograph is as constructed an image as any painting or sculpture. But for now, assuming that the photographer is honest, we can assert that a photograph of a fake scenario still faithfully captures the fake scenario, and still maintains the certificate of presence. Here, such as photograph says, was a fake.

That the camera is a mechanical device, and quite a simple one, requiring very little skill on the part of the operator, is a second factor. Terry Barrett explains that 'in experiencing photographs viewers blur distinctions between subject matter and pictures of subject matter and tend to accept photographs as reality recorded by a machine' (Barrett, 1986b, p. 14), or as Beloff puts it, 'we believe that it allows the state of a person or a situation simply to show itself' (Beloff, 1985, p. 101), the key phrase here being 'to show itself', as though the camera is passive in the making of the image.

Lastly, the immediacy of the image lends itself to a feeling of objectivity. Because the surfaces are so sensitive, and also because light is pervasive, the exposure is typically done in a fraction of a second. At such speeds, even rapid motion is arrested and fixed in the image. It all happens so fast it seems that there is no time to be dishonest. Because of this ability to seize an image within a fraction of a second, it is common to speak of a photograph as 'the freezing of time' (Hauser, 2007, p. 58), or 'the record of a brief and transitory moment in time' (Green, 2005, p. 9). The act of photography and fractions of time become synonyms. We speak of snapshots and photo-finishes.

All of this points to a quite simple understanding of the photograph as an objective and accurate representation of an instant made by a machine. 'The photograph is imagined to have a primitive core of meaning, devoid of all cultural determination' according to Allan Sekula, (Sekula, 1984, p. 5). Barthes called this 'the denoted image', that exists in 'a kind of Edenic state of the image; cleared utopianically of its connotations, the image would become radically objective, or, in the last

analysis, innocent' (Barthes, 1987, p. 42), where, by 'innocent', he means independent of a point of view. In other words, he speaks of a state where the image exists quite independently of interpretation. In this understanding 'the photograph is seen as a re-presentation of nature itself, as an unmediated copy of the real world' (Sekula, 1984, p. 5). Sekula hyphenates tellingly. In this simple understanding, the photograph 're-presents', or presents again, reality.

However, we need to return once more to Zelizer's insight that any representation is a translation into 'another code by which it is differently meaningful' (Zelizer, 2001b, p. 2). A photograph may appear to be a faithful rendering of an instant of reality that existed at some point in the past, but it is not that moment itself. This can be established in a number of ways. Even if we accept that a photographer may not interfere within the frame, to do so is to recognise that the image has a frame. Therefore, a photograph creates arbitrary limits, and enforces a shape, usually rectangular, in 4:3 ratio, upon the world. As discussed previously in chapter two, the frame is in dialogue with the image, giving it a limit and therefore, defining the structure of the work. Inevitably, items within the frame are overstated simply because they are included, while items excluded are, by definition, understated. This is an effective hierarchy of relevance, and that hierarchy is created by the photographer. He or she chose to point the camera *here* and not *there* for some reason. Equally, within the frame there can also be a hierarchy of relevance. While the photographer may not add or remove items, he or she can still impose a structure upon the image in a number of subtle ways. Using compositional rules such as the rule of thirds or the Fibonacci spiral, the photographer can compose the image so that items placed at particular locations within the frame carry more emphasis. This, in turn, has implications for understanding the image when we look at it. While we might agree that a photograph offers a certificate of presence, there is no doubt that there are both gross and subtle choices available to the photographer than can affect the semantic value of the image.

When we consider a photograph as a text, in the broadest sense, then we can see that it is an element in a discourse. When we gaze on a photograph we are not merely looking, but actively examining and interpreting the elements therein, and extracting some kind of meaning from it. In

other words, we are reading the image. However, visual literacy is as much a learned skill as any other kind of literacy. Melville J. Herskovits discusses the conventions of representing the world around us in art, and he notes that 'patterns of perception' (Herskovits, 1959, p. 55) shape both the response of the artist to the world and the response of the audience to the work. These patterns are:

> among the least conscious of our reactions to the world in which we live, and are thus the most difficult to change; it is because we turn to them so automatically in interpreting the 'natural' world, that the stylistic component in art … is so stable (Herskovits, 1959, p. 55).

He explores these patterns by reference to a simple drawing of a table. For instance:
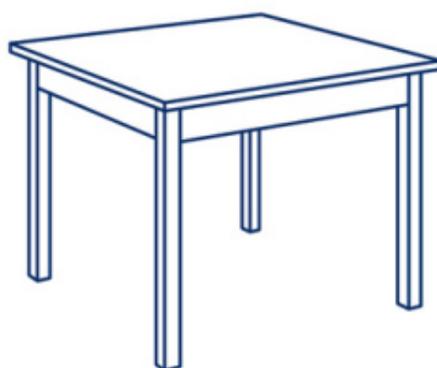
This image offers a simple and effective representation; however, on examination it is quite clear that any table thus constructed would be of limited utility, if not logically impossible. The top is sloped towards the viewer, yet the leg nearest the viewer is longer than any of the others. On the other hand, the leg furthest away is markedly shorter, but the corner it supports is higher in the visual plane than the one supported by the longer leg. Drawing is a language, and to understand it, the reader needs to have some fluency in its vocabulary and grammar. The drawing works because we and the artist share this language of how to draw three dimensional objects on two dimensional surfaces. This language is a 'a set of *rule-governed* transpositions' (Barthes, 1987, p. 43) [*emphasis in original*], that govern how we represent visual elements, particularly perspective. This language is pervasive but it is not universal, as Herskovits points out:

> But should we show this realistic representation to a man or woman from another
> society, one who has never had contact with this kind of realism, the meaning we so
> readily ascribe to the drawing will be found to evaporate into lines of unequal length.
> (Herskovits, 1959, p. 56)

As with drawing, so also with photographs: Melville goes on to describe what occurred when he

showed a photograph to a woman who had never seen one before:

> In the instance to which I refer, a Bush Negro woman turned a photograph of her own
> son this way and that, in attempting to make sense out of the shadings of greys on the
> piece of paper she held. It was only when the details of the photograph were pointed
> out to her that she was able to perceive the subject. (Herskovits, 1959, p. 56)

Notwithstanding the dated language, the point is clear. The woman, as an adult, had to be taught how

to read the photograph. More commonly, children learn to read images at a very early age. Often this

is done casually by the simple act of looking at picture books with parents, and identifying the car or

house, or the features of the little girl's face. And while the renderings of these things might be very

different from what the child sees every day, little by little she becomes literate in these two-

dimensional representations of the three-dimensional world around her.

Now we can begin to understand why Sekula refers to the 'folklore of pure denotation … the

mythic aura of neutrality around the [photographic] image' (Sekula, 1984, p. 5). By 'pure denotation',

Sekula means, as Barthes does, the idea that a photograph captures what it means without any

interpretation. We can tease this out a little by reference to material covered in chapter two. There we

examined Berel Lang's notion of 'the Holocaust un-constructed (that is, in fact)' (Lang, 2001, p. 150),

as though there exists somewhere a chronicle of facts about the Holocaust which speak for themselves

in some way, without interpretation. When we conjure an 'aura of neutrality' around the photograph,

or think of it as 'innocent' of connotations, as Barthes describes it, then we are assuming that a

photograph is just that kind of fact-that-speaks-for-itself. Of course it is not, and as we have seen, we

learn to read photographs just as we learn read everything else. So, 'the photograph is an "incomplete"

utterance,' says Sekula, 'a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and

presuppositions for its readability' (Sekula, 1984, p. 4). Barthes called this the 'connotative' element. While not denying the denotive qualities of an image, he does say that it is impossible for us to see such an image: 'we never encounter a literal image … in a pure state' (Barthes, 1987, p. 42). As Sekula puts it 'any meaningful encounter with a photograph must necessarily occur at the level of connotation' (Sekula, 1984, p. 5). Put another way, the viewer always brings baggage to the process.

In fact, there are ways in which the reader quite overtly creates the significance of photograph that he or she cannot do with other media. To see how this works, we can compare and contrast photography with the illustration, such as painting and drawing. What they have in common is a search for a significant moment, a synecdoche of something greater. The German dramatist Gotthold Ephraim Lessing focussed on this key point about painting in 1853:

> Painting can only make use of a single instant of an action, and must therefore choose the one, which is most pregnant, and from which what has already taken place and what is about to follow, can be most easily gathered. (Lessing, 1853, p. 102)

With illustration, the artist selects a point in the narrative, or, according to Peter Burke, 'condenses successive actions into a single image, generally a moment of climax' (Burke, 2001, p. 143), and uses this moment to imply a more complete story which the viewer can read or interpret. Illustration is additive. An artist begins with blank canvas, and is active in the frame, adding detail that embellishes or enhances the idea he or she is trying to illustrate, to guide and focus the reader's response. The documentary photograph aspires to a similar condition, but it works very differently. Photography is subtractive. The photographer begins with a viewfinder potentially full of the entire universe and works to exclude things that are not germane by leaving them out of the frame. However there is another very key difference: the person making a painting is working after the event, when the outcome of the narrative is known, and so the selection of particular moments can be weighed against the known outcome. This is what allows the artist to select the image that he or she thinks is most potent or pregnant. The artist is the only person making that choice. The photographer, however, works as the story is still unfolding, and as the outcome is still in the balance. Working at speed, often

he or she has no time to evaluate the metonymic potential of the image. Therefore, decisive moments are recognised, not by the image maker, but instead, afterwards, by the image reader. In other words, the decisive moment is not selected by the artist, but recognised by the reader of a photograph.

It is true, of course, that the photographer and the reader may be the same person, working at different points in the timeline, as the example of 'The Falling Man' demonstrates. This photograph was taken by Richard Drew on the morning of September 11, 2001. The image captures an instant in the descent of one person from the upper floors of the burning World Trade Centre. We do not know for certain who that man was,[29] we do not know if he jumped or fell. In his *Esquire* article about the photograph, Tom Junod describes the man and the photograph as follows:

> Although he has not chosen his fate, he appears to have, in his last instants of life, embraced it. If he were not falling, he might very well be flying. He appears relaxed, hurtling through the air. He appears comfortable in the grip of unimaginable motion. He does not appear intimidated by gravity's divine suction or by what awaits him. His arms are by his side, only slightly outriggered. His left leg is bent at the knee, almost casually. His white shirt, or jacket, or frock, is billowing free of his black pants. His black high-tops are still on his feet …. The man in the picture is perfectly vertical, and so is in accord with the lines of the buildings behind him. He splits them, bisects them: everything to the left of him in the picture is the North Tower; everything to the right, the South. Though oblivious to the geometric balance he has achieved, he is the essential element in the creation of a new flag, a banner composed entirely of steel bars shining in the sun. (Junod, 2016)

Because, in Junod's description, the man seems to be in control of his descent, he has a tragic sensibility: 'there is something almost rebellious in the man's posture, as though once faced with the inevitability of death, he decided to get on with it' (Junod, 2016). His alignment against the background of the two towers offers a poignant aesthetic quality to the image. It certainly represents a decisive moment in the life of the man himself, and it is one of the iconic images of that day in New York City.

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[29] Most likely Jonathon Briley, though possibly Norberto Hernandez.

However, rather than a single, composed shot, the image is only one capture of many made that morning. Drew photographed 'ten or fifteen' falling people, following each 'falling body for a nine- or twelve-shot sequence' (Junod, 2016). It took each person about ten seconds to fall, so there is no way Drew could press the shutter fast enough to capture those frames. Instead he relied on the camera's own multi-shot facility. He simply kept the button depressed until the memory buffer filled. Afterwards, Drew returned to his office and viewed the images on his computer. It was only then that he 'recognized, instantly, what only his camera had seen' (Junod, 2016). The 'picture just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and symmetry' (Junod, 2016). It was only after the event, when the image was read, that its significance was ascribed, not by the photographer holding the camera, but by the reader (even though these are the same person in this case).

In contrast, in other photographs in the sequence, the man is obviously tumbling, falling out of control, and so loses the aura of tragedy. There is no aesthetically pleasing alignment with the towers behind him. He is simply that most human of things: a man falling. Each of these images are true representations of what happened to this man and the other people who jumped or fell that day. They are all lost souls, turning and turning in the widening gyre for a ten seconds that is both far too long and yet terribly too short. However, only one of these images escapes the mere recording of fact, and utters something poignant and rich in meaning. Only one image aspires to the nobility of tragedy, but that is not inscribed on the photograph by the intention of the photographer, it is something found by the reader, after the event.

Clive Scott suggests that when we consider a photograph we need to distinguish between the instant and the moment. He calls the instant 'a "digital" experience, seized only in itself, as the smallest division of psychological or perceptual time', whereas a moment, for him, 'is an "analogue" experience of time and perception; we actively live moments in relation both to other, adjacent moments, and to other time' (Scott, 2007, p. 43). In other words, a photograph captures an instant, but can be read as a moment because it is:

> expandable, both spatially and temporally; we feel able to inhabit it and be inhabited

by it, have a greater sense of subjective presence. We are, in this momentary experience, susceptible to the beckoning of memory and feel a power to persist. (Scott, 2007, p. 43)

For Scott:

the taking of a photograph is an attempt to transform an instant into a moment, or, put another way, to extract from the instant the moment it has within it. The ability of the photograph to 'spread' the instant into the moment is much aided by the tendency of a photograph to shift from indexicality to iconicity, to shift from indexicality with a referent to indexicality without a referent. (Scott, 2007, p. 44)

In other words, the photograph allows us to extrapolate from an instant during a ten second span of one man's life, into his life and death and from that to a moment that captures the horror of attacks on the World Trade Centre. However, all of this extrapolation is done, not by the image, but by the reading of the image.

This is what Barthes is referring to when he describes photography as 'being by nature *tendentious'* (Barthes, 1981, p. 87) [*emphasis in original*]. There can be an agenda behind creating the image, but equally, one can be carried into the viewing of the image. This does not change the image, but rather the act of reading of it. While a photograph may make it easy for us to suspend disbelief, as Zelizer says, that is not the same as making it utterly objective or of perfect evidentiary value. The photographer's hand is present when he or she selects this view of all the views available in the universe. Equally, there is mediation when the photographer chooses this instant of all the possible instants, to press the shutter button. On the other side the reader of the photograph has a core role in the utterance that the image makes. Sekula summarises the situation as 'the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context determined' (Sekula, 1984, p. 4). This is another way of expressing what Keller is quoted saying above: 'how we perceive and interpret a given photograph is largely a matter of the specific context in which we find it embedded, as well as the specific historical situation in which we are rooted ourselves' (Keller, 1984, p. xviii). We cannot read a photograph outside of its contexts and our own.

We therefore need to acknowledge that while images are very powerful, visceral and immediate, they also have significant limitations as language instruments. Barthes points this out when he says that 'all images are polysemous;' he writes, 'they imply, underlying their signifiers, a "floating chain" of signifieds, the reader is able to choose some and ignore others' (Barthes, 1987, pp. 38-39). Umberto Eco points out that 'the ability of a visual language to express more than one meaning at once is also its limitation' (Eco, 1995, p. 174). This imprecision, this ability to signify more than one possible signified means that images are inherently uncertain and so risk falsification. Consider the following image:

*Figure 4: United States Holocaust Memorial
Museum and Jerzy Tomaszewski*

It is quite well known and is frequently used in books and on websites. In it, what appears to be a soldier is aiming a rifle and appears to be on the point of shooting a woman clutching a child. However, it is not the complete photograph. That is a wide angle shot, with more information presented.

Figure 5: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Jerzy Tomaszewski

Scanning from right to left we can now see the barrels of two other rifles interposing on the scene. On the ground at the soldier's feet lies the body of another woman. To the right of the woman and child are cluster of other people who seem to be digging. An upturned spade lies on a pile of excavated rubble. The photograph is most commonly read as 'a German policeman preparing to murder a Jewish mother holding a child while other victims dig their own graves' as Richard Rhodes captions the photograph in his *Masters of Death: The SS-Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust* (Rhodes, 2002, between pp. 178-179). However, the image is problematic in a number of ways. Obviously, we cannot tell the identity of any of the people in the photograph from the image itself. If the armed man is German, then he is not wearing a standard army or SS uniform, and while he may be an auxiliary, it must be admitted from the evidence within the photograph that he might not even be German. For those who deny the atrocity of the Holocaust, this is an opportunity.

The 'Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust' maintain a website at codoh.com, and it has a 'Library' where articles such as 'Another hackneyed Auschwitz revelation!', 'Photo Fakery Exposed!' and 'Gas Vans – forgeries galore! Part II: Wetzel to Lohse'[30] can be found. Among them is a document entitled 'A Closer look at a German "Atrocity Photo"', written by David Thomas. In

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[30] https://codoh.com/library/categories/964/

this article published on the 14th of February 1999, and amended several times afterwards, Thomas examines the photograph above and is unequivocal:

> the woman was added to a photo that included the items on the right and may or may not have included the soldier. What is fairly certain, even it (*sic*) the whole thing is real, is that he's not shooting at the woman and child. (Thomas, 1999)

His reading is that the photograph is a composite of several images and not a very good one. Then, to hedge his bets, he announces that even if he is wrong, and it is an actual honest capture of an instant, then the soldier is not actually aiming at the woman and child. He draws his first conclusion by comparing versions of the image from different sources, including versions printed in a number of books that he names, as well as online, at the United States Holocaust Museum website. A typical comment includes:

> Note that the back right side of her face is not in deep shadow, as are the other two. Also, the crouching man and the bundle next to him cast a proper shadow, but the woman and the standing soldier cast none. The soldier might be standing behind a raised ridge of earth, hiding his shadow, but no *(sic)* so the woman. You can also see a light line denoting the bottom edge of her sleeve, on a dark dress in shadow. The 'raised ridge of earth' could also be the marker line where the photo of the soldier was superimposed on a larger picture. The woman's right heel projects back too far, and is solid black as if it were a shadow. Note the white line around the heel of the raised right foot. (Thomas, 1999)

The notion that the soldier is not aiming at the woman is common in the comments on the website. For instance, these contributions by users 'sweetie pie' and 'Trevor':

> The soldier is smaller in scale than the other figures, and he is pointing his rifle into a distance somewhere behind the other figures, not directly at the woman, (sweetie pie, 2013)

Or

> He is not aiming at her neither at the kneeling civilians. (Trevor, 2014)

There are other accusations too, including that 'the soldier pointing the gun at the woman and child was not a German soldier at all; he was neither wearing the uniform of a German soldier nor using a German weapon' (Struk, 2011, p. 86). Still others object because the killing is not being done into a prepared pit. So, depending on what you read, the photo is a fake made by compositing several images together, or the photo is real, but the shooting man is not aiming at the woman, or it cannot be real because the man is not a soldier or not German (but is aiming at the woman), or a fake because the victims are not falling into a prepared mass grave, and so on.

Therefore, we find ourselves with a viscerally powerful image attached to a rather endless chain of floating signifieds, and we find that we need more context to complete the utterance of the photograph and to restrict the chain possible signifieds. Terry Barrett identifies three kinds of context that can affect how we read a photograph, which he calls internal, original and external, respectively. The internal context is the information within the image, and ideally that is all we might need to understand. As an example, most advertising photography aims to provide the necessary and sufficient information within the frame for the reader to ascertain that, for instance, this is a car that goes very fast. However, as Barrett points out, and is the case here, other images are 'inscrutable without information drawn from sources outside the photograph' (Barrett, 1986a, p. 34). This information is the original context, which 'broadly refers to that which was physically and psychologically present to the photographer *at the time the photograph was made'* (Barrett, 1986a, p. 34) [*emphasis in original*]. This information may elaborate on what the frame shows or, equally, it may subvert it. Lastly, there is the context of viewing the image, which Barrett calls the external context. Photographs can be easily '*overdetermined* by how they are presented, especially when accompanied by captions, deadlines or longer texts' (Barrett, 1986a, p. 35) [*emphasis in original*].

As we have seen the photograph of the man appearing to shoot the woman and child is lacking in sufficient internal context to fix its meaning. Janina Struk, unlike the objectors, has seen the original photograph, and also has established the provenance of the image ('the small original photographic print is in the personal archive of a former member of the Polish wartime underground, Jerzy

Tomaszewski' (Struk, 2011, p. 77)), and she recounts its history in her *Private Pictures, Soldiers' Inside View of War* (2011). This provenance does create an original context. The photograph was intercepted by members of the Polish underground working in the wartime postal service. They removed it from a German soldier's letter home. We also know that it has an inscription on the back that identifies it as a 'Jewish Action' near Ivangorod in the Ukraine in 1942. This additional information begins to fix the possible meanings of the image. Now the reader of the image needs to evaluate the photograph along with the additional information and decide which of the possible readings are most convincing. Needless to say, the objectors will continue to object,[31] but then for them it is an ideological exercise, as we have seen.

This points to an interesting relationship between photographs and words, because, although photographs tell their own story, it is frequently the case that we require words to amplify and explain what we see. Barthes speaks of affixing a 'linguistic message' to the image:

> At the level of the literal message, the text replies – in a more or less direct, more or less partial manner – to the question: what is it? The text helps to identify purely and simply the elements of the scene and the scene itself; it is a matter of a denoted description of the image. (Barthes, 1987, p. 39)

To be of value, the text attached to the image has to limit the possible connotations so that 'the linguistic message no longer guides identification but interpretation, constituting a kind of vice which holds the connoted meanings from proliferating' (Barthes, 1987, p. 39). Put another way, the caption or title of the photograph, provides something of what Barrett calls original context, aiming to fix the meaning in place. 'The denominative function corresponds exactly to an anchorage of all the possible (denoted) meanings of the object by recourse to a nomenclature' (Barthes, 1987, p. 39). This naming text 'directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance' (Barthes, 1987, p. 40), which is all just a way of saying that precise reading of a

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[31] As user sweetie pie comments in the same thread 'All the atrocity photos of supposedly Nazi "crimes" are fake in one way or another. You can take that to the bank' (sweetie pie, 2013).

photographic utterance is often dependent on words. Most commonly, words are attached to a photograph by the title or caption used to name and describe it. Consider these two photographs:

Figure 6: Erica Stone   *Figure 7: Henryk Ross*
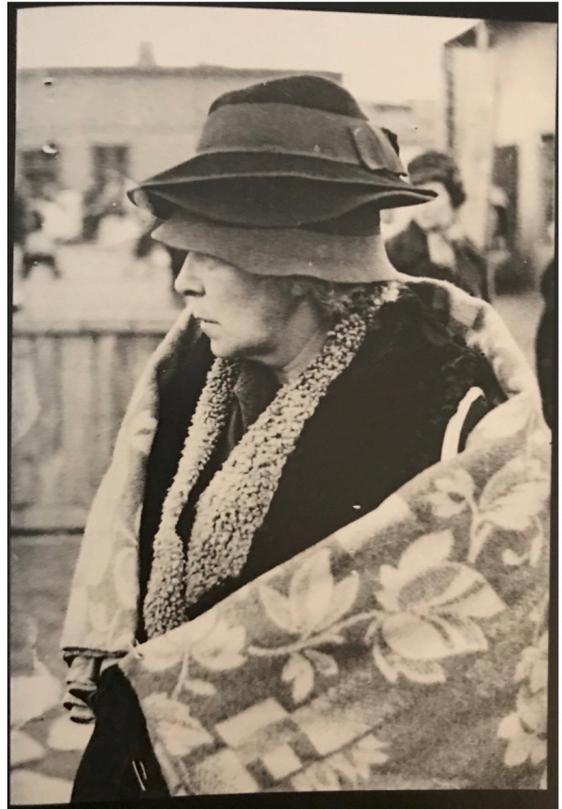
The internal contexts reveal some common characteristics. In the first a woman addresses the camera directly. She seems to be looking at us, a cigarette and a drink in her hand, a handbag on the table. With her head resting on her other hand, she seems tired, somewhat careworn and there is a sense that this may not be the first time she has sat with a drink and a cigarette. Her hat, a straw boater with a white frill around the brim, surmounted by a decorative quill, is somewhat incongruous. Both women wear overcoats, but while the first also has a scarf, the other is wrapped in a heavy shawl or perhaps a blanket. She, too, looks tired and worn, though she does not address the camera. Instead, she offers a profile to us and she looks to our left, out of the frame. She wears not one hat, but three, stacked on each other.

How should we read these images? In particular, how should we evaluate the choices of headgear made by the two women? We can look at these images and choose among a variety of possible meanings: for some people these photographs might be read as 'mother', 'sister' or 'wife';

for others, 'ladies in eccentric hats'. The first shot (taken by Erika Stone) is entitled *Ethel, the Bowery Queen*, and dated 1942. This title fixes the photograph to a time and a place. Now the cigarette, drink and expression combine with the title to give us a broader sense of a woman and the life she may have lived in one of the rougher parts of New York City, and even perhaps offers a suggestion as to why she chose that hat. The other photograph, taken by Henryk Ross, is entitled *Ghetto residents being deported to the Chelmno death camp, 1942-1944*. Again, the piece of original context expressed as a title anchors the photograph to a time and place, and this significantly alters how we see the picture. Now the three hats no longer seem whimsical. Now they arouse our sympathy for this woman trying to preserve her possessions in the face of deportation.

These photographs are in dialogue with their titles, and therefore with their contexts. The relationship is reflexive. Each title suggests an avenue of exploration for our understanding of the photograph, but also, the photograph does the same for our understanding of the title. If the reader has no knowledge of the social world of the Bowery in the 1940s, then the fact that this lady is the 'queen' of that world is an indication of what more detailed research might reveal. Equally, the photograph of the lady in the three hats makes real an abstract concept such as 'residents of the Lodz Ghetto'. So, while the two images may have some common points in their internal contexts (ladies in hats), the original context of the photos anchor their meaning into two profoundly different places that stress the differences between them rather than their similarities.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

When Barrett speaks of the external context, he refers to how the meaning of an image can be influenced by the context in which we view it. For instance, seeing these images in an academic setting, as illustrations of context, means that we look at them differently to how we would look at them in a book, exhibition or even online. Here they invite a more self-consciously critical reading than they otherwise might. However, the external context offers opportunities for manipulating

meaning. We can examine this idea in relation to the photo archives that we have from the Lodz ghetto. From a photography perspective, it offers a rich source of data. Within the Ghetto administration, there was a Statistics Department, and it employed two Jewish photographers: Henryk Ross and Mendel Grossman. Their duties included:

> portraits of ghetto officials, documenting official meetings, producing passport-sized photographs of every ghetto inmate for identity cards, making a visual record of unidentified corpses abandoned in the streets, tracking physical changes in the ghetto as building were pulled down, and chronicling the efficiency of the ghetto workshops. (van Pelt, 2015, p. 204)

However, at considerable personal risk, they both defied orders prohibiting personal photography and 'regularly ventured out into the ghetto to record ghetto life as lived' (van Pelt, 2015, p. 204). Coincidentally, Walter Genewein, the Austrian accountant who worked there for the SS, was an amateur photographer. He created a collection of colour slides that offer what Frances Guerin calls a 'meticulous documentation of the mechanics and activities of everyday life in the Lodz Ghetto between 1940 and its liquidation in 1944' (Guerin, 2011, p. 97). Genewein's work is unusual in a number of ways. It is a perpetrator's point of view (he worked for the SS after all), but not an official one. He shot in colour, which is very unusual for the time, and he annotated and numbered the slides to offer a structure for their viewing (although it is not known if this work was done during or after the war). His slides only became available in 1987, after his death. Other Genewein slides, including some duplicates, were found at a yard sale in the United States, most likely the result of them falling into the hands of a soldier in the liberating armies. There are several sources for viewing these collections of images. Henryk Ross's were compiled into a book called *Memory Unearthed, The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross*. Some of Mendel Grossman's can be found in books called *My Secret Camera, Life in the Lodz Ghetto* and *With a Camera in the Ghetto*. The work of both Ross and Grossman turn up as illustrations in many other books on the Lodz ghetto, ghettoes in general and the Holocaust. Genewein's images form the basis of *Fotomator (Photographer),* a film directed by Dariuz Jablonski, and released in 1998. Examples of all of their work can be found on the website of

the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (https://www.ushmm.org) as well as other locations online.

The Lodz ghetto was the longest surviving of the ghettoes the Nazis created after the annexation of Poland. The order establishing the ghetto was issued in December 1939, and by May 1941 the population of the ghetto was almost 150,000 people, and more than 200,000 people spent time there at some point, making it the second largest of the ghettoes, surpassed only by that of Warsaw. 'A quarter of the inmates died from starvation', writes Robert Jan van Pelt, 'the Germans killed the rest in gas vans at … Chelmno … and in the crematoria of Auschwitz-Birkenau' (van Pelt, 2015, p. 204). It is almost impossible to imagine the cruelty that pervaded that world of the ghetto. For instance, in 1942, the General Curfew was an *aktion* that lasted eight days. On September 1st the Germans emptied the hospitals, taking the sick away to murder them. Josef Zelkowicz described some of the horror, carried out in full view of the ghetto residents:

> Among the bedridden sick, who cannot even move … there is a fearful panic. They are cast upon the roads like calves driven to slaughter. Among the sick who are mobile, a feverish activity reigns – they make attempts to save themselves, jumping from upper stories, leaping over fences, hiding themselves in cellars. (Zelkowicz, 1991, p. 323)

Three days later, on the 4th of September Chaim Rumkowski, the Jewish head of the ghetto administration, made a speech, referred to before. The Germans wanted to murder anyone who could not work. So, they demanded the children:

> Just yesterday I ordered a list of children aged nine – I wanted at least to save this one age group, the nine- to ten-year-olds. But I was not granted this concession. Only on one point did I succeed, in saving the ten-year-olds and up. Let this be a consolation in our profound grief. (Rumkowski, 1991, p. 329)

On the 5th of September, the raids began. Dawid Sierakowiak kept a diary:

> The house across from ours was surrounded and after an hour and a half three children were brought out. The cries, screams and struggles of the mothers and everybody on our street was *(sic)* indescribable. The children's parents were completely frantic.

(Sierakowiak, 1991, p. 333)

The ghetto was seriously overcrowded. There were only 25,000 rooms in the area to house the residents, and this had obvious implications for public health. Moreover, the ghetto had no sewage system at all. Larissa Tiedens compares the Warsaw and Lodz ghettos:

> Both places were plagued by starvation, disease, and Nazi violence. The mortality rate, similar in the two ghettos, reflects the seriousness of this problem. In 1940 about 3% of ghetto residents died from hunger and sickness, by 1941 this rate increased to almost 10%, and by l942 to 15%. Both ghettos experienced an increase in population when the Nazis shipped in Jews from elsewhere. Then decreases occurred when they deported the sick, the elderly, the children, and then large groups of healthy men and women in the *aktions*, or mass deportations, of 1942 during which 80-90% of the population were sent to concentration camps. (Tiedens, 1997, p. 46)

The environment of the ghetto was 'cramped quarters, open sewers, disease, starvation, and death' (Guerin, 2011, p. 99). However, it was not only this. In this teeming crowded space people, being people, found ways to fall in love and marry. The bore children and tried to raise them as best they could. People died, and for a while, funerals were held. There were theatre productions, music was played and diarists chronicled what was going on. Mostly, though, there was labour in workshops all over the ghetto.

This was the world that Ross, Grossman and Genewein photographed. It was a place of terror, brutality and hunger but also, at times, of humanity. This is why the work of Ross and Grossman brings surprises: a woman in a shabby overcoat and a muffler still smiles for the camera; a grandmother poses with her grandson; children play and smile; couples pose on their wedding day; a fiddler plays in the streets. There are darker things too: a man fallen on the street, unable to continue through hunger; a woman talks earnestly to a child through a chain link fence; a body hangs from a scaffold; policemen capture people escaping from the hospital; decapitated heads and other body parts in the morgue. Then, like a recurring motif, the columns of people walking, carrying bags and baggage, the elderly and the children in carts, or gathered at the doors of cattle cars on their journeys

to death.

Genewein's photographs are different. Though he is a member of the SS there is little overt anti-Semitism in his photographs, these are not the crude stereotypes of Nazi propaganda. People are shown, in the most part, as being clean and appropriately dressed. Where he does photograph a man with a traditional beard (in slides often labelled 'Jewish type'), he shoots like a tourist might, as he would at a specimen, as someone with whom he has nothing in common. While there is no effort to 'mark the Jewish bodies as deviant or automatically highlight their difference, their cultural and physical "diseases" and deformations' (Guerin, 2011, p. 101), as happened with official media, neither is there any sense of connection between the subject and the man behind the camera.

As mentioned, Genewein 'deliberately numbered and captioned the glass-plate transparencies', writes Frances Guerin, and she concludes 'the numbering and labeling reveals the order in which the photographer meant them to be seen' (Guerin, 2011, pp. 102-103). The numbered images begin with a series that capture the physical space of the ghetto; then there are shots of visits by high ranking Nazis, including Himmler. The next sequence records the Jewish administration, including policemen. Then a sequence of photos of markets within the ghetto (including the people who lived there). The preponderance of images actually record the business of the ghetto: the various workshops, such as weavers, metal workers and furniture makers. Then there are shots of the gypsy section of the ghetto; there are some effort to record the deportations, as well as shots from Pabianice, a small town close to Lodz, where the Germans set up a work camp to process the clothes and other effects of the Jews they had murdered. Genewein's photographs show an enormous mound of shoes, workers sifting through clothes, suitcases crammed with valuables. The final image is of a large shower room, with 50 or more men washing or waiting to wash, under the watchful eye of a uniformed officer. For Guerin, these images combine to create a 'narrative of arrival at the ghetto, familiarization with its routine activities, eventual deportation, and prospective extermination' (Guerin, 2011, p. 103).

This is an intriguing insight. That the slides are numbered strongly suggests that there is an

organising principle behind them. If this work was done during the war, then it might suggest a critique of what was being done to the Jews, however oblique. The final slides, of the plunder taken from the murdered, and the men in the showers, does evoke the *Kanada* section of Birkenau, and the deliberately deceptive labelling of the gas chambers. However, if this work was done after the war, then perhaps it reflects the benefit of hindsight. Certainly, the shower photograph would require quite specific knowledge of the modalities of the murder facilities, and we have no way of knowing if Genewein had access to such knowledge.

There are two very striking differences between Genewein's photographs and those of Ross and Grossman. First, Genewein is always alienated from his subject. The photographs are 'not a study in gesture or emotion' (Guerin, 2011, p. 104); they are usually posed, still and self-conscious. The people are almost always aware of the camera, even though they are usually in medium or long shot. They have tight fixed faces. No one smiles. Guerin refers to an 'inertia' in the images, 'the unpredictability of human life is emptied from these images to present scenes in which people are stagnant objects—soulless, emotionless' (Guerin, 2011, p. 104). By contrast the photographs by Grossman and Ross are full of activity and emotion, even when they depict terrible things. In one image, a woman grimaces in pain as she and other infirm people are taken away by horse-drawn cart. When Genewein shoots in a workshop, all the work stops and people stand, expressionless, next to their machines. Ross photographs leather workers ironing, shoemakers cobbling and milliners at work shaping hats. As the ghetto had no sewage system, a team of Jewish workers had to drag the sewage away from the ghetto on carts they pulled themselves. It was then spread on fields. Genewein photographs these workers from a considerable distance. Ross, on the other hand, stands among them, to get head shots and two shots, full length portraits and photos of them pushing and pulling their odious cargo. Equally, Ross is among the columns of people being deported. Occasionally one or more people in the shot make eye contact with the camera. Genewein is well back from the crowds and shoots them from behind as they board the trains. Time and again it is possible to see in Genewein's photographs an attempt to avoid the humanity of the people he is photographing. As

Susie Linfield puts it 'Genewein had no compassion for his Jewish slaves' (Linfield, 2010, p. 73). They are only subjects to be photographed and he never wants to see their humanity. Grossman and Ross are quite the opposite. In suffering as well as joy, they seek out the personhood of the men or women in the photographs.

The second major difference is the world that they depict. Genewein, according to Nick Fraser in *The Telegraph*, was 'constructing a lie' (Fraser, 1999). Janina Struk is perhaps more forgiving when she says that 'he constructed his own truth' (Struk, 2004, p. 96). For Guerin, these images reflect 'Genewein's primary motivation … the careful, meticulous documentation of the ordinary … they present a showcase of the ghetto for the approving eyes of other Nazi officials' (Guerin, 2011, p. 102). The idea that Genewein is attempting to showcase the ghetto for other Nazis would explain his choices of photograph, and his style of shooting. However, it is hardly the full story of the ghetto, and therein lies the deception. This series of photographs excludes so that it can misrepresent the truth of the Lodz ghetto.

Struk debates this point. She points out that there are different experiences of the ghetto for different people, and how, for instance, greeting cards for the Jewish New Year were produced in 1940, labelled from the ghetto and featuring 'a young fashionably dressed couple' (Struk, 2004, p. 96). However, a greeting card produced in 1940 is just that: a single card. Genewein's work, on the other hand, is a series of photographs created over a number of years. There is a difference between not including the entire universe in a single photograph, and systematically excluding rampant disease, starvation and a mass murder programme from a whole series. While it is true that the experience of the ghetto would be different for people in different locations on the power structure, to simply ignore that such a viciously weighted power structure even exists seems dishonest.

Guerin admits that 'what is absent from these transparencies is the devastation, the disease, and the death that riddled everyday life in the ghetto' (Guerin, 2011, p. 118). However, she still sees evidence of this other truth in them:

if we look carefully, we will see another reality: corpses, piles of waste, decrepitude,

and emaciation. For example, in one image a dead woman lies in the rubble of a collapsed house, and in another a barber is gaunt and ghostlike, appearing undernourished. Germans ride in horse-drawn carriages while Jews are human rickshaws. And in Pabianice, the piles of goods such as those at the 'Schuhlager' are so clearly confiscated, so clearly the remnant belongings of dead owners. These signs and hints of another reality—a less attractive, less 'productive' reality of ghetto life—contribute to the complexity of the history Genewein represents. The piles of belongings, an old rabbi sitting in the cemetery, a corpse being transported, are the objects, the events, the images of a history that is as real as the workday in the ghetto. (Guerin, 2011, p. 119)

It is true that there is a photo of one dead woman in the rubble of a house. Also, the barber does look thin, and there is a shot of a body wrapped in shrouds. However, to describe these as 'hints' of devastation, disease and death that 'riddled everyday life in the ghetto', is to be more than generous. The barber does look thin, but he is wearing a shirt and tie and a clean white work coat. Is he starving? Or is he just a very slim man? The woman face down in the rubble is unidentifiable. Is she Jewish from Lodz? Or is she Ukrainian from Kiev? Or is she German from Berlin? Certainly, the shots from Pabianice show the proceeds of theft on a massive scale, but there is no sign of the thieves. At no point does Genewein describe the source of the misery and suffering at which he barely hints.

This is an elaborate example of external context at work. Each of Genewin's images functions as some kind of documentation of the ghetto, and as they are seen together they are in dialogue with each other, reinforcing the authorial point of view. However, if we view them along with Ross' and Grossman's work, the meaning alters profoundly. Now Genewin's images are undermined and their veracity is eroded. Now we see the omissions that betray the point of view of the SS accountant. We see how shallow and self-serving this collection of images really is.

The photograph that Vicki Goldberg terms the 'unimpeachable witness' (Goldberg, 1993, p. 19), stands on less firm foundations than it seems at first glance. It is a text like every other; it needs to be read and meaning gleaned from it, and that meaning is not absolute, but open to interpretation, misinterpretation and reinterpretation. Each photograph is in dialogue with other texts that can

elaborate or undermine its meanings. On the other hand, it is a text like no other, as it has the appearance of objectivity, and an implicit ability to affect us on a different level than words or other texts. We shall now examine some ways that photographs can work effectively with other texts to bring us to closer the victims of the Holocaust.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Even on a day busy with coach tours and backpackers, Birkenau can seem quite an empty place. The gate building is less imposing than its iconic status suggests. Through it, the camp manages to be both bigger than expected, but equally far too small to have accommodated so much suffering. To the left are the brick huts; to the right the remains of the wooden huts, with one row reconstructed, and the remainder marked by red brick chimney stacks, many teetering at unstable angles. Ahead, the ramp is arrow straight, pointing to the memorial now, but previously to a gap in the trees between Crematoria II and III. Once this was a crowded place, full of huts, prisoners, smoke and suffering. Now, all four crematoria are dynamited ruins, the bunkers, or burning pits, are flat green patches; the ash pond is only a pond, where still water reflects the tree line of birches and poplars. The musical chatter of children's voices offers a temporary reprieve from the taciturn nature of the place. In the distance, mowers and service vehicles struggle against the quiet. Bird song occasionally breaks the silence, but Birkenau seems to want to return to stillness because something is missing here. There is a hollow core. Birkenau today stands in testament to an absence. One million people arrived here and never left.

There is no trace of them, the absent. There are railway tracks and a carriage, artefacts of their journey; huts and ruins as artefacts of their incarceration and their destruction, and there are the ponds and pathways to the places their ashes were dumped, but of the men, women and children who arrived here and who died here, there is nothing. Their bags and baggage, their shoes and tin pots, the things they carried with them, their hair, have been taken to the formal museum at Auschwitz 1, a couple of

kilometres away. Birkenau bears witness to the structures of imprisonment and killing, but of those who were imprisoned, suffered and were killed there is only absence.

The curators of Birkenau are aware of this. Around the site a muted signage is used, sparingly. These are conceived as 'a system of profoundly symbolic signs consisting of granite blocks in the form of black slabs that serve as mini-monuments referring to the traditional slabs that cover graves. On these, information is displayed on plates bearing text, maps, or photographs' (Swiebocka, 2000, p. 295). The text on these information plaques consists of short paragraphs, in Polish, English and Hebrew, white text on black. They offer minimal context to what the visitor is seeing.

Figure 8: Terry Devlin

In some places the sign is augmented by a photograph, taken when the camp was active and situated at or near the location captured in the shot.

Figure 9: Mike Finn

Sometimes these information signs mix text and photographs; sometimes they use just one or the other. They are sometimes placed together. There is a deliberate effort to show people on these information boards. Additionally, within the so-called 'Sauna' building, once used for the intake of prisoners, the permanent exhibition contains a display of family photographs 'belonging to Jews deported to Auschwitz, and discovered on the grounds after liberation' (www.auschwitz.org, nd;). These photographs are the only visible traces of the dead at Birkenau, they are the only scratches on

Figure 10: Terry Devlin

the silence that surrounds them.

These photographs stimulate our empathy more than prose because they 'make the incorporeal, corporeal', according to Susan D. Moeller. As people we respond:

> more readily to flesh-and-blood people than to ephemeral concepts, however transcendent …. News needs to be related to an individual's experience in order for that individual to take it in. Images effect that more easily, partly because common ground can more readily be discovered in a photograph than in paragraphs of text: That is a picture of a child; I, too, have a child. (Moeller, 1998, p. 38)

However, though our empathy is aroused, Moeller is confident that our critical faculties are not diminished:

> Confronted with two images of a mother breastfeeding a child—one the image of the tired and dusty Migrant Mother nursing her infant during the Great Depression; the other of a Somali infant, flies glued to the child's eyelids, trying to nurse from the mother's shriveled breast—we react with greater emotion to the photograph of the African child. (Moeller, 1998, pp. 38-39)

We react this way because our reason tells us that the African child is at greater risk than her American counterpart. 'We know with a fair degree of certainty that the American infant will survive with a measure of health even if it has limited prospects', whereas, even it if survives this crisis, the experience will 'have seriously compromised not just the health but the developing brain of the [African] child' (Moeller, 1998, p. 39). Our response is therefore both emotional and critical. 'We apply our intellect and reason to the evidence we see—and then we respond, emotionally, to what critical theorist Walter Benjamin called the "aura": an image's elusive, charismatic and sometimes haunting presence' (Moeller, 1998, p. 39). This is the thinking behind the design of the Information Boards at Birkenau. Teresa Swiebocka, who runs the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Publishing House, is quite explicit when she explains that this is done 'so that we can identify with them and see, not the abstract numbers of victims, but the real people' (Swiebocka, 2000, p. 296). Photography, therefore, is overtly used at Birkenau in an attempt address this absence of the victims.

We have discussed the possibilities of words used for context, and equally, how the viewing of images in the context of other images can impact the meaning, but there are further options. The images used at Birkenau are muted and, in themselves, not very dramatic. When the photographs include people, the aim, as we saw above, is to help the visitor identify with the victims. The following photograph was taken at the copse of birch trees near Crematorium V, in May 2017. It is a peaceful glade, but through the trees the low remains of the crematorium building can be seen.

Figure 11: Terry Devlin

The next image is taken from the so-called 'Lili Jacobs Album', an album of photos named for the woman prisoner who found it, most likely 'at Dora-Nordhausen … where she had been transported from Birkenau' (Struk, 2004, p. 101).[32]

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[32] For a more complete discussion of the provenance if the image, see Struk, 2004, pp. 99-102.

Figure 12: Yad Vashem

In the photograph we can see women and children between the trees, behind them older men in hats. We can see the Star of David affixed to their clothing. This internal context identifies them and their time. However, if we see the photograph on the information board at Birkenau, then the external context, the location where we see the print, has a profound impact on our reading of the image.

Figure 13: Mike Finn

Now the photograph is transformed. Now we know that these people are doomed to die, and that it

will happen close by and probably very soon.

The photograph in this location also demonstrates another characteristic of photography, identified by Roland Barthes. In *Camera Lucida*, he argues that a strong or striking photograph consists of two elements, which he terms a *studium* and a *punctum*. The studium he calls the field, that which stirs a general interest. 'What I feel about these photographs derives from an *average* affect, almost from a certain training' he writes, 'a kind of general enthusiastic commitment … but without special acuity' (Barthes, 1981, p. 26) [*emphasis in original*]. The punctum, on the other hand, 'is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me' (Barthes, 1981, p. 26). The punctum disturbs the studium. It is what renders the photograph memorable, 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' (Barthes, 1981, p. 27). From this, we can see that not every photograph has a punctum. In fact, most photographs 'provoke only a general and, so to speak, polite interest: they have no punctum in them: they please or displease me without pricking me' (Barthes, 1981, p. 27). Even quite dramatic images can be enhanced with a punctum. The punctum of 'The Falling Man' is the coincidence of his alignment with the buildings behind him. That is what offers the impression that he is in control of his descent, which, in turn, gives him a tragic mien.

However, it arguable that sometimes the punctum is outside the photograph. In the case of the woman wearing three hats, the punctum of the image arises only when the photograph is considered in the context of the title. Then the image 'pricks … is poignant'. Without the context, the image is all studium. Similarly with this image at Birkenau. If there is a prick to disturb the image, it comes not within it, but from the location where we view it. To stand at this point where the photographer stood, and to see this image here, is to call these people out of the past. Standing there, looking around, some things become terribly clear. The ruins of Crematorium V are visible left of centre, about 30 metres away. The intact building, with its tall square chimneys belching smoke would have had enormous presence in this view. Straight ahead, at a similar distance, were the burning pits that were used when the volume of victims overwhelmed the capacity of the crematoria. As they waited among

the trees the people would have been all too aware that they were in a terrible place, and they could only have known the most terrible fear.

Once again, the image is in dialogue with the location and with its history. This time the conversation is between it and the location, where the terrible past throws the bucolic present into relief, and equally, the sunny grove of trees contests the stark image of the other picture. It is a contest that the image can win. It annihilates that sunshine and drags a gloom from the past like a pall over the location. Standing is this sun-filled copse, the image of this crowd of people among the trees makes it seem possible that touching the bark that they touched is a gesture that reaches out to the murdered.

The power of this image in this place is based on two core qualities of photography. First, it is predicated on the ability of the image to create empathy by showing us people like ourselves in this place, and the ability of the photograph to offer evidence, by certifying the presence of these people here, at that time. Equally, however, the image also demonstrates what Sekula calls the incomplete utterance of the photograph. While the image and the location are in dialogue, there is a third voice needed to extract meaning from it all, and that is the context provided by history. This is the text which anchors the image and points our reading of it into a specific direction. All work together to construct the utterance of the installation.

If we can have an image without a punctum, can we have one that is entirely punctum? Dan Stone argues that we can, and offers four particular images where, he says, 'the studium *is* the punctum' (Stone, 2001, p. 138) [*emphasis in original*]. Often referred to as 'The *Sonderkommando* Photographs', these four images were taken by Jewish prisoners during the summer of 1944, at the height of the annihilation of the Hungarian Jews. The images include two photos of the open-air cremation pits, where corpses and *Sonderkommando* workers are visible against a rising pall of smoke. There is one shot of a group of people, including some women, undressing under the trees in the copse mentioned above, and the last photograph is simply the upper branches of those trees, silhouetted against the sky. They were taken within the compound of Crematorium V, possibly by a

Greek Jew named Alex, whose last name is lost to us, but he was accompanied by four others: Shlomo and Abraham Dragon, Alter Fajnzylberg and David Szmulewski. Their purpose was simple, as explained by Tuvia Friling:

> The *Sonderkommando*'s central location in the heart of the death industry of the 'secret Reich,' the gas chambers and crematoria, gave its members special importance in the attempts to alert the free world about the Nazis' annihilation of the Jews. The idea was to photograph the killing process and to smuggle the photographs out of the camp. (Friling, 2014, p. 45)

Friling reports that a camera was sourced in the possessions of the dead and passed to the photography team. They took the photographs and passed the exposed film to the Polish Underground for processing. They were accompanied by a note, which Janina Struk quotes:

> Sending you snaps from Birkenau – gas poisoning action. These photos show one of the stakes at which bodies were burned, when the crematoria could not manage to burn all the bodies. The bodies in the foreground are waiting to be thrown into the fire. Another picture shows one of the places in the forest, where people are undressing before 'showering' – as they were told – and then go to the gas chambers. (Struk, 2008, p. 118)

Thereafter the images drop in and out of sight for a while. The photograph of the women was used as part of the first exhibition of the Auschwitz Museum in 1947, two were published in a book in the late 1950s and in 1960 a resistance volunteer, Wladyslaw Pytlik, brought three of the images with him when he testified about his wartime activities to the Auschwitz State Museum. Again, Struk quotes his statement to the Museum: 'in 1944 we received a piece of mail from the camp including photographic film. It included photographs made near one of the crematoria' (Struk, 2008, p. 118). However, it was not until Pytlik's death, in 1985, that his wife donated the originals to the Museum. Upon examination of these versions, it is clear that the most commonly used versions of the images are both cropped and retouched.

Figures 14 - 17: www.auschwitz.org

The image on the left is the original in each case. The first, of the burning bodies, was taken from inside a door (or possibly a window) of the crematorium, and the actual burning of the bodies is framed by the doorway.[33] The quality of the image is poor, the standing figures are noticeably more

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[33] It is worth emphasising that this can only be a doorway of the crematorium building, not the gas chamber itself. The

smudged and the background of trees is indistinct. The cropped image is sharper, and by removing the surrounding frame, we are brought closer to the horror, and the man picking his way between the bodies is noticeably clearer, as is the background. In the case of the second pair, the people occupy only a corner of the actual frame, at lower left, and are barely noticeable. The cropped version makes them the centre of the frame, and other manipulations, such as 'pencil lines to accentuate the outlines of the women's figures', and that the faces, are 'retouched' as they were 'indistinguishable' are noticeable (Struk, 2004, p. 118). Struk reports that a Polish photographer, Stanislaw Mucha, did this work after the war, 'presumably because he considered the images of the burning bodies and running women to be more important than the surroundings' (Struk, 2004, p. 118).

Therefore, what we actually have are images which have disappeared from view for years at a time, and which bear obvious evidence of darkroom manipulation. This must impact on their evidentiary value, and it does. Against that, however, we do have the note that accompanied the original film to the Polish Underground, and the testimony of Pytlik to support the provenance of the images. Given the circumstances under which the photography group and the underground volunteers lived, that is all that we can hope to get. This was wartime after all, and these images were taken at enormous risk. Had these photographs come to the attention of the occupying forces, then summary execution was the very best anyone involved in taking them, or in possession of them, could have hoped for. The alternative, including horrendous torture, hardly bears thinking about. Equally, the clandestine nature of the whole enterprise makes it unsurprising that the images are poorly composed; are of barely serviceable quality; and lack a perfect chain of evidence. What can be said with certainty is that these photographs do not contradict other sources that describe the open air cremations, or the use of the copse as an overflow staging point. In fact, they serve as corroboration. The cropping and enhancements do have an impact on the meaning, as we shall discuss below, but given that the aim of the men taking these photographs was to let the world know what was happening, it is clear that

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gas chamber did not have an opening to the exterior of the building. Several commentators confuse the two, and on occasion we have references to photographs from inside the gas chamber.

the alterations are in sympathy with those intentions.

Within those limitations, we can agree with Isabell Wollaston that these images are the only 'direct visual evidence of the process of mass murder at Auschwitz' (Wollaston, 2010, p. 443). Georges Didi-Huberman calls them 'images *in spite of all*: in spite of the hell of Auschwitz, in spite of the risks taken … in spite of our own inability to look at them as they deserve' (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p. 3) [*emphasis in original*]. At Birkenau, three are mounted on information boards near a small grassy patch. The fourth is not used at all. The leftmost image is probably in the wrong place, as it refers to a location behind the viewer, as discussed above. The other two depict a scene enacted on the grassy clearing to the right.

Figure 18: Mike Finn

The text used under the first image reads:

> These three photographs are the only remaining pictures of Auschwitz actually to have been taken clandestinely by prisoners. One shows Jewish women being driven naked to the Gas Chamber of Crematorium V where they were to be murdered; the other two show the bodies of people who had been gassed being burned in the open air next to Crematorium V.

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Again, the images are in dialogue with the space. That space looks innocent enough, but the images testify to another experience: the so-called 'bunkers', or burning pits, that existed there in the summer of 1944. Ya'akov Gabai worked there and described them to Gideon Greif:

> They brought the bodies from the gas chamber to the bunker and that's where they cremated them. The bunker was surrounded by trees so no one could see what was going on there. The method of cremation in the bunkers was like this: they laid the bodies on a layer of logs, placed logs and boards on top of them, and more bodies on top of those, and so on, three layers or more. Afterwards an SS man came over, poured gasoline into the pit, and lit a match. Everything burst into flames. About a thousand corpses were cremated every hour. The fat from the corpses kept the fire going. (Greif, 2005, pp. 187-188)

It is impossible to imagine that scene here on a sunny spring afternoon. How could anyone possibly find cadavers on the ground, men working between them, a pall of smoke, in this recently mown glade. However, staring at the photographs, the concrete fence posts at the tree line come into focus, and then looking at the field, those same stanchions stare implacably back, and suddenly the link is made: it is the very same fence.

Figure 19: Terry Devlin

The dialogue with the space is real and depends on the common items between the image and the space. There is a similar phenomenon at the museum in Dachau, where an image in the museum shows murdered inmates hanging from trees, and a glance out the window shows the very same trees. It is difficult to see these tiny details as anything other than a punctum, 'that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)' in Barthes' words. It is this detail that anchors these photograph with this location on this afternoon more than seventy years later.

Stone argues passionately that the 'dichotomy of studium and punctum cannot be maintained' (Stone, 2001, p. 138). He states that 'there is nothing that can be examined in a moment of quiet reflection, because everything is always and all at once bursting out of the photograph, carving a path of terror through our senses' (Stone, 2001, p. 138). However, this is not necessarily the case. These images have to be read and contextualised so that they can be understood. This is the business of reflection; if we examine these images as images, relying only on internal context, then what do we actually see? Certainly the images of cremation are disquieting. They beg questions: who are these dead people; what is going on here; why are these women undressed and where are they going? However, questions are all they offer without the information that we carry with us when we see them. It is only when we know who these people were, or we see these images displayed in this place, and can locate these images to this particular patch of ground, that they truly 'carve a path of terror through our senses', as Stone puts it.

However, these images bear witness to more than just mass murder at Birkenau. The story of how they came to be testifies to resistance, and this resistance is a rejection of the values of Birkenau. With courage and resourcefulness these men, for all the *Sonderkommando* personnel were male, contrived to document the horrors they witnessed every day. They also testify to the links they managed to forge with the Polish Underground, and all under the most horrendous circumstances. While ever mindful of Langer's warnings against finding redemptive moments where there are none (see page 15), it is impossible not to admire the fact that these men, however hardened they were by what they witnessed and were required to do, did not lose their desire to warn others of the dangers

and did not lose their will to defy their oppressors. This same impulse led them to link up with women prisoners in adjoining sections of Birkenau and with them, to smuggle materials required to make weapons for the *Sonderkommando* uprising on October 7th, 1944.

If the photographs testify to the resistance of the *Sonderkommando* men, then so does the uprising of October 7th. That day, without hope of escape or rescue, they sought primarily to destroy the crematoria, so that they might at least disrupt the killing process. For a variety of reasons they did not succeed completely, though they did wreck Crematorium IV. All of the men there were murdered, any who escaped were recaptured and murdered, and the women who helped them were murdered too.[34] This testifies to the imminent peril under which Alex and the photographic crew worked. This danger, for Georges Didi-Huberman, is missing in the cropped version of the photographs. 'This mass of black is nothing other than the mark of the ultimate status by which these images are understood: their status as visual event' (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p. 36). Removing the black frame 'is to act as though Alex were able to take the photographs safely out in the open. It is almost to insult the danger that he faced and to insult his cunning as *résistant*' (Didi-Huberman, 2008, p. 36). Removing the frame alters our sense of this act of photography; it changes the nature of the event. Similarly, excluding the fourth image, of the trees and sky, is to deny the:

> impossibility of aiming the camera, the risk undergone, the urgency .… This image is, metaphorically, out of breath: it is pure 'utterance', pure gesture, pure photographic act without aim (therefore without orientation, with no top or bottom): it gives us access to the condition of urgency in which the four shreds were snatched from the hell of Auschwitz. Indeed, this urgency too is part of history. (Didi-Huberman, 2008, pp. 37-38)

It is difficult to argue with Didi-Huberman on this. Once the reader understands what the black border is, once he or she understands the significance of the shot of trees and sky, then these details add an arresting additional layer of detail to the images. However, simply looking at the uncropped images

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[34] Ester Wajcblum, Regina Safirsztain, Ala Gertner and Roza Robota were hanged at Birkenau in January 1945. It was the last public hanging there.

does not give us this information, it is not available in the internal context, and so we need to refer to the original context again to read this from the image. When the photography group made the images they did not do so to draw attention to their own plight, or the personal risks they took. Their effort was designed as a warning to others. Therefore, while it is possible to recognise the value and importance of the uncropped images, it is equally important to recognise that the cropping (and other enhancements), do not invalidate the images. It is perfectly possible to find value in both, and as such, this again demonstrates the function of the reader in completing what Sekula calls the incomplete utterance of the photographs.

As time went on there was a strong impulse among the *Sonderkommando* prisoners to record and document the horror of the killing process. Some of them tried to record their experiences in writings that they buried around the crematoria compound. Nathan Cohen reports that six diaries and sets of notes, by three different authors, driven by 'a sense of historic mission imposed upon them … to document their lives during the Holocaust' (Cohen, 1994, p. 522), have been found. Such was their desire to bear witness that one of the diaries reports that they 'scattered around the place a very large number of teeth, in order to leave traces of the millions of people murdered' (Cohen, 1994, p. 525). Didi-Huberman locates the drive to create the photographs in this same impulse. However, both the exhibition of the photographs in Paris in 2001, and Didi-Huberman's essay in the accompanying catalogue have proved nothing if not controversial. Jacques Rancière summarises the primary objections:

> Elisabeth Pagnoux used the classical argument: these images were intolerable because they were too real. By projecting into our present the horror of Auschwitz, they captured our gaze and prevented any critical distance. But the second essay, by Gérard Wajcman, inverted the argument: these images, and the commentary accompanying them, were intolerable because they lied. (Rancière, 2009, p. 89)

Susie Linfield summarises the positions as:

> the Auschwitz photographs were both too strong and too feeble. In their view, these

photographs suggested that the unrepresentable could be represented and that that the incomprehensible could be understood: as such the photographs were taboo, heretical, an insult to the dead. These critics further insisted that since the Auschwitz photographs don't show the genocide's deadly center—which was, of course, the gassings themselves—they must, perforce, show nothing at all (and, in the event, give solace to the deniers). (Linfield, 2010)

The first of these objections, that the photographs purport to represent the unrepresentable, is another version of what Naomi Mandel describes as the 'rhetoric of the unspeakable', that allows a 'masquerade of rhetorical performance (evoking the unspeakable) as ethical practice (protecting survivors, respecting the memory of the victims, safeguarding identity, reality, or historical truth)' (Mandel, 2007, p. 209). The limitations of this position were discussed in chapter two. What is curious is the second argument, which Rancière sums up as follows:

> The four photographs did not represent the reality of the Shoah for three reasons: first of all, because they did not show the extermination of the Jews in the gas chamber; next, because reality is never entirely soluble in the visible; and finally, because at the heart of the event of the Shoah there is something unrepresentable – something that cannot structurally be fixed in an image. (Rancière, 2009, p. 89)

That these images do not show the dying within the gas chamber is true, but that does not invalidate these photographs. It is tempting, and common, to think of Auschwitz as a metonym for the entire Holocaust. Equally, it is tempting to think of these images in a similar way. But these are snapshots of quite specific moments in time, and are not typical, even of Birkenau. The reason that these bodies are being incinerated in the open air, and that these women are undressing in the copse, is because the facility was overwhelmed by the number of people it was murdering. Therefore, they do not claim to represent the reality of the Holocaust. Auschwitz is not the absolute reality of the Holocaust and neither are the gas chambers. They are no more than a couple of facets of a multi-year, multi-phase, multi-location operation with tens of thousands of perpetrators and enablers and millions of victims

that used multiple methods of killing, torture and deprivation. These photographs are no more, nor indeed, no less, than what they show. That is, in Linfield's words, 'flashes—quick, incomplete illuminations—of a larger actuality. They are fleeting, fragmented, maddeningly incomplete; they are pathetically small and weak when measured against the power and the crimes of which they speak' (Linfield, 2010, p. 90).

Other commentators have commented on the images from different perspectives. For instance, in their recent *Matters of Testimony: Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz* (2016), Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams argue that Didi-Huberman does not 'adequately address the significance of Alex's efforts to record the naked women on the way to their deaths', and that 'a consideration of gender is crucial to making sense of the photographs' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 185). They root their analysis in the alterations made to the images, particularly to the third one, which shows the naked women. They argue that the practice of cropping the image to centre on the group undressing, and the post-production enhancement to the faces and breasts of the two women, 'stills this image, distils it, extracting stability where previously there was none' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 186). These manipulations mean that 'the essence of the photograph becomes two faces, two bodies, made to stand for mass murder', and they implicitly criticise Didi-Huberman because he fails to 'pursue the potential implications at the level of gender of the decision to make these alterations' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 186).

The core of their argument is that the act of enhancing the face and breasts of the women, particularly the 'seeming desiccated, sagging body of the woman on the right', implants an 'illusion of youth and vigour' in order to 'enhance the horror of her impending death' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 186). She is 'remade woman', and 'is made to symbolise all those murdered in the Holocaust, becoming the picture-perfect figure to portray death' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 186). They then relate this to the work of Elizabeth Bronfen, who has written on the connections between death and femininity within art and literature. For Bronfen, these connections 'often function to stabilise death and femininity', which demonstrate traits she calls 'powers of excess within culture, pointing to a

reality that is beyond figuration and "disruptive of all systems of language"' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 186). Therefore, they conclude, that the retouching of the women's bodies is 'open to being understood as symptoms of anxiety relating to these excesses', and that they are 'an effort to recuperate order … retouching the image, making it clearer to see, is a means to assuage anxiety' (Chare and Williams, 2016, pp. 186-187). Thereafter, through a brief exploration of the uncanny and how it relates to Lacan's idea of the Real, which they accuse Didi-Huberman of using selectively ('Didi-Huberman's elisions are what we wish to draw attention to here'), we find ourselves where there is 'an anxiety towards the feminine as excess, as an unspoken formlessness, underpinning the decision to retouch the image and provide it with greater contour' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 189).

Unfortunately it is somewhat difficult to engage with this argument, predicated, as it is, on some loose assumptions. There might be some argument here if Alex and the photography group had specifically chosen to photograph women, but there is no evidence whatever they made any such choice. It seems far more likely that they photographed the people who happened to be undressing in the copse at that moment, and some of these happened to be women. Neither is there evidence that only women undressed there (even a cursory glance suggests that there are adult males in the group), nor is there any sign at all that the people photographed were selected by anything other than chance alone. If this is the case, then it is difficult to see how the consideration of gender is 'crucial to making sense of the photographs' as they argue. The first part of the argument is predicated on this assumption, but Chare and Williams offer no reason for us to make this assumption in the first place.

There is further assumption to note when considering the details added to the women in the darkroom. They speak of the 'seeming desiccated, sagging body of the woman on the right' who is 'remade woman' and so symbolises all who died 'becoming the picture-perfect figure to portray death' (Chare and Williams, 2016, p. 186). However, the key word in all of this is 'seeming': the woman seems to be 'desiccated' and have a 'sagging body'. This is an assumption. Perhaps she is not at all desiccated or sagging, but only seems so. Perhaps how she appears in the original image is a factor of the quality of the photograph, and not her actual appearance. This photograph is by no means

crystal clear, even after retouching. For instance, different commentators refer to the women as 'standing', 'walking', 'being pushed towards the gas chamber', 'on their way to the gas chamber' and even 'running through a forest',[35] so therefore much is unclear here. Coupled with these assumptions, there are further difficulties with how they conceive of the idea of woman in their gendered approach. They suggest that this woman is 'remade' by being made appear more youthful. Is an older woman not still a woman? Why would an older woman require remaking? Is there some reason that an older woman cannot also be 'the picture-perfect figure'? These concerns do not necessarily invalidate the insights that Chare and Williams offer, but it is difficult not to think their argument is based on conceptual assumptions stretched beyond breaking point. We have no reason to assume that the alterations made to the images are made for any reason except to enhance their ability to communicate what the photography group wanted to show the world. There is a danger that unnecessary assumptions reveal more of the people making them than they do of the subject they make them about.

It is certainly true that in spite of their undoubted power these images are not the whole story:

> What is missing from the four pictures is the actual process of extermination; we see the women running towards the gas chambers, and we see the *Sonderkommando* burning bodies on the other side of the building, but we do not see what has gone on in between. (Reiniger, 2013).

There are no images surviving from within the crematoria, and there may have been none taken there. However, Janina Struk interviewed Whilhelm Brasse, a prisoner-photographer at Birkenau, who said that he developed film for the German photographers that included shots of people entering the gas chamber:

> It was a photograph taken of one woman at the moment she was entering the gas-chamber, just to see her face, just to see her reaction – the photograph showed a bit of her torso and her face, her face was terrible, frightened with a horrible expression. (Struk, 2004, p. 111)

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[35] Jan Taubitz, Dan Stone, Jacques Ranciére, Chare and Williams, and Susie Linfield respectively.

In any event, these images have been lost. We do, nonetheless, have a view from within the crematoria, but it is through testimony rather than evidence. This is because this view is rendered in drawings and paintings by the Polish-French artist David Olère. How these works compare and contrast with the photographic record is revealing of the characteristics of both media.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

David Olère was born in Warsaw, but moved to Paris as a young man. He worked designing film sets and posters before being drafted into the French Army at the outbreak of war. He survived the fall of France, but was arrested in a round up in February 1943 and sent to Auschwitz. He was assigned to the *Sonderkommando* of Crematorium III, though he was more often put to work making paintings for the guards. However, he observed the full workings of the killing process, and, having survived to liberation, he created more than fifty sketches during 1945 and 1946 documenting his experiences. His drawings include architectural sketches, both plan and sections, that described the layout and

workflow of the buildings, as well as paintings and sketches that capture the horror of what he saw.

Figure 20: 'Crematorium 5 and its crematorium pit' David Olère.

This is one of his sketches of the same burning pit, captured in the photographs above. There are multiple reports of people being brought to the burning pits and either shot and thrown in, or, in some cases, thrown in alive. For instance, in his deposition to the first investigation into the crimes at Auschwitz, Stanislaw Jankowski reported that:

> if the number of persons to be gassed was not sufficiently large, they would be shot and burned in pits …. It happened that some prisoners offered resistance when about to be shot at the pit or that children would cry and then *Oberscharführer* Moll would throw them alive into the flames. (Jankowski, 2013, p. 56)

According to Robert Jan van Pelt, Olère's rendering of the scene is significantly accurate in its details, such as the building (Crematorium V), to the left:

> Drawn from memory, the elevation of the gas chambers is not perfect … but in its essentials Olère's representation is correct: the crematorium was a higher shed with two chimneys to which was attached a lower wing with small highly placed window.

(van Pelt, 2002, p. 180)

While these details may add to the veracity of the image, it is the rest of the scene that haunts the viewer. An SS man, in uniform, has shot a small child, who lies face down on the edge of the pit. Beside the child, another woman kneels, about to die while another stands, looking back at the killer, in a pose that evokes a renaissance Venus or Hellenic Aphrodite. That the killer is oblivious to her beauty is a comment in itself. The smoke from the crematorium merges with the smoke from the pit as if to suggest this is all one conflagration, and we can see the suggestion of other bodies burning within. It is a testament to Olère's work that Shlomo Venezia uses it to illustrate his memoir, *Inside the Gas Chambers, Eight Months in the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz.* Venezia describes emptying the gas chamber:

> Some tried to drag the bodies along with a belt, but this actually made the work even harder, since they had to keep tying and untying the belt. Finally, the simplest thing was to use a walking stick under the nape of the neck to pull the bodies along. You can see it very clearly in one of David Olère's drawings. (Venezia, 2009, p. 64)
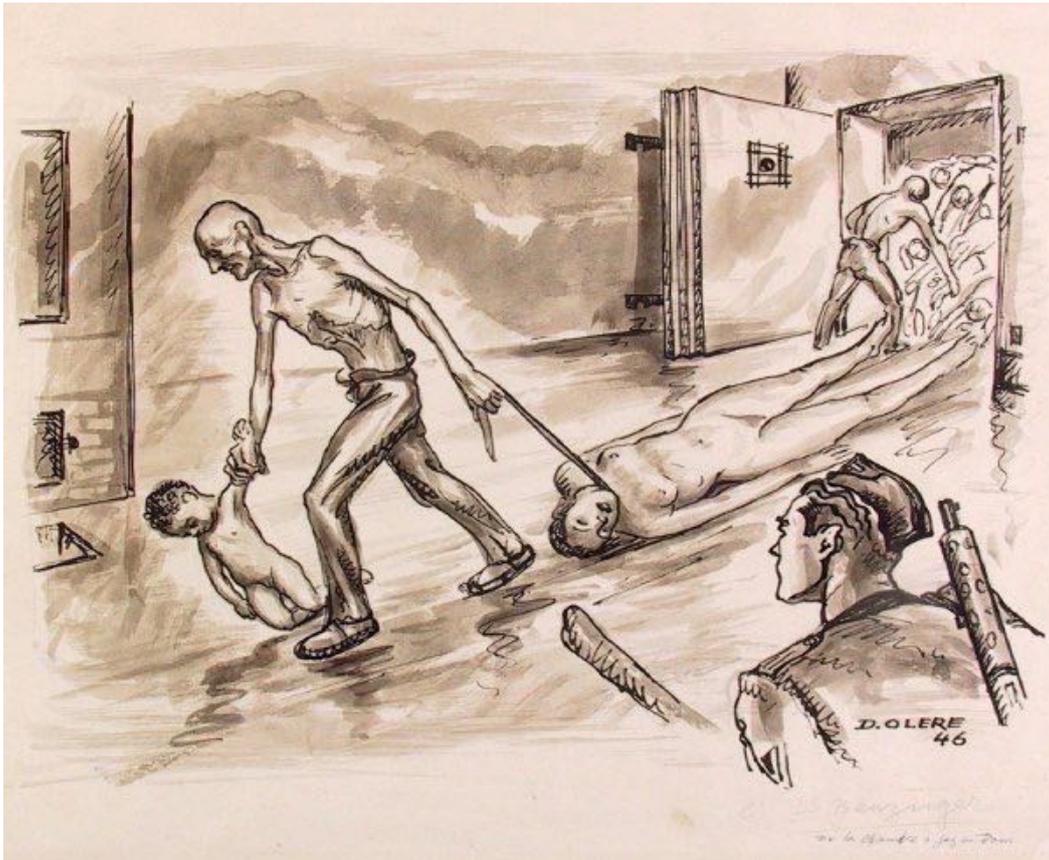
Figure 21: David Olère 'Clearing Out the Gas Chamber'

Unlike Venezia's description, which we can choose not to visualise, it is impossible to avoid the horror of this illustration. A gaunt figure drags the body of a woman along a floor using a ligature around to her neck. With his right hand he drags a child, gripped by the forearm. Both of these actions are an affront to dignity, and to our sensibility. This is no way to treat the remains of either human being. A soldier looks on, and in the background a pile of corpses is seen through a door, with another prisoner reaching in to pull one out. Olère's drawing corroborates the testimony of other survivors of the *Sonderkommando*:

> When they opened the doors, we saw a tangled mass of people who'd been suffocated. Little children at the bottom, adults above them, fat people below. Everyone had wanted to be on top, in order to breathe. It was terrible .... It was hard to untangle them in order to take them to the furnaces. (Greif, 2005, p. 320)

Or:

> Sometimes they were so tangled that you had to grab them by the neck and drag them out as you would drag animals. There was no other way. (Greif, 2005, p. 113)

Olère sketched and painted the entire process of mass murder and the daily life of the camp, not just the interiors of the crematoria. His illustrations include the arrival of a train, the undressing process, the collecting of hair and gold teeth, the burning of the bodies in the incinerators and, even, people inside the gas chamber.

One of the most iconic photos from Birkenau, and used on the signage there, is of an older woman accompanied by three children, walking away from the selection towards the gas chambers. She holds the hand of a very young child, who is supported on the other side by a child barely older. Behind, another walks, head down, hands in pockets. It is from the Lili Jacobs album. Olère has painted a version of that scenario. It is called *Unable to Work*, a status that was a death sentence.

Figure 22: Yad Vashem   *Figure 23: 'Unable to Work' David Olère*
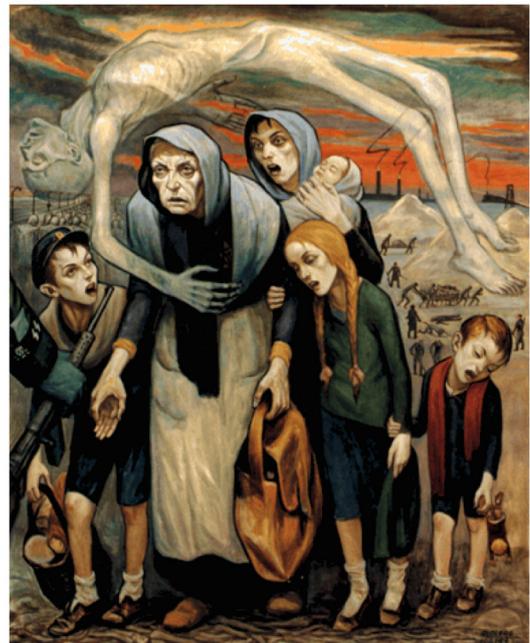
Here the group is an older woman, a mother with an infant, a little boy and two little girls. They face us instead of walking away, they are gaunt, almost cadaverous, indeed, almost dead already. Over them hovers a skeletal spirit, behind them the smoke stacks belch out smoke in the shape of the SS insignia. The arm of a guard holding a rifle is in front of them. Olère's painting is the essentially the same as the photograph, but it brings the external context into the painting. The skeletal figure, the cadaverous nature of the victims tell us what the photograph cannot show, and this is because the

painter can interfere in the frame in a way in which the photographer cannot. The painter can add detail and is not bound by reality in constructing his or her illustration. The value of the work as art is undoubted, however it value as evidence is less clear. Olère's works enhance testimony but lack the trappings of objectivity.

We can say this because these works are additive. Olère began with his memories and a blank canvas and added details. These works are not instantaneous and contemporary with what they depict, but are created from memory, after the war was over. Therefore, unlike the photograph, they fail to certify presence. There are elements in the frame that could not exist, such as the spectral figure. Death literally hangs over the group in the painting. Without the original context, we cannot say the same for the people in the photograph. In his work, he tells us what he feels, not just what he saw. He adds elements, like the shape of the smoke emanating from the distant crematoria, which carry more than a whiff of accusation. These images identify the perpetrators. In a great many of these works, there is the presence of a guard. Sometimes, like the illustration at the burning pit, it is a fully sketched figure; sometimes, as in the painting, it is a limb, a weapon or even just a boot.

While his figures are recognisably human, they are not anatomically correct, but rather demonstrate Zelizer's assertion that, as representations, they 'succeed by overstating certain aspects of that which is being represented and understating others' (Zelizer, 2001b, p. 2). Olère has made choices in how he presents the women at the edge of the pit, expressing their poignant vulnerability in soft curves in contrast with the angular brutality of the man, armed with a pistol and a whip. The body of the woman being dragged from the gas chamber has, on close inspection, extraordinarily long legs, while the pile of corpses in the gas chamber is but a few sketched gestures. Olère has found a style to carry his ideas and his hand is visible in every stroke. The success of the work rests entirely on his skill and ability as a sketch artist. He uses those 'rule-governed transpositions' to which Barthes refers. The crematorium building seems distant from the figures, a distance emphasised by the parallel rising lines that demarcate the edge of the pit. On the other hand, he can play with perspective too. The lines of the woman's legs draw the eye inexorably to the door of the gas chamber. He can

manipulate our emotions to shock us. The dead children in his illustrations are as chilling as a photograph of the body of a child face down on a Mediterranean beach. However, one cannot help but think that the man who lifted Aylan Kurdi at least cradled him, as an infant should be cradled, and granted him at least that minimum of affection and respect.

This is the power of Olère's representations. They are works of witnessing as valid as any memoir; they accuse and they provoke pity and heartbreak. Words are very powerful and wonderful instruments for capturing complex and ambiguous concepts. However, even phrases like 'you had to grab them by the neck and drag them out', or 'the simplest thing was to use a walking stick under the nape of the neck to pull the bodies along', can be elided by the reader to avoid the horror that is being described. Olère leaves the viewer with no place hide. This is the particular power of the image, to 'make the incorporeal, corporeal' (Moeller, 1998, p. 38), as Susan Moeller puts, and so stimulate our empathy.

How then should we evaluate Olère's works as a point of access to the lived experience of the Holocaust? What these paintings and drawings show is not real, with spectral characters and disproportionate bodies, but they do depict the truth, verified by many other sources. It is the work of a witness, one who was there and saw and, after the fact, wants to testify to what he experienced. The work is not objective, and so is not analogous to a history, neither is contemporaneous, and so in not analogous to a diary. However, in that it is a representation of his experiences, rendered in recollection then it is analogous to a memoir, and as such subject to the same considerations are we discussed in chapter three. In that many of his sketches and paintings are completed in a rush after the war's end, he recalls Primo Levi, who described his impulse to write as immediate and violent, and again, like Levi, much of the rest of his work is suffused with the sensibility of his experience. As for its veracity, apart from the validation offered by van Pelt, we can recall the report of Mark Rosen on his work with Marianne Ellenbogen, and how he noted that her recollection was accurate in all but minor details. Added then to his talent as an artist, and one who does not feel bound by strictly literal or photorealistic representation, Olère offers us an overtly subjective but powerfully vivid representation

of what he saw and experienced. He shows and tells, he accuses, and he is unflinching.

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On the morning of September 12th, 2001 newspapers across the United States ran the 'Falling Man' photograph. The reaction among readers was both swift and severe as letter writers charged that editors had 'exploited a man's death, stripped him of his dignity, invaded his privacy, turned tragedy into leering pornography' (Junod, 2016). The photograph 'ran once and never again' (Junod, 2016). Janina Struk points out that 'the Nazis took photographs of their victims to humiliate and degrade them. Are we not colluding with them' she asks, 'by displaying them ourselves?' (Struk, 2004, p. 215). She then goes on to cite two cases. In one she refers to images being used 'world-wide to support any amount of causes … sell cars, pornography, even books' (Struk, 2004, p. 215), and it is difficult to disagree with her. While being mindful that criteria for judging taste will ever be contested, there is no argument for the misuse of these images in crass and tasteless circumstances. On the other hand, she refers to the photograph of the old woman and the children mentioned above. This image now adorns an information plaque at Birkenau, just where they would have left the ramp, turned right and started to walk towards crematoria IV and V. Back then she argues, they had no choice but to be photographed; now they have no choice but to be on display for ever. 'Whoever they are' she writes, 'the have been condemned to tread that path forever. Returning their image to Birkenau may be their final humiliation .… Didn't they suffer enough the first time around?' (Struk, 2004, p. 216).

That they suffered the first time round, and terribly so, is undoubted. It is also inarguable that publishing the 'Falling Man' photograph may have invaded privacy, but whose privacy? The man himself is dead. He is beyond suffering now. For his family and friends, seeing a loved one so close to such a terrible death, would cause terrible pain, and that is reason enough to withhold publication anywhere they might see it. Does that mean we should never show it again, ever? Or if we do, at what point does it become acceptable? After 5 years? 50? 500? Further, while it is true that Nazis

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photographed their victims to humiliate and degrade them, what are we to do with photos that were not taken by Nazis, for example Ross and Grossman's images from Lodz, or the *Sonderkommando* photographs, which were taken specifically to testify and bear witness to what has happening to them. Do we exclude them from the photo ban? If we ban those too are we not frustrating the legitimate desires of these people to tell the world what was going on and being done to them? Do we not subvert the ambitions of the Nazis when we use their own images to accuse and convict them of their crimes?

One of the great gifts of photography is, as Susan Moeller says, that it gives some kind of flesh to the incorporeal. It offers us faces that belonged to the dead, and that break through the wall of numbers and facts and statistics to the people who were lost. When it does that, it finds some personhood with which we can empathise. Inga Clendinnen writes about the girl walking behind the others in the photograph from Birkenau, 'with a slight air of independence'. She finds it difficult to look at this image, because, while that girl would be an old woman now had she lived, 'she is forever my grand-daughter, trudging towards death in shoes too big for her' (Clendinnen, 2002, p. 10). We can look at David Olère's work forever and be riveted by the atrocities he presents, but the people he draws are not real people; they are his version of the denizens of this particular circle of hell. Looking at Ross's photograph of the lady with the three hats, you might see your mother, or grandmother, and then recognise that these were real people, just like you and me, and they were murdered in their millions. The weakness of text is that elision is possible. It is possible to read and to avoid the unpleasant parts, but it is very difficult to look at an illustration and do the same. This is how photographs act as history's proxy, as Vicki Goldberg says, and turns each viewer into a witness, in Barbie Zelizer's words.

We can be coolly rational and argue that Struk is wrong when she says that the people in the photograph are condemned to forever walk to the crematoria. The people are not there, and the photograph is simply a representation of them. They passed this way some time ago and they are not coming back, and so they know nothing about the photograph or the sign and are condemned to nothing. On the other hand, we can equally accept Struk's characterisation and argue the opposite.

This image grants these four a kind of immortality. It is impossible to look at the image and not wonder who they were and what it felt like to be them at that moment.

Conclusion

Two core concepts guide all of the analysis offered by this thesis. The first is based on Jacques Derrida's notion that '*Il n'y a pas de hors-text*' (Derrida, 1997, p.158), that there is no 'outside-text'. This is, at heart, an understanding of how we interact with reality or the world, where this interaction is characterised as a text or series of texts, and the implications that flow from that. The first implication of this is that if everything is a text, then everything requires reading to be understood. This introduces a note of uncertainty, a disconnect or *différance,* between the reader and the text. This is in the nature of reading because each act of reading is, in fact, the construction of an interpretation. In this process, the meaning of the text is commingled with the sensibility of the reader, and the resulting construction is never necessarily a pure reading of the text, but is always open to the influence of the reader's prior understandings. It is worth recognising that Derrida is not saying that we cannot know things, but rather, that we cannot be certain of what we think we know. In brief: there are no facts-that-speak-for-themselves.

There are facts, but if they speak, then what we hear is ever subject to our own ability to understand and limited by the tools of understanding that are at our command. Uncertainty, therefore, is built-in, and with it should come a certain humility. This humility is the difference between 'I know the right thing to do', and 'having given it some thought, I think I know how to proceed'. This is the difference between arrogance and a confidence built on applying critical thought to a question and working things through. It is a key difference. Arrogance kills people. For his television series *The Ascent of Man*, Jacob Bronowski travelled to Birkenau 'to stand here by the pond as a survivor and a witness' to underline the role arrogance in the murder of millions:

This is the concentration camp and crematorium at Auschwitz. This is where people

were turned into numbers .... And that was not done by gas. It was done by arrogance. It was done by dogma. It was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality, this is how they behave. (Bronowski, 2011, p. 337)

Therefore the responsibility of the reader, when we read, is to do so with humility and to understand the role we must play as readers, in finding a common ground with the text. This is equally true whether the text be words on a page or a real world situation.

The second core concept focuses more on the author of the text, and in particular, those writers, film makers, visual artists and so on, who make work either based on their own experiences of the Holocaust, or set in the world of the Holocaust. These works can include both fiction and non-fiction. This idea is borrowed from Barbie Zelizer, who asserts that 'each domain of visual representation ... translates some aspect of the Holocaust into another code by which it is differently meaningful' (Zelizer, 2001, p. 2). We have extrapolated a little, and assert this is true not only of visual work, but of every representation of anything. Therefore, a representation is not the same as that which it represents, and inevitably, it is an imprecise rendering, because representation succeeds by 'overstating certain aspects of that which is being represented and understating others' (Zelizer, 2001, p. 2).

This is a similar uncertainty to the imprecision of reading, with the emphasis falling this time on those who create texts. After all, it is the author of the text who both chooses which elements to overstate or understate, as well as deciding on how that should be done. These decisions are, in turn, built on the author's reading of another text: the event that actually happened, or their researches into what actually happened. Then there are the limitations of the format chosen for the actual representation. For instance, Raul Hilberg describes a problem with language: 'the Holocaust caught us unprepared. Its unprecedentedness and, above all, its unexpectedness, necessitates the use of words or materials that were never designed for depictions of what happened here' (Hilberg, 1984, p. 21). Jean Améry makes the same point about when describing the experience of being tortured: 'we would be hoaxed by turn on the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech' (Améry, 1998, p. 33), an

endless list if similes, none of which are very effective. How can we understand what it is 'like' to be tortured when we have never experienced anything like torture? We are at 'the limit of language to communicate' (Améry, 1998, p. 33). Additionally, the author's own ability to create a representation is also a factor. Not every historian or survivor is a literary or artistic force, and often, even those who are, are all too aware of their own limitations. Therefore, to borrow from T. S. Eliot in *East Coker,* every representation

> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
>
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
>
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
>
> Undisciplined squads of emotion. (Eliot, 1963, p. 189)

This is the world of representation, and it is the only route to the past. For those seeking to witness what happened through an authentic representation, then there are further complexities. As we saw, authenticity is not a fixed point. The survivor will always have a more rigorous test of the representation because he or she has not only the experience of the events, but aligned with it, the sense memories that can only be gained through experience. These are memories composed not only of sights, but also of sounds and smells, touch and taste. Experience is always more visceral than any representation. While there may be reservations about the concept of postmemory, in its original incarnation, as a feature of growing up in a familial relationship with a survivor, it does indicate that the sons and daughters of survivors have a claim to a particular relationship with the Holocaust, and consequently their own test of authenticity. It would be a rare parent indeed who could filter such trauma from their child-rearing. The other categories, described as the invested and the casual reader, each have claim to their different versions. This leads us to a point where each cohort can claim to find authenticity where others fail to do so, and this has implications for our understanding of what the authentic actually is. So we found a useful understanding of authenticity in how a text (of any kind), is measured against the contexts of the text. The more richly aware we are of these contexts,

then the more stringent the criteria of authenticity that we apply. Ultimately, we find ourselves at a point where authenticity is not only a value of an object or a report, but yet another construct, another edifice that is built in the foundation of the text within its context, and the extent of the reader's participation in that network of contexts.

So we find ourselves in a chain: an event happens, that event is read imperfectly, then translated with overstatement and understatement into a different code from reality, and that translation is limited by the author's talent and abilities, and also by the possibilities of the medium chosen. Then that representation is read and translated, with all of the inherent fallibilities of that process, by the reader of the work into his or her own terms. Each creator hopes to render an authentic representation; each reader hopes to find one, but there is no stability anywhere in the process. Everything is in flux, all of the time.

Through this world of imprecision, we have noted with Inga Clendinnen, that written texts are the best way to represent the Holocaust, and she specifically notes the importance of historical writing. Written work allows us to critically evaluate it over time, to explore its nuances and tease out its complexities. This is a great strength. However, writing is, of itself, highly abstract. It is significantly distanced from experience, particularly when compared to visual representation, such as photography. It is also worth noting that while the ambition of history is to construct a version of the past, this construction risks being flawed and limited. Historians place great emphasis on objective evidence, and on the archive in particular. Unfortunately, the archive can be corrupted. Just because a document is archived does not mean it is truthful. It is also quite possible that the archive is not comprehensive and is missing material. The recent work on sexual violence in the Holocaust is evidence of this. Archives are the creation of wealthy and the victorious. The vanquished, the marginalised and the impoverished are poorly represented. Further, in privileging documentary evidence it is possible for the historian to elide the individual experience which is the basis of all history.

Aligned with history, we have personal accounts of what happened, either in contemporaneous

diaries or in memoirs produced after the conclusion of events. There is a justifiable wariness among historians when faced with personal accounts. These can be incomplete because people forget or misremember, and they can be subject to self-censorship. There can be a reticence to report sexual assaults, for instance, to protect survivors or their families from further distress. Equally, memoirs can be self-serving, and gloss over items that show the author in a bad light. On the other hand, while they may be subject to the imperfections of human memory, Christopher Browning discusses a plausible system for evaluation of oral reports, as we shall discuss later, and we also saw the surprising accuracy in the recall of Marianne Ellenbogen, as recounted by Mark Rosen. What is certain is that contemporary diaries and survivor memoirs offer a view of events like no other, from within the maelstrom. They carry tremendous power for that reason.

For some, fictional renderings are an anathema; for others, they might be approached with a wariness. There is a fear that somehow fiction might falsify the experience, and it is true that there is be a danger of this. There are different ways that falsification occurs, depending on the work. For instance, if a memoir or history fabricates an event, then it falsifies that event. On the other hand, if a work obviously signals its intent to be a fiction, then it cannot falsify in that way. However, the danger is not in incongruous plot devices or in poorly contrived moments, but, more often, in the mischaracterisation of the dynamics between the Nazis and their victims. We can recall Richard Glazar's comments on Jean-Francois Steiner's *Treblinka*, for instance, where the novelist has a German guard offer his word of honour to the Jews. Or, we can equally recall Cynthia Ozick's critique of both William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, and Bernard Schlink's *The Reader*, where, in Styron's case he seeks to undermine the nature of the Holocaust as a Jewish experience, and in Schlink's case, he creates a sort of accidental Nazi, and an accidental atrocity, and so mitigate responsibility.

However, there are fictional works from within the world of the Holocaust where the author has chosen fiction as his preferred mode of bearing witness. Tadeusz Borowski brings us closer to the reality of the ramp at Auschwitz than any history book has ever done. The works of Ka-Tzetnik 135633 bring us into a foul and sordid world. His work prompts us to remember that the Holocaust

was not only about murder and death, but also about abuse in all its forms: physical, sexual and emotional. These works, though fictional, carry a ghastly ring of authenticity about that world, even if the specific details are created in the imagination. Similar issues arise when we consider cinematic representations. The same risks of falsifying occur balanced with similar opportunities to offer a visceral sense of what occurred. Movies like *Son of Saul* and *The Grey Zone* bravely enter into the crematoria buildings and attempt to give us a sense of what this process of mass murder looked like. Others, as we saw in the case of *Schindler's List*, can inadvertently falsify or create a false impression of Auschwitz as a space where rescue was possible, rather than being an extreme rarity. Against this, *Schindler's List* is unflinching in its portrayal of the Krakow ghetto clearance, and its depiction of Amon Goeth and his savagery is nuanced and complex. Still other films have taken a different perspective, and the celebration of the lost way of life in *Train of Life* makes that film all the more poignant, a quality that Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* pursues rather too obviously.

However, all of these representations, whether factual or fictional in ambition, have a common characteristic in that they are planned and structured towards a resolution that resolves the tensions in the narrative. The history, the memoir, the novel or movie all need an ending, a point where the print meets the back cover, as it were. It is not enough that the author simply stops writing in mid-sentence, as is often the case in real life, where death leaves much incomplete. So each of these works closes a circle in some form, and to do this, they write themselves towards a conclusion. History, on the other hand, never concludes. It is always unfolding. Even if we can say that the Holocaust concluded, that does not mean that stories of the survivors did, and in fact, in some ways, for some of them, the hell continued in new forms of suffering.

Of all the formats discussed, photography seems at first glance the least governed by narrative, and equally, seems to offer an unmediated access to the world of the Holocaust. By turning the viewer into a witness, it seems to offer the most authentic sense of the lived experience. However, as we saw, reading a photograph is a learned skill, and as open to misreading as any other. The viewing experience is heavily influenced by context, because photographs are polysemous. Contrasting the

photographs of Henry Ross and Mendel Grossman, taken within the Lodz ghetto, with the images carefully curated by Walter Genewin, demonstrates that while photographs may not lie, photographers might, and it is arguable that Genewin does by omission. That said, images are deeply evocative and provoke identification with the other. Deployed carefully, they can be very powerful. At Birkenau, the dialogue between the photographs and the place where they are now displayed (which is also the place they were taken), offers a real richness to both location and photograph, and recalls the absent victims to mind. However, we have no photographs from within the crematoria, and for an understanding of what that experience looked like we need to see the works of artists that were there. In David Olére's drawings and paintings, completed after the war, we find works that are analogous to survivor memoirs, in fact, it could be argued that these works are his memoir of his time at Birkenau. His images amplify and corroborate other descriptions of the process of selection, murder and incineration. They are immensely powerful, and at times offer an inescapable rendering of the horror. However, in a most obvious way, his images demonstrate Zelizer's comment that representations overstate some aspects and understate others. He plays with perspective. His Nazi guards are hard lines and angles, his piteous victims are rendered in softer curves and he does not limit himself to realism in rendering his version of the horror.

All of these considerations take place against ongoing debates about the propriety of representing the Holocaust at all. It must be said that those who would limit the discussion are driven by the best of motives: to protect the memory of those who died from exploitation and prurience. While it is true that the Holocaust is shocking in the depth of its depravity; appalling in its lethality; and utterly disturbing in its relentlessness, we must be wary of a rhetoric of the unspeakable. If the Holocaust may not be spoken about then we are designating as beyond human. However, this cannot be as the project was conceived, organised and executed by humans, and if we situate it as somehow beyond human capacity, then we also remove it from the moral sphere.

Taking all of this into account, where are we to look for an authentic representation of the lived experience of the Holocaust? Is one even possible? The simple answer is to say, no it is not

possible, that there are too many imperfections in our constructions of the past, and too many limitations in our ability to represent anything, especially events and incidents as extreme as the depravity that the Holocaust offers us. Even if we do come upon such a representation, how could we trust that it is authentic? The truth is that we cannot be sure if a representation is authentic, but that is not to say that it is not possible.

If Derrida's understanding of text, and Zelizer's ideas on representation, underpin this thesis, then one phenomenon stands out as offering a possible resolution for this problem of representation. Everywhere, through each chapter, we have seen how nothing stands alone, but is part of at least one, but in fact, probably a multitude, of contexts. Context radically affects meaning. Context can stabilise it, or equally, it can destabilise it. It was noted in the introduction how the Holocaust haunts the European mind, but if it does, it does so in the context of the Enlightenment. Those values that exalt human rationality over base instinct, and the belief in progress towards a better sense of our humanity are shaken to the core in the context of men shooting infants and children and gassing mothers and fathers with industrial intensity. That the Germany of the time was the country least exposed to Enlightenment values offers another reading, another context. That the Germany of today is partnered with many of the countries it once invaded, pillaged and destroyed, offers another context for viewing the European Union. We have seen how context informs and adds nuance to everything from a photograph to the very concept of authenticity itself.

When discussing texts, Derrida finds that objectivity is possible 'within a context which is extremely vast, old powerfully established, stabilized or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance, those of language), and yet which still remains a context' (Derrida, 1988, p. 136). He cites scientific objectivity as an example. We can trust it because the scientific method is solidly established, and is governed by widely accepted conventions that encourage challenging hypotheses rather than accepting any one version of anything. This context of science offers us, if not absolute certainty, then at least something in which we can have confidence. So, with astronomy, we have a working understanding of the solar system and the earth's relationship to the sun, and so we have a

confidence in predicting where the sun will rise tomorrow, even if we are not absolutely certain.

In chapter three, Christopher Browning's workflow for his history of the Starachowice factory slave-labour camp was discussed. As there is virtually no documentary or archival evidence surviving of this camp, he needed to work with oral testimony. To find a way of doing so with confidence, he developed a context. He gathered 292 eyewitness accounts, and, considering them in aggregate, as it were, he then had a baseline he could use to test individual accounts. In other words, he created a context that gave him confidence when assessing individual accounts. Again, he was not granted certainty, but confidence through his methodology.

From this we can see something of a way forward. Given that there are different experiences of authenticity, and even that a person's sense of what is authentic can change with learning, we need to accept that there is a core uncertainty at the heart of our notion of what is authentic. Given too, that there are limitations to our representations, as well as in our ability to make them, then, equally we need to accept there is a core uncertainty here also. However, the absence of certainty is not the absence of possibility, and it seems that we might construct a context for experiencing and assessing representations of the Holocaust, and do it in similar ways. Research, obviously, is the key. Reading first hand testimony is most important. Background reading, from historians and thinkers of repute offers further consolidation, and eventually builds a web of intersecting representations that cross reference each other and become a system of checks and balances which can be operative for any one version. No two versions will be exactly the same. Each point of view is different, but there should be a sufficient range of common experiences described to allow us develop a confidence, if not a certainty, that this is an authentic representation of what happened. Further we need to accept that, as we read and learn more, our criteria for authenticity will become more stringent. So the context of our researches will impact the context of authenticity, and it is reflexive. As our criteria for authenticity develop, we will re-assess works that might once have carried a veneer that is no longer convincing. Most importantly, we need to recall the limitations of representation and remember that that no representation can match experience. Those of us who were not there do not get to say 'this

is what it felt like'. That is only in the unfortunate gift of the survivors. What we can say is 'this is what those who were there report it felt like, and I have confidence in their report'.

In her introduction to Bernd Naumann's *Auschwitz: A Report on the Proceedings Against Robert Karl Ludwig Mulka and Others before the Court at Frankfurt*, Hannah Arendt writes that the truth of Auschwitz could not be found in the court proceedings, as there is no general idea of truth that can possibly contain 'the chaotic flood of senseless atrocities' (Arendt, 1966 p. xxix) that occurred there. 'Instead of the truth, however, the reader will find moments of truth', she wrote, 'and these moments are actually the only means of articulating this chaos of viciousness and evil' (Arendt, 1966 p. xxix). This idea of moments of truth is used by Susie Linfield to characterise the *Sonderkommando* photographs: 'flashes—quick, incomplete illuminations—of a larger actuality. They are fleeting, fragmented, maddeningly incomplete' (Linfield, 2010, p. 90), and perhaps these moments of truth can characterise all these works that bear witness. They cannot bring us there, but sometimes they open a door very briefly, and we get some insight, however fragmentary, into what happened and what it was like to be there.

If we go further, if we try to imagine what is was actually like to be there, then we risk the embellishments of our own imagination. The gate building at Birkenau is nothing if not iconic, with its maw of an arch that swallowed up hundreds of thousands, and its viewing tower that oversaw everything. In actuality it is both smaller and less imposing than might be expected. The opening, which so often looks like an entrance to Hades in photographs, to the visitor resembles nothing so much as a redbrick archway. Similarly, Rudolph Vrba, while a prisoner at Auschwitz, was part of a prisoner guard-of-honour that was inspected by Himmler when he visited the camp. To him, Himmler was 'an all-powerful ogre in our minds, an angry, ugly, bogey man who would grind our bones' (Vrba and Bestic, 1964, p. 7). However, as Himmler passed by, what Vrba observed was a man with a pale, flaccid face, his expression that was tolerant and condescending, slightly bored and slightly amused. His rimless glasses glinted in the sunshine. His uniform, unlike all the others, did not seem to fit very well; and I thought: 'This man is no monster. He's more like a school teacher. An ordinary,

run-of-the-mill school teacher!' (Vrba and Bestic, 1964, pp.7-8).

Christopher Browning found only ordinary men among the mass murderers of Police Battalion 101. The Holocaust had millions of victims, but it also had tens of thousands of perpetrators, enablers and bystanders. Our imagination risks building monsters of the worst of them, but monsters are not human. Almost all of them were ordinary people, most were very ordinary indeed. Their evil was a very ordinary evil.

As the numbers killed are truly shocking, it is easy to forget sometimes that the Holocaust is not evil because some six million people died; it is evil because one person died. That single death is enough to meet the necessary and sufficient conditions for the definition of evil, offered by Claudia Card, and adopted in chapter one, as a harm that is culpably inflicted and can be foreseen to deprive another of the basics that make life possible, tolerable and decent. If we fail to see that, if we become blinded by the volume of deaths, then we miss the simple evil of the atrocity. It is always about the individual, six million times over. This does not deny the truly shocking number of people who died, in fact, more than anything else, it anchors that number in individual experience.

However, humans abstract and generalise. We cannot remember every tree so we invent the concept of forests. There are so many dead, and they died is such terrible ways, and over such a long period of time, that it is inevitable that we lose sight of their individuality and the specific occasions of their murders. Among the millions who perished were the famous and nameless, paragons of virtue and terrible sinners, tall and short, healthy and frail, children, women, and men of all abilities and limitations. They were shot, gassed, suffocated, hanged, strangled, thrown alive into fires, had their heads smashed in with iron bars, had their skulls dashed against walls, starved, allowed succumb to disease, and were worked to death; in short they died by just about any means that humanity at its most despicable could devise or improvise. That forest of death we call mass murder or genocide. Unfortunately, as we abstract from the individual we risk losing sight of the singularity of their experience. A genocide begins with one person dying. Then another, and another and another after that. This is the ultimate truth of the Holocaust. This is why this thesis charts a search for a valid

representation of the individual experience, the lived experience of the Holocaust. Our memory of the event needs to be as true as possible to the individual experience because that is the reality of it all.

In his essay *From the House of the Dead: An Essay on Modern European Memory*, (2005) the late Tony Judt comments on our peculiar relationship with the past:

> The first post-war Europe was built upon deliberate mismemory—upon forgetting as a way of life. Since 1989, Europe has been constructed instead upon a compensatory surplus of memory: institutionalised public remembering as the very foundation of collective identity. (Judt, 2005, p. 829)

After the Nuremberg trials, Europe set about rebuilding itself, and to do that required a period of forgetting. The memory of the Holocaust and the many other atrocities committed by German forces during the war needed to be neglected for a while. It also involved forgetting some of what the Allied forces did too, of course, including the deliberate targeting of civilians in area bombing campaigns, to say nothing of the appalling behaviour of the Soviet armies of occupation. The *Realpolitik* of the Cold War era demanded nothing less. However, with the ending of the Cold War, much has changed, and since unification, Germany has been at pains to accept responsibility for the actions of the Nazi state. The German language has two related words that closely approximate the English 'memorial'. They are *Denkmal* and *Mahnmal.* The difference between the two is subtle. K. Michael Prince explains that 'the German word for memorial, *Denkmal*, can be translated as, "to think a moment", to stop and ponder' (Prince, 2009, p. 42). Such monuments 'can be celebratory in character, glorifying a military exploit, honoring a scientific or artistic achievement or lionizing personal accomplishment' (Prince, 2009, p. 42). However, there are other things that need to be recalled, things that are more shameful. These memorials are *Mahnmal* which:

> transmit the more forceful urgency of a warning, an admonition or an exhortation. Unlike the *Denkmal*, which simply asks us to stop a moment to ponder and recall, the *Mahnmal* is the dark siren of memorial culture, the Cassandra of historical memory. It does not request or solicit. It beseeches and entreats, it pleads and implores, it may

even demand, charging us, the living, with a mission to avoid the errors of the past. It aims less to inform than to offer up a secular sermonette. (Prince, 2009, p. 42)

Even as Germany was rebuilding the old *Reichstag* building, and moving the capital from Bonn to Berlin, both hugely significant and symbolic gestures, it was also concerned with marking the dark side of the German legacy. It commissioned and built a huge 20,000 square metre *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, a kilometre from the *Reichstag*. Germany is, by far, the largest donor to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, which funds the museum and memorial there, among other works. Many concentration camp sites in Germany are preserved, such as at Dachau, and German school children cover this period of history three times in the course of their primary and secondary education. At some point almost every schoolchild in Germany visits a Holocaust *Mahnmal*. 'Only after Germans had appreciated and digested the enormity of their Nazi past—a sixty-year cycle of denial, education, debate and consensus could they begin to live with it' (Judt, 2005, p. 830), writes Judt, and he points out that similar processes have taken place, or are taking place, in countries like France, Poland and Romania. He also points to a significant achievement: 'the rigorous investigation and interrogation of Europe's competing pasts—and the place occupied by those pasts in Europeans' collective sense of themselves—has been one of the unsung achievements and sources of European unity in recent decades' (Judt, 2005, p. 830). However, he rightly finishes on a warning note: 'if Europe's past is to continue to furnish Europe's present with admonitory meaning and moral purpose—then it will have to be taught *afresh* with each passing generation (Judt, 2005, p. 831) *[emphasis in original].* The work of investigating the Holocaust will never be over.

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