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Visualising the Holocaust

Abstract

In this text, I wish to explore the relationship between trauma and representation, which would serve as a theoretical framework for my research on the Roma Holocaust and its visual representation. First, I attempt to understand the concept of trauma starting from a rather psychoanalytic perspective and then shifting towards historiography. Then, I aim to conceptualise the Holocaust as a traumatic event within the context of representation and think about the ways in which the experience of the Holocaust was understood, thought, reflected or visualised in art. I argue that art, or representation in general, is an „outer dimension of memory”; a tool for the working-through of a trauma; a possibility for a new rhetoric that provides a better understanding of our past, present and our future.

“They also killed the Jews everywhere” says Rudolf Krasznai of Roma origin, born in Pécs, Hungary in 1927.¹ Krasznai, together with the other Roma in the area, were collected in the beginning of the 1940s by the gendarmerie and transported by train to a ghetto at Pélportpuszta. Following a few month of forced labour, they were taken on freight trains to a lager close to Linz. “They had taken fifteen or twenty people to dig the pit, the others encircled them”, Krasznai continues.

“And then they were shot in the head with machine-guns, they fell in the pit. I only saw dead bodies, they poured lime on them, the cart went, they put soil on it, and good-bye! I saw it in Dachau in forty-five. By then the camp was closed down, we were taken there to work. We buried people. Shovel and spade in our hands and we buried them. We were there for three or four days, we covered the body, that’s it. With shovel and spade. We pushed soil on them. That was it. Hey, my God, it is no use speaking about it. It was miserable. Miserable.”

“I [only] saw [...]” and in Krasznai’s testimony ‘seeing’ seems to be a self-evident and banal act of communication in the silence that was imposed by isolation. Also, in order to remember he has to ‘animate’ the past and compress it into images such as the “dead bodies”, the “lime”, the “cart” or the “entombment”. The art of seeing, argue Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in their book *Testimony*², is strongly related to the experience of witnessing in the Western world. In order to gain an objective knowledge in historiography on a certain event one shall occupy the cognitive position of seeing which then becomes the source of historical realism. Seeing since the Enlightenment, as a precondition of knowledge evokes truth and authenticity³ on the one hand, on the other implies the agency of the ‘I’. It suggests the possibility and necessity of seeing and the framing and transmission of the visual elements into under-

1 Gábor Bernáth (ed.), *Porrajmos. Roma holokauszt túlélők emlékeznek* [Roma Holocaust Survivors Remember], Budapest 2000, 99.

2 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony. Crisis of Witnessing. Literature, Psychoanalysis, Witnessing*, New York 1992.

3 Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind. How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, Chicago 2005, 164.

standing. However in the case of the Holocaust, as Felman and Laub write, the tension lies between witnessing that is “central to the Holocaust experience” and that the Holocaust is “an event without a witness” since there was “historically no witness to the Holocaust, either from outside or from inside the event”.⁴ They argue that the Holocaust was a historical assault of seeing:⁵ the main actors of the events – the victims, the bystanders and the perpetrators – either did not see or failed to witness, understand.⁶ The Jews saw but did not understand what they saw, the bystanders saw but did not look directly, while the perpetrators saw everything and made everything essentially invisible in order not to be seen.

As Laub and Felman explain:

“To make the Jews invisible not merely by killing them, not merely by confining them to ‘camouflaged’, invisible death camps, but by reducing even the materiality of the dead bodies to smoke and ashes, and by reducing, furthermore, the radical opacity of the *sight* of the dead bodies, as well as the linguistic referentiality and literality of the *word* ‘corpse’ to the transparency of a pure form and to the pure rhetorical metaphoricity of a mere figure: a disembodied verbal substitute which signifies abstractly the linguistic law of infinite exchangeability and substitutability. The dead bodies are thus verbally rendered invisible, and voided both of substance and specificity, by being treated, in the Nazi jargon, as *Figuren*: that which, all at once, *cannot be seen* and can be *seen through*.”⁷

Without the possibility of seeing, or as a result of that ‘seeing’ and ‘understanding’ were drifted apart, Laub claims the impossibility of bearing witness ‘from inside’ due to the absolute dehumanising and destructive power of the Nazi regime which did not offer any frame of reference to step outside and understand what is happening on the “planet of Auschwitz”⁸. Thus, for the dehumanised creature the result of both the impossibility of escaping from the “inside” and the lack of attention, recognition on behalf of the outside (bystanders or the outside world who overlooked or failed to see) “extinguished [philosophically] the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or of turning to, another”⁹, hence to bear witness. This creates for the Holocaust a paradoxical situation in history claiming that it is an absolute historical event “whose literally overwhelming evidence makes it into an utterly proofless event”¹⁰.

In his book, *Remnants of Auschwitz*¹¹ Giorgio Agamben develops a very similar argument on the ‘authentic’ or ‘real’ witness. He points out the paradox in witnessing emphasising that those who saw the ‘fatal secret’¹², in other words, witnessed the crematorium ‘from inside’ are dead, however they are the real witnesses of Auschwitz.¹³ The survivor’s testimony is neither authentic, nor complete but only mediated since

4 Ibid., 80-81.

5 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 209.

6 Ibid., 208.

7 Ibid., 201.

8 Dinoor/K-Zetnik’s term see in Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious. Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge 2002, 125.

9 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 82.

10 Ibid., 211.

11 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, New York 2002.

12 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 228.

13 Similarly: Agnes Heller, Hungarian philosopher, says the same in a video used for the RESCAPE project (2010–2011, initiated by Voices of the 20th Century Archive at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology; financed by EACEA ‘Europe for Citizens Program’). The project focuses on the period 1938–1956 and has two equally important parts: *Return* project is about homecoming whereas *Escape* documents the stories of survivors who escaped from regimes of oppression in Hungary. Agnes Heller’s testimony belongs to the second project. http://www.20szazadhangja.hu/heller_agnes (00:01 - 01:14).

“testimony contains a lacuna [...] and the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its centre it contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors with authority”.¹⁴ Agamben then however claims that on the basis of the “impossibility of speaking” there is a possibility of testimony to bear witness. In the case of the Muselmann, the figure on the threshold between life and dead, “there can be testimony because there is an inseparable division and non-coincidence between inhuman and human, the living being and the speaking being, the Muselmann and the survivor”.¹⁵ The Muselmann, according to Agamben’s interpretation, which is primarily based on Primo Levi’s understanding, are the remnants of Auschwitz, hence the true witnesses of the camp which cannot speak and whose testimonies are mediated by the ‘incomplete’ survivors.

In Agamben’s work there is not much about seeing but instead, he shifts the emphasis from the art of seeing to the act of speaking that appears as a ‘test’ of being or remaining human. Speaking is a triumph in a sense that the human overcomes the inhuman by appropriating language with the usage of linguistic signs, such as ‘I’ and ‘you’. Laub introduces the very same idea by filling the gap of ‘you’ with the role of the “responsive”, “attentive” and “unobtrusively present”¹⁶ of the listener that is the psychoanalyst. The necessity of a ‘you’ to enable the victim to overcome the traumatic muteness, to speak as well as to restore the victim’s humanity is, as Laub argues, “another mode of struggle against the victim’s entrapment in trauma repetition, against their enslavement to the fate of their victimization”.¹⁷ Since victims of traumatic events fail to integrate past experiences into their memories, which, consequently, continue to haunt them in the present, the present becomes for the victims nothing else but the persistent re-living of the past. Laub claims that the therapeutic conditions – identifying the analyst as a listener who carefully, and with empathy, follows the victim’s narration and might as well become a partner in this ‘journey’ – have a healing effect and might bring about the possibility of rescuing traumatic past experiences being entrapped in the present. The act of speaking in therapy, hence the narration of one’s life history under ‘sterile’ circumstances, whose life bore witness to a trauma, might help reconstruct history and re-externalise the event, in other words, emplot one’s own narrative into a coherent story in which traumatic disruptions become integral, nonetheless formative experiences of the past.¹⁸

Regarding the historical validity of the testimony Laub confronts with the historians and suggests that despite historical inaccuracies one’s personal account on the past provides a more nuanced, additional knowledge. To support his argument, his well-known example is taken from the *Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies* which he launched in 1979 at Yale University’s Department of Manuscripts and Archives, and which has now over 4,400 videotaped interviews with witnesses and survivors of the Holocaust. Laub cites a woman’s testimony in which she talks about being witnessed to a failed attempt to resist the Nazis in Auschwitz in October, 1944: “All of a sudden, we saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky, people were running. It was unbelievable.”¹⁹ While historians discredited her testimony due to her limited knowledge on the fact that only one

¹⁴ Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 33-34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁸ Tihamér Bakó, *Sorstörés. A trauma lélektana egy pszichoterapeuta szemszögéből* [Breaking Fate. The Psychology of Trauma Seen by a Psychotherapist], Budapest 2009.

¹⁹ Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 59.

chimney blew up in Auschwitz during the uprising of the Canada Commando in the end of 1944, Laub unfolded a different kind of truth²⁰ in her narration saying that “[T]he woman was testifying, not to the umber of the chimney blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four. The number mattered less than the fact of the occurrence. The event itself was almost inconceivable. The woman testified to an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth.”²¹

Laub’s approach to survivor testimonies was not paradigmatic but instead was a representative example of “the era of the witness”²², as Wieviorka names the time period from the end of the 1970s. Then a ‘frenzy’ started for life stories which on the one hand were standardised along the line of moral and political responsibility, on the other, rendered exclusive significance to the victims and their testimonies. Hence the legitimate speaker of a true and authentic account on the past, which was once the eyewitness, now became the traumatised victim.²³ By the same token the status of witnessing was delegated to the listener, let it be the psychoanalyst, the interviewer or the historian who from outside interpreted what was told and testified for the past.²⁴

Without diminishing the benefits of psychoanalytic reconstruction of traumatic past experiences I would argue that the shifting emphasis from the role of the eyewitness to the position of the victim has an effect not only on the witness but also on the ‘eye’, more precisely and literally, it takes the credit from it. And here I do not mean to play an arbitrary game with the words. The Holocaust, as Laub argues was an “unimaginable occurrence”, that is to say that it was a set of events which cannot be framed in images, which cannot be visualised in a true and authentic way, and hence it cannot be known and remembered properly. Thus positioning the victim’s, instead of the eyewitness’, testimony, as a privileged form of memory, denotes a shift from imagination, or imaginative representation to the historical. It deprives ‘seeing’ from ‘truth’, ‘authenticity’ or ‘agency’ and considers ‘the eye’ only as a vehicle of language and gestures to formulate historical knowledge.

What is happening is that the eye is distinguished from vision, since under the pressure of traumatic experiences, as we have seen the case of the woman and the

20 Laub’s approach is similar to what the psychoanalyst Donald Spencer calls narrative truth as opposed to historical truth. Discusses for example in Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *The Witness in the Archive: Holocaust Studies/Memory Studies*, *Memory Studies* 2 (2009), 151-170.

21 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 60.

22 Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, Ithaca and London 2006.

23 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, Philadelphia 2010; see an astute summary on present day memory politics in Hungarian: Máté Zombory, *Határtalan emlékezés [Borderless Memory]*, in: *Café Babel* 66 (2012), in English: Máté Zombory, *Memory as spatial localization*. (paper presented at the *Genealogies of Memory* conference, Warsaw, Poland, 23-25 November, 2011).

24 In an essay by Didier Fassin he aims to provide a typology, based on etymology, of the witness. His case study focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The word ‘witness’ evolved from the words *testis* (‘third party’); *superstes* (‘lives on beyond’); *arbitrator* (who sees without been seen); *martyr* (‘the sacrifice of his life bears witness’). This semantic richness of the word ‘witness’ allows instances of power to either produce the ‘sufferer’ or the ‘victim’. In the case of the sufferer the only possibility to get recognition of past experiences works through the testimony of trauma, in other words through giving voice to his/her sufferings. In the case of the victim, power produces subjectivities which lack autonomy, which are exposed to the judgement of power (and then, for example, humanitarian organizations speak testify in the name of the so-called victims). As a matter of fact the witness is not only a rhetorical figure but a political subject whose subjectivity shows that testimony is defined by structural ambiguities stemming from the variety of its meanings. We are living in a regime of witnessing and in order to become a witness one shall prescribe herself/himself in a codified tradition that lays down the rules of what and how to say as well as the aftermath of the testimony, such as the ways in it becomes archived, interpreted, published. (Didier Fassin, *The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, in: *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (2008), 531-558.)

four chimneys; it often leads to ‘false’, ‘inauthentic’ witnessing.²⁵ Thus testimony becomes the representation of the traumas of the Holocaust, the nonfictional genre, which is considered as historical truth, and furthermore, as Dominick LaCapra argues, in cases it is equated with history. LaCapra does not diminish the importance of testimony which is “crucial as a way in which an intimidated or otherwise withdrawn victim of trauma may overcome being overwhelmed by numbness and passivity, reengage in social practice, and acquire a voice”²⁶ but warns us not to equate testimony with history, neither agency with witnessing.

In this chapter I follow LaCapra’s admonition and explore the relationship between trauma and representation in order to provide a theoretical framework for my further analysis. First, I attempt to understand the concept of trauma starting from a rather psychoanalytic perspective and then shifting towards historiography. Then, I aim to conceptualise the Holocaust as a traumatic event within the context of representation and think about the ways in which the experience of the Holocaust was understood, thought, reflected or visualised in art. I argue that art, or representation in general, is an ‘outer dimension of memory’; a tool for the working-through of a trauma; a possibility for a new rhetoric that provides a better understanding of our past, present and our future.

Trauma and representation

Cathy Caruth begins with the story of Clorinda and Tancred in her book on trauma theory.²⁷ The Italian romantic poet, Torquato Tasso published in 1581 his epic titled *Jerusalem Delivered*, which is a story about the First Crusade and how the Christian knights battle against the Muslims and try to win back Jerusalem from them. Tancred, a Christian knight falls in love with Clorinda a warrior-maiden who is on the side of the Muslims. After Clorinda set the Christian siege tower into fire they come across each other behind the veil of night. Since both of them are in armour they fail to recognise (do not see) each other and start a fight in which Tancred kills Clorinda by mistake. In her last will the dying woman asks the knight to baptise her. Tancred removes the helmet and identifies under it his love. Following the burial Tancred rushes into a forest, grabs his sword and slashes it at a tree; “but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again”²⁸ – writes Tasso, quoted by Cathy Caruth, literary theorist, in her book *Unclaimed Experience*. Caruth opens her book and begins to think about trauma with Tancred’s story and follows Freud’s interpretation, which places repetition – that is the repeated infliction of pain on Clorinda – in the heart of trauma. However Caruth’s analysis draws attention not only to the traumatic experience and its unwished-for repetition but also to the phenomenon of the voice. Caruth argues that the traumatic event, when he killed his love by chance, happened too unexpectedly and too painfully for him that he could not integrate it into his past, hence Tancred becomes aware of his deed only the second wounding, in the forest.

25 Ernst van Alphen discusses this separation. Contemporary visual artists, let them be second or third generation survivors or of no background like this do come up with alternative ways of representation however ‘authenticity’ does not apply to them at all. Still in order not to surrender the visual domain van Alphen suggests to distinguish vision from its vehicle, the eye in other words, to privilege the visual medium and analyse what vision does, achieves in the context of the Holocaust. See: van Alphen, *Art in Mind*.

26 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, New York 1998, 12.

27 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History*, Baltimore 1996.

28 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2.

As a matter of the delayed understanding of what happened, Caruth's key concepts are 'belatedness' and 'inaccessibility' suggesting that traumatic events resist immediate comprehension²⁹, are always followed by *latency* and then the 'voice cried out of the wound'. The latter means that the victim of trauma cannot process and represent the event but performs, re-experiences it in the flashback that repeats the trauma in its literalness and immediacy. She supports her argument on unrepresentability with ideas taken from neuroscience, drawing on the American physician Bessel van der Kolk's³⁰ theory. Van der Kolk argues that the traumatic event is registered in the brain at its occurrence and then it later becomes and image on the right side of the brain, which resists to symbolization, representation. It cannot be read only belatedly not because of repression but because it is dissociated from the language centres on the left. Hence due to the temporary malfunctioning of consciousness and memory, instead of representation, the literal coding of the event takes place – the image gets imprinted into one's mind literally, which is by neuroscientific definition, unrepresentable but which comes back and haunts the victim via flashbacks. Flashbacks "suggest that [trauma] cannot be thought simply as a representation", it is perceived by Caruth as "a 'walking' rather than a 'seeing'"³¹. Traumatic experience stands outside of representation and since its transmission happens mimetically to the next generation the best it can be approached as a performative act of language, of voice.

Historian and trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra however discounts the deconstructive reading of Caruth's trauma theory, which says that trauma, as LaCapra argues "can only be represented or addressed indirectly in figurative or allegorical terms that necessarily distort or betray it".³² In the meanwhile LaCapra works on a set of criteria in order to conceptualise and evaluate the relationship between history and psychoanalysis avoiding the concepts such as deconstruction, pathologisation or redemption but linking the inquiry to ethical-political concerns. He makes a distinction between historical and structural trauma – which is considered by both Laub and Caruth as reciprocal – and means by structural general anxiety-producing conditions of humanity like mortality, while historical trauma is a historically and morally specific punctual event, such as the Holocaust. Historical trauma causes a rupture in memory, LaCapra calls it primary memory, thus the traumatic experience fails to integrate into the past and be directly remembered. Due to the lack of understanding on what happened, the only tool the victim has is to relive, re-experience the event, and later as a result of a critical work on primary memory, with the help of secondary memory, the event can be worked-through and inserted into one's life story.

As a matter of fact there could be three possible reactions given to trauma. There is the strategy of denial, mostly applied in the case of redemptive narrative, in which the victim excludes trauma and aims to avoid an "explicit encounter with normative problems and to restrict historical discourse to seemingly empirical and analytical uses of language".³³ The other two strategies focus on understanding the ways in which one *remembers* the traumatic event: LaCapra borrows the concepts of 'work-

29 Since full assimilation and comprehension is impossible trauma reveals not so much an empirical but an ethical relation to the real. Trauma, in Caruth's understanding, is non-referential, as a matter of fact, non-historical. Ethical relation imply the way to listen to the other, however she does not dwell into this argument.

30 Bessel A. van der Kolk and Alexander C. McFarlane and Lars Weisaeth, *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, New York 1996.

31 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 115.

32 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore 2001, 107.

33 *Ibid.*, 193.

ing-through' and 'acting-out' from psychoanalysis and makes them readable for historical studies. In the aftermath of the traumatic event, there is melancholia that is an isolating experience in which the traumatised self is locked in and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object.

More precisely, LaCapra differentiates between loss and absence and relates absence – a mimetic relation to the past, which is relived as if it was fully present which means to consider the past as if it was fully present – to the state of acting-out. Acting-out is a necessary precondition of processing and dealing with the past for those who underwent trauma. It is related to repetition or to repetitive-compulsion, which means the repetitive reliving or re-experiencing past occurrences, which might appear in 'flashbacks', as Caruth discussed it earlier. Acting-out might be countervailed by the force of working-through, however, as all binary oppositions are discouraged so is the relation between the two defined as in close proximity with each other. Melancholia can be followed by mourning, "where grief is repeated in reduced, normatively controlled and socially supported form".³⁴ Working through conveys the possibility to engage in trauma, hence the victim aims to take a critically distance on the problems; to recognise the difference between past and present and to deprive past experiences from the dominating the present. Achieving a distance and setting oneself free from the tendency to be fixated on the past as well as to be drawn back by flashbacks and nightmares implies the process of renewing one's life in the present and find harmony, hence the ability to reconstitute agency.

However, as historian Gábor Gyáni notes, LaCapra does not imply that working-through can be fully accomplished and it might not be a desired achievement for neither the survivors, nor their descendants. Otherwise such a detachment from a past experience would distort the meaning of the past, regard it as complete, total, banal or harmonic.³⁵ Additionally, not only the individual but also the community has responsibility and work to do via social practices an rituals which generate normative limits in order to, as Eric Santner writes not to "expunge the traces of trauma"³⁶, but to integrate into one's life story. Following Gyáni's line of thinking what is interesting here is that it seems like even though LaCapra and the others are engaged in challenging the concept of trauma, memory-compulsion still celebrates its victory over working-through. Hence trauma is inflicted upon the concept of working-through as if it was worth preserving at all costs. What strikes me in this is the question whether there is any kind of meaning of trauma, which could be distorted in the process of working through? What happens with the trauma when it enters the sphere of memory-work? How can this transformation be grasped? What is gained and what is lost in this translation? I argue that one among the dynamic social spaces in which grief- and memory-work can be effectively practiced is: art. Further, the history of the Holocaust representations provides a perspective, which might tell us more about the trauma, about its changing significance and its traces in memory, if at all.

In order to understand the role of art in relation to trauma I would suggest to go back to LaCapra. He argues back in 1994 that the Holocaust itself is an already canonised historical event that is to say that there exists an already established know-

34 LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust*, 199.

35 Gábor Gyáni, *Trauma, emlékezet, kultusz* [Trauma, Memory, Cult], in: *Élet és Irodalom* [Life and Literature], 13.11.2006.

36 Eric Santner, *History beyond the Pleasure Principle. Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma*, in: Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, Cambridge 1992, 143-155.

ledge which fuels as well as creates a frame of reference for historical and imaginative discourses. Canonisation, in this respect especially, covers all the wounds and pains the event might have been caused and creates an impression that nothing subversive or disturbing happened. However LaCapra proposes to the historians to re-think some of the texts that are chosen to be canonised as well as those which were marginalised in order to challenge the well-established knowledge on the past as well as engage in a critical dialogue with the present. A text is only considered as historical if it has a “never-to-be-fixated limit of contextualisation”.³⁷ Re-contextualization shall not be considered as the production of simple replicas or derivative items but as the creation of necessary, valuable reflections. Reflections fuel a critical work on the past in order to re-enact and not to repeat it as well as to open towards the future and engage in new imaginative and historical possibilities. Amy Hungerford in her book entitled the *The Holocaust of Texts* however vehemently opposes the possibility to rethink texts and channel or transmission their ‘new’ understandings into imaginative and historical representations. She is especially against the personification of the Holocaust and regards it as an arbitrary game of the “fantasy that we can really have another’s experience that we can become someone else”.³⁸ Similarly, Gary Weissman identifies the institutionalisation of the Holocaust in the “fantasy of witnessing”.³⁹ Both of them claim that one shall establish an objective and nonsentimental relationship towards the Holocaust, which sets aside transfiguration or any kind of artistic and literary representation. Gabriele Schwab on the other hand dwells into linguistics and argues that symbolism or anthropomorphism is a basic operation of language, all the more transfiguration – personalisation or anthropomorphic representation – is necessary in order to empathise as well as emotionally relate to the other person, hence to get engaged in the working-through process. As a matter of fact, art, as LaCapra argues, is considered – similarly to the historians’ work of re-thinking canons – as a possible tool to establish a stimulating relation to the past.

Similar consequence is drawn by the historian Saul Friedlander. His starting point is a differentiation between deep memory and common memory, two terms taken from Charlette Delbo.⁴⁰ Deep memory is meant to be an event, which remains an unsettled trauma and can hardly be integrated into one’s past, while common memory takes its place in the chronology of events. Friedlander’s challenge is to establish a historiography, which permits the integration of both types of memories in the historical narrative. He requires the self-awareness of the historian, in the form of the commentary, which “should disrupt the facile linear progression of the narration, introduce alternative interpretations, question any partial conclusion, withstand the need for closure”.⁴¹ He calls it as the working-through process of the historians who deal with the traumatic past. The process is primarily an imperative to work not only with documents, facts and figure but also with testimonies and personal accounts and secondarily working-through means an awareness to find a fragile balance between silence and disruptive emotions, that is to say to avoid on the one hand full objectivity and neutrality and on the other hand a full identification with the victims which might transform the researcher into a “surrogate victim”.⁴²

37 Ibid., 35.

38 Quoted by Gabriele Schwab, *Haunting Legacies. Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*, New York 2010, 16.

39 Ibid., 19.

40 The term appears in Charlotte Delbo’s *Auschwitz and After*, quoted by Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, Bloomington and Indianapolis 1993.

41 Friedlander, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, 132.

42 Ibid., 130-133.

This problematic balance brings up the question of transference that is in the psychoanalytic sense repetition, however when it comes to the role of the listener, researcher or of the historian it refers to a respectful and emphatic subject-position in relation to the victim. Hence the challenge for the historian is not to avoid engaging in a (possibly emotional) dialogue with the victims nonetheless – this would deny the possibility of positivism – and to articulate or reconstruct, without the hint of closure, a valid understanding of the past.

I would argue that the integration of deep memory into historiography invokes in Friedlander's work the need to think about the relation between memory, history and representation in the context of the Holocaust. He questions the literary representation which was born following the World War I, lived on after the World War II – this also suggests that there was no adequate artistic or literary response to the World War II – and has an ironic aesthetics, since the emerging literature (for example Aharon Appelfeld, Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski) could not speak with the same voice but aspired to tell their experiences in a profoundly didactic way. He believes that the ironic mode undermines all the meanings and “creates a major obstacle to the representation of the Shoah” as well as “accentuate the dilemmas”. Friedlander cries for a new aesthetics, which respects remembering-compulsion and avoids the transgression of meanings. He might also suggest that the representation of the Holocaust on the basis of “the new aesthetics” would powerfully and effectively contribute to collectively deal with the trauma. Hence it would provide a solid frame of reference for the “collective self-perception of the groups directly involved” as well as play a primary role in the elaboration of historical consciousness.⁴³

Friedlander's argumentation brings up the question of how it is possible to experience an event collectively, or create a sense of collectivity? How can a traumatic event experienced if it was never experienced directly? As it was discussed above, from the 1970s the personal trauma went into public *en masse* and testimonies, more precisely the voice of the traumatised victim started dominating the discourse on the Holocaust contributing to the creation of a globalised space of Holocaust memory. That is to say that the Holocaust becomes a definitive catastrophe which bridges over national or ethnic lines and represents the universal Evil, a reference point to all other traumatic historical occurrences.

Jeffrey C. Alexander argues likewise and explores those socio-historical processes through which the Holocaust became detached from a particular historical event and became a central and universal tragedy of humanity in modern times.⁴⁴ However Alexander explains the shift from regarding the Holocaust as one of the atrocities of World War II to a full identification with the traumatic event by introducing two forms of thinking. The first is, as he calls it, the Lay Trauma Theory which claims that trauma is naturally part of humans' lives and traumatising is an automatic reaction to it. In the second theory, called Cultural Trauma, trauma is conceived as a socially constructed phenomenon that is epistemological, hence is not an ontologically given but something that has to *become* traumatic. It becomes traumatic when there is a gap between the events and its representation, but it only gains social significance and becomes a collective state of affairs belatedly and requires agents, mediations and a community of carriers and caretakers. The gap is not always open to interpretation and agency, sometimes it demands decades to achieve appropriation,

⁴³ Ibid., 47-55.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma*, in: Ron Eyerman (ed.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Berkeley 2004, 1-30.

and furthermore, as Ferenc Erős, psychologist, notes, it might trigger a great outburst of hostility from the outside and puts a burden not only on the relatives and on those who are directly affected but also on the following generations.⁴⁵ As it was in the case of the Holocaust which was in the beginning a war drama, then already at the Nuremberg trial its generalisation started, followed by the establishment of a legal framework as to never let it happen again, then came the 1960s and the Eichmann trial when victims came into the limelight and later from the 1980s it established the basis for metonymic quilt, became an analogy for discrimination and provided a vocabulary for the framework of universal human rights. In sum, Alexander argues that the collective and universal trauma of the Holocaust is a result of two parallel procedures: one the one hand of the construction of the community of victims as well as by the emotional identification of either with them or with the perpetrators, on the other hand of the symbolic extension of the event which stimulated an unprecedented universalisation of moral and political responsibility (as the 'never again!' moral imperative suggests).

Alexander argues that trauma is mediated through representation, which generates some kind of knowledge as well as identification towards the event. The mediated power of representation does not only function in the first stages of cultural trauma but also when the trauma-situation stands still and when the meanings get materialised in museums, monuments. In this part of the chapter, I attempted to explore trauma as an object of memory studies as well as to understand the ways in which trauma theories approach the question of representation.

Considering the previous theories on trauma, through the lens of Alexander they all belong to the so-called Lay Trauma Theory. Indeed, both by Caruth and LaCapra trauma, as the mental consequence of an act of violence, was theorised as a self-evident and automatic reaction of a human being. Alexander argues on the other hand that it cannot be read as a fixed and positivist affirmation of a violent situation but it is produced, belatedly through the course of time. Trauma can be understood as a "moral problematisation", which "propose now frameworks to interpret [...] conflicts [...] [and] is not only a clinical description of a psychological status but also a political expression of a state of the world".⁴⁶ Trauma is political because it has both individual and collective importance in positioning ourselves and let ourselves be positioned in the narrative of the past. However I find important LaCapra's concept of working-through since it offers a practical approach to come to term with the past as well as suggests closing the gap, which, in Alexander's interpretation, is between the event and its immediate representation. In the following, I will introduce the dilemma of representation in the context of the Holocaust.

Representation and the experience of the Holocaust

Literature dealing with the problematic relation between the Holocaust and its representation tend to start with the (in)famous statement of Theodor Adorno saying that "after Auschwitz it is barbaric to continue writing poetry".⁴⁷ Questions regarding

45 Ferenc Erős, Trauma és történelem [Trauma and History], in: Trauma és történelem. Szociálpszichológiai és pszichoanalitikus tanulmányok [Trauma and History. Studies in Social Psychology and Psychoanalysis], Budapest 2007, 13-26.

46 Michel Foucault quoted by Fassin, *The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony*, 532.

47 Ernst van Alphen, *Caught by History. Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory*, Stanford 1997, 17.

aesthetics or ethics have been raised and up until recently we could witness one of the biggest polemical debate of our times. His antipathy towards art provided the dominant theoretical framework to understand the aesthetic regime in the post-holocaust era. As Dora Apel explained, art existed after 1945 indeed however it was dark that is realistic without the sense for redemption imagination.⁴⁸ There is the Stojka family, with a special emphasis on Karl Stojka who throughout his life, starting immediately after his liberation in Dachau, attempted to depict the fate of Roma reflecting on, remembering, re-enacting his experiences under the Holocaust.⁴⁹ Zoran Music, a Slovenian Jewish survivor of Dachau, returned home to Gorizia and carried with himself a package of drawings on corpses. He refined and clarified the pictures, then took them away and only in 1970 returned to the subject under the title *We are not last*. Osias Hofstatter's work resembles the chaos and voidness after Auschwitz while Yehuda Bacon, who was thirteen at the time he was interned to Theresienstadt, then was deported to Auschwitz, Mauthausen and finally to Gunskirchen and gave his testimony in the Eichmann trial, started his workbook series in 1973 – at the time he returned from a sabbatical year in the United States to Jerusalem. These workbooks contain his memories about the Holocaust.⁵⁰ However, the art of the non-survivors let them be of Jewish or non-Jewish origin was also based upon the refusal of aesthetics: Pablo Picasso or Leonard Baskin regarded the Holocaust as a universal tragedy and avoided any Jewish reference,⁵¹ while Chagall applied Christian symbols.

As a matter of fact, as Lawrence Langer⁵² or Ernst van Alphen⁵³ argues, “Adorno never intended his statement to be taken literally, as his own elaborations of the principle demonstrate”,⁵⁴ hence instead of closing down the discussions on artistic representation we shall deprive this statement from its assumed authority and reflect upon the issue critically. Indeed, Adorno repeated his statement in 1962 saying: “I do not want to soften my statement that it is barbaric to continue to write poetry after Auschwitz [...] It is the situation of literature itself and not simply one's relation to it that is paradoxical. The abundance of real suffering permits no forgetting ... But that suffering [...] also demands the continued existence of the very art it forbids.”⁵⁵ He refused those kinds of works of art, which aimed at the forgetting of the Holocaust and redeeming the ‘audience’ from the pain, trauma or victimhood. Adorno was hostile towards transfiguration, especially towards what Langer calls “literature of atrocity” which is about “the suffering of the victims into works of art, tossed out to be gobbled up by the world that did them in”.⁵⁶ Langer continues with Adorno's words, that “[t]he so-called artistic representation of naked physical pain of victims felled by rifle butts, contains, however remote, the potentiality of wringing pleasure from it”.⁵⁷ The moral consideration behind Adorno's hostility was the impropriety of

48 See Dora Apel, *Memory Effects. The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing*. New Brunswick, 2002; Matthew Baigell, *Jewish-American Artists and the Holocaust*. New Brunswick 1997.

49 Lorely French, *An Austrian Roma Family Remembers. Trauma and Gender in Autobiographies of Ceija, Karl and Mongo Stojka*, in: *German Studies Review* 1 (February, 2008), 64-86.

50 Glenn Sujo, *Legacies of Silence*, London 2001, 92-101.

51 Ágnes Heller discusses the same phenomenon in the field of Hungarian literature: http://boldogsag.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=12763:zsidoatlanitas-a-magyar-zsido-irodalomban-&catid=650:zsidokerdesek-magyarorszagon&Itemid=493

52 Lawrence Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, New Haven 1975.

53 Van Alphen, *Caught by History*.

54 Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*. 1.

55 Theodor Adorno, *Engagement*, in: Rolf Tiedeman (ed.), *Notes to Literature*, New York 1992, 87-88; quoted by van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 18.

56 Theodor Adorno, quoted by van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 18.

57 Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, 1.

aesthetic pleasure in the sense of amusement and banality as well as the promise of relief, or redemption. Instead, he suggests making art which remembers the Holocaust and which works not toward repression or denial but which engages with the past and is willing to deal with it.

Ernst van Alphen argues in *Caught by History* that it is primarily due to Adorno's dictum that Holocaust representation is morally inadmissible, because it is assumed to cause aesthetic pleasure. The statement evokes a complex range of discourses around the Holocaust such as its taboo-status – considering it as sacred which would be ethically unacceptable to represent. Jean-François Lyotard philosopher proclaims, on the basis of the uniqueness and unrepresentability of Auschwitz, the end of the era of the meta-narratives. He compares Auschwitz to an earthquake which destroys everything including the very reference points by which one is able to formulate judgements: "Suppose that an earthquake destroys not only lives, buildings, and objects but also the instruments used to measure earthquakes directly and indirectly. The impossibility of quantitatively measuring it does not prohibit, but rather inspires in the minds of the survivors the idea of a very great seismic force."⁵⁸ Lyotard, similarly to Adorno, considers Auschwitz as an event, which cannot be fully known, however, unlike Adorno, he destroys all kinds of possibility and knowledge, as the total destruction of the measuring devices by the earthquake suggests. Although scholars would claim that nothing is knowable to them about the event, the average people would rather have the feeling of indeterminacy and insecurity and they would remain in silence. With this metaphor Lyotard suggests that due to the extremity of the event our traditional categories of representation and explanation are questioned and language itself becomes insufficient. However, as average men in the aftermath of the earthquake are waiting for the historians and scholars to define and explain what happened so also do we need a solid narration about Auschwitz. Terrence Des Pres is also guided by Adorno's dictum and suggests that experiences shall automatically be channelled into language without the need to mediate them through imagination or culture. And, unavoidably, when it comes to representation, then Des Pres sets out the principles for an ethically acceptable form, that is to say that the Holocaust shall be represented as a unique event; representation shall be faithful, accurate; and the Holocaust shall always be preserved as sacred.⁵⁹

Van Alphen however claims that the reason why the historical representation of the Holocaust, that is modelled on documentary realist genres such as the testimony or the eye-witness account, is regarded as the 'proper' mode of representation because it is mimetic (as opposed to the imaginative representation's interpretive approach), true and not trapped in vision's mirage as well as re-creating the past as its mirrored image, hence is untouched, unrepresented. As a matter of fact, Erős explains that is morally impossible to represent the Holocaust, only its re-presentation, its reassertion into the present is allowed.⁶⁰ Hence one could re-live the past by "the mystery play of reenactment", that is by retelling the past from the position of the victim. On the other hand, he continues, there is the imaginative representation of the event, which is, as they are binary oppositions with the historical, also less valuable. It is considered as morally intolerable, inauthentic and subjective. Van Alphen suggests replacing the historical and imaginative oppositions into literal and figurative. The latter means that the imaginative discourse is personalised, hence "only

58 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, Minneapolis 1988, 55-56.

59 Terrence Des Pres, *Holocaust Laughter*, in: Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust*, New York, 1988, 217.

60 Erős, *Trauma és történelem*, 25.

figurative discourse allows expression of that which is unrepresentable in so-called literal, factual, historical language”.⁶¹ Not only believes van Alphen that the figurative/imaginative discourse has an added value to our knowledge about the Holocaust as well as it completes what cannot be expressed otherwise, but also he argues from a moral point of view saying that the Nazi regime aimed at the total destruction of the individual and one’s personality thus art shall recreate subjectivity’s well-deserved place in history. Later in his book he – instead of imaginative representation – introduces the term ‘Holocaust effect’ as a matter of reenactment (direct experience via artistic works) and not representation.

The other problem of Holocaust representation, which van Alphen mentions, is semiotic: the Holocaust is unsayable and – in case of its articulation – has to face the limits of representation. Éva Kovács, sociologist, and Júlia Vajda, psychologist, for instance discussed in their book titled *Appearance. Jewish Identity Stories*⁶² the case when a disruption of continuity in one’s life story, hence the experience of a traumatic event, challenges one’s identity as well as deprives from both the ability to share it with the others and the possibility of healing. However, van Alphen changes the discourse on ‘unsayability’ with an argument, in which he claims that the problem is rather with the available frames of representation or following Alexander’s argument, there is a gap between the event and its existing representations. We first have to experience the event in order to formulate, shape our experience through representation however experience is already a representation, it is already the transformation of the pure ‘naked’ event into knowledge.

As the true witness of the Holocaust is the Muselmann who cannot speak, according to Agamben, it also suggests that there was no form of representation available for the prisoner, such as language, in order to help them articulate into experience what they went through:

“(T)his unrepresentability defines those events as traumatic. The Holocaust has had a traumatic impact for many because it could not be experienced, because a distance form it in language or representation was not possible. [...] I would argue, in fact, that the problems of the unrepresentability of the Holocaust arose during the Holocaust itself and not afterward when survivors tried to provide testimonies of it, whether literary/artistic or otherwise. To put it differently, the later representational problems are a continuation of the impossibility during the event itself to experience the Holocaust in the terms of the symbolic order then available.”⁶³

Similarly to Hannah Arendt who said that if Auschwitz is unthinkable in juridical or political terms then we must rethink and redefine our concept of law and politics.⁶⁴ Hence the historians “must not accept that the problem posed by the genocide of the Jews be neglected by relegating it to the unthinkable. The genocide was thought, it was therefore thinkable.”⁶⁵ The genocide was presented, it is therefore representable. Only the forms of representation shall be *figured* out.

“The representation of the Holocaust is conditioned by the historical moment in which it is produced.”⁶⁶ That is to say that there is no strict, solid and ever existing

61 Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 29.

62 The book contains eleven interviews, in narrative life history style, conducted with families who send their children to Jewish schools. Éva Kovács/Vajda Júlia, *Mutatkozás. Zsidó Identitás Történetek* [Appearance. Jewish Identity Stories], Budapest 2002.

63 Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 45.

64 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of All. Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, Chicago 2008, 25.

65 Pierre Vidal-Naquet, quoted by Didi-Huberman, *Images in spite of All*, 25.

66 The Holocaust Effect in Contemporary Art, CCA Visual and Critical Studies Lecture Series, 25 January 2009; see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSEwi9CoZ2E> (28.2.2014).

mode of representation in relation to the Holocaust but the ways in which the Holocaust appears in the historical or imaginative discourse is the matter of the ideological, political and cultural circumstances under which representation appears. That repetition in this subject matter offers paths to deal with the past experience and does not necessarily maintain the very same discourse but challenges the individual and collective narrations of the traumatic event. Apel claims that from the mid-1970s a new generation of artists appeared on stage to change the agenda.

The first representatives were Anselm Kiefer or Christian Boltanski. The former was born in Germany a few months before the war ended, on 8 March 1945. At first, he studied languages then he turned to art, to photography. His first exhibition, for his diploma in 1969, called *Occupations (Besetzung)* was a collection of photographs taken in Switzerland, France and Italy, and on each of those Kiefer was standing in front of a famous building and saluting to Hitler. As opposed to the American and German critics, which idealise Kiefer's work and praise its 'Germanness', Andreas Huyssen⁶⁷ claims that his work is not about forgetting the German past but rather bringing it into the fore and criticise it. He refuses to hide behind ideas such as 'transcendental art' and 'universal humanness', neither does he consider his mythical motifs exclusively as a pathway to resurrect the German nation, but rather regards myth and history, or as van Alphen puts it, 'the imaginative' and 'the historical', as equally important and mutually explanatory in the context of the past. He evokes the crimes the Germans committed in World War II but also creates spaces for renewal, rebirth. Christian Boltanski was born a year earlier than Kiefer, in Paris, France with a mixed Jewish and Catholic background. As an autodidact, he began his career in 1958 and became famous by the end of the 1960s. One of his first work, which focuses on ideas such as life and death, mourning our memory was the *Attempt at Reconstitution of Objects that Belonged to Christian Boltanski between 1948 and 1954* (1970–1971). As van Alphen notes in his analysis on Boltanski, "his consistent use of historical resources such as the archive reveals the Janus face of the historical approach to the Holocaust. The strategy of mimicking archival research is confusing because it does not provide objective information about the Holocaust. Instead we are lured into the event itself, experiencing directly a certain aspect of Nazism or of the Holocaust as we view an image. We are no longer listening to the factual account of the witness, to the story of an objectified past. Rather we are placed in the position of being the subject of that history. We are subjectively living it."⁶⁸

The historical moment which rendered representation possible was largely shaped by the German *Historikerstreit* and the approach to 'seeing' of those historians, who dominated and controlled knowledge on the Holocaust. The *Historikerstreit* was a debate about Germany's responsibility in World War II and in the Holocaust as well as about the necessity to historicise the Nazi past. The debate was formative in forming a new German national identity and initiated in 1986 by Ernst Nolte who had published an article on 6 June, 1986 in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* with the title *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will (The past won't go away)*.

A few years later, in 1989, the debate *History, Event and Discourse* on the nature of historical truth between Hayden White and Carlo Ginzburg followed. White, with extreme relativism, aimed to lay a new foundation to historical understanding by analysing the relation between historical storytelling and historical reality. In this

67 Andreas Huyssen, Anselm Kiefer. The Terror of History, the Temptation of Myth, October 48 (Spring 1989), 25-45.

68 Van Alphen, Caught by History, 10.

debate, he argued that the choices we make to understand history – i.e. the choice of the mode of emplotment or the choice of language – are already interpretations. In that sense, White denies the possibility of any kind of ‘truth’ or ‘real’ or ‘meta-narrative’ in the context of the Holocaust:

“This is not to suggest that we will give up the effort to represent the Holocaust realistically, but rather that our notion of what constitutes realistic representation must be revised to take account of the experience that are unique to our history and for which older modes of representation have proven inadequate.”⁶⁹

Hence, he favours the ‘modernist approach’ and names Primo Levi as one of its representatives. As opposed to White, Ginzburg underlines the importance of microhistory. He tells the story about a Jewish community in La Baume which was exterminated in the mid-1340s with only two survivors left. On the basis of the story he claims that “just one witness” is enough to get an insight in historical reality, hence to get the hint of historical truth.⁷⁰ His insistence on objectivity and historical truth, as Friedlander explains in the Introduction, is very much informed by ethical and analytical categories. That is to say that if we deny the voice of the survivor as well as consider the Final Solution in White’s relativism than we provide the opportunity to the counter-history to rise, which might lead to the justification of the Nazi regime. Friedlander formulates the need for a “new rhetorical” mode which on the one hand respects the radicalism and uniqueness of the event and on the other hand offers the possibility for a hypersensitive transgression of the limits of representation.⁷¹

In this historical situation I would identify three main “shifts” which changed the discourse on Holocaust representation, which overwrote the demonization of aesthetics and legitimized the role of artistic genres.⁷² The first one is what James E. Young calls mediation that is a shift from representation to the portrayal of the artist’s hypermediated experiences. The second one, very close in meaning to the first one, introduces the Holocaust as not a singular event but as an event which is already filtered through various channels of representation such as media, hence can be endowed with a variety of cultural, historical and political meanings. The third one is the shift from the need of documentation to the need of identification, which visibly manifests itself in the field of education as Shoshana Felman discusses it.

To the dilemma of how it is possible to remember an event which one never experienced directly, James E. Young provides the answer with the term ‘vicarious memory’. One shall witness the emergence of a new post-war generation, which has not directly experienced the events under World War II but only know them from hearsay, listening to the older generation’s stories as well as shaped by them. This generation of artist, as Young argues, does not depict or represent the event as it was passed on them but portray the Holocaust from a “vicarious past”⁷³, that is a distance taken from the first generation’s experience, furthermore, Young claims that their work is a valuable contribution to the understanding of what happened in the past. The common denominator of the secondary witnesses is that they deal with and reflect upon the memory that was transmitted to them however they also add to it their own re-

69 Hayden White, *Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth*, in: Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’*, Cambridge 1992, 52.

70 Carlo Ginzburg, *Just One Witness*, in: Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’*, 82-97.

71 In: Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the ‘Final Solution’*, 2-4.

72 Hereby I have to note that Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* shall be regarded as the fourth factor which triggered the shifting of the discourse however I will discuss it in another chapter devoted exclusively to films.

73 James E. Young, *At Memory’s Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, New Haven and London 2000, 1.

searches. In Young's words, this generation "rarely presumes to represent events outside of the ways they have vicariously known and experienced them. Instead of attempting to portray the events of the Holocaust, they write and draw and talk about the event of its transmission to them – in books, films, photographs and parents' stories. Instead of trying to remember events, they recall their relationship to the memory of events."⁷⁴

Such as Art Spiegelman, David Levinthal, Tibor Balogh, Zsolt Vári or Teréz Orsós, these artists childhood is overloaded with stories of the Holocaust and they seek to find these memories a proper form of representation which does not fall into the trap of melancholy neither repeats the traumas of the proceeding generation nor cause disintegration in their life stories. Following the same line of thinking Dora Apel highlights that these artists instead of rendering the memory of the Holocaust exclusively to the survivors and ascribing one meaning to it, they question conventional aesthetics and aim to look at the event as a culturally, socially and politically significant occurrence in the past and then attempt to reformulate the meanings attached to it. The question is not whether these representations are violations of a single fixed meaning – they are since all representations, as Apel argues, are partial, and Auschwitz can never be fully represented – but how they engage in new effect of the Holocaust.

Indeed, they introduce a new ethic in representation that is their explicit aim to replace sacralised pedagogy of the Holocaust with the interplay of various meanings which makes visible as well as raise attention to for instance the relationship between race and nation, the presence of everyday racism, the underlying mechanisms of capitalism which intensify discrimination. Sacralised pedagogy is meant to transmit a "complete and totally appropriated knowledge", which "will become in all sense of the word, a mastery"⁷⁵. In this sense of the world pedagogy is and "academic discourse"⁷⁶, as Lacan names it, is linear, frontal, hierarchical and all the more tends to control, forbid and suppress. On the basis of Adorno's dictum and Terrence Des Pres' premises, the Holocaust is meant to be taught, learned and memorialised in a disciplined manner and was believed that it can be mastered and never forgotten. However – and this is the third point –, as Shoshana Felman argues, from the 1980s psychoanalysis opened up new teaching possibilities, renewing both its core questions and practices and suggests that pedagogy, similarly to psychoanalysis, shall proceed through "break-throughs, leaps, discontinuities, regressions and deferred action". As it follows, instead of considering teaching as a hierarchical setup between students and teachers we shall take knowledge as essentially dialogic, as an exchange of thoughts.⁷⁷ "Dialogue," writes Felman, "is thus the radical condition of learning and knowledge, the analytically constitutive condition."⁷⁸ By the same token the new generation of artists challenges the traditional pedagogical approach to the Holocaust. Their artworks shift the discourse from the historical that is from documentation, from the desire for mastery and from testimony, to the imaginative.

74 James E. Young, *The Holocaust as Vicarious Past: Art Spiegelman's Maus and the Afterimages of History*, in: *Critical Inquiry* 3 (Spring 1998), 670.

75 Shoshana Felman, *Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terrible and Intermittent*, in: *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982), 28.

76 *Ibid.*, 22.

77 *Ibid.*, 33.

78 *Ibid.*

Generations of post-Holocaust

From the beginning of the 1980s, as the survivor's generation is passing away, there is more and more focus on secondary witnesses, hence on the second or third generations and on the ways in which they attempt to approach the Holocaust. On the basis of the above I argue that in the beginning of the 1980s one could have witnessed a paradigmatic change in the field of the representation of the Holocaust. Hence, the core questions of representation before the 1980s were how to transmit the knowledge of the traumatic experience in a way that preserves its historical truth and authenticity? Also, what kind of form of representation would represent the trauma of the others in an ethically and aesthetically adequate way? Following the 1980s in the heart of the debate there was the question of how to use trauma of the survivors and of the later generation as a means to communicate or mediate the memory of the Holocaust to the later or secondary generations. New concepts came to the fore in order to deal with the traumatic experience as well as to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

One of the most well-known concepts is 'postmemory' introduced by Marianne Hirsch.⁷⁹ Initially the concept was understood as a response of the second generation to the trauma of the first, hence as the second generation channels their parents' memories into art. Memory is considered dynamic which is affected by and effects the present and the future. Later, the term has shifted focus from family structures but then broadens it up to the affiliative structures:

"(N)o more than an extension of the loosened familial structure occasioned by war and persecution. It is the result of the contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation, combined with a set of structures of mediation that would be broadly available, appropriable, and indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission."⁸⁰

According to the additional understanding of postmemory, the concept is broadened and becomes the reservoir of secondary witnessing. Postmemory denotes the identification with the traumatised victim as well as a latency, a belated and not first-hand experience of the traumatic event. Hirsch is concerned about the better understanding of the past, thus 'postmemory' – 'retrospective witnessing' – is explored by photography: encounter with the photography and re-living the traumatic event in the visual domain has a traumatic effect⁸¹, however it is different from the survivor's since instead of re-experiencing it the secondary witness repeats the event. Repetition is in the center of Hirsch's arguments, since she claims that it transforms aesthetics into ethics. As opposed to Andrea Liss, who claims that the creative use of photography by artist cause "pitfalls that trespass too heavily through postmemories"⁸², or Barbie Zelizer⁸³ and Geoffrey Hartman⁸⁴, who discuss the desensitising effect of the repetition of images, Hirsch argues that "repetition connects the second generation to the first, in its capacity to produce rather than screen the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly as compulsive repetition by survivors and contemporary witnesses."⁸⁵

In the case of secondary witnesses repetition is not the means of retraumatization but a helpful vehicle of "transmitting an inherited traumatic past in such a way that

79 Marianne Hirsch, *The Generations of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York 2012; Hirsch, *Family Frames*, Cambridge 1997.

80 *Ibid.*, 36.

81 Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, New York 1989, 19-20.

82 Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows. Memory, Photography and the Holocaust*, Minneapolis 1998.

83 Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, Chicago 1998.

84 Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow. In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, Bloomington 1996.

85 Hirsch, *The Generations of Postmemory*, 108.

it can be worked through”.⁸⁶ Also it raises the question how these images avoid retraumatization and translate the “shock of seeing” into working through. The repetition of images has no restorative attempts, “it is only when they are deployed, in new texts and new contexts, that they regain a capacity to enable a postmemorial working through”.⁸⁷ Hence, postmemory is not an identificatory model, “it is ‘post’ but at the same time “it approximates memory in its affective and psychic effects”.⁸⁸

In Hirsch’s understanding postmemory is a personalised conception of trauma, which evokes empathy in the secondary witnesses towards the victims without the appropriation of their identity. Architect Daniel Libeskind however considers trauma abstract, which is linked to concepts such as exile or annihilation.⁸⁹ His concept ‘spaces of memory’ reflects upon the experience of the material dimension of trauma. Trauma is an architectural challenge that is built into architecture in the forms of void or cuts or sharp lines, while the secondary witnesses become subjected to the materiality of the trauma, to its physical, bodily and spatial sensation, by visiting the site and being exposed to it. The void, as Libeskind explains, suggests the very limit of representation: “The need in architecture to respond to the questions of culture, of public space, of the void is very palpable, since in architecture the void is a space. It is a place of being and non-being. It is a place where one can hardly find traces of a relationship. And yet, it is something, which has been recorded and presented in light, matter, and documents. One can attempt to have access to it through names, addresses, through a kind of haunting quality of spaces which the passage of absence took place.”⁹⁰ Libeskind establishes site-specific buildings – let us think about the Garden of Exile in Berlin at the Jewish Museum – whose authenticity might be questioned by the survivors, although, as Libeskind suggests forgetting authenticity and instead practicing the creative reimagination of the authentic spaces.

Besides Adorno’s dictum the fact that certain kind of aesthetics was exploited by the Nazis, hence aesthetics was an inherent component of the Fascist regime, and that the Holocaust was supposed to be unique, hence needed an equally unique aesthetic regime led to the demonisation of aesthetics and beauty in the context of the Holocaust.⁹¹ Artists during the Holocaust produced works of art as an affirmation of life, as an act of witnessing, as a spiritual resistance through the assertion of individuality or just to meet the client’s needs that is to paint to the order of the commanders.⁹² In the aftermath of the events they felt the innermost urgency to reflect upon what happened and deployed a “dark style” that was anti-realist (i.e. the Holocaust is not knowable and not representable), iconic and figurative based on the concepts of heroism (i.e. anti-fascism) and redemption. However from the 1970s the face of Nazism begun to change in the West and despite their varying tone, register and genre those artworks aimed to introduce a more authentic perception of the past that was also a critique to previous representations.⁹³

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁸⁹ Comparison of the two is done by Elke Heckner, *Whose Trauma Is It? Identification and Secondary Witnessing in the Age of Postmemory*, in: David Bathrick/Brad Prager-Michael D. Richardson (ed.), *Visualizing the Holocaust. Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, New York 2008, 62-86.

⁹⁰ Quoted by Heckner, *Whose Trauma Is It?*, 75.

⁹¹ Brett Kaplan, *Unwanted Beauty. Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation*, Urbana 2007.

⁹² Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *The Complexities of Witnessing*, in: Monica Bohm-Duchen (ed.), *After Auschwitz. Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*, Sunderland 1995, 25.

⁹³ Saul Friedlander, *Reflections of Nazism: an Essay on Kitsch and Death*, New York 1984.

It became clear that the operation of Nazism could not have been analysed only from political, social or economic point of view but there was a need for a synthesis of divert interpretations as well as for the inclusion of images and emotions. Aesthetics presents and interprets the past as well as helps to better understand the present.⁹⁴

By the 1980s a new generation of artists came to the limelight “those who confront the horror of the Nazi genocide and the suffering of its victims, and who continues to bear witness through reconfigured forms of contemporary testimony to events they have never experienced”.⁹⁵ They rejected previous modes of representation and aimed to combine their relation to the past to its memory and in the meanwhile integrate the event in their life narrative. It is not about mourning or talking from the position of the traumatised victim but instead it is a political act, an identity struggle and an attempt to overcome the non-autonomous subjectivity of the victim and to gain control over the future.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Dora Appel, *Memory Effects*, 21.

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