

Michael Marnin Jacobs

THE WEIGHT OF ABSENCE

*A Ghost Hunt through Time and Space and the Geography of History.
A Diaspora Story. Meditations and contemplations on concealed
history and the span and affliction of anti-Semitism.*

University of Lapland
Faculty of Art and Design

Degree: Doctoral of the Arts
2025

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Doctoral Dissertation

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THE WEIGHT OF ABSENCE

I try to breathe life into the past

with what strength remains

I reach back for a touch

I need to know the why about so many why's

Does anybody realize there are so few of us?

I awoke not so long ago from the cosmos

with a target on my back

placed there eons ago

I hadn't noticed at first

It's a riddle

Author: Michael Marnin Jacobs

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation explores the persistent impact of the Holocaust and its deep-rooted connection to anti-Semitism, examining both the private and public consequences of these historical events. Central to this research is the exploration of how the presence of absence created by such trauma can be approached through an artist's vision, specifically through the medium of photography. The thesis grapples with the question: can the past be visualized in a way that facilitates a deeper understanding of history in the present day as well for the future?

Photography serves as the primary tool for this investigation, offering a means of illumination within the intimate, personal space of family history. The research emerges from a deeply personal intersection of art and memory, where the need to grasp both the artist's own narrative and the broader historical context converge. Photography, as a memory-keeping medium, plays a crucial role in externalizing and solidifying internal thought processes, offering both a record and a means to engage with the weight of historical trauma. Through the act of visualizing reflections, feelings, and experiences, the photographs become representations bridging the personal to the collective memory, creating a space for reflection and understanding.

The methodology for this research is rooted in narrative autoethnography, combining self-reflection, autobiographical exploration, and qualitative inquiry. This approach intertwines photography and text into a cohesive narrative, which exists both as an illustrated dissertation and the stand-alone exhibition, *Grant Me Light*, the artistic component to this dissertation. The research draws from personal and collective oral histories, historical accounts, and fact-based fictional works, bridging gaps between fact and narrative to illuminate a small but significant chapter of the Jewish experience in relation to Jewish history as a whole and its connection to world history past and present. Ultimately, the study aims to create a space for dialogue and reflection on the Holocaust, its ongoing impact, and the role of art in understanding and processing historical trauma.

KEY WORDS: Absence, visualizing absence, Holocaust, Holocaust by bullets, narrative autoethnography, geography of history, photography as an investigative and research tool, photography methodologies.

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Lapin yliopisto
Taiteiden tiedekunta

Taiteen tohtori
2025

TIIVISTELMÄ

Väitöskirja käsittelee holokaustin pysyviä vaikutuksia ja sen syvälle juurtunutta yhteyttä antisemitismiin tutkimalla näiden historiallisten tapahtumien yksilö- ja yhteisötason seurauksia. Tutkimus keskittyy siihen, miten tapahtumiin liittyvän trauman aiheuttamaa poissaolon läsnäoloa voidaan lähestyä taiteilijan näkemyksen avulla ja erityisesti valokuvauksen keinoin. Väitöskirjassa kysytään, voiko menneisyyttä visualisoida tavalla, joka auttaa luomaan syvemmän ymmärryksen historiasta niin tässä ajassa kuin tulevaisuuttakin ajatellen.

Ensisijaisena tutkimusvälineenä toimii valokuvaus, joka tarjoaa perhehistorian intiimissä ja henkilökohtaisessa tilassa toimivan kuvitusmenetelmän. Tutkimus juontaa juurensa taiteen ja muistin varsin omakohtaiseen yhtymäkohtaan, jossa taiteilijan oma narratiivi ja laajempi historiallinen konteksti yhdistyvät toisiinsa. Muistintallennusvälineenä valokuvauksella on keskeinen rooli sisäisten ajatusprosessien ilmaisemisessa ja kiinteyttämisessä; se tarjoaa sekä aineiston että tavan historiallisen trauman painolastin käsittelemiseen. Visualisoimalla ajatuksia, tunteita ja kokemuksia valokuvat muodostavat kuvauksia, jotka yhdistävät omakohtaisuuden kollektiiviseen muistiin ja luovat siten tilan reflektoinnille ja ymmärrykselle.

Tutkimuksen metodologia pohjautuu narratiiviseen autoetnografiaan, jossa yhdistyvät itsereflektio, omaelämäkerrallinen tutkimus ja laadullinen tutkimus. Lähestymistapa kietoo valokuvauksen ja tekstin yhtenäiseksi narratiiviksi, johon kuuluvat sekä kuvitettu väitöskirja että *Grant Me Light* -näyttely, joka muodostaa opinnäytteen taiteellisen osuuden. Tutkimuksen aineistona ovat omakohtaiset ja kollektiiviset suulliset tarinat, historialliset kertomukset ja tosiasioihin pohjautuvat fiktiiviset teokset. Se tasoittaa faktan ja narratiivin välisiä kuiluja kuvatun pientä mutta merkittävää lukua juutalaisten kokemuksista suhteessa juutalaisten historiaan ylipäänsä ja sen yhteyttä koko maailman historiaan menneestä ajasta nykyhetkeen. Tutkimuksen perimmäinen tarkoitus on luoda tila reflektoinnille ja vuoropuhelulle, joiden aiheena on holokausti, sen yhä jatkuvat vaikutukset ja taiteen rooli historiallisen trauman ymmärtämisessä ja käsittelemisessä.

AVAINSANAT: poissaolo, poissaolon visualisointi, holokausti, holokausti ja luodit, narratiivinen autoetnografia, historian maantiede, valokuvaus tutkimusvälineenä, valokuvausmetodologiat

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To those we lost along the way, my brother Noah, Pekka Ranta, Pirjo Mäki, Jussi-Pekka Mäki and Seppo Mäki, Elaine Christian, Larry Hunter, amongst the many.

For my family, those near and far, I can only thank you all for putting up with me, with patience and curiosity throughout this experience. Most of all, my lifelong partner who has never lost faith in me even as I have stumbled.

I dedicate this to the loving memory of my parents, Frances and Cyril, for their enduring support for my love of all the arts and for my beloved grandfather Morris, who crossed chilled Atlantic winter waters in search of a new and safe harbor and life, while unable to save his extended family from the horrors of the Holocaust. But from his life comes mine and this story is in honor of him.

Rovaniemi, 2025

Michael Marnin Jacobs

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I. INTRODUCTION

A rusting iron reenforcing bar peaks deviously just above this garden's grass line wondering if anyone has noticed it before. It is only iron, and yet it carries ugly vibes of the not-so-past past directly into the present. This doctoral dissertation, *The Weight of Absence*, is about post-memory, personal and collective trauma, as well an endeavor at developing models of artistic approaches, specifically via photography, through which history can be transmitted out, shared with, in the present, and for the future.

From that innocuous grass patch, that iron bar ascends from the remains of a cement foundation, long crumbling under the pressure of passing time and years of intentional amnesia. An innocent ground squeezing out what is foreign. Not eighty years have passed and the ghosts of 1943–44 seep out and it is remarkably discomfoting. It is as if history has made a full circle, meeting itself one day. Only, I was not there at the start. I came to the world barely 13 years after the end of the catastrophe, the Holocaust. And now well into my 60's, I face history and from an unexpected perspective. This place, my garden in Lapland, set in motion a research project that would carry me across continents in both geography and memory. The ghosts of the Nazis and the menace of anti-Semitism have made a return (were they ever gone?). It isn't something that only we Jews recognize, it's all over the news.

The systematic persecution and genocide of millions of Jews, along with a deep-rooted anti-Semitism that the Holocaust represents at its worst, continue to

reverberate in our collective memory. This doctoral thesis has two aims, to explore the profound impact of history and the private and public consequences in relation to anti-Semitism and the Holocaust and how to approach this vast 'absence' via an artist's vision and abilities. At the center of this project is the attempt at solving a riddle: Can the past be brought to light, to be visualized towards attaining knowledge and understanding of history in the present day?

It is from this standpoint I have been implored to pursue research through photography as an illuminator to this seemingly forever crisis. The manner of illumination reaches into an unusually private, intimate, and dense space, family. The tug of history and my family's narrative were awakened to the need to comprehend the arc of my life and the arc of my art. Like so many artists who plumb from what is near and dear, and at the expense of security, the need and pull of clarification to what is private, and complex, becomes exposed, illuminated.

Photography has been and is the medium through which I comprehend the world and myself in it. Accessing photography's mysteries and pushing the medium's capacities towards a form of de-veiling the past, goes contrary to photography's forward vision, its endless predicting of times ahead. My lenses, those of my cameras and that that makes my third eye what it is, turns backwards and forwards, weaving through history's meridians and parallels, in constant conversations deep within, all leading to that moment when the shutter and the pressure is released. It is a strange moment; the making of an exposure is just the place where "the photographer cannot intervene".¹ Each exposure (the time capture) made specifically for this research project is where everything has beckoned, even if for that fraction of time pulled from the continuum, like a gathering at a funeral. The past, present and future, all in existence. To a certain extent this is a funeral, a place and circumstance where what's past is supremely present, like in a photograph. And like always with the photographic act, the future summons.

For this undertaking, the photography began prior to any writing, with ideas churning deep in the psyche like questions and murmurings for clarity, explored via camera and film. The idea world externalized first into photographs, the ultimate *media memory* keeper, for without photographs the written narratives would remain

1 Dubois, Philippe. *L'Acte photographique et autres essais*. 1990. Paris. Nathan. From Ruchatz, Jens, *The Photograph as Externalization and Trace*. Cultural Memory Studies.

unanchored from my own mind.² "In their (photography) function of enhancing memory's capacity, technologies of externalization follow and supplement the internal technique of mnemonics."³ In fact, ownership, accountability, transparency, empowerment (OATE) are what have provided me with agency to proceed through each facet of this research. And although the languages of photography and the grammar of my written language are burden-full, this exteriorization also offers 'viewing' distances from thoughts and offers space for consideration. The photographs are indeed representations, visualizations of thoughts, requiring the trappings (chemical and/or computational) that, with enough skill, allow for a near (often not necessarily near enough) translation.

In their best attempt, these photographs embody emotions behind thoughts. The writing is not intended to embody or prove the meanings that lie behind the photographs. The text opens the narrative into specifics that photography cannot achieve. But it is through photography that brings a distinctive and weighty awareness, and a kind of thickness to the text. This endeavor began with photography precisely because of what it offers, a peak into the windows of the past, my own and that of millions of others. That nervous peak does more than just jog memory, it witnesses a radiating history nearly lost beyond the edges of the abyss.

METHOD: NARRATIVE AUTO ETHNOGRAPHY. SELF-REFLECTIVE. AUTOBIOGRAPHIC. QUALITATIVE.

As previously stated, the *Weight of Absence* comes together from parallel tracks, one of photography and the other text, that are joined as a textual and visual narrative that also exist independently as a photographically illustrated dissertation and/or a stand-alone exhibition. The body of the dissertation addresses both aspects separately and conjoined. The research methodologies chosen are founded on a narrative autoethnographic, self-reflective tactic, as well the autobiographic, all meant to magnify a tiny chapter within the greater Jewish story, and opening a dialogue with the modern story tellers, be their stories factual accounts or fictional explorations based on facts. I advance this study from a qualitative methodology with incorporated narrative inquiries coming from both personal and general oral histories, published independent historical accounts and fictions inspired by events

2 Ruchatz, Jens. *The Photograph as Externalization and Trace*. 2008. Cultural Memory Studies. p. 367

3 Ibid. p. 368

from the late 19th century through to the present day, like historical tributaries feeding into a unified and coherent space of understanding.

I am well aware that narratives of these kinds have their down sides. As Patricia Leavy writes, “The primary advantage of this method is the possibility this has to raise self-consciousness and thereby promote reflexivity. However, placing oneself at the center of the research process carries its own set of considerations and burdens. Autoethnography requires the researcher to make him- or herself vulnerable.”⁴ Can an ethnographic, dispassionate, approach, considering the context, be possible? For this research I act both as informant and writer having “insider status”, thus requiring and demanding that what is informed is accurate, accessible, even clarifying (considering the diversity of the history covered) to the reader.⁵ Although, in this case, the concept of *insider status* can be perceived as misleading. I did not witness firsthand, with own eyes, the humiliating treatment nor the death of the millions of people in question. Through photography I venture to develop a manner in which to be ‘returned’ to the places and faces of the horror. My *insider status* is that of being situated simultaneously at the outer edge and at the center of a vast space, continually buffeted by the ever-expanding shockwaves. Considering the best of circumstances, the objectivity of the visual anthropologist and the dispassion of the ethnographer are challenged in this research beyond adequate outcomes. There are many state-of-minds at play throughout.

The motivations that lie behind the photography are experiences, memories, topographies, all gathered and boxed up, stored in wait for just this project. The autobiographic methodology that weighs on the research is assuaged by the approaches and presentation of the photography. My experience with expressive (fine arts) photography is that the practice is by its nature autobiographic and autoethnographic, the vision is both self-critical and self-centered as such, where the artist and the art can be vulnerable, if they allow it. Considering the current (2025) political and social atmosphere, the word *vulnerable* underlines the challenge to make such art that carry forward the burdens of the subject and to write about why such a project is even necessary. The artworks for *Grant Me Light* (the artistic

4 Leavy, Patricia. *Method Meets Art. Art-Based Research Practice*. 2020. Guilford Press. p. 57

5 Vickers, M.H. *Researcher as Storytellers: Writing on the Edge-and without a safety net*. 2002. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(5) 609

component to the dissertation) straddle many paths towards consideration. Some are pure fictions (but always referential to the history), some are unmanipulated landscapes and urban scapes from the precise locations within the geography of history (subjective choices, honestly photographed). Others, illustrative of ideas born out of perception epiphanies, entirely reflective through expression of the narrative’s content. The visual representations are not in and of themselves objective (as one considers the nature of the photographic act).

In terms of detailing the photographic methodologies, the integration is from a wide range of practices, the landscape, the city scape, medical photography (macro and micro photography), sequential imaging, time and space explorations, the directorial mode⁶ even portraiture. Additionally, there are photographic captures from historical genealogical archives (ocean liner manifests), and newspaper clippings. To use the Yiddish, the body of work is a *mishmosh* of approaches and techniques, something perhaps chaotic. The desire to break traditions is for my own artistic good, good of the explorations, and good as an effort to push the boundaries of the photographic narrative beyond traditions.

LITERATURE

The principal literature chosen is broad and gathered from a cross section of themes that serve both general and specific purposes for the dissertation. Like staring at bookshelves, thematically ranged, the cross section covers art-based research practices and methodologies, Jewish Holocaust histories, studies on memory and post-memory, first person Holocaust accounts, transcribed Holocaust oral histories, and published artistic exploration.

From the arts-based research practices, Patricia Leavy and Eva Hoffman on survivor generational inheritance and trauma and Pirjo Ahokas (ed.), on the reclaiming of memory.

6 A. D. Coleman is an American critic, historian, educator, and very well-known curator of photography and photo-based art. He has been widely respected essayist on the entire arc of photography, from its earliest days and well in the present, from the Daguerreotype through to the digital technologies.

Available literature covering anti-Semitism and the consequences of the Holocaust could fill any city library. I chose from a cross-section writings that impact and challenge perceptions of this gruesome history. From the realm of Holocaust histories, Laurence Rees' deeply researched Holocaust history. Raul Hilberg's charting and analysis of European railways essential and destructive facet to systemized transport and murder. Zygmunt Baumann on modernity and Holocaust, about how we understand it today as opposed to its conclusion. Yehuda Bauer on re-thinking the Holocaust, understanding the Holocaust's place in contemporary Jewish as well as gentile communities. Charlotte Beradt's, *The Third Reich of Dreams*, a previsualization to horror through dream accounts during the Nazi rise to power. And Dara Horn, who's scrutinizing the ways Jewish history is exploited radically, prompted me to reassess my understanding of the Jew in this world.

The study of Holocaust survivor narratives I consider essential. The first-person accounts by Tadeuz Borowski (poet, non-Jewish inmate at Auschwitz), Primo Levy (Italian Jew, chemist, Auschwitz survivor), Shlomo Venezia (Greek Jew, Sonderkommando in the gas chambers and crematorium at Auschwitz- Birkenau), Elie Wiesel (Auschwitz and Buchenwald survivor), but to name but a few helps in forming a language that aids in dissect the artwork. Of these, I consider Borowski's book the most stunning for its directness, his words are like a raised eye to a camera finder, through the lens, directly to the subject, exclusive of other intermediaries.

About photography and the Holocaust, David Shneer on the Jewish photographers for the Soviet Union who documented for the press (and propaganda) for future litigation against Germany and its allies for the obliteration of Jewish communities across the Pale of Settlements, Wendy Lower's deconstruction of one of the few photographs documenting the Holocaust by Bullets, the murders of Jews across Soviet Ukraine by the Nazis and their collaborators. Janina Struk, photographing the Holocaust and interpretations of the evidence.

For and about photography and art in and of itself, I have chosen a cross section that addresses photography's mysteries. Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, asking us to consider what really is photography's essence. Essay collections by A.D. Coleman: *Light Readings* (1982), *Tarnished Silver* (1996) and *Vicki Goldberg: Photography In Print* (1985). Susan Sontag: *On Photography and Concerning the Pain of Others*. Mary Price, on strange and Confining (photographic) Space. And Paolo Rossi: the creative act and the concept of memory, from which much of the structure I use is derived from.

**WITNESSING AND POST-WITNESSING THROUGH
THE PHOTOGRAPHIC AND OTHER ARTS:**

Roman Vishniac, *A Vanished World*

David Levinthal, *Mein Kampf*

Shimon Attie, *The Writing on the Wall*

Jeffrey A. Wolin, *Written in Memory*

Thomas Joshua Cooper's *The Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity, The World's Edge*

In addition: Péter Áldor's monograph, *1944*

Judy Chicago Holocaust Project, *From Darkness to Light*

Holocaust as a subject matter may be the most researched and written about of all genocides, certainly in the modern era. But has there been much art made of Shoah after the fact (ex post facto)? There are three bodies of work, all strikingly different from each other, as different as there can be approaches to any subject matter through photography, that I have chosen to concentrate on. Though, one of them, Roman Vishniac, *A Vanished World*, was created in progress (in profectum) but not published until 1977, but literally gives face to time and a people in the process of implosion.

In 1975, *Hitler Moves East*, the first of David Levinthal's use of miniatures for photographic narration, was published. It does not address the Holocaust by Bullets directly, but we follow the German army's expedition to conquer the USSR and into slaughter. In 1994 Levinthal return to the subject of World War II with his seminal publication *Mein Kampf*, continuing on his use of miniatures, but this time with the help of Polaroid and the 20x24inch camera, delivering images with a depth of field measured in millimeters and a color field that was unique to Polaroid. The project is groundbreaking. The images are groundbreaking. They represent a departure from how the Holocaust has been spoken about visually up until then. Incorporation of miniatures falls under what A.D. Coleman referred to back in 1978 as *The Directorial Mode*⁷, using "dolls, masks and other simulacra of the human into the scenarios"⁸ as totems⁹. "Here directorialism reveals itself as – in part – an extension of the still-life tradition in painting, particularly the

7 Coleman, A.D. *Light Readings*. 1979. Oxford University Press. p. 246–57

8 Coleman, A.D. *Depth of Field*. 1998. University of New Mexico Press. p. 58

9 *Ibid.* p. 58

vanitas mode of the Dutch masters, with its deployment of symbolically charged objects in allegorical configurations. All still lifes that involve the photographer's arrangements of their contents are inherently directorial, even when the concern is a strictly formal one."¹⁰ David Levinthal's approach jarred me upon seeing the works in exhibition. Although these works are from 'last century', their audacity reverberates well into today.

Shimon Attie's *The Writing on the Wall* (1994), a body of work meant to reveal what traces of a lost culture and community are left after the Holocaust, incorporates archival imagery, in-situ projections, re-photography¹¹, tying it all together via installation documentation for exhibition and book publication. Attie states; "I began doing this research in a number of archives, pouring over historical photographs of Jewish street life in Berlin during the 1920's and 30's. All the while making forays in the city, seeking out traces of the former Jewish presence."¹² Where David Levinthal visualizes via the fiction of dolls and such, there is no direct trace other than the scored and scarred perceptions we might carry from either direct or indirect knowledge of those events he portrays, the photographs Attie makes take us to the specific geography of history, down to a specific address, and captures the reflections of that trace. The archived image projected shows proof of place and time, while the photographs Attie makes prove as well that the architecture of the time lives on. Two traces, one from a distant past, another from a more recent past, becoming a time-compressed archive for some future consideration.

Both Levinthal and Attie do a valiant visual struggle with the question of history and memory and with the memory of history. Both Jewish artists, both creating their own paths from the horror, and back to the horror. I raise the question in chapter X (origin story #10) about what role or duty do Jewish artists have into 'keep *the* memory alive', as the question of memory, in and of itself, has come under renewed and intensifying scrutiny and evermore derision. Is their artwork meant for tomorrow? "Memory is not just the opposite of forgetting ... to think of memory or to think anamnesis, here is to think of things paradoxical as the memory of the past that has not been present, the memory of the future, the movement of

10 Coleman, A.D. *Depth of Field*. 1998. University of New Mexico Press. p. 58–59

11 A diachronic practice of taking multiple photographs of the same subject, from the same location, at different times. Prime example: Mark Klett, *The Photographic Survey Project* (1984).

12 Muir, Peter. *Writing on the Wall. History, Memory Aesthetics*. 2016. Routledge. p. 59

memory as ties to the future and not only to the past, memory turned toward the promise, toward what is coming, what is arriving, what is happening tomorrow."¹³

Thomas Joshua Cooper's *The Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity*, (LACM 2019) a photographic exploration without comparison except possibly for Timothy O'Sullivan, whose photographs of untamed, pre-industrialized land for the United States Geological Exploration of the Fortieth Parallel were free of the landscape painting conventions of the time, taken under remarkably difficult conditions. Cooper's shores are a testament to man's thirst for foreign soil and riches. Cooper's treks to untold number of land's endings in search of the geography of history's later consequences, underline the importance of place, even when the events occurred in a time long prior to our presence. For both, whether the surveying and mapping of uncharted lands or the surveying of locations of serious consequence far into the future, play on the mind what means the geography of history.

My contribution to this field of research addresses numerous aspects, each have their part. Photography as an exploratory and expressive medium, photography as a research tool with its exceptional empowering applications, and photography as a storyteller. Art and photograph have a great potential to open avenues of understanding and discourse of this period in history especially when confronting the residue that lingers and impacts on the present day. Out of the photography comes the activities and actions of artists struggling to illuminate for the present the past. I believe the methods employed and the structures developed for mapping and charting this story can be applied broadly when revealing concerns from history.

Via the dissertation I allow myself to open the trunk of history to find bits and pieces of the past, scattered about, forgotten but not entirely gone, to be accessed, joined, and distributed. It is a way of taking what is invisible and adding it to the collective awareness. The mining of what is deeply personal is nothing new for the arts or artists. But it is in this atmosphere that both to unveil and identify absence reveals the concept of absences presence.

13 Derrida, Jacques, *Points ... Interviews, 1974–1994*. ed. Elizabeth Weber, trans. Peggy Kamuf et al. 1995. Stanford University Press. p. 383 (Found in Muir, Peter. *Writing on the Wall. History, Memory Aesthetics*.)

OF EPISTEMOLOGIES AND ONTOLOGIES

I have taken epistemological perspectives that have direct correlations to subject matter I consider of great importance to the theme of my research and encompassed in the body of photographs. From the search and study of historical documents (documents found through genealogic research and study), testimonies both the private (family) and public spheres (survivor testimonies), Jewish diaspora and Holocaust chronicles. Put together a critical analysis via all these sources and more, I strive to construct a historical narrative that illuminates history in unique ways in which knowledge is produced and interpreted.

Ontologically, the focus is on the nature of existence in a macro and micro way, on collective and individual memory, and the impact these historical traumas have on individuals and communities. The "presence of absence" is explored in terms of the lingering effects of loss and collective memory, as well as the ways in which absence is 'felt' and represented within cultural and historical discourses.

Overall, examining through artistic practice, the epistemological and ontological dimensions of the Jewish diaspora, the Holocaust, and the presence of absence will provide insight into the complexities of understanding historical events and their enduring significance.

Returning to the overriding research question: Can the photographic arts chart trauma, loss, and absence? I answer this question through *The Weight of Absence*, a doctoral dissertation with accompanying photography exhibition *Grant Me Light*,¹⁴, an exploration through the art of photography, oral and written histories.

¹⁴ Grant Me Light ~ Suo minulle valosi. Artistic component for Doctor of the Arts dissertation. Valo Gallery. Rovaniemi, Finland. (2.-4.2021)

DISSERTATION LAYOUT

The layout is determined by the role photography takes as the topic transmitter of insights and observations. As doing research through photograph.

My primary task, the disentangling of complicated conceptions of complex historical events and incidental consequences on the public sphere as experienced within the confines of my private sphere. The text is modelled around the reasons and character of the photographs. They are not a timeline but a path through the subject.

The thesis is broken up into a set of chapters, each a category, all a subset of the approach, action, and results attained via photography. Within each category are histories and analysis that endeavor to deconstruct the components embedded within.

GLOSSARY OF TERMINOLOGY

The Holocaust: Typically refers to the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and annihilation of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators during World War II.

Shoah: The Hebrew word for the Holocaust. The title of Claude Lanzmann epic documentary about the Holocaust.

Diaspora: Refers to the dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland. For this research I concentrate specifically on the Jewish diaspora and primarily on the Ashkenazim which I am descended from.

Holocaust by Bullets: Refers to the mass shootings of Jews, Roma, and others by the Nazis and their collaborators in Eastern Europe, primarily in occupied Soviet Ukraine during World War II.

The "geography of history" refers to specific geographic locations and physical and topographical landscapes shaped by historical events.

Equilateral triangles –Star of David, also known as the Magen David, shield of David.

IDENTIFYING THE GAPS IN THIS MANNER OF RESEARCH

In the majority of artistic explorations into Jewish history and its lingering consequences, the relation between the history, the art and the storyteller, a type of trinity, is not often encountered other than some kind of preface to a body of published work (example: David Levinthal's *Mein Kompf*). I choose to open my doors and windows wide, letting the viewer/reader into the hub of the story and the practice, into the darkness and light of memory, into the struggle to translate this world of ideas and ruminations into forms for visual and emotive impact.

MAIN FINDINGS

Main findings emanating out of this research are numerous from this dissertation. Paramount is how photography, a medium of the moment, can crack time and space and make possible a return to events long since past but seemingly forever present. This was the goal, to visualize the sources of great mystery, of trauma and loss and decision-making to secure life, towards a deeper understanding and reflection. In addition to photography's power to perceive such a past in the present, in the process of creating the body of artwork, artwork based on ideas, experiences and emotions, the richer the understanding of the journey of the Jewish peoples, of my family, and in myself, that would further open understanding and knowledge of the causes and effects on our sense of self. This, intern, continually impacts on me as a visual artist. If there are results that can be measured from the distillation of this immense history, it would be that in each and every one carry the weight of history. Although generally autobiographical, the narrative is autoethnographic and as such reveals much well beyond what is in my inner circle. The manner in which this dissertation has been conducted, the structures and methods can be applied to the expanding discipline of art and language as a narrative's storyteller.

II. THE WEIGHT OF ABSENCE

A Ghost Hunt through Time and Space and the Geography of History.

A Diaspora Story. Meditations and contemplations on concealed history and the span and affliction of anti-Semitism.

Can absence be located, revealed, preserved and shared? These are the basic questions I use as the foundation of this project and for art specifically, as it is through the artworks that I am most capable of transmitting my understanding. This contribution is but a fragment within all the fragments that make up the Jewish diaspora and the Jewish experience of the Holocaust

The past is not dead, and history is always something we wander into. So much is hidden, so much is concealed, so much has happened, so much can yet happen. Some things should never happen but do. For the Jews of Europe, the path enters and exits the abyss of the Holocaust.

The Weight of Absence, a doctoral dissertation with accompanying photography exhibition *Grant Me Light*,¹⁵, are explorations and research through photography, written and oral histories of a Jewish diaspora story, me firmly included, with roots in a disintegrating Europe of the early 19th century (and earlier with a long list of forced dispersion and exile, edicts and pogroms dating back beyond antiquity),

15 Grant Me Light ~ Suo minulle valosi. Artistic component for Doctor of the Arts dissertation. Valo Gallery. Rovaniemi, Finland. (2.-4.2021)

arriving in the new world, migrating to the southern hemisphere and returning to a reconstructed Europe and coming to a sudden standstill in Lapland, in my very garden, where the past hides in plain sight and in the present.

Attempting to breathe life into the past I try and crack the hidden code of time and space, about history, memory and geography. What is it that a tribe of people, endlessly forced to pack and move, who wander from generation to generation, face in the present day the scourge of the first conspiracy? Using the medium of photography as a portal into history, into my private and collective memory, transcend time, I endeavor to bring to light the *Absence*, like waves of trauma oscillating like an invisible and entrapping web in an endless storm, one that has no center nor edge.

The question I pose, and the question posed of me goes as follows; Does absence, an absence filled with an insurmountable sorrow, carry weight and, if so, what does it contain and how? The absence that is my quest to visualize, through photography, is made up of tens of generations of struggle and loss, of the silent trauma carried on the backs and hearts of a people from a time before the modern calendar, through the present moment and most likely beyond.

This research comes from numerous directions, that of a personal history of a secular Jewish person, coming to terms with the past, entirely connected to some of the most profound events of the 20th Century, through the medium of the photographic art.

It is about the Jew as a forever migrant, artists addressing issues pertinent to the Jewish and human experience and the sharpening of my own artistic senses

needed for untangling and unwinding the riddle that is the past which has felt like a wild needle-worked lace-like veil hiding what has been in plain sight throughout my life. Accessing oral histories from within our immediate family, from Jewish story tellers, migrants and Holocaust survivors (Jewish and otherwise), I use as a model for exploration and research my extended family's splintered diaspora story, the role of the Holocaust on my immediate family's interpersonal dynamics as well as the cause and effect of historical events and attitudes encompassing anti-Semitism, racism and trans-global migration via artistic practices in general and on my artistic exploration specifically.

This thesis does not attempt to explain nor solve the festering disease of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is ancient, existing through uncountable iterations, ethnic, religious, racial and in the post-Nazi period a contemporary ideological anti-Semitism as well as an expanding fourth wave that ties all of the above including political and economic waves, each one stronger and more dangerous than the previous coming to a fifth wave of Holocaust revisionism¹⁶, where the Jew is removed from the story altogether, except for one popular statistic, that anomalous the missing six-million.

This doctoral thesis attempts to locate, study and visualize the traumas that come from deep within this history, from disturbances that are penetrating, that provoke and persuade me as an artists to find a voice of expression.

16 Grabowski, Jan. Guest Essay; The New Wave of Holocaust Revisionism. New York Times. January 29, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/opinion/holocaust-poland-europe.html>; (14.3.2022)

III. ART AS A LANGUAGE OF SUFFERING

*“To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.”*¹⁷ For philosopher Theodor Adorno, was Auschwitz as low as humanity could sink? Was it something so beyond comprehension that nothing written, spoken, nothing drawn, painted, photographed, composed, or sung about after the Holocaust, for which Auschwitz represents the incomprehensible and bleakness, a perverse effort?

Even today there is much bafflement over Adorno’s dictum. Some confusion comes from the fact that it is quoted incorrectly and so its use as an outrage over the Holocaust inevitably leads back specifically to Adorno and a dead end, so to speak.

Yet, this dictum, perhaps the most important challenge to the arts and to artists, raises the bar for art addressing trauma higher than ever before. Trauma “demands a kind of art that can speak for what is hidden by the veil.”¹⁸ The goal of the Nazis was the total annihilation of world Jewry. It is difficult yet not inconceivable by our present-day perceptions to come to terms with even the idea that an entire ethnicity, religiously observant or not, would be judged so worthless that all national forces, be they private and public, be calibrated in full towards that end. For all intents and purposes, the demands that began with the top echelon and with relentless gravity spilled down like a poison across the skin of a nation until everything was seen and completely hidden.

17 Adorno, Theodor. W. 1949.

18 Adorno, Theodor. W. *Aesthetic Theory*. 1970 (first English translation, 1984). p. 26

The barbarity of Auschwitz reveals all only to those with the strength, willingness and ability to peer under the veil. Yet how? In *Art as Therapy*, they propose a list the Seven Functions of Art¹⁹ (and in this order);

1: Remembering

2: Hope

3: Sorrow

4: Rebalancing

5: Self understanding

6: Growth

7: Appreciation

All relevant, but the order is, for me, wrong, not because the writers got it wrong, but because there is little precedent prior to Shoah on how to process through art such horror. As a child I was aware, in a deep visceral sense, of the barbarity Adorno refers to. I had no clue who he was and no idea on how his ideas, precisely this one, could direct my life and art so specifically. Soon after the war’s end, a deep sorrow was a shroud that still shivered nervously from the remnants of soundwaves just out of earshot from the last shut of the gas chamber’s iron doors, as they slammed shut. The shockwaves from this and all the scream of bullets going silent in pierced flesh reverberate still in this day. My entry into this known unknown has been blocked for years by the sorrow like a pall, like thick and heavy curtains extended from well below this earthly floor and up beyond the heavenly ceiling. Yet it is sorrow, not anger, from where I commence. Sorrow, “the most somber and solemn of emotions”²⁰, can also be very misleading, filled with emotion that will cloud artwork and push it in directions that offer no contributions.

There was this period where remembrance, sorrow, self-understanding and even appreciation were set aside like on a night table to wait for another day. But it was not after my grandfather Morris passed away. When he vanished from our presence it was as if we turned away, away from the awareness of his life lived and what of him, if anything, transferred into us. His story, partially known, but now no longer accessible to help fill in the gaps. My camera’s attention turned to mundane activities as portraiture and the California landscape. Typical photog-

19 De Botton, Alain and Armstrong, John. *Art as Therapy*. Phaidon. 2013. p. 7

20 De Botton, Alain and Armstrong, John. *Art as Therapy*. Phaidon. 2013. p. 24

raphy. With the decision to pack up and move abroad, I had not realized I would be losing even my mundane subject matter. “When we are at home, we don’t have to talk about it.”²¹ It is not like we needed this sense of the past, the nostalgia of our roots. There was no nostalgia for our diasporic story. I think my mother and father hoped we wouldn’t carry that weight.

In the last days in January 1990, left home, country, and language, brought with me cameras, film and what I understood of the language of photography, settling into an apartment by a canal leading to the sea, surrounded by tall birch trees and walking paths leading to and from the center of town. At that time, not understanding much, dinners with my partner’s family or while travelling from place to place on busses or trains my mind wandered, soaking up new environments, acknowledging things out of the ordinary or things so ordinary as for me to wonder was I really half the planet away from *home*?

Immigrant communities often gravitate to each other, participating in life far more communal well out of their birth countries. Religion might also play a bigger role within such a community as a matter of security. I did not search out for my countrymen nor a common religious affiliation as there was none to be found in my new surroundings. Certainly, as my mind wandered, language bounced off me like damp snowflakes in the Oulu wind. And where did my thoughts go to? Around Christmas I might’ve reached back to Chanukah gatherings or in spring to Passover, missing the food, reaching back for something that may or may not actually have existed as I remember.

Today, when I study those early pictures of barbed wire fences and train tracks, for which I also made numerous during that same outing, I see that such frequent repetitions of such familiar Holocaust symbols pose aesthetic and emotional dangers²² due to their derivative and stereotypical characteristics. My beginnings clearly wrested against Holocaust-embedded visual traditions of such subject matter that are some of the most troubling and powerful, of enslavement and annihilation, electrified fences and vast pits of dead bodies. But such subject matter is certainly not only that. As hard as it is to get away from all that, it is from ‘all that’ where the visual research begins.

21 Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books. 2001. p. 251

22 Ahokas, Pirjo and Chard-Hutchinson, Martine. *Reclaiming Memory. American Representations of the Holocaust*. University of Turku. 1997. p. 14–15

GAZING INTO FRAMES OF THINGS, TIME, & SPACE

It is difficult to encapsulate things from the past to the present, the motivations, reasons, understandings, actions, involved in this research. The camera, of one sort or another, has accompanied me throughout the better part of my life. But no subject has been more challenging than this one, the peering into an absence, an emptiness trembling in a tempest. The nonappearance I refer to is recognizing that outside both front and back doors to life, in all of me and not-so-neatly tucked away into my marrow, exists an accumulation of a residue from actions and traumas that influence all that is immediate. Inside that churning pall is a fair share of terror, horror, ambivalence, doubt, anger, and, somewhat necessary, hope. History clouds optics.

Indeed, clouded optics, from a gauzing-over of history, ineffectively protected from truth’s acuteness, of events that touched, scratched, and scarred the core of my family, by parents protecting us from what they knew was a historical constant, and consequently a constant into the future, as well. But life is not a constant and no matter the distance between my parents and myself that grew to half the planet away, the farther afield I went, the closer the past appeared like peering at a rear-view mirror and realizing I am being overtaken. The realization the Nazis repaired heavy war machinery from 1941 through 1944 on what is today my garden (since 2003 my family’s home), cleared these inner optics in an instant and in that instant I felt an absence filling me to point of choking.

No cracking of champagne bottles, no animal sacrifices, or spilling human blood like Vikings before some long journey’s maiden voyage. For this expedition only humorous act, walking out late in the warm August still bright arctic evening to the place in the garden where proof of the Nazi presence, an iron reinforcing bar sticking up at me rather like a middle finger through the soil and grass, and urinating on it. Isn’t that what dogs do when claiming their territory, after all? For those few moments the cloudy inner vision cleared. Although the actual journey’s launch did not take place for many years, deep in my mind’s eye I could see the spreading of charts unfold before me, preparing me for an ugly and complicated journey.

Put modestly, my artistic language is photography and any attempt at explanations fall endlessly short of intent. Though I am well aware photography is a conglomeration of a myriad of languages and dialects and choosing what explains things best does not mean the resulting clarification gets any closer to the core. So I turn to and paraphrase Paul Auster: To combine the strange with the familiar:

that is what I aspired to, to observe the world as closely as the most dedicated realist and yet to create a way of seeing the world through my unique distorting lens, for *making photographs* that dwell only on the familiar inevitably teaches me things I already knew, and *making photographs* that dwell only on the strange, teaches me little I need to know, and what I aim above all else is to *photograph* stories with light that make room not only for the visible world of sentient beings and inanimate things but also for the vast and mysterious unseen forces that are hidden within the seen.²³

This relationship between the visible world within the visible light spectrum and the unseen forces hidden within an undefined spectrum is the space between seeing and sensing. The action of photography, the borderline between the real and the extra-real or hyper-real, cannot be defined as something razor thin. To cross the line is to go from a spectrum understood and then pushed into a fiction, even if the source material deliberates on optical facts. It is an area that photography excels in the so-called digital age but rarely excels in conjunction with the real, side by side.

This has been one of photography's big burdens and so tied to its history. This is also one of my biggest burdens. And without being able to see far into the future I absorbed photography intuitively as a boy, making pictures of things important to me, our dog Mickey jumping for oranges in our walled garden, my elder brother cradling his red Fender, later me and my drums. Years later wandering the streets of San Francisco and diving into *The Modern* to see the Weston and Ansel Adams retrospectives, with my buddy Justin, talking photography like nothing else mattered. With music as a career abandoned and high school over, I opted for photography studies in advertising and industry, to learn a trade. Later at the university for a mix of photojournalism, the fine arts and visual anthropology to expand a visual vocabulary. And finally, an attempt at the profession, a failed

23 Auster, Paul. 2017. Faber & Faber. p. 463–64.

The original text: "To combine the strange with the familiar: that was what Ferguson aspired to, to observe the world as closely as the most dedicated realist and yet to create a way of seeing the world through a different, slightly distorting lens, for reading books that dwelled only on the familiar inevitably taught you things you already knew, and reading books that dwelled only on the strange taught you things you didn't need to know, and what Ferguson wanted above all else was to write stories that would make room not only for the visible world of sentient beings and inanimate things but also for the vast and mysterious unseen forces that were hidden within the seen."

attempt as it turned out. I both wanted to make a living with the camera and save the world with it. Still, along the way I absorbed a constellation of methods and learned that seeing with the help of a camera taught me how to see and deal with the world without one.

Leaving the American mainland allowed me the opportunity to be dislodged from the chains of my education. But instead of extricating myself free, I have kept it all and chosen to re-order it according to how subject matter calls to me. The process has been risky but immensely fruitful and rich. In my back pocket sit the greats, Stieglitz, Cunningham, Weston (Edward), Adams (Ansel and Robert), Abbott and Atget, Michals and Muybridge, Seppo and Kovalainen, and so many more names I could drop. Each and every one of them, like drops of developer into exposed my marrow. Sounds pretentious? It is not, I couldn't make the photographs I have made for this project, or any of the earlier ones, without their help and guidance. These, for me, are the magicians of light. There are plenty outside of the silver and gelatin, creators in the realms of sound and song, ink to paper, the world beyond the two-dimensional. I am not a sculpture nor a physicist. I think of myself sometimes as if I were a silver-based alchemist.

The task faced, as I understood it, as I still understand it, was how to tell a story so deeply personal with universal implications without descending into nostalgia and sentimentality. The reason for this is in part the rise of anti-Semitism and the equal and opposite decline in Holocaust awareness. Dead in the middle of these two actions is the *weight of absence*, a presence so profound as to consider what are its metaphysical properties.

I pull half of a sentence from Hiroshi Sugimoto: Does not art serve to retrieve what has fallen through the cracks,...?²⁴ I consider very carefully its meanings. And I consider what it is I am trying say and do. I use photography like a sailor might cast off a life preserver to those in jeopardy. And it is I, as well, who is in jeopardy.

24 Sigimoto, Hiroshi. Opticks. Fraenkel Gallery. [https://fraenkelgallery.com/exhibitions/hiroshi-sugimoto-opticks](https://fraenkelgallery.com/exhibitions/hiroshi-sugimoto-opticks;); (5.10.2022)

**UNSAYABILITY AND UNREPRESENTABILITY:
WITNESSING THROUGH THE IMAGINATION**

There is a type of understanding about the Holocaust that says there are things that have unsayability and unrepresentability.²⁵

Representation, as a tool for artistic expression is all we have at our disposal while attempting to crack open the locks to the past. This kind of exploration cannot be done alone. Yet, to visualize horror, to understand mourning and to capture melancholia require more than just the desire and need to do so. We need teachers to help us, to be examples and role models in ways that tell us ‘*this* is worth the trouble.’ There are many artists who have contributed to and challenged me to look at who I am, how I became this person/artist and to address this horrifying period in history out of the need of self-understanding. ‘Inspiration’ has come from within the gamut of all the arts, photography, painting and drawing, sculpture, the aural arts be they traditional and/or experimental and from written word. (But also from without, which is a far less defined and even less recognized place.) Amongst those who have given me the courage to face the subject and not turn away, are Holocaust survivors and victims, Jews and non-Jews alike, artists who have delved specifically into these horrors and others who have simply faced subject matter of any and all human experiences.

PRACTICING THROUGH IMAGINATION

Shoah, Claude Lanzmann’s nine-hour long lament, was released in 1985 and broadcast in 1987 over public television (PBS) over four evenings. Those 9 hours and twenty-six minutes cemented me to the past. Prior to that it was Alain Resnais’ *Nuit et Brouillard*, *Night & Fog*. I had heard that in some high school classes it had been often shown. But I didn’t see it until years later, after Shoah.

These two films represent watershed events in understanding that the Holocaust could be a subject for the arts. Where both films are considered documentaries, Resnais’ *Night & Fog* is a poem disguised as a documentary and Lanzmann’s *Shoah* manages to reveal the horror of horror only through words. Not a tortured or dead body to be seen throughout. The risk taken was out of pure imagination. The result was, *Shoah* the film returned the Shoah to the minds of many and in a way that only Claude Lanzmann could’ve conceived.

25 Chare, Nicolas and Williams, Dominic. *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. Berghahn. 2016. p. 14

The dead are long gone and buried, or the dead are the dust floating like an invisible haze, everywhere. It is all there, all invisible, and all up to the imagination to find the path from the darkness into the light.

ENVISIONING THROUGH RESEARCH

The research methodology is through photography, not one specific manner practice but approached according to the character and the manner in which I desired to be present with the subject matter. Contemplating on the required elements I perceived to be essential I drew up a set of strategies for formulating a coherent approach to this artistic research project are based on the following aspects and qualities in this order: Information, Facts, Evidence, Emotion, Doubts.

ENVISIONING INFORMATION, FACTS, AND EVIDENCE

The quantity of Holocaust information one can access in the present day is astonishing., from periods before and after, not only is there available the vast cataloging of Nazi crimes by the allies but also all the documentation the Nazis were unable to destroy. The problem with this is not so much in the information itself, nor the facts, which are straightforward, but because the evidentiary archives exceed most other events in width and breadth, pushing up and out through the rafters. From both the inside and outside, emotions run high. If only these archives would leave us free of distrust, we could shed proper tears and resume living in a learned and healed world. Yet, even before the last of bodies were buried, heckles were being heard and fingers pointed at what few Jews survived the years of violence, raising doubts about all information, disputing all facts and evidence and ridiculing emotions. Doubt in the pursuit of art is essential. Doubt meant to debilitate the truth is poison.

The paradox in visualizing absence is that the path along the workflow is based on givens generally accepted and thus doubt refuses to allow us lowering our guard. Holocaust deniers abound. I am *comfortable* in the facts of the Holocaust, as beyond comprehension they are. Doubters and deniers are a sorry lot, a dangerous lot, considering their behavior in recent times, refusing all responsibilities for their actions. Well into the 21st century, is this really the environment in which I do my work? My cameras don’t (currently) document social or political tensions, nor are they involved artistically with the either the look of the rich one-percen-

ters nor the challenges to the poor ninety-nine percenters,²⁶ and neither dodging bullets, camera in hand, in war zones. The work I do is from somewhere inside of space and time, out of any ordinary flow. Although, under most circumstances, the camera (with film or sensor) is an odd clock mechanism that activates itself, really, for only a fractions of time. To me, those fractions, however long or short they may be, require a deep perspective on the past, and an eye for the future. To envision facts, one needs to understand them and trust them. To envision evidence is to recognize and ensure that content and character are in no way distorted. Of course, the risk of failure, that the photograph will be less than the sum of its parts, is always ever present.

Taking this line of thought into an expanded visual world, in the words of William Kentridge: “*Art, is its own form of knowledge. It does not simply supplement the real world, and it cannot be purely understood in the rational terms of academic disciplines.*”²⁷ He continues: “*What is thought turned into action? Action sparking or provoking thoughts. How to put the different ideas, images and fragments together, and parallel to that, a thinking in material.*”²⁸ William Kentridge writes about walking around the studio, 830 laps of the studio, as both a metaphor to the process of processing art. He may physically cross the 10,000 steps in the course of those 830 laps, he will not know if it has been worth the effort. But the effort is required. “*There are two things going on here. What physical material will propel the thought? Hoping to heat things up. To make a collision a material and an idea.*”²⁹

The palette available for the photographic arts is nearly as wide and as possible as all processes invented since that auspicious day in 1839 are still in practice. A few have fallen by the wayside (Kodachrome, original Polaroid) and some are not so much impractical as they are dangerous (not that that is reason enough for those to be avoided). What impacts on approach to subject matter has very much to do with the media platform. Photojournalism has variables yet stricter parameters that impact on information, facts and evidence. Outside of those structures and dogmas, the artist is freed from those rules and shackles to confront and interpret information, facts and evidence. But to be free, to be unencumbered by

26 Photography of either the rich or the poor in society in the manner of Jim Goldberg and others.

27 Harvard University Press announcement of Kentridge, William. *Six Drawing Lessons*. <https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674365803>; (23.9.2023)

28 Kentridge, William. *Six Drawing Lessons*. 2014. Harvard University Press. p. 124

29 Ibid. p. 124

traditions and codes of visual behavior, may mean that certain parameters are more necessary than ever.

Although trying to break free from the doctrines of my photographic education, those strong bonds cloud the potential the same education struggled to inculcate. On the other hand, the better part my photographic education was steered to fields of practice and use: advertising and industrial, photojournalism, visual anthropology. Fine art studies did an adequate job to believe dislodgment possible when my maturity was enough to recognize the necessity.³⁰

This leads us towards a convergence of factors directly influencing, motivating, and challenging the act of envisioning complicated histories. These artistic factors, having come to me slowly, have coalesced at an opportune moment in this artistic research. The open challenge to address an impossibly difficult personal and historical exploration necessitates solutions that go to the core of my photographic knowledge, technical understanding and practice, visual expression and practice, and historical knowledge. And this, in turn, permits creative, not deceptive approaches to information, facts and evidence that remain visible and present along with an aesthetic foundation.

ENVISIONING THROUGH EMOTION AND DOUBT

“*The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference.*”³¹

The request of me, when at an art and research seminar taking place in a beautiful and austere corner of Finnish Lapland, came in the form of an imploration, not as a proposal. It went something like this: Anti-Semitism is, yet again, on the rise and ‘I can’ and ‘should’ do something about it. The question of who’s responsibility it is to keep society from forgetting the Holocaust is addressed in a later chapter.

30 As an introductory and intermediate level photographic educator, I’ve not been obligated to focus on any specific field of practice allowing for explorations beyond the traditional and standard analogue and basic digital practices, stretching both well beyond their traditional methods and materials, going deep into the hybrid realm.

31 Wiesel, Elie. Original quote in full: “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.” *U.S. News and World Report* 27 October 1986. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780191826719.001.0001/q-oro-ed4-00011516;jsessionid=6606FC133C2A156AC-93B20C92E67D842>; (30.6.2023)

General themes and concepts surrounding trauma have long been an aspect of my photographic explorations including my father-in-law's and older brother's battle and defeat to virulent forms of cancer, my father's descent into the abyss of Alzheimer's Disease, and the varying forms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders amongst the youth and the aged that I've known within my community.

The 'implication' was not against an implied 'indifference' on my part but an indifference in society and in the arts community, perhaps more akin to a kind of prevailing selective denialism of the coming storms that potentially could (and now we know would) disrupt politics across the western world. But reacting by saying 'no', that I might hold other issues nearer and dearer to me needing attention, I would be seen as being indifferent and therefore negligent in some sort of duty. To say 'yes', as a Jew, I must confront this pressing need, would be to, yet again, ask: is this a Jewish problem, not from within but from without, that only a Jew could properly tackle?

(For further reading, refer to Chapter X, Origin Story: Artist Jew - Jewish Artist, p. 304)

It is not like I am shackled in the darkness of some kind of Plato's Cave, unwilling to venture out into the light to face and recognize the truth, truth of the darkensses on the horizons of the past, but of the present and future as well. Should it be my jobs to return to the cave with the darkening news? In the 21st century there is an astonishing contemporaneity to the allegory. "*The shadows on the wall are a procession. Not just people moving across the space, but a procession of people carrying objects.*"^{32,33} This procession continues today, at this very moment across vast distances in the Middle East, across Africa and from the southern hemispheres or the 'New world' to the north. It is unrelenting. Those shadows are as well the Jewish populace in the present, needing to consider, yet again, where could there be a safe haven? But prior to and during World War II Europe, dragging whatever belongings one could to some unknown destination. The procession only stopped in places of refuge or destinations of annihilation like Treblinka and Auschwitz, with burlap bags and suitcases piled high blocking all light until the procession of possessions, relieved of their owners, did a 180° turn, leaving no record, not even a shadow of a man. This complete lack of the shadow of the Six Million, the lack of the shadows of my grandfather's entire family that stirs confusion and

32 Kentridge, William. Six Drawing Lessons. In Praise of Shadows. p. 28

33 What Kentridge alludes to is not of the process of Nazi annihilation of European Jewry. "The flickering projections we see in the news of people fleeing floods, civil war, refugees, migration, refugees returning, displacement." Ibid. p.28. But the shadows of Anti-Semitism is like dark matter interwoven into the fabric of the anti-other, currently the African and Middle-Easterner.

challenges doubt. It is this *unseen* that drives me through this doubt.

I did not see in the bright light of day, nor did I hear in the dark past midnight entire communities rounded up and disappeared. After the fact, I heard about it. I read about. I read about Anne Frank's exit from the cave, not into the beauty of humanity but a hell of man's creation. I believe she would've re-written what is now the most famous quote from her diary: "Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart."³⁴ No doubt she would've reconsidered that entry. I come to understand this and more in the absence of what might still be or what might've been present. I have no doubts nor disbeliefs in the factuality of those events, only doubt that through my eyes and cameras I could bring any further proof to the world of doubters (I am aware there is little one can do to influence a doubter) or undrape anything unrecognized out of the consequences of this history.

**IN PRAISE OF ART: ARTISTIC PROCESS,
CONTEMPLATION, PRACTICE AND SHARING**
Four Steps, Five Tasks and the Seven Functions of Art.

Seeking, finding, judging, preserving, transmitting-the human species does only this.³⁵ I would paraphrase this by concluding-the *artist* does only this. But what is the use of these verbs without the need of exploration and creation, without desires to understand and question, to understand and be understood, to share. This is my perception of the fine arts as a holistic practice. From the first experiences probing through the myriad geometry of my surroundings, trying not to see things but into things, learning how and when to 'capture' them, like making instantaneous fossils, and reproducing them via the translucency of the negative, a time held captive in celluloid amber, and somehow to be shared with an audience beyond merely me.

Seeking and transmitting, is it enough to 'take' and 'hold' what exists opposite the camera lens? Or what of the beauty of things as I perceive them? And what of human folly? Should I photograph it and do something about it? Photography is an aspect of many things and in everything that involves humans, including the history we create. Photography and the photographic image became inseparable to the human on that 19th of August day, 1839.

34 Frank, Anne. The Diary of a Young Girl, Saturday, July 15, 1944, p. 358

35 Rossi, Paolo. Creativity and the Art of Memory. Creativity in the Arts and Sciences. Shea, William R. and Spadafora, Antonio. Editors. 1990. Science History Publications, USA. p. 1

THE CAMERA AND 20TH CENTURY GENOCIDE

Not sixty-five years later, in 1904, the Germany army is in far South-West Africa, now Namibia, at war with the Herero and Namaqua tribes. A group photograph showing an indigenous group chained together, clothed in rags, guarded by two armed German brigades. The photographer unknown. The suppression of the Herero and Namaqua revolt is considered the first genocide of the 20th century.³⁶

In April 1933, the boycott of Jewish business across Nazi Germany intensifies. Signs are posted announcing: "Jewish business! Whoever buys here will be photographed!" The camera and the photograph become a weapon intimidating Germans and of intimidation and humiliation of their Jewish neighbours.³⁷

In Kiel, Germany, on the 12th of December 1931, Rachel Posner, the wife of a Rabbi, makes a photograph of a Hanukkah menorah with nine candles, the last day of the eight-day celebration, ready to be lit at sundown. Outside hangs a large Nazi banner, swastika and all. Scribbled on the verso, "Death to Judah", so the flag says. 'Judah lives forever', so the light answers.³⁸ The photograph is a premonition. The Posner family escaped in 1933. Yet so many could not believe or understand the sights and sounds around them during those intervening years and paid for it with their lives.

By 1935 the German government prohibits Jews working as nurses, veterinarians, holistic practitioners, and dentists.³⁹ In August the Soviet and German governments sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact. On September 1 Germany invades Poland. By November 1939 all Jews residing within the General Government (all Nazi annexed areas) requiring all Jews to wear an armband with the Star of David.

German soldiers carried small cameras with them making snapshots of their adventures. Members of the SS Einsatzgruppe were forbidden to make images of mass murder. In July 1941 General Otto Woehler, Chief of Staff of the 11th German Army, in whose area Einsatzgruppe D operated, ordered all such amateur photos confiscated:

36 Kentridge, William. *Six Drawing Lessons*. 2014. Harvard. p. 38

37 <https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/online-resources/simon-wiesenthal-center-annual-volume-1/annual-1-chapter-3.html> (20.12.2022)

38 <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/19/world/europe/menorah-hanukkah-germany.html?searchResultPosition=1;> (20.12.2022)

39 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/1939-key-dates;> (9.12.20)

"No photographs will be made of such abominable excesses and no report of them will be given in letters home. The production and the distribution of such photographs and reports on such incidents are looked upon as undermining the decency and discipline in the armed forces and will be severely punished. All existing photographs and reports on such excesses are to be confiscated together with the negatives and are to be sent to the Ic counterintelligence officer of the army giving the name of the producer or distributor. It is beneath the dignity of a German soldier to watch such incidents out of curiosity..."⁴⁰

October 3, 1941, in a forest just outside of Miropol, 135 miles west of Kyiv, in Ukraine, Slovakian security guard Lubomir Skrovina serving with the SS in Ukraine takes a photograph so horrific, of a Jewish mother and two young children being forced to the edge of an open pit as the Nazi executioners fire their rifles at point blank range.⁴¹ The photograph is one of the few in existence that document what was to become known as the Holocaust by Bullets. Skrovina's camera is a Zeiss Ikon Nettar, foldable. A very popular camera at the time. It is estimated that six out of 10 soldiers carried one or another of this kind of 'pocket' camera during World War II.

August 22, 1942, Austrian soldier, Hubert Pfoch, on a train destined for the Russian front, secretly photographs actions against Jews being deported to Treblinka. Later he sees the same train standing at Treblinka station.^{42,43}

August 2, 1943, in Treblinka, a railway worker takes a photograph of the burning of the extermination center initiated by a prisoner revolt.⁴⁴

40 Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals under Control Council Law No. 10 [Green Series] (14 vols.; Washington 1950–52) 10: 1209 (Nuremberg Document NOKW 2523: Letter of July 22, 1941, from the 11th Army, signed by Chief of the General Staff Otto Woehler). <https://www.museumoftolerance.com/education/archives-and-reference-library/online-resources/simon-wiesenthal-center-annual-volume-1/annual-1-chapter-3.html>; (7.11.2022)

41 [https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/murder-in-action-rare-holocaust-photograph-that-sparked-ten-year-investigation/;](https://www.jewishnews.co.uk/murder-in-action-rare-holocaust-photograph-that-sparked-ten-year-investigation/) (25.3.2022)

42 <http://www.deathcamps.org/treblinka/photos.html>. (5.2.2022)

43 Sereny, Gitta. *Into the Darkness*. Vintage. p. 192–193

44 <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/photo/smoke-from-the-treblinka-killing-center>

In 1944, members of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando procure a camera and attempt to document the genocide in progress. Two images are made. One of naked women being driven by the SS to the gas chambers. The second photograph, that of the Sonderkommando burning the murdered victims in an open pit.⁴⁵ These are the only 'real time' photo documents of this action known to have been made.

January 1945, the Russian army on the verge of liberating Budapest, Evgenii Khaldei (Jewish), staff photographer for TASS, makes a portrait of a Budapest Jewish couple, both with the stars still sowed into their coats with a destroyed Budapest receding into the background.⁴⁶

On January 27, 1945, the Red Army liberates Auschwitz. Soon photographs of emaciated survivors, stacks of dead and mountains of hair and shoes are printed in daily newspapers across the world. Not long after newsreels show bulldozers pushing the mountain of dead bodies into open pits to be buried. Soon the war comes to an end. Soon Europe is to experience a silence like none heard since the early 1930's.

WAR'S END

For European Jewry, this is end of the final chapter of the story of their existence. This is also the end of the final chapter of the remnants of the Jews that once resided within the walls of the Pale of Settlements from which I am descended. I am the third son of Frances Jacobs, previously Prootkow, daughter of Morris Prootkow, previously Morris Prudkow (religious name, Mordechai), born in Luhansk, Ukrainian Russia, and the only survivor of the Prudkow extended family. Because of this macro and micro history, I seek out my family history, (of that which is possible) in hopes of finding that kernel of the past from which I am made up, judging its miniscule place inside the vast and tumultuous history, preserving what little there is but in the best light and transmitting out and into the universal archive for my children and for present and future generations.

So, how is it possible to seek what is gone? And if it is gone, what is left to find, and/or to consider on?

45 <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/gallery/historical-pictures-and-documents/extermination,11.html>

46 Shneer, David. The Elusive Search for Evidence: Evgenii Khaldei's Budapest Ghetto, Images of Rape, and Soviet Holocaust Photography. *Slavic Review*, 76 (1), 2017, p. 80–89. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26565017>; (16.1.2023)

WHERE IS THE BEGINNING?

Where to begin? How to end? From where to begin? Does it have an ending? What if the beginning cannot be found and the end is forever being written? Is this the journey's middle, will I always be in the middle of this passage? *Grant Me Light*, the exhibition, is an illustration of what is part genealogy, part 19th to 21st century world history, A collection and recollection of local histories, an anthropologic study and archeologic dig, a detective story, a fact fiction, and a multifaceted artistic endeavor, for the doctoral dissertation, *The Weight of Absence*, that ponders the question, is absence ever present?

A SENSE OF AN ABSENT PRESENT

Within me a long-guarded secret, the recognition that all this history sits nervously by my side, behind me, and also just ahead. When I move, it moves. Like being followed by the moon low on the horizon. It is not clear when or how I entered into the subject of hidden consequences of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. The events of the past are the drivers behind this study. But these events require a deep dive into that gone yet lingering world. Was I prepared for the task? Were my artistic sensibilities as well as my technical skill set up to the task?

By now, years upon years honing skills, processing ideas, of putting ideas to the visual test, after tens of group exhibitions and numerous solo exhibitions, of accessing and re-assessing the arc of my visual development and practice, and with enough maturity, intellectually and visually, I was ready to explore what I, much to my astonishment, had already been seeking to understand from a very early age. Things happen step by step, sometimes below the radar. Sometimes they stare at us in the face enough to frighten us, but not enough frighten us away.

IV. THE ART OF ART RESEARCH AND DISCOVERY

DIALOGUE WITH MEMORY: A SEEKING (PART 1)

To remind, there is a type of understanding about the Holocaust that says there are things that have unsayability and unrepresentability.⁴⁷

CONTEXT: A BIT OF HISTORY

Long before I put the camera to the task, I would wrestle with questions that found no form through whatever physical contortions of tongue and mouth and air squeezed from my lungs and through my vocal cords. On the one hand, I didn't have the vocabulary and, on the other, I didn't understand the purpose. These questions have incubated and fermented deep in the psyche until finally and firmly, when out of the fold, I found the need for answers. But as is typical, more questions arose than questions answered.

The knowledge possessed, of a family history barely known or understood, lightweight history lessons in high school, television documentaries offering barely enough a foundation to build upon. I swept my desk clean, metaphorically speak-

⁴⁷ Chare, Nicolas and Williams, Dominic. *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz.* Berghahn. 2016. p. 14

ing, and returned to my foundational knowledge and sources of the Holocaust first, Resnais' *Night and Fog* by (1956), Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levy's astonishing account of his survival from arrest, deportation, and daily challenges to survive a horror that had no precedent. Required was a deep dive down the rabbit hole of Holocaust knowledge. What followed seemed to proceed as if preordained. Journeys into Poland, Czechia, Germany. Absorbing oral histories via Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundations (a YouTube bounty of horror stories of survival) and hunting for appropriate literature, oral histories, and academic research.

Mining family history became a race against time. Alzheimer's Disease made digging deep into needed family history, especially from my father's side, a chaotic and hopelessly illogical treasure hunt. Nothing of his history lost but accessing and understanding it... like unwinding drying spaghetti until time finally ran out.

My mother's father's story, the story of a man whose survival mine and my mother's life is entirely dependent upon, was a fragmented mess that required constant prodding and cajoling over many years, frustrating my aging mother to no end until her time too also came to an end.

As my mother's memories began to wane, the amount of new Holocaust literature and research, specifically Jewish history, was bursting out just as anti-Semitism seemed to explode from every rupturing seam across the Americas and across the whole of Europe. Everyday news accounts of anti-Semitic incidents, from tarnishing historical sights (cemeteries and temples of worship) from beatings to murder, even mass shootings and murder, specifically targeting Jews.

With each day came other stories in the form of books filling my postbox or waited for pick-up. Prior to my journey to the second visit to Treblinka, my bookshelves became crammed, catalogues, articles, copies of documents, even music recordings, anything and more about the Holocaust. Titles of these books alone bring a sense of trepidation, *Into the Forest* (Fraenkel), *Inside the Gas Chambers* (Venezia), *Man's Search For Meaning* (Frankel), *The Drowned and the Saved* (Levy), *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death* (Kulka), *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (Borowski), *The Third Reich of Dreams* (Beradt), *When We Cease to Understand the World* (Labatut), *Strangers in a Stranger Land* (Simon), *People Love Dead Jews* (Horn), *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes* (Shneer), *Photographing the Holocaust* (Struk), *German Railroads. Jewish Souls* (Browning, Hayes, Hilberg), *The Ravine* (Lower), *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman), *After Such Knowledge* (Hoffman), *The Holocaust* (Reese), *How could this Hap-*



Fig. 1 Jägala Concentration Camp (1942–43). 1991

pen (McMillan), *Re-thinking the Holocaust* (Bauer) and numerous collections of essays on any number of topics on the cause and consequences of the Holocaust and the lingering presence of anti-Semitism.

And the spectrum of research material was broader still, artworks and art projects, both photography and non-photography based, published in print and copies from other media platforms, *Mein Kampf* (not Hitler, but David Levinthal), *Holocaust Project* (Chicago), *Written on the Walls* (Attie), *Written in Memory* (Wolin), *The Universal Archive* (Kentridge), and *Maus I & II* (Spiegelman) being very likely the most important due the impact the publication of both series made on the general public at the time.

Yet even as I write, new material is being churned out at a pace not seen, ever, since the Holocaust came into the worldwide consciousness. As my project comes closer and closer to completion, every day the world loses more of those who survived Shoah. This fact alone has spurred a rush to fill gaps in Holocaust history before there are no survivors left to *bear witness*. Of course, this is but one reason for a growing interest amongst the general public and in academia. In times of uncertainty, the political and economic winds traditionally, stereotypically, tend to blow in the face of the Jew and a counter force is now more necessary than ever.

This act of seeking has led me into arenas of thought and arenas of history both very personal and, much to my surprise, far more universal than I was to expect. What I began with, what little of it at first I possessed, opened up and splayed out like a connecting web to the vast history of the Jewish experience. Things suppressed in the shadows of this history, attaching themselves to me in my

childhood, very likely even when womb-bound, had more weight and substance than I could've imagined. The farther afield I travelled, both through literature and kilometers, the closer the catastrophe appeared until I seemed enveloped by it.

'If you seek, ye shall find.' So the adage goes and so it occurs. Before the books and before the thinking, a sensing of things. And in those early years my new-found European life, things would occur in ways that made little sense. In 1990 an Estonian man I had befriended, who suspected⁴⁸ I was Jewish, took me to a wartime killing field. What possessed him to do so? I did once ask. He shrugged and said he thought 'I might find it interesting.' It was interesting, confusing, even startling.

Arriving at Kalevi-Liiva, stepping onto the dead soil that once housed the Jägala Concentration Camp, was nothing other than a commemoration to the Great Patriotic War, written in both Russian and Estonian. No mention at that time of the Jews, only the estimates of the murdered. Officially it had been a '*labor Education camp*' operated by the Estonian Security Police during the German occupation from 1941 through 1944.⁴⁹

In the setting autumn light, a series of photographs was made, each in a square format, together five individual exposures creating an edge-to-edge panorama from this desolate and melancholy patch of geography and its history, and a way of explaining time, space and history.⁵⁰

48 It has always been difficult for me to understand, but more than on a few occasions seemingly out of nowhere has come the question if or the assumption that I am Jewish.

49 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%A4gala_concentration_camp; (21.2.2023)

50 This series was first seen at the Mänttä Arts Festival, Mänttä, Finland, 1995.

EARLY ON THE PATH, TWO IMAGES

Already sometime ago I stopped thinking when and how the Holocaust entered into my subject matter. I can only say that those first explorations came about subconsciously, possibly even out of happenstance. On long walks, camera in hand, barbed wire fence, an angry dog chained and angry, I raised the camera to my right eye, studied the composition, pressed the shutter. This was not Auschwitz, Majdanek or Dachau, nor any other camp. Just a city along the Ostrobothniacoast. These images created superficially within the genre of concentration camp imagery.⁵¹

Years before emigrating east, my camera's attention was attuned to typical, some might say mundane photographic activities as portraiture and the California landscape. These are the foundations of my education in photography. Imogen Cunningham, Edward Weston, and of course Adams. Not Robert but Ansel. Robert Adams and his role in the New Topographics⁵² would impact my work in the future.

Upon immigration came incubating, pondering on the past and what might come next would be a ten-year long process. Missing the comforts of the familiar and surprised by the unexpected come dreams and thoughts, I a Jewish person alone, secular yes, but very much, alone. "When we are at home, we don't have to talk about it."⁵³ It is not like we need this sense of the past, a nostalgia for one's roots. Or do we? There is little nostalgia in any diasporic story. I imagine my mother and father hoped we would not carry that weight forward as they seemed to have had to. But that weight was felt, and it made me curious.

51 I was very happy the dog angry, back arched and the fire of the sun reflecting off an angry eye, was on the other side of that fence, staring straight at me.

52 In 1975 the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a man-altered landscape*, organized at the George Eastman (Kodak) Museum in Rochester, New York, curator William Jenkins brought a divergent group of photographers together for a exhibition about the landscape as perceived in the post golden age of photography (1930–1960). At the time the show was not well received. Over time the impact on the perception of the landscape in photography has changed radically. This exhibition is considered the catalyst of that change. Cheng, Wendy. *American Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2011, p. 151–62. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41237535>; (23.9.2023)

53 Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*. Basic Books. 2001. p. 251



Fig. 2 Fence & Very Angry Dog. 1990



Fig. 3 *Down a Narrowing Corridor. (1492–1945) 2009*

Immigrant communities gravitate towards each other often participating in a life far more communal out of the birth country. Religion may play a bigger, even outsized, role within such a community (often as a matter of perceived security). I do not search out my countrymen nor a common religious affiliation. In these regions, none of the religious are to be found. In this sense, I am in exile, awake in an unfamiliar place, language bouncing off me like damp snowflakes in the Finnish wind, and the mind wandering, but to where? Around Christmas time there is a reaching back to family Chanukah gatherings or in spring to Passover, missing the tastes and the atmosphere.

Today, when returning to those early photographs of barbed wire fences, barking angry dogs, and train tracks, for which I have made numerous, I see a frequent repetitions of familiar Holocaust symbols, now recognizing how they pose aesthetic and emotional dangers into their derivative and stereotypical characteristics.⁵⁴ But at that time there simply seemed to be the need to begin something. Those beginnings clearly wrested against the subject matter's visual traditions, as troubling and powerful as they are, of enslavement and annihilation, electrified fences, and vast pits of dead bodies. But the subject matter is certainly not only that. As hard as it is to get away from all that, it is from 'all that' where this project's visual explorations emanate.

Back in 2006 the explorations expanded the theme of the Holocaust inside my practice. Capturing my attention, two to place are arrived at, like bookends from the arc of history, the Andalusian Peninsula and the city of Granada, known up until the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 as *Garnata Al-Yahud*, and to Poland to be immersed in the dark history of the Warsaw ghetto, Majdenek and Treblinka extermination camps. A 'tone lamentation' (as I secretly referred to them) *Down a Narrowing Corridor*, ultimately completed in 2009. This work was meant to be my one (and only) contribution as a Jew, or as a Jewish artist, to the subject of the Holocaust.

However, after my initial visit to Treblinka in 2008, a project idea festered under my visual bonnet for years. Unable to free myself of the idea, the location and its history, this part of the story would need explorations. And with it, all the Holocaust including facets outside the edges of the usual.

⁵⁴ Ahokas, Pirjo and Chard-Hutchinson, Martine. *Reclaiming Memory. American Representations of the Holocaust*. University of Turku. 1997. p. 14–15

Two additional artworks came out of this search and exploration. Images made during my first Poland journey from a city park that a local historian informed me had been a place of great violence during the closing and deportations from the Radom ghetto. Trees, with buried bullets, survive still today with the local community preferring to forget and move on. Those tall trees, like aging physionotrases, standing against a coal pall, late autumn gray sky.

The second set of images, inspired by Alphonse Bertillon's anthropometric photographic methodology, used to great detriment by Francis Galton setting in motion terms we might use today such as stereotyping and racial profiling.⁵⁵ Galton's composite mug-shots are ghostly. Placing a stack of five tracings on a light table while preparing chemicals and seeing the lines from the composite of all five drawings. When separated the line drawing appear like microscope studies of the brain by Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852–1934). When printed together a similar ghosting as in Galton's composites appears. Bertillon techniques and Galton's purposes are a bitter stain on the sciences. And yet, by my eyes, these mysterious images represent the slaughter visited upon an untold number of people in forests across eastern Europe and the Baltics.

Where Santiago Ramón y Cajal's drawings, considered accurate still even today, and still used for medical education across the globe, mine could represent the chaos of the hunt into the wilderness of oblivion.

At that time in my life, out of a great uncertainty I would not have gone even to Auschwitz. Yes, in 1985 I called on Dachau but feeling myself far outside of the experience, the place made little sense, unable to make the transition from history book photographs, TV documentaries and such where Dachau plays a role, to what Germany has really made of the place today.

There was (and still is) the need to understand the location the Holocaust resides in the Jewish mind requiring a clearer cognizance of Jewish history (not in the religious sense), for what is the Jew in the modern world and my place and path inside the greater narrative?

55 <https://smarthistory.org/alphonse-bertillon-mugshot-and-record-of-francis-galton/>;
(28.9.2023)

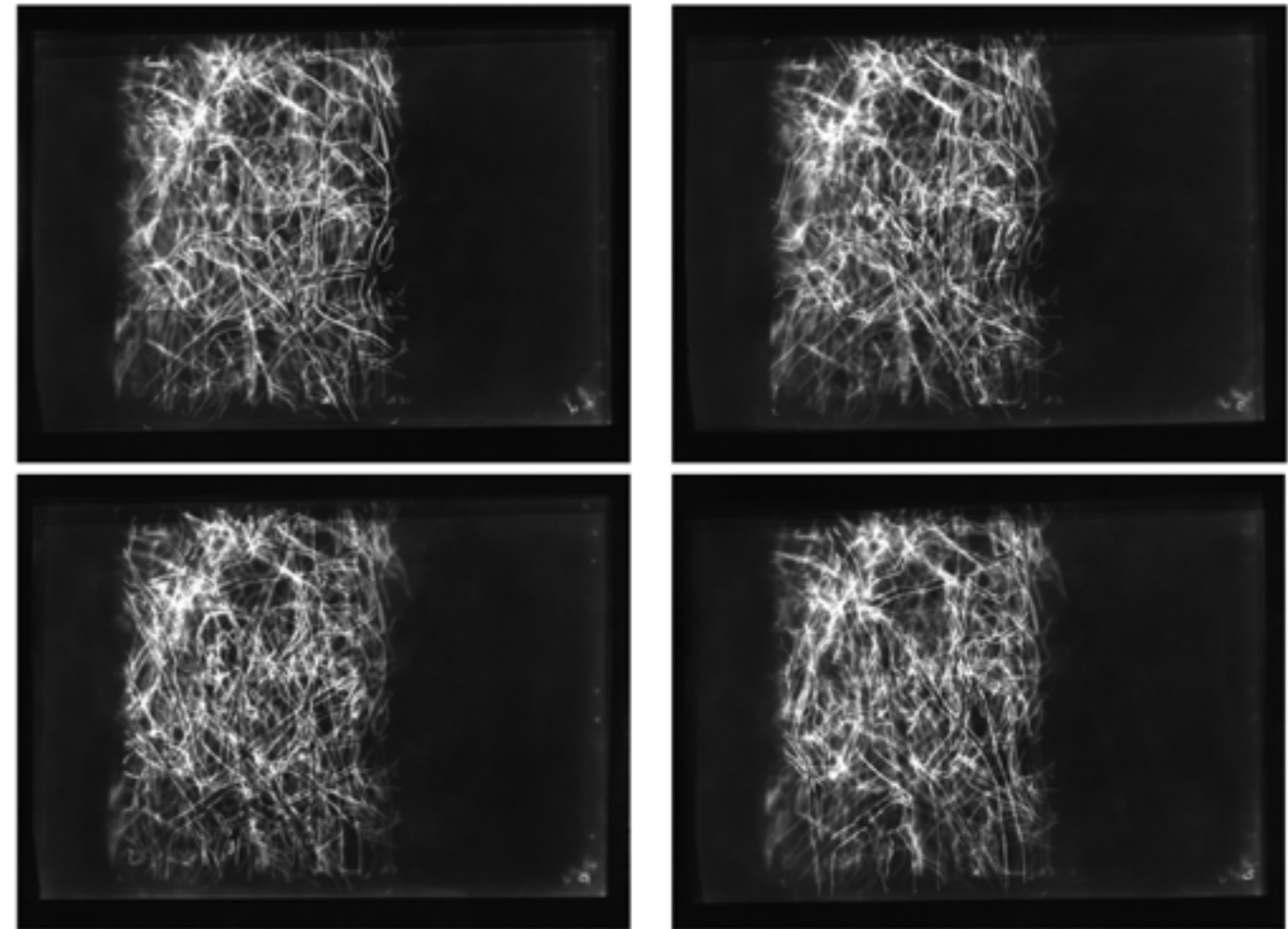


Fig. 4 *Physionotree-traces Series. 2009*



CONFRONTING UNSAYABILITY AND UNREPRESENTABILITY: SEEKING (PART 2)

The studio of the mind & Heart

To borrow and re-interpret the subtitle to William Kentridge's essay, Practical Epistemology: Life in the Studio⁵⁶, the history of *photography* turns time into stone, but also turns a stone into another kind of stone. In fact, it can turn a stone into almost anything. How transfixing photography must have been, from its earliest of hours and early in the years after August 19, 1839. I have only been immersed in photography at least since the age of eight, only one hundred and eight years later, after that grand announcement at the Institut de France.⁵⁷ For me that moment of birth was the moment I pulled the shutter lever on the Kodak Brownie down, hearing the shutter open and close, *sensing* a shaft of light spread its circles (of confusion) across the plane of film. Did I catch our dear collie, Mickey, in mid-flight with his lion's mane sweeping and swirling? My photographic ambitions then were simple and honest. Very quickly they greatly expanded. By the time I arrive at the outset of this project, I have a grip on the photography language, enough of it I had assumed, to be able to project ideas towards that future cone of light and meditate on what might be plausible, what could be possible, and what was probable.⁵⁸

56 Kentridge, William. 6 Drawing Lessons. 2014. Harvard. p. 105

57 The announcement of the Daguerreotype was made at a joint meeting of the French Academy of Sciences and the Académie des beaux-Arts held at the Institut de France in Paris on Monday, 19 August 1839.

58 The Einstein-Minkowski Light Cone. The characteristic feature of this spacetime is the Light Cone, a double-cone centered at each event in Spacetime. The upper-cone (called the future light-cone) represents the future history of a light-flash emitted at that event. The lower-cone (called the past light-cone) represents all directions from which light-flashes can be received at that event.

Fig. 5 Silent Witnesses

This cone of light I refer to, I borrow from the Einstein-Minkowski Light Cone. A very handy yet complex model of understanding the presence of the past on future potential. The past, a collection of hypersurfaces of the present, all relegated to the past, bundled into the past, and past cones stacked like matryoshka dolls and stored and archived progressively, simultaneously individually contained and contained within the ever-expanding universal cone-shaped container that reaches as far out to the edges of the sphere of events and awareness. The closer we get to the recent past the narrower the cone until we finally reach the present moment of understanding. Simply put, now.

The artist studio of the mind is always in the *now* and yet we must dig through boxes and bag (some in fact and other only of the mind) for useful fragments we suspect have potentials. Seeking out knowledge in the abstract would be impossible without our very personal storehouse of experiences and memories that is but one archive stored amongst many. To get a pass into others, we must first pass through our own narrowing minute cone, residing within the vastness of all that has been. The studio of my mind is where one discovers questions and concerns, scattered all about the place, going back into the earliest of experiences, prior to a conscious memory.

These past years I have been rummaging through my past, rummaging through the archives of memory, of so many individual and interlocking events and histories, opening one that leads to another and still more. It is endless. The further back one goes, the finer the history, like flakes of dust. There is so much to choke on that if one didn't have an intuition for the potentials, it would be a muddled chaos and of little use.

Before I walk around my studio, the physical place where I attend to one aspect of my work, the darkroom, my other studio is my past, like the stacks in an old library designed by Escher. For what I wish for, both are needs. To which I enter first is not important. Both require each other in getting the work done: "There are two figures walking in opposite directions. Trying to make sense of the idea of time and trying to find it in the material of the studio. Trying to find the transformation of different degrees of tension to squeeze an insight from the rock of stuck thought. Circling the ideas. The other self walks in the other direction, a

hand reaching for the papers, scissors, rock, thinking about the walk itself. The studio is the brain. The 17m walk in the studio like the 4cm circle of the synapses."⁵⁹

Here William Kentridge writes about the action of mind and body. I read it also as an analogy to the act of seeking which is also a trait of the duality. I dig into the past repeatedly finding fragments, splicing what I can together into *travel documents* allowing me an artistic embarkation, requiring throughout, a constant re-appraisal, even now as I write.

How can one know how much of early life is stored in that past light cone? I would wish for what fragments found might be larger and of clearer detail. These fragments, these threads, the tincture of not only a time past but a time existed, are the treasures that push one into the challenging sphere of the artistic potentialities.

TO DIVE INTO THE WELL OF SORROW: SEEKING (PART 3)

But Treasures deceive, and all too easily push one off a cliff into an abyss of incapacitation and oppression. Warnings, like sirens in the distance, have not stopped coming my way during all the years pursuit of insight into the Holocaust. The warnings come with qualifications, like to be careful, to keep some distance, to be objective. It hasn't been uncommon to be told so and so or something like: they themselves visited Auschwitz and had nightmares long afterwards. I recall friends and family checking in on me before and after spending twelve hours or more going through this theme park of death. I appreciate their concern. There is still merit in their concern.

Digging into these horrors is taxing. Discovering (if I can use such self-conscious term) just how far back into history the roots to this tragedy go is bewildering. Deep the wounds. A vast weeping wound, like rivulets dripping into tributaries spilling in from every which where, on this only planet of ours. If I had chosen to move on, as my own family recommended, and even insisted on, it would have been on the path to forget, to move on, to *put it behind me*. Maybe I would forget and live my life always focused on the future and let the past fade beyond obscurity and an infinity outside and beyond the realm of events. It is not in anyway allowed in the Jewish tradition to let the past go. We carry it with us.

59 Kentridge, William. p. 124-125

There is desire to let sleeping dogs lie, to forget, based on political or social expediency. In Spain it is called The Pact of Forgetting. “Let’s not disturb the graves and hurl bones at one another — let the historians do their job,” said José María Aznar, a former prime minister, in a speech years later.⁶⁰ Only now are the Spanish facing the traumas and horrors of the Franco dictatorship, already so many years after his death.

The well of sorrow has a narrow mouth but is deep and vast. The first sip of those waters might well be the most difficult. The art that called out to me in need of being made required a deep dive into history, recent and ancient. I needed to go beyond books and movies, and well aware that without contact with, at the very least with, the upper surface of the verified yet often forgotten soil, the location of toil, the photographs and accompanying materials would be of little import.

MATERIALITY IN ART AS A CONVEYER OF LANGUAGE FOR MODERN TIMES: SEEKING PART 4

Photography is the foundation on which these narratives rest upon. It is a kind of trick because photographs are purely illusionary. And so are memories. And so are the words that describe history. The goal throughout this research is to be accurate and truthful. Like any and all language, all comes down to the context of its use.

The physical character of materiality in both what is captured and what does the capturing does is what defines the photographic grammar. Through trial and error, one arrives at a point of possibilities and intentions. The entirety of my photographic education, prior to my current assignment (1991 to the present), has taken place analogically with digital photography entering my realm of understanding and experience not until 1989, the year prior to my departure from United States. I could not foresee how the digitization of photography could and would be supplanted almost entirely within fifteen years of its onset. I have not been keen on giving up the analogue grammar (from visualization, pre- and postproduction, and for exhibition) and its wonderful materiality which work with me and communicate with me, at my tempo, and to the sight and touch of it.

⁶⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/27/magazine/spain-stolen-babies.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article;> (15.11.2022)

Thomas Joshua Cooper, creator of *The Worlds Edge-Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity*, is slowly exhausting the last remaining batch of Agfa Multi Contrast Classic in the world. Everything in his process from camera and lens, film and film developer, paper and paper developer and post-production toning in selenium, are all components of his voice. With it we hear by seeing what he has to say.⁶¹ Cooper uses still to this day a film and photographic paper long since discontinued, in addition to a camera, an Agfa Ansco 5x7 built in 1898 in New York. Considering how large his exhibition prints are, he either has much of his desired materials in storage or is very frugal a master. Certainly, circumstances teach us the hard way that when the right circumstances arise, we are prepared.

I practice photography in the sincerest sense of the word, advancing beyond the tool’s limitations, ultimately exceeding my own misunderstood limits. The goal, to *speak* photographically in my unique voice, to hone that inner expression and make connections with tools and materials that unify expressively. Like Cooper, I have also counted how much of that Oriental G photography paper remains in storage. This sounds silly, even to me. But when one has spent many years focusing towards some end result, the saying: *Keep your eyes on the prize*⁶², in this case meaning; concentrate, consider, assess possibilities and circumstances.

TO SEEK IS TO FIND

From Intuition to Consciousness. The Art of Examination and Judgement. Exploration Before Creation

Step by step, from intuition to consciousness. Step by step, with a list of concerns. Step by step, a bigger picture forms from quantities of questions shouted out in the galleries of one’s mind, hoping for at least one to echo for a sign to proceed. At its most basic, there is the simplest of questions: can any of the following items find sayability and representability; an unknown and distant family’s annihilation, the known distant family’s annihilation, the struggle for refuge, villages emptied by violence, barren fields once blood soaked, fields coughing up their dead, the

⁶¹ [https://www.onlandscape.co.uk/2017/03/thomas-joshua-cooper/;](https://www.onlandscape.co.uk/2017/03/thomas-joshua-cooper/) (13.10.2022)

⁶² Original: Philippians 3:14–21. For me, not in a Christian context.

fear of violence and the unknown, doubt, the disappeared, the absent? Here a simplified list as a guide;

Exile

Diaspora

Semitic laws part 1 dictating: education, employment, residency, ownership.

Emigration, migration, and immigration.

Semitic laws part 2, dictating, education, employment, residency, ownership, marriage.

The Holocaust as a structured action.

Shoah as a burden without conclusion.

Family history (macro and micro)

Near vs. far consequences and histories

2006 and 2010 visits to Poland provided valuable grounding and understanding of the afore mentioned potentials and possibilities. Most, if not all, the photography created in Poland in 2020 would've likely failed without those previous experiences. Loaded with mental and diary-based notations based on conversations, observations and research gathered during those early visits, each intended body of work was realized beyond the intended.

TO FIND IS TO JUDGE: OF ACCEPTANCE OF AND/OR REJECTION OF

Trying to unwind the fierce history and tackle what I considered as exploratively indispensable, it became necessary for the mess of pieces, his scattered puzzle, to unify factors, bridging universal and personal features of this photographic endeavor. In part each idea required its qualities weighed and understood in its whole, rather like Ansel Adams' 'previsualization' philosophy, from idea to visualization, through materiality, the print, ending (if the art experience ever ends) in presentation. In old school darkroom language, from dry to dry.

V. WITNESSING THROUGH THE IMAGINATION AND THE ARTISTIC ACT

APPROACHES TO PHOTOGRAPHY

The Envisioning Information, Facts, Evidence, Emotion, Doubts

The above set of nouns make up the structure and the manner of my explorations. The following are the themes and subjects I chose to pursue for my photographic research.

THE GHETTO

Four defining characteristics of ghettos:

1. Resettlement and concentration into area only for Jews
2. Restrictions on entering and leaving the area
3. In existence for at least two weeks
4. Defined as ghetto or "Jewish residential area" in sources⁶³

63 <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20130500-holocaust-in-ukraine.pdf>. p. 64.; (25.1.2022)

TYPOLOGIES

The Germans established both “open” and “enclosed” ghettos in occupied Ukraine, and witnesses do not always discriminate between the two. For the purposes of this research, three main types of ghettos are identified.

1. Open ghettos (Jewish residential areas)
2. Enclosed ghettos (surrounded by barbed wire, wooden, or stone fences)
3. Destruction ghettos (existed for less than two months)⁶⁴

Once the German army enters Soviet Ukraine, a system of ghettos, an estimated two-hundred and eighty-five are established.⁶⁵ Many are small and not at all intended to exist for any long period of time. Some lasting from two to eight weeks before they are emptied, its occupants gathered and shot or murdered in gas vans. Around every region where ghettos are created, so are there killing fields, ravines, quarries, mine shafts, where men women and children are murdered and disposed of.

By the late 20th century, the progress of the modern world buries a great many ghettos under parking lots, shopping centers, apartment building and such, covering over the sights where people languished for a time before their murder. The sites of many mass graves are marked by monuments, but few plaques exist to inform inhabitants about the sites of former ghettos.⁶⁶

1941, in Poland alone, two years after Nazi Germany annexes Poland, there are over one thousand ghettos scattered throughout the occupied territories. Warsaw’s ghetto was the biggest and most cramped. In an area covering 2.4 percent of Warsaw’s total area, 350,000 Jews, thirty percent of the city’s population tries to survive. The Łódź ghetto, renamed Litzmannstadt was the first such ghetto and a huge task for the Germans as one in three out of the 700,000 population of Łódź was Jewish.⁶⁷

The Radom ghetto is a fraction of the size but was just as overcrowded. What remains today is remarkable. The ghetto’s outer perimeters are in part the outer walls to buildings, not so much abandoned as hollowed out. Deeds to

64 Ibid. p. 64

65 Ibid. p. 84

66 Ibid. p. 77

67 Rees, Laurence. *The Holocaust. A New History*. Penguin. 2017. p. 158–159

properties still exist, relatives of the murdered have rights to claim property (if they produce adequate proof), at one time beautiful buildings, and the center of the Jewish community of Radom, an old community dating back to 1567 (first documented record).⁶⁸

Deep inside the discussion of European and worldwide Jewish history, the ghetto is never far from the tongue. The ghetto, Jewish ghetto, goes far back into history and is consequential in understanding to what lengths societies and governments have taken to control Jewish populations. The ghettos assigned for Jews during the Second World War were gathering and holding places where none could exit of free will. The Nazi’s, realizing the murder of so many could not take place all at once, the ghetto was ideal, nothing more than a death row.

Wandering amongst the buildings in what remains of the Radom ghetto, in the alleys and along streets that meander throughout the ghetto, one senses anxiety permeated through all waking and sleeping hours, embedded. When the starving trapped within the ghetto walls are ordered out, those caught trying to escape are lined up and shot against an outer wall. This inner vs. outer space, is the borderline between two impossible spaces. My great grandparents, did they endure this before they were dragged off and murdered at the Yvanitchev Yar either in November of 1942 or January of 1943?⁶⁹ Did they manage avoiding being murdered at the hands of local nationalists during the seemingly endless pogroms taking place? Or, did they have escape deep into Russia just prior to the German onslaught, never to be heard from again?

GRAVEL AND TOIL ACROSS EUROPE: ON HANDS AND KNEES DIGGING

Jewish refugees in Finland fleeing Nazi persecution find themselves on hands and knees digging gravel with poor tools for the railway the Nazis needed in which to penetrate into Russia. On the one hand I talk about Jews grabbed from all over Europe and funneled either off to death or into a slave labor death mill. And on the other, Jews desperately seeking sanctuary anywhere, even Finland, finding themselves required to work, just as all able-bodied adults were required during the war period, only finding themselves in northeastern Lapland, the Salla region, surrounded by German soldiers, administrators of work and prison camps and de

68 Home Radom. *History of Radom’s Jews*. “Resursa Obywatelska” Cultural and Arts Center. 2018. p. 7

69 <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/lugansk/>; (10.7.2022)

facto overlords of the region. When the Finnish authorities deemed it too dangerous for these refugees to be anywhere near the Germans, the refugees are sent south to toil making barbed wire, by hand.⁷⁰

(For further reading: Chapter X, A Topography of Secrets in my Neighborhood. p. 230)

And at the same time, all through Poland and all through the occupied and annexed areas, factories producing anything and everything for the war machine ‘employ’ labor, slave labor. As conditions grow more brutal only death frees up space for another to fill its place.

OF GEOGRAPHY AND THE LANDSCAPE

Ansel Adams believed the landscapes best photographed before 10am and after 2 pm. The New Topographic photographers like Robert Adams (no relation to Ansel), Lewis Baltz and the Becher team, Bernd and Hilla, had different intentions. They might choose a light smack down the middle of day when light could be at its ‘worst’. These New Topographic landscapists, finding inspiration along the character of Timothy O’Sullivan and the landscape imagery made by the wet plate collodion process, concentrate on sky and earth appearing as they were, including the character of air, dust, and the heat of the places.

There are approaches to landscape photography grounded in method and dogma. Bernd and Hilla Becher have sought out industrial forms, water towers, blast furnaces and such, from all angles and choosing light that cradled their subjects neutrally and passively. Ansel Adams hunted for the greatness of America, Robert Adams for something closer to the truth. What do I aim for? Still deeply immersed in Adams, both Ansel and Robert, in Weston, mainly the elder Edward (the elder), in Minor White and/or someone from the present day, Joshua Thomas Cooper. Where Cooper is different is not necessarily in how he makes his photographs, but why.

Cooper, California born, part Cherokee, part Jewish, his approach to the geography of history is both an inspiration and an insanity. Cooper’s determination is to set his camera on the precise location of events in history of great influence. It isn’t enough for his work to represent or allude to those events. His work requires that specific location for that unique understanding of the question at hand, the meaning of the specific geography’s history. My decisions on how to proceed with

70 Kortenien, Savu E. *Prosessi/Der prozess 1: Käskyjä ja kuiskauksia*. 2021. Kaltio. 1–2 p. 71



Fig. 6 *Maps from Times in Exile*. 2019

‘landscapes of the metropolis of death’⁷¹ (to borrow directly from the title of Otto Dov Kulka’s youth spent in Auschwitz) is influenced by this determination to ‘re-witness’ a geography’s history as a way of keeping it from vanishing, at least, from my memory.

Where my earliest Holocaust imagery is only referential (bordering on cliché), *Down a Narrowing Corridor* (figure 3), depends on the same dynamic, standing and presence on actual soil, absorbing the landscape’s facts, both of the past and present. This was the model for any future explorations to the geography of history themselves. Where the land is of concern, the land and the scape to be photographed had to be sight and history specific.

MAPS AND CHARTS

Born at the equator, high in the mountains, my family’s local travels were never along a splayed-out space but either up or down. Leaving Colombia one last time the flight rises high above the Altiplano Cundiboyacense, high above the Colombian Andes, bidding a final goodbye to Bogotá and as it gently veers to the northeast, and destination New York. Up until then, life is off and on through my first eleven years between Bogotá and New York. My childhood years the trip would last sixteen hours stopping in Barranquilla and Panama City before continuing to Miami followed by New York. For this last journey the flight goes directly to the Big Apple. Much had changed since 1958. At that time my birth country was descending into civil war. The internal maps of my world were either in inclinations or declinations from our home if we were going up into the mountains or

71 Kulka, Otto Dov. *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death. Reflections on memory and imagination*. Belknap Harvard. 2013. Cover title.

dropping down into the basins. Now it is a direct, non-stop journey first to New York followed by a non-stop flight, travelling west across three time zones and dropping south across a few latitudes, finally ending up in the city by the Bay, San Francisco and a new life.

Of all my father's Colombian belongings a map case stuffed with rolls and rolls of rolled up maps was to find a lonely, damp place in our San Francisco basement, to be promptly forgotten. Years have passed and knowing they were there, I often went to look at those captivating maps containing geologic clues to my birth country. I could study them as I might look at the paintings in a gallery or museum. These piles of maps had not exited the basement until rolling as many as possible and returning home just prior to the onset of Covid-19. Dust from 1969 choking like history can choke. My father's work and his story are an integral component of this research. I'll explain.

He, as a well-educated young Jewish man, is required to make decisions towards his economic and professional future and a matter of the ability to do the work one had intended and studied for. But clearly Jewish, by name and by face, his future on North American soil was not going to happen under the then 1950's pervading socio-economic climate. Succinctly put, as a Jewish American there would be few opportunities of employment in his field in the late 1940's, around the time he completed his M.A. in petroleum geology.

(For further reading: Chapter X, Between Bogotá and Dachau p. 194)

There is this weirdly familiar element that reminds me of the decision forced upon him, that if *you* want to have a future in this business, it isn't going to be here. Here being those United States of America. I must be clear, his decision is not made from looking down the barrel of a gun. But it is a reminder that even so few years after the Holocaust's end and the camps liquidated, anti-Jewish sentiment had not changed on the home front.

Those maps, produced during his many years in Colombia, are geologic explorations, envisioned information of a very specific type. Some of the maps are from a bird's eye view and other a cross-section, perhaps a worm's view. They are all data maps⁷². These maps, a combination of cartography and statistics are in a language not only that of geology, but specifically petroleum geology.

72 Tufte, Edward R. *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Graphic Press. 2001. p. 20

My father's work was gathering information that, in addition, needed visualizing. Although my father was an aesthete, the maps and charts are not visualized according to aesthetic inclinations, but to his and/or his employer's needs. Yet, as a child, to me they were very beautiful. They are with my adult eyes intriguing, even mesmerizing. Information design in the field of data visualization can be remarkably aesthetic.

I quote from Edward R. Tufte: "*Graphical elegance is often found in simplicity of design and complexity of data.*"⁷³ I cannot say I was aware of the word *elegant* back then, but back then as now, my eyes roved over lines and numbers, occasionally attempting to dissect the maps and chart legends for clues to meanings. But as there was no way to fathom their meanings, I assumed them to represent something of this planet I stand on.

A funny story about maps, proprietary information and the camera: At 19, during my second year studying photography, in a portrait class, for an assignment, I intended making an environmental portrait of my father, in his office. He agreed. I showed up tripod in hand, a Mamiya twin-lens reflex camera (that I barely knew how to operate), film, light meter and an idea. I would place him in front of one of the large maps tacked to a wall behind his desk. He would have his pipe in hand, looking stylish and dignified. As I set up the camera he went about his business until I called him over. When he sat down, he asked if the map would be visible in the photograph. I said yes, it would be prominently displayed with only his head and upper body framed in the lower third corner of the square frame. He stood up and said sorry, the map should not be seen by anybody, trade secrets. I did not understand that his own son could not be trusted? It took months getting over it. Ok, I am naïve. As I recall the portrait was a failure. I never succeeded in making a proper portrait of my father thereafter.

So, for the greater narrative, my father's decision-making needs to be included, as well as those maps and charts. They are his work, but those graphic maps are also very much about his greater inner and outer outlook.

73 Ibid. p. 177



Fig. 7 *The Star on the Coat*. 2020

THE STAR

To dress is a selective event, and at the same time practical and personal. Covering the body and adapting to the variations of weather, time of day and the seasons are the practical purpose of dress.⁷⁴ Evgenii Khaldei's portrait of the couple (Budapest Jewish Survivors) both still with their handmade Jewish star stitched to their overcoats, has everything selective about it except for the star. The couple has survived the Holocaust. They have ventured out into the snow covered and destroyed Budapest streets, wearing heavy winter coats and thick scarves, he with a woollen men's hat, she with head wrap, both stylishly set for an afternoon walk. Except, those stars, which look like as if cut from fabric, perhaps a bed cover, and hand stitched to their coats. Though the war has essentially come to a conclusion, this couple are still with one foot in hiding and the other testing freedom is true.

“Clothes are also a means of expression, regardless of whether one is dressed fashionably, in a business-like manner or elegantly, or expressing something quite different.”⁷⁵ Jews ordered to deportation centers, always forcibly marched at gunpoint along city streets, often dressed in their best clothing. Knowing nothing of their destination, having packed what they can and dressing decently. The most famous photograph of the children of the Holocaust is undoubtedly ‘Warsaw Ghetto Boy’, made in 1943 between mid-April and mid-May.

This boy and others in the photograph have survived years in the ghetto and previous four weeks during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. He exits a bunker where he and others have endured the ghetto firebombing and gassing, wearing what appear to be polished leather boots, woolen high socks, short pants, a thick wool coat and a wool cap. Did his parents decide to dress him in his best as they were being sent off into the unknown? Was the boy dressed to make a statement? The boy, his identity unknown to this day, was most likely under ten years of age, as he has no star on his coat.

Today people buy clothing with tags big and small, advertising proudly their favorite brands. The Nazi brand is a revulsion and meant as a revulsion against the enemy. All across Europe the Nazis demand, and require via penalty of death, the star be worn and seen. From the furthest corners of Vichy France to the far north-east in the Soviet Ukraine, these equilateral triangles that make up the star are pinned to clothing, printed on armbands, and worn at any and all times. In every region under German control the stipulation comes with a set of rules and penalties.

74 Harni, Pekka. *Object Categories*. 2010. Aalto University. p. 74

75 *Ibid.* p. 74

The find and purchase of the golden yellow and black equilateral star in Belgium with the French *Juif* embedded, still today day unnerves me. The Nazis were certainly industrious of their war against the Jew and engrossed in bearing down on their *ex-citizens*⁷⁶ with a fusillade of humiliation often leading to violence, inevitably leading to murder, the only logical outcome, as irrational as this seems.

This French yellow star, stored in a drawer, calls for me often. I let it rest in my palm. I Study it. And I also often asked myself, why on earth should I have this? What good does it do me? So, I consider the morality of using the star towards artistic expression. My ambivalence towards this artifact is acute. Knowing that when used, no matter the presentation, it is a fiction with an undeniable resistance. But this extended story is not a fiction. And it is searing with friction. It is based on facts, all of which have been corroborated. But the *badge of shame* is such an integral aspect of the story. I return the star into that same drawer where it waits, suspended in time, until a decision is made with what to do with it, and because of it.

(For further reading; Section X: Equilateral Triangles. The Golden Yellow of Envy and Gall and an Old Coat. p. 208)

NAKED YOU SHALL REMAIN (TATTOO)

I cannot recall when, I was still a child, spotting a construction worker with a tattooed arm. I succumbed to the tattoo desires and many years later desiring something permanently marking some stage in life, I took that tattoo. I couldn't reveal it to my parents, and certainly not to my mother. But one fine midsummer day with my parents in Finland, exiting sauna, jumped into a cool lake, my mother saw it and murmured, "why on earth would you do that to yourself?" Behind her reaction exists two things. The first, simply put, "silly". The other had a far reach back into time and religious practice. As she put it, G_d brought you in naked and naked shall you leave. Leviticus 19:28, "You shall not etch a tattoo on yourselves." It is considered a mutilation that is an offense and an insult to G_d's work.

The Holocaust and the tattooing of camp prisoners complicates matters greatly, especially today with the seeming hunger to be tattooed top to bottom. For the Nazis, on the one hand, a matter of bureaucracy, the tattooed numbers matching numbers on a list. On the other, the forcible stripping of one's *given* name, given at birth. That stripping away of one's name is also the stripping and cancelling of one's past. With each murdered prisoner, a number would be crossed off the

76 Eleventh Decree to the Law on the Citizenship of the Reich, November 25, 1941.



Fig. 8 *Indelible*. 2022

list. The consequence of this action is embedded deep into the mind of older generation Jews. Many survivors have chosen surgical removal, for many reasons like survivors' guilt, and another, the attempt to forget. Still others have taken a different tack. Choosing to retain them, proof to their experiences of which many in the public doubt, even today.

For the murdered, the tattooed blue ink was discharged along with the flesh as smoke through the crematorium's towering smokestacks.

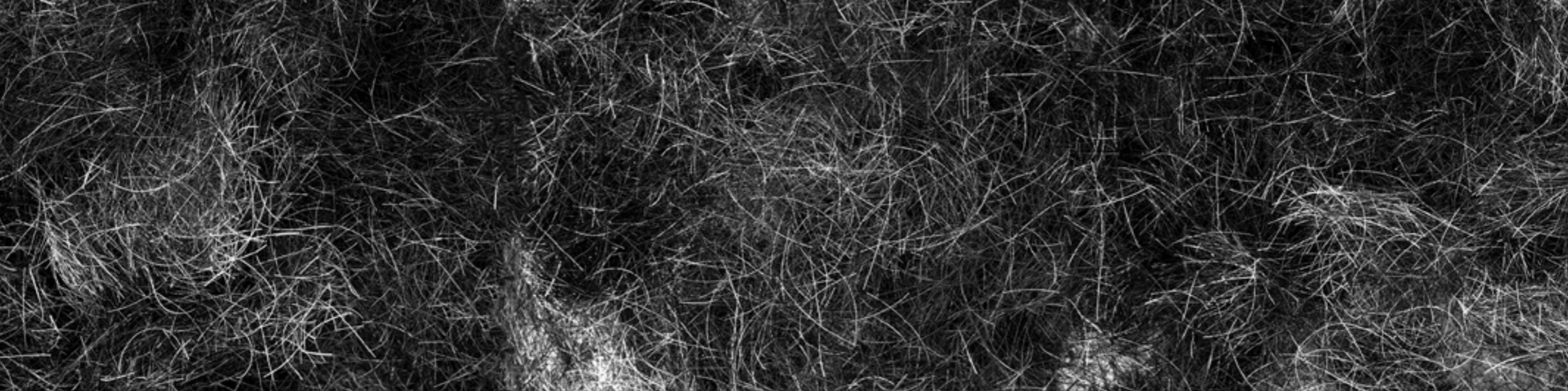


Fig. 9 Hair. Cross Section of Years. 2020

Artur Zmijewski's 80064, a performative video work from 2005 where the artist convinces 92-year-old Auschwitz survivor Józef Tarnawa, to "renew" his tattoo, as it has almost faded completely away. I will try and keep my personal opinions of this action in check. Zmijewski, an artist provocateur, attempts to "open the doors of memory." Tarnawa himself, in the eleven-minute video becomes ambivalent of this action.⁷⁷ At its most spare, renewing the number is a metaphor about memory and history. Was this hackneyed lesson worth the price of a vulnerable old man's peace of mind?⁷⁸ Tarnawa is victimized not just once (1943), but a second time (2005), only the second act renews the terror endured and is he forced to carry this until the end of his days, which, at the time of this insulting video act, would arrive sooner than later.

Tattoos are powerful in their meanings and purposes. The act of tattooing has a deeply uncomfortable place even in the modern Jewish psyche, and yet the global proliferation tattooing has not spared even Jerusalem, where there are currently over twenty such studios.

77 International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA). <https://www.idfa.nl/en/film/e42b89be-9d61-4934-b12b-19cf72988d95/80064>; (21.8.2023)

78 An Artist Turns People Into His Marionettes. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/30/arts/design/30zmijewski.html>; (17.6.2022)

FICTIONS UNDERLINE THE FACTS: A HUMAN BYPRODUCT

What started out as a project marking the path of the years turned into something far more important, intriguing, and frightening. By the time I reached my forties, gray had long appeared in and around my beard, head, as well as a receding hairline.

I began saving and dating all that I cut. At first it was meant only to follow the natural path of aging. The goal was to live long enough to have compiled a complete grayscale.

Over the years small bags, most dated, some with ink rubbed off or faded, has proved to be quite a collection. Hair is a touchy subject. It is more often than not central to one's vanity. I lament my balding. My grandfather Morris, the person for who this entire project got its start, and to whose memory this project is dedicated, died at eighty-seven with a full head of hair. I had assumed that would be my destiny. I figured wrong. In an off-handed way I also consider myself lucky. I'll explain in a moment. One of the more revolting acts Nazis perpetuated against Jews was a sheering, head to toe, bald, before or after the gas chambers. Many go to their deaths as naked as the day they are born. The hairless bodies are promptly cremated and the shorn hair packed and stored in the camps until being shipped to Germany for use in winter clothing insulation, sofa and car seat stuffing, and especially bomb fuses.

BEETHOVEN'S MITZVAH

Hair can contain one's DNA. Until just recently it is believed Beethoven died of lead poisoning. A lock of his hair cut by violinist Karl Holz for Anton Helm, a renowned pianist, whose wife, who greatly admired Ludwig Von Beethoven, wished for a lock of his ample hair. But this was not the lock of Beethoven's hair that captivates many hoping for the truth of Beethoven's many ailments and possible reasons for his ill health and deafness, and very possibly for power of his music. This remarkable story continues. A Jewish boy of fifteen, Ferdinand Hiller, accompanies his composition instructor, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, on what turns out to be the final visits with the great composer himself. They return to Beethoven's side after his death, after the autopsy. Although Beethoven's brother, Johann, had refused all permissions to cutting and securing a lock of hair, in the sadness of the moment Ferdinand Hiller pulls out scissors tucked in his heavy overcoat and cuts a thick lock of Beethoven's hair, pulling it away from his head, setting it free.⁷⁹

But the story doesn't stop there. By 1880, Germany is becoming a difficult place Jews. Ferdinand Hiller, already in his 80's, offers the lock of Beethoven's hair he had snipped at Beethoven's death fifty-six years earlier, too his son Paul, an opera singer, on his 30th birthday. In December 1911, now eighty-four years since Beethoven's death, Hiller takes the wooden framed lock of hair for repairs. It is the last known reference of the existence of the lock until one day showing up on a Copenhagen Sotheby's 1994 auction list, lot #33. Two months after the auction and sale of the hair, a letter arrives at the Beethoven Center in San Jose, California, explaining the history of how the lock of hair ends up in Denmark. In 1943 a Danish doctor named Kay Alexander Fremming, in the town of Gilleleje, located at the northern most point of Sjælland island, home of the capital Copenhagen, helps Jews, both offering medical treatments and arranging for their secret escape on midnight boat transports into neutral Sweden. The lock of hair? Payment for his services.⁸⁰

79 Russell, Martin. *Beethoven's Hair*. Penguin Random house. 2001. p. 32-33

80 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ira_F._Brilliant_Center_for_Beethoven_Studies; (13.2.2023)

As author Russell Martin notes in *Beethoven's Hair*, "His wild hair had been the physical thing that most immediately characterized him, it was a metaphor somehow for his eccentric ebullience, his utter unpredictability, his astonishing artistic power."⁸¹ Martin's book about Beethoven's hair is published in 2000 and a documentary film follows in 2005. Since then, DNA analysis has advanced greatly and the search for more of Beethoven's hair continues resulting in numerous surprises, one being that the Hiller lock (also known as The Guevara Lock, cut on Beethoven's death, March 27, 1827) is not, in fact, Beethoven's hair at all, but that of a woman, believed to be Sophie Lion, the wife of Ferdinand Hiller's son Paul. And to make things yet more interesting, Sophie Lion is Ashkenazi Jewish. The latest results alter the theory of Beethoven's poor health, deafness and cause of death. If the hair truly belonged to Sophie Lion, then her fate was sealed by lead poisoning. But those strands of hair, as poisoned as they are, most likely saved one Jew fleeing certain death.

Imagine as well, all throughout Germany, hair containing DNA code of the murdered, found in war era leather coats, stuffed in vintage car seats and possibly in living room sofas still in use today.

My daughter found this compunction of saving my cut hair "sick". A group of my students found the experience of eyeing my hair incased in plastic freezer bags, a cross section gathered over years, bewildering. Hair is bewildering. In Auschwitz, Block 4, the hair of the dead is stunningly on display. Visitors are admonished to not photograph the hair.⁸²

(For further reading; Section X: Equilateral Triangles and The Golden Yellow of Envy and Gall and an Old Coat. p. 208)

81 <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/the-peculiar-tale-of-beethovens-hair>; (03.2.2023)

82 Badkem, Anna. On Visiting Auschwitz and Grappling with the Climate of Evil and Injustice. <https://lithub.com/on-visiting-auschwitz-and-grappling-with-the-climate-of-evil-and-injustice/>; (29.9.2022)

STATISTICS: IN A VALLEY OF BONES

The artist challenge, finding new ways to illuminate things in spite of ‘nothing new under the sun’ assumptions. Heading toward a century (nearly eight years as of this writing) since the world awoke to horrific images in newspapers and cinema newsreels of emaciated bodies bulldozed into waiting pits. Today, do such scenes confound or shock us anymore? Could it be simply those piles of bones destined for a trash heap have become abstraction that statistics are impotent to clarify. Have those images, over time and through over-use, deadened our compassion?

‘Icons of destruction’.⁸³ These image types have become Holocaust tropes, especially tropes about photography and the Holocaust, nevertheless lacking much informational value, whether denotive or connotative.⁸⁴ They have become an outsized aspect of the Holocaust, they are the only images the world has seen and knows and therefore too easily dismiss or disregard. The Nazis and their collaborators were determined beyond all logic to ensure no future Jewish contribution nor continuity in this world, or any other, any further. In those pile of bones, I see the enormous loss of contribution, potential and presence. Yet, how through art can a face be put on it?

(Further reading: Chapter X, Gray Zones that Dot the Landscape, p.244)

83 Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory*. 2012. Columbia. p. 113

84 *Ibid.* p.113



Fig. 10 Burnt Offerings (outtake). 2020

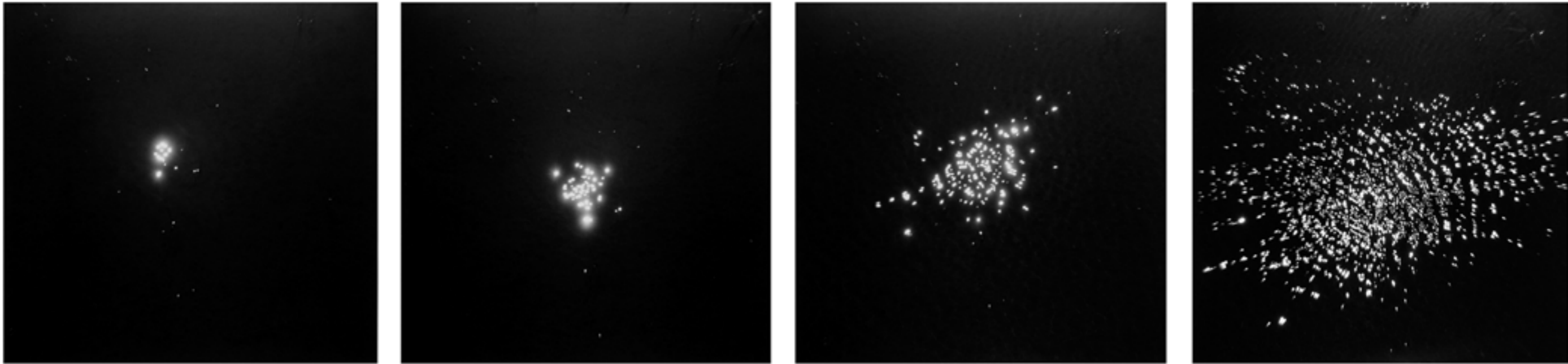


Fig. 11 *The Weight of Light*. 2004

A BELATED GENESIS: LIGHT AND TIME

Once, I fell mute trying to introduce an exhibition of photographs. When my mouth finally opened, seemingly from a blank sheet the following lifted off my tongue: “This exhibition has come about from a complete loss of ideas. But in refusing to give up I retreat into the light.”⁸⁵

Usually, we look at things and record through the process of light waves focused onto emulsions with light sensitive properties that grab and hold. If all goes according to the process, we can reflect on our observations indefinitely. Do we genuinely understand what we are able to observe after the fact? Does it derive meaning? At the outset, I contemplated long and hard on the core of the story, gathering things, topics, experiences, curiosities, questions, a lot of questions, and weaving them into a unifiable structure as a guide with guardrails to keep from

85 Opening speech at my own MA exhibition, *Transmigrations & Ghost Hunts*. Faculty of art and design. Gallery Katve. 10.2009

getting lost along the way. Now was not the problem of a loss of ideas but a place and moment in which to depart from.

Lähtökohta (lähtökohta),⁸⁶ the meaning, as accurately as I can translate it, a point of departure. But that is not precisely its meaning. I understand it as everything one brings to that place from where things begin. It is the past, all experience, all learned, like a suitcase filled with all one’s belongings. Once, long ago, walking through stripped forest I came upon a large puddle filled with rain from a recent thunderstorm. With the wind raising and ebbing, the sun’s reflection was scattering like a new year’s fireworks display. That scattering light, right out of the story of Genesis. I also witnessed the dark waters devour the light.

86 *Lähtökohta*, a Finnish word with an astonishing meaning, poorly translates into English. Point of departure might be the closest in character. I might say that it is the past to present to the future, like the Einstein-Minkowski Light Cone.

This experience and the artwork that came from it is the groundwork, is the *lähtökohta* for the diptych *The History of Time* (fig. 13), illustrating the immigrant passage across the Atlantic.

This is how in judging what has been essential to the visual narrative, the process of understanding what should and could be *'witnessed'* via the imagination through the artistic processes, has been attempted.

What follows is a list of Holocaust topics disregarded for this research and for what reasons.

CAMP LIFE IN THE DEAD ZONE

This thesis is not and has never been intended to be a concise or even partial tome on Jewish history. There is much that has been dropped in transit or not considered within the structure essential.

(More on this addressed in Chapter VIII: The Art of Elocution and Transmission. p. 130)

The expectations for the dissertation's artistic component has impacted on the character of the artwork as well as the research subject matter. The Holocaust plays a primary role in this research with everything entering and exiting this ghastly period. But I have felt it is too *simplistic* to only spend my days wandering the paths, fields, and barracks of the centers of the factories of annihilation. These places, in particular Auschwitz, have been written about and photographed extensively in almost every conceivable light and through all the seasons of the year. There is little that I am able to contribute except for one little location, so captivating in its darkness, it has ruined many a night's sleep. The courtyard where Primo Levi and thousands upon thousands more suffered under every and all conditions, the *apel*, here they stood time and again, waiting for the ritual counting, as well as for public executions. This piece of miserable gravel marked Primo Levi in manner that only he has been able to express. His words are searing, leaving at least this reader to set foot on such earth. (fig. 76)

The Holocaust is embodied by Auschwitz. It is therefore understandable that Auschwitz might be the first place when getting acquainted with Holocaust history. But there is little to add to the Auschwitzian experience that would provide any meaning or impact either to the reader of the dissertation or to the viewer of my exhibition.

Staying away from camp life is not the same as staying away from the subject of death. The Camps are, in a sense, empty of life, excepting for the throng of

tourist wishing to venture into the dark history (or, for example, tourists to Krakow, paying for all inclusive tour packages, Auschwitz included, along with a few castles and boat rides). The vast area of Auschwitz, filled with visitors from many walks of life and continents, meandering around as if searching for something, speaks much about world tourism in the 20th and 21st century, and tells of the importance unambiguously of this geography of history. But at Auschwitz, my camera would bring no new insight or even new knowledge.

MEDICAL EXPERIMENTATION IN BLOCK 10 AND OTHER LOCATIONS:

The list is long. I will detail two such subjects.

The Holocaust touches on everything man can do as well as not do. I decline to peer into the trauma of medical experimentation. Artist Judy Chicago, in her *Holocaust Project: From Darkness to Light* (1993)⁸⁷, followed a traditional path into this subject with a couple of additions, differentiating her input/output from other such projects, homosexuality and the Holocaust, and medical experimentation. Two tabu subjects. I stay away from Mengele. The year Mengele arrives in Auschwitz to do his 'research', all lines have already been crossed and whatever temperament of morality or ethics have long been scrubbed from thought. With his reluctant and loathing assistance, Wilhelm Brasse, a trained photographer, a man sent to Auschwitz as a political prisoner already in 1940, he is ordered to photograph Mengele's victims, mostly women and girls, from all angles, partial and full bodied, often naked.⁸⁸

Mengele was not the only Nazi doctor conducting medical experimentation at Auschwitz, but his name represents the ultimate signature on Nazi behalf, of medical ideals thoroughly corrupted. Years before the Nazis included eugenics, or *Rassenhygiene*, the German equivalent, into their political agenda, racial hygienists in the 1920's were sympathetic to the Nazi movement early on.⁸⁹ In 1933 genetic research gets a big boost leading directly to Mengele's so-called research taking place in Block 10.

87 Chicago, Judy. *Holocaust Project: From Darkness to Light*. Penguin Books; First Edition (October 1, 1993) 1985–1993

88 Rees, Laurence. *The Holocaust. A New History*. 2017. Penguin. p. 357–88

89 *The Lancet*. December 2004. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(04\)17619-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(04)17619-8/fulltext;); (8.2.2023)

“The existing evidence illustrates an inherent logic of these research endeavours: the urge to establish new knowledge superseded any respect for the people who suffered in these experiments. Faced with the challenge of a given medical question, researchers sought opportunities to carry out the experiments required to solve it. It was in concentration camps, asylums, and hospitals in the occupied territories that they found these opportunities because existing legal regulations and sanctions did not apply there.”⁹⁰

Whether the science was outdated or brought new knowledge to the field of medicine, Nazi logic was its impulse. Within the electrified fences at Auschwitz anything having to do with Block 10 was nothing but living horror. Those who hadn’t succumbed to the experiments were subsequently gassed (often immediately). The few miraculous survivors carried the results of *Volkskörper* (body national) science to their graves.

Beyond the Nuremberg Medical Trial of 1946–47, there are medical ethical issues that have raised questions on how the data archives based on these experiments should be used, if at all. As recently as 1989 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considered using Nazi research into phosgene gas effects believing the data could help US soldiers stationed in the Persian Gulf at the time.⁹¹ For fear of criticism the data was not used. Writing for *Jewish Law*, Baruch Cohen concluded that the EPA's "knee-jerk reaction" to reject the data's use was "typical, but unprofessional", arguing that it could have saved lives.⁹²

90 Ibid.

91 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_human_experimentation; (20.2.2023)

92 Ibid. Cohen, Baruch C. "The Ethics of Using Medical Data from Nazi Experiments". *Jewish Law: Articles*. 2008. <http://www.jlaw.com/Articles/NaziMedEx.html> (23.3.2023)

THAT WHAT IS LEFT OUT IS PRESENT NONE THE LESS

In places like the Auschwitz museum, all primary Holocaust themes are covered. Everything having taken place during those years is not just a minor detail, as Jean-Marie Le Pen rudely stated on 13th of September, 1987: JEAN-MARIE LE PEN :

*“Je suis passionné par l'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale. Je me pose un certain nombre de questions. Je ne dis pas que les chambres à gaz n'ont pas existé. Je n'ai pas pu moi-même en voir. Je n'ai pas étudié spécialement la question. Mais je crois que c'est un point de détail de l'histoire de la Deuxième Guerre mondiale.”*⁹³

Here the statement in translation:

“I am passionate about the history of the Second World War. I ask myself a number of questions. I am not saying that the gas chambers did not exist. I couldn't see any myself. I haven't specifically researched the issue. But I think it is a quirk of World War II history.”

A “quirk”? Le Pen’s passions of the past and the manner in which they are conveyed are words from his mouth to the ears of Holocaust deniers, and there are plenty across the globe. What is being passed down and solidified in the minds of many is the following: “c'est un point de détail...”⁹⁴ Meaning, in the scheme of things, it is minor and of little consequence. The consequences of the attempted annihilation of European Jewry have been to leave a black hole in every community, in every city, town and village. Even such a minor “detail” as that is trapped in the deepest reassesses of every European psyche, cannot be expunged no matter how much such people as le Pen and his ilk attempt to.

93 https://fr.wikiquote.org/wiki/Jean-Marie_Le_Pen; (11.4.2023)

94 Ibid.

A prime example of this is how Spain has never recovered from the expulsion of their Jewish population. In 2013 the Spanish government makes an announcement granting citizenship to descendants of the Jews exiled from Spain in 1492. In the first months after the offer, the government receives six thousand requests. For Spain the expulsion is still today a psychological, intellectual, and economic disaster. The edict secured the power of the Spanish Inquisition that stilted Spanish society, lasting well into the 19th century.⁹⁵ The Alhambra Decree of 1492, better known as the Edict of Expulsion, which sent Jews scrambling in all directions, including into hiding, is revoked not until December 16th, 1968, done in conjunction with the Roman Catholic Second Vatican Council's document *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time), stressing that the Jews could not be held responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, and that, contrary to Catholic teachings over the centuries, Jews were not an accursed people.⁹⁶ I have little doubt Le Pen thinks the Edict also a minor detail of history, perhaps just an aberration.

As I have listed above, there are certain themes that are chosen to steer clear from as my contributions would be of little relevance. There are many subthemes relating to the Holocaust for which I have not addressed directly through my photography, for example the amount of people who hid in the forests, moving only in the dark of night, in search of food, evading Nazis and collaborators. What also falls outside of my sphere of knowledge and its pertinence to this research, Jews teaming up with the partisan armies throughout the occupied territories. A very important topic as it defeats the perception of a people walking naively to the slaughter.

To put it another way, the tributaries carrying all of world and Jewish history into and out of the Holocaust are simply so many, yet all of importance, that I am obliged to choose themes from those directly impacting on my family story directly.

I repeat this sentence: There is a type of understanding about the Holocaust that says there are things that have unsayability and unrepresentability.⁹⁷ The work of the artist is to see not at things, but into them. The challenge is to extract solutions from this mass of history to the *unrepresentable /unsayable* quandary.

95 <https://nadeaubarlow.com/1492-expulsion-of-the-jews-was-a-disaster-for-spain/>; 7.2.2023

96 <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2015-12-16/ty-article/premium/this-day-spain-lifts-the-expulsion/0000017f-f60e-d887-a7ff-feeef10000>; (30.10.2022)

97 Chare, Nicolas and Williams, Dominic. *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. Berghahn. 2016. p. 14

VI. OF ART AND AFFLICTION

THE VOICE OF ART AND THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

Art is the wellspring and power of the imagination. Making art is taking risks with one's imagination. To let one's artistic imagination wander unescorted through the Holocaust is to invite failure from the outset. Yet it is understood that at the core of all artistic practice must be the threat of failure, hanging out like an uncooperative guest. The subject of the Holocaust has complexities and ambiguities we've still only begun to untangle this bewildering human created catastrophe.

"Ever since photography was invented, it has kept company with death."⁹⁸ I do not imply *Grant Me Light* is only about death nor is it just a lament, but because the Holocaust is so tightly entwined into my life I feel driven without much option but to stare into it. The challenge to art and the photography is making history explicit without being preachy, moralizing, or sentimental.

The background stories are comprised of a series of origin story commentaries. They, separate and together, make up the foundation and frameworks for the artworks. The artworks exhibited stand on their own with history's ghosts mingling about the crowd, helping them through the traumas the photography alludes to. The artworks come from a confrontation with history that is unequivocal. Digging into this history is like finding weeping wounds and scars initially I was obli-

98 Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. 2003. Penguin Random House UK. p. 19.

ous to. The narratives are complex. The entire story is vast and unmeasurable. As my opening statement indicates, the modern Jewish experience, at its core, is the Holocaust. It is in this consequence where we enter and exit, never healed. We endlessly ask why could such a thing happen? But *why?!* is not only too big a question to be asking, it is a question not worth asking as there are no answers, suitable or otherwise. Instead, I have chosen subject matter, chipped away at it like a sculptor might until shapes and forms begin making sense. That is to say, making my past make sense to me enough to comprehend how this subject drives my art on and what I will contribute to the subject.

In this period of exploration, researching and writing, I reflect often on artistic thinking and artworks, and I acknowledge that the photographs are themes and variations, telling their stories in keeping with the character and purpose of the narrative and exhibition. It is a serious and disturbing story, finding no humor in any of it, but having encounter beauty, though, like exiting a cave of sadness into the light. A beauty as a kind of release. Yet, light needed for this work is found in places that prefer to remain anonymous.

Choosing my methods and the manner of addressing facts, going to the geography of this history for proof, using proof and facts as elements in and of themselves, and in using these facts in fictions that address and underline these proofs. The origin stories are the foundations for photographs individually and those grouped sequentially for exhibition. The exhibition is meant to stand alone, free from text, and as a thesis illustrated. Throughout both the exhibition and the complete illustrated thesis, a red thread holds all elements together, not snapping or rupturing.

INSPIRATION & INFLUENCE

This art on affliction comes with a vast body of work that comes to me as an inspiration and a great motivation to continue working towards effective visualizing. In the world of art, we are never alone. We rely on each other for insight, inspiration, and awareness. From the vast archive from the world of art I cull artists and their art, using them to calibrate my visual and philosophical compass, hoping to find guidance through the challenges and struggles encountered along the path of this journey, looking directly at those who have tackled the very subjects of memory, trauma, mortality and mourning. These are the themes I find necessary for myself as an exhibiting artist, and subject matter that should be present as a part of public discourse.



Fig. 12 Harvest Festival (early test). 2020

THINKING AHEAD, NIGHTMARE AFTER NIGHTMARE: AN EXHIBITION

My photographs are meant as windows into another time and space, and portals deep into ourselves. Approaches to storytelling in the fine arts and with photography have gone through big transformations during the past forty years. Duane Michals bringing sequential imaging to visual narratives, Arthur Tress and the photograph as a theatrical stage, or Robert Adams and a re-interpretation of what the landscape is as a cultural and environmental barometer. These artists and many more stretching the boundaries of what photography can be, both impact on my understanding of photography and challenge me to wonder if there are other approaches beyond what has been comfortable prior to commencing Visualizing Absence. The usual terms, thinking out of the box, stepping out of one's comfort zones, are trite. I offer this challenge to my students all the time. But to actually step out of that box and out of that comfort zone is to break whatever structures one's education has provided. On the other hand these structures have helped artists formulate plans and strategies for their manner of communication.

FORMULATIONS

Christian Boltanski's installations⁹⁹ confuse me and yet keep my full attention, especially the use of multiples, remarkably with face. There is depth to the drama in Boltanski's installations that can leave audiences with the art glowing firmly in the retina. So much happens with the face. Only my grandfather's stern face is represented in my exhibition. He really is where the story transitions from only questions of distant history by pivoting towards a personal understanding that also branches outwards to countless directions and historical events. Christian Boltanski's use and command of the installation has inspired generations of artists to think and work out of the box, and inside the public's uncomfortable zone. As close as I allow my works to drift into a manner of installations is *Maps to his World*, incorporating one chart, one map, with one photograph. Had I the courage of

99 Jewish School of Grosse of Hamburgstrasse in Berlin 1938. 1984.

William Kentridge, I might have tried to imbed imagery into the geological maps. But I am certainly not Kentridge and my risk-taking clock has had its time limit. As I have mentioned, risk taking is necessary. But never have these attempts felt appropriate, except for the one I settled on.

Harvest Festival, a series of 50 photographed details and *Burnt offering and Death Masks*, 22 individual studies, is photography done with the intention of transporting the viewer into a kind of elsewhere, heavy, silent place, finding the threshold where what is presented explicitly is not specific. Faces are very specific, even Boltanski's mysteriously hazy faces, leap off the installations pictorially, seemingly floating. I make no attempt to imitate his work. But what Boltanski offers to all artists is an awareness of possibilities. He's one artist who has attempted removing photography from its shackles. My artwork requires shackles. I do aim for the purely photographic experience of being drawn into the space in question and not just the gallery itself as an installation. I would wish the viewer becoming absorbed into the space and path through the trees to Treblinka, as if they themselves are going to Treblinka via the rails that transported hundreds and hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children to their deaths.

The selection of works from *Grant Me Light* containing specificity in location, the abandoned cemetery in Holesov, Czechia, the ghettoscapes in Radom, Poland, all the works revolving around Treblinka, from the Bug River, the swamp, the *Tree of Souls*, the path, the EU signpost, all obliging the viewer to understand the history in that location, where the photographs have been made, not more than three quarters of a century post facto.

In notes from *The Atlas of Emptiness and Extremity*, Thomas Joshua Cooper writes: "From the sight of the first European village established in the New World by Christopher Columbus, and from the exact recorded site that Columbus made landfall in Cuba, December 1492."¹⁰⁰ Cooper's work is specific and explicit. His

100 Cooper, Joshua Thomas, Govan, Michael and Morse, Rebecca. LACMA. Delmonico & Prestel. 2019. p. 17

methodology borders on dogma (and a rather large dose of insanity), investing time and energy documenting the worlds extremities, edges of landmasses, wherever and however they can be reached, with only one photograph being made for each location, as in his Cuba photograph, 525 years past Columbus made landfall. From this oceanfront in 1492, in the far west, that same year the Spanish Monarchy expelled from the entirety of Spain the entire Jewish population, forcing them underground or into a diaspora, spreading them far and wide to the east, and the west to the newly discovered New World.

Cooper's works astonish in part because we understand he has been there. The punctum of the idea is to see it with his own eyes when pressing the shutter as both proof of his presence and the photographic print becoming proof of the location, and the location as proof of what colonization has wreaked upon the planet. Dana Goodyear writes: "Embedded in Cooper's work is a critique of what he calls the "conniving, disruptive, venal, and murderous" impulses of colonization, the slaughter that followed in the explorers' wake, or that they themselves perpetrated. My whole practice is edges," Cooper says. "Edge of the world, edge of the picture, edge of the land and sea."¹⁰¹ For my viewers, my personal presence may be of no importance. But for the viewer's understanding is the same, that from here, things

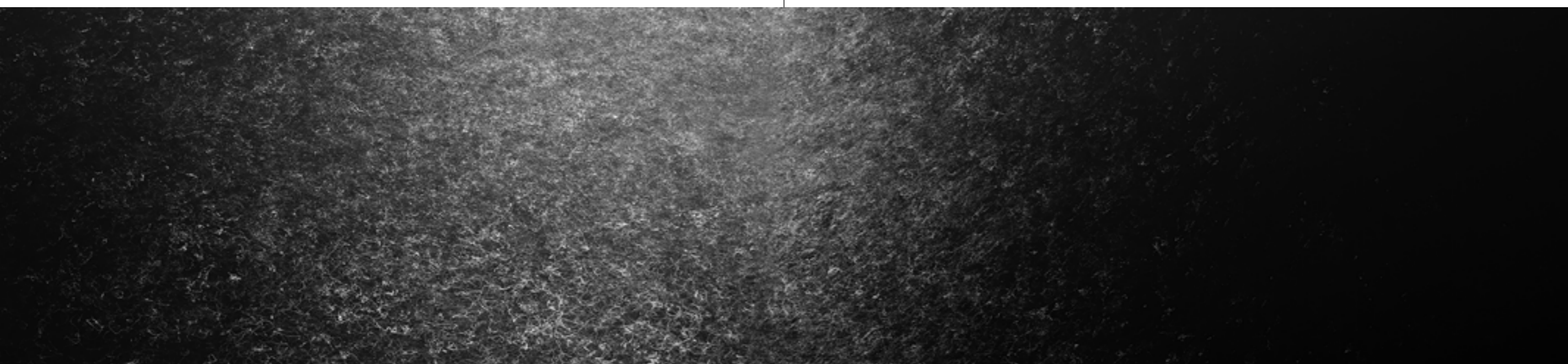
101 Goodyear, Dana. A Photographer at the Ends of the Earth. Thomas Joshua Cooper risks his life to document the world's remotest places. *The New Yorker*; 30.9.2019

began, existed or ended. That here, things happened. That *here* things took place is more than just vital, but essential.

I am no hero for setting foot in such places. I doubt Cooper considers himself a hero either. Just because I chose to spend a bunch of days walking around in the scorching heat in Treblinka doesn't make me hero, but it underlines and solidifies the truth about the story. These places as captured on film do exist, in all kinds of weather and seasons, perhaps not quite as in the day Columbus landed in what is Cuba today, or necessarily throughout those thirteen hostile months of a minimum of three transports a day of human cattle destined for slaughter within deceiving the gates of Treblinka.

The majority of Holocaust films have not been made on site. These films may re-enact horrid consequences close enough to a supposed reality, at least a reality of the mind. These films need no more than brackets and blinders to keep audiences present and believing. The artwork I make, Coopers as well, requires the geography of history for accuracy, and truthfulness. This is what makes his *Atlas of Emptiness and Extremities* so utterly extraordinary. It does not either hurt at all that Cooper's photographs are beautiful, that they capture and cradle the character of that place of history in the present. I would hope my audience senses the specificity's significance.

Fig. 13 *A History of Time (detail)*. 2019



Before I learned of Thomas Joshua Cooper, I knew the extremity of the Pacific Ocean at Ocean Beach, San Francisco. After leaving Colombia behind, arriving in a cold and damp August San Francisco afternoon, I knew immediately I am no longer at 2,640m above sea level, far from the sea. Our family settled into a beachside motel, just a stone's throw from those cold Pacific waters. I spent the first three months everyday after school at the beach, in whatever weather, always reminding me I was at the end of the world (or a new beginning to it). My bedroom window faced directly west. I could see the sea. It could see me and know that sometimes, in the heart of the midnight hour, windows open, hearing the quiet grumble of waves or when the fog was at its worst with the distant foghorns calling its warnings. I was also keenly aware that from there one can go no further. Some days I would borrow my father's heavy binoculars and watch the sea come and go.

My grandfather left European soil sailing away from the German city of Hamburg. From there most European Jews migrating west travelled through Hamburg and then on to the Americas. Such a mass of people on the move across vast lands, taking the slow and rough crossing of the great Atlantic. Surely looking forward to their future, they all watched as their past receded into the past and finally beyond the horizon.

The History of Light (2015) is about choices, journeys, and time. The light on the water writing its story, frantically scribbling observations, a knitted lace of light vanishing into infinity. My grandfather vanished from Europe. He never saw it again; he neither ever saw his family again.

My father and mother's first travels to Colombia were by ocean liner. I suspect my mother did not look back but stared forward to her new life, with her father remaining in New York. He had made the journey west towards a new life, my mother journeyed south hugging the western Atlantic, landing on the equator. Nineteen years later we, a family with four children, leaving Colombia, returning north by air along the western Atlantic's edges to New York, then soon later across a great landmass arriving five hours later on the West Coast of the New World.

In the words of the great Beat poet, Lawrence Ferlingetti: "The whole popu-

lation slid west."¹⁰² I suspect my father would have joined in the great migration to the west after the war had there been the chance. Instead, South America called to him until circumstances in Colombia got bad enough twenty years later. But New York, the east, did not call to him back. The west called to him, it was the new culture and ultimately that last frontier. My father loved San Francisco in every way I could imagine and was content to end his days there.

One night, well past midnight, the night following my father's funeral, I lay in my American childhood bed in my American childhood room, staring in complete wonder as light, the dim city lights, spilling imperceptivity from the edges of drawn curtain, wondering how had I not seen this before? I mean to say, nothing had really changed in my bedroom from day one back in 1969. In that west facing room hung the same curtains as on the first day I set foot in it as an immigrant to the city and country. Now the shades are drawn and me, unable to sleep, a day that only happens once in one's lifetime, the mind's eye seeing into it and telling the other two eyes to take a look.

Leaving one empty, as funerals can, I still set up my camera. Behind the ground glass, barely making out the surface of the curtain, the more the eyes could see. Focusing carefully, inserting film holder into my beloved Wista wooden flatbed camera, not so different from Cooper's camera, pulling out the dark slide, squeezing and locking the shutter open, and waiting two long hours. Like being present in Kazimir Malevich's Black Square or like Joseph Albers' White Line Squares. Or, perhaps, trapped in the eternal gap between night and day. Later, a second image is made of the same but in a bright afternoon light, nearly one full day after my father is laid to rest, some forty-five years after first stepping into the bedroom, running extatically to the window, pressing my nose to the glass, amazed seeing the western edge of land and the sea spread out beyond the horizon.¹⁰³

102 Ferlinghetti, Lawrence. <https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/lawrence-ferlinghetti>; (22.8.2023)

103 I have been always aware that the days of soaking in the sea from the second story bedroom window in the Ingleside District of San Francisco would one day come to an end. And so they did.

I study those two photographs often, finding myself receiving them in numerous and strange ways. The most startling of which is sensing an epiphany of thought; those spaces could be anywhere and always showing the direction out but offering no exit. The photographs belong as integral components to the overall body of work. I read them in the following ways: With the final solution in full swing, whether in hiding or trapped in the camps, the inside world, even when bright, is dark. The outside, freedom is ever so near and completely out of reach. From my beloved window beyond the Western Frontier, became a window into of the space and mind of the Holocaust survivor.

Both works, figures 27 and 28 in chapter VI, origin story: Gray Zones that Dot the Landscape Untitled Gray Zones #1 & #2. Both images were assigned this title unconsciously.¹⁰⁴

א.י.ד.ת

IS THE LANGUAGE DYING OR DEAD ALREADY?

Jews beyond the Pale were Yiddish speaking. Their world was Yiddish. The language, Yiddish, means Jewish. For Ashkenazi Jews, Yiddishkeit, have been Yiddish speaking, and their world is a Yiddish world. A language that is some 70% West Germanic and 30% who knows what. Prior to World War II Yiddish had an estimated eleven million speakers. The vast majority of Holocaust victims were Yiddish speaking and, therefore, Ashkenazi. Could one Nazi intention be to eradicate a people whose language having such old Germanic roots and so free the German language of a hated Germanic based ghetto dialect?

¹⁰⁴ I didn't arrive at these titles out of theft. Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* was read much later. I was stunned when I turned to Chapter 2, entitled: The Gray Zone.

From my mother's perspective there was no more a reason for the language. Most of its speakers are long dead and the modern world has no need for it. And yet my mother treasured the times when she could commune in Yiddish.

The black of ink on paper keeps a language alive. It is from the white that surrounds the ink that reflects light, in a sense light cradling the word. It is a paradox. Our one sun, at time furiously writing in white ink its presence off a liquid membrane, captured on film, studied, but still remains un-decodable. On one film negative, forms can be seen over the deep water in black opaque density, looking as if ink is melting away into darkening sea. Printed as a positive I relate to my mother's sadness. Imagine a language so old and rich coming to its end in our family with her death. I am saddened not to understand the language but able to lament its preciousness. It is in the danger of absolute loss my photographs of light attempt addressing.

The language of light is revealed on a parchment of water and speaks in dialect of all of nature's dynamics, wind, rain, storms, sun and clouds, and time. The triptych *Night Falls* (fig. 21) comes about, I dare say, from a kind of nautical twilight of consciousness, like through barely shut, barely open eyes, like exiting a deep sleep. But once these three negatives lay backlit on my darkroom light table, the light over the dark cold water, seemingly yanked down from below, appearing as if a colossal yet private struggle taking place. If Yiddish is considered a dead language, does the same thinking apply to the Ashkenazi Jew, a dead tribe? Oddly Yiddish is going through an astonishing revival today. Begun already in the 1970's with klezmer music stepping out from hidden chambers in Brooklyn and beyond. It wasn't just the music, it was the language driving these birth, marriage, life and death songs. *Brave Old World, Beyond the Pale*¹⁰⁵ makes me wonder where and how could they find somebody who could sing in Yiddish? *Night Falls*, a triptych about the loss of language, invokes an extended but undefined timeline and a seeming struggle against its dissolution.

¹⁰⁵ *Brave Old World*. Rounder Records. 1994

SEQUENCES IN TIME

The doctoral exhibition, *Grant Me Light*, is primarily made up of sequences in varying manifestations, linear, chronological, others not necessarily chronologically photographed but arranged as if implying time frames. *History of Light*, *Only the Wind ...*, *Night Falls*, and *Harvest Festival*, intend to carry an expanded time value by taking the perception of a space, say a cemetery, the open sea, or a mass grave, through the optics of time beyond our own narrow capacity of experience.¹⁰⁶

Of the sequences on exhibit, as in *Only The Wind* (fig. 25)... for which a kind of time continuity and compression is revealed, the order is influenced by the dramaturgy's characteristics. In this case, an unattended cemetery since the war.

And what's to say of abandoned cemeteries? Poland is full of them. Some get restored and re-consecrated. Most remain abandoned. Even in death the dead die outside of memory. Holešov, near Zlin, Czechia, had a once vibrant Jewish community. The Nazi's did away with the two hundred people making up the community. So, no community, no cemetery upkeep. In Ilsa and Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, only two examples out of thousands of cemeteries whose headstones were removed, where now trees grow to the skies like souls rising trying to catch a breath of light and warmth. In Holešov, in late spring, with a high grass uncut and dried out, the wind whips the grass into a frenzy, ebbing and flowing like ghost children, themselves in a panicked frenzy dashing in and around of the stones.

¹⁰⁶ The actual exposure times plus the times in-between exposures when added up are not of consequence in these works except for the original concept for *A History of Light* which each image had a full exposure time of 3 minutes and thirty-three seconds. Using an 8 f-stop neutral density filter on top of the metered light/time(exposure factor 256) plus reciprocity factor = 3.33. This has nothing to do with kabbalah numerology. It's only an off shoot of film emulsion/exposure latitudes ramifications, summed up as reciprocity failure effect.



Fig. 14 Holešov Cemetery. 2014



Fig. 15 Photographing in the Radom ghetto. 2019

IN PARALLEL IN NOT-SO-FAR-OFF POLAND

The war along Finland's eastern front exists in a stasis and signs of a Nazi failure are becoming ever apparent, while in Radom, Poland, the ghetto is emptied, the inhabitants (if one is to consider the ghetto as a place of habitation) either deported to Treblinka or in the throws of being dragged out of the ghetto enclosure, lined up against walls facing away from a city square, and shot.

An estimated 278 ghettos and labor camps are built at the advent of the German occupation in Poland.¹⁰⁷ January 20, 1942, Reinhard Heydrich sets in motion at the Wannsee Conference, the *final solution* to the *Jewish question*. German industry builds six extermination camps and systematic liquidation of the ghettos begins across the Polish territories. An estimated 32,000 Radom Jews are destined for extermination Treblinka between March 1941 and August 1942. It is not known how many are executed on site inside and outside the ghetto perimeters. Despite buttresses leaning tired against crumbling walls and windows cemented shut, sealing the interiors from birds, scavengers and squatters, light, and in spite of the fact that fences enclosing the ghetto from the so-called outside world have long been removed, the structures are, to the local population, invisible, standing like visible ghosts, seen but not seen. Photographing what remains disturbs passers-by as if the camera's presence somehow illuminates what should remain invisible or out of memory's reach.

A VIEW FROM THE HOME FRONT/A GARDEN VIEW

Valo Gallery, the site for my exhibition, was once an academic library concentrating on the arctic, now just an art gallery in the arctic. The space is large, even cavernous, with a low overhanging ceiling on one side and high ceiling with floor to ceiling length windows. Where the low and high ceilings meet divide the space in two along its depth. The space when empty is intimidating. Located along the far end of the long-bowed wall *Her Autumn Dress* (fig. 45) is displayed, a beautiful dress hanging, forgotten in the rain in a garden surprisingly still in full bloom, photographed, printed and framed modestly, behaving like the end of show, the last work, a release from darkness into light. I was thanked on numerous occasions for at least having one relieving, rehabilitating photograph, somewhere in the exhibition. This neither has been my intention. The Holocaust is dark, offering no room

¹⁰⁷ List of Jewish ghettos in German-occupied Poland. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_ghettos_in_German-occupied_Poland.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_ghettos_in_German-occupied_Poland;); (27.8.2023)

to exhale in relief. Although supposedly there might be an air of hope represented by the fullness of the garden growth as well as the late afternoon's luminant light. I express in this photograph both a great anger and also a determination against fascist ideology by taking back the garden, a photographic re-consecration perhaps, if only by artistic force, a banishment of ugliness.

Rovaniemi once lay in ashes as the Finnish army began their final act towards retaining independence, driving the German armed forces from Finnish soil via Lapland and out. Scars remain, even to this day, in everyday discussion. Today, though, tourists and residence alike, squirm to come up with an appropriate description of this city. A beautiful town before the war, upended by the war, the town a smoldering mess, there was a great need to house the displaced. Our home and garden rest on the surface of the Nazi psychosis. This house is as old as I am. (The garden even won an award for Rovaniemi's *Most Beautiful Garden* sometime during the 1960's).

On the first day of our ownership the son (now in his late seventies) of the man who built the house (1958 through 1961) entered through inquiring if the house was for sale. Upon receiving the bad news, he anyway offers us the history of the house including the grounds. What he then offers is not pleasant listening. The garden and surrounding environs, a hub to the comings and goings of the Nazis 20th Mountain Army regiment. Here, what is at the far end of the property, was a series of garages, repair stations for everything from bicycles to tanks. After the war, much of the oil-soaked soil was disposed of. What soil avoided the disposal raises to the surface year after year, with it much construction detritus, cement, iron supports, broken glass, and more.

Had we known of this prior to the purchase, would our decision to buy have been any different? On that first night, after a first full day of remodeling, taking sauna, walking outside late into the August night, finding iron rebar protruded from the moss and grass, like a dog re-claiming its territory, I restate my claim in no uncertain terms.

Her Autumn Dress (Hänen syysmekkonsa), a photograph that unveils austere, but expresses a lot. The dress hangs both heavy and light, enveloped by a nature refusing to give in or give up.

This image encapsulates a very challenging personal part of my story in Lapland. The need and demand to take a space back into its rightful existence, to be full and uncompromising with the past. The photograph is that demand. Am I any freer in attempting reconciliation with the past, with the present for the future? Not fully. That is an impossibility. But this history is known, verified, documented, occasionally discussed, it exists. To be able to return our garden, to the gardens in Eden, would be to erase from memory, all history, from everyone and everything.

A TOPOGRAPHY OF SECRETS

The Lapland landscape is a vast space that, at its peak during the war, was walked over by an estimated 200,000 German soldiers. On their way out they burn down most every structure, entire towns, farmhouses, sheds, bridges, anything that could burn or be blown up. Underneath all that ash across Lapland, Nazi era waste is a forever remainder. Where was my first encounter with this recent history? In my very own garden. The two photographs for *A Topography of Secrets*, created prior to *Her Autumn Dress*, open a cognizant connection to the larger narrative of the war.

The subject, my garden, Nazi history, needing slow and careful thinking, and a slow and thoughtful approach. Although coming from a different inspiration, Josef Sudek's garden images, treasures of dense beauty, a thoughtful beauty. Sudek, through his gardenscapes, implies that one's garden of Eden is only just out the backdoor. This garden was no Eden during Operation Barbarossa.

The three images together become a trilogy of sorts. Without context these photographs beg explanation. Context provided becomes embedded in a framed text with precise location that posit the viewer into the past drama. *A Topography of Secrets* looms in an uncomfortable light. *Her Autumn Dress* might be the antidote.

A LITTLE VILLAGE NEXT TO THE BIG BEAR

SALMIVAARA ~ HUIITSIN NEVADA. (a Colloquial Finnish Expression)¹⁰⁸

From Rovaniemi there is the town of (new) Salla 150 kilometers to the northeast. The original Salla remains on the Russian side ever since peace agreements signed with Stalin ending hostilities. Just south of the newer Salla one finds remains of Nazi German controlled (1941-44) encampment and gravel excavation pit for the train lines into Soviet territory. The pit, long since abandoned, is nearly as it was when the day the Nazi Germany abandoned their war efforts on the Finnish eastern front. The place is no beauty. But during the summer of 1943 it was a place where Jewish refugees are forced to live and work. Half a mountain fell carved nearly in half, meant to supply gravel for train tracks and fortifying roads, with one diesel steam shovel and some hand shovels, all that were offered as tools.

History does not reveal itself here. And surely that is something that is reflected all across Europe, places of toil during the war, long vanishing or vanished from awareness and a forgotten record of history, lay in wait for the curious and the concerned. Surprises abound, Finnish national broadcasting company (YLE) reporting on war history and locations in Lapland located the sight. What highlights and defines this encampment over others is its 'Jewish history'. Were there other similar circumstance for Jews in 'enemy territory'? None that I have learned about. On days I making photographs at the site, working in cool temperatures, under a grayish light, dramatically different conditions comparing to that 1943 hot, mosquito filled summer at Salmivaara.

The better part of the Jewish refugee story goes as follows. A group of Jewish refugees from Austria, escaping an imploding Europe arrive in Finland, the only European country Austrians have visa free entry. In 1941, with Finnish law requiring all foreign citizens resettlement during war time, away from major cities, the Soviet border and the coastline, and with German soldiers moving through Turku and Helsinki, the ministry of the interior decides to speed up their relocation from 135 to 160 kilometers north of the capital.¹⁰⁹ By 1942, all Jewish refugees in Finland, between the ages of 15 and 65, totaling more than 40 out of 100, are ordered to report for work and sent north to Kuusivaara and Alakurtti near Salla in the Northeast. These refugees, originally settle the countryside and away from the Germans, their new location is paradoxically German soil as the area is fully under German military control.¹¹⁰

108 Huitsin Nevada connotes a place in the middle of nowhere and far from everything.

109 Simon, John. B. p. 383

110 Ibid. p. 399



Fig. 17 Photographing at the Salmivaara gravel pit. 2021



Fig. 18 Salmivaara. 2021

As for all the Jews of Europe, this place for the forty-two refugees could just as well been “huitsin Nevada”. All labor camps, all concentration camps, all death camps to the captive’s mind, are in the dead center of nowhere. So many European Jews ending up in any number of thousands of the *nowhere’s*, and nowhere was generally last stop before oblivion. This Jewish contingent thrown into the dusty, mosquito infested gravel pits of Salmivaara during the summer months, are in a nowhere surrounded by a large contingent of German soldiers.

The northern landscape is austere, with few landmarks, taking time to locate the Salmivaara gravel pits. The place is vast, requiring a careful study of the local topography recognizing the terrain where train gravel wagons turn away from the mainlines into the quarry, remaining nearly unrecognizable, even from Google Earth satellite imagery.

Current topographic maps include what has become a road after the train tracks are pulled up. It is a short drive over a barely passable road. A valley opens up just beyond the final bend. With half the fell carved away, today, nothing to find. No steam shovel, no hand shovels, only empty shotgun shells, crap wood and cardboard for target practice, one with a drawing of a duck and target rings over its heart. The place feels like time has taken a break since 1944, perhaps waiting for some kind of acknowledgment.

The ground still carved and chewed up with gravel mixed with mud after recent rains. Thin clouds layer diffused light without flattening it out. A winter chill with a light wind wafts through this carved up valley. According to records the summer of ’43 was hot. Now, nearly eighty years later, winter is just around the corner. This place was not a concentration camp in the typical sense, but a Nazi German controlled and concentrated place meant for hard and relentless labor. Jewish refugees escaping from Austria find themselves in Lapland, surrounded by Germans, protected by Finns, with no freedom of movement and always under the threat of being turned over to the Nazis. Finnish authorities, not wishing to tease the Nazis any further, transfer all refugees in the dead of night south to Suursaari where their toil is to continue, now only under the Finnish thumb, not the Germans.

VII. THE SEARCH FOR A POST-MEMORY AESTHETIC PRACTICE

VOICES TO THE VOICELESS

The Weight of Absence, with accompanying exhibition, *Grant Me Light*, is based on four non-linear steps, five concrete tasks and the application of these towards the function of art. The four steps: exploration and creation, dialogue and memory, art as language and art as experience. Inside of these are the five tasks, each both philosophical and practical, that are fulfilled along each of the steps. The steps and tasks are applied into the Seven Functions of Art, remembering, hope, sorrow, rebalancing, self-understanding, growth, and appreciation.¹¹¹ (Refer to chapter II and III)

The non-linear structure employed for this research is not out of some academic methodological requirements but rather due to the nature of the study. Every step and all tasks are like a weaving of time and events that coil back and forth, vertically, diagonally, horizontally. And none of this is possible without a need to face and stare into the window of history where there has never been a clear beginning. There is this story, filled with the past, continually predicting its future, and always experienced in the present.

111 De Botton, Alain and Armstrong, John. Phaidon. 2013. p. 7

THE ART OF MEMORY AND CONSERVATION

As composer Nico Muhly states; “Here is the challenge: How do we as scholars give voice to the voiceless? How do we understand lived experience if we have nothing from the actors themselves? Is it possible to recover and interpret the past?”¹¹² This recovering and interpretation requires the knowledge that there are things recoverable. Muhly’s opening lines in the first movement to his composition *Stranger*, sung in tenor voices, sung with pain and foreboding, reflect my anxiety towards this entire project. Though already wrestling for years to comprehend the subject and consequences, artistic concepts, perceptions, and actions, seem to some as something pointless, a thing of the past, better forgotten.

Did I think I could call up the dead and free them from their historical bondage through an act of capturing light and form? What is to be gotten through the attempt to recover the past? Art is of course interpretation, yet it is not as if there anything in need of interpretations since Holocaust needs no re-interpretation. The Holocaust needs a collective recovery to memory. Are my photographs thought provoking? Do they provoke the mind to consider history not only from a mass of statistics but as far down to an individual’s silenced voice? Without shouting through a bullhorn (although some of the artworks are very large), these photographs could remind our majority communities the consequences of threats and intimidation to minority communities, not only to Jews, but to all in need of sanctuary.

Absence, /'abs(ə)ns/: a state or condition in which something expected, wanted, or looked for is not present or does not exist: a state or condition in which something is absent.¹¹³ Presence: one that is present: such as, a: the actual person or thing that is present, b: something present of a visible or concrete nature.¹¹⁴ Throughout these years, wrestling inside these two outer limits, still, these are strange concepts, absence, and presence. To understand their meanings is one thing. To translate the absent present into pictures is like squeezing a plant-mister into sunlit air and catching sight of a prised light suspended. Unfortunately, there is little warmth of the sun to rejoice into what I choose to elucidate.

112 Muhly, Nico. *Stranger*. 1st Movement; Fragments of the Past. 2022. Avie Records

113 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/absence.>; (29.3.2023)

114 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/presence.>; (29.3.2023)

GRANT ME LIGHT ~ SUO MINULLE VALOSI

Now we arrive at what is in many senses either the easiest or most difficult portion of the project, dissecting and analyzing the artwork themselves. It is certainly a cliché if I say the artworks should speak for themselves and therefore little I add is of much consequence. As the artist Nick Cave recently stated when asked to reflect on his output: “One loves their work until when required to speak about it. You suck the life out of it, strip it of any mystery that it may have had.”¹¹⁵ There is much about processes surrounding the photographic act that to leave out some aspects impedes on a holistic understanding the character of the medium itself. Explanations of employed technologies and techniques used in creating these photographs have their place. The palette of possibilities in photography are vast and the spectrum of communication, as a result, comes from the mind and heart of the communicator, the artist. I use photography as the foundation and architecture to my idea world. This medium I communicate through communicates as well in return to me in its language forming a vibrant dialogue.

As described in earlier chapters, the process has been long and thoughtful, gathering knowledge, each thought and experience after the next, result in widening awarenesses into deeper ideas and considerations. The photography mirrors the research structure detailed in previous chapters. Only that the act of photography has its own unique dynamics, often the challenging environments and unpredictable circumstances, requiring creative solutions. From the start, there has been comprehensive concepts to what kinds of images I aim for. It has entailed a decision making of what, why and how things should be stated, testing all along the parameters of photographic language.

The preparatory process for and creation of these works has not followed in orderly schedule, but both as planned and executed work, and work created, at times on the fly, as consequences have dictated. This body of works comes to fruition via study, intuition, and execution. Intuition only helps when prepared,

115 Petrusich, Amanda. Nick Cave On The Fragility Of Life. *New Yorker Magazine*. (23.3.2023) <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/nick-cave-on-the-fragility-of-life>; (8.4.2023)

like forever on stand-by mode. To claim that my knowledge base was sufficient overstates the truth. Growing up in a generally secular environment has left me with vast gaps in knowledge in Jewish history, religious and otherwise. Many of these gaps have been filled as the process has proceeded. This procession from awareness to a knowledge dynamic has been neither linear nor only circular. Envision cardinal points from an equilateral triangle, lifted and folded over like origami, into a small box in multi dimensions and then opened a new.

At times the work has come slow, needing maturation (*Re: Night Fall*). At other times the circumstances have formed themselves with clarity, be it a set/site specific idea and/or images made within a timeframe. (*Re: Along the Path to Heaven*). Through constant photographic practice, a solid foundation formed helping in the explorations on serious subject matter free of typical and traditional constraints, or even completely within them. Expressive photography, fine arts photography, as it is generally practiced, is trapped under traditions and dogmas that are a dare to break. Reasons are many, understandable when considering two things, photography is still a new and developing medium and photography's inner mysteries are still not fully understood. It is *a strange and confined space*,¹¹⁶ borrowing from Mary Price's 1994 rich yet somewhat confusing book's title. It is in the confines of the bordered image that jostle about. From the earliest of evolutionary stages, I have allowed myself to reach back into traditional and non-traditional photographic approaches and methodologies, film and camera technologies, printing techniques and reaching forward creating a display of possibilities on impossible subject matter. But, and I emphasize here, the exhibition *Grant Me Light* is not an exhibition about photography, but about the subject it underlines.

Wittgenstein: “*We speak. We utter words and only later get the sense (original quote: picture ...) of their life.*”¹¹⁷

116 Price, Mary. *A Strange and Confined Space*. Stanford University Press. 1994

117 William Kentridge and Judith Butler: Video Art and Social Intervention: Forms of Life. Recorded at BAMPFA on March 16, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-FnQ6e28rn8>; (9.7.2023)

PRESERVING AND PRESERVED

What follows is commentary on and about photographs chosen and displayed for the *Grant Me Light* exhibition (Valo Galeria, Rovaniemi, Finland, 2.-4.2021). For this discussion I have separated the body of work into sections that function as distinct sets of components out of the whole. And although the complete body of work has been created over the course of many years, while experimenting with a wide variety of approaches, the goal was for an exhibition in balance and wholly unified. Indeed, a photograph and an exhibition is the sum of its part. My wish and ultimate desire for this body of work would be a successful transporting of the viewer into the heart of the topic, via the photographic arts, without stumbling over photography itself, but, in fact, offering my audience enough of a helping hand for stepping into this unusual photographic and idea realm.

A HISTORY OF LIGHT: THE WEAVE OF TIME

The sun scribbles its history on and into the receding water, watching for years the light dancing in a wild swirl off wave-tops like a possessed crochetier needle-working a veil nebula.

The day's sun glistening off rolling and tumbling waves etching itself in a scramble of energy, writing its origin story. I wonder what that incredible cosmic ink wishes for me to know. With the wind still, the waters at rest, the sunshine still and determined, as one. Then a strong gust from the south-west churns the waters and the one sun scatters and dances about creating a blinding bright calligraphic text. Two three-minute exposures and a story is *written*.

Most of humanity, I believe, keep some form of a creation story nearby. Light illuminates, it reveals life, it reveals time. Whether it be a nice sunset or sunrise or the play of light off tall buildings or high fells and mountains. Light is life. So

is water. From the sun's still vantage point, it scribbles its graffiti-like messages on a paper of water, like the greatest of scribes of history. "The nature of mind is pure light, and our experience of the world only passing waves on its surface."¹¹⁸

One week later the two sheets of film, developed and ready, two large negatives lay illuminated on my light table. I witness lace-like orthography hovering in a space of its own through a magnifying loupe, close-up, every twist and turn of the sun's pen is clear and defined as if each letter and word and sentence and story and chapter and book is as it is supposed to be, no corrections necessary. Two photographs are made, one favoring the left and one the right from the center point of the sun. On either side only dark water, a vast empty space. But what can be on the light table is something far more immediate, appearing as if from the back of a large seafaring vessel, sailing far away from some old landmass, one final time, on a bed of lace.

These two images, presented in diptych, but actually two images that make one work, embody the experience of wonder, of relief, a state of mind my grandfather might've, must have, felt as he witnessed the old world disappear beyond the horizon.

This work also underlines two key concerns of mine that I address throughout the exhibition and dissertation, the question of decision-making and that of the question of time.

118 Bill Viola quoting from the story of Ani Pachen in *Sorrow Mountain: The Journey of a Tibetan Warrior Nun*, a statement by the guru Gyalsay Rinpoche. <https://www.lionsroar.com/the-light-enters-you/>; (4.2.2023)



Fig. 19 A History of Light. 2019

That 1976 Polaroid portrait of my grandfather is pinned to my internal bulletin board looking not back at me but somehow out beyond me. And now when needing it, and luckily finding it, I see that he seems to look towards the past. That look is captivating. This portrait, reproduced from the original to a size commensurate with the reproduction sizes of the ocean liner passenger manifest documents. The documents in question, departure and arrival passenger manifests from the SS Bulgaria that traversed the Atlantic in 1912, have been accessed from two sources, the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation (a public entity) and Ancestry.com (private entity). Such passenger manifest binders, heavy with pages containing thousands of names, the weight of the westward migration, resting on the emigration official's pulpit, while throngs of new arrivals to the New World waited patiently, nervously, for their turn for the final judgement to their journey, are heavy with the presence of that period in US immigration history. The narrative contained in the microfiche image of that original document tells a vast story with my grandfather at the fulcrum of the narrative of my life.

This artwork comes together from two directions. One, the unique photograph, one image of one man, made using a technology that produces only a single image, truly is a one of a kind, rather like a Daguerreotype but of the 20th century. The second and uniquely challenging problem, bridging the concrete past to a unique and specific individual. A vast amount of documentation from this period and others have been saved, microfilmed, catalogued, archived and, over time, have become available to the general public primarily for genealogical purposes. This artwork is only partially genealogical, introducing one person's past which cracks opens, ever so slightly, a family story and its greater genealogy. So, this raises the question, how is this work meant to be read and how does it fit in amongst all of the other works on exhibition? Everything about this work is different, the color portrait and the nearly lithographic characteristic print quality made directly from digitized files from the original photographs of the original documents. This work underlines the place in the story where a narrative is taking place and acting as the introductory narrative to a personal yet universal story.

My father's Polaroid camera was a purchase that never ceased to surprise. Its ease of use perfect for all family members. Although my mother, a capable photographer herself having been a pupil of the New Bauhaus teacher Georgy Kepes and as the owner herself of a Rollei Rolleicord III. The Rolleicord and the



Fig. 20 One Story of Morris Prootkow

Polaroid OneStep are in most senses two worlds apart other than they both produce square images. I had access to both when I began my own studies in photography.

The instant analogue image captivates today in the same way as in the beginning. In retrospect it was good fortune to have raised that plastic semi-marvel of a camera with utterly marvelous image quality capturing, or better said, absorbing my grandfather's character in a way that is immediate and whole to me, titled with the variations of my grandfather's name, encapsulates what was the coming future with the present and past, not time in reverse but as a circle.

(For further reading : Chapter X: Mr. Prootkow's Journey Through Space and Time. p.172)



Fig. 21 *Night Falls*. 2020

NIGHT FALLS: LOSS OF LANGUAGE INTO AN ABYSS

Squinting into the evening light, witnessing calligraphy by light, hanging just above the waterline. Lowering my field camera into the water, opening the lens, seeing shapes dancing slowly seemingly above a barely invisible horizon. Light peering almost imperceptively from behind a darkening veil of storm clouds, and a cool wind stirring, causing the water to undulate slow and heavy, like gasping for breath. Off the camera ground glass, witnessing distorted calligraphy undulating like some film credits in a just out of reach language. Hebrew and Yiddish sharing the same orthography is strangely very close to me. Seeing either language written and hearing either language spoken feels intimate and familiar. The calligraphic images,

reflections off water, call out to me, coming and going, and disappeared into a thick blackness. Only through film and the photographic act will they be grabbed and held.

Yiddish was my mother's birth language and frequently reminding me Yiddish is a dead language. How many Yiddish speakers were devoured in the blackened waves of the Holocaust, including their writers, their poets, their cantors, and all the printed matter gathered and secured through the centuries? This work, *Night Falls*, is a lament and a warning: When language is destroyed so will follow its people.

(For further reading: Chapter X. *Night Falls: When Language is Forbidden Only Death Can Follow*. p. 220)

HELD UP IN OPPOSITION (GHETTO STRUCTURE)

Radom, Poland, 250 kilometers north of Auschwitz, the place all surviving Jews trapped within the walls of the main city ghetto, are sent to be gassed. A modern industrial city, covered in its fair share of graffiti, with typical bustling shopping streets leading directly to the old ghetto, now remarkably quiet. This ghetto is listed in the town's tourist information pages (though not on Google Maps). The Radom community published a book on the history of the Radom Jews in 2018¹¹⁹ detailing the war history very well. Yet, at street level, the ghetto is a place present and invisible. Across the street from the building at 28 Wałowa (Fig. 25) outside the official ghetto perimeter, a car dealership. Near the ghetto are numerous tattoo parlors, a couple museums, bookshops, hostels and restaurants. Life circles around the ghetto in a way that what buildings and ruins survive are ignored, left hidden in plain sight and left to the elements.

Thick wooden buttresses, like determined triangles, press against the outside walls of the numerous ghetto structures, keeping them from collapsing. These buildings are not so much abandoned as hollowed out. Deeds to the properties still exists, relatives of the murdered have rights to claim the property, a once beautiful building and the center of the Radom Jewish community. Although it remains a state's duty to protect these properties, does the state really wish to, or are there outside influences insuring the properties won't come crashing down? The triangle shoring braces, made from old forest trees now thick beams that in the bright light a chiaroscuro giving a wonderful sculptural characteristics straight out of an M.C. Escher multi-level maze. These supports never rest, forever keeping some of that history from descending into dust like its citizens did over eighty years earlier. Unattached and unsecured, appearing temporary and yet forgotten, very much like the ghetto itself.

119 Beit Radom. History of Radom's Jews. 2018



Fig. 22 *Held Up in Opposition. Radom ghetto. 2019*



Fig. 23 The Executioner's Wall. Radom ghetto. 2019

THE EXECUTIONER'S WALL: A NON-DESCRIPT GHETTO WALL.

When the starving trapped inside the ghetto walls are ordered out, those caught attempting to escape or caught hiding are lined up and shot dead, against this wall. The war ends; every Jew of Radom was dead. The wall as a witness slowly loses its memory as sun and rain, winter and hot summer long ago erased the blood stains away. Only pockmarks from the bullets remain.

A large wooden field camera pointed at a crumbling wall doesn't appear to be of any importance to any passerby. A Middle-aged man, old camera, old wall, probably a Jewish tourist come to Radom, climbing into the past, might be the thinking. The fatigue to a society having Holocaust era ghosts such as this ghetto wall, staring blankly back, is a sad reality. The general attitude encountered while photographing in and around the old ghetto quarters goes something to this effect; it is high time for bulldozer and time to move on.

THE VISIBLE UNSEEN: A COAT, A STAR (MY COAT, FOUND STAR)

This artwork, *The Visible Unseen*, is about the terror of being seen and scorned, and the attempts at invisibility.

The star, a flea market purchase from a rude vendor on a beautiful day in Ghent. Although it has not been properly authenticated, it appears genuine. The place, Flemish speaking flea-market in Belgium. The star, a bargained for 'souvenir' containing pseudo-Hebraic lettering, *Juif*, Jew in French, in raised, rubberized lettering. The star itself is of the type Jews of France were required to wear during the war. It is possible it belonged to a French Jew who tried to escape deep into Wallonia, Belgium. Ghent resides due north-west from Brussels, well inside Flemish speaking Belgium. But this is only conjecture. The Belgium Jews fared far better than those of The Netherlands and France. It has been assumed Belgian police were far less eager in their participation with the Nazis as well Belgian citizens somewhat less willing to cooperate with their occupiers. Yet in a report released in 2007, Belgium actively helped the occupying German forces round up and deport the country's Jewish population. In addition, according to historians from the Center for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (Ceges) in Brussels. "The Belgian state adopted a docile and cooperative attitude in some very diverse, but crucial domains providing collaboration unworthy of a democracy, with a policy that was disastrous for Belgian and foreign Jews," the historians said.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ <https://www.dw.com/en/report-belgium-collaborated-with-nazis-in-deporting-jews/a-2351064>; (4.2.2023)



Fig. 24 *The Visible Unseen*. 2021

Anne Frank's diary takes place in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. For Anne and family, The Netherlands became a trap as they were later informed on and deported. This was not untypical. As the Dutch Government-in-exile stated in 1943: "They (the civil servants) had spent their whole lives accustomed to obey, they were always – and rightly – so proud of the impeccable execution of their tasks and conscientiousness and the same fulfillment of their duties that they brought the same conscientiousness of the plunder of our country, to the advantage of the enemy."¹²¹

On exhibition, this work, set in a painted dark gold baroque wooden picture frame, becomes the center piece for both its location and character. Other than the portrait of my grandfather (Fig. 47), my father's maps (Fig. 57), and the gold-painted frames for *Harvest Festival* (Fig. 36), throughout the exhibition there is no color really to speak of. The gold color and tone chosen is as close to the mustard yellow, the color of *envy and gall*.

For Dutch Jewry this was disastrous. Confiscated businesses, homes, property, and no possibility of existence in the public sphere, leaving few choices but to hide.

(For further reading, Chapter X: Equilateral Triangles. The Golden Yellow of Envy and Gall and an Old Coat. p. 208)

121 Rees. Laurence. *The Holocaust. A New history*. 2017. Penguin. p. 184

ONLY THE WIND VISITS AND CARES FOR THE DEAD.

Ghosting at the Graveside

The town of Holešov, nestled in the hills above Zlin in the Moravian region of Czechia, appears sleepy and clean. The Jewish cemetery has remained unattended since wars end. Grass chest high, swirling and dancing in a warm late spring wind, both hiding and revealing its history. A kind of hide and seek. Imagine, a forsaken Jewish cemetery intact. There are very few such cemeteries in Europe. For so many Jewish cemeteries across the wartime occupied regions, not even the dead come to pay their respects as many of these places have either been swallowed up by nature or time, or covered in asphalt. *Obecnie nieobecni - Presently Absent*,¹²² a Polish production documenting locations of Jewish cemeteries throughout Poland that have vanished. One becomes a swimming pool, another a grassy area surrounded by apartment buildings, another yet, a Catholic shrine on a street corner where once existed the town's only Jewish graveyard.

These cemeteries are forsaken by the violence. A murdered congregation spells doom not only for the present but also for the past. The wind as real as the headstones, the uncut grass whispering of abandonment. The photographs bring this abandonment into a present context with the presence of the past, when an entire community is dragged off and murdered.

(For further reading: Chapter X; The Birth of the Jewish Heritage Site. p. 292)

122 https://www.facebook.com/obecnienieobecni/?locale=pl_PL; (10.7.2023)



Fig. 25 Only The Wind Cares for the Dead. 2014

MAPS TO HIS WORLD: (GATHERING DUST BELOW STREET LEVEL)

This photograph I consider a portrait. And like all good portraits we wish to know something of the subject's face, the clothing, the posture, things providing the viewer with clues to whom they are studying. This portrait brings me sadness. I know the subject (as much as a son can know his father). The image is a summation of a life lived in unusual circumstances, always on the look out for sanctuary. There is so much of my father's state of mind embedded in this basement landscape. The geological maps are long past any use, stored haphazardly. A life's work and recognition forgotten. It is such a personal photograph that it pains me to explain it.

My parents taught us to peer forward, not backwards. Neither of them successful for the simple reason they neither could free themselves of the past. With a growing awareness of the Holocaust, my identity fragmenting, pieces of an American boy, pieces of a Colombian boy, all Jewish yet secular. In Colombia we were surrounded by people who were lucky to have survived the Shoah. They searched for and found (for the time being) a place of well-being.

As Alzheimer's disease fragmented my father's mind, he stumbled over facts, experiences, and timelines of his life. An immensely proud man, the stories shared, of hacking his way through jungles or trekking across deserts, befriending indigenusness guides, revealing things he himself was surprised about. The Jewish boy from Brooklyn, a white man in an indigenusness universe. He was in his element, away from the Jew haters.

Upstairs, a man losing the grip of self. Deep down in the dusty, spiderwebbed encrusted basement, the remnants of his Colombian life, notebooks, stacks of business cards, Spanish language trade publications, a scattering of horse racing spreadsheets, and a trove of geological and topographic maps. In that basement, a soft light streaming through high windows facing to the west, staring at a vertical map-case, with maps rolled, stuffed, and crumpled unceremoniously, all forlorn and forgotten, draped across an old bookcase with mold-stained paperback mysteries, the sum total of his working life seemingly in wait in a state of deferred intentions. It would be the first portrait of my father after his death. *He is not* there, but very much there.

After the funeral, hours are spent unrolling dusty map after molding map, like unrolling his travels through an unknown Colombia, into the soil, deep into his new world's earth. Scouring for visuals to integrate the photographic and purely graphic, making an atypical (for me) work with density and yet (somehow)



Fig. 26 Maps to His World. 2019

accessible.¹²³ Settling on two maps, one folded and the other rolled, for both their informational yet visual attributes, character of line, tone and colors, also the curls and folds (stored folded). The flat folded, beautifully color-coded map hangs in the exhibition vertically like a partially opened accordion. The rolled chart becomes a scroll, buttressed on both sides with the photograph *Maps to His World*, and the semi-unfolded map on the other. The scroll tightly rolled and stored away prior while still in the southern hemisphere, does not see light until again until being unrolled in the northern hemisphere the following century, in the middle of the Covid-19 crisis.

A WINDOW TO THE WEST IS A WINDOW FROM THE EAST

Half a world away, and another time, deep in a nocturnal silence, a lone streetlight to the west illuminates the border line between a curtain and the window frame. The light, like an apparition. It does not undulate like some clichéd ghost. It is that mysterious ‘midnight hour’ hanging unchanged until the first light. All is still and silent except for my eyes, once rubbed free of sleep, seem to deep breath in this light. An astonishing chiaroscuro.

On the following night I experienced quite the opposite. It becomes a trapped light or a light trapping and holding an unrelenting darkness, both on the inside and the outside. In the bright of the day, the entrapping scene feels the same. All is still, but the outside world is anything but silent, spinning its merry spin.

This question of *light* makes me reflect on my introduction to the photography and the mind of Hiroshi Sugimoto via the Sea of Buddhas series (1995). I rejected them as conceptual claptrap upon first viewing. Still, the images kept washing over and through me and it was I who fell into the trap of time. Immediately returning and facing all forty-eight photographs, finding myself transformed. Time and space with a space(s) both trapped and free of time. Classified by Sugimoto himself as

123 Tufte, Edward R., *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Second Edition. 2001. Graphics Press. p. 13

conceptual art, it is rare I read his works as such. To my sense of sight, I am still overwhelmed by these photographs in deeper way than being amazed on my first view of the Grand Canyon. And I had yet to visit where the series was created. I did not yet know what an astonishing experience was awaiting me. By accident, shivering in a cold December day, in need of some hot tea, in 1998 I entered the vast halls. Like being on a pilgrimage but completely unaware, the Sanjunsangendo Temple in Kyoto, Japan, and face to face with Sugimoto’s vision.

At no point does Sugimoto’s aesthetic precision and technical mastery ever draw the life out of his artworks. In both the Buddhas and Seascapes series, I get pulled into the space, forgetting or not caring how these images came about. Only relishing the experience of such visual experiences, meditating with photographs that are meditations themselves.

Back in my childhood bedroom, to suddenly witness the midnight light just barely within eye shot, I detected in my peripheral vision Sugimoto’s sense of light, space and time. Now experiencing them in real-time as landscapes of the mind, with two distinct spheres, inner and outer, and an immeasurable time span, or time without time. I also knew how they would translate into photographs but not quite how they might fit into the overall research narrative. As my father’s mind dislocated itself from his and our timeline, with radical daily changes to his behavior and awareness, I recognized why the midnight epiphany strikes me so deeply still now. Though his mind was no longer anchored to any cardinal points, his mind hadn’t lost anything other than the threads of time and his timeline. He was trapped by the instinct that somehow things were quite making sense. This confusion, as it were, most certainly is the experience of concentration camp captives during those initial horrifying days (and nights).

In *Untitled Gray Zone #1 and #2*, I cannot help but recognize many things, confusion and fear amongst the arrested, deported, transported, those in the camps, those running and hiding. Perhaps that’s what makes the Holocaust and art on the Holocaust endlessly troubling, and forever challenging.

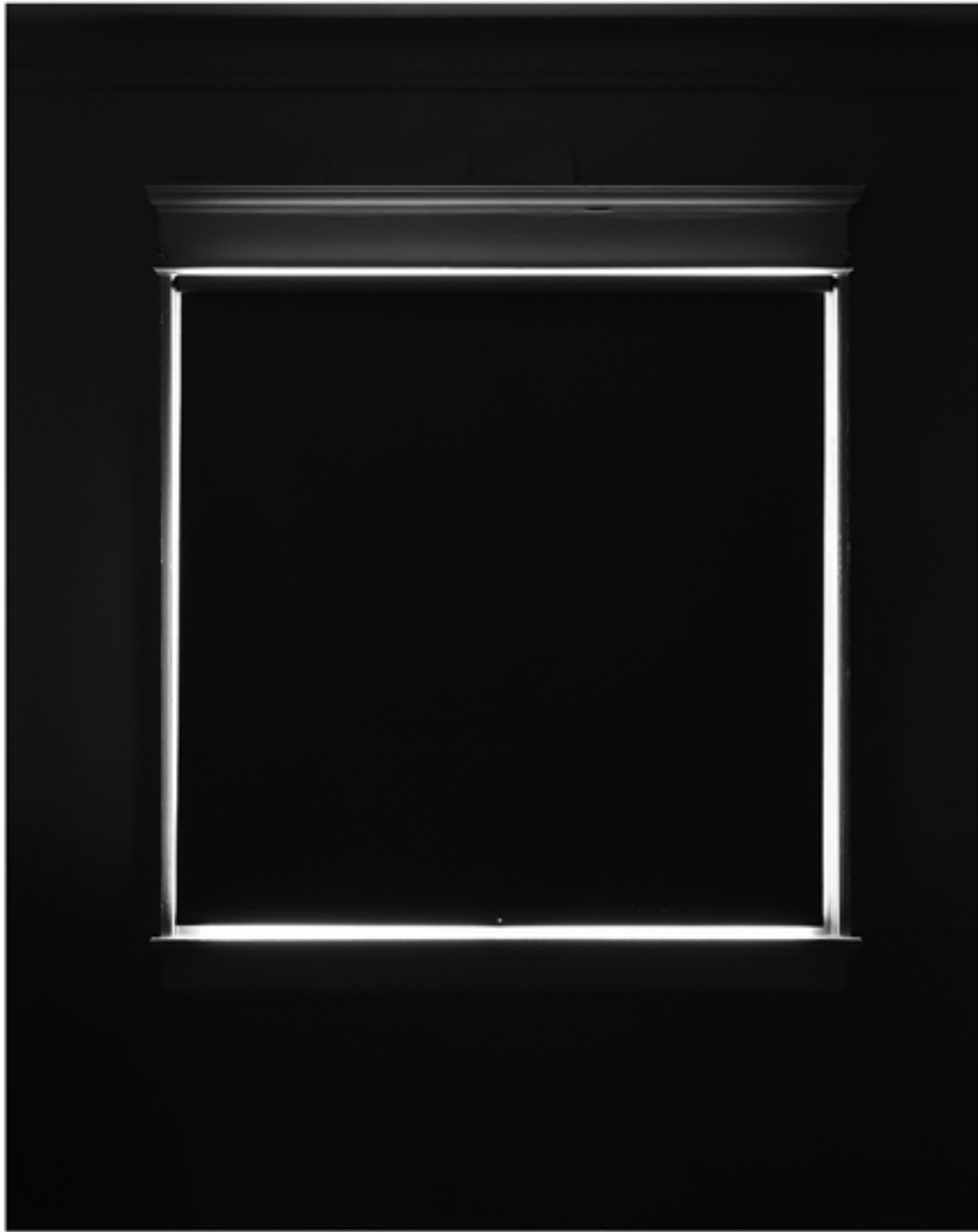


Fig. 27 Untitled Gray Zone #1. 2018



Fig. 28 Untitled Gray Zone #2. 2018

THE LONG REACH

I, seeing it, I didn't believe my eyes. I asked if the young man, the bearer of the tattoo, would mind sitting for a portrait. He complied but insisted on anonymity.

Apparently in this day; it is more difficult to know your enemy. The New York Times (7.3.2023) publishes an article: What These Thirteen Jewish Americans Are Proud of and Afraid of.¹²⁴ The moderator's inquiry list reads as follows: Fill in the blank: I feel blank about being Jewish in America right now.... The responses are very much in keeping with the general atmosphere Jews, not only in the United States but across Europe, and particularly in nations that have large Jewish population. Replies such as proud, scared, uneasy, "proud, but I'm hidden", minimized, and "I feel unknown".¹²⁵ Their answers highlight the gamut of thought and emotion related to a very straightforward query. This person choosing to have such a tattoo expresses pride without saying much. Yet when asked to illuminate the why of the tattoo, he displays an ambivalence towards what needs explaining.

Not long after the mass murder at L'Simcha synagogue, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, I found myself warning my children concerning the perception in the public but also within certain groups that had, in recent years, expressed dislike and even hate towards Jews. I find myself still stepping back into shadows and feeling the need to protect my children, perhaps even akin to my parents' efforts to protect us. There is confusion in doing so. It is a contradiction, a conundrum, a sad paradox of the state of things. So, when my subject arrives to the studio I indicated where to sit. He pulls his shirt sleeve back and suddenly I feel a great admiration for him. He neither reveals nor hides the tattoo. We exchanged few words. I counted to three, pressing the shutter for a good four long seconds, flipping the film holder, making a second exposure, thanking him for his time. He quietly stands up, stopped for a moment. Running the fingers of his opposing hand ever so lightly over the tattoo and says, "she did a good job." The photograph, *The Long Reach* /Fig. 29), fills in a blank to the above query, but from a place far from any Jewish community, but in an astonishingly personal way.

124 <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/03/07/opinion/jewish-americans-focus-group.html>; (9.3.2023)

125 Ibid.



Fig. 29 *The Long Reach*. 2020

ALONG THE PATH TO THE “ROAD TO HEAVEN”:

From an epiphany in 2008 to realization in 2019.

Along the Path to the “Road to heaven” comprises one series of six-photographs in sequence and four stand alone images. This work encapsulates a manner of thinking and perception at the heart of the struggle toward comprehension of what victims of the Holocaust might have experienced.

In 2008, when first walking the short path from what had been, up until late 1943, the path leading directly into the Treblinka extermination camp, I walked in the opposite direction, towards the warped bridge crossing over the River Bug, away from the camp. At that time neither trains nor cars could traverse the bridge as the structure was in complete disrepair. Even as a pedestrian I had the feeling the bottom could fall away at any moment. Upon exiting the path, crossing over a crumbling asphalt and climbing up onto a raised levy, it dawns on me what a point of hope or horror must have been experienced as the tracks turned off the main line into a densely forested path, the train moving at just beyond a standstill towards some unknown. It was that walk away from Treblinka along the now trackless levy, reaching the main junction at Malkinia, firmly captured in my mind’s eye then and there the kind of artwork I previsioned. the opportunity not arriving until 2019.



Fig. 30 Along The Path to the “Road To Heaven” (complete series) The final 1.1 kilometers to the gas chambers. 2019



Fig. 31 *Last Look. At the gates to the "Road to Heaven". 2019*

In 2018 my attentions returned to this location, opening digital maps, getting an overview of the surrounding landscape and, possibly, the local conditions. Back in 2008 there was no road directly to Treblinka. By taxi a circuitous and bumpy route through villages, farms, forests, and around swampland. What I was unaware of, in 2018 the collapsing River Bug bridge and the levy had vanished. In their place a well paved road and a bridge that didn't feel like a bridge, but a non-descript freeway overpass. This realization knocks the artistic wind out me. With the old bridge gone progress alters the environs nearly indistinguishable from the first encounter. Still, remnants of the levy remain and the railway track siding (tracks long removed), through the path ferrying the doomed to their destination, is still there.

All during those intervening years I prepared a photographic strategy. Arriving eleven years later the new bridge, which by now, after its reconstruction, offers a solid foundation in which to document the Bug River and to study the character of the landscape all along the path into the Treblinka camp. From the wetlands that buttress the river on both sides, passage with a camera is difficult. No wonder escape into the surrounding countryside from railroad was an impossibility. The swamps from spring through late autumn could swallow up anyone and anything that ventured into them.^{126*}

Throughout these years I have not stopped considering, even dwelling, on the psychologic and chronologic characteristics of fear the deportees experience as the transports slow down to their unknown destination. This weighs heavily on me. Could time be different in Treblinka, like when nearing a blackhole? I attempt to convey in this series how and when the future is not secure, and what is unknown becomes a storm of observations, emotions, and questions. Time then has no logic.

The series culminating photograph, *Last Look*, is a gaze back into the direction from where one has come. Did the deportees turn and look? If they could, I suspect they did, was it out of astonishment peppered with the dust of hope? Or was it pure dread? In the opposite direction death (the Nazi death machine, unknown but suspected) unfamiliar, impatiently awaited. In those thirteen months, all the seasons are faced, each transport experiencing each day of the season uniquely. The vanishing point from the top of the tree line would have been seen by all who turn to look. A vanishing point to the past and nothing of the future ahead.

126 *Refer to figure 36, Beauty's Final Deception. p. 32

BEAUTY'S FINAL DECEPTION

Stepping away from the path hugging the bridge on the Malkinia side, pushing through high and damp brush towards the edge of a swamp, an initial exposure is made as clouds clear and the landscape brightly illuminated. Trying still to get closer, a second exposure is made as an army of fire ants attack my feet from inside my shoes. I exit the wet brush with both feet and legs on fire in astonishing pain. Nature is unforgiving. The region around Treblinka is farmlands, rivers, tributaries, and devouring swamps. Heinrich Himmler must have been very pleased by the location, a place with no escape, except via the gas chamber.

Walking through wet grass and soggy soil with tripod-mounted camera slung over my shoulder, I recognized myself playing the role of the great American landscapists, searching for an exciting scene, a solid composition, a terrific light and 'the moment', so f64, so California, but cognizant not only of the intentions of the photograph in progress, but the photograph's ultimate role in the determined narrative. But I will not deny the thrill and trepidation of watching and predicting the 'right' light and 'right' moment in such a 'wrong' place.



Fig. 32 The Final Deception. 2019



Fig. 33 2nd image (outtake).

TREE OF SOULS

As I have stated before, it is impossible to comprehend what thoughts can race through the minds of those hundreds of thousands, all locked up in rolling boxes, nearing the end of the line on their deportation to death. What can they have sensed after Malkinia junction, with the change of tracks and change and of speed, nearing some sort of conclusion. Once at the River Bug, the pace must have slowed down to a crawl as the train cleared the tree line. If anyone could see through the wooden slats, could they have witnessed trees reaching high into the skies before the transport descends from the iron trestle bridge into the thick forest?

Jewish commentaries (Midrash) single out trees as one of the most important aspects of the natural world. The Tree of Life, or Tree of Souls, is ancient learning and understanding of the natural and spiritual world. According to Jewish mythology, in the Garden of Eden there is such a tree that blossoms and produces new souls which then fall into a body, a Treasury of Souls.

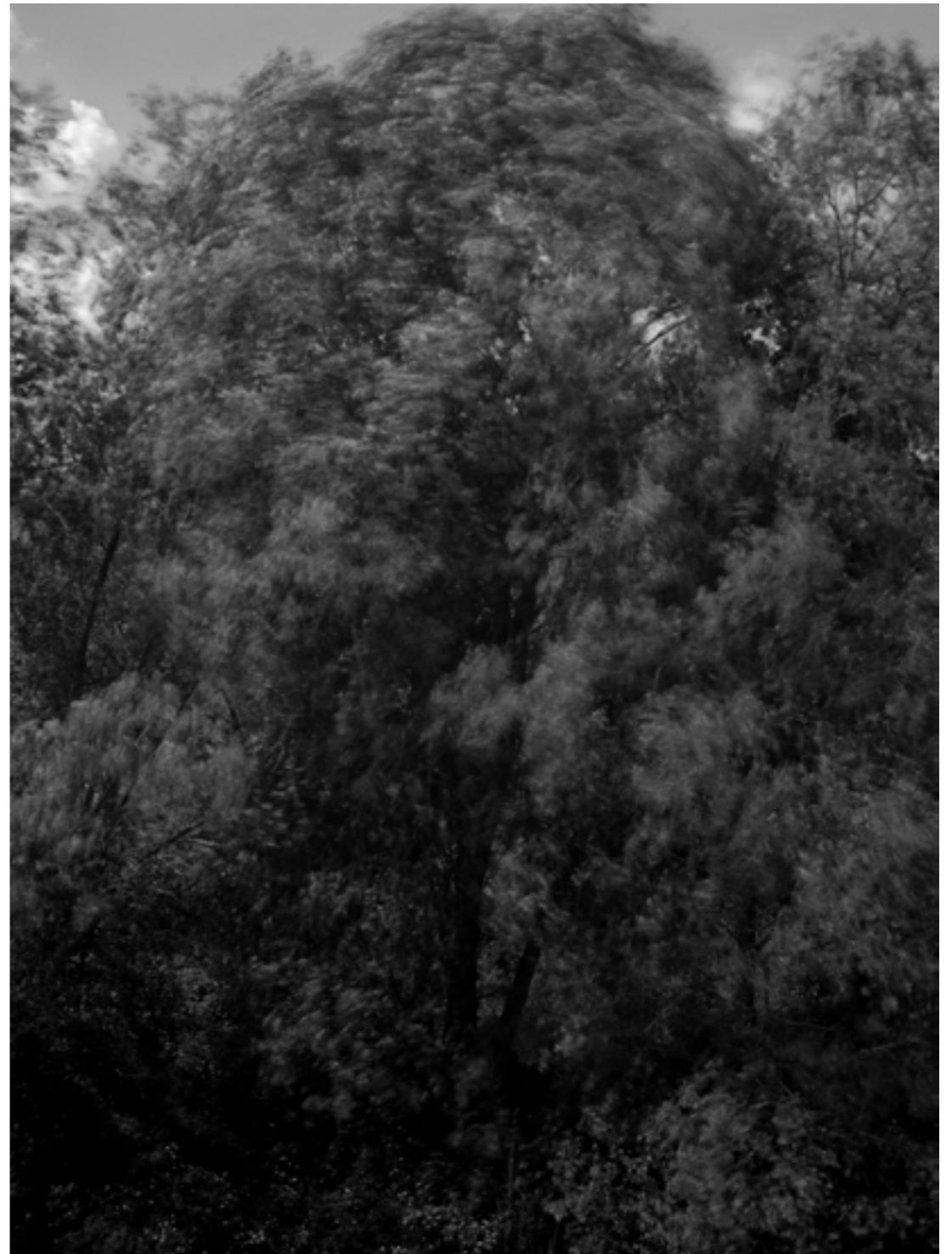


Fig. 34 Tree of Souls. 2019

The transports, as many as three per day during the thirteen-month long existence of Treblinka, once passing this point, might be no more than one hour until their souls will be yanked out of them in a room filling with carbon monoxide.

Do trees have eyes? The frightened mass on the move, all in a struggle to comprehend the present, let alone any future, and the trees and surrounding forests absorbing this saturation of distress. On that day in early June, from the bridge over the Bug, I witnessed one beautifully tall tree swinging manically, reeling from side to side, back and forth, from an incessant pulsating and pounding wind. What could this tree be telling me? Was it re-encountering those horrid thirteen months? The tree's base sat solid and still, despite the wind gale high above.

THE EU ARRIVES IN TREBLINKA

In a sweltering mid-morning heat, resting against my tripod-mounted field camera, waiting for a softer light (which never arrived), a grandfatherly gentleman on an old bicycle with what is most likely his granddaughter straddling the rear rack, legs dangling from either side, her tiny fingers holding onto the bicycle seat, interrupting their journey to greet me. With no common language, hand motions, facial contortions, he lifts his hat wishing me a good day, I do the same in return as they ride away, child stares at me, unblinking, for that entire minute.

Had the man been present in Treblinka village during the war, would he have known of the slaughter taking place in his backyard? He appeared to be of that age, a young boy during those thirteen months of Treblinka's existence and during the length of the war. I assumed he knew why I was there. During my first visit to the Treblinka and its environs, Poland already a member of the European Union for four years, the EU presence was nowhere to be seen. In 2019, a properly asphalted road hugs the surrounding forests and swamps, allowing passenger cars and truck transports of all kinds and sizes to fly past at modern speeds. Still, the roads through the village of Treblinka are of dirt and the surroundings still and quiet as on my first visit. I think of the little girl, born into a free and modernizing Poland.

The name Treblinka rings ugly in my ears. Treblinka, the town, Treblinka the extermination camp, retaining its name throughout the Holocaust and beyond. Not in the same way Oświęcim. On the 27th of January 1945, with the Wehrmacht pushed out, the village regaining its name. The Polish government has been very clear, Auschwitz pertains explicitly to the Auschwitz I, Auschwitz



Fig. 35 *The EU arrives in Treblinka. 2019*

II- Birkenau, Auschwitz III-Monowitz and the areas of the subcamps. All visitors to the Auschwitz camps go through Oświęcim, a city of 40,000 inhabitants today. Many visitors will spend a night or two in the hotels, hostels and bed & breakfasts, before and/or after their tour of the camps.

Treblinka, a polar opposite, currently has a population of 330 people. Auschwitz received over two million visitors in 2019 alone, with Treblinka remaining mostly empty during the two days I spend photographing there. It is in the emptiness that is telling of present-day Treblinka. There is very little near, even the closest hotel is over 30 kilometers away. That there are few if any services in the area is not the issue. 1943, as the allied army's liberation march nears, the extermination camp is dismantled, corpses are dug up and burned to ash in an effort to hide the purpose and the crimes taking place during the camps existence.

Auschwitz, as opposed to Treblinka, is a major tourist destination in Poland. When combining the city of Krakow and Auschwitz, they make for a very powerful economy. Returning to Krakow from the long day at Auschwitz, caked in dust and dried sweat, stumbling through the streets in search for my hotel, Auschwitz seems so near yet so far from Krakow.

Treblinka was razed to the ground, yet the name lives as a distant hub of horror. Even in this post-communist, European Union of free and open borders, Treblinka slides back into invisibility, where even an EU paid roadside billboard is a vanishing act.

TWO RADICAL SOLUTIONS TO TWO RADICAL CIRCUMSTANCES (HAIR AND BONES)

Large format micro photography.

The two most technically challenging artworks included in *Grant Me Light* are the *Harvest Festival* (Fig. 39) and *Burnt Offerings and Death Masks* (Fig. 40). Both series requiring developing a microphotographic system allowing for images exceeding a ratio 1:1 onto large format film (9x12cm and 20x25cm formats).

The impetus behind both series comes from the way the eye absorbs large scenes. In this case killing fields, large pits, filled to the brim with the dead. Photographs made from these scenes in the occupied territories and of the gathering up of the dead after liberation, are images with a wide field of view. The human eye does not share the same field of view. The human eye absorbs vast spaces in an act of fragmented scanning and capture manner, a kind of compartmental-

ization, stitching seamlessly into our perception a constructed whole and unified space. This scanning process is not continuous. The eye stops, captures, re-frames, captures, re-frames, like pigeons in some town square.

This process of seeing may be analyzed into three subsidiary processes; “a process of sensing, a process of selecting and a process of perceiving.”¹²⁷ If the subject matter is outside our manageable ability of absorption, the seeing process becomes far more acute than when under so-called normal circumstances. Deportees arriving at any of the camps would have been overwhelmed by their state of confusion, their senses would have scrambled for anything to guide them. Panicked children searching for their parents, panicked parents for their children, husbands for wives, followed by an inner demand to select, to discriminate, to single out from everything of importance. This act, both physiological and psychological, for on any given occasion there is generally something within the visual field for which it is in our interest to discriminate more clearly than on any other aspect within the field. This seeing act is finalized in the act of perceiving. The process entails recognition of the sensed and selected *sensum*¹²⁸, as an appearance of a physical object existing in the external world.¹²⁹ It is our minds which interpret the *sensum* as the appearance of a physical object out in space.¹³⁰

In this mental side of seeing, our eyes provide us with visual sense impressions, the raw materials of sight. The mind takes these raw materials working them up into a finished product-normal vision of external objects.¹³¹ There could be nothing normal in any of this, for what the new arrivals were seeing was entirely out of any understanding and devoid of context. In *Burnt Offerings and Death Masks*, I try to capture the insanity of such sight.

Both artworks play on a similar involvement that visitors to Auschwitz or Majdanek might experience. At Auschwitz it is forbidden to photograph the piles of hair. If the eyes of visitors to Block 4 could be charted as they sift through the massive piles of hair, what could be learned?

127 Huxley, Aldous. *The Art of Seeing*. 1942. Montana Books. p. 18

128 *Sensum* theory (n): a theory in philosophy: *sensa* are real entities intermediate between the content of perception as such and the ultimate physical reality. [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensum%20theory.](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sensum%20theory;); (29.3.2023)

129 Huxley. p. 18

130 *Ibid.* p. 19

131 *Ibid.* p. 97



Fig. 36 *Harvest Festival (in exhibition)*. 2021

HARVEST FESTIVAL: YEARS OF HAIR

Hundreds of little bags meant for freezing food stuffs, most marked in ink and dated, stuffed with shaved and saved hair, dating back to the late 1999. This artwork contains a cross section of dates covering the entire period since the beginning of the collection. From each bag a portion laid down on a glass with lens resting only centimeters above some hair, camera bellows at maximum extension, illuminated by a ring of LED lights, placed just between lens and subject, appearing at times like a Kandinsky abstract upon the camera ground glass.

Displayed grouped, an unexpected type of typological meditation occurs. *Harvest Festival* borrows from the experience of seeing vast groups of portraits of Nazi victims photographed in Auschwitz, displayed in Block 6 of the Auschwitz Museum. Envisaging each close-up detail of hair from a cross section of ages representing a small cross section of those passing through the camps on their way to nowhere. What began as a way to intimately measure time, is a meditation on the what if, asking the question, what if it was me at this age or that age, 42 through 62?¹³² This work, many years in the formulating and in the making, touches on two distinct traumas, one, that of being swallowed up into a factory of death, as the Holocaust did across the entire arc of ages, from the very elderly to the newly born. The other, how hair as a byproduct became highly sought after for military and commercial use.

132 Even though *A Harvest Festival* was on display at the doctoral exhibition, it is a project that continues. One day it will be expanded to include a cross section of material gathered since that time.

BURNT OFFERINGS: AND DEATH MASKS

Instead of quantities of objects (like the mountains of combs, glasses, wallets, shoes, toys, suitcases, etc. as can be seen at Auschwitz and Majdanek museums) is also the issue of the quantities of bones. Where are they displayed? These examples are missing from museums. These people are missing from the world. Shot or gassed, either way, the bodies buried or burned, or bones crushed, ground up and dumped into nearby rivers. There are, of course illuminated statistics taking us to specifics, smashed and pulverized statistics. It is terrifying, the mass of bones, the impact of bulldozed bodies barely of skin and certainly of bones, as seen in pictures. Pushed to the pits, skeletons of those not surviving long enough for liberation, and to all that perished along the way, pulled into the thousands of killing fields scattered across Europe, from Germany all the way deep into Soviet Ukraine to the east, up to the northern edge of Estonia to the west. In many cases mountains of bodies are set alight destroying evidence. In places like at Treblinka, one wouldn't have to dig deep to find bone fragments, even chipped teeth.

I light a match. I light a candle, I witness the bright hot burning match descend into darkness. From under the dark cloth, carefully focusing until the objects come into sharp view on the ground glass, an astonishing and disturbing sight. The darkness comes into the light.

Nothing can be as disturbing as the real thing. All photography in the *Grant Me Light* body of work only has the ability to allude to times and events in history. Other than my grandfather, we do not encounter people, only references to the troubles and tragedies endured. We encounter post factum places, things, ideas and contemplations that are a miniscule part of the sum total of the chain of events, before, during and after the Holocaust.



Fig. 37 *Burnt Offerings and Death Masks (in exhibition)*

**ARTIFACTS AND MEMORABILIA,
PIECES OF HISTORY OR SOME COLLECTOR'S FETISH?**

Of artifacts and relics, objects, ephemerae, and keepsakes

It is on the physicalness and contextuality of objects that form a window into the mystery of the past, lived experiences and otherwise.¹³³ Of artifacts and relics, objects, ephemerae, and keepsakes, things remind of times and events, for better and for worse. There is the collector in me, mostly cameras. There was a time before the camera became a third limb, where objects here and there, about the house(s) of my youth, imprinting themselves like mail order catalogues. My father's pipes and stamp collection, geology hammer and loupe, chess competition awards. My own awards, two swimming competition silver medals won at the age of ten at the Maccabi Games (Nationwide Colombian Jewish sports games, a kind of Jewish Olympics) sit now with other personal Jewish ephemera, things of nostalgia, objects of concern.

Things of sentimental value become gathered and stored in boxes, forgotten until accidentally or intentionally, usually accidentally found. Relics and keepsakes speak of the past.

Auschwitz, Block 5, shoes, an estimated 110,000 shoes. Heaps of them: children's shoes, sandals, wingtips, winter boots, mary janes, a lady's single red espadrille.¹³⁴ They are on full display (with plenty more in storage). That is nothing as compared to the amount of expropriated Jewish goods sent to Germany, along with almost all other belongings that could find use. Of those, what remain today, is hard to say. Things lay in wait in attics or flea markets scattered across the country perhaps.

133 I had considered displaying the objects and artifacts themselves with the exhibition. After careful consideration the idea was rejected. Choosing instead to photograph what I considered essential to the narrative. Yet in retrospect, I consider this portion of the exhibition the weakest.

134 <https://lithub.com/on-visiting-auschwitz-and-grappling-with-the-climate-of-evil-and-injustice/>; (29.8.2022)



Fig. 39 Star of David Wood Relief-block. Carved in 1928

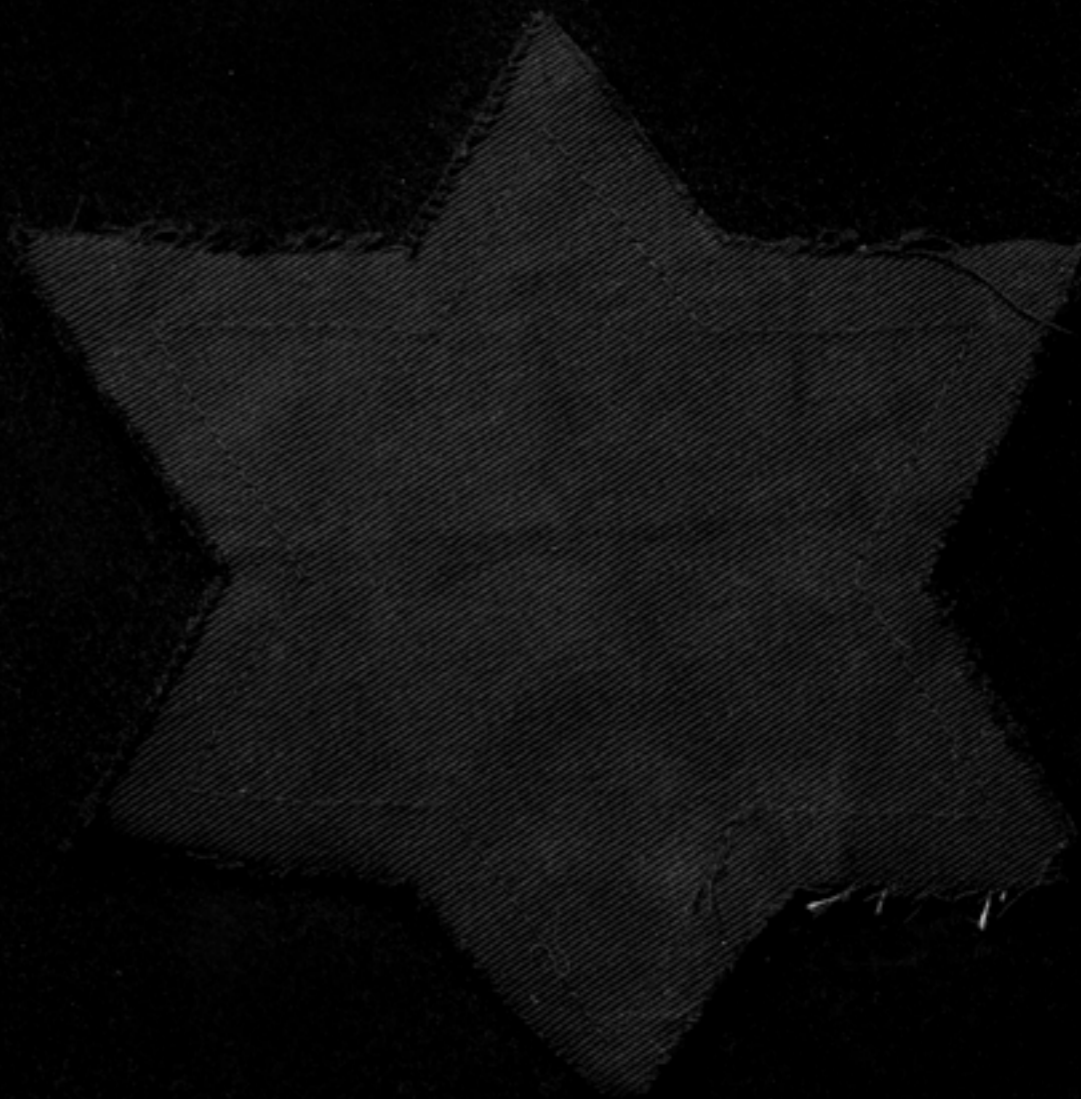


Fig. 38 Badge of Shame (front & verso)

BADGE OF SHAME AND GALL

Without any real intentions, my collecting and collection began, with a Holocaust era, gold on black Star of David, *Juif* inscribed within the equilateral triangles, finding its way into my possession. That money was exchanged for this artifact remains, after all these years, a personal psychological disturbance. Should such types of items hold commercial value? I have dwelled on why the seller had not handed it over to a local historical museum? Yet when reflecting on national attitudes and actions towards their Nazi occupiers, as compared to either France or The Netherlands, Belgium made more efforts to protect their Jewish community.¹³⁵ This was not the impression I got from this seller. He pocketed the 20€ bill and turned away towards another client.

(For further reading, Chapter X: Equilateral Triangles. The Golden Yellow of Envy and Gall and an Old Coat. p. 208)

In Poland, I was offered as a gift (apparently because of my Jewish heritage) a woodblock for stamping (printing) a Mogen David, still having remnants of the blue ink on the block face. I recommended it be given to the local historical museum. Upon return to Poland in 2019 it was offered to me once again. Apparently, the museum wasn't interested. Now I am in the possession of these two startling items, both precious to me, precious for their historical value, yet tragic as the history reminds us.

ONCE FOR CEREMONIES. LATER FOR SHAMING.

The face of the Star of David wood-carved relief-block shown a hollow blue, the remnants of the very same ink the Nazis forced Jews to stamp their own armbands for which the Jews had to buy paper or cloth themselves, to make and wear as was required by law.

In an earlier time, the relief-block was for printing the Star on rolls of fabric or paper, decorating a temple's social hall or such place, for Bar Mitzvah, weddings, and for bris (male circumcision).

¹³⁵ Currently in Holland there is a re-evaluation in progress questioning the Nazi resistance there. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/25/arts/design/resistance-museum-amsterdam.html?searchResultPosition=2;> (26.1.2023)

A KEEPSAKE WITH UNSETTLED SECRETS

A third object of curiosity comes to me in a local dusty, musty flea market. A leather pouch with the name of the Finnish town, Lappeenranta, embossed on its cover. Flipping it open two photographs, one of a member of the SS. The other, a mild-mannered photograph of a German soldier relaxing and smoking a pipe. To my mind, I classify the three objects as artifacts from a wretched time of recent history. These items have come my way by luck or serendipity, or as gifts. I am not a collector nor a fetishist. I treat these objects of curiosity as relics, as proof, proof of history. The world is full of hunter-gatherers for things Nazi. Locked in the vitrines of museums they might be artifacts. Displayed in private, these relics exist as fetishist's war memorabilia.

Did some young lady from Lappeenranta carry this leather pocket album containing two photographs of some SS acquaintances tucked neatly into her overcoat? At wars end such a keepsake would have been clear evidence of collusion, of consorting with the enemy, even if Nazi Germany didn't become the enemy until the war's final phase.

This 'keepsake', a small handmade, leather wallet, embossed with a scene from the Lappeenranta memorial statue (commemorating the White Army soldiers killed during the Finnish civil war of 1918, containing the two photographs), with no signs of identification, either of who the Nazi soldiers are or who carried the palm sized wallet around with them. To add to the mystery, the wallet is bought in Rovaniemi. But flea market finds of wartime memorabilia are not so uncommon. Of the two that have come into my possession, the Badge of Shame (found in Belgium) and this photo wallet (Rovaniemi) illuminate one great tragedy and one undoubtedly very private tragedy. The star has no face, per se, but whose symbolism is undeniable. The badge was meant to neutralize everything respective of the person excepting for the category of state enemy. The two faces in the wallet, on the other hand, are right out of things Hannah Arendt might have written about in the Banality of Evil. In the context of the brutality of Operation Barbarossa, the photographs themselves reveal little. One is a snapshot and the other a studio portrait, undoubtedly for identification. To my eyes they burn.



Fig. 40 A Flea Market Oddity. 2021

‘Young Soldier, Westerwald’ by August Sander (dated 1945)¹³⁶, a photograph of, as the title states, a young soldier in the German army. The face does not express anything of the calamity the Nazis bring on Europe nor the calamity taking place in German society at the time of this sitting. The portrait revels in quiet mystery. Who is this young man? Does he see conflict? Does he survive the tumult? The face is of young innocence. The face has presence, though not in the same way as Andre Kertész’ portrait of the schoolboy Ernest (Paris, 1934). For both Sander’s and Kertész’ portraits I recognize what Barthe writes: “The date belongs to the photograph: not because it denotes a style, because it makes me lift my head, allows me to compute life, death, the inexorable extinctions of the generations: it is possible that Ernest is still alive today (but where? How? What a novel!).”¹³⁷

The two wallet enclosed photographs are neither innocent nor subversive. In fact, they barely tell more than what the images themselves contain. But they do provide enough additional context: what, when where and maybe some of the why. But as to who these figures might be, we are left reading a limited but sufficient number of clues to know that both men were, at some point or another, my enemy. As the keeper of this keepsake ... I will always be intrigued by who carried it on their persons and for what reason.

136 Young Soldier, Westerwald’ by August Sander (dated 1945) <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/13022;> (23.8.2023)

137 Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida. 1984. Flamingo. p. 84



ARCHEOLOGY OF HISTORY

iron latticework,
german made,
on a bed of once motor oil-soaked earth
german army waste
on a bed of precambrian rock
dating to the archean eon
my arctic garden
as it is today

Fig. 41 German Army Rebar (from our garden)

Having been made aware of the Nazi presence in our garden during the war years in Rovaniemi, one bright day, while mowing the lawn, the rotating metal blade strikes a protruding piece of iron reinforcing bar and sends me and the machine flying. Looking for the culprit, there it is, sticking up bent and tired. Year after year, the ground continues squeezing up crumbling cement and iron bar. I only guess that this garden will vomit up for the next thousand years the detritus of the 'thousand-year Reich'.

It is known the Nazis German army brought most everything with them to fight their war in Lapland. German tourists to the north suffer from this stereotype, bringing with them food stuffs and drink. Tourism is one thing. Waging war is another. From Rovaniemi all the way to the northernmost region of the pre-war boundaries, a junkyard of military machinery, unused ammunition, garbage. My garden hides a web of iron reinforcing bars horizontally and laterally splayed that once supported the concrete foundation thick and heavy enough to withstand the heaviest of equipment, like tanks. But nature doesn't care for such alien intruders. Every spring, as the snow thaws and the ground undulates like breathing in the fresh spring air, more of this dark stuff peaks out.

This is a dreadful artifact, an artifact of the times, an artifact of war, like the Star of David, the printer's woodblock turns into a badge of shame, the leather pocket photo album contains the photographs of Nazi soldiers, and even this iron remnant. These are genuine items containing their own astonishing energies, each having unique yet conjoined history.

A BOOK FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Not raised speaking Yiddish or Hebrew, these languages were mostly heard by my young ears. Yiddish, the language between my mother and my grandfather, Hebrew, heard in my youth in temple and from my father as he read from a Passover Haggadah and during a Chanukah Seder prayers. Of course, in my very young life we attended the synagogue. I must have seen plenty of the language, some of it ornate and some of it no more than illegible ink on a page. But I always felt it was beautiful.

My father's Siddur, prayer book, the book held in his hands from days when studying for his Bar Mitzvah, until the last Passover Seder celebrated before Alzheimer's disease fragment his mind and took him elsewhere. A simple book, with Hebrew printing still deep and black but whose pages and binding sadly now fragment. Two photographs, made in the quiet of my basement studio, represent two contradictions in my life. One, how our family life becoming ever more secular as we grew older and two, how my father was both an ancient and modern Jewish man, who preferred his children find their own paths. I cannot read this ancient language of Hebrew, and for my father it was not important that we could, but how important it is to me that he could.

My father spoke critically of his orthodox education, although the Siddur looks and feels like it was in regular use. Now the pages flake, the binding no longer binds, revealing hidden text inside the spine, taped together. If this was a Torah, the damage would require it to be buried. During the November Pogrom, formally known as Kristallnacht, two-hundred and sixty-seven synagogues are destroyed across Germany.¹³⁸ Along with Torahs, entire libraries are set alight.

Deported Jews arriving at the camps are stripped of all possessions, personal documents, photographs, anything of religious significance, prayer books included. Identity papers and other documents are set alight immediately ensuring no record of the murdered remain. At liberation, mountains of confiscated prayer shawls, those that are not recycled for other uses, are found bundled and stacked to the rafters in Auschwitz. And prayer books? Likely burnt to ash, like the mountains of documents, mountains of photographs, and the world of humans. This prayer book is proof to me that not all went up in smoke.

¹³⁸ <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/9-november-1938-kristallnacht-2/>; (5.8.2023)

Fig. 42 Siddur (Jewish Prayerbook)

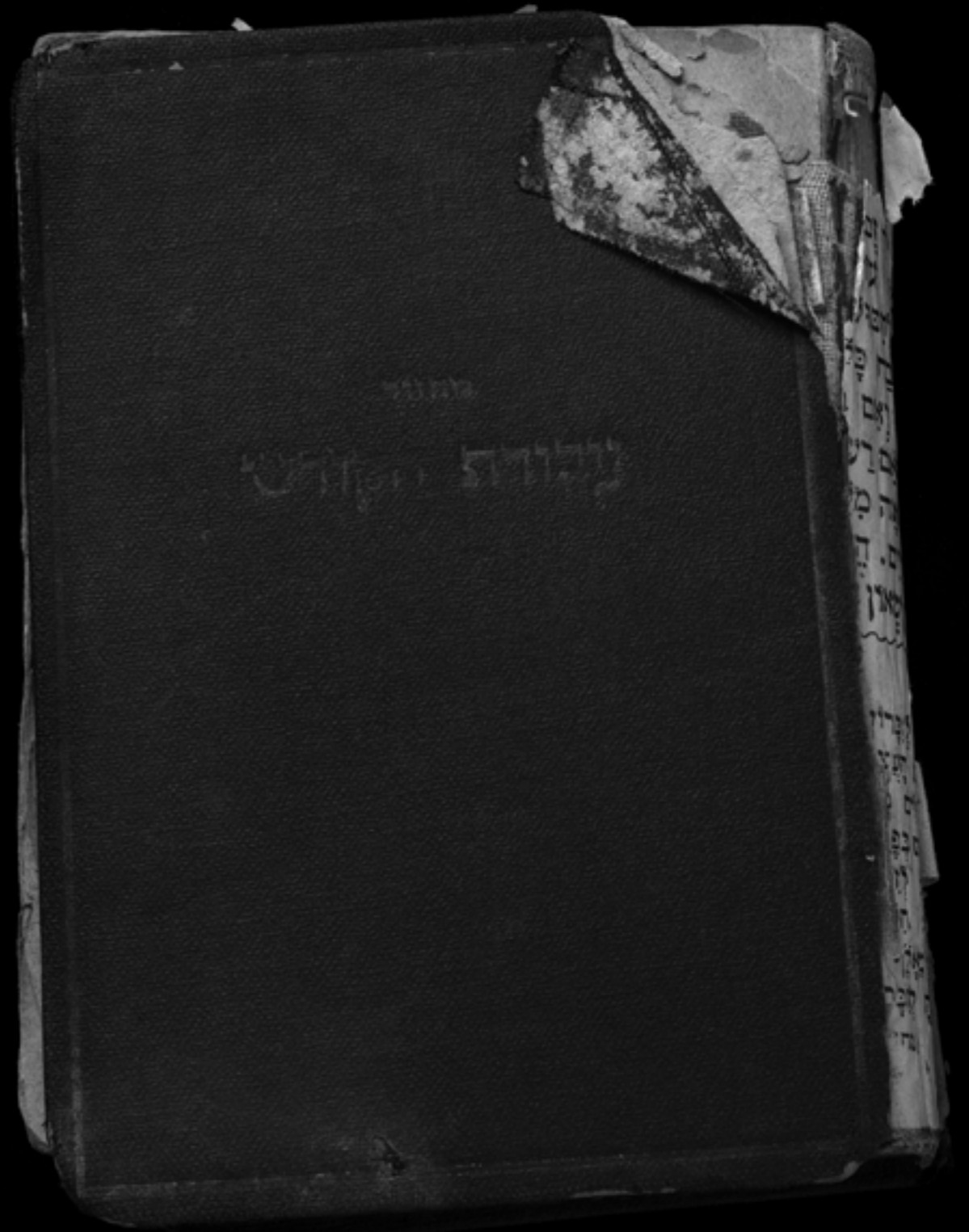




Fig. 43 A Dark Speculation. My wife's 1st dress shoes, My old work boots
(Inspired by van Gogh)

WHAT IF?

Toying with the *what if's*, fictions, yes, two images, my wife's first shoes and my old work boots, counterpoints to the mountain of shoes witnessed in Majdanek (2008) and at Auschwitz (2019). Of course, pictures of the piles of shoes and other objects seen in textbooks, magazines, history books may not necessarily jolt us as they might have in earlier times. Anne Badken; "The shoe display at Auschwitz is a kind of panorama: it both centers wickedness and reduces it to its attributes, renders it the way one boils down a poison; everything here stands for something else."¹³⁹ When standing almost shoulder to shoulder with a cross section of the world staring at the pile of shoes I could not help it, seeing my own loved ones, even selfishly myself not there, but shoes representing us and me there. "Our ability to substitute one thing for another—what neuroscientists call *cognitive capacity for symbolic representation*—is the evolutionary development that gave us language, gave us poetry: in a way, it made us human."¹⁴⁰ But substituting one's own shoes? Could it be as if wishing it had been me and not whoever's feet fit in those shoes? In one sense, I am somewhat regretful of this vertical diptych. They are not create out of an inability to resisting temptation, but out of a stark need of an essential, albeit cruel awareness.

139 Badken, Anna. <https://lithub.com/on-visiting-auschwitz-and-grappling-with-the-climate-of-evil-and-injustice/>; (5.7.2023)

140 Ibid.

A TOPOGRAPHY OF SECRETS

Discovering an existing Nazi history buried not so deep in my garden, still a shock to me today. Now had I been more aware, or should I say, less naïve, about Finland's role during the war, I could predict the presence of artifacts of war.

The title: *A Topography of Secrets*, is misleading. A fair amount of research and existing data is readily available, enough so, to surmise what lay beneath my feet, not only in my garden but all through Lapland. Yet there is something to my reaction when sharing my story with others. It is a topic, until very recently, better pushed aside and ignored. And as Helsinki is the cultural and economic center of this nation, the wartime history has primarily concentrated on history taking place in the south and southeast of the country (including things directly related to land the Soviets demanded as compensation for wartime actions and towards securing peace).

As the years pass, with what few witnesses remain, the impetus at attaining a more complete picture of the war and its consequences in the arctic region grows more serious. My explorations are, for the most part, superficial. But their inclusion ties not only the region to bigger picture of the war, but it also ties my life to the entire story with a remarkably contemporaneous awareness.

That Nazi boots trampled all over my future garden perhaps bewilders me. Still, over time I have inverted the equation. Because of all the trash poking up through the topsoil, history is exposed to me and therefore me to my history.

AN ABUSED GARDEN

Abandoned and defiled cemeteries can be reconsecrated. Can one's backyard garden? Art can be a cleansing act, even if the art is dark. "Art can offer a grand and serious vantage point from which to survey the travails of our condition."¹⁴¹

That World War II reaches even here, with the Nazi presence extending as far as the arctic sea, and Rovaniemi, the gate to Lapland, psychologically and administratively, this region, this city, this property containing remnants and reminders of that period.

141 De Botton and Armstrong. *Art as Therapy*. 2013. Phaidon Press. p. 25



Fig. 44 *A Topography of Secrets*. 2018



Fig. 45 Her Autumn Dress.

HER AUTUMN DRESS - HÄNEN SYYSMEKKONSA: A RECONSECRATION

And there it hung, day after day. And day after day I admired it more and more. The more difficult our lives, the more graceful depiction of flowers might move us. “The tears – if they come – are in response not to how sad the image is, but how pretty.”¹⁴² A floral print summer dress, hung out to dry. As the late summer rains came, the dress waited, a slight wind gently teasing its hem from side to side. How could I resist this seduction?

The dress hanging from a clothesline attached between two rowan trees just inside the low fenced perimeter. Anyone walking along the bicycle path would see it. It is not as if there could be a scandal of any sort, the dress fluttering day and night in the late arctic autumn air. “Art can mitigate randomness and chance, though, for it provides tools for generating helpful experiences on a reliable basis, so that we can have continuous access to them whenever we are able to look up from our sadness.”¹⁴³ Taking a deep breath, gathering my largest camera, walking out into the light drizzle, parking the tripod, lifted and opened the old Kodak 8x10, freeing our garden from the past.

142 De Botton. *Ibid.* p. 17

143 *Ibid.* p. 27

A NON-DESCRIPT AND GRIM GRAVEL PIT (SALMIVAARA)

This precise location is a mystery except to a few. Even a news report carried by YLE¹⁴⁴ (Finnish national broadcasting company) does not detail its location, implying for me that better it remains off the beaten path. It is a beaten path and a beaten place. And for forty-two Jews, including numerous Austrian Jewish refugees, the place, Salmivaara, became a location of daily toil in hard labor, digging with poor equipment, gravel for train lines leading across the Finnish border in the north-east into Soviet territory. By 1944, half an arctic fell was carved away by these refugees and thousands of Russian POW's.

Today this place stands silent excepting for the locals who come for target practice, with fragments from clay skeets and shotgun shells strewn all over. Could this be the northernmost place escaping Jews find themselves in during the war? In Finland, it seems so.

AT THE OUTER LIMITS

To this research there are these two outer limits. At one end, Nico Muhly's; 'giving voice to the voiceless' (p. 95) and at the other, Nick Cave's fear of spoiling the magic and mystery of art through analysis and explanation (p. 96). These are represented of two of the most difficult challenges to any artist (of any level). The silent and avoided world of the voiceless demands from artists commitment to express the inexpressible. To explain it beyond what has been expressed as art begs danger of a dilution of meaning. *Giving voice* is to enter dark uncharted waters. Many times, there has been this feeling my inner compass leads me astray. So much history to process, both personal and familial, the macro and the big history, like vast orb stuffed tight of all history like a universal archive. Seemingly never a magnetic north or even a north star to calibrate navigation.

The further venturing out, the vaster and rougher the seas into history there is to contend with. These artworks are charts for and from the navigations. *Grant Me Light* can be read like an atlas produced by a lone sailor in search of traces and evidence of a continent lost of its people. "In discussions of the Holocaust, the numbers sometimes seem numbing. Two out of every three European Jews were murdered in the genocide. Entire centuries-old communities were exterminated.

144 Tapani Leisti/YLE. Sallan rata ja operaatio Barbarossa – Stalinin hyökkäysurasta Suomeen tulikin Hitlerin hyökkäystie Venäjälle. <https://yle.fi/a/3-11474736>.; (27.1.2023)



Fig. 46 Salmivaara Gravel Pit. 2020

It is hard to grasp such slaughter.¹⁴⁵ For the purpose of navigation, statistics have been invaluable, although, in this case, devastating. Embedded in the following quote from journalist Yair Rosenberg is the burden post-war Jews carry: “But I have found that one statistic does help capture the enormity of the atrocity: So many Jews were killed by the Nazis that the global Jewish population is still lower today than it was in 1939. After more than 80 years, the Jewish people still have not recovered demographically from the body blow inflicted on them.”¹⁴⁶

It is in this vast absence that navigation has been on a ship with a lens at the bow, film at the stern, a keel deep keeping us upright and a tall mast and main-sail catching the winds of history, taking us across three continents, countless countries, cities, towns, villages, places known and unknown, all places worthy of voice and remembrance.

Throughout the journey, with no clear beginning and seemingly no end in sight, written and spoken words, the pen and ink of cartographers and illustrators, the painters brush and colors, the voices and tools of the musicians, the silver and glass of the photographers, and the fears and desires to know the past, the present, hoping for an estimation of a future. In this sense, I have not sailed alone. In this sense it is a lifetime of learning, a lifetime of dialogue and discovery.

145 Rosenberg, Yair. What to read on Holocaust Remembrance Day. A few selections on the human, statistical, and moral dimensions of an incalculable crime. <https://newsletters.theatlantic.com/deep-shtetl/63d40e172e99700039b7a033/what-to-read-on-holocaust-remembrance-day-2023/>; (8.9.2023)

146 Ibid.

VIII. THE ART OF ELOCUTION AND TRANSMISSION

TOWARDS AN EXHIBITION

For what is the purpose of an exhibition? To whom does the artist speak with or to? Is it a forum for dialogue or is it a monologue and/or even a sermon, like preaching to the converted? Gallery guestbooks rarely reveal the viewer’s experience(s). Artist should not live alone in the world, even with subject matter like this. The traditions of hanging artworks on gallery walls suits my work, suits me, no matter the exhibition’s reach be maximal or minimal. Many an exhibition experienced has inspired me to not only exhibit but to take a space and exceed it into a unique experience. Would the Holocaust, as an aspect for art, be enough of an invitation for an audience to suffer along with artists who explore on such a topic? Has not the Holocaust been hashed over long enough? To many it certainly appears so. Finland’s current speaker of the Parliament, Jussi Halla-Aho certainly thinks so. He has written in his Scripta-blog posts: the mass murder of Jews as a “historical curiosity, that doesn’t interest him” (‘historialliseksi kurioositeetiksi, joka ei häntä kiinnosta’) and of “Holo-nonsense” (‘holo-hölinäksi’).¹⁴⁷¹⁴⁸ If this kind of callousness

147 https://www.halla-aho.com/scripta/kansanmurhista_ja_niiden_muistamisesta.html; (27.8.2023)

148 Yli 30-vuotiaana väitöskirjatutkijana Halla-aho julisti, että häntä ei juutalaisten kansanmurha holokausti kiinnosta, ja kutsui sitä historialliseksi kurioositeetiksi. Auschwitzin vapautumisen 60-vuotismuiston juhlallisuuksien aikaan Halla-aho kirjoitti holo-hölyttäjistä ja holo-hölinästä. <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/496f4352-3da3-4345-a6e8-5943cb4614a2>; (27.8.2023)

is the general attitude in society, then what choices are we left with; to turn away from the past as a useless endeavor or to learn from? Or must we dive headlong into Halla-Aho's "curiosity" disinterest to remind ourselves of just how quickly a society can be usurped and turned against its very own interests and citizenry? In western societies, acceptance of the Holocaust is not a done deal. It is an ever-incomplete equation with far more unanswered, possibly unanswerable, questions to face.

As William Kentridge puts it: "Old questions don't disappear."¹⁴⁹ *Grant Me Light*, is an investigation into a deep past into an unknowing future. The artworks address old and current questions, actions, conditions, circumstances, traumas, attitudes, and perceptions stemming from the Holocaust back into history and forward, beyond the Holocaust, beyond our present day. It seems that with each sunrise, each new day, none of these concerns have become superfluous. When populist audiences across Europe (including those very close to home), throughout the middle east and Africa, across the Americas north to south, are being riled up "dangerously, because the actual lawmakers, judges, are the real threat, rather than the hooligans."¹⁵⁰ there are acute reasons for worry.

This exhibition is a voyage of history that persistently impacts our world. From my lonely perch, I nervously rest with a display and a request, to concern ourselves with attitudes and actions that have far-reaching consequences and to consider these consequences on *our* behavior. I understand we live in oddly jaded times; heads might bob out of boredom or turn away and move on. If eyes are the window to the soul, I would hope hearts don't go cold and acknowledge the circumstances in which life and society are currently headed and how it is a strange and frightening reflection from the past.

FROM THE MIND'S EYE-PROJECTOR ONTO BLANK WAITING WALLS

All history follows a timeline. For history to be followed incrementally, dates, places, and times might be obligatory. This exhibition, the display according to accurate chronologies is impossible. Of course, for the reader of the exhibition, a clarity of purpose and meaning might dictate a visual narrative chronology. Certainly, from the earliest written accounts of pogroms against Jewish communities anywhere, as an example York, England, 1190, the timeline leads and branching

149 Kentridge, William. <https://www.thebeliever.net/an-interview-with-william-kentridge/>; (23.3.2023)

150 <https://www.thebeliever.net/an-interview-with-william-kentridge/>; (23.3.2023)

out like roots, weed like, to everywhere. The roots could not be or were not cut at wars end. An exhausted world is letting them slip and spread under the radar where they turn on themselves choking off any possibility to a peaceful end. This is the chronology of anti-Semitism. Art and exhibiting art based on historical and personal orientations and interpretations makes for trouble.

And if matters aren't complicated enough, these artworks represent an intertwining of history, like diving back and forth through wormholes in time. Adhering to a certain extent, chronological structures help bind the artworks, allowing for a less incumbered, flowing narrative. My photographic practice, though, is not only about the *when*. It contains all the rudimentary elements of an essay, the *who*, *what*, and *where*. The *when*, in terms of the years of the Holocaust, is, in general, reasonably understood throughout society and age groups from secondary school through to the elder citizenry having lived (survived) through these times. The *why* is an accumulation of the "old questions" that refuse to fade.

Although there was a frenzy of action to dispose with as much evidence implicating themselves, the Nazis left a unique trail of evidence, with tons of paper and film they thought had been burnt into undecipherable ash, was left behind implicating the lot of them. They also left a heap of unexploded ammunition and abandoned war machinery scattered across continents. How can it be that in the present-day eyewitness accounts, piles of physical, visual, and bureaucratic records, there are people who presently insist that there is no 100% proof the Holocaust took place? My exhibition unlikely sways any doubters and non-believers. But to exhibit is to have hanging in the public sphere, an opportunity for dialogue with oneself or within the community about the near past still impacting and influencing our actions.

I set out gathering evidence (in a manner of speaking) not so much as to prove something but to reveal connections to a web of circumstances and events in history that impact us today and tie me both indirectly and directly to a complex past, troublesome present and undetermined future. These works of evidence are not, in themselves, explanations. Even with all that has been researched and written about Jews through history, about the reasons and results of anti-Jewish animosity, about the circumstances and lack of will in the grater world allowing for the abyss of the Holocaust to take place and that anti-Semitism, despite all this study, has finally been put down for good, it exists and rises day in and day out. There is no way a group of photographs will ever explain away any of this. But dynamic art (an opinion) can open minds.

Although *Grant Me Light* is the visual culmination of this inquiry, the two primary questions it addresses are: Is absence present? If so, can it be visualized? To these questions, my answers: maybe. An additional question may be of greater value: Is it necessary to dig through this history, yet again? My answer to that is unequivocally: yes. I must add that there are certain caveats to that answer, I have already explained the reasons for my doubts, and those reasons have not been persuasive enough to abandon nor move on to other issues. The concerns addressed through this art wind tightly over my bones and flow through the marrow. These concerns are inescapable because they as well bind the bones and poison the marrow of society.

The exhibition is the summation of the narrative, known, re-learned, newly discovered, that I live with since birth. But in terms of the exhibition and exhibiting in general, it is a risky process committing to display one's artwork publicly. I am aware the exhibition might not have fulfilled nor exceeded what had been hoped for. My entire focus has been to create a body of work that is the distillation of this history and my idea-world as well as a body of work that contributes hidden and missing components to this vast history and as a visual and written letter to my children to secure their familial awareness to this astonishing past.

With great trepidation entering this long-term and complex process, even to the point of worry, long, long before the exhibition's completion and inauguration, such worry as of a brick flying through our living room window or my children experiencing harassment. I was assured by one newspaper photographer not to worry, "those that might do that don't read the cultural pages. They are only interested in the sports results."¹⁵¹ Ok, not that I want to or even accept the position many Jews feel themselves to be in, but I worry, because that's what Jews do, for longer than any of our sages would attest to. When looking into the past we see the future. This is reason enough for this hard work.

There is the seemingly unspoken understanding, amongst Jews and non-Jews alike, that a Jewish artist must do what they do so this history does not get forgotten.

151 Photographer Jussi Leinonen, while convincing me to be photographed for an article about the exhibition.

I have already done what I considered that kind of *mitzvah*¹⁵² in this respect with *Down a Narrowing Corridor* (2008) that has been exhibited in Finland, Poland and even in my previous home town, San Francisco. Was it not enough (in my opinion, or in anyone else's)? It seems it is not enough. Something tugs and yanks at my curiosity which cannot be negated nor rebuffed. There is something perverse in the assumption that it is a Jewish duty to not forget and make all others not forget. This problem has its consequences when such artwork produced within the Jewish mind and heart but displayed where it would be impossible to gather a minyan¹⁵³, and then having to explain to a Gentile audience that 'bad things happen'.

On occasions, especially recently, I've pondered the question as to what kind of artwork would be creating by me if I wasn't Jewish or that Jews and Gentiles living side by side, in peace, both sides accepting each other within the vast spectrum of humanity, where the term anti-Semitism never needed to be coined. As a person of Jewish extraction, I am unable to place myself inside another cultural construct. Is it a state of mind or something far deeper? On many levels I drag an inherited ball and chain, anchored insecurely to my history. At no point in this research do I attempt to create art as if I was something or somebody else than I am. And like many Jewish artists I have studied, I come to acknowledge this reality, not bury it.

The exhibition reflects and displays truthfully my inner and outer deliberations on the subject. The challenges of developing a visual language that expresses my concerns to the world inside and outside of my roots goes to the heart of my relationship with photography and art. Under normal circumstances incorporating the use of numerous written languages requires fluency of a different order. Photography is a conglomeration of many languages. I am of the opinion that working across photographic visual platforms is not the same as speaking or writing or conversing simultaneously in multiple languages. Although it is still, in this day, not a fully accepted practice to mix and match photographic mediums, I believe in terms of the nature and character of this project, joining different platforms broadens the possibilities for the artist and the audiences experience.

152 The literal meaning of the Hebrew word *mitzvah* is commandment, but the generally accepted sense is that of a good deed. The emphasis is on deeds—not on positive thoughts or wishes, but on conscious acts of empathy and kindness. <https://pjlibrary.org/mitzvah#:~:text=The%20literal%20meaning%20of%20the,acts%20of%20empathy%20and%20kindness;> (14.7.2023)

153 Minyan: the quorum required for Jewish communal worship that consists of ten male adults in Orthodox Judaism and usually ten adults of either sex in Conservative or Reform Judaism.

IX. IN SUMMATION (WITHOUT CONCLUSIONS)

walking away from the garden of eden
in search of a safe haven
over and over
and over
again

IS TIME A FLAT CIRCLE?

Carl Sagan, cosmologist supreme: “The Holocaust is a crime against creation.”¹⁵⁴ All genocides are. Through the centuries Jews have settled and then been unsettled, forced into moving on in search of yet another sanctuary. This apparently endless movement of people searching for a safe haven is not something only from the Old Testament, and it did not end with agreements between nations. For every migrant escaping poverty, escaping drug violence, escaping the violence of climate change, escaping factional wars, escaping state sponsored wars, escaping racial, religious, gender-based violence, a safe haven denied is a crime against humanity. For those that trudge long arduous distances, through heat and cold, hunger and desperation, only to find closed borders or a swallowing sea, their suffering and loss is a crime.

In Carl Sagan’s words: “When you look at earth from space, it is striking. There are no national boundaries visible. They have been put there, like the equator and the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, by humans. The planet is real. The life on it is real, and the political separations that have placed the planet in danger are of human manufacture. They have not been handed down from Mount Sinai. All beings on this little world are mutually dependent. It’s like living in a lifeboat.”¹⁵⁵ Our lifeboat is crowded and full of disagreements, and suspicions.

As Simon Schama tells it: “There was a summer evening in 1780 when Philosopher Moses Mendelssohn¹⁵⁶ had been out strolling with his family in the Berlin gloaming. It was what Jewish families in Europe did and would do in Vienna, Prague, Paris, Budapest. But on this particular evening the serene satisfaction of being at home, in the city was shattered like a pane of glass. Mendelssohn’s family were set on by a crowd of youths hurling stones and abuses. The streets rang with ‘Juden, Juden, Juden’. The frightened children turned to their father and had asked what they had done to deserve the terror. ‘Yes dear Papa... they

154 Sagan, Carl. *The Varieties of Scientific Experience. A Personal View of the Search for God*. 2007. Penguin Books. p. 205

155 *Ibid.* p. 210–11

156 Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) German-Jewish philosopher and theologian. Known for his writings and ideas on Jews and the Jewish religion and identity, central to the development of ‘Haskala’ or ‘Jewish Enlightenment’ of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

are always chasing after us in the streets, cursing us, Juden! Juden! Is just being a Jew enough of a reason for them to curse us?’ In a letter relating the encounter to a Catholic correspondent, Mendelssohn confessed that at that moment he was at a loss for words. He could say nothing by way of comfort to his scared and perplexed children, all of whom would grow up to grapple, in their own ways, with the problem. He would only say under his breath: People, people, when will you stop doing this?¹⁵⁷

Here, on our little globe, ‘time is a flat circle.’¹⁵⁸ At some point in the far and distant past anti-Jewish sentiment stepped into the ring. Not quite the boxer’s nor the circus ring, but a flat circle like a vinyl disk. The first anti-Semitic acts did not take place with the first of over 400 decrees, regulations, and legislation drawn up in 1933 by Hitler and his cohorts. What if all the tragedies of the world were recorded onto disks and packed into boxed sets and virulent anti-Semitism was one disk among the set? Would the entirety of anti-Semitism fit onto one disk? With grooves microscopically thin, what needle could read such an amount of misery without wearing out long before arriving at the present? Or should the needle be dropped into the 1933 groove and ignore all that has previously transpired? Knowing what we know of those ‘formative years’, 1933-1945, could we assume there would be no further need to worry and no further acts to record?

Today, Nietzsche’s doctrine, that of eternal recurrence, plays out very much in a manner postulated. Most names, places, dress codes and such have changed, but they are only cosmetically superficial things. The doctrine lists and lifts from human history things that are regular occurrences, not only happenings and events but ways of thought that ostensibly refuse to die out.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) In 2022, recorded 3,697 antisemitic incidents throughout the United States. This is a 36% increase from the 2,717 incidents tabulated in 2021 and the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979. This is the third time in the past five years that a year-end total has been the highest number ever recorded.¹⁵⁹ And this is only for the United States.

157 Schama, Simon. *Belonging. The Story of The Jews. 1492–1900.* 2017. Vintage. p. 313–14

158 Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/10/14/nietzsches-eternal-return>; (23.9.2023)

159 <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/audit-antisemitic-incidents-2022>; (29.7.23)

These are challenging things to face. The Jewish diaspora is scattered far and wide. Many without choice, and some, as in myself, having choices and opportunities and the possibility to choose my destiny. I did not come from a tight Jewish community. I am probably of that Jewish stock distressed and fractured by the Holocaust, so much so, in fact, we folded our Judaism into the privacy of our homes. Some might see this a form of consequential assimilation. I believe I am a product of that generation. But I also hold on to a modern take on *Tikkun Olam*,¹⁶⁰ the Jewish concept of *fixing the broken world*. In choosing the risk, I have become ever more aware that the world is small and saturated, with an ever-growing portion of the global population no longer aware of the tragedy. So, I take the call partly out of some unspoken sense that this can be a valued contribution. But also, for, if I may say, for deeply personal reasons; I need to know for myself of what foundation am I built upon. All this there is, some known in limited ways, and most hidden and stored deep under the skin like an invisible tattoo. Only the ink never sets, it is in the blood that flows.

The Holocaust itself is not what motivates me to participate in art (as a retort to Adorno). It is that what I am is the sum of our history, and driving the artist in me, even against some better judgement, to create and communicate through the camera. As hard as I have tried to push ‘my Jewish question’ to the background, it keeps pushing itself back through curtains that obscure and guard the past. The struggles to understand this conflict, a conflict that goes against what I have long considered an artist’s duties, to plumb one’s history and things that dwell in waiting in our personal bedrock. An equal and opposite struggle is stated with two questions; is there interest in seeing such art, about such things? And do I have the strength and abilities to bring anything additional and of value to the topic? Both questions are at odds with each other and both questions underline that artists contend with doubt, but that doubt is essential if we want to create art that lives and speaks independently of us.

Everybody has a story to tell. Every story should be told and retold, and why not retrieved through all the arts, embedded in the human archive for future generations.

160 <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/tikkun-olam/>; (28.8.2023)

X. COMMENTARIES & ORIGIN STORIES



Fig. 47 Morris Prootkow, 1976, age 85. Photograph by Michael Marnin Jacobs

I. MR. PROOTKOW'S JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

It would become a final visit to my mother's side, and to my childhood home, nearly as far west as one could go on the American continent. I wondered about the whereabouts of a single photograph, a one-off as it might be called, made of my beloved grandfather, Morris Prootkow, on the day of my graduated from high school.

Box after dusty box opened and closed, contents rummaged through until, one day, there it appeared, colors seemingly as bright and fresh as that day in June, 1976, when I pressed the button of that plastic Polaroid camera, that strange looking "modular" box, and out came a portrait of my eighty-five-year-old grandfather, Morris. The image is an odd bird, owing to its size just slightly larger than 4 by 3 inches, corner to corner, with an actual square image (aspect ratio measuring a tidy 3.1 inches). And there he was, as stoic as ever, only now the year was 2019.

This one of kind photograph, that all Polaroid instant pictures essentially were, having a remarkable quality. This unique print of that unique man is still my favorite. For years, though, the photograph remained in a drawer gathering dust, forgotten. It was found amongst plenty of things that I did not need to find. But his face, his eyebrows, that hair ... he seemingly called out to me in that wonderful combination of heavy Russian accent and a Louis Armstrong gravel filled voice (he suffered severe vocal cord damage when he was young), "Hyeh-loh My-kl." With this delicate image in my palm, I said "Hello grandpa, we have missed you".

It's a strange and inviting image, an old man who witnessed great change yet rarely commented on it. He was no longer in New York, having moved yet further out west to live with us in San Francisco and where he ended his days at the age of 89. What a world witnessed. From shtetl life and poverty in a land of constant sorrow and turmoil where a Jewish boy would well understand that dreaming of a better life would get him no closer to a better life. He traversed the continent of Europe, possibly by horse and buggy, by train, somehow, then crossing the Atlantic in a steel hulled, twin screw, passenger-cargo ship, German built. His final journey out of New York, on a TWA Boeing airlines model 707, to San Francisco, lasted all of five hours.

In my possession is another photograph, that of *his* grandfather and grandmother, my great-great grandparents, dressed in traditional orthodox garb, sitting side by side. My grandfather's grandfather apparently devoted his days to Torah studies. His grandmother's social and political life would've been secondary at best and nonexistent for the most part.¹⁶¹ I was made to understand my grandfather did not like his grandfather and, yet, he brought with him this photograph across a vast land mass and then the great Atlantic, this lone sitting, maybe the only time this old couple sat for the camera in their lifetime.

The portrait of my great-great grandparents is what it is, by no means a work of art and never intended to be as such. But it is a treasure. Everything about it, all that is contained in it, speaks of uncomfortable times. The depth of that visual story telling from the image in and of itself, the character of the pose, the clothing, the environment, the type of paper it was printed on (most likely albumen), the character of the cardboard that it is glued to, the semi-ornate design that speak so much of the period. The relief of the designs add physical depth that deepens the viewer's perception of the unknown couple. If I knew the couple, had I met them in the flesh, my relationship with the photograph would be very much different and deeper and the cardboard frame of little importance. I imagine they passed away well before the catastrophes that were Stalin followed by Hitler. Tragically for their children that would not be the case.

These two images, that of my grandfather and that of his grandparents, remained here in my childhood home in San Francisco, boxed at sea level pressed by gravity, untouched for years waiting for an audience. So many other artifacts of their lives misplaced or since banished to the dust bins either forgotten in transit or disposed of without thought or intentionally. I would have expected to see photographs of my grandfather's parents, but no, those are missing. This gap is a hole in the archival continuity. We have images of the younger, as well as older, Morris Prootkow, and of his great grandparents (both maternal/paternal unknown) but not of his parents so the of identity of those contained in the photograph remains in doubt without further references of proof. The consequences of this is characterized in the image itself, the aged couple as if sitting just outside the exit/entrance to the cave of my history.

161 Bauer. Yehuda. 2001. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. Yale University Press. p. 168



Fig. 48 My great-great grandparents from my mother's side. Luhansk, Ukraine, est. 1910–10. Photographer unknown

Again studying the Polaroid photograph of my grandfather, the photograph barely protected in a transparent cover sheet of mylar, is as I knew my grandfather, his voice, his touch, his gifts of money on my birthdays, his serious character in general, his “old country” presence, and sadly his lack of desire for a continued life that made up his final years and his presence in mine. After his death, he silently disappeared into that family archive of history, in some box, in some drawer, until I went hunting for him to find out who am I.

A UNIVERSAL ARCHIVE, SOMEWHERE, SOMETIME ACCESSIBLE.

What if one was handed an archive, pulled from some mysterious universal archive, containing fragments of a person’s life illuminating the past like a light at the far end of a tunnel? What if that archive crisscrossed through time and space like on a web of rails that thread and tie the future to the present and the past? Where might it take us, lead us, leave us? Would it offer answers or raise more questions? Could the contents help us formulate questions we might need as we oddly walk forward into the past?

A German lawyer, amateur astronomer, and writer Felix Eberty¹⁶² postulated in 1846 that all of space could be a universal archive of all that has happened on Earth.¹⁶³ And what if some researcher on some distant star opened up the archives for greater Europe from Earth year 1942, what would they make of it? Was this year somehow different from previous years or centuries? This genocide could be cross-referenced in its similarities with the German army’s genocide of the Herero and Nama people in what was then German Southwest Africa, now Namibia. From 1904 to 1908, starvation, massacres where even medical experimentation took place. This is now considered the first genocide of the 20th century.

Could our distant researcher recognize the thread that connects this period through the Armenian Genocide (1915 through 1917) all the way to events at Auschwitz? Would our researcher return to the 1942 archive and come to the page detailing Dr. Mengele’s torturous experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz and consider the war against the Herero and Nama a dress rehearsal? What else could our researcher come upon in opening up this archive?

Such an archive as a *universal archive* that Eberty and Kentridge have pondered over, would be, on one hand, a wonder and on another a horror. The human

162 Eberty, Felix.. Boston, W. Crosby and H. P. Nichols. 1849. p. 29

163 Kentridge, William. 2014. *Six Drawing Lessons*. Harvard. 2014. p. 24

is a consequence of his environment and all that they built it which includes so much from a time long before our personal arrival into the world. The archive that I carry has become heavier from the time I embarked on this project. Yet I recognize that it is fragmented and not seamless. That mysterious, barely perceptible, *red thread*, the thread of time and history, is hidden in the fabric of life. Occasionally, yet rarely expected, that thread is recognized and understood that it stretches back, very far back into the earliest of human experiences. I know that I sense only peripherally genocides through history other than the trials of the Jew. This history, this archive, is not of the binder kind. It is a tincture in the marrow. How strange that I am unable to read Hebrew or Yiddish, but when I see these languages written I sense them *in* me. They look and sound deeply familiar. My grandfather’s story has come to me in fragments in the form of overheard comments and/or through a sense of the recognition and weight of the presence of absence. My grandfather, he revealed little. I still am not sure if my parents were trying to protect us from the knowledge of such history. At times, I seem to have been allowed to be near adults as they conversed at dinner gatherings. If all around us were people who spoke English or Spanish in heavy European accents, I must’ve known they were from another part of the world. I might have even wondered why they *chose* to live in such a place as Bogotá, Colombia. At what point does one begin to do the math? At what point does the familial archive begin to share its contents, if only clue by clue?

If Eberty was correct and such a universal archive really could exist, possibly we could hear my Grandfather Morris (long before he is *destined* to be my grandfather) at the age of thirteen, in 1904, having an argument with his father about what he wants of his future. The circumstances in question would’ve taken place in a town of Lugansk in east of the Russian Ukraine. The language would’ve been Yiddish. And the then young Mordecai Prudkow was to lose out in the argument and instead of going on to study engineering in Odessa, as he had wished to do, he was to be a milliner.¹⁶⁴ I cannot even pretend to know what that argument sounded like. But I do know the argument took place and that the consequences

164 When my mother told me this story I was stunned. I asked her what was my great grandfather’s problem with having his very intelligent son go into engineering, a respectable line of work. And she told me the following, as a Jew having just gone through his Bar Mitzvah, he was considered as a man now. And as such he should be become a bread winner as the family is poor. In the present day, one’s Bar Mitzvah would be a great family celebration. Back then, 1904, amongst Jews in The Pale of Settlements, no more time to play but to work.

of that are completely yet sadly understood in the present. That decision saved his life. But the life of his family was doomed due to the oncoming series of catastrophic events. What we know: pogroms against the Jews throughout the Pale of Settlements already driving emigration westward and as America (those United States of) was calling out for laborers of all kinds and Moris Prudkow (the original iteration of his name) had skills. He packed his bags, crossed a fracturing Europe, arriving two years later in Hamburg, then traversing the Atlantic during the early winter stormy season arriving in the New World on the 16th of December, 1912.

LINE 29. PRUDKOW MORIS

Born into an orthodox and possible Chassidic family his Jewish name was Mor-decai. For the Czar's Russia, it was Морис (Moris). To the Germans in Hamburg he was Moris. After passing through Ellis Island his first name became Morris and his last name went from Prudkow to Prootkow. If we were to leaf through his documents located in this Universal archive (under all these names) all kinds of surprises would be found. He was from strict orthodox lineage but like many young Jews politics were driving him towards socialism in the hopes that it would save them from constant persecution.¹⁶⁵ The dossier would reveal, as well, that he married Fannie, neé Feige Epstein, from Slutsk¹⁶⁶, now a part of Belarus, and had a child by the name of Frances, who would later become my mother.

Ideally, the universal archive would contain documents that are essential in understanding the weight of the coming catastrophe and how it might impact on the course of my life from childhood on through to the present as a family man, an educator and artist. One of Morris Prootkow's duties as an emigrant from Russia was not only a matter of finding decent employment and a path out of poverty but to bring his family out of that old world and into the new one, the one where

165 My grandfather Morris arrived in New York a socialist and was active in union activity even throughout the economic depression that began in 1929. The story goes that he was employed at a hat factory, which went bankrupt after the depression hit. A relative of his wife had a cabinet making workshop and hired him. Morris Prootkow promptly tried to unionize the shop and was promptly fired for it.

166 Slutsk was a city utterly destroyed during the war. The German occupation of the city took place all of three days after the invasion of Russia began with Operation Barbarossa. The city was occupied from June 1941 through June 1944. The Jewish population was massacred on the 27th and 28th of October, 1941.

the "wretched refuse"¹⁶⁷ might be accepted. He never succeeded. First it was the tumult of World War I followed by Stalin's Holodomor (1932-1933) and finally Nazi Germany's Operation Barbarossa and invasion of Russia in June, 1941. Voroshilovgrad, as Lugansk was called from 1935 to 1958, had been occupied by the invading Nazi armies in 1942. By 1943 all Jews not evacuated were rounded up and shot. The burial are were found at the Ivanischev Yar (ravine).¹⁶⁸¹⁶⁹ Precise date of the massacre is unknown. But two accounts of the disaster are recounted in the Australian press, the Sydney Jewish News and The Argus (Melbourne) in February and later in July, 1943. Both reports originated via the AAP (Australian Associated Press).¹⁷⁰

Did my grandfather's family find refuge from the Nazi onslaught by evacuating inland? Would they have been able to trust a non-Jewish population in trying to secure safe passage and safety? The level of distrust existing between Jew and non-Jew inside of the Soviet Union was extreme already long before the outbreak of the Second World War. Pogrom after pogrom singled out Jewish communities throughout Russia and the Ukrainian territories. As far back as 1920 the New York Times ran reports, though sparse, of such violence often ending in murder.¹⁷¹ I'm not sure my grandfather would be reading these accounts in The Times. Had there been accounts in the Jewish Forward (Forvets in Yiddish) he most certainly would have seen them, read them and wondered.

The unsuccessful attempts to bring his extended family west followed by years of searching for any surviving family members must have been a horrible burden.

If the Universal Archive existed and contained the thoughts and emotions of events visual, aural and written, could I make any sense of them? But I don't have access to those archives. I have only sparse words, pieces of conversation, and whatever paperwork having come across in dusty boxes and what few documents accessed through genealogical and historical portals via the internet. Things of this world.

167 From the Emma Lazarus poem on the plaque of the Statue of Liberty.

168 Shneer, David. 2011. *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes*. Photography, War and the Holocaust. Rutgers University Press. p. 256 (on notes to pages 141-146).

169 30.7.1943. p. 5. *The Sydney Jewish News*. (8.8.2022)

170 Scouring the New York Times archives from 1941 through 1943 there is no mention of such tragedies.

171 https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1920/02/26/96875876.pdf?pdf_redirect=true&ip=0 (8.8.2022)

BALCON, CABIN, AND STEERAGE ALIENS MUST BE COMPLETELY MANIFESTED.

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Required by the regulations of the Secretary of Commerce and Labor of the United States, under Act of Congress approved February 20, 1907, to be delivered to the United States Immigration Officer at the Port of Arrival.

S. S. BULGARIA sailing from Hamburg November 27th 1912, 19

No.	Family Name	Given Name	Age	Sex	Color of Hair	Color of Eyes	Place of Birth	Profession	Last Previous Residence	The name and complete address of nearest relative in United States, if any, to whom you are coming	Date of Issue	City or Town	Date of Issue	
													Month	Day
1	Wichard	Josif	27	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
2	Wichard	Bozh	24	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
3	Wichard	Leok	18	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
4	Wichard	Stanka	15	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
5	Wichard	Liza	12	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
6	Wichard	Jane	10	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
7	Wichard	Anna	8	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
8	Wichard	Stefan	6	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
9	Wichard	Bozh	4	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
10	Wichard	Stanka	2	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
11	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
12	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
13	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
14	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
15	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
16	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
17	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
18	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
19	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
20	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
21	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
22	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
23	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
24	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
25	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
26	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
27	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
28	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
29	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
30	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27

THIS SHEET IS FOR STEERAGE PASSENGERS.

STATES IMMIGRATION OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

To be filled out by the United States Immigration Officer by the Commanding Officer of any vessel having such passengers on board upon arrival at a port in the United States.

Arriving at Port of New York 16th of December, 1912

No.	Family Name	Given Name	Age	Sex	Color of Hair	Color of Eyes	Place of Birth	Profession	Last Previous Residence	The name and complete address of nearest relative in United States, if any, to whom you are coming	Date of Issue	City or Town	Date of Issue	
													Month	Day
1	Wichard	Josif	27	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
2	Wichard	Bozh	24	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
3	Wichard	Leok	18	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
4	Wichard	Stanka	15	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
5	Wichard	Liza	12	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
6	Wichard	Jane	10	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
7	Wichard	Anna	8	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
8	Wichard	Stefan	6	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
9	Wichard	Bozh	4	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
10	Wichard	Stanka	2	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
11	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
12	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
13	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
14	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
15	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
16	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
17	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
18	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
19	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
20	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
21	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
22	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
23	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
24	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
25	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
26	Wichard	Anna	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
27	Wichard	Jane	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
28	Wichard	Stefan	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
29	Wichard	Bozh	1	M	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27
30	Wichard	Stanka	1	F	Black	Blue	Bulgaria	Farmer	Bulgaria	John Wichard	1912	New York	11	27

Fig. 49 Passenger-cargo steamship SS Bulgaria, Hamburg to New York. Nov. 16-Dec. 27, 1912. My maternal grandfather, one of est. 1110 passengers arriving at Ellis Island, USA.¹⁷²

GERMAN TERROR AT VOROSHILOVGRAD

LONDON, Friday, AAP
Because they refused to work for Hitler, 3,000 men, women, and children at Voroshilovgrad were herded into a stadium and mown down by machinegun fire, says the *Daily Telegraph* Moscow correspondent.

Horrible tales are told of children screaming as the first lines fell, he says. Several similar massacres occurred, the victims totalling many thousands. The Germans before they left blew up a prison, burying 300 prisoners. They also blew up the great Red October factory, using such heavy charges that they killed over 500 people in neighbouring houses. With methodical savagery they blasted or burnt every public building, school, hospital, and library.

LESS LIGHT FOR GERMANS

LONDON, Friday, AAP
German News Agency says that Sperer, German Munitions Minister, has ordered all Government party offices, military establishments, banks, and private concerns to reduce consumption of electricity and gas by at least 30%, small, medium-sized households by 10%, and households using more than 10 rooms by 20%.

Lured by Palestine Promise

Massacre of Voroshilovgrad

KUIBYSHEV. — Thousands of Jews in the large Russian city of Voroshilovgrad were lured to their death before firing squads by a rumour spread secretly by the Nazis that all Jews there were to be evacuated to Palestine, it is disclosed in a report released by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in Kuibyshev on the basis of a statement by an eye-witness from Voroshilovgrad.

"Early one week," the report states, "the Germans circulated a rumour that all the Jews were to be transported to Palestine. Fantastic as the rumour was the starving, tormented people were ready to grasp at any straw. That Saturday evening a notice was posted ordering Jews to report, together with their belongings, at the municipal stadium the next morning. As soon as dawn came scores of people wearing black six-pointed stars on their sleeves could be seen trudging towards the stadium, carrying large bundles. Many had babies in arms and others led aged and tottering people.

"At the stadium, motor-cars were ready. Load after load of Jews were whisked to the outskirts of the city, while more and more unfortunates arrived at the stadium unaware of their ultimate destination. By noon, however, the city learned of the tragedy that was being enacted. As the carloads of Jews arrived at the outskirts of the city, they were stripped of their clothing and group after group were methodically shot down. All day long the crackle of gun shots could be heard in outlying sections of the city. Among those executed were two noted aged Jewish doctors, Moshe Katz and Isaac Fishkin."

away. Yes, there were transparent floating clues handed out in conversation between my mother and I, yet those times were few and far between. The need to know his personal history and his history in correlation to the vast history of anti-Semitism beginning in centuries past coming like a slow rolling fog on a cold morning. Such a fog is neither comfortable nor inviting. By the time it enveloped me, my questions came too late to ask them of him. My mother had not asked either, most likely as to not burden her father any further. She could recall what he recounted and that seemed to be very little other than things and events that kept the overall picture of his past intact, like a tattered old sweater, but still wearable. Though she was aware that her father had searched through European, US and Jewish post-war databases for those lost and those found in *The Holocaust*. Whatever he learned from them or how he felt about coming up empty in his search was certainly never shared with me.

So here I am, third son from a family of four, with parents both Jewish, and a thick empty line in our family history's continuum. It wasn't as if our family was born only when our parents were born. There was an earlier time, only it wasn't easily or ever really addressed. It wasn't until after a visit to New York in 1973 turned upside down that my grandfather joined us on our return flight to San Francisco and his history prior to his arrival in New York in 1912 became an object of my attention.

I've understood that my grandfather Morris was very disappointed by his father's decision that he should become a milliner. But between his father's decision to demand his son gain a trade and the son's decision to start a new life in the New World, the end result is the survival of my mother's father and therefore allowing for my existence.

On my mother's paternal side, family information is strangely scarce other than Feige Epstein (becoming Fannie Prootkow after marriage) born in Slutsk.¹⁷³ It's not known when her family packed their bags and travelled to one of many ports of embarkation. But certainly, they waved their final goodbyes to *the old country* as so many had already done and so many more were yet to do.

173 Primo Levy recounts in *The Awakening* a visit to Slutsk during his meandering journey back life, to freedom and on his way back to Italy.

Fig. 50 *The Sydney Jewish News*, 30th of July, 1943 → 20.02.1943. *The Argus* (Melbourne, Au.) Originally reported by AAP (Australian Associated Press)

Surely Mr. Prootkow in 1912 and the family Epstein (at some point in time either before or after that year) knew that along the way there were no guarantees of a safe haven, let alone safe harbor and especially not in the New World. For that matter, there was no safe harbor even after arriving at the place of embarkation. The *Auswandererhallen*¹⁷⁴, where all incoming emigrants were required to lodge before their embarkation west, located on Veddel Island, a part of the city of Hamburg, Germany, built after a cholera epidemic killed an estimated 10,000 people in 1892. Prior to the construction of the “city within a city”¹⁷⁵ the conditions that awaited those emigrating abroad were very poor and unhealthy. After the epidemic was brought under control the Hamburg-America Line owners petitioned (threatened might be a more appropriate term) the city of Hamburg to build proper housing for all incoming emigrants awaiting departure west. The business of transporting emigrants across the water was hugely lucrative employing innkeepers, travel agents, money changers, and merchants. The housing, or better said, a stopover and quarantine area, were completed in 1901.

The cholera epidemic was blamed specifically on the Russian Jews. Between 1899 and 1909 over 990,000 “Hebrews” alone emigrated to the United States.¹⁷⁶ When the *Auswandererhallen* was rebuilt and conditions improved, Jews were still put under quarantine that lasted up until the day of their travels. In fact, all along the journey borders across Europe were erected specifically to monitor and handle

174 Reports of the U.S. immigration Commission, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*. Washington Government Printing Office. 1911. p.99-100. <https://archive.org/details/reportsofimmigra04unitrich/page/98/mode/2up> (8.8.2022)

175 Stephanie O. Gawel. Ancestry.com. 2010. https://www.ancestry.com/mediaui-viewer/tree/6084791/person/-1348401038/media/b3785a3b-2ba0-46c7-a599-dd116c8e69d7?_phsrc=uhw325101&_phstart=successSource (19.8.2022)

176 Reports of the U.S. immigration Commission, *Emigration Conditions in Europe*. p. 25 <https://archive.org/details/reportsofimmigra04unitrich/page/24/mode/2up> (8.8.2022)

the vast quantity migrants with health issues being at the top of the list.¹⁷⁷ As I read details from this massive 424 page report commissioned by the 63rd Congress, 3rd session in 1910 (published in 1911), it is hard to imagine the level of patience required for such a long haul knowing that at any point along the arduous path from the departed home front to the harbor’s edge any amount of complications could arise and render the journey impassable and ultimately impossible.

By the time Moris Prudkow arrives in Hamburg he has experienced much. From the shtetl, via numerous way stations, armed bureaucratic check points, arriving finally at what amounts to an enclosed ghetto. How long he resides in the walled off city, we do not know. As he finally boards the S.S. *Bulgaria* he must pass a medical exam yet again and receive a full set of vaccines. Had he not passed the exam there would be no need to vaccinate. He would be simply sent back in the direction from which he came.

The Universal Archive surely would contain a wealth of documents from most who waved their last wave to the old country. For many during this period of the great European migration (1820-1924) the regrets were probably few as they had come from a people who *occasionally* had to pack and run. Was it by now embedded in their genes that history proves things can turn towards the worst and on short notice? As the magnitude of the migration into the Americas increased so did the push back. In 1921 and 1924 restrictive laws in the United States and elsewhere were enacted. But between 1881 and 1924 two-and-one-half million Eastern European Jews did the packing and said good riddance to deep poverty and violence. Amongst this mass of people, one might say, were *my people*. Do I carry this gene?

177 Ibid. *Emigration Conditions in Europe*. p. 77 <https://archive.org/details/reportsofimmigra04unitrich/page/76/mode/2up> (8.8.2022)

**3RD CLASS, STEERAGE. HAMBURG TO NEW YORK.
NOVEMBER 27 TO DECEMBER 16, 1912**

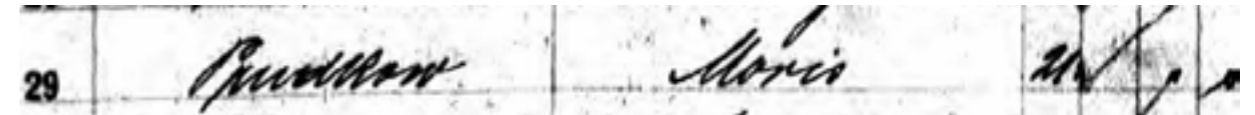
All passengers travelling in 3rd class, steerage, would be transferred to a barge and be ferried to Ellis Island. Awaiting them was yet more processes of judgement. For either health reasons or suspicion that a perspective immigrant might become an *LPC*, a *Likely Public Charge*, the name would be registered in a folder indicating further review required.

Moris Prudkow, as he was officially listed on the Hamburg-American Line German passenger manifest, had documents attesting to his milliner's skills and a contact in New York, and that was enough.

The document in question, or at least a microfilm copy of the document, is from files of all immigrants to the United States of America having gone through Ellis Island, New York between the years 1882 through 1924. The passenger manifest from the S.S. Bulgaria's Hamburg to New York journey, from November 27 to December 16, 1912, contains his name. It is the first concrete connection made with my grandfather as an emigrant. I might have seen pictures of him from his earlier days, but I couldn't make this kind of connection. When I zeroed in on his name from line 29 I felt as if I could feel the pressure of the black inked nib pressing and scarring the paper surface like a loud statement, "Prudkow, Moris, *welcome* to America." (But, consider to alter your name, if you so choose, to make it easier on everybody, so now it is Morris Prootkow.¹⁷⁸) I marvel at this two page document, the penmanship, the text and font styles, though the handwriting is not his but that of the processing control official on duty at the port of the ship's origin.¹⁷⁹

178 There has been a great deal inquiry into the question surrounding changes in full names as immigrants passed through Ellis Island. Even within the world of genealogy this is a hot potato as is illustrated here; <https://ancestralfindings.com/changed-name-ellis-island/> (9.8.2022) This site states that it is a "myth" names would've been arbitrarily altered according to some English language standard. This site claims that that names would only be altered at the immigrants request most likely to have them Anglicized. In my grandfather's case I believe this to be the case for even though he could speak little English upon arrival in New York the border agents employed spoke Russian and Yiddish.

179 Horn. Dara. *People Love Dead Jews. Reports from a Haunted Present.* 2021. W.W. Norton & Co.



Refer to Fig. 49

I didn't encounter my grandfather's script from his own hand until much later, first in his milliner's union card and the naturalization (citizenship) documents (1927). It didn't strike me the same way. The passenger manifest has that announcement, that you are now a part of the official registry of this nation, of *these* United States of America.

But let's rewind back 19 days in time, from December 16 back to November 27. The arriving manifest to the United States and the departing manifest from Germany and Europe look much different from each other. Here are samples from the two passenger manifest banners;

The manifest banner on the American side looked like this;



Refer to Fig. 49

document banner reveals something intriguing yet not surprising. Moris Prudkow travelled in the steerage section, where the poorest of the poor travelled and under not very inviting conditions.¹⁸⁰

The manifest banner on the German side looked like this¹⁸¹ ;

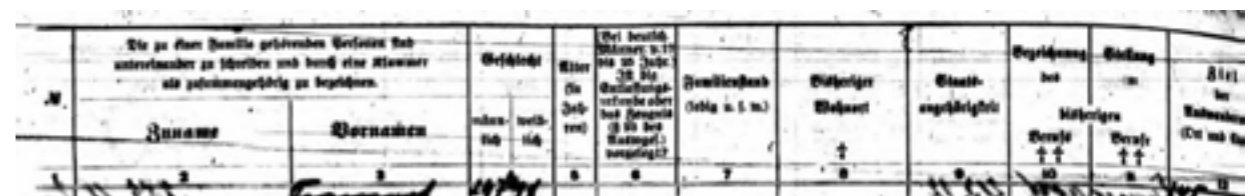


Fig. 51 "Schwabacher Judenlettern". Fraktur type face.

180 Steiner, Edward A. (1906). "The Fellowship of the Steerage" On the Trail of The Immigrant. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company. p. 35-38

181 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schwabacher> (9.9.2022)

Affidavit of the Master or Commanding Officer, or First or Second Officer.

Master of the **BULGARIA** from **Hamburg**

I hereby solemnly swear that I have caused the surgeon of said vessel sailing therewith, or the surgeon employed by the masters thereof, to make a physical and oral examination of each and all of the aliens named in the foregoing lists or Manifest thereon, and that from the report of said surgeon and from my own investigation, I believe that no one of said aliens is an idiot, or insane, or a feeble-minded person, or a person who is likely to become a public charge, or is afflicted with tuberculosis or with a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease, or is a person who has been convicted of, or who admits having committed a felony or other crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude, or is a judgmental or one admitting belief in the practice of polygamy, or an anarchist, or under promise or agreement, express or implied, to perform labor in the United States, or a prostitute, or a woman or girl coming to the United States for the purpose of prostitution, or for any other immoral purpose, and that also, according to the best of my knowledge and belief, the information in said lists or Manifests concerning each of said aliens named therein is correct and true in every respect.

W. Miller
Master

Given to before me this 16 day of December, 1911,
at New York

E. J. Murphy
Notary Public

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FILLING ALIEN MANIFESTS.

Article 1 (Age).—The names of age in entries should be expressed in years or months, the latter applying only to those under 1 year of age.

Article 2 (Sex).—The name for women should be either "Miss" or "Mrs."

Article 3 (Married or single).—The name in entries should be either "Married" or "Single." "Wid" is not correct, as is "divorced."

Article 4 (Religion or occupation).—The name in entries should describe as accurately as possible the occupation, trade, or profession of each alien named, as for example: "Coal miner," "mechanical engineer," "insurance engineer," "sewing machine," "house painter," and "carriage driver." "Farmer" is not correct, but "farmer" is correct, and "farmer" is correct, and "farmer" is correct.

Article 5 (Date of arrival).—The date of arrival should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 6 (Port of origin).—The name of the port of origin should be given in full, as for example: "Hamburg, Germany." "Hamburg" is not correct, nor is "Hamburg, Germany."

Article 7 (Place of birth).—The name of the place of birth should be given in full, as for example: "Berlin, Prussia." "Berlin" is not correct, nor is "Berlin, Prussia."

Article 8 (Place of residence).—The name of the place of residence should be given in full, as for example: "New York, U.S.A." "New York" is not correct, nor is "New York, U.S.A."

Article 9 (Date of departure).—The date of departure should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 10 (Date of arrival).—The date of arrival should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 11 (Date of departure).—The date of departure should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 12 (Date of arrival).—The date of arrival should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 13 (Date of departure).—The date of departure should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 14 (Date of arrival).—The date of arrival should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Article 15 (Date of departure).—The date of departure should be given in full, as for example: "15th day of December, 1911." "15th Dec" is not correct, nor is "15th Dec 1911."

Fig. 52 Extract from Passenger Manifest Instructions.

The second banner is from the German and European side, for the same ocean liner and same voyage. I have trouble with the Fraktur fonts. These were rarely seen on any print form on the American side of the Atlantic. Whenever coming across it a connection to something distinctly old and European and specifically German is implied. And this Germanic look goes along with a stereotypical take on spoken German. Strange and disappointing how a spoken and visualized language could be so utterly stereotyped and yet no surprise of that within my family circles. None of this would have had any meaning at the time to the sea of emigrants crossing in and out of Germany, that is not until the Nazi rise to power where the visualized language of authority would become a daily nightmare covering every conceivable document, including personal status, living quarters, work, property, business, the list was long.

The irony concerning the font style used for the passenger manifest on the German side, the Nazis determined that Fraktur typography was a Jewish creation (it wasn't) and, as such, should be erased from all governmental and non-governmental documents and official stamps. On January 3, 1941, in a circular from the Reich Chancellery "on behalf of the Führer", a decision was made to switch to the use of the Antiqua font.¹⁸²

Once again studying the U.S. passenger manifest, on the final pages was a guideline," instructions for filling alien manifests".¹⁸³

182 <https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/unimut/themen/fraktur-verbot.html> (9.9.2022)

183 Final pages from Ellis Island archive, passenger manifest Dec. 27, 1911 (21.9.2022)

Classifications

The list is a distinctly typological and not difficult to understand how *race* or the classifications of *peoples* were embedded into the bureaucracy of the time and primarily within a white Christian society such as the United States of America considered itself to be. When looking into the history of race theory, from Linnaeus' classifications (1735-59) of all the then-known animal forms (lumping humans and primates together) to Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's *Humankind's* five varieties (1776), the institutionalization of race in the 18th and 19th centuries leading into the transformation of *race into species* in the 19th and early 20th centuries all leading directly to anthropometry¹⁸⁴ and eugenics.

For the Jew entering the United States there would be two classifications. In the case of my grandfather, he would be listed as Russian and Hebrew with the additional tag of language, Yiddish, clearly written. He certainly spoke Russian, Ukraine as well as Hebrew. But his mother tongue and the language spoken at home was Yiddish.

For a person from African descent, be they from the continent of Africa or from the Caribbean or Central and South America the *Negro* was *Negro* with no reference nor acknowledgement to nationality or colonial designation. A peoples further off the charts than the Jews.

These archived manifests from Ellis Island are filled with nearly invisible surprises that joggle the mind, about cause and effect. As often as I have poured over these documents, at times using imaging software to enhance the close details searching for clues to who knows what of missed things. And this one slipped by me until I began writing this chapter. The second of the final three pages still startles me.

"Race or people" is to be determined by the stock from which aliens sprang and the language they speak. The original stock or blood shall be the basis of the classification independent of language. The mother tongue is to be used only to assist in determining the original stock.

LIST OF RACES OR PEOPLES.

African (black).	Korean.
Armenian.	Lithuanian.
Bohemian.	Magyar.
Bosnian.	Mexican.
Bulgarian.	Montenegrin.
Chinese.	Moravian.
Croatian.	Pacific Islander.
Cuban.	Polish.
Dalmatian.	Portuguese.
Dutch.	Roumanian.
East Indian.	Rumanian.
English.	Norwegian (Norse).
Finnish.	Scandinavian (Norwegian, Dane, and Swede).
Finnish.	Scottish.
French.	Serbian.
German.	Slovak.
Greek.	Slovenian.
Hebrew.	Spanish.
Hungarian.	Spanish-American.
Irish.	Syrian.
Italian (North).	Turkish.
Italian (South).	Welsh.
Japanese.	West Indian.

Fig. 53 Extract from *Passenger Manifest Instructions*

OUTSIDE OF THE PORT OF NEW YORK IS FOR STEERAGE PASSENGERS. List 17

Affidavit of Surgeon.

I, Dr. Rosenbaum, Surgeon of the BULGARIA sailing therewith do solemnly, sincerely, and truly swear that I have had four years' experience as a Physician and Surgeon, and that I am entitled to practice as such by and under the authority of the German Government, and that I have made a personal examination of each of the aliens named herein, and that the foregoing Lists or Manifest Sheets, 31 in number, are, according to the best of my knowledge and belief, full, correct, and true in all particulars, relative to the mental and physical condition of such aliens.

Sworn to before me this 16 day of December, 19 12 at New York

[Signature]
Immigration Officer.

Fig. 54 Affidavit of Surgeon. S.S. Bulgaria. 16.12.1911

Dr. Rosenbaum, most likely a German national, Jewish and certainly fluent in Yiddish, under the authority of the German government but employed by the steamship company as a ship's surgeon. In this case, surgeon means doctor. And as the ship's doctor, it would have been under his responsibility to insure all those travelling in steerage, the 3rd class, would be inspected and inoculated according to US health requirements and laws of the day.¹⁸⁵

But with all the archives to enlighten us, if that would be a proper expression in this case, we know that every Jew was being hunted down across the entirety of

185 Inoculation requirements according to the law; Mumps, Measles, Rubella, Tetanus, diphtheria, Meningococcal disease, Pneumococcal disease, Haemophilus influenzae type B, Rotavirus, Varicella, Influenza, Hepatitis A and B, Pertussis, and Polio. https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/about/medical-exam-FAQs.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fimmigrantrefugeehealth%2Fexams%2Fmedical-examination-faqs.html (3.11.2022)

184 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/race-human/Scientific-classifications-of-race> (22.9.2022)

Europe by 1938. My grandfather survived because he was appointed by his family to be the one to bring them to the *New World*, or, better said, to take them out of *Old Country*. He alone succeeded. But what of the good Dr. Rosenbaum? Did he continue his employment on the Hamburg Line until all Jewish emigration into the United States was brought to a close with the restrictive laws issued in both 1921 and 1924? By 1938 he would have his practicing license stripped. By 1945 there is no clue to his whereabouts.¹⁸⁶

This microfilmed document attesting to my grandfather's arrival and the accompanying photograph is an attempt at bridging his journey as a very young man to the man who was my only bridge to the *old country* and the *old world*. It tells a story about millions coming to terms with difficult circumstances, making the decision that change was the only way out knowing well the way out was going to be a burden without guarantees.

Morris Prootkow came alone, across Europe, destination The United States. Did his family only have enough funds for only one with the intention for others to follow as circumstances allowed? During the great western migration (1880's through 1924), the majority of emigrants were men and travelling alone except for Bohemians, Moravians, Finns and the Hebrews.¹⁸⁷ He arrived alone, formed a family, built a life far from his birthplace, a life his parents and immediate as well as distant relatives would never see.

186 I found no trace of who this Dr. Rosenbaum was or what became of his practice or life. But the supposition is not difficult to make. Rosenbaum, a typically Jewish name, might have listed (or stamped) in any civil registry (birth certificate, residency permit passport, etc.). The fact that he was Jewish, religious or secular, would have been known by the authorities.

187 Reports of the U.S. immigration Commission, Emigration Conditions in Europe. p.24 <https://archive.org/details/reportsofimmigra04unitrich/page/24/mode/2up> (23.10.2022)

The more I dig into this unique archive, separating the known into one pile and the guesses and speculation into another, I'm left astonished. It is not that my grandfather's journey was in any way heroic, certainly not by Hollywood's standards. In fact, he made little or nothing of it throughout his life. Not to our family, not to his daughter and never to me. Was it simply that out of that great migration once all those people exited Ellis Island, setting foot in the Lower East Side, one simply attempted a recalibration to the new life in the new world as if this was simply the order of things?

Surely the knowledge of his parent's demise weighed heavy on him long after he gave up the search. He kept it to himself and we either didn't have the courage to inquire or it didn't occur to us to inquire. What certainly never occurred to anybody was that he was a Holocaust survivor, of the second generation.

June 21st, 1978, his archive was closed and filed away, as complete as it could be and rose up and left on the long journey out and into the vast universe. Within a matter of days, he was laid to rest in a casket slightly better than what the Chasidic tradition would call for.¹⁸⁸

188 My mother, when shown the casket an orthodox Jew would be buried in, she responded by saying, "*I wouldn't bury even a dog in that!*"

2.

BETWEEN BOGOTÁ AND DACHAU

*Approximately 9,500 Kilometers,
Almost Like Next door.*



Fig. 55 Cyril Jacobs, Geologist. Choco Region, Colombia 1952

TRAIN JOURNEY DEEP INTO A DREAMSCAPE ... INTO HELL

Between my father's first car, a Land Rover with a canvas top, and his third car, a Toyota Land cruiser, also with a canvas top, he owned a Vauxhall, a family car of sort. Not exactly a car for the Colombian countryside. Although we often travelled beyond the constantly expanding city limits. I could not have been far from my first memories as a child. My father prepared me for its impending arrival and me waiting with nervous anticipation. The darkening light of dusk was deepening.

And as predicted, a rumble and a spotlight out of a dense darkness cutting across the lowering track gate what seemed to my eyes a beast spitting smoke and cursing like a whipped racehorse. I ducked behind thick leather front seats. I was perhaps six years old and have not been able to vanquish that memory since. To my father, Colombia still had things old, things from *his day*, his youth. By 1964, in and about the time of this experience, high powered diesel locomotives cut swaths across every direction in north America. At the cusp of 1944-45 all sorts of German and Nazi expropriated steam (mostly) trains, passenger cars and cattle cars from the countless occupied collaborator nations, had already cut violent and destructive paths from a far-off southern Greece to the northern most track lines of Norway, Finland, deep into Russia. From France, Belgium and The Netherlands through Germany to Poland and Hungary and beyond. A web so vast, most delivering fresh blood and returning with broken and ruined souls and carcasses.

Steam locomotives might've been from an earlier generation, not in Colombia. The sight of that billowing steam hanging on a low horizon as this train raced past us was enough to infect my dreams still. Nightmares then, nightmares now. Night terror playing out and into a realization of things not until 2008, at Treblinka, Poland. That single visit to a passing steam locomotive on a darkening night put me on some hidden rails that weaved and twisted in and out of our family and immediate social circles. As the years came and went my unconscious gathered fragments like hints left by the wayside of buckling rail lines.

A REFUGE FOR THE MIND AND THE DISPOSSESSED

I am born in 1958. With my waking awareness, that is to say my memory of it, our family had friends of all kinds. Expatriates like my parents themselves, local people my parents befriended and people who spoke both Spanish and English funny. I did not laugh when they spoke but I was aware there was a difference. Things were as they were and people speak as they do.

I grew up in a secular Jewish household. My mother did not keep kosher. We went to temple up until the elderly Rabbi passed away and his replacement turned out to be strictly orthodox which did not please my parents in any way. My father's parents, who were affiliated with the Conservative Jewish movement in New York, made the decision to have their son's religious studies take place in amongst the Orthodox. For this act my father never forgave them. Apparently, the religious studies Rabbi was very strict bordering on the mean. My father learned to read and speak fluently Hebrew but chose not to have his children endure the same treatment.

As a consequence of this, I am not Bar Mitzvah'd and therefore still a child (according to Jewish law and tradition). Well, this child appears to have had a somewhat different Jewish consciousness education. Mine took place under vicarious circumstances, at the top of the stairs, over-hearing stories of the blossoming of hate and rejection, stories of daily humiliations on the streets, in classrooms, in shops. The stories of those selling everything for nothing just to feed themselves and their families, selling everything for peanuts to get enough cash to escape abroad in any direction and far enough from the building storms and stories of those who escaped or went into hiding and later got caught or were never heard from again. Did I really hear these stories? I did not take notes and I cannot say that I did, in fact, hear such things. If I had not heard such things I certainly felt such things. and his wife Eva, Hungarian refugees, he an artist and political cartoonist and she a proprietor of an international bookstore in the city of Bogotá, both very kind people. It was understood already when I was very young that Péter was a world-renowned artist. Péter and Eva, Jewish, both Holocaust survivors. Yet it was not until 2021 when I began to consider their spoken accents and their connections to the respective pasts and why had Colombia become their place of refuge.

There was a framed drawing always hanging on our living room wall. It was of woman looking back on the horror and frozen.



Fig. 56 Lot's wife. Péter Áldor. 1945. From the original monograph 1944. Collection: Michael Marnin Jacobs

A captivating work that resides in the earliest memories of the art in our house. It stood alone in its starkness. As a child, I knew Péter had drawn it but never asked what it was about. Did I have to ask? It was the only work of its kind in the house. Most of what was on view, some sketches but mostly paintings and small indigenous sculptures, were local or regional. I cannot even recall anything that had much of a European or north American character to it.

1945, a monograph containing a series of 18 lithographs, produced by Péter Áldor and published in Budapest not long after the end of the war, very likely the first such artistic representation of the Holocaust to be published, certainly from the Hungarian Holocaust experience, the final work in the series is this work in question. In the Hungarian, it is simply titled *Loth*. It could be Lot's wife turning to stone when turning to witness the inconceivable only not in the Bible's Genesis narrative but after end of the catastrophe that murdered 90% of the Hungarian Jewish population, over 400,000 just between May and July, 1944.

The story of this monograph and how it came into my possession will come later in the story. That this lithograph, in particular, is the one my parents chose to hang in their home either means it was gifted to them by the Áldors themselves or my parents requested this one specifically. The result of a gesture to receive art, frame art and hang the art and have the art follow our family's wanderings all the way to San Francisco is that the work has always been in my presence, daily while still living in the city, and even in my consciousness now when out of sight 8000 km away. I took one last look at it before stepping out of the San Francisco house and hopping into a waiting taxi, my last trip (just prior to the world being put under lockdown due to Covid-19) away from the second city of my youth, returning me to my life in Finland. I was not just going home, I shared what I knew were my last goodbyes to my aging mother and, as I suspected it would be, my last visit with her in that house and the house itself. She passed away not long after. And not long after that the house had new occupants. Péter Áldor's *Lot's Wife* is packed away and awaits for other walls to tell its story.

The Áldors were not the only family that exhibited that European character. In one other family, I recall the parents speaking not German but Yiddish with each other and Spanish with their children as all had been born in Colombia, the

same as me and my three brothers were. I do not understand Yiddish (other than the occasional wisecrack or loving insult) but I know its sound as Yiddish was the common language between my mother and her father, they spoke together in a mix of Yiddish and English, we spoke with our parents with a mix of English and Spanish.

Our life in Colombia was divided up in the following ways. My brothers and I attended an international school. A school for the children of expats and diplomats (surely some children of C.I.A. employees) and richer local families desiring an education in English. After school hobbies were mostly being on the swimming team of the regional Jewish sports club. Weekends we often headed up into the mountains to the lake and streams for fishing and lounging around. My personal hobbies were the drums and, in its own childlike way, photography having absconded with my oldest brother's Kodak Brownie.

My brothers and I were members of the swimming team. Numerous times a week a bus would take us from our school to the club for practice. One day, in the locker room, a fellow swimmer, also Jewish, commented on my physique, "*You look like a survivor from Dachau.*" He says. I was 8 years of age. That night I asked my mother to explain. She tried her best. I do not recall anything of what was said. I only knew that something bigger than anything before I encountered in my young life was all around me and in me, deep. I could never look at my parents the same way again. What did they know? How did this impact on their lives? Why didn't they sit with us, speak to us, instruct and educate us?

From 1948 though 1958, Colombia went through a political civil war referred to as *La Violencia*. The agreements between the conservative and liberal political parties that put an end to the war were about to expire. My father was a geologist. This work is what brought him to Colombia after he completed studies in petroleum geology. By 1968 conditions had worsened and my parents decided it was time pack up and return to the United States. By 1969, late August, we arrived in a chilly San Francisco.

FEW CHOICES ... BROOKLYN OR BOGOTÁ

Two things took my father to Colombia and a life of adventure. He could see the future fading of his father's work in theater in Times Square, Manhattan as a stage manager for the Shubert Theater. He witnessed the demise of vaudeville and the rise of the theater arts. His son also witnessed it and in spite of his father's wishes my father wanted no part of it. He had bigger plans. Earth history, not the human comedy or some such on stage, would be his calling. Although human history plays a critical role in him ending up in south of the border, very south, three years after the knowledge of the Holocaust my father graduated with a master degree which should have gotten him work anywhere. The shock of the Holocaust had yet subsided but neither did trust within the United States of the Jew. My father found no employment in his field of study on American soil. Yet if the Jew was willing to relocate to some other part of the world employment opportunities would open up. And they did. By 1950 he is somewhere either in the deserts or jungles of Colombia making geological surveys, far from the hustle and bustle of Brooklyn, his home borough.

We spoke, my father and I, about the conditions and opportunities for Jews in the United States after the war. He spoke little of this and even less of the Holocaust. About the closest we could get to his disgust was on the issue of purchasing German goods, be they electronics or automotive. An unspoken yet completely understood rule, nothing German-made would find a place in our home. A complete boycott. There are two stories that illustrate this. Some years after our arrival in San Francisco my father's radio died. He'd listen to the morning news each and every workday, shutting off the radio as he dashed out of the house to catch the streetcar ride downtown. With his birthday coming up we as a family gathered together and bought him a radio mistakenly thinking it was Dutch made. To our shock, the radio is a German product, Grundig. Somehow, we thought it was *Made in Holland*. The radio remained silent for years and only after another radio my father bought out of disgust also died. When the Grundig radio died, we all

let out a deep sigh of relief. We understood his trauma. Yet, to this day I cannot understand if my father considered himself a *survivor* and me a child of a *survivor*. Did my father still consider Germany and Germans the enemy? Was my father, as an inheritor of a trauma, *arrested and fixed*, a member of the *hinge generation*, as Eva Hoffman states, with conscious confrontation and a simmering awareness acting out against his modern self?¹⁸⁹

There was, in addition, guilt behind the trauma. After the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor my father attempted to enlist but was rejected due a leg wound he suffered as a child after getting struck by a car. Instead, he served stateside as postal clerk which must've been strange in such a large city as New York, empty of young men. It wasn't unusual for Jews to sign up for war duties as a show of proof of patriotism to the home nation. During the first world war both French and German Jews participated and died with the rest in a show of loyalty. That in the following war both the French and Germans should rise up against the citizen Jew seemed inconceivable considering the sacrifices previously made. My father's war years were spent sorting military mail. He surely followed the news coming from Europe, as censored as it was. But by the time American forces freed Dachau he was left stunned into silence and that silence didn't lift except for one unusually unexpected decision that requires explanation.

As a wedding gift we became owners of a 1966 Volkswagen Beetle. The same car I used to call a Nazi wagon. I nearly fainted as the car rolled into the garden party. I find it, still, inconceivable my father could bend at this stage in his life. Once in San Francisco I asked him about it. His answer, very curt as it was, lifted the veil only ever so slightly, "Those old bastards are dead and buried now."

189 Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge. A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust*. 2005. Vantage. p. 103–104

A JOURNEY INTO A STEAMY VALLEY AND A DISCOVERY

I recall a trip our family made into deep valley to a town called Villavicencio. I somehow recall the road hugged a mountain side. We encountered two nasty accidents including one that my father had to get out of our car to understand what had occurred. We all got out and stood silently, stunned. A VW bug flattened by a lorry many times its size and weight. It left a lasting impression on us all. Later that day we noticed the wreck had been hauled to the local police station across from our colonial style hotel. When I stare out of our living room window here in Rovaniemi and see that *nightmare* wedding gift I also think of that car and the poor soul who died. I also think of my father and his lifelong struggle with things German.

La Meta, the region where Villavicencio was located, was tropical and humid. Never in Bogotá was such a character of weather. During the days, my father went off to do some necessary geology. He loved his work. It brought him close to local populations and he had a great fondness for the indigenous tribes he regularly worked with. He could speak fluently the Colombian Spanish including many of the regional dialects and never considered a gringo. He carried himself as if he'd been there since day one. Nobody would've known he was a New Yorker and a Brooklyn boy at that. In the evenings he would return, sit at the bar and have a drink or two while we four boys swam in the hotel pool as bats got all confused by the pool lights, came crashing down into the water. We'd fish them out and they'd fly off all dazed and confused. My father was not in New York, and we were in the country of our birth. He studied his charts and talked of the wonders of the earth below.

It has been said that Jews are the first cosmopolitans. I suppose when one gets kicked out of so many places through generations and centuries, it just happens that *your people* can be found in nearly every continent. A cosmopolitan by choice is one thing and by force another. My father's presence in Colombia was not the same as for the Áldors. Yet they were end products of the constant push and shove across vast distances. Péter and Eva Áldor found their final place after such devastation and cruelty in their home country, Hungary, and were not about to leave Colombia for yet another plot of land and supposed safety.

That the Áldors were even alive, let alone in Colombia, was based on a confluence of events that few, if any, know about. If my parents or any of the Áldor's friends and acquaintances were told of their exact path to survival those tales were never recorded or shared. Péter Aldor was a writer, journalist and illustrator in Budapest. He seemed very well connected to the pre-war political environment in the country. In the inscription written in the signed monograph *1945: To my friend Mihály Borsa (Borsa Mihály barátomnak Áldor Péter)*. Mihály Borsa (previously Glück). He had been employed by the city of Győr Chamber of Commerce and Industry from 1929 until 1939 when the Jewish laws were imposed. On the 19th of March, 1944, he was arrested and with his wife and child sent to Auschwitz. Only he survived. His wife and child were gassed upon arrival at Auschwitz. He spent time in Auschwitz, Buchenwald and finally, but not to his death, in Dachau. Péter and Eva Áldor both survived their arrests and journeys to Auschwitz, and near war's end in Dachau. Their paths before, during and after the Holocaust were intertwined and it helps in understanding how he ended up in Dachau. But between Budapest and Dachau via all those miserable places the distance is over 1500 kilometers.

The monograph contains two dedications. Antal Szerb and Ferenc Vághidi. These dedications read as follows: "*Szerb Antal és Vághidi Ferenc bajtársaim emlékének, akik már nincsenek itt, hogy tanuságot tehessenek.*"¹⁹⁰ In memory of my comrades Antal Szerb and Ferenc Vághidi, who are no longer here to bear witness.

Antal Szerb, writer, scholar, considered one of the more important of Hungarian writers of the 20th century, had books banned by the Hungarian fascists and later by the communists. Late in 1944 he was arrested and sent to the Balf (Wolfs in German) concentration camp in 1944. He was beaten to death in the camp in 1945.

Ferenc Vághidi was a journalist and novelist. He was abducted and murdered for writing anti-fascist articles by members (death squads) of the Arrow Cross, a Hungarian ultra nationalist fascist party that officially existed from 1935 to 1945.

190 From my personal copy of the Péter Aldor monograph 1944. Fuggetlen Nyomda Budapest (Independent Publishing Budapest)

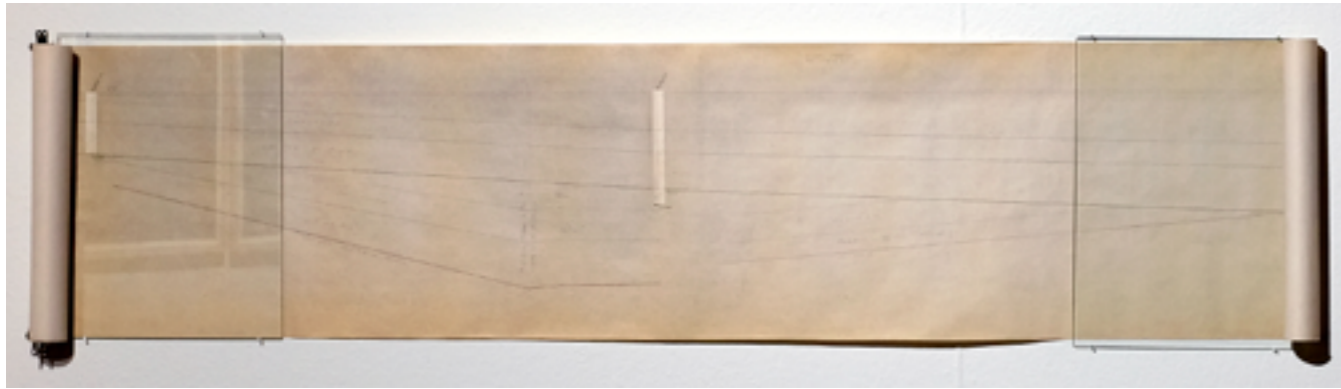


Fig. 57 *Maps to his world (detail)*

Péter Áldor knew these two men well and clearly their deaths were a great personal loss. But the loss was also loss to the Hungarian nation. The tragedy of the Jewish Hungarian Holocaust must have weighed heavy on the Áldors. It wasn't long after the monograph was published they packed up what remained of their lives and moved away from one continent to another, to a new world and a new life, never to return.

My father found his place and hung his hat in the southern hemisphere doing the work that absorbed him in ways that few today can accept and/or understand. His job was to survey potential territories for oil exploration. A post war world in need of oil, a post war America, in particular, thirsty and hungry for great post war era. He was an adventurer at heart, experiencing things that few white men did. Did he, being Jewish, have any part in this is impossible to say. In a sense he was 'forced' to search for opportunities elsewhere.

Many years had passed, the worlds political orders were shifting, the politics around oil and gas were becoming uglier by the year and he had had enough. In retirement, he drifted away from these adventurous years until a radical change suddenly seemed to take place. The onset of dementia and Alzheimer's Disease in his middle 80's scattered his mind, life experiences, knowledge, once secure on a magnetic tape thick and wide his mind stripped of order and logic like an incoherent jumble of damp pasta. His stories, all verifiable, simply ran in and out of each other with fluidity that was out of any linear time continuum. But more often than not they revolved around his life as a geologist on the hunt and caring for those in his team including having to care for, accompany and deliver his deceased boss' body back to America to a waiting widow. Another story, meeting Elie Wiesel on

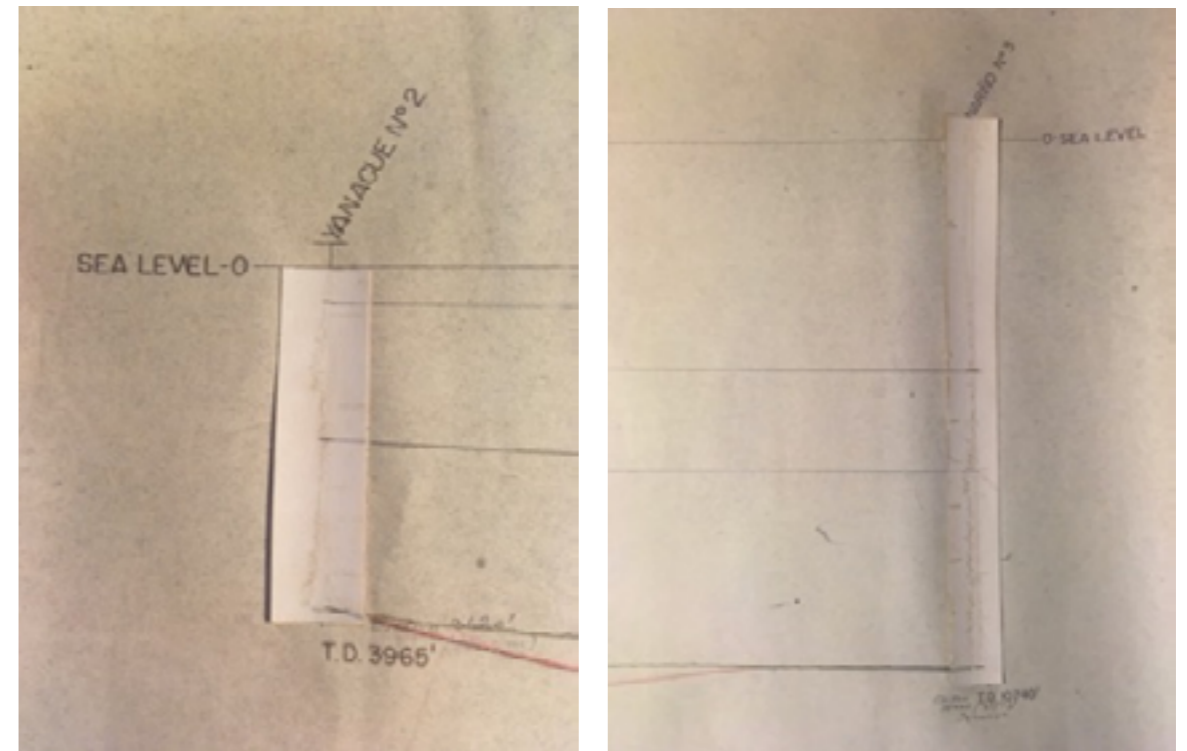


Fig. 58 *Left and right-side details from Maps to His World. 2020*

a long flight back from Colombia to New York. This memory, possibly the most important of all. After all, my father was genuinely a Jewish man meeting one if not the most important Jewish men on the planet.

Before my father passed away, I was in the presence of a man who hadn't really lost anything. His sense of self was becoming a scattered puzzle. In the basement of the old house in the Ingleside District of San Francisco were all the geological maps taken with him when we left Colombia. I sat with these dusty, cobweb encased maps and absorbing each demarcation of nation state, region, city, town, river, mountain, desert, jungle. Studying maps with declination and inclination coordinates and vertical lines pointing *down* like arrows into not so much as an underworld but the planet itself as far as his tools could measure. These maps were at once the foundation of the nation of Colombia and the routes into my father's deepest of curiosities, the planet.

Was the world up top so filled with hate and uncertainty? He would sooner talk about rocks and fossils, about parking his boots upside down to keep the

scorpions out, the character of northern deserts of *La Guajira* or the jungles in the *Chocó* facing the Pacific. His mind often returned to the road from Pasto to Tumaco in the far, far southwest. But always the grounding of his memories was in geology. These maps have become my road map into his sense of the world. The more his mind became fragmented his own timeline of events broke all time logic while not losing the compass cardinal directions and distances nor depths.

In my mind's eye, I was looking at geological version of Santiago Ramón y Cajal's histology and micrographics. With a chart delineated from surface to depths the passage through soil and rock formations, recognizing in them my father's inner mind penetrating the earth skin, visualizing it with the draftsman's skill.¹⁹¹ Like Ramón y Cajal¹⁹², the maps are often highly detailed illustrations and/or subtle and minimally detailed. They shift from the macrographic to the micrographic level. At times the diagrams splay out as if looking from space into the earth with x-ray vision. Other maps are as if the earth was sliced open like a Damian Hurst cow or shark or da Vinci's anatomical study of a human skull.

For the better part of his life my father's world was all about surface to core with the core being the center of the universe smaller than the atom itself. The axle of the planet.

Ever since that night semi-hiding behind the driver's seat of that Vauxhall, my world has been from the surface splaying out into unknown directions, unknown distances searching for answers to questions I am not sure I should even attempt to answer. That one screaming locomotive travelling from my right to left, pulling me into a form of lucid dreaming, me asking questions and a dream providing me with open ended answers drenched in disturbing questions.

One dream in particular, probably around the age of seven sometime during 1965, was later to set the stage for a sequence of images that weren't made until 2019. In the dream, I am on a train passing along and through dense forests. The light is dim but I can make out trees and foliage, yet none of it in clear detail as if my eyes are not given the light sensitivity needed for a proper look. I sense

191 I do not know if my father himself drafted the data. But he certainly had a hand in how the accompanying legends were designed to coordinate clearly data and visuals.

192 Santiago Ramón Y Cajal was a Spanish neuroscientist, pathologist, histologist, specializing in neuroanatomy, amassing hundreds of drawing illustrating the arborization of brain cells. He was a winner of the 1906 Nobel Prize, along with Camillo Golgi, in Physiology or Medicine.

the presence of the carriage as it travels ahead as I peer to my left through slats of wood and watch as the scene disappears to my right. Time feels, in spite of the trains apparent movement and speed, to be at a standstill. Suddenly I am at the intended destination. I am now in between the tracks that carried the train to its horrific destination. I don't look at where I have arrived but back down the path from where the train travelled and all I see are trees barely silhouetted with a dappling of the falling light and reflections off the iron rails towards a minuscule vanishing point. This dream reoccurred time and time again, often waking me up struggling for breath. By the time we moved away from Colombia the dreams tapered off until forgotten.

Freud, Jewish, delved into the dream world of his patients. His take on dreams and the unconscious are past oriented. The Jewish take on dreams is future oriented¹⁹³. In 1933, Charlotte Beradt, a Berlin based journalist, would wake up night after night drenched in sweat, teeth clenching in terror. One night, after waking from a dream of being hunted "pillar to post" by Nazi storm troopers she wondered if she was not alone with these experiences.¹⁹⁴ Secretly she recorded many dream accounts as Nazi authority increased and life for the Jew became unbearable. The accounts Beradt catalogues in *Dreams of the Third Reich* are stunning. Jews from all walks of German life processing the rapid changes to their current living circumstances. For many it was a time of the greatest abstraction even having tucked into the coat pockets the history of their people. This time each succeeding day brought new restrictions. Each night of sleep and dreams was followed by a day of more stress. "The only person in Germany who still leads a private life is the person who sleeps."¹⁹⁵ So said one within Hitler's inner circle, the Nazi Robert Ley, then NS-Reichsorganisationsleiter.

Did my dreams fit this model? Did these dreams come about by all the talk wafting silently through my young life, apparently not quite out of earshot? Apparently our Colombian life was both a focal point of the consequential events of Jewish history as well as an archive and incubator for the artwork I'm compelled to create today.

193 The Talmud states, dreams are one-sixtieth of prophecy. Brachot 55–57.

194 From introduction to Charlotte Beradt's *The Third Reich of Dreams* by Sharon Sliwinski. <https://www.museumofdreams.org/third-reich-of-dreams>

195 Beradt, Charlotte. *The Third Reich of Dreams*. 1966. English translation, 1968. Quadrangle Books. p. 3

3.
EQUILATERAL TRIANGLES AND
THE GOLDEN YELLOW OF ENVY
AND GALL AND AN OLD COAT



Fig. 59 A Shape and Color So Distinct,
It Needs no Explanation

“A bird flew in as if it were gliding on a ray of light. It was a yellow bird, the most brilliant shades of yellow. The bird seemed flattened in the stream of light. Its dazzling yellow colors were set aflame by the sunbeam, and Livia was overcome by the bird’s strange, hypnotic beauty. But not her father. “Look at it, look at it, look at the bird!” “Livia woke up covered in a cold sweat, trembling with fear, and with a strange premonition that her father would not return home, and she would never see him again.”¹⁹⁶

Could that dream of yellow, the color of *envy* and *gall*, a color that can shine like gold or tarnish snow like a dog’s urine, be not from a dream out of nothing and nowhere? It was everywhere throughout Germany and anywhere The Third Reich and its collaborators existed. The color stuck like sweet mustard and provoked despair on the soiled. That pungent color was like acid on tongues and eyes of everyone else.

In November of 2006, on a sunny day in Ghent, Belgium, I came upon a neighborhood flea market located in beautiful tree-lined park packed with sellers. The place abuzz with Flemish, French, English, German, even Spanish mixing up the soundscape. From a short distance I could see *it!* mixed amongst all kinds of junk, on the ground behind the middle-aged seller, a yellow so distinct with the star thick and black and a feux Hebrew spelling it out, Juif (Juif). I asked to have a look. With clear displeasure he handed it to me. Gently laying it upon my up-turned palm and others gathered around, and, at least to my memory, things got very quiet. I studied the stitching, I caressed the Hebraic text, a strange kind of embossed surface, almost rubbery to the touch. I inquired from where he had found it. He just barked at me, “buy or don’t”, but not to bother him anymore. I put my money down and walked away with what someone might consider either a brutal war artifact or some memorabilia from the Holocaust.

196 Eliach, Yaffa. *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*. Avon Books. 1982. p. 112

Victor Klemperer recounts, “Today I ask myself again the same question I have asked myself and all kinds of people hundreds of times: which was the worst day for the Jews during those twelve years of hell. I always, without exception, received the same answer from myself and others: 19 September 1941.”¹⁹⁷ From that day it was a compulsory act. Reinhard Heydrich signed the decree on the 1st of September 1941, dictating that all German Jews must wear a badge and from that moment on every Jewish person in Germany understood with clarity that the game had changed. Having contributed to a society either in the general workforce, in higher education, in business, in all aspects of culture or in national defense (military or police) would have no meaning whatsoever, from that day forward. The horrifying events two years previous, the 9th and 10th of November 1938, the Night of Broken Glass, Kristallnacht, was the warning shot that would lead to millions being gun down in a hail of bullets against city walls, in open fields, in graves they themselves forced to dig. In the population census German Reich conducted in 1939, Dr. Conti, the head of the Nazi Physician Association, came up with an absurd figure of 1,550,000.¹⁹⁸ The Nazis needed high numbers to help inject additional fear and suspicion of Jews in the general population. A way of thinking, the bigger the enemy, the bigger the fight. The actual figure resulting from the census in 1939 was total of 318,000.¹⁹⁹ The buildup to the elimination of all civil and economic rights was already well in place by the time the day arrived that all people classified as Jews are required to where a *Badge of Shame*.²⁰⁰ Anybody that fell within the stipulations expressed in the Nuremberg Laws²⁰¹ of 1935, a very broad expression of who was Jewish, were required the badge and for it be affixed over the heart and as an arm band on the upper right sleeve. As the Nazi occupied territories expanded well beyond Germany and Austria, variations on the badge requirement followed nearly in lockstep.

197 Klemperer, Victor. *The language of the Third Reich*. Bloomsbury Academic. 2013 p. 171

198 Blau, Bruno. “The Jewish Population of Germany 1939–1945.” *Jewish Social Studies*, 12 (2), Indiana University Press, 1950, p. 161–72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4464869>; (9.9.2022)

199 Blau, Bruno. 1950.

200 *Badge of Shame* ...Find an appropriate reference

201 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuremberg_Laws; (18.4.2023)

Again Mr. Klemperer, “A man who looks upright and good humored comes towards me leading a young boy carefully by the hand. He stops one step away from me: ‘Look at him, my little Horst! – He is to blame for everything!’...”²⁰²

This badge of humiliation was not new to Jews. Humiliation was something Jews were born into already in the Middle Ages, yellow-colored cloth badges were required amongst Jews in some Muslim caliphates. Even throughout the Medieval and into the early modern age Jews were required to be seen in some form, separate from the rest. The Nazis returned to the history books and chose the yellow, the color of “envy and gall”²⁰³, of plague and quarantine, a color that cuts through all atmospheres.

Embossed with stitching in black on yellow, no, make that a gold-colored fabric stitched onto a jet-black fabric and cut to the shape of the six-pointed star, a compound of two equilateral triangles. I weighed the star when I arrived home, 3.8 grams. Getting caught without the star could mean death. Wearing the star was a prediction of one’s untimely death. The relentless propaganda against the Jews has been a fact of life since the time of Abraham. By the time the Nazi come to power the propaganda machine turned its full force against all perceived enemies and the Jews were destined to get the worst of it. This propaganda, no longer passed from word to mouth in the streets, marketplaces, or temples but via radio and the printed press. By 1933 Joseph Goebbels has complete control of the propaganda machine including radio. Fired from their jobs in broadcasting and the radio waves become focused like laser beams with a narrow yet sharp focus on all Jews. Not that the Aryan German was necessarily listening other than passively.²⁰⁴ Yet, day in and day out, vitriol against one group or another is be hard to defend against. The ability for the *statesman* to have access to a grand stage far

202 Klemperer, Victor. p. 172

203 Klemperer, Victor. p. 171

204 Klemperer, Victor. ...on many occasions in the factory during air raid protection duty – when the Aryans had their own room and the Jews theirs, and the radio was located in the Aryan room (along with the heating and the food) – on many occasions I heard the cards being slapped down noisily on the table, - d the loud discussions of the rationing of meat and tobacco and about the cinema, whilst the Führer or one of his henchman was carrying on interminably. And the next day the papers claimed that the entire population had been hanging on every word. p. 15

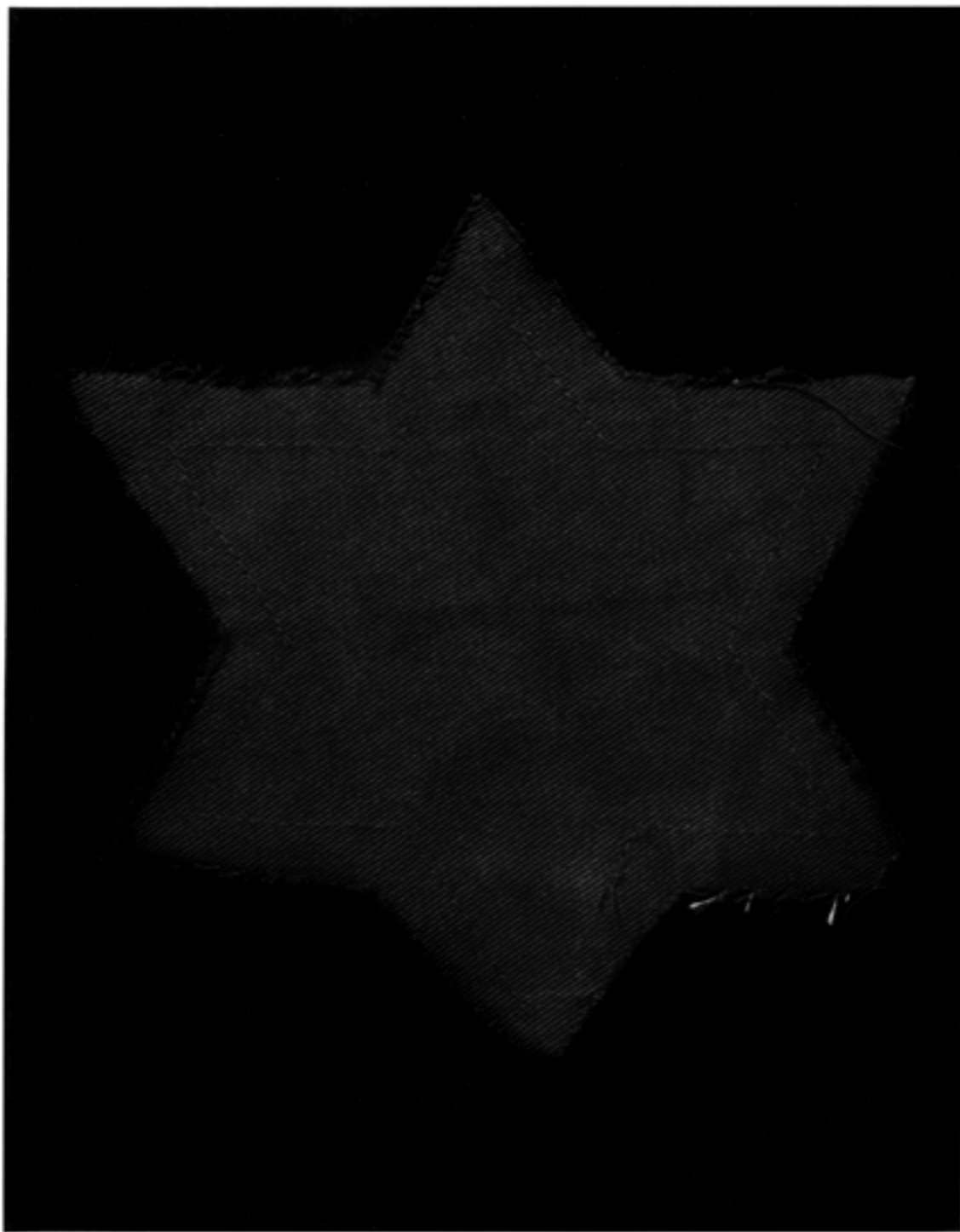


Fig. 60 Black Star. 2020

A BLACK STAR

first ... education

then work

prayer

property

terminating with a badge of shame

The bleakness of the abyss rests

against the heart

beyond those only present in the flesh made for a complete paradigm shift on how information/propaganda would be disseminated. The speed and coverage made it impossible to defend against.

On that 19th of September, Jews go to work (if they still had work) or to shop for necessities and all eyes fall upon them. The golden color and the fake Hebrew text become more than a warning signpost. Non-Jews understand that cordiality of any kind, be it an expression of empathy or sympathy, would lead to undefined but understood troubles, as if an invisible hand and arm gently separate the German Aryan from the German Jew. Some Germans cross streets with heads bowed or release shouts of disgust. This golden yellow creates an inescapable aura like being walled off from the rest of the world while being surrounded and trapped by the same.

From Péter Aldor's 1944 monograph, *Első nap a csillaggal* (First day with the star), page 7, shows what appears to be a middle-aged couple walking down street as soldiers, police and the general citizenry look on in disgust.²⁰⁵

When holding this patch of fabric in my open palm, I feel such a deep disgust. This so-called *badge of shame* was a tool that weaponizes the gentile's eyes and created a weeping wound to the bearer. Something so little, so light, an act so petty and ugly, and completely destructive.

The pieces of fabric and the arm band with the star in blue were made by the Jews themselves. And by Nazi decree, the badges and arm bands had to be always visible, clean and in good order. Victor Klemperer described the following;

*"Many was the time, when it came to sowing a new star onto a new piece of clothing (or rather an old one from the Jewish clothing store) a jacket or a work coat, many was the time I would examine the cloth in minute detail, the individual specks of the yellow fabric the irregularities of the black imprint – and all these individual segments would not have been sufficient, had I wanted to pin an agonizing experience with the star on each and every one of them."*²⁰⁶

The circumstances were unpredictable except punishments could be severe.

205 Aldor, Péter. 1944. *Független Magyarország Kiadása. Független Nyomanda Budapest* 1945. p. 7

206 Klemperer, Victor. p. 171

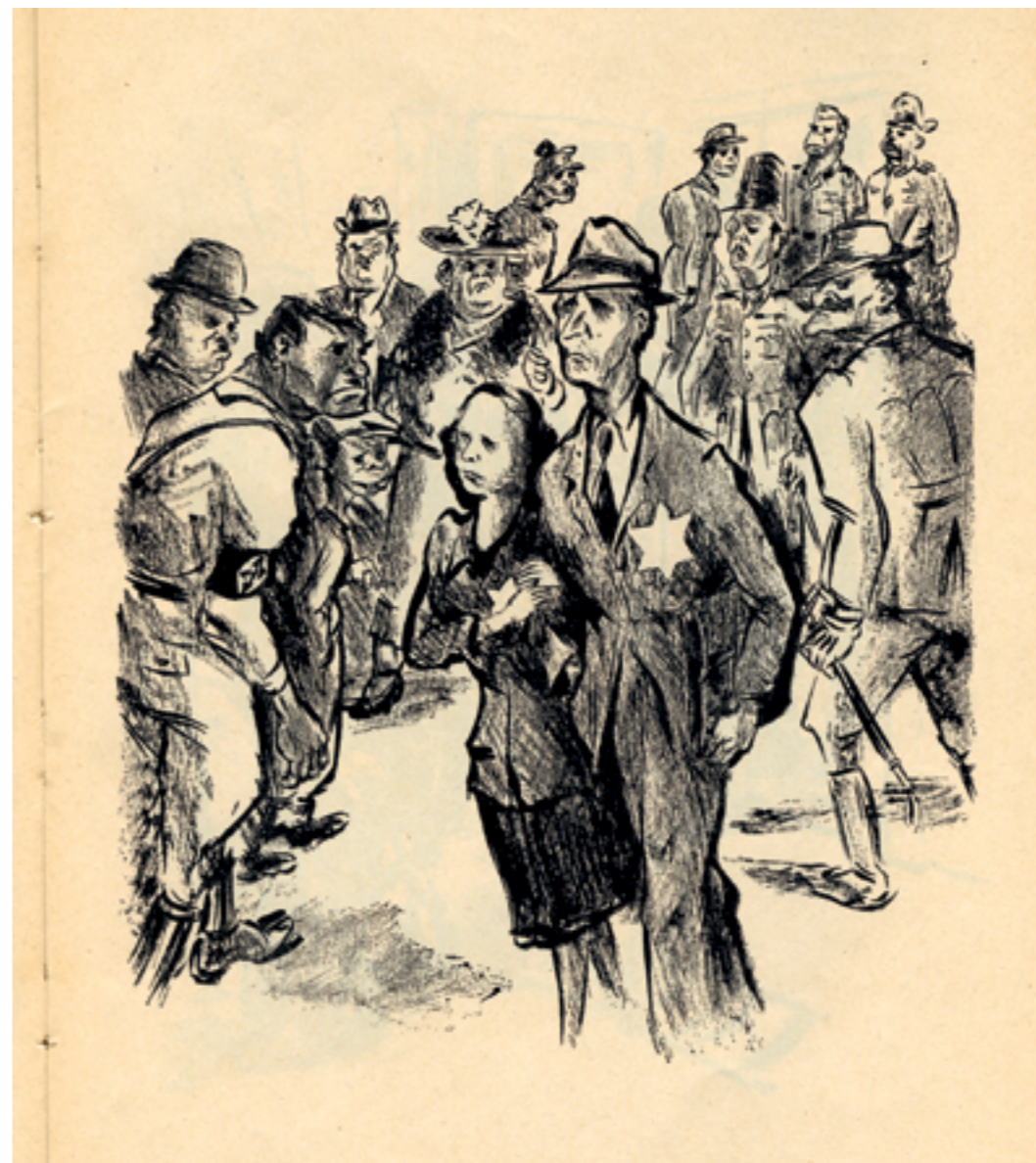


Fig. 61 Aldor, Péter. *Első nap a csillaggal*. (First day with the star). 1945. From the original monograph 1944. Collection: Michael Jacobs Marning.

An artifact handed to me by a Polish academic while researching the Holocaust in Poland, is a wood block with a Star of David carved out and most likely used initially in the Synagogue to make banners for ceremonial events of one kind or another. The wood block, from 1923, had been carved in the town of Radom. By September 1939, the German army had control of Poland and Radom. The wood block still has remnants of blue ink required by the occupying Nazis.

By 1941, if the Jew had not found a path out of Germany or any of the occupied territories there were few choices. To walk the streets was to be reminded that the enemy is amongst us, and he/she is I. Those who had not found themselves a hiding place are soon gathered up into over packed ghettos. Even in the ghetto the Jew is required to wear the star, that it should be always visible, as a punishment that says to be a Jew is a humiliation in and of itself and that each and every Jew should understand that and have no escape from that fact.

The coat in the artwork entitled *The Visible Unseen* is borrowed from my wife, long before we were betrothed and never returned. This coat reminds me of something very European that could be comfortable in on cool and cold days. When pulling out that Jewish badge after long years in suspended animation in some drawer, I could feel as if the star being pulled down by an immense gravity in spite of its 3.8 grams of fabric and thick ink. The badge alone is like a star alone, rejected, in some vast universe. Even when cradled in my palms it cries dry tears.

I saw one of those star badges in an exhibition once. I cannot quite recall where or when. I believe it might have been Dachau in 1985. It hung from a rusted diaper pin against a backdrop of dusty black velvet. That one had the German Jude (Jude) instead the French Juif at the center of the inner star. Understanding its history and context on an intellectual level is one thing. The need to reveal its visceral qualities through art is another. That was to change one early autumn afternoon in my crowded garage, my studio for a selection of works destined for the dissertation's art exhibition. An afternoon light came through a small window peering barely above street level, shining in on the coat hanging like inside some

hideout or an attic where all was hush. Pinning this tool of humiliation, this artifact from Europe's darkest time, this tarnished golden key into the keyhole to the past into the coats upper left side, at heart level. And there they appeared, countless faces seen in historical photographs in textbooks and seen in documentaries. Only this time it was not in two dimensions. The room was silent except for the sound of my beating heart ringing in my ears.

That patch of darkened golden yellow and black, equilateral triangles creating a form, the hexagram, so familiar that I feel that I understand it's meanings in my marrow. Is Jewish marrow stained with this history? Has it damaged our DNA?

Hungarian writer and Nobel Laureate Imre Kertesz recounts the outset of Nazi rule and the required star, "It was a clear and balmy morning, considering it was just early spring. I was about to unbutton myself but then had second thoughts: It was possible that, light as the head breeze was, my coat lapel might flip back and cover up my yellow star, which would not have been in conformity with the regulations."²⁰⁷ He was all of fourteen when life began to turn upside down. "It was a slightly uncomfortable feeling going around, with them like that, as a trio, yellow stars on all three of us."²⁰⁸ Embarrassment, no teenager wants to stand out, certainly not in the company of their parents. But this was something altogether different, even though well before the war Jews in Hungary were pushed to the edges. By the time the star is required the cause and effect of such demand is like having the Star of David branded with a hot iron leaving a lingering pain with every look. "It is difficult to harm a person we touch. It is somewhat easier to afflict pain upon a person we only see at a distance."²⁰⁹ With the badge clearly visible to all in one's own community and beyond, across vast distances from as far as occupied France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to the north and all

207 Kertesz, Imre. *Fateless*. 1975. Re-issued by Vintage 2017. p. 5

208 Kertesz, Imre. p. 9

209 Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Polity Press. 1989. p. 155

Russian areas Nazi Germany occupied, the psychological and emotional infliction of being paraded like a convicted criminal without a trial over broken laws for nothing other than being Jewish.

Requirements of the star in the public sphere becomes the defining line drawn between the Jews and all others. If the line of demarcation, between them and us, made for two unequally coexistent peoples was not clear enough, in many regions in occupied Poland the Jews were required to have two stars visible, one in front and one on the back,²¹⁰ making the line of sight straight through the heart. Without stating as much, all non-Jews understood they were to have nothing to do with those wearing the star.

It put the fear of the expression of sympathies or empathy in a clear context. Humiliation factors are like a tightening screw on both sides of the line. And only the *authorities* (police, military, government functionaries) had rights to interaction with the Jews. This put the non-Jew into the position of being a powerless bystander. As more and more Jews are rounded up and *disappeared* (from view) without any trace, the gentile becomes freed from the burden of being a helpless bystander. The challenge of seeing whole families whisked away and their processions auctioned off certainly must have made people consider the circumstances, even questioning the validity of such actions. If there was any stress to their moral make-up most kept it to themselves for fear that they could be subject to the same.

And for those swallowed up by the roving oblivion, inaction becomes equivalent to collaboration. When survivors returned after the war, as if from the dead, many found all their personal possessions taken or long since sold and their property occupied by new tenants, which, in some known cases, were friendly neighbors from before. From friendly neighbor to bystander to thief and collaborator in the matter of a year or less, is the case what the few Hungarians surviving

210 Frankel, Rebecca. *Into the Forest. A Holocaust Story of Survival, Triumph and love.* St. Martin's Press. 2021. p. 62

Auschwitz and other camps experienced. Their return was far more unwelcoming as their departure was welcomed.

At the very least, survivors, upon returning from hell, wore no badges or armbands. They didn't need it to prove they were still the enemy. It was written all over their gaunt and exhausted bodies.

In Belgrade and Sofia it was just a plain yellow arm band. There were other types in Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Slovakia. For Bohemia and Moravia, there was the same.

The star in my possession is from France or more likely the Walloon region in Belgium. For the Flemish it was a star with the letter J in the center, and the Dutch it was *Jood*. To the German Jew it was *Jude*. Simply, Jew.

4. NIGHT FALLS:

*When Language is Forbidden
Only Death Can Follow.*

Of what language, of all the languages of the world, do we talk about here? As to history, specific to the years leading up to and of the Holocaust, the years 1935 to 1945, it is all languages, from the spoken to the written, from the intellectual and scientific, from the religious to all the creative arts. Nazis, in their goal for domination, are willing to sacrifice abstract thought for the purity of ideology. The Nazis try to destroy it all. For Jews (and certainly for all humanity), language does not simply mean a commonly understood manner and means of communication. Language is everything, from a thought to its verbalization, from written to spoken, from sketched to painted, from the acoustic action of properties of wood and cat gut, via musical notation or improvised, from the witnessed to the photographed. I state this once again, language is everything.

When the Nazis set out to destroy the Jewish world (realizing their window of opportunity had arrived), they set out to do it methodically, with bans on education, both in learning and teaching, also applying bans on all religious activities in and out of the synagogue. Bans on work, not only manual labor but intellectual participation in the sciences, industry and culture. Bans on writing and publishing, bans on publicly performed music, bans on public and private gatherings further limiting the exchange of ideas and experiences. Bans on living in one's own home, bans on the freedom of movement, bans on speaking Yiddish in public.

In the end a ban on life itself. This prohibition was rarely proved in writing. There are few documents to prove such a claim. Had such a document been seen

on some billboard, pasted on like an edict, would Jews have knowingly or willingly walked into such a trap? A postwar account by Hilde Sherman-Zander, a Jewish survivor from the transport from Düsseldorf to Riga on the 10th through the 14th of December 1941 tells us the edicts may not have been clear to anybody except to this group that were being transferred to the Riga ghetto. All who had survived the transports were asked to hand over their valuables, wedding rings, furs, watches, anything. After order was restored, the everybody was told the following;

The following is forbidden and punishable by death:

Jews may not possess any valuable.

Jews may not leave the ghetto.

Jews may not make contact with the civilian population through the barbed wire fence. Jews may not barter.

Jews may not bear children.

Jews may not receive or send mail.

Jews may not... May not... And may not... Punishment by death... Punishment by death ... Punishment by death...²¹¹

What a horror hearing such words barked directly at you. Clear as a clear day, this document proves the war against the Jew was for total annihilation. The language and intent are unmistakable.

Throughout Jewish history, written, aural and visual representations of their history have been an essential form for charting existence. This exercise has gone unbroken from the first word(s) in the Torah's Book of Genesis all the way until and from within the Holocaust. Throughout this long history Jews have repeatedly been forbidden, unsuccessfully, from practicing and contributing to this recording of history. In the camps, pen and paper was entirely forbidden under penalty of death. Yet drawings were made, and text was written and concealed. A history

211 Browning, Christopher R., Hayes, Peter, and Hilberg, Raul. German Railroads. Jewish Souls. The Reichsbahn, Bureaucracy, and the Final Solution. Document F.1. Hilde Sherman-Zander, *Zwischen Tag und Dunkel: Mädchenjähre im Ghetto* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1989, pp.29-34.) p. 97-98

for future generations, like all histories. The most astonishing of these texts are contained in what is referred to as The Scrolls of Auschwitz²¹², a collection of texts written by members of the Sonderkommando, the men whose job, if it can be called a job, to usher their brethren into the gas chambers, to pull their dead out and transport the bodies to the crematorium but not before ensuring all gold teeth, any valuables hidden within, and all hair is removed. These same men gathered up and burned all documents the murdered carried in their procession. These same men hauled the ash, what was left of their peoples, to the pits, fields or rivers to be dispensed with. This was not a concentrationary universe but an exterminatory universe.²¹³ A universe beyond anything Dante could've come up with. A universe beyond anything language ever had contended with before. These same men, under conditions so extreme, conditions so out of any realm of understanding, still they had a determination to leave a written chapter of and for the People of the Book from the darkest period in Jewish history.

The pen and paper, ink, the need and the will to share the worst of the worst in an environment cut off from the rest of the world, provided the men of the Sonderkommando with agency to write works of history rather than simply record their experiences.²¹⁴ To do this they took what writing materials came with the arrivals soon to be gassed. The presence of such items as fountain pens, ink, notebooks, in their belongings gives indication as to their social class and literacy.²¹⁵ Otherwise they needed 'outside' help. The outside help came from the only people who had any access to goods. These were the chosen few whose job it was to gather, sort, store, pack and ship all confiscated, stolen, goods including all personal possessions as

212 A collection of handwritten texts hidden underneath the crematoriums at Auschwitz. Written together and separately, in Polish, Yiddish and Greek, they make up the only verified accounts of inner workings of the gas chambers.

213 Chare, Nicolas and Williams, Dominic. *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. Berghahn. 2016. p. 14 <https://en.wikipedia.org/>; (19.1.2022)

214 *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. p. 13

215 *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. p. 36

well as human byproducts such as hair and skin. From within Kanada^{216 217} materials for writing were smuggled into the buildings that housed the gas chambers and crematoriums. But these materials weren't enough. Materials to preserve the texts such as wax were needed to seal the packages from the elements.

It is important to note that it wasn't only the Sonderkommando that tried to record their ordeal. Even scratching one's name into a surface, be it wood, stone, cement, was an attempt to bear some kind of witness. And much more was done. Secret lists were kept, copied and official records and photos hidden. Drawings and art representing camp life were concealed on site, or in some cases smuggled to the outside beyond the camp. Clandestine lists of various kinds were kept by Otto Wolken, Jan Olszewski, Izydor Łuszczek and Vlasta Klavivová. Tadeusz Joachimowski buried the record books of the 'gypsy camp' in a bucket in its grounds. They were dug up in 1949. Ludwik Lawin and Tadeusz Kubiak made copies of official photos, which were buried and later retrieved in 1946.²¹⁸

The gas chambers and crematoriums were the pumping heart of death to the concentration camps with the Nazis were determined to keep their existence to the outside universe a secret. At regular intervals the Sonderkommando would be gassed, and new slaves would be recruited²¹⁹ to continue with the Nazi goal of complete annihilation of European Jewry (as well as other undesirables).

The pages of testimony written from deep within the Holocaust are in themselves many things. They are documents with details, even inventories, written oral histories, pleas to a future generation to not be forgotten as they struggled with feeling forsaken. The Zalmen Gradowski account, one of the four that include Zalmen Lewenthal, Lejb Langfus and Chaim Cherman, includes preliminary matter written in Polish, Russian, French, German and English. This preamble to his account comprises a single sentence translated into the five languages: 'Take interest in this document, which contains very important material for the historian.'²²⁰

216 Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Penguin. p. 30

217 *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. p. 10

218 Długoborski, Waclaw, Franciszek Piper. *Auschwitz 1940-1945, Vol.3*, p. 260–265

219 *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. p. 4

220 *Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz*. p. 36

In Yiddish, Greek and Polish, the existing manuscripts written from the belly of the beast, a place where the language of Goethe was dispensed like a whip or a hammer or a barrage of bullets, languages from the periphery of their imploding world dispensed the gamut of emotions that miraculously still resided in their hearts even as they dragged the freshly murdered to the ovens. With remarkable detail, the life 'below' is depicted with accuracy.

And at the end of a long day slaving away in the gas chamber and crematoria, under dim light, 'the damned' might stare onto the black pages they had precured. With no idea if their words, their descriptions, their thoughts would ever see the light of day beyond the electrified fences, two and three deep and there, an outside universe, a universe all the Sonderkommando were sure they would never see again. Day after day, week after week, from where did they get the strength, let alone the motivation, to keep the pen to paper? "The 'Scrolls' occasionally provide a 'a blank screen' comparable to that of the analyst. Writing becoming a space through which traumatic experiences would be articulated, and, to a degree, managed. Sheets of paper 'listened.'"²²¹

**A DEAD LANGUAGE FROM A DEAD PEOPLE,
I HEARD IT LOUD AND CLEAR AT HOME.**

I grew up being reminded that Yiddish is dead. In fact, it was my dear mother who expressed this on many an occasion. For me, then a young boy, this was strange considering that when my grandfather was present the house came alive with Yiddish. When they conversed, which was often, it was he in Yiddish and she in English with a mix of Yiddish. In New York on holiday as a child or much later in our house, on the far west coast of the United States of America, only two and one-half miles from the Pacific Ocean, at least to me Yiddish was present and alive.

As much as one can attempt to understand six million dead, eighty five percent of them Ashkenazi Jews from Poland, from the USSR, especially Nazi occupied Ukraine and other Eastern European countries where Yiddish was the spoken language deep within Jewish communities.

As of 1938 Yiddish, in its numerous forms, was spoken by an estimated seventeen million people. By 1945 many of the Yiddish speaking six million are nowhere to be found. The post war Jewish diaspora further diluted the use of the language through migration and assimilation.

²²¹ Ibid. p. 15

The language of the damned, so my father said of Yiddish. Yet, in the house of my youth, Yiddish was proudly considered as a kind of ghetto language, filled with secrets and an ability at finding irony in the most mundane of human experiences. I'm forever disappointed I didn't learn much of the language (other than to kid, curse, and insult others). Had I asked my mother to teach me she would've only rolled her eyes and ask what's the point? Yet, in its history, Yiddish bridged a vast community already from the Middle Ages. With a high German based vernacular with a mix of Mishnaic Hebrew and Aramaic and as well as a splattering of influences coming from Slavic languages yet written using the Hebrew alphabet.²²² The Ashkenazim had what was essentially, to the outside world, a nearly understandable yet deeply coded language. To put it simply, it is 70% German and 30% who knows what.

One of the three languages used in the 'Scrolls' is Yiddish, hand-written in a uniquely personal font. The scribe accessing an ancient alphabet and a cursive Hebrew but written in Yiddish, the language that experienced a daily loss into the thousands, occasionally into the tens of thousands. I wonder, did they these scribes wonder, if and or when the manuscripts were found, would there be anyone around able to read these accounts?

There is a type of understanding about the Holocaust that says there are things that have unsayability and unrepresentability.²²³ The 'Scrolls' speak the unsayability, and the pencil, pen, ink on paper, especially the paper, straddles the paper-thin line between the unrepresentable and a representability that is shattering. The writers of the 'Scrolls' attempted at nothing less than achieving justice against their oppressors and, to our great fortune, enough of these testimonies survived the destruction of the camps and the winter and spring cold and damp that followed. The words are damning, the ink drips a deep sorrow, and the pages are canvases steeped in horror that transcend (I cannot find an appropriate word) their cumulative components.

But is the language that suffered itself art?

I once borrowed a Jewish cookbook produced 'on the cheap' from an acquaintance. It was the cover image, a reproduction of a painting *In a Jewish Café* by Raphael Soyer (previously Raphael Zalman Shoar before immigrating the US in

²²² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yiddish>.; (2.11.2022)

²²³ Matters of Testimony. Interpreting the Scrolls of Auschwitz. p. 19

1912 from Borisoglebsk, Russia) of an elderly Jewish man in a café reading from a Yiddish newspaper that grabbed me, not the recipes. Maybe I recognized the gentleman in the painting as myself, with a lamenting look, right hand resting on the open page, with that deeply familiar written Yiddish, the language of the Ashkenazim, *mame-loshn* (lit. “mother tongue” as opposed to *loshn koydesh*, “holy tongue” Hebrew). I cannot read or write Yiddish, nor can I speak it. Although I sense I can understand some of it. I am close to the language from my aural and visual senses. I do recall with pleasure my mother and grandfather speaking Yiddish together. I even recall my grandfather Morris reading Yiddish newspapers. It’s the traditional Yiddish orthography (as compared to the Cyrillic orthography) that speaks of my past and directly to me. I see it, I feel it. It is calligraphy that hugs and clings itself to my identity.

And although Yiddish is considered the language of damned, in Israel it is still widely spoken amongst the ultra-orthodox. It is also the language of Klezmer. They cannot be separated.

THE INDELIBLE IMAGE. NOT A NAME BUT A NUMBER ETCHED.

We carry our given names like they are our skin. One learns of another’s name by asking. When we learn to write our names, we become aware of who we are. When our names are erased by a series of numbers in blue ink, embedded under the skin, we, as we have known ourselves from birth, are no more. The Torah (Leviticus 19:28) states, *you* shall not make gashes to the flesh for the dead or incise any marks on yourselves. For the religious, this was an assault against God. For the Nazis, it was a matter of better bookkeeping.

Like in so much the Nazis planning and execution, the practice of tattooing went through phases of trial and error. Soviet army prisoners of war were tattooed on the chest by means of a metal plate with interchangeable needles attached to it; the plate was impressed into the flesh on the left side of their chests and then dye was rubbed into the wound.²²⁴ This allowed the whole serial number to be punched at one blow onto the prisoner's left upper chest. Ink was then rubbed into the bleeding wound.²²⁵ “While it cannot be determined with absolute cer-

²²⁴ <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-evolution-of-tattooing-in-the-auschwitz-concentration-camp-complex;> (3.11.2022)

²²⁵ <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/tattoos-and-numbers-the-system-of-identifying-prisoners-at-auschwitz;> (3.11.2022)

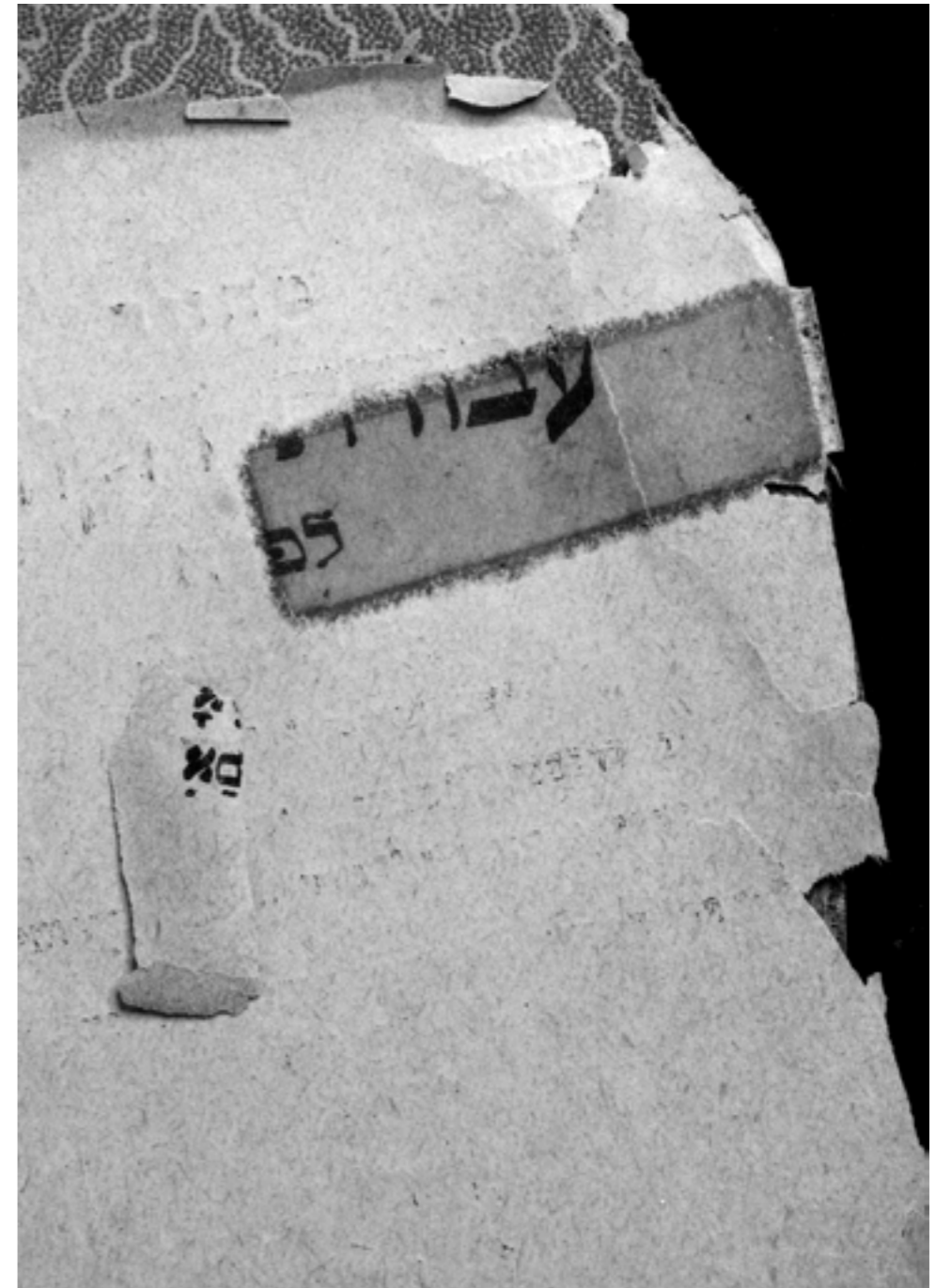


Fig. 62 Siddur fragment.

tainty, it seems that tattooing was implemented mainly for ease of identification whether in the case of death or escape; the practice continued until the last days of Auschwitz.”²²⁶

Shlomo Venezia, a Greek deportee, would go through the gauntlet at Auschwitz that began at the railway station, then herded the selection (he was motioned to the right and survival), to the showers, though first to the ‘hairdressers’ and the tattoo parlor. “Everything happened in a highly organized way, like an assembly belt on which we were the finished products. As we stepped forward, others came to take our places. Still soaking wet and naked, I followed the queue until I reached the tattooing room. There was a long table in which several poisoners had been put to tattoo our identity numbers on our arms. They used a sort of ball-point pen with a sharp point that pierced one’s skin and made the ink go under the epidermis. They had to make these little penetrations until the number appeared on one’s arm. It was extremely painful. When the man tattooing me dropped my arm, I immediately rubbed the front of my arm to lessen the pain. When I looked to see what he’d done to me, I couldn’t make anything out under the mixture of blood and ink. I was suddenly frightened that I might have wiped the number out. With a bit of spit, I wiped my arm clean, and I saw the number that had been correctly “injected”: 182727, my identity.”²²⁷ From that day forward that was not his name, but his identity. And if any of the camp SS asked who he was, he was to answer *in German* those very same numbers.

*“Its symbolic meaning was clear to everyone: this is an indelible mark, you will never leave here; this is the mark with which slaves are branded and cattle sent to slaughter, and that is what you have become. You no longer have a name; this is your new name.”*²²⁸

226 Ibid.

227 Venezia, Shlomo. Inside the Gas Chambers. Eight Months in the Sonderkommando of Auschwitz. 2009. Polity Press. p. 41

228 Levi, Primo. The Drowned and the Saved. Abacus. 1988. p. 104

I admire my father’s signature still to this day. He was born left-handed but was forced early in life to write with his right hand. Essentially, he was ambidextrous, but I never saw him write or sign anything other than with his right hand. The penmanship was exquisite, but only for his signature. He could duplicate it to the millimeter. I once got the courage to ask him about it as he was signing a check. He said, “Make it so no one can copy it.” As children, we practice this act of signing our names. And as we gain control over hand and pen or pencil we become secure in ourselves. This injecting of dyes under our skin, one final act towards the banishment of identity. No longer is a person a part of any civil society. Now they are nothing more than numbered slaves within a bureaucracy of death. An estimated 400,000 prisoner serial numbers were tattooed between May 1940 and January 1945 in Auschwitz alone. Those selected for immediate extermination were stripped, shaved, and gassed. No tattoo but efficiently added to the ghastly statistic ending in 6,000,000.

Extermination camp survivors returned to civil society permanently marked as the damned. Many hid their forearms even from their wives and children. Some had them removed or covered with skin grafts. There were some who carried them proudly. And there are even the descendants of survivors who have had the serial numbers tattooed to themselves as an expression of solidarity, an embrace and a memorialization of the Holocaust and what their decedents had to endure.

5. A TOPOGRAPHY OF SECRETS IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD

1941 through 1944, difficult years for a certain piece of earth which hosted a repair station of the 20th Mountain Army of the German Third Reich during the *Unternehmen Barbarossa*, Operation Barbarossa. Everything from bicycles, motorcycles, cars, trucks, personal carriers and tanks came and went, leaving puddles of gas and oil and solvents and whatever else embedded in this arctic soil. This piece of earth located just below the Arctic Circle, just off the Rovaniemi city center in Finnish Lapland, hosted then the Nazi German army in its many forms, and now is the cradle of our home and garden.

Before the war this was only farmland. The war transformed not only Rovaniemi, the administrative center and gateway to Lapland, but Lapland itself with over 250,000 German troops spread across Finland and a substantial portion of them in this arctic territory. Officially Finland was a co-belligerent with Nazis against the Soviets. This relationship which later leads to the entirety of Lapland becoming a scorched earth during the war of Lapland with the German army forced north and off Finnish territory.

As Petri J. Raivo states: “The historical landscapes of war and conflict — such as battlefields, remains of military constructions, memorials and graveyards — are fundamental parts of the national iconography of modern states.”²²⁹ My peace of

²²⁹ Raivo, Petri J. From abstract; Politics of memory: Historical battlefields and sense of place. Nordia Geographical Publications. 2015. p. 95

earth, bought and paid for in 2003, was never a battlefield, nor a memorial after the war, only a graveyard of oil, broken glass, and reinforcing bar and crumbling cement from the remains of the military garage’s foundation. It all went up in smoke on October 13 and 14, 1944. All that remained within the city limit were brick chimneys standing like shell shocked skeletons. This landscape of petrified skeletons has become a backdrop to a modern post war Finland.

Rovaniemi, before the war, was then, as now, the administrative center and the gateway to Lapland. Two strong rivers, The Kemi and The Ounas, meeting and splitting the town in two. Since war’s end I sense the town has not looked back into its past.

There are few remnants of what was. And what did survive did survive survived either by decree or by luck. For all intents and purposes Rovaniemi and Lapland were rebuilt from scratch.

LEAVING THE PAST BEHIND

(ONLY TO FIND ONESELF FACING IT, FACE TO FACE)

In late August of 1969 we said goodbye to Colombia. We departed a life that was for my parents a tight and creative community. My father no longer felt safe working in the field as Colombia’s political environment deteriorated. We arrived after a short stay in New York in a cold and damp San Francisco as Americans, as our passports indicated. But truly fish out of water. The Jewish community our family was connected to no longer played a role in our lives and, for the most part, we never made any deep connections to the Jewish community of San Francisco, which was a community with many Holocaust survivors, first, second and even third generation. During the 1970’s there was a great Jewish migration out of the Soviet Union to the United States, primarily to New York for its existing Jewish population, as well to Los Angeles and San Francisco. Amongst the San Francisco immigrants were many who had survived the destruction of the Jewish community of Harbin, China. This community was founded in 1898 with the primary task of helping Czarist Russia build the train line from Moscow to Vladivostok.²³⁰ By 1949 most Jews and descendants of the original Harbin Jews were either dead or had everything taken from them before being exiled.

In 1938 German and Austrian Jews were getting desperate trying to flee a hateful Germany, found few options as most countries were denying entry.

²³⁰ Horn, Dara. People Love Dead Jews. p. 18

Fig. 63 Diaramas from Rovaniemi before and just after the war.
Regional Museum of Rovaniemi



Word got out that there was no visa requirement to enter Shanghai, China. An estimated 20,000 Jews left Europe with virtually no property and no money as the German state applied strict restrictions on those with exit visas. By 1943 the Jews of Shanghai were crammed into a one square mile ghetto in the Hongkew district, also known as Little Vienna.²³¹ Most of these stateless Jews found their way out of Shanghai after the war and many settled in San Francisco.

California's Jewish population predated the California goldrush of 1849. The discovery of gold became an invitation to a vast cross section of peoples and nationalities. This is where Levi Strauss of Levi's Jeans made his mark. I bought into the jeans craze but somehow our Jewish life was only found during Hanukkah and Passover. Otherwise, ours was a secular life.

This Jew's wanderings brought him to the arctic city of Rovaniemi in 1985 the first time as a tourist. In 1992 I began teaching at the university and by 1997 my wife and I settled down here in this unique border town. In 2003 we bought a house and the day the house came into our possession was the day I was cognizant of the Nazi presence on our property during the war. In 1943 the German army built extensively throughout the town and outlining areas barracks, storage facilities, and what was on our property, a heavy machinery mechanics repair station. The knowledge of the armies of the Third Reich inhabiting and poisoning this 1000 sq. m only 58 years earlier was something for me to behold.²³²

I grew up somehow understanding the past was in the past. And yet over and over again I seemed to be walking straight into it. This time I was in it and on it, and its remnants could be easily found sticking up from the deep green grass. With each passing winter it was ever more apparent the ground gives up its history. With snow melting away and the ground drying, reinforcing iron bars would stand barely invisible, waiting for my Swedish-made lawnmower to hit the iron bar, prying the machine from my hands with a nasty force. Over the years

231 McGreevy, Nora. Europe's Jews Found Refuge in Shanghai. Smithsonian Magazine. 2021. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-holocaust-survivors-found-refuge-shanghai-told-through-stories-and-photos-180978235/> (5.6.2022)

232 At the end of the day the house officially came into our possession, after a long day of remodeling, I took a hot sauna. All that day I felt as if I had been staring into the face of the Nazis who had brought such an amount of misery to Europe. I ventured out into the garden, found signs of the cement foundation, pulled my pants down and urinated. Like a wandering dog, I reclaimed that space as mine (true story).

this neighborly duty of keeping a respectful garden has proved a challenge. This innocent piece of real estate behaves like an ocean with a never-ending swelling and sinking tide. As the ground undulates it devours as well as reveals its history. Yet, with a camera, for years I did nothing other than wonder about this local history, a microcosm of the vast, ugly events of the 20th century.

The geography of history as a subject of interest for the visual artist, especially with photography, requires a methodology that can withstand the weakness of photography. My garden is a point on a map. It has longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates (66.50577074480306, 25.711524873856053.²³³) Without any references to this history in question, this place is simply a place with little context. But these coordinates have context, and both have been verified as a part of one and the same.²³⁴ Taking a closer look at these coordinates from a bird's eye view (via Google Maps) gives us a recent capture from space. It has little to do with what was taking place from 1941 through 1944. Cars, trucks, motorcycles, halftracks, and tanks, even bicycles came and went from the arctic western front to this humble corner located only minutes south of the Arctic Circle.

The floor foundation built to Nazi specifications was thick enough to carry the heaviest of weights. After nearly 80 years nature has finally smashed most of the cement into minute chunks and dust. And every year nature squeezes out these remnants. As the autumn days cool, a symphony of leaves blankets the garden. One early winter morning, through my vintage Kodak Master View 8x10, I witnessed nature refusing to give in to history. Where once cement covered with motor oil spilled into the soil, nature tries its best to grab what winter light remains. These photographs allow me to accept the events past and motivates towards an exploration of this geography and its history which includes the long arm of the Nazis intentions, even here in Finnish Lapland.

233 <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Palkisentie+44,+96100+Rovaniemi/@66.5058007,25.7091914,411m/data=!3m2!1e3!4b!4m5!3m4!1s0x442b4b8eee43cad7:0x343c90c189ad0!8m2!3d66.5058007!4d25.7113854> (5.6.2022)

234 Mikkonen, Kalevi. Parakkeja ja Piikkilankaa.2016. Lapin Maakuntamuseo. p. 104



Fig. 64 German army iron reenforcing iron bar. 2020



Fig. 65 Arctic Garden of Mysteries. 2018

A TOPOGRAPHY OF SECRETS

Rovaniemi, Finland
66° 30' 0" N / 25° 43' 0" E

Once a repair station for heavy machinery
for the 20th Mountain Army of the German Third Reich.
1941–1944

ה'שת"ה-ב'שת"ה

Our autumn and winter garden wonderland.
2017

ה'עשת"ה

NO EDGE NOR CENTER

It's a long way from Salmivaara to the center of the bureaucracies and ornate offices of the S.S. and Heinrich Himmler in Berlin. Yet, by 1942 the Nazi universe has expanded all the way from the Baltics up to the Arctic Sea. A group of Jewish refugees are forced to work in gravel pits under hawk-eyed Nazi soldiers²³⁵, Jewish soldiers, Finnish citizens themselves, fighting along the eastern Finnish front against the Soviet armies. These Jewish soldiers, decedents of the first Jews in Finland, the Russian Imperial Armies Cantonists, found themselves suddenly free of indentured servitude to the Czar, some for as long 25 years of service²³⁶. These poor souls, ripped from their families, kidnapped, from their homes deep in the Pale of Settlements that stretched from Latvia as far south as the Black Sea. Those surviving the long march first to St. Petersburg and up to the Arctic Sea at Arkhangelsk lived lives not much better than the prisoners in Dachau. When their military service was completed they were allowed to settle in the communities of their final billeting.

THE SUMMER OF 1942

It is there, at the end of the sweltering summer of 1942, that forty-two Jewish refugees dissolved into the arctic bright midnight on a bus, under the noses of the Nazis military controlling the Salmivaara gravel pit as if it was, in fact, by agreement, German soil. Their destination? Suursaari (Big Island), located in the Gulf of Finland 725 kilometers due south. From there, a select few are handed over to the Nazi authorities. What follows them is only a continuing journey south to one of many an abyss. And not coincidentally Reinhard Heydrich's Final Solution already set in motion the dissolution of millions of Jews and "undesirables" from Poland and all across Europe.

That summer in eastern Lapland is hot. The place dusty and throat chapping. The forests nearby teeming with mosquitos and gnats enough to make even the reindeer insane. The Nazi's are desperate for gravel for the train tracks leading into Russia.

235 <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11474736> (5.6.2022)

236 Simon, John. B. Strangers in a Strange Land. Hamilton Books p. 62-63

NO EDGE NO CENTER

66.784373°N, 28.434903°E,
Salmivaara, Finland—Radom, Poland
2093 km, Same time zone.

60°01'20.57" N 26°59'26.38" E,
Suursaari to Warsaw 52°14'1.38" N 21°04'17.16" E
1 500 km

Warsaw to Treblinka 52°37'51.84" N 22°03'12.57" E
104 km

Warsaw to Majdanek 51°13'13.17" N 22°36'0.25" E
186 km

Warsaw to Auschwitz 50°02'09" N 19°10'42"E
356 km

In the summer of 1941 the “Big Ghetto” of Radom, 52°14'1.38" N 21°04'17.16" E, is established by the occupying Nazi armed forces and overseen by assigned the Governor General of the region Hans Frank, was created. 16th through the 18th of August 1942, the ghetto is dissolved.

All the residents of the Big Ghetto are sent to Treblinka.

Radom—Treblinka
207 km

The universe has no center nor edge. And yet every destination has a measurement. Every place has a size and every person occupies a place in their center.

Auschwitz 40 km²

Majdanek 3.4 km²

Treblinka 3.4m²

Suursaari 21m²

Salmivaara Gravel Pit 50m²

Salmivaara Gravel Pit—Auschwitz-Birkenau.

1 990 km

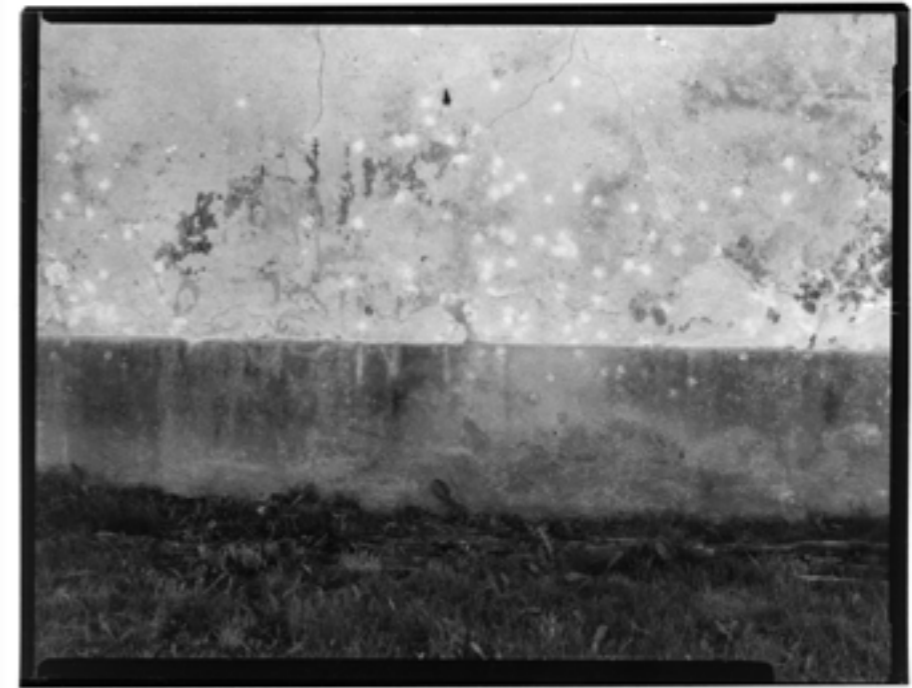


Fig. 66 Radom Ghetto Executioner's Wall / Salmivaara Forced Labor Gravel pit



Fig. 67 Radom Ghetto / Salmivaara Gravel Pit

The distance from Radom, Poland to Salmivaara, Finland, as the crow flies, is 2093 km. The Radom Jews are rousted out of their lives while the Jews of Finland (citizens and refugees) are in great danger of themselves being rounded up and ground up into absence.

As John B. Simon recounts in *Strangers in Strange Land*: “Finland must be the only country where the Jews were brought by force. Most places, they either arrived because they had been driven out of somewhere else because they were Jews or are trying to get in so they can make a better life for themselves and their family, but the first Jews came to Finland as soldiers who were marched here without even knowing where they were going.”²³⁷ By 1918 Finland is in shock at the ferocity of the civil war. In a brand-new country society is polarized from the start. Yet, in that same year Finland grants Jews full civil rights.²³⁸ Who could imagine that in twenty-two years hence Jewish Finnish citizens and soldiers would loyally defend *their* country.

“*Tell them, my good General, that I wipe my ass with their medal!*” What Finnish Medical Captain (later Major) Leo Skurnik son of Ben-Zion Skurnik and grandson of Shmuel Skurnik was really saying with that outburst was: “*Tell the Nazis who want to give one, General Silasvuo, that I wipe my Jewish ass with their Iron Cross!*”²³⁹

And defend the country they did, so well in fact, from the highest echelon Iron Crosses were awarded to, all in all, three, two soldiers, Captain Leo Skurnik and Lieutenant Salomon Klass. Both refused the awards. One woman, Dina Poljakoff, serving in the Woman’s Auxiliary (Lotta Svärd), waited until the day of the awards ceremony. “... checked the tables where the medals were displayed to make sure that there really was one intended for her, and then left without accepting it.”²⁴⁰

The Holocaust is in full force and while those awarded the Iron Cross were to be celebrated for their bravery. Pressure was raising on the Finnish government and Finland’s President Mannerheim to deal with the Jewish question. Himmler twice visited Finland attempting to persuade the authorities to hand over the Jewish population, unsuccessfully. From within the Finnish police force the atmosphere is noticeably anti-Jewish. Jews as Director of State Police (1941-1944), Arno Anthoni, is openly anti-Semitic and distinctly pro Nazi. In all eight Jews amongst twenty-seven refugees deported at Anthoni’s demand to the Gestapo in Tallinn. Out of the eight one survives.

237 Simon. p. 50

238 Simon. p. 141

239 Simon. p. 2

240 Simon. p. 2



Fig. 68 Salmivaara Gravel Pit



Fig. 69 Salmivaara Gravel Pit. All heart.

6. GRAY ZONES THAT DOT THE LANDSCAPE

Venice, Italy, 1516, Jews are herded into an enclosed neighborhood giving birth to the first *Ghetto*. More were to follow. This enclosure comes about in part due to the movement of Jews during the diaspora resulting from the Jewish expulsion from the Spanish and Portuguese territories. The Venice ghetto is considered wealthy. Rome's not so much. Jews of the Venice ghetto are required to police their own people and neighborhoods. By decree four Christian guards, during the nights, are placed outside the locked gates, this paid for by Jews, by decree, themselves.²⁴¹ Outside the ghetto gates, conveniently located on an island, surrounded by canals, are guarded by roving patrol boats preventing escape (the boat patrols likewise paid for by the Jews²⁴²).

The Rome ghetto, established in 1570, in and around the same time as Saint Peter's Basilica, a place so tightly packed, the only possibility to alleviate the overcrowding was to build *up*. The Jewish Quarter in Rome is considered the first place on earth that gave rise, so to speak, to the skyscraper. Residents of these urban prisons might have tried to touch the sky, as they would be very limited to touch anything, anywhere outside of the ghetto walls. And when allowed outside of the confines of the ghetto, yellow badges and hats a requirement.

241 Horn, Dara. *People Love Dead Jews*. 2021. p. 200

242 *Ibid.* p. 200

For all intent and purpose, Jewish life is a locked up urban prison that does not come to an end until 1945. By that year all manner of control through laws, decrees, taxation, humiliations (badges and hats), conspiracies (blood libels), treacheries (Bolshevism, capitalism, world domination, etc...) had been effectively wiped away Jewish communities from the face of this earth. Even in the depths of the *Final Solution* Jews are made to control their own through the Judenrat overseeing the management of the ghettos, through the kapos in the concentration camps, and for the final act, the Sonderkommando ushering the damned into the gas chambers, all paid for with stolen property, stolen money, stolen hair, and stolen gold-covered teeth. Perhaps one of the greater theft in all of human history.

All through history Jews did not lock themselves in at home come the night. The Jew was locked out unless invited in or thrown out. The Pale of Settlements, a vast collection of communities all controlled from the outside. On the inside, life is, for the religious, dictated by Talmud and Torah, embracing the good light, as described in Genesis, and attempting to live a life handed down to them, word for word, through the ages. Surrounding the shtetl, the gentile community has great distrust for the *people of the book*, a people refusing to embrace the Messiah of the gentiles. This act of refusal ensures them no security in the world. With each succeeding generation pressure mounts against the non-convert until Jews are left to wander when allowed or forced to wander at a moment's notice. What peace found, always temporary throughout history. In the 19th and 20th century whatever corridor exists between Jewish communities and the rest of the world narrow year by year and day by day. In 1924 the doors to fortress America close. For those remaining in Eastern Europe life is already hard. For Jews of Western Europe, the walls around have again begun cave in.

In the Czar's and Soviet Russia, many years prior to Operation Barbarossa, Jews are subject to violence in the form of pogroms throughout the Pale of Settlements. What the Nazis bring to this continuity is something of the 20th century, bullets, and lots of them. The Final Solution for the Jews of the Soviet territories is known as the *Holocaust by bullets*. Entire Jewish communities pulled from their homes, gathered into barns, set on fire and shot as they try escaping, though more often lined up at the edges of open pits dug from a local ravine or forest, and shot.

In Poland, the ghettoization of the Jews takes on new meaning. Prior to the emptying of the ghettos, any Jew found outside the designated ghetto walls, like in Radom, is subject to death on sight. By the time the Nazi have developed their industrialized killing factories the ghetto become moot. Jews are first forced out of their homes, packed into centralized ghettos and finally from the ghettos herded into concentration and death camps. By August 1944 the ghettos stand empty and silent.

A DISPATCH FROM A SMALL POLISH CITY, RADOM, BEFORE THE WAR

When the Nazi appear in town, everything changes. Ramon Szczawinski is sent to Auschwitz, his wife sells the house, for a pittance, to Halina and Mieczysław Tymon Nowicki in the hopes of saving the property. During the Nazi occupation of Radom, the villa houses a German doctor. Upon occupation's end, Poland becomes a communist state and the owners are refused access to the property. The original owner, Ramon Szczawinski, the lawyer, perishes in Auschwitz. Date unknown.

The authorities of the Polish People's Republic turn the villa into a home for orphans and victims of the fight against the Nazi occupiers. Not until 1956 was the Nowicki family allowed to return. In 1959 began the long restoration work needed as both the Nazi occupiers and the post war inhabitants left the house in near ruins.²⁴³

RADOM, IN THE PAST

The first reference to the presence of Jews in Radom in the year 1567, a Żydowska (Jewish) Street is first mentioned. In 1724, King Augustus II of Poland (and Grand Duke of Lithuania, 1733-1763) decrees Jews prohibited from earning money within the city walls.²⁴⁴ By the 1800's, in a newly independent Poland, the Jewish presence in Radom is growing. By the 1900's the Jewish presence in the city exceeds 30 percent out of the 85,000 inhabitants. The city has Jewish operated business, small shops and factories, homes for the elderly, an orphanage, a Jewish hospital, numerous social, cultural, political clubs, a Jewish press and lower and higher education.²⁴⁵

243 As told by Katarzyna Nowicka Urbanska, current owner.

244 Metzger, Renata. Dom Radom. History of Radom's Jews. 2018. Ośrodek Kultury I Sztuki, Cultural and Arts Center. p. 7–8

245 Ibid. p. 13

FROM HOME TO GHETTO

Radom, in east-Central Poland, some 100km south from Warsaw, still has traces of its absent Jewish community, here and there, but mostly huddled in and around the city center. The cemetery, on the outskirts of the city, was in the process of re-sanctification during my first visit in 2008. What is officially recognized as the Radom Ghetto area barely stands, with some outside walls (I couldn't get inside) supported by thick wooden buttresses nearly encircling the buildings with tarnishing and ugly graffiti peeking through overgrown grass. In a doorway the absent Mezuzah is present by its absence leaving only the empty space, rather like the presence of the absent Jews of Radom.

THE GHETTO IN THE CITY CENTER

Two young men passed me as I peered under a red dark cloth trying to compose a photograph. With a look of puzzlement, they ask why I would choose to photograph such an ugly structure. Small conversations with some locals prove what is worrying, the wish for the entire ghetto to be raised to the ground with everything from that period be left to history books or banished from memory altogether. Yet, oddly enough, the city of Radom cannot take a ball and chain to these buildings as there are still owners, distant relatives of Radom Jews still retain valid deeds to the properties.

THE OCCUPATION

September 8th, 1939, Germans take over Radom and the occupation begins. In April 1941 the ghetto is created in and around Wałowa St. and other streets nearby. By August the ghetto is sealed. Altogether an estimated 30,000 Jews are interned, and like all other ghettos throughout Poland the conditions are abysmal.²⁴⁶

The following year, in Early August, one Sunday morning, electricians come and install powerful searchlights at every ghetto street corner. The ghetto becomes hermetically sealed by Polish and German police units.²⁴⁷

246 Metzger, Renata. Dom Radom. History of Radom's Jews. p. 35

247 Ibid. p. 40

VILLA "MILLA"

from 1929 through 1942 home to Ramon Szczawinski, lawyer.



Fig. 70 Nowicka House. Radom, Poland. 2019



Fig. 71 Nowicka House. Radom, Poland. 2019

GHETTO TO CONCENTRATION CAMP

Evacuation (liquidation) of Polish Jews: 1 train per day from Radom to Treblinka, 200 freight cars, estimated at 1000 people per transport.²⁴⁸

On the 17th of August 1942 the liquidation of Radom begins. At April's end only 2000 inhabitants remained. During the roundup anyone unable to keep up, the elderly, the infirm, children, are shot.

By June of 1944 the few survivors are escorted under guard to the waiting freight cars. All remaining Radom Jews are deported to Auschwitz. Four centuries Jewish life in Radom comes to an end.²⁴⁹

CONCENTRATION CAMP TO THE GAS CHAMBER

Within an hour upon arrival to Treblinka, all who survive the transports are dead. All stolen goods are sent into storage. All gold covered teeth are extracted. All orifices are searched for hidden items. The dead are dumped in burial ditches located on both sides of the gas chamber.

THE WAITING GAS CHAMBER

An Event Horizon

A voice from the gray zone wrote, "We, the wretched victims of our people, were mobilized to serve at the front of the struggle, against our own brothers and sisters, our very selves, our very flesh. Ours is to be the first line, on which the victims may fling themselves . . . In a little while we will be witnesses, with our own Jewish eyes. We will have to observe our own destruction and see how five thousand human beings, five thousand Jews, five thousand strong, vibrant, budding lives . . . how under the pressure of the accursed criminals, with the participation of the rifle, the hand grenade, and the machine gun . . . will immediately pursue, shove, and beat them murderously to confuse and abuse them, and how they will race . . . into the arms of death. What is more, we, their brethren, their very selves and flesh, will have to assist in this . . . to help escort them, absolutely ready, to help escort them into a bunker – into the grave – of death."²⁵⁰

248 Hilberg, Raul. *German Railroads. Jewish Souls.* p. 54

249 Ibid. p. 59

250 Gradowski, Zalman. *From the Heart of Hell: Manuscript of a Soderkommando Prisoner, found in Aushwitz (Oswiecim, Poland: Publication of State Museum of at Oswiecim, 2017.)* p. 46

It is here, at the threshold of the gas chamber, where the ultimate in humiliation of the Jew takes place, hour after hour, day after day, and even year after year. In Treblinka the production line of murder is thirteen month long with just under one million deaths. The hands of the Nazi remained clean. The Sondekcommando, a slave to death, either participates or is murdered. To the outside world it seems incomprehensible that a Jew would cooperate in such a completely immoral act. An act of apathy, betrayal and complicity.²⁵¹

In Primo Levi's words, the lager (Arbeitslager, German for "labor camp") is the Gray Zone.²⁵²

If in Theodor Adorno's quote, "after Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric"²⁵³, is to mean, as many have interpreted and/or misquoted it, as *after the Holocaust, there can be no art*, then, from 3 minutes and 20 seconds through 7 minutes and 35 seconds of Lázló Nemes' film *Son of Saul* (2015)²⁵⁴ brings us as close to a Holocaust blasphemy as has been attempted. If there is anything like a no-go area in any visualization from the horror of the Holocaust, it is the gas chamber. The Russian production, *Sobibor* (2018), directed by Konstantin Khabensky, crosses this threshold, I believe, for the first time.²⁵⁵ Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* nearly crosses it but then tricks the audience by showing hot, steamy water pour from shower faucets. I recall the audience in unison letting out a gasp of relief (which may prove that even very basic Holocaust history lessons have left their mark).

251 Ingle, Leah. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1576&context=masters>

252 Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved.* Abacus. 1988. p. 31

253 Adorno, Theodor. *Cultural Criticism and Society.* 1949

254 Nemes, Lázló *Son of Saul (Saul fia)* Laokoon Filmgroup. 2015.

255 *Sobibor.* Dir. Konstantin Khabensky (2018) Russian 11.00–13.15. There is sound, even talking. The scene is focused on one young woman. The valve is turned, the woman notices a camp commander staring from a window high above the gas chamber. As others begin to scream our heroin vomits and collapses. The scene fades to all the dead woman, commander still peering in, and choral music topped by a high soprano voice like that of a child's or how a child's pitch acts like a voice from an angel.



Fig. 72 Radom Ghetto. In the Spirit of Atget. 2019



Fig. 73 The Sealed Doorway, Radom, Poland. 2019

THE ABSOLUTE OF EVENTS

The sign of the times

The first gas attack in history overwhelmed the French troops near the small town of Ypres, in Belgium.²⁵⁶

It is in this absolute of events, the ten to twenty minutes when one's life is snuffed out by a *puff* of carbon monoxide or the gases emitted from Zyklon-B, a wickedly efficient formula that in its earliest iteration, hydrogen cyanide, was a fumigant used as a pesticide in California in the late 1800's. It was first called Zyklon (cyclone) and later Zyklon-A, a pesticide that when mixed with water and heat produced chlorine. This gas was first used at Ypres in the spring of 1915. The mastermind behind the chlorine gas was a Jew named Fritz Haber, an enthusiastic and patriotic chemist for the Germans discovering an agricultural revolution using ammonia by combining atmospheric nitrogen with hydrogen, a fertilizer that came with a catchy phrase, *bread out of air*. But his enthusiasm for serving the German war cause led him to create a gas that horrifically killed soldiers in the fields and trenches of what were very likely fertile farmlands in peace time. His Zyklon-A was updated into Zyklon-B, a rat poison first tested on Soviet prisoners of war and soon after introduced at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Majdanek and other concentration and death camps.

Willi Siebert, one soldier who opened some of the six thousand cannisters of chlorine gas the Germans released that morning at Ypres wrote: "We suddenly heard the French yelling. In less than a minute they started with the most rifle and machine gun fire that I have ever heard. Every field artillery gun, every rifle that the French possessed must have been firing. I had never heard such a noise. The hail of bullets going over our heads was unbelievable, but it was not stopping the gas. The wind kept moving the gas towards the French lines. We heard cows

²⁵⁶ Labatut, Benjamin. *When We Cease to Understand the World*. 2020. Pushkin Press. p. 24



Fig. 74 Radom Ghetto 2019



Fig. 74 Radom Ghetto 2019

bawling and the horses screaming. The French kept on shooting. They couldn't possibly see what they were shooting at. In about fifteen minutes the shooting petered out. After half an hour, only occasional shots. Then everything went quiet again. In a while it had cleared and we walked past empty gas bottles. What we saw was total death. Nothing was alive. All of the animals had come out of their holes to die. Dead rabbits, moles, mice were everywhere.²⁵⁷

Zyklon-A was banned after W.W.I. The use of gas on the battlefield thereafter was forbidden by treaty. That a Jew was in part responsible for creating a formula against insect infestation that later would pave the way for a gas that would wipe out over one and half million of his own people is something very difficult to explain away. Fritz Haber's wife, Clara Immerwahr, also a chemist, protested at his participation in using chemistry as a weapon of war. To Haber, gas and bullets were no different. Clara took her own life after Haber returned from Ypres. As the Nazis rose to power Haber was able continue his research until 1933. He left his institute and died of a heart attack no more than one year later.²⁵⁸

In 1939 the Nazis had brought together all the successes of the industrial revolution, in transportation, in the sciences, in media information and disinformation, all into a seemingly fluid war machine that turned out to be the most fluid killing and murdering machine this planet has ever experienced, that is until *Fat Man* and *Little Boy*, the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

257 Labatut, Benjamin. p. 24–25

258 Engines of our Ingenuity. Fritz Haber. <https://uh.edu/engines/epi2287.htm> (20.11.2022)

TRAGEDY VS. STATISTICS

*The daunting mystery of death is not cessation of our body's vitality, but in the question of what, if anything, will follow.*²⁵⁹

The victims forced to the pits edge, dressed or stripped naked, vitality was already long exhausted. Death staring at them face to face, those bullet came from behind. The scene that lay in front of them not even Hironimus Bosch would have conceived. Day after day, the Einsatzgruppe II, with plenty of local help, murdered over 1.5 million Jews from 1941 through 1944. The first uses of suffocating gases took place in Poland. But in Ukraine soldiers with bullets did the job murdering more than one million Jews with the Nazi hunter/killing machine roving relentlessly through the Ukrainian landscape shooting men, women, children, any and every Jew was unable escape into Russia.

Statistic: 1,500,000

Statistic: 1.5 Million

Statistic: 1 & ½ Million

Statistic: One and a half million

Humans

*"A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." ...*²⁶⁰

My introduction to mass murder has been through pictures. It has been so for most of us. Primarily two types of pictures, the mass and heaps of emaciated and intertwined bodies in large open pits and a photograph of a man, a Ukrainian Jew on his knees with a Waffen-SS soldier holding a revolver to the head, about to be executed in Vinnitsa. I did not become aware of the location until 2020. I have tried desperately to put my eyes into the eyes of this man condemned to death for being Jewish.

Stalin's citation on statistics has been worn down over time. It is as if everybody not only knows what it means but understands instinctively the meaning. But

²⁵⁹ Mancoff, Debra N. *The Face of Human History*. 2018. Thames & Hudson. p. 252

²⁶⁰ I think there is no need to cite who said this.



Fig. 75 *Burnt Offerings (1 of 22)*. 2020



Fig. 76 *The Appel. What Primo Levi Hated Most. Auschwitz. 2019*

who wishes joining the ranks of nothing more than a statistic? The man is about to lose a life that surely would've continued if under so-called normal circumstances. The Einsatzgruppe went from village to village, day after day, for years, on a sweep that like in slow-motion and yet unstoppable scythe. People are murdered and the dead go from having names and histories to having their life added up to nothing, but a razor thin bead added to the abacus of the murdered. If a camera looked down upon one dead and then retreated to fill the expanding frame with each additional victim, at what point would the subtle detail of a face melt away into the quantity of faces? As the camera recedes individual faces disappear into a mass of forms still resembling something human. At some point the image will make no sense. The specifics of the subject matter vanish and simply turn all form into abstraction, free of location, devoid of understanding, freed from history, free of history.

Can anyone looking into the faces, those imprisoned at Auschwitz, photographed by Wilhelm Brasse,²⁶¹ and not think what those people might've been thinking and how they might have thought about it? The same applies to the photographs made by Nhem Ein of possibly every prisoner entering the secret prison, S-21, now the Tuol Seng Museum, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. An estimated thirty thousand people, many children included, only a handful surviving the horror.

The portraits (I am not sure they are really portraits), all classically hanging in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum's Block 6, displayed all along the corridor walls, is haunting for both their circumstances but also by the manner of photography and what photography can do. The photographs are *identity pictures*. These people give their final look out and into consciousness of future generations. Are they aware of this? Are we aware of this?

I made the 'pilgrimage' to Auschwitz, it might be such a journey for many, the kind of journey Jews take because it is understood that one cannot genuinely mourn unless one stands on *that* specific geography of recent history. Is this true? I am not sure. But Auschwitz is a serious tourist destination for Jews and non-Jews alike with busses arriving throughout the day, transporting visitors from Auschwitz I to Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is curious, some people clearly nervous about being there, unsure what their emotions will reveal. Even on that day of my visit, a gruelingly hot day in June, the busses never stopped unloading and loading tourists, tourists from all over Europe and abroad. 2019, a banner year for Auschwitz tourism and the year I visited, 2,300,000 visitors walked through those halls, amongst the barracks, latrines, past Mengele's block, past the courtyard where prisoners stood to be counted over and over and over again. Primo Levi spoke of this place with deep disdain of that little plot of land, I had to stop, stand for a moment in the near 36°C heat, and thank him for having the strength to burn his searing experiences to memory.

These memories may fade over time like any old photograph will fade in time. Primo Levi put to paper, *Survival in Auschwitz*, from memory, about all that had taken place for over fourteen months. 1,100,000 deaths and one survivor bring the outside world into the abyss and that abyss to the outside world, where he endured yet nearly dying, often, but beating the statistical odds and as a prize is awarded with continued life, as tattered as it was upon liberation.

261 One of Mengele's photographers in Auschwitz.

Those photographs displayed in Block 6, all the faces nicely framed and hanging precisely, in that well lit hall, no words uttered by anybody as one after another in a line, stopping to stare, to wonder, peering beyond the picture, as deeply in as one could possibly go. I assume no faces captured, displayed, exist now or even not long after the images were created. But they do exist in these photographs. My mind switches tracks, taking me to the pile of corpses. I want to see faces. Even today, when researching these horrid images of things outside our normal senses, I remind myself, each and every one of these skeletons was of flesh, face and life, not simply bone.

There is a constant need to unravel statistics. A goal is to if not find at least recognize the individual within this mass of statistics and information. It is difficult but not impossible. The prisoner photographs, so carefully hung in those halls, are the only remnants of the photographed other than some numbered list, either crossed out or marked as *selected* for gassing. We have few photographs from the million plus humans that passed through Auschwitz, that toiled in the hot sun or freezing winter, that stood in line morning and night endlessly being counted, no pictures of the constant public beatings and public executions (not that anyone ending up at the camps was in any sense in the public sphere). There is a huge gap in understanding other than through such acute descriptions provided by the few survivors as well as those whose lists and descriptions make up the Scrolls of Auschwitz. (Refer to Chapter X: Night Falls. p. 220)

As a child, I did not have information to fall back on. I did not have parents who could cross the line and tell me: bad things happen and have happened. Of what I had were the few photographs ministries of education, be they Colombian or Californian, were allowing to be in print and published in whatever school textbooks were given to us, without warning. This means that between the images of Jews harassed and mistreated at the hands of angry mobs or law enforcement authorities (be they the police, brown shirt types or military) and rounded up and loaded onto train wagons, and the mountain of corpses, there was a vast unknown. The German authorities were keen on ensuring such image were not to be made.

The irony is that, as in today, soldiers have cameras. They want to document their glory for Mom and Dad, perhaps. Photographs were made in the ghettos. Mendel Grossman, Jewish, secretly photographs life in the Łódź ghetto for nearly four years until the ghetto is emptied. These are truly remarkable photographs, made under the worst of conditions, he is showing his ability to photograph an accurate cross section of life in the ghetto. The most poignant images are those of his immediate family. Each member, father, mother, brother-in-law, nephew, all fade away from life and into death from starvation and cold. An estimated 10,000 negatives survived, hidden in cans in a wooden crate put in a hollow space made under the windowsill in his apartment in the ghetto. Sadly, the collection was sent to Israel to a kibbutz that fell into Egyptian hands and vanished. Luckily many of the prints made survived. Mendel Grossman himself died on a death march at age 32.²⁶²

One German soldier and anti-Nazi, Joe Heydecker, spent two days in February 1941 photographing in a manner as tourist. These images are unique in that they are not made as propaganda, for which the Nazi made many visits to the ghetto not only to make propaganda photographs but filmmaking in addition. Heydecker's images have a touch, an emotion, sorrow. His images remained hidden until 1981. We can say better late than never. The long delay in revealing their existence was due to shame and the inability to deal with the images in the first place, according to Heydecker.

262 <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/who-took-the-pictures.html> (12.12.2022)

THE LILI JACOB ALBUM

An album with a dedication: *'as a remembrance of your dear, unforgettable Heinz.'*, found on a *'night table at Mauthausen'*.²⁶³ Apparently the location of the find was at the Dora-Norhausen concentration camp where the then Lili Jacob (later Zelmanovic, then Meier) had been transferred from Birkenau. Countless times the album has been used in criminal cases related to Nazi's genocidal activities. Already in 1964, in a trial of German guards at Auschwitz, Lili Zelmanovic gave evidence by use of the photographs. Eight years earlier two former Czech prisoners at Auschwitz gave sixty-four (out of the original two hundred and three photographs) of the same photographs to the Auschwitz State Museum that had been found in the archives of the State Museum of Prague.²⁶⁴ Could this have meant there were more prints to be found scattered asunder after the Nazi collapse in 1945?

All concentration camps, excepting for Belżek, Chełmno, Treblinka and Sobibór (camps specifically for extermination) had departments of photography known as Erkennungsdienst (detection service), supplying identity photographs of non-Jewish prisoners, local civil employees, propaganda photographs and films, construction work documentation, medical experiment documentation (specifically documenting Josef Mengele's unit's experimentation on Jewish prisoners), etc. Both Auschwitz and Mauthausen contained complete photographic and moving film laboratories and darkrooms. Prisoners were 'employed' for film developing and printing, cataloging, and posting material to specific ministries back in Germany. What few photographs survive from activity inside the camps, survive because of prisoners' awareness the material could be used at some point in the unknown future against the prison authorities in a court of justice. Of the hidden material only a fraction has survived. Much of the Nazi propaganda photography and film material have survived included large archives of film and photographs documenting Mengele experiments.²⁶⁵

263 Struk, Janina. *Photographing the Holocaust*. Routledge. 2004. p. 99

264 Ibid. p. 99

265 I was 18, it was 1976, a senior in high school, when arriving home late from a school orchestra concert found my mother watching a documentary that followed the rise and fall of the Third Reich. Concentration camp footage was extensively shown including many of the experiments made to the prisoners. I sat next to my mother, we, both speechless, absorbing the impossible. This documentary, shown on American public television, very late in the evening. At documentary's end, we exchanged quiet words and wishes for a good night's sleep.

With war's end, and revelations of the extermination camps hitting the news, creating a media circus. Photographs done upon camps liberation are seen in newspapers and newsreels in movie houses. Photography exhibitions are made displaying much of the material military and civil press photographers made in the months prior and after liberation.

Soon though the political climate changes as the West vs. East sets in and issues surrounding justice related to Holocaust began to diminish. Not until the 1980's when a renewed interest in that period of history leads to publications of some of the strongest photographs made by some of the most competent photojournalist that had been photographing during those horrific years. They include Yvgeni Khaldei, a Russian Jew, responsible for the most important Russian propaganda image of the fall of Berlin, including the Soviet flag raising over the Reichstag, and photographs by Dmitri Baltermants, best known for a photograph called "Grief", a woman searching for her dead husband, gain worldwide attention. American photographer Lee Miller's photographs from the liberation Dachau are completely modern in visual character, raw and direct, like later photographs by Diane Arbus.

The Lili Jacob album is the only complete selection of images from one day in the life of Auschwitz. In it we find photographs of a train transport from Hungary arriving at the ramp at Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Lili and her family were on that transport. The date of this deportation from Hungarian occupied Slovak ghetto at Beregovo is 24 May, 1944. Between May 15 and July 9, 1944, 437,402 Hungarian Jews are deported to Auschwitz. On that day, the day that particular transport arrived at its destination, all the usual activity took place. The captions in the album state: 'Resettlement of Jews from Hungary; Arrival of the Transport; Sorting out; Arriving Men; Arriving Women; After the Sorting Out of Still able-bodied Men; Still Able-Bodied Women; Not Able-Bodied Men; Not Able-Bodied Women and Children; After Delousing; Assignment to Labor Camp; Personal Effects.'²⁶⁶

All not able-bodied, all elderly able or not, all children, mostly all mothers with children will be murdered within an hour of their arrival. The photographs don't tell us this. The photographs only speak of the present. Our precise knowledge of the workings of Auschwitz connects the invisible dots, not once the album is closed, but from the first photograph.

266 Struk, Janina. p. 99



Fig. 77 *Burnt Offerings (Matchbox Sculptures) 2020*

WORDS SUCCEED WHERE PICTURES FAIL

Camp life, we don't have those pictures. We 'make' those pictures from all the text available to us today. I do not recall sitting down and reading camp survivor accounts until sitting with Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*. I turned away from those pages constantly but could not put the book down. It is not a heroes journey (a reference to Joseph Campbell). It is a journey of a man who happens to be Jewish, intelligent and manages to survive. This book and all his other writings covering his experiences of the Holocaust make him a hero for refusing to forget the experience. His death by suicide (though still inconclusive) does not alter the depth of his sacrifice in life or in death in any way.

What Levi and so many since have written, fill in the space and time that cannot be found in any photographs from that appalling period in history, simply because there are no photographs to show us the reality of each of those tormented days. This raises huge problems for artists who wish to explore such subject matter. To understand this more clearly, many a Nazi soldier and officer enjoyed producing and looking at photographs of the torture and mutilation that were produced by the Erkennungsdienst. A morbid curiosity, a kind of horror pornography, this was entertainment coming out of a distortion of science, ethics, morality, politics, beaten into these Germans and their accomplices like a never-ending circus freak show. Wilhelm Brasse, Erkennungsdienst photographer, ordered by Dr. Mengele to make photographs for him and for the chief camp physician Eduard Wirths of their pseudoscientific experiments, had no choice but to comply. For Mengele he photographed Hasidic and traditional looking Jews regarded as 'interesting'.²⁶⁷ Triplets, twins, gypsy children, people that were regarded as 'strange', 'diseased', 'deformed', 'disfigured', 'disabled' or on the verge of dying.²⁶⁸ Wirths ordered Bródka (another photographer) and Brasse to make photographs of SS men, sick with malaria during a feverish 'fit'. The photographs, which apparently showed their terrible distorted faces and trembling bodies, were processed, and printed in the Erkennungsdienst darkroom and sent to Berlin.²⁶⁹ For what purpose, for what end?

²⁶⁷ Struk, Janina. p. 108

²⁶⁸ Struk, Janina. p. 108. Author's interview with Wilhelm Brasse; testimony of Wilhelm Brasse, 1989; Testimony of Alfred Woycicki 1959

²⁶⁹ Struk, Janina. p. 108. Author's interview with Wilhelm Brasse; testimony of Wilhelm Brasse, 1984

Although ‘official’ intentions for the production of such photographs was for science, medical, anthropological (more like a mixed-up cocktail called eugenics) the photographs were to such an audience as the concentration camp personnel entertainment. Indeed, photographs can live many lives as almost any photograph can be interpreted according to a set of parameters that social and cultural attributes impact on. The Nazis who soaked up these images, and it appears that many did, it was a sign of a serious national and cultural sickness that could only have been brought to such a point by so many years of xenophobic, racist, anti-Semitic hammering. A din of hate coming from all directions.

The series, *Burnt offerings* (Fig. 75 & 77) comes out of the challenge to visualize the horror I first witnessed in textbooks during my secondary school education. Although I must have been aware of it earlier, already in Colombia, I was kidded in the locker room at a swimming pool that I looked like a Dachau survivor. It is in that locker-room where I first heard of a place with a strange sinister sounding name. My swimming mates surely had seen the same imagery. If photographs of those contorted faces and heaps of skeletons are in fact my visual introduction to the Holocaust, what choices could there be other than begin from them and then work, in a sense backwards, or use that ‘inspiration’ as a tool for untangling the mess that the Holocaust has made of the contemporary Jewish artistic mind? *Burnt Offerings* as an artwork, is cruel. It is meant to be cruel. It is meant to be at times provocative and always throughout thought provoking (as I hope all artworks in the exhibition are meant to be). They are not meant as entertainment. The intention is to remind us how bad it can be. Yet, in a gallery does it become entertainment? (I explore this question further below.)

Anti-Semitic laws prescribed over centuries, brought us, humanity, to that point, to the tip top of the pyramid of bones. That mountain of bones is the future pre-written by peoples who couldn’t accept that another group of people have chosen to keep on with what they believed is their way of thinking and living in the world. All that was left was to do was to destroy them, from flesh and bones, over one to one million or more lies. When the lie is repeated often enough, no amount of logic and reasoning will have an impact in any way.

All it has taken are resources and knowledge arrived at by the 20th century and put in motion. Like an absurdly heavy train with just enough power to turn its wheels and achieve enough speed that, at some point in space and time, no brakes can put it to a stop until all that energy that has kept it moving is crushed by its own weight, by the consequences of willful deafness and blindness, of the

mind, the body and the soul. “How is it possible for a people of culture who lived in the midst of Europe and having created one of the great civilizations ever, to subscribe to such an ideology, to instigate a war of annihilation because and to stick to it until the bitter end?”²⁷⁰ Germany of the Third Reich offered a promise of something so grand, based on an offer of fealty, nobody could refuse. A utopia. A Nazi utopia. Anything below this threshold was to be ruled over with impunity until its last breath is squeezed out into nothingness.

For Jews, the beginning started under the good light from the sky and nights under a canopy of stars, a celestial huppah²⁷¹, in the desert in a world seemingly with no edges nor center. And it nearly ended after getting squeezed down an increasingly narrowing corridor until all that remained was just a ramp that led to oblivion and, out the other side, a pyramid of bones and dust.

Harvest Festival

A Still Life

The order of events is fairly well known, upon arrival at the camp, men and women are separated. The women, including all children, are herded to the *Auffanglager* (a transit camp). In this fenced off area all property is handed over at the “cashier’s booth” after which the women and children are ushered into what is at Treblinka, the last act before murder takes place. In a room out of view of “Der Schlauch” (The Tube), or the name prisoners assigned it: Himmelfahrtsstraße – the road of ascension or Himmelweg – *the road to heaven*, which is the path leading into the gas chambers. Here a “hairdresser” shaves the prisoners bare, including pubic hair. Naked and unadorned like at birth, these victims get crammed into the gas chambers, of which in Treblinka there were thirteen. During the following ten to twenty minutes it takes to kill the group, all possessions including all hair is transferred to sorting barracks and re-packed for transport back on the same train the victims arrived on, out of Treblinka, towards Germany. For the deportees it is a one-way journey. The rest of their “goods” make a round trip as everything is to be recycled.

From the outset of the Third Reich’s war against the Jews, the kick-off being the implementation of the Nuremberg Race Laws in 1935, the purpose is to make

270 Bauer, Yehuda. p. 263

271 A nuptial canopy that creates a temporary sanctified space for the Bride and Groom.

clear to the German public Jews are the enemy. From the dispossession of citizenship, work, lodging, property, and freedom the intent is to instill deep in the heart and mind of the Jew of this status.

For those surviving the transports to labor and death camps such as Auschwitz (few survived Treblinka), their arrival and what followed is a show the Nazis put on to ensure the enemy is the enemy. In Primo Levi's words: "Kicks and punches right away, often in the face; an orgy of ordered shouts with true and simulated rage; stripped to complete nakedness; a haircut, full bodied; the fitting out of rags."²⁷² "It was all staged and this was quite obvious."²⁷³

There is somehow something ugly and ironic in hair, including pubic hair, that found its use in Nazi army coats, boots, sofas, car seats, mostly for warmth but also for haircloth²⁷⁴ and delayed action bombs²⁷⁵. Camp prisoners are shaved regularly or for one final cut before being gassed.²⁷⁶ The Nazis are determined to profit in every possible transaction that involves the Jews. It was completely within Nazi logic to profit from the byproducts of their enemies.

Upon the liberation of Auschwitz in January 1945, stored in the *Canada*²⁷⁷ warehouse, remained an estimated 6,350 kilograms of hair along with 7000 thousand survivors, 100,000 pairs of shoes and millions of items, eyeglasses, shaving razors and brushes, combs, suitcases, and a lot more all stacked to the ceiling. It is the hair that fascinates many if not most visitors in Block 4, room 5. In this room in the Auschwitz Museum, photography is forbidden. Cameras in Auschwitz were strictly forbidden during the war. With an estimated 2.3 million visitors (2019 estimates) visiting both Auschwitz I (museum) Auschwitz-Birkenau II, the numbers of cameras, cell phone and otherwise, the sheer number of images digitally snapped goes beyond calculation. During my stay in room 5, I witnessed numerous visitors surreptitiously lift phones to *grab* snaps of the hair, and precisely *that hair*. What is

272 Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. Abacus. 1988. p. 34

273 *Ibid.* p. 34

274 *The Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial. A guidebook*. Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. 2018. p. 18

275 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1993/11/15/evidence-of-evil> (05.12.2022)

276 Delayed action bomb

277 'Canada' designated wealth and well-being of the camp. More specifically, it referred to members of the labor gang, or Kommando, who helped to unload the incoming transports of people destined for the gas chambers. Borowski, Tadeusz. p. 30

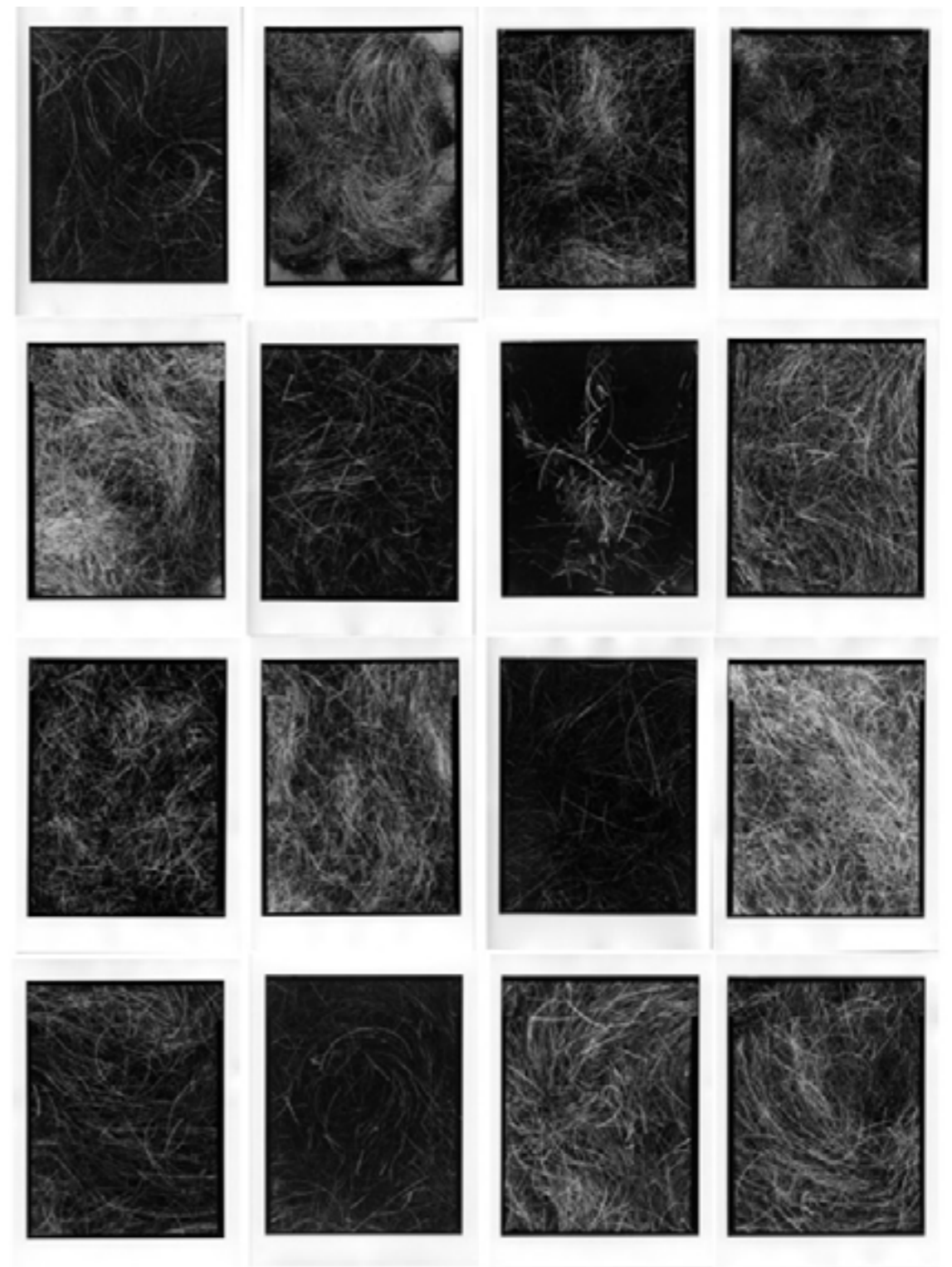


Fig. 78 From Series: *Harvest Festival*. Test print selection. 2020

it about hair and the Holocaust that is so uniquely troubling? The Auschwitz State Museum which operates the concentration and extermination camp as a museum and memorial, forbids photography of the hair “out of respect for the dead”. And they’ve made a very interesting decision concerning the fate of that mountain of hair, it will be allowed to fade and turn to dust and disappear, with no plans for conservation nor preservation.²⁷⁸

4 Block, this unique place on earth, where we come face to face with our own vanity, our own fragility. I sense it. Do others? I know of no other place where we instinctively, viscerally come to understand and fear what has taken place, over and over to the living and to those deemed unworthy of continued life.

The stripping of Jewish identity the Germans mastered, was for no other reason than to fool themselves into believing they were supreme. Primo Levi: “We ask many questions, but they catch ahold of us in a moment we find ourselves shaved and sheared.”²⁷⁹ The only apparent difference between the men and the women are that the women are given stripped dresses. At least the very minimum the Nazi attempted to keep something of gender identity alive. But for all practical matters, once hair is shaved the human is defused. Those not chosen to be gassed will be given new names. Better stated, are stripped of their given names. For many this stripping of humanity begins long before the Nuremberg Laws. Like the whole of the exercise of entry into the hell of the camps, this must have been an extreme shock after all that had already taken place. First the hair sheering, then prison clothing, and finally a tattoo. No more the deeply personal ritual of getting one’s hair appearing good enough, no more looking into the mirror and recognizing oneself, I don’t mean in a superficial way.

Prisoners unlucky enough to be pointed in the direction of certain fate, but to the opposite direction of those temporarily spared, entered the gas chambers and exited life almost as naked as when born. In the time taken to complete murder, others are reduced to a most basic appearance of man, with skin hairless and cold,

²⁷⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/16/arts/international/at-auschwitz-birkenau-preserving-a-site-and-a-ghastly-inventory.html> (22.08.2022)

²⁷⁹ Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. Collier Books. 1961. p. 19

given a slave’s uniform and finally a number, not given but forced upon. There is not much left of a person after that.

There is something concerning the portrait gallery in Auschwitz that still catches my attention, although uncomfortably. Men and women, all bald, all staring bewilderedly into the cold eye of the camera lens. Identifying tags, where from, age, occupation, etc., and most printed on paper with a typewriter, tell us of a life lived and lost. In the age of the Renaissance, a painting’s frame could outdo the painting with stylized ornate handcraft and often a copper plate with the necessary details carved in. Could this be the logical extension from that? No Rembrandt lighting, no hyper stylization like a Helmar Lerski portrait. Just a flat light, like for medical photography.

The Germans during those years are a thorough bunch. At the outset of the war, having access to synagogue records is invaluable in the Final Solution success. Once the Jews are gathered into concentration camps, all pertinent information is gathered and logged in ledger after ledger. In Ukraine, the Germans and their collaborators, gather as many Jews as possible while sweeping through towns and villages. Their desire is for as much death as could be accomplished in as short a time as possible. Here names and occupations are meaningless. While bullets kill, synagogues are set alight destroying generations of documentation. For the Nazis in Germany, Poland and all the countries within the General Government, the process of identifying Jews through temple records helps in their location and arrest. The result is that for many of the murdered at Auschwitz, their names, ages, even occupations and from where they are arrested could be found amongst the mountains of ledgers. Because of this we know a great many of the victim’s names. In Ukraine it is like a storm swooping in taking everything with it. Very little of anything is left to remind and prove of the hundreds and thousands of Jewish communities that once and for a very long time existed in those territories.

7. THE GEOGRAPHY OF HISTORY IN A DREARY CORNER OF POLAND



Fig. 79 Exiting Treblinka at the River Bug. 2019

52.635180°N, 22.053886°E, Vassili Grossman describing this landscape in 1946 as dreary.²⁸⁰ Even in 2010 dreary would still be an applicable description. 2019, the new road from Małkinia Górna sweeps passed Treblinka. Come early June, *dreary* gives up some of its dominion to something dreamy. Trucks laden with goods destined for Belarus race past the modern green road sign informing passerbys they now pass Treblinka, a name that to the geographically and historically uninformed might mean nothing.

280 Grossman, Vassili. *The Years of War (1941–1945)* Foreign Publishing House Moscow. 1946. p. 24

Sally Mann asking an impossible question: “Does the earth remember? Do these fields, upon which unspeakable carnage occurred, where unknown numbers of bodies are buried, bear witness in some way?”²⁸¹ Her photography is firmly located in the American deep south. Mann’s photographs search out for the American civil war and embedded deep in the wetplate emulsion are the still active tremors from the slaughter of those years. Mann continues: “And if they do, with what voice do they speak? Is there a numinous presence of death in those now placid battlefields, these places of stilled time?”²⁸² I’m searching amongst the overgrown ruins of Treblinka for the Nazi civil and state war against European Jewry.

For those historically informed they might still not know the place even if they stood on the grounds that swallowed up an estimated 900,000 victims of Nazism. On my first visit the ground was still moist from the end of winter. For the second visit the ground was dry and hot, feeling it could at any moment combust. During fourteen horrid months, from July 1942 to October 1943 this dreary place existed as a cauldron of death. Now back with sheets of film, my trusty camera, plan, a plan that began forming itself from a dream I had long ago, where I was on my way to Treblinka, and it didn’t feel good at all. The dream startled me then, the place startles me now and, after so many years, and by *chance*, finding myself in this troubled and abused place and some strange and mysterious loop closes.

To step into and onto the sorrowful and swollen earth, an earth that still, to this day, gives up its dead with bits of bone, white specks like fresh hail, rise and rest in the light of day after a cool rain.²⁸³ It is a topography of great misfortune. Such a wretched period, well into the world’s modern period, this place throws hint after hint, clue after clue, to its reality and to its truth. Already long ago was I was destined to come and make art here?

While on a work trip to Poland in 2008, my first of what would turn out to be many visits over many years, I received an invitation from a Swiss friend attending the same meeting, to pay a visit to Treblinka. The invitation came without warning as we sipped coffee early one morning in central Warsaw. Often I have heard, when people recount their visits to such Jewish heritage sites²⁸⁴, they say they couldn’t properly prepare themselves for such experiences. Could Treblinka

281 Mann, Sally. *Hold Still*. 2015 Little Brown. p. 411

282 *Ibid.* p. 411

283 Grabowski, Jan. The New Wave of Holocaust Revisionism. 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/29/opinion/holocaust-poland-europe.html>; (3.6.2023)

284 Horn. Dara. *People Love Dead Jews*. Reports from a Haunted Present. p. 22–23

honestly be considered a Jewish Heritage Site? Google Maps lists both the museum in Treblinka as a history museum (I'm not sure this can really be classified as a museum) and Treblinka II as a historical landmark (that it certainly is) except that at this landmark, typically as at many such places, is a memorial sculpture (of sorts). The memorial is meant as a place of reflection. Indeed, there is a good reason to have something more than an equivalent of a road sign or a marquee highlighting the tragic history.

My friend, Eric and I jump on a train in Warsaw headed to Bialystok, hopping off at Małkinia Górna, the closest village to Treblinka. Małkinia junction to Treblinka, eight kilometers as a crow might fly. The approaching Soviet army forces the Nazis to erase the existence of the extermination camp. Until 2019 there was no direct route to the hidden ruins. During those war years trainloads of men, women, and children, packed like cattle, traversed the eight kilometers by rail over the River Bug, veering off into the forest at approximately one kilometer before the *Road to Heaven*.

The taxi driver informs us that the trip will take some time. The journey meanders through village upon village, over poorly asphalted and wet dirt roads. Upon arriving, the driver offers to wait, perhaps thinking that our visit will be short like others have been. My travel companion kindly gives him our thanks and tells him there is no need for waiting. We would be walking back towards Małkinia via the ruins of the railway that once was a oneway line to death.

Spring had sprung and the day warmed up pleasantly. With the winter snows recently melting away, everything on the ground a moist dark brown. The only other people in the area are the two men selling ice cream and tickets to the museum from a little hut adjacent to the parking lot. With visits to the museum and the memorial, we quietly exchange opinions and thoughts on the non-stop slaughter during all those months. The place was nothing more than a factory of death. In the spring-time silence, with only birds singing their songs, and the nearly inaudible hum of bugs, I had found myself less capable of understanding the meaning of the place. I lift a camera to my eye in self defense. This piece of earth has an overwhelming history. And yet the place is distinctly underwhelming due to what it is today in opposition to what it was.

All one can grasp was that the soil under our feet has been once soaked in the blood back in 1943. Treblinka's gas chamber was a diesel-powered carbon

monoxide producing beast.²⁸⁵ From the fifty to sixty rail cars packed with mostly Jews entirely unaware of their impending fate. At Małkinia the trains are broken up into groups of twenty wagons and forwarded along the last eight kilometers and last hours of their lives, enduring years of humiliation and violence all along a narrowing corridor of existence, and a final deception at the fake railway station that included a fake hanging clock. From there murder would be completed within twenty minutes. Bodies thrown into open pits and buried. Nearing the end of the Treblinka as a death factory, as the Germans understand the Russian are nearing and the war coming to a disastrous end, the bodies are dug up and burned. The ground, once soaked in blood, is now covered in human ash and the soil tilled until all evidence vanishes.

Again, I lift camera to eye, make images of brown wet earth covered in rotting leaves left there from the previous autumn fall colors and the heavy winter that followed.²⁸⁶

My travelling companion and I remove our coats in the warm air, stare down the path leading towards civilization, and step slowly a from the bowels of history. The walk back is transformative. I could now wrap my exhausted mind around the concept of, as well as the reality of Treblinka, a place where my childhood nightmares seemingly had taken place.

Approaching the dilapidated bridge spanning the River Bug, I can understand the Nazi choosing such a place. Swamps to the left and to the right, an unpassable river, and finally the final kilometers leading to the final deception surrounded by forests winding in and out of the swamps. Except by the elements of nature, the bridge appears as if no one had crossed it since the day of the Nazi retreat. By 2009 the bridge is warping and rusted through and through and completely unsafe to pass over. But pass over we did. Once on the other side distant sounds from trains passing along the route from Minsk to Bialystok to Warsaw can back be heard. Arrived in Małkinia in time to buy some water and candies from a kiosk before a passenger train returns us to a modern Warsaw.

I remember these dreams battering me throughout my childhood. Had I really dreamt of such a location? How had such a dream come to me? What was heard in the confines of our house or in the homes of family friends? Or maybe

285 https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205886.pdf; (7.6.2023)

286 Jacobs, Michael Marnin. *Down a Narrowing Corridor*. 2008. A set of seven sets of sequences charting the arc of history leading into the Holocaust, from 1492-1945.

during those outings high in the mountains above the alta plano of Bogotá? This dream like heavy cumbersome luggage, held together with rope and an address Treblinka scribbled in white all over the sides.

Poland's 20th century history, from an occupied and brutalized state during the second world war to a Soviet satellite and now an uncooperative EU member state, is complicated. Treblinka is located in the Masovian Voivodeship in eastern Poland. With Poland joining in 2004 the European Union, I arrived the first time in 2008 with great trepidation. It was a different feeling of inner disquiet than the first time setting foot in Germany and Dachau 1985. Now the feeling was like landing in an ancient cauldron of bubbling dry ice from where the Nobel laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer wrote magical and unnerving stories of villages out of time and goblins turning everything upside down. Because the Nazis used Poland as their death cauldron it occupies an unusually complicated place in the Jewish psyche.

ALONG THE PATH TO THE "ROAD TO HEAVEN"

For years, that path from Małkinia Gorna to the "Road to Heaven" occupied my artistic dreams, both during the day and deep into to the midnight hours. I envisioned a return to survey the landscape, to better understand this great catastrophe. From that first visit, many things had been churning in my head and mind's eye. The walk from Treblinka back to the Małkinia train station planted the project seeds. Over time, many years, the call to this non-descript Polish neighborhood grew stronger and stronger until finally the choices were to do or to not do something about it.

A strategy session began with opening a computer, opening Google maps and Google earth, Like taking off into space in search of the big picture to make sense of an area altogether not much bigger than 42 acres (17 hectares) including the narrow corridor from the River Bug to the gates of the extermination camp. Zooming back down from space I could make out the river. The two anchoring points, markers for the two specific sets of survey imagery were located. But I could see something that made little sense, a road, the 627, a road that did not exist in 2008, passing through Małkinia, across the River Bug and passing Treblinka ending at Sokółów Podlaski, not 60 kilometers from Belarusian border. Switching to Google Earth for detailed photo-topographic imagery and what did I see? The old warping bridge seemed to be no more. There was some construction connecting both north and south sides of the river, but, from the air, it appeared as if it was one continuous well paved, brand-new road. I was astounded, astonished, angry,

confused and disappointed, asking myself, if *my* bridge was gone, the bridge proving of the remains from that period, would I have a viable project?

Choosing not the last eight kilometers, from the Malkinia Gorna junction to Treblinka, but from just prior to the River Bug to the entrance of *Road to Heaven*, the landscape of my meditation on the unimaginable.

A PLACE LIKE ANY. A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

On the way into Treblinka, the second time in 2019, an acquaintance wondered and asked why I had to travel so far just to photograph some trees. Indeed, I could have substituted some tree and use them metaphorically, as representations. I am reminded about something my father told me after he visited Spain. Across the street from the café where he sat he recognized the building where the Inquisition in Sevilla took place. My father, a man of history, and history meant Europe to him, not America. The geography of history. It democratizes space and lets the earth do its speaking. I was in need of the bushes, the grass, the sandy soil, the swamps, the trees all around Treblinka to do the speaking.

Sitting in the passenger seat staring forward as a commuter train sped by the crossing, wondering how much had the European Union invested in constructing a road, a bridge and more road that allowed traffic to pass the town and death camp of Treblinka? I had become aware these roads and River Bug bridge were EU funded when with the help of Google Streetview, I "drove" the new road from the comfort of my living room in Lapland after noticing Google had already been there. As I clicked the mouse, moving my position forward one click at a time, as if I was both in the driver's seat and some one-eyed bot with a wide field of view, far wider than any humans. I saw roads that did not exist in 2007, roads that followed the precise train line from Małkinia towards and over the River Bug bridge and onwards to Treblinka and beyond. At the southern end of the road, not far but just past Treblinka, there it was. The sign I had been searching for while "driving" my car and rotating my vision like a person rubber necking, like a tourist might, looking not for the *Jewish Heritage Site* but the *EU heritage Site*, a billboard detailing the local renewal project and sponsors list, bleaching in the hot summer sun since 2011, with only the EU flag logo cracking the white space.

After crossing over the train tracks in Małkinia we turn towards the direction of the camp. An amazing road by Polish standards. Smooth and black with nearly new asphalt. Crossing over the bridge, I forget to take notice of what had and had



Fig. 80 Bush Forrest Surrounding Treblinka Death Camp. 2019

not changed during the intervening years. The same kiosk, still standing, and, for a moment I thought the same two gentlemen were selling museum tickets and ice cream to put a bit of chill to the heat. It was early June and the temperature unseasonably hot. The short drive from Malkinia to Treblinka is confusing. eleven years earlier this site sensed completely out of time. Where there had been train tracks, now left are the levies costing the lives of tens of thousands of Poles and Jews forced into constructing an estimated nine pitiful kilometers cutting through swamps and over a river. Thirteen years later a bridge completely free of aesthetic allows cars and trucks to fly by at high speeds, slowing not at all for a sweet view of the river that travels from East to West. Oddly much of the levies are still there like a parallel universe on the east side of the nearly new route DW627. There is history for the asking.

GEOGRAPHY AND THE QUESTION OF TIME

The geography of history and specifically this geography is rather banal.

This region had plenty of swampland but has since been mostly cleared for farming. In the heat of the day I arrive to a soundscape made up of the humming of bugs, passing cars and trucks, a cow's moo in the distance, and the ruffling of leaves from wild brush and tall trees by an undulating westerly wind. The first transports to Treblinka arrived on July 23, 1942. By September 21st approximately 254,000 Jews from Warsaw and other places within the Warsaw district were murdered.²⁸⁷ ²⁸⁸ Each day at least one train of 50 to 60 cars holding between 6000 and 7000 people arrive at Malkinia station. 20 cars at a time are sent down what would later become the DW627. The remaining cars will wait for their turn to be sent down to the end of the line at the Treblinka camp.

THE TORMENTS: HEAT, THE COLD, HUNGER, THIRST, TIME.

This section of the project is not sole about the land as a physical marker of the event. What of the last hours of each one of those 900,000 victims, each one in their own time and space according to their mindset? Their eyes taking in of the world that passes by at the speed of the train that dispatches them closer and closer to oblivion. The clickety clack of the rolling wheels like an insane metronome. Did they, at first, wonder why the train from Warsaw was suddenly turning east at the Malkinia Gorna junction? What have they seen? Could they see only flatlands, pastures, a very non-descript landscape? Did they wonder as tall trees came into view with a suddenly a changing soundscape as overcrowded cattle cars traversed the length of the rickety steel bridge spanning the River Bug? And what of their reaction as the train turns onto a spur pushing its way through a sunken path with forests on either side scraping the wagons like the devil's nails on a chalkboard. Was it comforting to be hugged by the forest? Was it intimate or terrorizing? Or out of understanding?

To better appreciate how many people get to see only once this piece of forested real estate, an estimated 300,000 people are deported from the Warsaw

²⁸⁷ https://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205886.pdf; (10.6.2023)

²⁸⁸ Browning, Christopher R., Heyes, Peter, and Hilberg, Raul. German Railroads. Jewish Souls. The Reichsbahn Bureaucracy, And the Final Solution. Berghan Books. 2020. p.

Ghetto to Treblinka during a three-week period, from the end of July to the later part of September, with a one week break from the 28th of August through the 3rd of September.²⁸⁹

And what of the days in the summer months when temperatures easily exceeding 30°C and no water provided? And what of winter when the only heat is from the mass of bodies crammed together as the train trudges through snow a meter deep?

The warmest months for the Warsaw region are June through August with average temperatures hovering around 24°C. On the days spending hours photographing in Treblinka the temperature rose to 33°C. The condition in those rail cars all through those summer months could only be described as horrific. Even in the icy cold of winter the torture of a lack of water is on equal to a lack of food. The torment from both those was two from the endless list of humiliations the Nazis and their collaborators insisted upon.

289 Rees, Laurence. 2017. *The Holocaust. A New History*. Penguin Books. p. 305

Fig. 81 Collected Luggage. Auschwitz Museum 2019



Paraphrasing Carlo Rovelli: Who are the timekeepers? Angels, mathematicians, the devil?²⁹⁰ What is the character of time when one has no knowledge of the coming hours or minutes? A people fed lies for so long who are only left with something called hope, as if hope is the magic wand that extends time itself. It is that last kilometer, from the place when the spur ends at the gates of the false railway station, clock and all, and ultimately to their final destination *The Road to Heaven*, that has had me stumped, that makes me wonder if I understand time at all. A torment that goes along with hunger and thirst, time. That is to say, time without a set of predictable anchors like train schedules with known destinations and assigned arrival times. What is to make of being forced to pack belongings in only minutes with no knowledge of any kind other than do it or be done in, as most people understood while being angrily barked by black leather clad gestapo agents and their hired help.

Once in Treblinka, as in Auschwitz, all property brought along is left to be sorted as the doomed are hurriedly rushed into the camp area, undressed, valuables collected, heads shaved and rushed again into the waiting gas chambers. Within fifteen minutes from the closing and locking of the iron doors all will be dead. Between the collected and catalogued lists of the deported and the names and addresses inscribed on luggage is all that remain of their names and lives.

July of 1944, Israel Abelezs, experienced first-hand the fate of the Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz, of which nearly 437,402 were transported on 147 transports to their deaths in 56 days from May 15th to July 9th, 1944.²⁹¹ Over time, having avoided the initial selections (to the gas chambers), it became increasingly evident that death was going to be the only departure. “In my experience there was no hysterics. The people accepted fatalistically what’s going to happen to them. There was no screaming.” “Otherwise, what is to scream? To whom do you scream?”²⁹²

As is very well known, at Treblinka, all confiscated (read stolen) property is stored in the fake railway station that is made to fool the unaware condemned. Goods deemed of value, basically all goods, are reloaded onto the same railways cars that brought the mass to their final destination. The wagons would then return to Warsaw, goods transferred to trains destined for Germany all the while as bodies pulled out of the gas chambers, checked for gold teeth or other hidden valuables,

290 Rovelli, Carlo. *The Order of Time*. Riverhead Books. 2018. p. 59

291 <https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/special-focus/the-holocaust-in-hungary/the-holocaust-in-hungary-frequently-asked-questions;> (12.6.2023)

292 Rees, Laurence. 2017. *The Holocaust. A New History*. Penguin Books. p. 386

are move to the cremation pyres and set alight. The same would take place over and over again. On a *normal* day 15,000 people are murdered. At full capacity, after additional and more efficient gas chambers are installed, full capacity could reach 22,000 to 25,000 people per day.²⁹³

Treblinka was an extermination camp. Its sole purpose to eliminate Jews and steal their property. Imagine you are given only those 30 minutes to gather things for a purpose without definition, possibly given some vague idea of something about relocation. Something, maybe nothing at all. Already those in the ghetto understand they have no say in any matter whatsoever. But the months and years in the ghetto only squeeze their world into the limits between living and dying, between life and death. The ghettos of Radom, Czestochowa, Lvov, Tarnow and Krakow, to name but a few, are sucked dry of everything until all that is left are those alive enough to be herded into aging cattle cars with barbed wire for windowpanes. All trains servicing the armies of the Third Reich are given the right of way. All other trains interfering with the heavy traffic towards the east stop, wait on a siding until there is a clear path to the next destination which could, and often was, another siding and further waiting. The trains are guarded around the clock by soldiers with dogs.

The first transports arriving in Treblinka arrive in July, the hottest Polish month of the year. Even as short a journey as from Warsaw to Treblinka might last days. No water, no food, excruciating heat during daylight hours, the darkness at night turning the cattle car into the loneliest place on earth. The push and pull and rattle of the old wagons adds torment to the journey that moves at a snail's pace into environments few have witnessed before.

Trains either destined for Treblinka via Małkinia or Siedlce travel on the main line at speeds of 50 to 60 kilometers per hour. But from Małkinia over the iron bridge at the River Bug, to the rail spur leading into Treblinka station, a short 8 kilometers, the speed are be dramatically slower. That last kilometer through a tight swath cut through dense forest and brush, so tight it would have been like the forest squeezing the last of life out of that nearly dead cargo. The majority of Jewish communities in Poland were not located near forests.²⁹⁴ The forest was, in some senses, foreign territory. "*There were no forests in the ghettos.*"²⁹⁵

293 Sumler, David E. (1 January 1973). *A history of the Twentieth Century*. Dorsey Press. p. 250. ISBN 0-256-01421-3. Retrieved 1 November 2013.

294 Bauer, Yehuda. *Rethinking the Holocaust*. 2001. Yale University Press. p. 141

295 Death camp Treblinka. *Survivors Stories*. 2012 BBC. Time stamp; 13.42

By now time would have felt endless. Once out of the wagons they might've looked back from where they came, both in disbelief at everything with utterly no idea of their impending fate. Turning away from the past they walk away from the forest and into Hell.

How does time work inside that *inner world*? When there is little or no stress and little to do, time can feel slow and endless. When we are in a rush to get to a known destination time feels fast and full. A child's day at the park or by a river or simply at play might feel like time has no end. In a packed cattle car with no cattle except humans of all ages, thrown together, locked up, mostly standing as there is little room, wondering what of the *what next*. Children search in their parent's eyes for signs of security. Adults are left anchorless without words for the children or one other. In reading or listening to survivor oral histories from the transports and the camps, one thing is common to most if not all is the need for hope. But what is hope based on? Without knowledge of destination or the familiarity with a journey end, what becomes of the mind? What happens to the mind when time itself loses its structure?

A powerlessness, powerless to change trains, to change directions, negotiate an alternative route, to negotiate towards a common solution, to the benefit of all. Beginning in 1933 the Jews of Germany find themselves struggling with a chipping away of common rights, only getting worse as the years plod on. By 1938 phenomenal decisions are being made under impossible duress. For Germany Jews, they have lived and worked amongst the middle class, participating in all aspects of society including service in the armed forces. Only now it is all gone and their world is upside down. Decisions are made and quickly, if at all possible. For those without economic means and those incapable of understanding the gravity of the situation, their destination is inevitable (to us). (fig. 31 A final look back. Treblinka. 2019)

Those unable to be hurried along the "*Road to Heaven*" are escorted to the *Lazarett*, which is no sickbay but a killing and dumping ground. Bullet to the back of the head. In the course of a *normal day* up to 15,000 men, woman and children are murdered. Their bodies transferred to open air burning pits. Those being rushed into the gas chambers have no view to the pits and no idea of their fate. Only the Sonderkommando has complete knowledge.

Franz Suchomel²⁹⁶ interviewed by Claude Lanzmann²⁹⁷:

FS: The new gas chambers were built in September 1942.

CL: Who built them?

FS: Hackenhold²⁹⁸ and Lambert²⁹⁹ supervised the Jews who did the work, the bricklaying at least. Ukrainian carpenters made the doors. The gas chamber doors themselves were armored bunker doors. I think they were brought from Bialystok, from some Russian bunkers.

CL: What was the capacity of the new gas chambers? There were two of them, right?

FS: Yes, but the old ones hadn't been demolished. When there were a lot of trains, a lot of people, the old ones were put back in service. And here ... The Jews say there were five on each side. I say there were four, but I'm not sure. In any case, only the upper row on this side was in action.

CL: Why not the other side?

FS: Disposing of the bodies would have been too complicated.

CL: Too far?

FS: Yes, up there Wirth had built the death camp, assigning a detail of Jewish workers to do it. The detail had a fixed number in it, around two hundred people, who worked only in the death camp.

296 Franz Suchomel participated in the Operation Reinhard Action T4 euthanasia program as well as the Einsatzgruppen actions in the Adriatic operational zone. He was convicted at the Treblinka trials in September 1965 and spent four years in prison.

297 Claude Lanzmann, French writer and filmmaker. Directed Shoah and other documentaries concerning events surrounding the Holocaust (1925–2018).

298 Lorenz Hackenhold, participated in the T4 euthanasia program and built and operated the gas chamber at Bełżec, Poland.

299 Erwin Herman Lambert. With the rank of rank of SS-Unterscharführer (corporal), supervised the construction and operation of the Aktion T4 euthanasia programs in Hartheim, Sonnestein, Bernburg, Hadamar and finally the extermination camps at Sobibór and Treblinka. He specialized in building larger gas chambers that killed more people than previous efforts in the extermination program. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erwin_Lambert; (7.01.2023)

CL: But what was the capacity of the new gas chamber?

FS: The new gas chamber...let's see...they could finish off three thousand people in two hours.

CL: How many people at once in a single gas chamber?

FS: I can't say exactly. The Jews say two hundred.

CL: Two hundred?

FS: That's right, two hundred. Imagine a room this size.

CL: They put more in at Auschwitz.

FS: Auschwitz was a factory.

CL: And Treblinka?

FS: I'll give you my definition. Keep this in mind! Treblinka was a primitive but efficient production line of death.

CL: A production line?

FS: of death...Understand?

CL: Yes, but primitive?

FS: Primitive, yes. But it worked well, that production line of death.³⁰⁰

300 Lanzmann, Claude. 1995. Shoah. Da Capo Press. p. 51-53

8. ACROSS THE ATLANTIC TO THE PACIFIC



Fig. 82 George Segal. *Holocaust* 1984. Sculpture near San Francisco Bay

Located on what might be considered San Francisco's choicest piece of property sits a sculpture by George Segal entitled *Holocaust Memorial* in Lincoln Park, next to the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. The Legion of honor, as the local citizens refer to it, is a fine arts museum's museum. The entrance leaves all incomers shaking their heads and mimicking the statue, a Rodin Thinker, in full size, one of the forty out there in the world (plenty more Thinker memes out there more than are worth counting), thinking and not raising its tired head looking out to the north beyond the Golden Gate Bridge. The thinker is thinking, and it makes many of us think as well. At a diagonal towards the sea, appropriately fenced in, is the Segal. The first time peering down from a stone railing it felt as if the wind got knocked out. At that time, I lacked knowledge enough to absorb it yet too much to turn away from it. San Francisco has a sizeable Jewish population. Many are second, third and fourth generation American Jews. My mother's Torah clique, and from time to time her kaffeeklatch companions, mostly Jews having emigrated from Russia early in the 20th century. For many, including my mother, the sculpture by George Segal was correct and necessary. For my mother it represented a vindication against lies. A modern city, as far from Europe as one could get, still has people traumatized by the loss of family members and by the knowledge of those Holocaust events.

In our San Francisco home the potential for anti-Semitic aggression never arises as a topic of discussion. Home was home. I don't recall we had a mezuzah³⁰¹, giving us away. But puberty and anti-Semitism made for a strange brew. Was I aware the problem was not of my making? It was like, we are Jewish, so? The struggles in the Middle East made my father very uneasy. My mother often expressed anger at the entire conflict. My parents never visited Israel. Once, late in my mother's life, asked why they had not gone, even once? My mother's response:

301 Mezuzah. מְזוּזָה The Hebrew word mezuzah means "doorpost." According to tradition, the mezuzah is to be affixed to the doorpost at the entrance to a Jewish home as well as at the entrance to each of the interior rooms except for bathrooms. The mezuzah itself consists of a small scroll of parchment (k'laf) on which are written two biblical passages. The first and second passages are from; Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Deuteronomy 11:13–21. <https://reformjudaism.org/beliefs-practices/lifecycle-rituals/what-mezuzah-why-and-how-do-we-use-it> (8.2.2023)

“why?” as her head rocked side to side, I believe, expressing her disappointment with so much trouble over religion, land, and ugly politics. Her father had been an active socialist. She, inheriting that tradition, never rejecting her leftist Jewish New York outlook. At the time, the left-wing of the political spectrum was prominent amongst the majority of Jews in most economic classes.

I believe my mother passed away as a devout atheist Jew. Religion itself played no part in her life, especially after my father died. It was his role to light the Hanukkah candles. To my mother it was all the same. During the depression she, her parents, and relatives of her mothers, had all live together under the same roof in their tiny Lower East Side apartment. The uncle was devoutly orthodox and, as such, claimed one entire room for himself, for his books and for his studies. In conversation, my mother would raise this up with me so often I finally asked her what the problem was. She simply felt this religious man should share the burden of living equally. My maternal grandmother I never really knew. I understood she was quite the feminist and was unhappy even that her daughter wanted to marry. What influence this had on my mother’s philosophical and political outlook I am unable to say for sure, but I have a pretty good idea.

Between August of 1969 and late January 1995, our Judaism, as we lived it, was comfortable for us. The Holocaust was essentially a non-topic. Not by decree and not even by understanding. It was of the past. That is, until one fateful evening during my 11th grade year in High School, returning from some evening school event only finding my mother riveted to the television and a program about Jewish history, concentrating specifically on the Holocaust and the mass displacement which followed. My mother, indicating I should join her, after which my Jewish innocence was no more. The documentary covers everything beginning from the rise of Nazism, the anti-Semitic laws, the transports, the killings, including graphic footage from Mengele’s experiments.³⁰² Sitting silently, absorbing what we could, finally calling up the courage to ask why we weren’t told of this? I often

302 Recently, in retrospect, I have wondered about all the documentation of Mengele and his team’s work. Hammer butts to head, shock treatment, high altitude and deep-sea pressure experimentation. Even discussing the castration experiments (addresses in the British film, KB-7). There are but three photographs from Auschwitz secretly taken by prisoners who stole a camera, a camera most likely owned by someone who went through the gas chamber. Nobody was allowed to photograph inside the camps. This applied to all the Nazi camps. But inside of Mengele’s torture chamber in Block 10 movie film cameras and lights recorded much of his dirty work.

wonder still how little seems to have been taught about the Holocaust in secondary school. Maybe I absent from class that day? Never have I seen such graphic documentation and film imagery of the Holocaust on television, or, for that matter, anywhere since. Even YouTube manages to filter all the Holocaust ugly out. I have been told that in Yad Vashem, under very strict supervision, that material is available for research. The experience viewing this, and with my mother, whose father lost his entire family to the Nazis was overwhelming. It didn’t change our household Judaism, but it did rattle my mother deeply. Yet a general silence about the Holocaust remained as before, leaving me dwelling to this day on what we had seen together silently that night.

In San Francisco I visit Segal’s memorial always. I am very pleased it is there. Not everybody is though, certainly at the outset of the planning phase for the memorial howls are heard from all quarters. From the Jewish Bulletin, dated 2 November, 1984, came the following; OUR COVER STORY: Holocaust memorial in S.F. Controversy shadows dedication.³⁰³ The trouble is directly related to the artwork itself. Other issues are the location, the possibilities of anti-Semitic acts, and over whether it represents a Jewish or universal statement. The sculpture is first suggested in 1977. By 1983 the sculpture, not yet displayed is creating controversies between the two coasts. New York art dealer, Lydia Titcomb refers to it as “disgusting”. While in San Francisco itself, Thomas Albright, San Francisco Chronicle art critic writes that it is “something out of the Chamber of Horrors in the Wax Museum at Fisherman’s Wharf.”³⁰⁴

When Segal began designing the monument, he said, he took into account “full flesh, starvation death, brutality and other levels. I wanted to evoke the woe-fulness of the theme a heap of corpses, barbed wire and a solitary survivor.”³⁰⁵ Two things to mention here. One, it did not take long for the sculpture to find its place within the minds of San Franciscans. The second thing, What Segal succeeded in doing was making it clear, the tragedy of the Holocaust was a world-wide affair, not something that occurred on a minuscule plot of land somewhere far off. That sculpture taught me what my parents were unable to.

303 J. The Jewish News of Northern California, Volume 132, Number 43, 2 November 1984

304 The Chronicle (Hearst) One of the two general readership daily newspapers in the San Francisco Bay Area at the time.

305 California Digital Newspaper Collection. Jewish News of Northern California. The Jewish News of Northern California, Volume 132, Number 43, 2 November 1984 <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/?a=d&d=JW19841102.2.2&c=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-----> (16.6.2023)

9. THE BIRTH OF THE JEWISH HERITAGE SITE

It has been in front of me, spread out and obvious, only never recognizing it all these years. It neither occurred to me during or after visiting Dachau, not at any of the little Holocaust monuments spread across Germany and Europe, like a village fountain in Göttingen. “There is a tourist-industry concept, popular in places largely devoid of Jews, called “Jewish Heritage Site.” Dara Horn’s *People Love Dead Jews, Reports From a Haunted Past*, delves early in the book, directly into questions getting little to no coverage. Summing up the issue in this way; “Jewish Heritage” is a phrase that sounds utterly benign. It is much better than “Property Seized from Dead or Expelled Jews”.³⁰⁶ Horn is provocative because she’s angry, and she is angry because of the absurdity of nearly everything that regenerates anti-Semitism, that has no basis in fact, but everything that has accumulated under the flag of the Jewish Question is based on lies that are not allowed to quit.

“These non-Jewish and their benevolent governments have chosen to maintain this cemetery or renovate this synagogue or create a museum purely out of respect for the Jews who once lived here (and who, for unstated reasons, no longer do).” “But still, you can’t but feel uncomfortable, and finally helpless, as you engage in the exact inverse of what Benjamin of Tuleda once did: instead of traveling the world, you are visiting their graves.”³⁰⁷ But these are not your ordinary graves.

³⁰⁶ Horn, Dara, p. 23

³⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 23

Jewish communities across Europe, being emptied and forced into ghettos, many Jewish cemeteries desecrated, headstones finding new purposes for roads or simply defaced and knocked over. After the war’s end, over time, most cemeteries fall into disrepair as there is no longer a community to care of its dead. As far afield as Iłża, Poland and Holešov, Czechia, and tens of thousands of other cemeteries spread across the entirety of the Europe, the Nazis find holes in which to enter, and most from all that remain are abandoned lots. In Iłża it took three tries before the cemetery was located. Trees reaching outstretched into the light above, growing tall and straight are all that remain within the cemetery boundary walls. Iłża is a typically sad case, the headstones all disappeared along with the entire the Jewish community, and with the help of the Polish police, all that can be found are rounded up in December of 1941. The estimated 2000 Iłża Jews are ultimately gassed in Treblinka in October of 1942.³⁰⁸

Fig. 83 Abandoned Jewish Cemetery, Iłża, Poland. 2008



³⁰⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iłża> (10.6.2022)

In some villages today, when asking the whereabouts of the Jewish cemetery, answers prove disquieting. In Wojslawice, southeastern Poland, the question is answered with a question. “Which one, the cemetery or the mass grave?”³⁰⁹ After all, not all Jews were murdered in the camps. The entirety of Europe is a mass grave, pock marked landscape going back hundreds of years. Mass graves dating from the 1930’s through 1945, with pogroms taking place well into 1946 in Kielce, Poland, are directly connected to the events of the 20th century Nazi doctrine. The better part of eastern Europe and many parts of the west are littered with unattended to, forgotten and/or paved-over Jewish cemeteries.

Going as far back as the 16th century Holešov, a tiny Czech village in Moravia, had a Jewish presence. By 1942 what remain are a Šach synagogue³¹⁰ and a cemetery hidden in dried, neck-high grass with most of the original headstones still intact yet barely visible. The “new” synagogue, built in 1893, is destroyed by the Nazis in the same year as its ancient Jewish population.³¹¹

There are numerous kinds of Jewish Historical Sites, ghettos, cemeteries, Synagogues, ancient villages. Countless historical sites are located across not only Europe-wide but in nearly every land from the Caucasus through to the Middle East and North Africa, from Spain and Portugal and across the Atlantic, from the very North of the Americas all the way to the tip of the southern Hemisphere, back across the planet to Turkey, India and even China. In every one of these places Jews have settled, lived, built communities and hounded and/or hounded out. In many of these places they have been subject to abject violence and murder. In one of these places 80% of the Yiddish speaking community is subject to an assembly line of death. Yet today, in many of these places, there are statues, plaques, monuments, synagogues, some in ruins and some restored. There are stories from all these places. Usually, stories of a vibrant Jewish community living in peace or, at the very least, manageable harmony alongside others. But then something happens. In most cases laws are enacted limiting living, limiting education and work, limiting participation in the greater community. Once property seizure begins it was only a matter of time to pack and go, if there is the means and the where with all to do so. This story is repeated so often it is of no surprise considering how few Jews there are in the world, how few Jews have been in the world, that the world

309 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/not-forgotten-mass-graves-of-jewish-holocaust-victims-dedicated-in-poland/> (2.3.2022)

310 A Polish style synagogue looking from the outside like an ordinary building.

311 <http://holesov.jinak.cz/zide.php?zide=synagoga&menu=2> (7.4.2022)



Fig. 84 Abandoned Cemetery, Holesov, Czechia. 2015

is like a random collection of dots, often red from struggle, where once thrived or at least existed a Jewish community. When connecting these dots it reveals a web that girdles the globe.

In Göttingen, Germany, somewhere between Hamburg and Munich, walking the streets in the city center I came upon a sculpture commemorating Kristallnacht. One could sit underneath a spiraling Star of David at the Platz Der Synagoge and eat a sandwich or simply meditate on both the sculpture and tragedy of that night and the horror that ensued. I took notice, passers-by sitting for a rest on a hot summer day, but do they consider the meaning of the monument? Or is this just another place whose intentions have long passed into the passive where one’s more pressing and daily concerns occupy the mind?



Fig. 85 Auschwitz-Birkenau. 2019

From this town, from so many such towns like this, men, women and children yanked from their lives and funneled via satellite camps into planetary sized hells within Germany and beyond. Towns like this fell silent from fear and shrinking populations, leaving behind homes and property. What deportees could carry was all that physically left these communities (though much of it finding its way back into German society, mysteriously).

THE DREADED FIRST DEATH CAMP VISIT

Arriving two days later in Dachau and I'm begging for tears, but none come. Scanning the area, searching for the past, but finding nothing really except plenty of text and objects in the museum. Today I barely recall that visit to Dachau excepting for the constant question that rolled in my mind, what would my parents think if they knew I visited this place? Years later in Auschwitz I walked in a stunned silence.

By the time I arrived at the "Road to Heaven" in Treblinka I don't cry but I know it is time for a re-assessment this history on my history. To be in Iłża, in Iłża's long-silent cemetery, is to understand that, yes, on one hand, it is a Jewish Heritage

Site. This one, one of an unknown number of not abandoned cemeteries but of places ripped violently of their heritage. It is hard to know that if the Holocaust had, in fact, not taken place, how many of these communities would still be viable in the modern age. Throughout the world in the post-war period the cities have grown in size and importance while smaller communities, drained of opportunity and community, have silently dried up. This is what I call abandonment. Jewish communities, both large and small, are stripped of existence by casting off into oblivion all present generations and consequently future generations. The meaning of these cemeteries has changed. Now they might be tourist destinations.

TREBLINKA, A PLACE OUT OF SPACETIME

Treblinka, the village today, is mostly farmers and pensioners and perhaps the few people that operate the Treblinka Museum, ticket booth and kiosk. It is not much more than a stone's throw from Warsaw, yet a world apart. On my first encounter with Treblinka in 2008, my friend Eric and I were the only visitors during those two to three hours. Years later, in 2019, in early June, numerous busloads of Israelis and their guides came, laid wreathes and flags, walked around and left. Treblinka could be to Warsaw what Auschwitz is to Krakow.³¹² Treblinka is to the Holocaust what a black hole is to spacetime, a place where nothing escapes, and time does not and didn't exist. The doors to the gas chamber are, for Jews, the event horizon. The singularity, unobservable in physics, is neither observable in the Holocaust as anybody that had the misfortune to enter did not return to be cared for by a younger generation. There is no older or younger generation to commune on the past, present and future. This is what the Nazis intended for each and every Jew, anywhere on this planet of ours, to be reduced to even less than nothing.

But from this black hole comes radiation emanating from the abyss of the Holocaust, an invisible churning wave never ceasing to weaken within those of us who are endlessly walking into it. The build-up to the Holocaust was a slow and plodding affair, setting off on its pace long, long ago with some centuries worse, some centuries better. Each edict, each anti-Semitic law, with each violent uprising, the path towards the abyss to killing fields and gas chambers in the 20th century has been prepared with their books used against them as if they walked down the *Road to Heaven* on the bone, stone and the words of their forefathers. And this they knew but could not believe.

³¹² The Krakow Ghetto does not have the same resonance as the Warsaw Ghetto for known historical reasons.

AUSCHWITZ

Some days later, early in the morning, I am standing on the rails at the entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Is there anything one can add to anything to do with Auschwitz? In its name is only revulsion. This raises a question; for non-Jews, what could be the meaning of the Holocaust? The day spent in Auschwitz is brutally hot. Everybody seems to wilt in the heat. Yet they wait patiently in line to enter the mother of all Jewish Heritage Site. All through the day, busloads of tourists, speaking a universe of languages, streaming through the gates to Auschwitz II-Birkenau, some with guides describing the commotion that would've taken place on any such day as train carriages packed with people shipped from near and far places, are forcibly emptied.

Teenagers, dressed more likely for a day at the beach, stare at their phones while little children run about, oblivious to the history. Adults try to hear what their guides are saying over the din of every other group and guide. The cacophony is astonishing but nothing like between the years 1940 through 1945. As a Jew it is disorienting to be Auschwitz, wondering if all these people are really interested in history or acting as spectators to the horrors of the past. Of course, not wishing to question the intentions of the millions of visitors to Auschwitz every year, but it is a challenge.

Before Covid-19, Auschwitz ranked amongst the most visited sights in all of Poland. In 2019, I was one amongst 2,320,000 visitors daring to trudge through the mystery and disgust of the place.³¹³ The statistics do not reveal the percentages of Jews to Gentiles. So, what is it that people come to see? Is a factory of forced labor, of medical inquiry and torture, extermination, more interesting than Henry Ford's first automobile factory or the modern American slaughterhouse?

Surely when tourists, Jewish or otherwise, visit the picturesque Polish village Kazimierz Dolny, they depart feeling relieved. Relieved that such a place exists and still retains the quaintness from an earlier, pre-war time. The cemetery on the hillside is a wonder to everybody, Jew and non-Jew alike. The place gives off a feeling of apology. It is difficult to explain.

The Jewish population of Kazimierz Dolny, upon arrival of the Nazis in September of 1939, were forced to build roads with the headstones from that same cemetery up on the hill. Those stones that survived were transformed into a memorial wall to the Jews of Kazimierz Dolny and to the whole catastrophe.

313 <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/2-million-320-thousand-visitors-at-the-auschwitz-memorial-in-2019,1400.html> (25.6.2022)



Fig. 86 *Abandoned Cemetery, Kazimierz Dolny, Poland. 2019*

but suddenly the light
i was suddenly speechless
suddenly i froze
but only suddenly
it was joyous and sudden
and then
suddenly
sad

that beautiful light, like an apology, didn't last long though.

KLEZMER OR KITCH

Klezmer music, like the Yiddish language, is a conglomeration of influences and is finding its way back into a nearly Jew-free world. In the US, klezmer music was experiencing a revival already in the 1970's. By the early 2000's a Jewish presence in Poland was experiencing itself some kind of revival, not in terms Jewish immigration but in Jewish culture. Klezmer music, the music of the Ashkenazi Jews, Jews from the Pale of Settlements, played and danced to at weddings and other social events. Klezmer, both a music of rejoicing and of lament. Its structure more than mimics the ups and downs of Jewish Shtetl life. Klezmer was the heartbeat in song for the Jew from the east.

An announcement of a klezmer festival coming to Kazimierz catches my attention. Could klezmer and a Jewish world in Poland be revived or was there some contrition in the works?

The current Jewish revival in Europe has been both applauded and scorned. I still sit on the fence of opinion over this. Encountering the *klezmer in Kazimierz Dolny* I find it to be in somewhat poor taste. It hits a nerve. I inquire if the musicians are Jewish, if they speak Yiddish, and so on. I am assured they mean well. But what is the meaning behind this? Anyway, could such a festival of music have existed before the war? Certainly, a Jewish theater would have had a secure place within the community. But there is an actual Jewish cultural and immigrational revival in Europe taking place both in Germany and Poland. It has its supporters and detractors. The sticking point (for me) is if there really is any humility and respect behind the cultural revival considering that much of it does not stem from an actual Jewish community. Can this be classified as some kind of cultural appropriation or an honest expression of contrition?

The Holocaust did not smite the Jew nor anti-Semitism in either of these two nations or in any parts of Europe, or, for that matter, any place on the globe. So, as a Jew, should I embrace and support this revival? Having met no Jewish tourists in Kazimierz Dolny I won't speak for others, only for myself. I still have genuine troubles understanding if I was just a tourist in Kazimierz Dolny, enjoying the quaintness of this age-old vacation destination or a Jewish person nervously returning to be reminded of loss. How many lenses could cover my own optics in the situation? Do all Jews experience this dislocation?



Fig. 87 Klezmer Festival Announcement, Kazimierz Dolny. 2019

IO. ARTIST JEW ~ JEWISH ARTIST

The weight of history is like pulling wheeled luggage, the goods neatly folded, rarely opened but with a presence understood, possibly accepted, possibly not. Or perhaps somewhat akin to a ball and chain, forever dragging down the passage to time. For others the weight lays heavy squarely on shoulders, knees buckling under the weight and balance challenged by an intractable load. When I was young and my body strong, I could moderately and mostly successfully ignore the burden. Time is a body wrecker. The body bruised is a body and mind aware.

I have asked, if just rhetorically, is this my life's work? Must all artists, Jewish by heritage, whether practicing or not, adhere an unofficial requirement dictating that artists who happen to be Jewish must create artwork on anything relating to Jews? As a Jewish person, an Ashkenaz Jew, a Jew of Eastern European decent, am I obliged to direct my creative abilities and energy towards the subject of anything and all Jewish? Would I be any less of a creative artist if I pointed my camera at flowers, the human body or towards the trees in my local landscape? And what of racism, sexual, social and economic inequality? What about climate change? The list of subject matter is endless. I've wondered if all Jews in the arts, in whatever area of the creative arts, suffer from this same syndrome.

Of course, the same question could be and is asked from North Americans of African descent, or from any community that has suffered unacceptable indignities. Artists are the sum of their parts. It is possible that without these parts, either in being unaware of them or having rejected them, I would either have found other subject matter or not have found art at all.

But I raise this issue knowing my own ongoing struggle with Shoah's place in my sense of self, sense of family and senses revealed through artistic expression. There are artists both Jewish and non-Jewish who feel the call to the subject. Some will devote one or two projects and then 'free' themselves of further obligations. Others will keep at it like working a block of clay in search of new ideas and/or forms, or they might encounter the inability to disconnect or sever themselves from the Holocaust trauma itself or purely out of the need to understand more.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE JEW: *For Posterities Sake*

"Who can resist the lure of the past?", asks Elie Wiesel.³¹⁴ So much of photographic art created by Jewish artists address the past. This is not just because in a paradoxical way photography, an act of preserving the present, addresses the past. But because for Jews, the past, is both a mirror and a window into the future. The past always weighs very heavy and to take a cross section of art from artists known to be Jewish, the unusually wide variety of approaches to subject matter could be indicative of the sheer emotional, not nostalgic, weight the past influences on artist's determination to understand the consequences of history. Art is always viewed in the present; therefore, the past is like a stiff wind we struggle against.

The great French photographer Eugene Atget (1857-1927) knew the modern world would irrevocably change Paris as much of its history was being wiped away before his eyes. With heavy camera, tripod and film, down every street, avenue, alley, cul-de-sac in and around Paris, in a rush as place after place was being stripped away. Roman Vishniac (1897-1990) did the same, receiving a commission from the JDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) in 1935 to photograph Jewish settlements across Europe with the intension of helping these impoverished communities. The character of the photography Vishniac made are within the ethnographic tradition.³¹⁵ Based in Berlin his travels continued from 1936 through 1938 when it became impossible for him to continue. According to the I.C.P. (International Center of Photography) with over ten thousand negatives it is "the most extensive photographic record, by any single photographer, of Jewish

314 Wiesel, Elie. Forward written for Roman Vishniac, *A Vanished World*. Schocken Books. 1947

315 Shneer, David. *Through Soviet Jewish Eyes. Photography, War and the Holocaust*. 2011. Rutgers. p. 66

life in Central and Eastern Europe before the Holocaust.”³¹⁶ The photographs are a wide-open window into a world at the cliff’s edge, on the cusp of oblivion. The photographs from this period are all that remain of these people and that world, including the property itself. The book’s title tells it all, *A Vanished World*. It could also be titled *a vanquished world* considering that the Jews as the Nazis mortal enemies gave reason to go to war against them, one and all.

Unlike Atget, Vishniac carried only small and medium format German made 35mm Leica and Rolleiflex cameras, working up close and intimately, often in poorly lit environments and even under candlelight. The work diligently done during those years, taking down names and stories from each of his subjects, is breathtaking. In *A Vanished World*, Roman Vishniac has five pages of commentary on the photographs. For the *People of the Book*, religious, pious Jews, commentary as a path to deeper understanding of religious texts, is essential. That Vishniac prefaces with commentary the collection of photographs with detailed explanation and opinion helps the reader understand what remains invisible. “If I am to breathe life into the pictures that follow, it is by providing you, the reader, with my thoughts about them. The pictures depict people and places that no longer exist, yet in my memory they do exist.”³¹⁷ And here Roman Vishniac implies that every person and, possibly, every place photographed during those years have vanished and vanished violently.

Page after page in *A Vanished World*, photographs recall images of poverty and destitution from previous years, like Jacob Riis’s New York slums and tenement dwellers in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) and Lewis Hine’s child laborers in the glassworks and amongst the cotton mills workers (1913). Riis’ photographs made monumental impacts on inner city development towards a manageable urban existence and Hine’s photographs ended up forcing the United States Congress to enact and implement child labor laws across the land that sadly precariously apply today. Roman Vishniac’s photographs probably saved no lives but the memories of a people in their place, embedded in silver halides, a modern kind of amber. The likes of Riis and Hine, and many others, found a determined purpose to influence and generate awareness of the human condition via the camera. Vishniac knew very well that for the Jews of the Pale, for the Jews

316 Opening the Roman Vishniac Archive. Jackson Krule. The New Yorker. 2014. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/roman-vishniac-digital-archive>. (5.12.2022)

317 Roman Vishniac, *A Vanished World*. 1947 Schocken Books. From commentary (page unnumbered)

throughout Europe and possibly the rest of the world, their lives were being pressed into impossible and inhuman conditions.

On page 3, a portrait of a village elder, a man with a heavy and long whitened beard, his right hand clutching a cane, his head resting against his open left hand, and staring into and through Roman Vishniac’s camera, directly at me. I don’t need to wonder what became of him. This amazing photograph, made in 1938, tell us the odds that he lived to see 1945 are not worth calculating. Yet, I wonder about him. A pious man, surely knowing the abyss is near, he surely knows his history which is the history of the Jews. Roland Barthes, in his monumental philosophical study of photography in *Camera Lucida*, embraces a tender portrait by André Kertész of a boy in a classroom standing next to his desk. It is titled *My Friend, Ernest*, and dates from 1931 (Paris). Barthes makes us stare into the boy’s accepting eyes and asks us to wonder if the boy “is still alive today (but where? How? What a novel!)”.³¹⁸ I hold the image of the wise aged man close my heart I wish to believe he could have ended up elsewhere, safe, still able to dispense his honest wisdom to all ages and generations. The way Barthes projects the potential of Ernest’s future at us makes it conceivable the boy did indeed find his way and a good life was had after all. Kertész was Jewish. Was this boy in his classroom Jewish? If so, Ernest’s fate very well could have been the same miserable fate as Vishniac’s wise elder.

The Second of the Ten Commandments prohibits graven images. In theory even a two-dimensional non-abstract image could be ‘worshipped’ and therefore against G__’s commandment. Many great photographers have been Jewish. The list is long and grows uninterrupted. Roman Vishniac, Jewish, fluent in Yiddish, allowing him to photograph amongst his people undeterred. Religious Jews, then and now, reject the camera precisely because of the Second Commandment. Yet, for Vishniac, everything happening to the Jews during those time, boycotts of Jewish businesses, laws against Jewish labor amongst the gentiles, in housing, education, in essentially all aspects of life, only make him work harder to be allowed to practice his art. We are very lucky we have had such people amongst us willing and determined to see their duty through. That gentle candlelight, lent by Rembrandt to Vishniac, illuminating the wise elder with enough reflection off his skin, white beard, wrinkled hands, and dark wool overcoat to be able to capture one exposure on film. I believe this elderly gentleman knew very well his days were numbered allowing for the commandment to be broken. We do not worship

318 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida. Reflections On Photography*. Flamingo. 1984. p. 84

this image. It is not graven. We peer at it with an unsettled astonishment because of its sheer beauty and unrelenting sadness.

All photographs from a certain period where humans are present can be understood in certain ways. The environments may or may not have changed but those humans whose photographic presence ensures us that they once existed amongst the world of breath and emotions. This, of course, implies they are no longer among us. When we know for sure that those photographed are no longer with us, we look at such images and are reminded of their life and our loss. This purely photographic paradox is experienced by everybody on this planet who have photographs of loved ones on the mantelpiece or in some household altar. Roland Barthes dissected this paradox using what is essentially a mugshot of a man accused of conspiracy to murder. Alexander Gardner's portrait of Lewis Payne, 1865, "He is dead and he is going to die..."³¹⁹ staring into the face of the photographic paradox of life and death. A man sits, hands shackled, awaiting the verdict he well knows will lead to the gallows. He will die by hanging. He died by hanging. He sits looking beyond the camera, perhaps into the near future and his end. Barthes describes the image in the following manner, "*This will be and this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future."³²⁰ And for Payne, the gallows are the place and the rope and gravity the method. For Vishniac's elder man we don't know but most likely by the bullet at the edge of a pit in some ravine.

Roman Vishniac escaped the Holocaust via Lisbon, arriving in New York in 1940, on New Year's Eve.

From the Big History in Small Places to Little Objects and Big Histories

The Subcarpathian Rus' where Vishniac recorded the portrait of the community elder is a small place. But in the words of historian Celia Applegate, it is the small places that help us "think big."³²¹ In New York, Roman Vishniac found no work. By 1946 he gave up portraiture and began working freelance in photomicrography.³²²

319 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. p. 95

320 Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*. p. 96

321 Segal, Raz. *Genocide in the Carpathians*. Stanford University Press. From introduction: <https://www.sup.org/books/extra/?id=26373&i=Introduction.html>; 9.11.2022

322 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Vishniac; (18.3.2023)

HENRYK ROSS

Inside concentration and death camps, there is little photographic documentation. But as it turns out, the ghetto is as well a social and bureaucratic sphere where common requirements exist, personal documentation (for identification cards and/or official documents). Henryk Ross, 1940 to 1944, officially, worked for the Statistics Department of the ghetto's Jewish Administration, photographing the ghetto's Jewish inhabitants for identification cards and for use in Nazi propaganda. Ross is a member of the Judenrat (Jewish Council), an administrative body that acted as a kind of go-between the Nazi authorities (free on the outside) and the 'Jewish Council of Elders (imprisoned on the inside. But Ross uses his access to materials and laboratories to secretly document life on the streets and in the homes. This is illegal (by Nazi law) and very dangerous for the photographer. Both the Germans and the Jewish Council, as dictated by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski (a.k.a. 'King of the Ghetto') head of the Nazi's Judenrat/Jewish Council, banned photography for private purposes. Nevertheless, Ross uses his Privilege to clandestinely make photographs that juxtapose daily subsistence with those of people dying in the street of starvation, along with the ongoing deportation of children, the elderly, and the infirmed.³²³ Ross was accused of being a collaborator with the Nazis, just as all Judenrat were considered.

The Ross archives, those surviving the war, iron jars filled with the nitrate-based film are stored in tar lined wooden container buried in Jagielonska Street in the Łódź ghetto. Seeping groundwater unfortunately damage over half of the 6000 negatives put into hiding. Henryk Ross' approach to his people's plight is that of a street photographer in any big city. He does not only photograph the dead and the dying, as well as children at play, birthday parties, couples steeling a kiss. Things ordinary, things of beauty.

Ross insists he photographs for posterities sake and in his defense as a member of the Judenrat he states it as such. "I buried my negatives in the ground in order that there should be some record of our tragedy... I was anticipating the total destruction of Polish Jewry. I wanted to leave a historical record of our

323 Hirsch, Robert. *Photography and the Holocaust: Then & Now*. Jewish Photographic Perspectives, Part 3 Henryk Ross: The Łódź Ghetto Photographs. 2022. https://vjic.org/vjic2/?page_id=6892; 11.8.2023

martyrdom.³²⁴ The photographs in their undeteriorated mode are disturbing in their factuality of life in the ghetto. Children playing ‘good guy, bad guy’ or better stated, ‘ghetto policeman (kapo) and Jews’, Judenrat vs. the rest. Such images are extremely troublesome when they first appear out of hiding in 1997 after Ross’ son makes the collection available. Robert Jan van Pelt writing in the forward for the book *The Lodz Ghetto Album*,

“For me, and not only for me, these pictures testify to the uncomfortable fact that, amongst the pauperized and starving mass of ghetto inmates, in the wrenching situation imposed by the Germans, a small minority fared relatively well. [...] Two generations after the Germans liquidated the ghetto we are ready for the whole picture, and therefore need every single photograph. [...] The differences between the seemingly privileged and the obviously destitute fade in the knowledge that almost all the people caught by [Ross’s] camera were murdered shortly thereafter.”³²⁵

Many of the negatives, perhaps as many as half of the archive, suffer from decomposition, taking the images into the surreal, giving them a haunted, even poetic characteristic. Printed into positives reveals an aesthetic blending of x-ray and projected melting movie film footage. In terms of photographic Holocaust representation, they may fit well into a specific body of photography art about the Holocaust. And although photographic surrealism is, as we might say, alive and well in the day (Moholy-Nagy, Andre Kertesz, Lee Miller, Man Ray, others), these variants from the original are striking. These distorted negatives reveal a creeping deconstruction like metastasized cancer. The surviving archive has two distinct representations of the tragedy of the ghettos. Which one penetrates deeper into the tragedy?

324 [http://agolodzghetto.com/view/objects/asimages/67397?t:state:-flow=0d670ab8-0746-4fc3-ac97-f07cc30d24f5.](http://agolodzghetto.com/view/objects/asimages/67397?t:state:-flow=0d670ab8-0746-4fc3-ac97-f07cc30d24f5;); (13.8.2023)

325 Jan van Pelt, Robert, *Lodz Ghetto Album*. Foreword, 2009. Chris Boot. p. 7.

DAVID LEVINTHAL

David Levinthal’s microcosmic *Mein Kampf*³²⁶, a Holocaust story, a groundbreaking and ground shaking work. With few faces, those we recognize, their body language and color field, even without any clear detail, take the viewer (exhibition), the reader (book) into the horrors of the killing fields and death camps. Soldiers, executioners, in blacks and reds. The one face that even without any focal point whatsoever, a face so recognizable despite the fact no one has seen him since the 3rd of April 1945. Death by suicide, body burnt to ash, out of sight but not out of mind. Hitler is ‘seen’ no less than in eleven images of sixty images comprising the body of work. His fleshy presence reminds us that at no point during those years was he ever going give up on his war against the Jews.

Vishniac’s portraits are not fine grained enough to enable us to make out precise photographic details. The images, though, are not pictorial. The portrait of the aging Hassidic man is an authentic photograph, steeped in the humanist documentary tradition. There is a sense of flesh, his physical warmth as well as his stress. Levinthal, on the other hand, takes us into a different world where nothing is sharp, where what form and color is visible saturates to the edge of a threshold. Was this how all new arrivals to Auschwitz experienced their first moments? Is this how one sees in the process of insanity?

David Levinthal begins his exploration of the Second World War with *Hitler Moves East* (1972-1975)³²⁷ incorporating a type of directorial mode, fiction from fact, incorporating in this case the use of dolls and other representations of the human into the scenarios.³²⁸ This was not necessarily brand new. Oscar Rejlander, in his *Two Way of Life* (1857), is one of the earliest examples of an entirely directed artwork. Where Rejlander photographs individual scenes that are destined to be printed together into seamless montages, Levinthal creates scenes with miniatures, using molded plastics, the green army men are turned into monochrome using orthochromatic lithographic film and photographing in large format with wide aperture delivering a depth of field in the millimeters. The final images (as seen

326 Levinthal, David. *Mein Kampf*. 1997. Twin Palms Press.

327 Levinthal, David and Trudeau, Gary. 2008. Powerhouse Books.

328 Coleman, A.D., *Depth of Field*. Essays on photography, mass media and lens culture. University of New Mexico Press. 1998. p. 58.

in books and via the photographer's Internet web pages) appear toned in sepia and selenium giving the images a rough and aged appearance. Through the body of work, one gets the sense of the inevitable push to the east by Hitler's army and to their known defeat. And despite knowing the outcome I cannot help but feel the trauma of the time.

Coming into my serious interest in photography by 1973, I must have seen these prints on exhibition. After a seemingly relentless drumming about the great modernists and the west coast photographic philosophy of f 64, here are photographs breaking all those rules. These images do not behave like documentary photographs and neither do they subscribe to any recognizable movement in photography before or during this period.³²⁹ At the time, for me, a head turner, that one could address issues creating fictions from facts with an unrelenting power, simply done.

David Levinthal creations in 1994 with the Polaroid 20x24 (51x61cm) takes the viewer and stuffs their face into the Holocaust in a mesmerizing way, all in the vibrant colors that Polaroid of that type could and did offer. The bigger the camera, the shallower the depth of field per aperture. This camera offers Levinthal an extreme a lack of focus depth. The resulting images are rich in color, soft and disturbing in form. The primary question here: Can what has come and gone be photographed? According to Levinthal the answer is an astounding yes. But there is much to consider when the need to is to look backwards into stories and traumas that endure.

JEFFREY A. WOLIN

For the purpose of clarity, classifications provide foundations helping us understand time, place, manner of things within a bigger picture. Photography is filled with classifications like any field of study. Despite the unresolved distinctions of Ross' intentions, where Henryk Ross' archives, the undeteriorated ones, do reside is within the context of photojournalism and documentary and even within Cornell Kapa's classification of 'Concerned' photography. But as Susan Sontag pointed out, "At the time of the first photographs of the Nazi camps, there was nothing

³²⁹ First coined by A.D: Coleman in his book of essays, *Light Readings. The Directorial Mode: Notes Towards a Definition.* 1978. p. 246–257

banal about these images. After thirty years, a saturation point may have been reached. In these last decades, "concerned" photography has done as much to deaden conscience as to arouse it."³³⁰ This quote may well apply to my exhibition and to any body of work addressing the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, and the Jewish diaspora. And it concerns me.

In the same year the Henryk Ross archive is published, so is *Written in Memory, Portraits of the Holocaust* by Jeffrey A. Wolin. This is a collection of portraits of Holocaust survivors by Wolin but with text culled from video interviews written directly into the images. As Charles Stainback in his introduction to Wolin states (certainly in response to Sontag), "They are historical accounts that convey not a saturation of violence, not a deadened conscience, but acute, vivid memories."³³¹ In Errol Morris' *B-Side: Elsa Dorfman Photographer*, Elsa states in her droll New Yorkese, "photographs have no context."³³² Her use of the Polaroid 20x24 for portraits of writers, poets, musicians including Bob Dylan and Allen Ginsberg, are unique both for Elsa's approach to her subjects but in very big way by the character, look and size of the prints. The context is gathered with a name and date, title and or explanation. Very simple and minimal.

Wolin's portraits require of the viewer/reader patience. It's not like reading printed text. The lettering works around the subject creating a kind of organic wallpaper. Patience and concentration for this subject matter require a willingness of the audience to accept, sense, and even see with the mind's eye all the most horrible of images while absorbing their stories. The context is Holocaust and personal tragedy. Their words embed themselves into the photographic space but seamlessly and spill in and out of the frame. The stories offer us some inner details that seem to float off the pages getting submerged into its dreadful history. The texts also appear to be projected into the image from the minds and memories of the survivors, or the photographed, themselves, appear to be projected into the space displacing the text.

³³⁰ Sontag, Susan. *On Photography.* 1973. A Delta Book. p. 19

³³¹ Wolin, Jeffrey A. *Written in Memory, Portraits of the Holocaust.* Introduction by Charles Stainback. 1997. Chronicle Books. p. 7

³³² *The B-Side: Elsa Dorfman Photographer.* Morris, Errol; Director. 2017

SHIMON ATTIE

As for Shimon Attie, *The Writing on the Wall, Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter*, is the projection from the past into an aged space in the present. The photographs that capture these site-specific light installations deposit the viewer into the conflict of space and time. In this highly researched project, Attie searched through pre-war newspaper photography archives for Jewish life in Berlin's Jewish Quarter and then searched for their precise locations. The projections of images past are scaled to register as closely as possible the past with the present, illuminating the past on the skin of the community that had everything taken and stolen from them. To state that these images are spooky does not explain the temporal distortion taking place.

As Jeanne Wolf Bernstein elucidates in her study of Attie's project: "Attie pries open a memorial space that allows a glimpse into how Jews lived and not just how they died."³³³ It leaves the viewer in a state of speculation on events of the day, events specific to distant faces reflecting off of old brick in the old Scheunenviertel of Berlin, to a greater struggle of melancholia and repentance. Although as opposed to the period when Attie's book was published and the exhibition toured, speaking of the last years of the 20th century, the melancholia has drifted towards resignation and repentance to an active rejection of the burden of the war.

We are not even talking about what few years have passed between the click of the camera shutter just before the war, nearing mid 20th century and the clack of another camera shutter, at the end of the most brutal century in all recorded mankind. So few years passing, such a dense past to content with "-a world whose brutal obliteration has made its very absence a question haunting our lives and

³³³ Bernstein, Jeanne Wolff. Making a Memorial Space: The Photography of Shimon Attie. 2000. p. 351

practices today."³³⁴ Bernstein continues; "The past", we have been told, "is a foreign country."³³⁵ Could it be that this past is from a Germany that does not exist, or exists as something from elsewhere, that even archival photographs offer a proof little cared for now?

Attie insists he's not a "Holocaust artist".³³⁶ The statement comes early in his artistic career, with the release of the *Writing on the Wall* project and reads with a similar struggle that I and certainly a great many Jews who practice the arts experience. In 1991, Shimon Attie moved to Berlin. As Attie states in the book version of the project: "Walking the streets in summer, I felt myself asking over and over again, where are all the missing people? What has become of the Jewish culture and community which had once been at home here? I felt the presence of this lost community very strongly, even though so few visible traces of it remained." Can the Jew ever escape the Holocaust? Can the Jewish artist ever escape the Holocaust? Clearly for artists such as Shimon Attie, the obligation to his Jewish roots and the human condition do not end with the Wall project. His subject matter has expanded as has his visual vocabulary with works about humans as refugees in exile (*Portraits of Exile*. 1995), the intersection of cultures (*The History of Another*. 2002-2003), *The Facts on the Ground* (2013-2014). Each succeeding project exploring the present with a constant awareness of the past.

Born Jewish, I'm born with burdens to carry. Becoming an artist, the burdens are both a mine field and an immensely challenging opportunity.

³³⁴ Essay: Shimon Attie: Images as Memory-Memory of Images. Michael André Bernstein. From; Attie, Shimon *The Writing on the Wall. Projections in Berlin's Jewish Quarter*. Edition Braus. p. 6

³³⁵ Ibid. p. 7

³³⁶ Ibid p. 7

ΕPIGRAPH:

A personal note to the reader

This dissertation, written in a matter of an incomplete autobiography, is my story. Or better said, I am a part of this story. My share is of someone whose history and pre-history are not just windows to the past. The past, firmly in my present, guiding me with each step. The earliest awareness of things uncomfortable lurking in the past reside in a photograph of my great grandparents, of whom I have only a vague conjecture of. It is in my grandfather's experiences throughout his life, especially his early years, enlightening and terrifying me concerning his parent's lives and very likely their deaths. Their deaths and the knowledge I have come to comprehend of the circumstances of where and in the times they lived, has been hidden and very little understood until recently. My maternal grandfather passed away many long years ago, so when finding information detailing the date and circumstances of the murder of the Jews of Luhansk, his life came back to me in a much different way. I knew him well, my grandfather, and his memory is deep in me, his Russian-Ukraine accent, his hoarse voice (from vocal cord damage; reason unknown to me), his tender manner and his less-than-tender political views. The *me* that I know begins in a sense with him. He looms large in the story of my life that I remind myself of it regularly, privately, like a prayer.

His daughter, my mother, she is the silver eminence behind so much of my life. It was her intellectuality and love of the visual and musical arts that continually grounds me in my own artistic practices and inspires me still to take the risk of exposure to the truth.

On my father's side, we know very little. I've been able to trace his family's roots to Belarus and later in New York. But my father's role in my story is very large, for understanding his decision-making reasons, for his relationship to his work, the company he (and my mother) kept, and the character of his life and our life as a family. His Bar Mitzvah in the orthodox tradition (though his parents were not orthodox) lived a life of what I call a devoutly secular Jew. We celebrated the high holidays as a way for keeping ties to the past alive and continuous. My father was a very modern man who understood history, including that of his ancient tribe. Through my grandfather Morris, and my mother and father, I have inherited this ancient and unbroken Jewish past that resides deep my psyche and marrow. Their experiences have been absorbed by me through the mysteries of familial osmosis. This also applies to their 20 and 21st century Jewish concerns.

I AM AT A LOSS FOR WORDS

At this age I should have a firm grasp of the task at hand and a language to precisely to tell this story. Available to me, my spoken and visual languages, are nowhere near enough. Even with a healthy state of mind, I'm unable to understand or come to terms with the offenses laid upon so many and for what or why. Via thoughts gathered from over sixty years of pondering, they are strung together like amber beads on a necklace containing the DNA of lives, histories, tragedies. Therefore, any words written here are translations at best of what I need and attempt to say. With the help of photography, and the written word, like a pair of crutches, this is as close to an acceptable translation of my feelings, thoughts, and intentions as I can achieve.

It's a heavy act, digging through the detritus in one's being, searching for clues that lead to fragments that, when tied together, make up the past. There is so much to this history that is known, through the mountains of documents the Nazis were unable to destroy at war's end, the meters of movie film the Nazi produced to document their obsessions, the visible carnage left to rot and the destruction strewn across Europe from one end to the other, and from the handful of survivors who have been willing and able to recount their trials. And of these precious people there are only a precious few left who can testify to the truth. At the time of this

writing, in Israel alone, an estimated forty-two Holocaust survivors die each day.³³⁷ And as the statistics begin to reveal the truth, the realization of the Holocaust, day by day, slipping beyond the history books while anti-Semitism is back in the news each and every day. Is this reason enough to go diving deep down the rabbit hole of the Holocaust? This is one of many reasons to do so.

Deep inside this rabbit hole the imagination doesn't find a lot of room. But after all the years since liberation and all the Nazi guns gone silent, I found a space and a way in which to peer back and take account of things. I had not understood this until finding myself squeezed by events of the 20th century, of events taken place across three continents, that I am what I am as a person and as an artist very much because of them.

Within every story there are substories and within these going down to the sub-micro level are stories that are unknown and absent from the historical record. I wish and need to add this to the historical record. But, I remind the reader, this is not only my story. It is a story that includes me as *me*, and as the storyteller *me*. With the constant sense of trepidation but also with a heightened intuition of being on a path into the past, striding into recent and ancient history with camera, film, words, and an open heart and mind, on the ready to learn. The story told here is based all on facts and expressed through the power of the imagination.

RESISTANCE AND DEFIANCE AND THE POWER OF THE IMAGINATION

*This is my Piece of resistance.*³³⁸

How is it that a nightmare experienced as a child so long ago would throw me back in time and space to a time and place not lived? And how is it, after all this is not about the past but about the present and the future?

³³⁷ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ahead-of-annual-memorial-day-161400-holocaust-survivors-living-in-israel/; 10.6.2023>

³³⁸ Berger, John. *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance*. 2007. Pantheon

That even after centuries of persecution culminating in what is universally referred to today as the Holocaust, the virus of anti-Semitism still has no cure. Not only had it not go into hiding after the war, it campaigns harder than ever for new hosts. As the location of Jewish communities across the world shrink this virus holds on to existence with unusual ease and reproduces and spreads to all the places where Jews once resided as well as to places no Jew has ever set foot (is there such a place?). And as it spreads it swallows up lives and vomits up lies from the smallest of neighborhoods to the biggest nation states and countless terrorist groups and organizations.

Born, as any child, innocent to the world of breath, coming to terms with a history for which I am joined to by bloodlines and bloodbaths going back eons. I, like most children, wished to remain innocent. But that was not how things were going to be or are.

Beginning as an exploration into *presence of absence* through Jewish history, world history and family history brings my past and the past of my distance relatives into the very present, making clear to me the past, the present and the future are astonishingly interwoven. In the course of my life, in the early years, the past was everywhere and in everything. Only I was far too young to recognize it knowingly. The California years, a time of denial. Not even on my first journey through Europe could I grasp how deeply hidden within me, and seemingly the world, the consequences of this history.

Far from my place of birth, far from what I understood as anywhere near the geography of history, from the darkest period of the 20th century, remnants lay in wait for an opportunity to say: the past sits in wait right outside your front door. It was here and on a day in August 2003, my *piece of resistance* begins.

AFTERTHOUGHT

There have been occasions, many in fact, where ignorance, as dull as it can be, cuts like a knife, where circumstances leave no room for dialogue or discussion or even room for protest. If I was to list them all, those that I can recall, they would fill reams and reams of pages. As a chronologic list, they would begin at some of my earliest memories and continuing well into today.

Whether at school or at a school gathering at a classmate's home. Whether in the workplace during my teenage years or in my present workplace. Whether on holiday on some seemingly distant and inviting island or on the streets of my many hometowns. As if there is something that makes people feel it necessary to be reminded of some alien and repulsive attributes that I, myself, simply do not recognize. Here lies one of the many challenges. How to navigate an environment made up of everything that is of this world, from the physical through the virtual? But navigate we must, antennas always active, psychological peripheral vision blinder-free, and a reminder that out of seemingly out of nowhere one can encounter messages of hope.



Fig. 88 Solta Island, Croatia. 2011



Fig. 89 Granada, Spain 2009

EXHIBITION DOCUMENTATION

GRANT ME LIGHT ~ SUO MINULLE VALOSI

GALLERIAT VALO JA KATVE

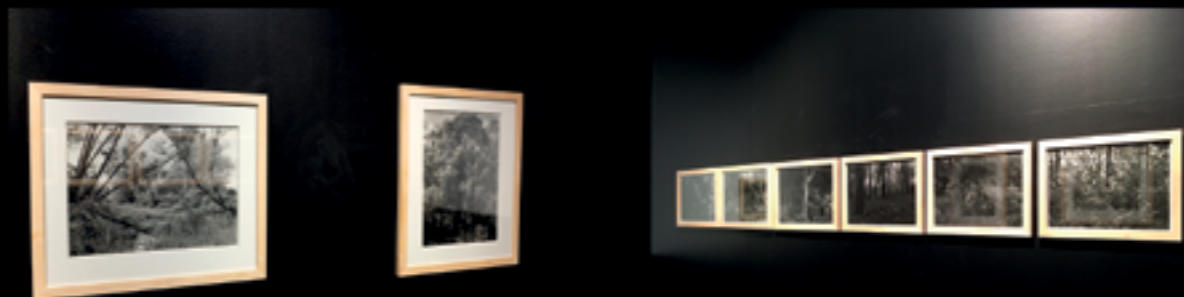
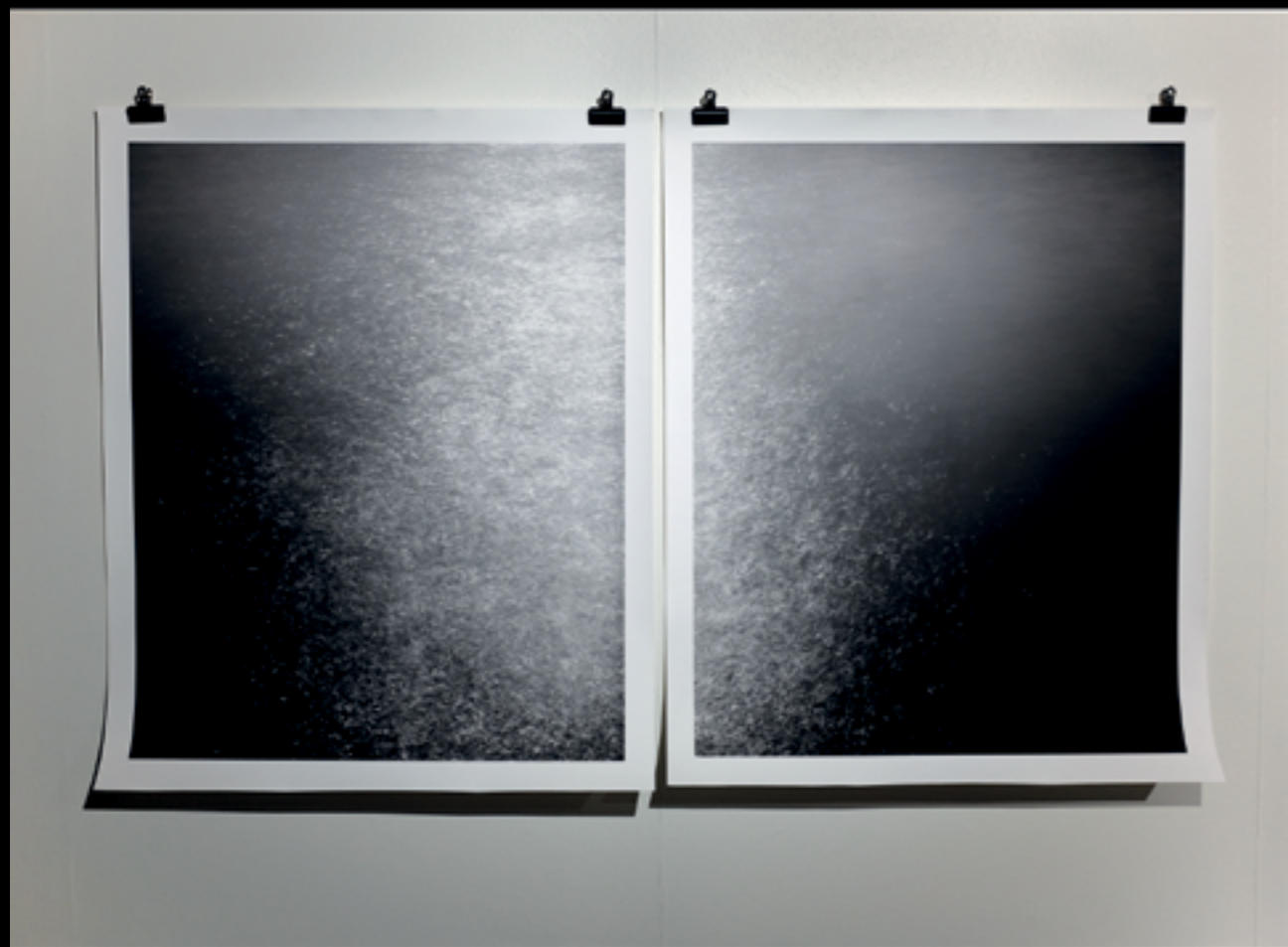
ARKTIKUM, ROVANIEMI

4.2.–3.28.2021



















APPENDIX I: THE ART OF SOUND AND SONG

Composer John Zorn faced the trauma that exists within all Jews. Through art he faced it down and excised it in his 1993 *Kristallnacht*. The work is powerful. Nothing held back. Even the cover art, the *badge of shame*, the yellow star with the German Hebraic text, puts the listener on alert. For Zorn, from the cover to the final note, his ‘duty’ is done. “Every Jew has to come to grips with the holocaust in some kind of way and that was my statement, that’s how I did it. I do not need to do it again (...) it meant a lot to me. It was like a whole lifetime of denying my Jewish heritage coming out in one piece – ”.³³⁹

Composer Aaron Copland embraced the ‘vernacular’ in the American sound. Anything ‘Jewish’ didn’t reflect out from his music. Should it have? Although, he acknowledged his Jewish background he either didn’t refer to it on purpose or was simply not attracted artistically to it. His leftist politics did reflect his Brooklyn Jewish upbringing. But that aspect of his life was more apparent in outreach work as a music educator, orchestral conductor and supporter of composers living and creating under authoritarian conditions.

At the other end of this spectrum is the composer Steve Reich. Since 1981 has returned repeatedly to his Jewish roots and always in fresh and unique ways. Where *Tehillim* (Praises/Psalms)³⁴⁰ delves into the Hebrew language and prayer, *The Cave* asks the question, who was Abraham? It is from the perspective of people in the West Jerusalem/Hebron (1989), East Jerusalem/Hebron (1989 and 1991) and New York City/Austin (1992). It is a meditation on the Hebrew and Arabic languages, on Jews and Arabs, on Israelis and Palestinians. This work does not touch on the Holocaust but does touch on very 20th and 21st century issues of the region. The Daniel Variations weaves elements from the Book of Daniel and Daniel Pearl, journalist murdered by Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan in 2002.

339 John Zorn on [BBC Jazz File](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht_(album)), July 2000. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht_\(album\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht_(album))

340 Reich, Steve. *Tehillim*. ECM New Series. 2006

In the Traveler’s Prayer, also known as the Wayfarer’s Prayer (2020)³⁴¹, is traditionally recited before embarking on a journey, be it by land, sea or air, it can also be used as a blessing for those embarking on a journey from this world to the next. This is Reich’s most recent composition written in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and appears to be a kind of bookend to his long years of composing.

Only one of his compositions directly addresses the Holocaust. *Different Trains* (1998)³⁴² for string quartet and recorded voices, speaks specifically about trains, transcontinental train passenger transport, trains for deportations and death, train travel falling on hard times. From the liner notes for the 1988 recording by the Kronos Quartet;

1st Movement: America – Before the war

2nd Movement: Europe – During the war

3rd Movement: After the War

Steve Reich looks at the wonder of trains and the industrial revolution. Trains are what bridged the American east with the west coasts, across a great expanse. By the 1930’s fast trains crossed north to south and east to west and back. Reich, as a child, traveled the east-west, New York to Los Angeles route often between 1939 and 1942. In Europe during those same years and for some time afterwards trains transported millions of soldiers and weapons to the front and Jews to the camps. The second movement, *Europe – During the war*, begins with the voice, “1940”, “On my birthday”, “The Germans walked in”. The movement closes with, “Flames going up to the sky – it was smoking”.³⁴³

341 Reich, Steve. Traveler’s Prayer. NPO Radio 4 at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam on October 16th 2021

342 Reich, Steve. *Different Trains*. Kronos Quartet. Elektra/Nonesuch. 1989

343 Reich, Steve. *Different Trains*. Liner notes.

The third movement begins with, “And the war was over”, “Are you sure?”, “The war is over”. “Going to America”. Reich astonishingly weaves a work of time and space and history. There are few Holocaust-based artworks that weave a parallel timeline. The compositions of Zorn and Reich use a similar method of pre-recorded sound. But where Zorn attempts to make the listener feel the composition viscerally, Reich uses pre-recorded voices as story tellers. The result is as well experienced viscerally but in a remarkably different way. The music is plodding and like death coming in slow motion. The Nazis take over everything step by step. Train wagon wheels spin at different rates, sirens blare, train horns shout. Zorn’s composition is an intense and disordered cacophony, Reich’s is an organized one.

Composer Steve Reich’s *Different Trains*³⁴⁴, composed in 1988, and two years prior to my arrival in Finland. This work had a profound impact on my perception of how art could tell a story and about the story itself. The threads from this monumental three-part work are woven into the story I tell.

Ever since the advent of the vinyl recording, cover art and liner art and notes, have played an important role. They set the stage for the listener to understand the contents, rather like the title of artwork on a gallery wall. John Zorn’s *Kristallnacht* underlines in no clearer terms (to those that know the meaning and impact of the yellow star with text) what the composition is about. The inner art/graphic design only underlines the point further and starker. The cover art for Steve Reich’s *Different Trains* (1998) is as his compositions are, minimalist, pared down nearly to the minimum. A set of train tracks framed in the square (both the vinyl and CD versions) photographed at around 45°, having the tracks merging to the top of the image and cropped at the point where the tracks lead to invisible vanishing points. Both compositions leave the listener with much more than the sum of their parts.

344 Reich, Steve. *Different Trains*. Nonesuch/Presto Music. 1988

STEVE REICH JUDAISM BASED COMPOSITIONS:

Tehillim 1981
New York Counterpoint 1985
Different Trains 1988
The Cave 1993
Proverb 1995
You Are (Variations) 2004
Daniel Variations 2006
Traveler’s Prayer 2020

JOHN ZORN’S JUDAISM BASED COMPOSITIONS:

Kristallnacht 1993
Masada Books 1 & 2. 1993 & 2004
Bar Kokhba 1996
Masada Book 3 – The Book Beri’ah 2018

OTHER COMPOSERS:

Leo Ornstein (Born: 1895, Kremenchug, Russia (now a part of Ukraine. Death: 2002, Wisconsin, USA).
Erwin Schulhoff (Czech. 1894–1942) Dies Wulzburg prison. Tuberculosis.
Pavel Haas (Czech. 1899–1944) Gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau 1944.
Viktor Ullmann (Silesia-born Austrian. 1898–1944) Gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau 1944.
Aaron Jay Kernis (American. b. 1960)

POP MUSIC & JUDAISM

The challenge of being Jewish and coping with the Holocaust through music is not only reserved for the contemporary classical music arts. Even in popular music there are threads and references that seem to rise from between the grooves. Paul Simon's most recent and most likely his final output, *Seven Psalms*;

*"The Lord is my engineer
The Lord is the earth I ride on
The Lord is the face in the atmosphere
The path I slip and I slide on"³⁴⁵*

*"Dip your hand in heaven's waters
God's imagination*

*All of life's abundance
In a drop of condensation"³⁴⁶*

Seven Psalms is a meditation on the purpose and even the very existence of God.

In a re-issue (re-recording) of Paul Simon's 'Love';

*"The price that we pay
When evil walks the planet
And love is crushed like clay
The burning temples, the weeping cathedrals"³⁴⁷*

Lyrics and song (poetry) rise from between gentle breaths, riddled with Nazi shrapnel, covered in ash.

These are only two humble references from undoubtedly a vast archive of music and lyrics.

345 Simon, Paul. *Seven Psalms*. 2023.

346 .Ibid.

347 Simon, Paul. 'Love'. From *In The Blue Light*. 2018

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