# Holocaust as the Visual Subject: The Problematics of Memory Making through Visual Culture.

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## Abstract

The visual construction or re-construction of traumatic events whether through art, photography or celluloid representations is an intrinsic aspect of human propensity to remember and work through trauma. The assembling of images, its display and invitation to gaze are mediated by political, social, cultural, historical and aesthetic processes. Visual culture functions both as a memory archive but it is equally implicated in the 'critique of inadequacy' in any representation where limits are imposed both through the vantage points, access and what may be visible or invisible to the naked eye. The integration of visual culture into our contemporary consciousness through electronic technologies embedded into our everyday lives thrusts the visual into an arena of the everyday where images work through both individual imagination and collective-meaning making. The tenuous relationship between visual culture, memory and trauma is discussed through the remembrance of the Holocaust.

## Introduction

This paper explores the role of visual culture particularly in enabling Holocaust memories where the need to remember and forget and the urge to integrate history without it becoming a debilitating device encapsulates three fundamental themes: the spiritual struggle for a positive German national identity (post-1945), the need for European Jewry to renounce the label of victimhood and above all to repudiate the charge of evil which had besieged modernity after Holocaust. In interrogating visual culture and trauma this paper explores how trauma is often reliant on material formats to translate both its occurrence and its burden on the human condition. The dialectical strands of universalisation versus particularization of the Holocaust makes it a difficult project to articulate both discursively and visually and often Holocaust memorials whether in Germany or other parts of the West have only materialized after long periods of deliberation as to their role, function and message to societies. A miscarriage of any commemoration objective through art or artefact is often perceived as transgressing the sacred realms associated with the Holocaust.

Our contemporary visual economy produces a materialization of culture where it is manifested not only through ‘displays but structuring a modern way of seeing and comprehending’ (Macdonald 1996:7). This paper positions visual culture as both the social construction of the visual as well as the visual construction of the social. Both processes are iterative where neither is reductive or subsumed by any one element whether it is social, ideological or historical. In discussing visual culture in reference to the Holocaust I want to draw on Mitchell’s (2006) notion of vision. Mitchell premises vision as a cultural construction that is learned and cultivated, and not simply given by nature. It is connected to the history of arts, technologies, media and social practices of display and spectatorship and is deeply involved with human societies with the ethics and politics, aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen (Mitchell 2002:166).

Visual culture evolves through a complex interplay of discursive and ideological debates mediating the ways in which we see, believe and make meaning. These processes do not thwart individual agency but they provide material and symbolic spaces for collective identification. The increasing use of screens, visuals and simulation technologies to experience or re-live trauma in museums no longer privileges the eye or the gaze alone but combines it with emotive elements to evoke sympathy. A case in point is the Beits Hashoah Museum of Tolerance in the Simon Wisenthal Centre in Los Angeles where emotions and images and not objects alone become the driving force (cf. Hoskins 2003:14). Ironically, in direct contradiction to the rule of rationality in the project of Enlightenment and modernity, comprehending trauma privileges the ‘irrational’. Visual culture then alludes to not just the material formats or technologies. It also encompasses the ways in which we gaze, the ontological status of the visual in representing reality, the problematics of representation and aesthetics, the political economy of visual production and the incestuous relationship between political thought, contemporary consciousness and visual culture.

Lennon and Foley (1999: 47) point out that visual media are often central to the recreation of memory and spaces of commemoration with the emphasis on simulations, replications and virtual experiences. The screen culture and experience is also a vital part of the reproduction and renewal of memory. ‘Television is so widely and easily disdained as a trivializing or corrupting force that it is seen as a vehicle that cannot help but produce unsatisfactory representations of the Holocaust' (Shandler 1999: 259). But ironically, it was precisely the medium of television which universalized Holocaust to audiences making horror and the 'inconceivable' accessible. According to Jeffrey Alexander (2002:35) a handful of actual dramatizations in books, movies, plays and television shows (initially formulated for the American public but reached a wider set of audiences after) presented the Holocaust in a personal perspective of family and friends. Alexander points out that the prototype to this was Anne Frank's diary first published in 1947 and adapted into a Pulitzer-prize winning Broadway play in 1955 and a Hollywood movie in 1959. In the course of the 1960s, Anne Frank's tragic story became the basis for psychological identification and symbolic extension on a mass scale – it set the stage for the rush of books, television shows and movies (Alexander 2002: 36). In the digital age, the prominence of the screen and the constant visual presence of electronic media and print create what Andrew Hoskins terms as 'new memory' - a memory constantly evolving but circulated and renewed through these screen cultures. Andreas Huyssen (1995: 225) describes this coalescing of memory and pervasive visuality as a 'hybrid memorial-media culture.'

The intertwining of image with trauma and its distribution through a circulation economy is a resonant part of contemporary visual culture. Trauma needs an audience to bear witness, to work through the catharsis and to consign it to the annals of history where it can be repeatedly re-visited to make sense of other trauma that human societies inflict on each other or experience through natural disasters. Trauma equally has a face and visual culture provides this 'faciality' where these depictions both function as pictures of 're-memory' (Toni Morrison's, 1987 *Beloved*) and as narratives of history torn out of their historical contexts to be viewed with renewed horror.

The ontological status of an image as bearing witness also calls into account how we valorize the image as a form of visual testimony. With real stories becoming a past, the past often becomes commodified through the visual. The emergence and popularity of 'dark' tourism or tourism associated with sites of death, disaster and depravity (See Foley and Lennon 1999) is to a large extent dependent on symbols, physical spaces, artefacts and visuals. This visual economy is equally dependent on new media formats which shrink distance and temporality between the event and spectator where the circulation of iconic images create collective identification with an event producing a capsule memory. This capsule memory both simplifies the event whilst personalising it for the individual. If images provide a window to the past, mass viewing through the screen democratizes trauma. Despite the discourse of 'incomparability' and 'unspeakability' which surrounds Holocaust, its multiple representations through popular culture are ineradicably part of Holocaust memory making it fractured and sedimented (Huyssen 1995: 241-2). In the visual construction of the Holocaust, Auschwitz has become the central reference point along with images of death camps and dead bodies piled on top of each other where these appropriate an iconic representation of the tragedy (Morrison 2004: 343).

Whilst the brevity of this work does not afford me the liberty to completely unpack all aspects of visual culture in the construction of the Holocaust, this paper will explore some crucial strands identified in this introduction. These include the ideological and discursive formations which influenced the symbolic and cultural construction of the Holocaust, the issues of representing the 'inconceivable' and the role of the image in bearing witness and creating spaces for public communion and commemoration of the event.

## Critical Deliberations on the Holocaust

The occurrence of traumatic events often sets the stage for public discussions. In our modern memory 9/11 created a surge in contemplative dialogues which sought an explanation to what the Western superpowers deemed as inconceivable. As Barbie Zelizer opines (2002: 698) traumatic events 'rattle what it means morally to remain members of a collective'. Since 1945 the question of how a supposedly civilized nation such as Germany was able to commit such barbarous acts has come to haunt the consciousness of Western imagination (Waxman 2009: 94). Dominick LaCapra (1992: 122) terms 'Holocaust as an event which clamoured for serious reflection and a comprehensive approach to its representation for without one both the German society and Western modernity is trapped without a comprehensive understanding of the past or the way to move forward in the future'.

The formation of public discursive spheres and narratives after an event is a post-event phenomenon where the discursive paradigm is both our need to make sense of, explain or comprehend what we perceive as inconceivable. The *Historikerstriet* in the 1980s encapsulated the need to deal with this national trauma sparking a series of debates and quarrels amongst historians and philosophers where the urge to embrace a positive future required the intellectuals and the average man on the streets to confront the past. The post-narratives that emerge from traumatic events are discursive formations which affect both public sentiments and people's construction of themselves and national identity. Equally visual culture is not immune from such philosophical and political debates. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin which opened in May 2005 was 'subject to 17 years of heated debate regarding its necessity, dedication and locale' (Dekel 2009: 72). Plans for a House of History in Bonn suffered a similar fate. Unlike narrative and discursive spheres, visual cultures speak through the image and symbols whilst influenced by contemporary thought and consciousness. There were numerous dilemmas in the representation of the Holocaust beyond the limitations of image of visual economy. Like the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum was mired in controversy as to its role, function and the nature of message (Lennon & Foley 1999: 47).

One resonant theme of the *Historikerstreit* was how exceptional was the Holocaust in the history of Europe and the collective history of Western civilization and humanity. Whilst it was represented as 'unexceptional' by a group of scholars such as Ernest Nolte, Michael Sturmer, Rainer Sitelmann and Andreas Hillgurber others such as Saul Friedlander (1995:2-3) argued that the Holocaust defies any conceptual and definitional categories reifying it as 'an event at the limits' or in the Durkheimian sense 'sacred-evil' where it is set apart from ordinary evil making it inexplicable and mysterious. Holocaust was no longer narrated as an event in history but an 'archetype' – an event out of time and a 'world historical' (*weltgesichte*) event – an event whose emergence onto the world stage threatened or promised to change the fundamental course of the world (Alexander 2002: 27-30). Dan Diner (2000: 1) concurs that the 'growing centrality of the Holocaust' has altered our 'sense of the passing century' such that 'the incriminated event has thus become the epoch's marker, its final and inescapable wellspring.'

The discourse of non-comparability is an intrinsic aspect of the Holocaust which often evokes much reflection on how the event can be captured or commemorated by society. The Holocaust was initially described as one 'atrocity' amongst many others in the Second World War especially in the American media where the liberation discourses overshadowed the trauma of the death camps. The need to distinguish it from other crimes against humanity demanded that the trauma be renamed as Holocaust. According to Jeffrey Alexander (2003:28-30) Holocaust does have an English meaning and refers to 'something wholly burnt up.' The term entered ordinary English usage in the early 1960s as a proper noun. Several years after the extermination of the Jews, Israelis named the event *Shoah*, a term from the Torah which refers to the kind of extraordinary sufferings God had periodically consigned to the Jews. 'Holocaust became part of contemporary language as an English symbol that stood for the thing that could not be named (Alexander 2002: 29).

The Holocaust was also seen as a crisis for the Western civilisation and the whole of humanity and informed the imperative not to forget a universal agenda. It was seen as a tragedy of reason and of modernity itself (Levy & Sznaider 2002:88) and this was a resonant argument in the debates of the Holocaust. For political philosophers such as Jurgen Habermas the event was transformative in as far as it confirmed Western civilization's break with the Enlightenment tradition. The 'universalisation' discourse conveyed a consolidated the need to remember the event beyond the boundaries of Germany as well as the agenda to arrest the decay of modernity as a project warranting Western solidarity. According to political philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1990, 251-252)

> *Something happened here (in Auschwitz) that no one could previously have thought even possible. It touched a deep layer of solidarity among all who have a human face. Until then – in spite of all the quasi-natural brutalities of world history – we had simply taken the integrity of this deep layer for granted. Auschwitz altered the conditions for the continuation of historical life contexts – and not only in Germany.*

The Holocaust is inextricably imprisoned through the dialectical discourses of universalism and particularism (Young 1993). Holocaust's ability to subsume the whole of European Jewish identity is another source of contention in the issue of representation. Robert Altar (1981, cf. Kuavar 2003:133) asserts that 'to make the

Holocaust the ultimate touchstone of Jewish values whether political or religious, is bound to lead to distortions of emphasis and priority' and falsifying 'our lives as Jews as setting them so drastically in the shadow of crematoria'' – totalising Jewish identity, consigning them to victimhood.' Similarly, when a proposal for a Holocaust memorial in New York came before representatives of the leading Jewish organizations in the late 1940s, they unanimously rejected the idea on the basis that it would give currency to the image of the Jews as 'helpless victims,' an idea they wished to repudiate (Novick 1994: 160).

A further discourse which makes the Holocaust a challenging subject for representation is the discourse of evil. Alexander contends that from the late 1930s onwards 'there emerged a strong and eventually dominant anti-fascist narrative which coded Nazism as apocalyptic' (2007:23). The construction of the Holocaust as unprecedented evil added to the particularism stance and equally to the theological and moral notions of redemption. Any representation of the Holocaust could not possibly overlook the strong moral and religious overtones cast by the shadow of 'evil'. Additionally, the notion of 'metonymic guilt' (cf. Alexander 2002:44) became another dimension of this genocide. Habermas' 'attempt to expel shame' became a call to the whole nation. (cf. Kampe 1987:63)

Hannah Arendt's (1963) 'Banality of Evil' discourse not only cast aspersions on representations through witness testimonies but extended the notion of evil as something that can reside in ordinary people when 'the private person abandons the moral community' (Waxman 2009: 94). Evil was no longer narrated through the polarities of protagonist against antagonist (i.e. the allied liberators versus the evil Nazis) but that mysterious, dark and abstract force that needed to be coded and discerned in representations of the Holocaust and lying dormant in the whole of humanity. Evil became an ontological construct rather than an epistemological one (Alexander 2002) and in view of this (*weltgesichte)* event was seen as a transformative device that had altered the world. The intellectual and philosophical discussions of the Holocaust made the representation of the event a crisis for representation where any endeavour to capture and portray had to remain faithful to these issues without tainting it.

## Representing the 'Unrepresentable'

The Holocaust often begs the question that Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002) raise in their thesis on *Cosmopolitan Memory* - who does the Holocaust belong to? Is it to particular ethnic groups or victims of atrocities or can all of humanity lay claim to it? Levy and Hirsch (2002: 93) point out that the Holocaust has been confronted by various forces which seek to universalise it, particularize it and to nationalise it and these dialectical forces have created a crisis of representation. In many countries it has become a sacred entity surrounded by taboos and any endeavour to represent the Holocaust is seen as transgressing these taboos or tainting the memory of the event.

Visual culture builds narrative through symbols and images. Spaces, places and material artefacts become symbols of representation. Auschwitz (i.e. the crematoria) as a form of touristic ritual in recounting the fate of Jews in the Second World War creates a prism through which stories are narrated. The spaces of the museum, galleries and image archives become intertextual and co-dependent elements in the visual economy where representations and imagination are both enabled and limited through these visual terrains. These images of crematoria, gas chambers and dead bodies provide an iconography in contemporary consciousness which enslaves both German history and Jewish identity. Cultural representations are often seen as disruptive or desecrating a sacrosanct entity.

The ongoing endeavour to crystallize Holocaust memories have come under intense scrutiny and criticism due to this. In 1978 Elie Wiesel responded to NBC television mini-series, *Holocaust*, by proclaiming, 'it transforms an ontological event into a soap-opera'. As the holocaust transcends history, Wiesel (cf. Alexander 2002:31) contended that it cannot be explained or visualised. Similarly Claude Lanzmann responded to *Schindler's List* by commenting that Holocaust is 'above all unique in that it erects a ring of fire around itself' and so fiction becomes a transgression and that there are some things that cannot and should not be represented' (cf. Hartman 1996: 84). Nevertheless the 1978, mini-serious, *Holocaust*, (four part, nine-and-half hour drama) watched by nearly 100 million Americans personalized the trauma and this public attention was repeated when it was broadcast in Germany where it was seen as significant in influencing public opinion about the ordeal and in removing the statute of limitations on Nazis who had participated in what was no longer a war crime but a crime against humanity.

Certain themes became central narratives in the representation of the Holocaust and these simplified the event as a trope of good versus evil making them adaptable to the grand plots and cinematic devices of Hollywood. Alexander (2002: 20) argues that 'a system of collective representations that focused its beam of narrative light on the triumphant expulsion of evil' became central narratives for Hollywood. Positive representations of Jews in America followed in the post-war years ranging from dailies to lifestyle magazines which sought to fight quotas set for Jews in educational institutions and professions. In 1983 a movie promoting anti anti-semitism *Gentleman's Agreement* won the Academy Award for the best motion picture and another, *Crossfire,* had been nominated. Jews held symbolic pride of place in these popular culture narratives because their persecution had been pre-eminently associated with Nazi evil (Alexander 2002:24).

The themes of redemption and victimhood have become residual components in representations of the Holocaust as the West endlessly deploys the ghost of the Holocaust to represent itself both as victim and redeemer (Mirzoeff 2002:246). Nicholas Mirzoeff in invoking the metaphor of the 'ghost' uses it to refer to liminal spaces (and entities) between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, and the palpable and the impalpable where both the eye and visual culture cannot completely capture events and histories. The marginalised peoples in society often become ghosts occupying a liminal space of presence and absence. According to Mirzoeff the ghost has many names in many languages: diaspora, exiles, queers, migrants, gypsies, refugees, Tutsis, Palestinians, etc. According to Mirzoeff (2002:239) the ghost is one place among many from which to interpolate the networks of visibility that have constructed, destroyed and deconstructed the modern visual subject. The 'ambivalent and ambiguities' (in society) are accorded a ghost-like status and he accords both the Jews and the Holocaust a similar status where the Jewish body and the event of the Holocaust become unspeakable and non-categorizable entities (2002:244-246). This he asserts makes the Holocaust ever more central to contemporary visual culture. Images, events and people don't only become ghostly apparitions because of their marginal status but when they become iconic symbols where it is difficult to thwart their centrality.

Levy and Hirsch (2002) assert that the iconographic status of the Holocaust was established between the 1960s and 1980s where a number of important events including the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt in 1963 played the memory of the Holocaust in vivid detail through these mediated representations reaching a broad transnational audience. Prime Minister of Israel, Ben Gurion saw the Eichmann trial as an opportunity for the younger generation of Jews 'to get acquainted with the details of this tragedy about which they knew so little' (Braun 1994: 183, cf. Alexander 2002: 66). Media representations renew these sacred threads whilst reiterating the dominance of these cultural memories.

In citing Anne Frank as the 'best known ghost of the *Shoah*', Mirzoeff (2002: 247) argues that we know her visually through her famous photograph and that she seems at home in New York (where her original portrait is located) precisely because she speaks to (and with) many survivors of the Holocaust in its various forms and still more people at some degree of separation from those events'. Similarly, an ABC television mini-series on the life of Anne Frank claimed the mantle of universality by wrapping her in the family values of Walt Disney. For Mirzoeff Anne Frank's ghost is then haunting and hunted in New York, while at the same time being invoked for the hawking of all manner of products (2002: 248). Modern visual culture is unrelenting in the exploitation of the familiar and the iconic. As LaCapra (1992) asserts there is a distinction between representation that simply acts out the drama and that which finally seeks to work it through. But Mirzoeff adds a third distinction of representation as one that is exploitative where history and trauma are commodified for mass entertainment. The visual economy of the 'Holocaust Industry' (Finklestein 2000) creates a form of inescapability where repetition entraps memory into a bind where the repetition of visuals can lead to an anaesthetization to trauma;

> *'There, just off the National Mall in Washington, the victims of Nazism will be on view for the American public, stripped, herded into ditches, shot, buried, and then the tape will repeat and they will be herded into ditches again, shot again, buried again. I cannot comprehend how anyone can enthusiastically*

> *present this constant cycle of slaughter,'* (Gourevitch 1993, cf. Lennon & Foley 1999: 49).

The normalization of pain and suffering and the reliance of visual culture on enacting the inconceivable dulls our human reaction to the Monument. As Musil (cf. Lennon & Foley 1999: 50) notes;

> *There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument and whilst they are erected to be seen and to attract attention – they are at the same time impregnated with something that repels attention causing the glance to roll off.*

Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2002:88) argue that the Holocaust has the foundations of a 'new cosmopolitan memory' where a memory can transcend ethnic and national boundaries. In their thesis, they contend that it is not the event per se that becomes the object of study but rather how the changing representations of the event have become a central political-cultural symbol facilitating the emergence of cosmopolitan memories. They argue that Holocaust impresses a symbiotic relationship between memory and modernity evoking a public sphere which has questioned the very process of self-reflection through modernity. Holocaust has they contend universalist and humanist identification. The critique of their thesis is also one of the visual culture and our contemporary consciousness where dominant and iconographic images serve to obliterate other memories keeping them distant and not consequential for modernity. We are selective about what penetrates our social construction of reality and how we conceptualise the real and unreal is intimately bound with our cognitive reality. Zizek (2002: 16) in writing about the World Trade Centre attacks states;

> *We should therefore invert the standard reading according to which the WTC explosions were the intrusion of Real which shattered our illusory Sphere: quite the reverse – it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceive Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality, as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) Screen – and what happened on September 11 was that this fantastic apparition entered out reality.*

Visual cultures are both influenced by regimes of power and are a reaction to it. Young (1993) in questioning the absence of commemoration of other form of genocide re-examines the politics of representation as well as remembrance. He contends that our selective amnesia is just as disturbing (if not disruptive) as our will to crystallize certain memories and histories;

> *Where are the national monuments to the genocide of the American Indians, to the millions of Africans enslaved and murdered, to the Russian Kulaks, and peasants starved to death by the millions?* (Young 1993: 21)

One of the main objections to representing horror through artistic expression is from Theodore Adorno. In *Negative Dialectics* (1973: 361) Adorno is emphatic that art may suggest some sense where horror did not and was not capable of making sense. In his misunderstood quote about 'poetry after Auschwitz' Adorno is sceptical about artistic expression mainly due to the fact that poetry may suggest a state of mental complacency where it could arrest critical thinking necessary to overcome moral depravation. Adorno's objection to stylized representation was its ability to diminish suffering whilst packaging it as enjoyable. It highlights the uneasy and conflicted relationship between art and horror.

In essence, popular representations are problematised by the ideological discourses of the Holocaust. Representations of the Holocaust are seen as inadequate and tainting the image of the event. Other issues such as historical authenticity, commodification and commercialisation of the Holocaust along with the 'Disneyfication' are seen as thwarting purist constructions of the event which may reside in communal imaginations. Despite these criticisms, the popular representations have helped to retain the centrality of the event in modern consciousness. Beyond popular representations there is a need to explore the notion of bearing witness through images and their implications for authenticity and truth in the project of memory making.

## Image as Witness

Ernst van Alphen (2002) premises image and vision as having a fundamental role to play in trauma and memory. He points out that vision can be genealogically located in the Western imaginary from the Renaissance where it is implicitly bound up with truth and authenticity (2002: 206-207). This privileged epistemological status of the visual image since Enlightenment means that it is a precondition and guarantee for knowledge. In particular, visual art became the domain where the question of historical truth is enacted even if that truth is unbearable. This founding and grounding function of visual images in 're-membering' is even more crucial in the disappearance of the eye-witness. Nevertheless for van Alphen images only represent or depict parts of a story but often the visual image is imprinted in the human brain of the affected person where its accessibility and translation into image is not always possible. The human mind retains these 'visual imprints' which may not necessarily be communicated to others.

Van Alphen (2002:207) posits through his interviews with eye-witnesses of the Holocaust that seeing is not always about comprehension. The visual imprints in peoples' minds provide a testimony to the event but in the Holocaust testimonies these visuals function as an unmodified return to what happened rather 'than a mode of access or penetration.' Conversely, Walter Benjamin in his paper on photography (cf. Dant & Gilloch 2002:10) refers to the 'optical unconscious'- that which the eye must have seen but which the conscious brain cannot discern or grasp due to size, motion or inconspicuousness. This for Benjamin is captured by photography and its ability to record exhaustively. Our ability to 'see' is mediated both by technology and what the eye and mind are able to perceive.

Van Alphen makes the point that visual art and culture are often devalued through the notion of authenticity where the act of seeing appropriates a privileged status. The need for authenticity has very much dominated debates on visual culture where artistic depictions are often questioned for authenticity and assigned a quest to represent the real. Much of the visual representations of Holocaust have been questioned for its authenticity especially Hollywood portrayals such as *Schindler's List*. On the other hand, Claude Lanzmann's, *Shoa* and its depiction of the Holocaust for example is associated with the authentic. Here seeing is to witness and to witness then makes it real. Thus vision has a problematic relationship with truth and authenticity.

Van Alphen's argument is twofold. Firstly, vision does not automatically lead to authentic witnessing as this must be supplanted with the ability to account for what is seen before the act of witnessing can be completed. Secondly, there is often a problem of transmitting the act of seeing something traumatic and as there is a need for language to intervene. Hannah Arendt (1963) in observing the Eichmann trials in Jerusalem raises the question of whether the survivor-witness can distinguish between things that they might have experienced and things they might have heard extending the suspicion of authenticity to testimonial narratives (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009: 160).

Authenticity with regard to the 'Holocaust Industry' (Finklestein 2000) is a conflicted entity. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC which was built with $168 million in private funds is a clear example of not having a vital connection with authenticity. Neither the site of the Museum nor many of the displays have an authentic connection with Jewish Holocaust (Lennon & Foley 1999: 47). However, the 'deterritorialization of politics and culture' (Tomlinson 1999) in the era of globalization and the re-positioning of space through new media communication technology can influence memory making as a device stripped of context. The Holocaust museum in Washington also sought to make the Holocaust experience that others can identify with. This 'Americanization of the project' seemed important to transcend the ethnic boundaries and to construct a monument that can sit easily with the wider American culture and its notions of citizenship and justice. The inauguration of the museum also coincided with the popular success of *Schindler's List* contributing to the universalisation of the Holocaust (Levy & Hirsch 2002).

Beyond the dimension of the individual visual image imprint that Van Alphen refers, Barbie Zelizer constructs the image and particularly the photograph and the act of capturing an image as a process and means of forging connections with traumatic events. The urge to capture and preserve images constitutes a human response to traumatic events. Zelizer (2002) sees this human agency resonant both in the reconstruction of the horror in the extermination of the Jews in the Holocaust as well as the destruction of the World Trade Centre in 2001. Zelizer (1990:10) defines the act of bearing witness as a process that enables people to take responsibility for what they see where the personal act of 'seeing' can be transformed into a collective act of dealing with trauma. Shoshana Felman (1992: 204) extends this collective act of bearing witness to equally acknowledging the truth of the occurrence of a traumatic event.

Collectively held images, Zelizer contents create a mnemonic frame in which people can remember others (2002: 699). For Zelizer, bearing witness and collective recovery are intrinsically bound where coming together of humanity remains crucial both in the passing of the trauma and recovery. Images through photography construct a post-traumatic space where images 'stand in for the larger event' which they represent (2002:699). Photographs concretize memory in an accessible way and become aides in facilitating the recall of events making them the 'primary markers' of memory. Nevertheless she acknowledges that photographs are not without their limitations as composite entities they are arbitrary, conventionalized and simplify complex situations and events where they work for collective endorsements and readings whilst not necessarily triggering a personal memory. Our ability to store, freeze frame and replay images in our new media economies and display them in spaces such as museums, art galleries, television archives, makes the past work for the present (Zelizer 2002: 699).

With specific reference to the Holocaust, Zelizer (1998) examined the role of photography in showcasing the trauma and the role of individuals in bearing witness to the liberation of the Nazi camps in 1945. The coming together of mobile technology in the format of miniature cameras and the consolidation of photography in daily newspapers made trauma accessible to a wider public who had previously only heard of the atrocities under Hitler's rule. With the liberation of the Nazi camps on the Western front in the spring of 1945 there was an imperative to reveal and soldiers with cameras in the pocket were able to take pictures of what they found inside these camps.

With General Dwight Eisenhower facilitating journalists to bear witness to images inside camps, photographs provided a visual narrative of what the world was not able to see. The conjoining of the urge to bear witness through photographs and the need to publicise them through newspapers and journals provided a visual documentation of life under Nazi Germany. Zelizer (1998) points out that a veritable cottage industry formed under the need to bear witness where amateur photography helped to produce numerous pamphlets and booklets. As Alexander (2002:11) asserts these visual economies became a means to control symbolic production and narration of the Holocaust. With the liberation of Nazi camps in 1945 they became the controllers of this cultural production. They promoted the vision of American as an 'imperial republic' conjuring it as 'the triumphant, forward-looking, militantly and militarily democratic new world warrior'.

The ability of photographs to represent the real is nevertheless a contested terrain. Susan Sontag (2004: 21) claimed photography has kept company with death ever since it was invented in 1839. When the camera was emancipated from the tripod and became portable enabling close observation from a distant vantage point, picture taking acquired immediacy and authority. This valorization of the image is an intrinsic part of human culture where images can define complex narratives. Sontag points out that images contain an inherent contradiction – possessing both objectivity and a point of view. Thus they enable make belief whilst attempting to portray reality.

Daniel Goldhagen's (1996) controversial thesis on the Holocaust directed a narrative through shocking imagery to attribute an essentialism of evil to the average German. This essentialism conjured through a heavy reliance on images simplified the Holocaust as a propensity for unmitigated cruelty by the Germans towards the Jews. The images of German perpetrators inflicting heinous crimes were seen as the 'power of visual evidence' (Morrison 2004:349). Goldhagen's accessible history became instantly popular with the public, selling over 500,000 copies in the first year topping the non-fiction list in more than 13 countries. Morrison invokes the memory of Nanking and the rape of 80,000 women by 300,000 Japanese solider after the fall of the Chinese capital in 1937 to refute Goldhagen's monothematic cultural expression. Morrison in demonstrating similar photos of Japanese acts of cruelty questions Goldhagen's construction of Holocaust as unique on this basis without having undertaken research on the wider issues of genocide. Morrison contends 'photographs as cultural artefacts are open to an array of questions' and played a significant role in making Goldhagen a commercial success.

Sharon Sliwinski (2006:334) in writing about the charges levelled against King Leopold II of Belgium and his colony, the Congo Free State in 1906 refers to the role of the photographs in highlighting the human right atrocities to the world. The Congo Reform Movement used photographs of human atrocity as a central tool in their human rights campaign. Crimes in distant shores were made publicly visible through photography. Sliwinski argues that the articulation of human rights emerged through this particular visual encounter with atrocity. In the Congo atrocities, the photographic images played a significant role in creating a public and in setting forth a process to stop these atrocities (2006:346). With the tide of public sentiment against King Leopold, his displeasure with camera and its ability to speak for the mutilated are revealed;

> *The Kodak has been a sole calamity to us. The most powerful enemy indeed. In the early years we had no trouble in getting the press to 'expose' the tales of mutilation as slanders, lies inventions of busybody American missionaries and exasperated foreigners…Then all of a sudden came the crash! That is to say, the incorruptible Kodak – and all the harmony went to hell! The only witness I couldn't bribe. Every Yankee missionary and every interrupted trader sent home and got one; and now – oh, well the pictures get sneaked around everywhere, in spite of all we can do to ferret them out and suppress them* (cf. Sliwinski: 346).

Slinwinski emphasises that photographs and visuals were not clear-cut or unproblematic devices neither were they transparent historical evidence. In effect, they became tools of the 'empire' capturing panoramic views and ethnographic specimens of 'primitive races' and 'exotic beasts' during the era of colonial expansion. The photograph crystallized the notion of the 'other' through the visual and was constructed for a Western audience. It became part of the machinery of colonial agents who sought to create support and interests for their causes one way or the other.

Relatedly, Slinwinski (2006: 247-248) points out that notion of 'phantasmagoria' is of interest to art historians where it represents a symbolic link between visual technology and notion of imagination as a haunting force of the 19th century often associated with the magic lantern technology which was a prototype of the modern slide projector. Phantasmagoria also alluded to an anxiety-related psychological state in which the divisions between reality and fantasy are eroded. This liminality captured the haunted space of imagination where 'thoughts are projected in the internal screen of the mind.' For the Congo reform movement a series of lectures entitled the 'lantern lectures' delivered to the public with a mix of discourse and horror-filled slides representing atrocities interspersed with prayer, hymns and evangelical messages elicited strong emotional responses. The mutilated and maimed become characters deprived of their own voices transformed into objects of 'pity' where both imagination and reality became conspirators in enabling this interface with the unknown. Similarly, Interactive museums and exhibits which simulate victim experiences through sights, sounds, visuals exploit this notion of phantasmagoria where the act of remembering a distant past requires a personal access to the suffering of others where such suffering could be inconceivable in a secure society. The Holocaust industry has emerged through a difficult mix of reality and visuality which seeks to personalise trauma and create a proximity to distant events.

## Conclusion

The universalisation, the Americanisation and the particularization of the Holocaust hinge on the crusade to elongate and entrench a prosthetic memory for younger generations for whom the past can only be remembered and imagined through spaces of material culture. The production of cultural symbols in the project of remembrance is often politically and historically driven appropriating different cultural and physical manifestations and formats to communicate the imperative at hand. The Holocaust as an 'event at the limits', on the one hand, is reified as 'unpresentable,' and on the other, the possibility of forgetting threatens to destroy the very construct of modernity along with rationality and critical thought. This double bind constructs the Holocaust as a cultural gargoyle guarding humanity against the 'banality of evil.' Whilst visual culture enables access to historical imagination it can equally distort memory and de-contextualise suffering and disassemble it from history.

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