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THE FIGURE OF THE CHILD IN HOLOCAUST REPRESENTATIONS

A Dissertation in
German

by

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation titled “The Figure of the Child in Holocaust Representations” focuses on the child as a narrative construct and its function in Holocaust literature, film, and museums. Before my work, the figure of the child in the context of Holocaust representation had not been adequately researched at the academic level, despite its prominent presence in Holocaust representation since the immediate post-war years, starting with the popularity of Anne Frank’s diary. In order to adequately observe the child figure phenomenon, I investigate each medium of Holocaust representation and conduct close readings of popular or well-known representations using Hayden White’s concept of the middle voice and Alison Landsberg’s work in memory studies in order to illustrate how the child’s constructed innocence can impact a work. The first chapter focuses on literary representations of the child and close readings ranging from *The Diary of Anne Frank* to W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*. I examine the particular narrative techniques the works use via the child figure to negotiate the impossibilities of Holocaust representation. The second chapter discusses filmic representations of children with an emphasis on film post *Schindler’s List*. I observe the unique role that films with an emphasis on the child as storyteller play in the discussion of the Holocaust and how a child’s viewpoint can provide a new visual manner of representing the Holocaust in film. The third chapter focuses on museums representations of the Holocaust child figure, centering on USHMM’S Daniel’s Story and its connection to the larger museum spaces dedicated to the atrocities. I evaluate the positioning of the child figure within institutional walls and the educational reach a child’s perspective can have on a visitor. In my conclusion, I examine the digital shift and the future impact of digital tools on these institutions.

The works I discuss range from the historical to the fictional to show the child figure’s broad impact on Holocaust representation. My research provides an evaluation of the child’s role

across all three mediums of representation and how its perceived innocence can interrupt a standard narrative. By investigating the representations of children in Holocaust narratives, I provide a new approach and way of reading the canonical material as well as new applications of archival material.

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Introduction

“I understand the logic of sending back political refugees to Germany, but young children? Why do you think we have to send young children? It is inhumane. We should not do that.”¹

In the early 2000s, the acclaimed dancer and choreographer, Bill T. Jones, adapted his Jewish mother-in-law Dora’s experiences during World War II into a stage performance. Dora spent the majority of the war working for the Organization for Saving the Children (O.S.E.) in Vichy, France.² As shown in the quote above, Dora considers the concept of the child and the value of his or her innocence in relation to the Nazi machine. According to her testimony, each child O.S.E saved had to be replaced with an adult. They had quotas to fill which were set by the Nazis. Dora chooses the word “cooperate” rather than “collaborate” to explain her own as well as the organization’s role because they did save some people—children. Dora explains: “The French had to deliver a quota, so if you took one out, another had to be put in. So my feelings were mixed. Saving children, I had no problem with that. But for adults...I somehow couldn’t face it.”³ They did save the children.⁴ For many involved in the war, children, in the immediate sense, were a topic of discussion, as Dora’s own history exemplifies—how do we protect the most innocent? The child’s prominence permeated into the legal realm, and they were even, at times, the ones who were exempted from national immigration policies.⁵ The question of what to do with a child,

¹ Bill T. Jones “Analogy/Dora” 11

² O.S.E was an organization tasked with helping Jewish refugee children from France and Western Europe before and during World War II. They were housed in the unoccupied section of France and saved children from Nazi concentration camps and killing centers.

³ Ibid. 11

⁴ Shortly thereafter in the script, her son questions her for rescuing children over adults and what their logic was since they were still sending others to their deaths.

⁵ The most notable is Britain’s Kindertransport where nearly 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi occupied Europe were sent to Britain for the duration of the war. They were primarily housed with families, often Christian, and many remained as their parents often did not survive. In 1939 in the United States, lawmakers introduced a bill to admit 20,000 Jewish child refugees over a two-year period. The legislation, despite endorsement from First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, did not pass. According to the *Americans and the Holocaust* online exhibit on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website as of August 26, 2019.

in particular how to protect a child, was pervasive during the war and remains a significant topic today.

As Dora continued to cope throughout her life with the work she did during the war, we too, as a society, struggle to come to terms with the genocidal acts the Nazis implemented.⁶ The attempted elimination of an entire religious group based on hatred is inconceivable to many. Men, women, children, the elderly, the young and healthy, it did not matter. Nobody was excluded from the policies. The ethical ramifications that the mechanized genocide poses should be clear; but, at the same time, the guidelines for representation seem to be changing as we move further away from its origins. Alain Resnais's 1955 film *Night and Fog* contained archival footage of the camps, the inclusion of which Claude Lanzmann later explicitly excluded from his 1985 work *Shoah*. And yet, in recent years, as scholars such as Brad Prager have noted, even Lanzmann seems to have softened his stance on the total prohibition of images.⁷ The art and manner of testimony itself has evolved over the decades and now includes second-generation mediated representation, most notably Art Spiegelman's *Maus*.⁸ This text, especially its use of animals to depict different national origins, is of course not without controversy. Nevertheless, its popularity among readers suggests a shift in modes of representation. Despite these representational shifts, however, the child figure persists, and can be seen from Anne Frank's diary all the way to *Son of*

⁶ Seen via the numerous debates on *how* to represent the atrocities. For a deeper discussion, see *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*.

⁷ In Brad Prager's 2015 *After the Fact: The Holocaust in Twenty-First Century Documentary Film*, Prager comments on Lanzmann including documentary footage from the Nazi propaganda film *Theresienstadt: A Documentary Film from the Jewish Settlement Area* in his own documentary *The Last of the Unjust* (2013) with the words "Mise en Scene Nazi" across the screen as the footage plays. Including this footage is counter to Lanzmann's earlier stance and insisting that documentary footage should not be shown. As Prager comments, "Lanzmann seems to have cast aside his own directive, and now, in the twenty-first century, he too can be described as being in a 'post-Lanzmann' phase." Prager, 9-10.

⁸ Art Spiegelman is the son of Holocaust survivors and is recounting his father's survival tale. His work discusses, on the meta-level, the difficulties of representing not only Holocaust history, but also another's history. In one scene, Spiegelman depicts himself attempting to represent his father's story and the insecurities which arise from it. Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 41.

Saul.⁹ In this dissertation I look to Holocaust literature, film, and museums in order to investigate the different ways the child figure can disrupt the conventional modes of Holocaust representation.¹⁰

As I show in this dissertation, the child figure often appears in Holocaust narratives as an allegory of innocence amid the turmoil of mass atrocity and evil. Moreover, the figure features prominently in Holocaust representations—literature, film, theater, museums, and memorials—whether at the center of the narrative or on the periphery. Regardless of the figure’s importance to a particular story, though, the child figure, as I will show, can impact narrative strategies and open up a perspective on history which was previously inaccessible. Due to unspoken “limitations” on Holocaust representation, such as fear of voyeurism or misrepresentation, tensions and difficulties persist around such attempts.¹¹ It is the child figure’s ability to see and hear what others cannot, as Deleuze notes, which allows the figure to enter spaces that are often deemed “unrepresentable,” and provide an account of the twenty-first century’s worst atrocities.¹² As the Nazis created a non-sensical world, the naïve child perspective has the ability to represent the absurdity, either abstractly through humor or concretely by entering sacred spaces, as they are not bound by preconceived notions of the world. And yet, within the context of Holocaust representations, their presence has rarely been discussed.

⁹ As will be mentioned later in the dissertation, Otto Frank first published an edited version of Anne Frank’s diary in Dutch in 1947. It was translated into and published in English for the first time in 1952. *Son of Saul*, a film by Lazlo Nemes, appeared in 2015.

¹⁰ The child figure will be defined as the National Association of Child Holocaust Survivors (NAHOS) defines a child survivor: those who were children or teenagers during 1938-1945. I transfer this qualification over to the literary concept of the child as well. They were designated as children by the Nazis, and they are represented as child figures in literature, film, and museums.

¹¹ For a lengthy account of the issues of Holocaust representation see *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*. The dissertation will engage with these complicated aspects of Holocaust Studies, and the foundational theoretical arguments will be set up in the following paragraphs.

¹² Deleuze, *Cinema* 2, 3.

Previous Contributions to the Field

From a broader perspective, the discussion of child figures as allegorical configurations is not a novel approach to evaluating literary or filmic representations. If we look at the secondary literature on child representations from the ancient period to immediate post war, we find an extensive discussion of the topic, especially in the past few decades. In 1975, Robert Pattison investigated the role of children in English literature, examining the history of child figures in literature and their relation to the “concepts of the Fall of Man and of Original Sin.”¹³ His work shows how the presentation and discussion of children in literature has been an historic constant over the centuries, but Pattison halts his work before World War I. At the same time, much has been said about the child figure in post-war representations, particularly in the rubble films of Italian Neorealism. In his article “On the Ruins of Masculinity: The Figure of the Child in Italian Neorealism and the German Rubble-Film,” Jaimey Fisher applies Deleuzian concepts to read post-war films in the effort to argue that the male child figure disrupts the standard narrative of the adult male as savior. In these instances, it is the child that usurps the place of the returning soldier, shattering the traditional masculine role. The child, according to Fisher, consequently plays a vital role in the representation of post-war Europe and the problematic nature of the returning soldier.¹⁴ The child figure’s presence does not stop there and continues to permeate even modern digital documentation, and children continue to be frequently found in news stories of war zones and refugee camps.¹⁵

¹³ Pattison, ix

¹⁴ The child figure in these instances disrupts the strong male narrative, which, at the time, was a standard and accepted narrative. The returning soldier motif or “heimkehrenden Soldat,” however, did not fit the standard male narrative anymore, as many struggled to return to society and their previously understood societal roles. According to Fisher, the child figure was used in these films to represent these issues. The child has the ability to disturb and disrupt, a concept I will investigate further throughout this dissertation. Fisher, 28.

¹⁵ Two of the most prominent images from the Syrian conflict and ensuing refugee crisis are of a shell-shocked and dust covered young boy, Omran Daqneesh, and a father carrying his son, Aylan Kurdi’s corpse from the sea after crossing to Europe. In an NPR interview, Paul Slovic, a psychologist from the

It took until May 1991, at the Hidden Children conference in New York City, for the first major academic discussion of children in the Holocaust to occur.¹⁶ Focusing on and attended by children who went into hiding while the Nazis were in power, the conference allowed for a push to discuss personal histories outside of the standard deportation, ghetto, camp narrative. Although horrific, the victims' experiences while in hiding varied greatly, and discussing the lesser-known narratives allowed for a broader understanding of the subject of children in the Holocaust and the historical significance of their experiences. According to testimony from many attendees who had been "hidden children" during the war, they had yet to speak out about their experience because it did not include the camps.¹⁷ Despite appearing in representations since the post-war years, children and their representational counterparts had not been discussed to any extent by the academic community.

And yet since then, next to a small handful of dissertations, only a few scholars, such as Mark Anderson, David Bathrick, and Sue Vice, have discussed the child figure as it pertains to representational methods in any substantial detail. In his 2007 article, Anderson is concerned primarily with the ethically problematic misappropriation, in the American context, of the child figure, which, he argues, is frequently used to establish an (over) identification with the Holocaust experience.¹⁸ In his 2000 article, "Rescreening 'The Holocaust': The Children's Stories," Bathrick discusses the role or voice of children in works such as Roberto Benigni's film *Life is Beautiful* (1997) and how the child perspective can (or should) change the perception of a

University of Oregon discusses the power of what he defines as an "identified individual victim" and equates the power of Aylan's photo to rouse the general public to Anne Frank's diary and Elie Wiesel's *Night*. "Study: What Was the Impact of the Iconic Photo of the Syrian Boy?" *NPR* Diane Cole January 13, 2017.

¹⁶ David Patterson, *Encyclopedia of Holocaust Literature*.

¹⁷ According to many testimonies of hidden children but as commented on in the New York Times article "Coming Out of Hiding: Childhoods as Non-Jews" from May 5, 1991 by Frank J. Priol.

¹⁸ Much of Anderson's work is grounded in the "Paper Clips Project" which took place in Whitwell, TN. He fears an over-identification with the child figure, which, in his opinion, can lead to a misleading message: identification with child over moral message of Holocaust representation. Anderson, "The Child Victim as Witness to the Holocaust."

work. Bathrick argues that by focusing on the child figure's perspective, Benigni is "permitted" to treat the topic of the Holocaust in a comedic manner—what would normally be a contentious manner.¹⁹ Vice's book *Children Writing the Holocaust*, from 2004, discusses children in Holocaust works but focuses strictly on literary representations and the varying techniques and structures used by authors to tell the stories from a child's perspective.²⁰ The authors she investigates are adults writing for an adult readership who employ anything from split narration (adult author's thoughts alongside childhood perspectives) to thematic concepts such as the hidden child to give voice to something they no longer are. The dissertations discussing children and the Holocaust, on the other hand, deal with either the author as child survivor, or with the traumatic repercussions of the child survivor.²¹ These works deal with the historical examples detailing the lingering impacts after the war. When discussing Holocaust representations, as opposed to the Holocaust generally, most of this work focuses on the psychological aspects of the authors themselves rather than the child as literary device that allows a privileged perspective on the atrocities. These dissertations, and even articles, such as Lisa Costello's from 2011, do not separate the children to whom the authors refer (often themselves in the past) from the actual writers.²² Their research sets the groundwork for my claims about the child figure across representational mediums.

¹⁹ Bathrick analyzes the shift in Holocaust representation which began with *Holocaust* (1978) and was followed by *Schindler's List* (1993). His work claims, it is "in the wake of" these productions, which brought the Holocaust to a commercial level with their popularity, that we must reevaluate any unspoken limitations to Holocaust representation. Bathrick, 57

²⁰ Vice's research, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter One, began after researchers announced Benjamin Wilkomirski's novel *Fragments* to be fraudulent. Nevertheless, captivated by Wilkomirski's work, Vice was motivated to discover the precise techniques adult authors use, which allow the reader into a child's world.

²¹ See Rechtman *Child Survivors of the Holocaust; Literature, Trauma, Memory* 2006 and Kaplan *Children in the Holocaust* 2002 as examples.

²² For one example see Lisa Costello's 2011 article "Performative Auto/biography in Ruth Kluger's *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*."

As Anderson's work shows, the child as a representative of innocence and purity can leave a powerful impression on the reader or viewer. But where he sees a fault (negative outcomes of overidentification), I see the potential that the child figure offers these works to represent the atrocities while maintaining the critical distance needed in order to understand—without overidentifying with—as Hayden White calls it, this “modernist event.”²³ The child, as I will show, has the ability to challenge the known Holocaust paradigm without crossing “limits.” I thus follow Fisher in viewing the child as a figure of rupture, applying it more broadly to how the child provides access to a world and a history that is itself ruptured.

My work aims to make a major intervention in the field by focusing on the figure of the child in film, literature, museums, and memorials, and thus offer a deeper exploration and subsequent theorization of the child figure's presence in Holocaust representation. I will investigate how the child figures allow for a more nuanced form of representation in their ability to witness and in turn represent in a manner which those around them cannot. As Fisher argued in his article, the child figure can act as a rupture in the narrative, as a modernist device. As he states, “both Italian neorealist and German rubble-films depict a revealing oscillation of the child between active agency and passive observation.”²⁴ Throughout the dissertation I will show how this oft-present figure of the child not only ruptures or disrupts a Holocaust narrative confined by its representational limitations, but also is capable of representing the “unrepresentable.”

²³ Hayden White, as I will show in the following section, argues that the Holocaust is at its core a modernist event and demands a modernist approach to represent it. White, 52

²⁴ Fisher argues for the male child in particular and the challenge that the figure poses to a traditional male role in a filmic setting and continues, “the child highlights the limits of the male, the horizons of his effective agency, and the twilight of his conventional role in the masculine action-image.” Fisher, 33.

Terms, Definitions, and Methodologies

Since I focus throughout the dissertation on the child figure in representations of the Holocaust, I will also engage with the general debates surrounding Holocaust representation. As Andreas Huyssen stated, the question is no longer “if” we should represent the Holocaust, but rather “how.”²⁵ Indeed, as Lore Segal writes in the introduction to Ruth Kluger’s *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, the dilemma of speaking the “unspeakable” is a constant concern even for those who write about this event: “She [Ruth] worries that the very act of literature betrays what was experienced in the Holocaust: don’t words make ‘speaking’ what is not? The recollection of her mother physically punished and out of control is so ‘vivid and lurid,’ she thinks, ‘I can’t write this down.’ Then she writes it down.”²⁶ As is seen with the participants of the Hidden Children conference as well, survivors often feel a contradiction inside themselves as they attempt to describe what they witnessed under the Nazis. Does telling your story negate other victims’ experiences? What if you survived longer than you were supposed to? Does this mean things “weren’t that bad”? Does this mean you are morally corrupt?²⁷ The short and obvious answer is no. The Holocaust is not an event that can be easily described or reasoned through, as is shown with the countless debates of why and how the Nazis did what they did—nor should it be. The Holocaust was thus “unimaginable,” and yet, in order to begin to understand it, we must not only imagine it but also represent it. The child figure offers a unique vantage point for representing the topic. As I will show throughout the dissertation, by “witnessing” from their privileged space between knowledge and innocence, the child figure can broaden the

²⁵ Huyssen, “Of Mice and Mimesis: Reading Spiegelman with Adorno,” 65

²⁶ Kluger, 11

²⁷ As Kluger herself states, “Later in life, nothing offended me more than the generalization that the camps turned us all into brutal egoists, and whoever survived them must be morally defective. Again, the blithe refusal to look closely, to make distinctions, to reflect a little.” Kluger, 77

representational methods for Holocaust representations in part by allowing alternative approaches such as comedy and experiential engagement with the material.

I turn then to modernist concepts of representation, storytelling, and memory in order to theorize my close readings of the child figure's ability to navigate these spaces and put the readings in conversation with more historical representations. I focus specifically on the major shift in how Holocaust representation is discussed brought about by Hayden White's theory of historical emplotment. The Holocaust is, according to White, a product of modernity, one that was previously unimaginable, and thus demands a specific narrative mode in order for it to be told or represented properly. White states:

Looked at it this way, modernism appears, less as a rejection of the realist project and a denial of history, than as an anticipation of a new form of historical reality, a reality that included, among its supposedly unimaginable, unthinkable, and unspeakable aspects, the phenomena of Hitlerism, the Final Solution, total war, nuclear contamination, mass starvation, and ecological suicide; a profound sense of the incapacity of our sciences to *explain*, let alone control or contain these; and a growing awareness of the incapacity of our traditional modes of representation even to *describe* them adequately.²⁸

According to White, and since then others, such as Dominick LaCapra, the Holocaust accordingly requires a more modernist approach in order to represent the horrors of the modern world.²⁹

In order to accomplish the "impossible" feat of representing the Holocaust, White suggests a form of intransitive writing is needed "as a way of resolving many of the issues raised by the representation of the Holocaust."³⁰ In order to discuss the child figure's intervention in Holocaust representation, I thus engage directly with White's concept of a middle voice, a narrative method of intransitive writing where the "subject is presumed to be interior to the

²⁸ White, 51-52

²⁹ Additionally, in regard to the actual writing process, White discusses the limitations or dangers of writing. White claims that no description of an historical account is without some form of storytelling. Storytelling is inherent in the writing of history and historical truth is not a given, as both stories and historical facts are "linguistic entities." That is not to say the Holocaust cannot be described in an historical or purely factual manner, but only that historical writers must be aware of their writing's narrative elements.

³⁰ White, 48

action.”³¹ White develops the notion of the middle voice using Roland Barthes’s discussion of the verb “to write” and its meaning in literary modernism as well as Derrida’s explanation of his notion of *différance*. Barthes notes that the modern Indo-European languages contain only the active and the passive voice. In both of these literary voices, a subject of the sentence is either the agent or the “patient” of the verb in linguistic terms. However, in ancient Greek, as Barthes notes, a third linguistic option existed, which allows us to go beyond the literary oppositions of realism. The middle voice, however, is best described in, as White quotes him, Erich Auerbach’s description of literary modernism, in which narrative doubt about objective facts becomes constitutive of the work. Auerbach provides a list of literary elements, including the use of *erlebte Rede* or free indirect discourse which can help to eliminate the illusion of an “objective reality” known to the authorial figure. Although these are not narrative methods invented in the post-war literary world, White argues for their use to represent this “new form of historical reality.”

The child figure, as I will show, has the potential to speak from this middle space—with no active or passive relationship to the object—and represent this modernist event “adequately.” The middle space allows the figure to push past the limits of representing this modernist horror and achieve a representation needed to convey what is otherwise unimaginable. I show throughout the chapters how my selected works mobilize particular narrative techniques to negotiate the parameters of a child’s perspective and thereby represent the Holocaust in a way that is distinctly modernist. The figure, as we will see with works such as W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, can fracture a present-day world through its multiple embedded narrative voices or as in Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful* distort a reality that is known to an author or viewer. The child figure, and/or the perspective this figure can offer, is appropriate to this new shattered reality, in part because it has the ability to call into question what reality is.

³¹ White, 48.

As I will argue throughout the dissertation, the child figure lends itself to this modernist reading because it can show a world beyond the pale. As a historical literary device, the child figure brings an element of innocence and relatability to all manners of representation. As Debbie Pinfold has noted in her work on the child figure in post-war German literature:

The child figure has come a long way from Wordsworth's tranquil image of the child communing with nature but...it has retained much of its earlier heritage [its innocence] and much of its significance; indeed, if anything, the desire of writers and readers alike to believe in the positive potential of childhood has been strengthened in our own era and thus the child continues to meet the deepest needs of writers and readers alike.³²

This constructed innocence can permeate a work and have a powerful effect on the reader, viewer, or visitor. In the realm of Holocaust representation, however, the child figure, precisely by virtue of this "innocence," can also often walk a fine line between universalization (allowing an "outsider" to better understand the material) and overidentification (causing the learner to misinterpret lessons of the representation).³³ In universalizing human suffering by removing unfounded stereotyping, this figure is able to draw a person into a space or a history that, as White's has shown, is difficult not only to represent but also to comprehend. At the same time, this "innocence" can also remove the critical distance which must remain in order to understand the Holocaust's history. As Sue Vice notes in her work on children in Holocaust literature, there is a risk of provoking "morbid pieties" when discussing child figures.³⁴ However, it is also this constructed aura of innocence, both its negative and positive qualities, that allows us to access the Holocaust through a "sensory experience," as Miriam Hansen defines it. The works I will discuss should be seen, as Hansen notes, "as an aesthetic attempt to engage the extreme difficulty (though

³² Pinfold, 29.

³³ The discussion of universalization and the ability to "access" a work will be discussed in the film and museum chapters in connection with Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory. The issue of overidentification will be discussed more concretely with regard to James Young's work on museums and memorial.

³⁴ Vice, 3.

not absolute impossibility) of giving sensory expression to an experience that radically defies sense.”³⁵

My work will investigate the tension between the loss of critical distance—the negatives of the perceived innocence—and the potential to thematize and address taboo topics which the child figure can introduce into a Holocaust representation. Fisher’s work shows that the child figure with its innocence could rupture a standard narrative in Italian Neorealist films. That rupture persists in Holocaust representation, but as I will argue, the figure’s presence in the Holocaust narrative is not a singular rupture. The child figure, rather, gives access to White’s notion of a middle space, challenging the presumption of unrepresentability, and insisting on mediating the topic. By approaching the topic of the child figure in Holocaust representations through White’s theoretical framework of a middle voice, my work will show how the child figure’s presence can provide a framing device for the material that is capable of taking Holocaust representation into the digital age.

Chapter Overview

In the following chapters, I answer the key question: How does the child figure navigate the Holocaust narrative space and does its role differ across mediums of representation. In order to provide an overview of the Holocaust child figure, my work thus discusses three prominent types of Holocaust representation—literature, film, and museums. I will focus on the most iconic contributions to Holocaust representation; works which are either popular or those which are often found on college syllabuses. Throughout my research, I investigate the child figure’s

³⁵ Hansen, “*Schindler’s List Is Not Shoah*,” 305.

position within the narrative at hand and how the figure, as a representational device, traverses each representational space.

Chapter One

The first chapter investigates literary representations of the child. Here I engage with Sue Vice's research and the concept of innocence often attached to the child figure. Ultimately, my discussion of Holocaust literature engages with three texts: the original and perhaps most well-known child figure in *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, Ruth Kluger's notable memoir *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* and Sebald's modernist text *Austerlitz*. I discuss each narrative separately in order to argue for their individual contributions, but the three distinctively different works nevertheless speak to one another. By examining these three works together, I can investigate a broader range of approaches to the literary child—diary, memoir, and fictional narrative—as well as the differences between fictional and testimonial Holocaust literature. Much has been written about these texts, with the exception of Anne's text, however, rarely is the child figure at the center of these discussions.

Anne, with her diary's many adaptations into various modes of representation, is perhaps the most heavily researched of my subjects. Her work has been translated into multiple languages since its original release and has even been adapted to a graphic form, not to mention other, non-textual adaptations. Although discussed at length, at least in regard to Americanization, heroism, and even the child specifically, Anne provides an entrance into my discussion due to her impact on Holocaust "culture" at large.³⁶ Although I cannot apply her experiences to all children who

³⁶ For further evaluation of the impact of Anne Frank in the American sense see Judith Doneson's *The Holocaust in American Film*. Doneson traces the rise of Anne Frank's popularity from the initial English publication to modern day, discussing even the casting choice of the first filmic Anne, Millie Perkins, and her resemblance to Audrey Hepburn.

suffered during the Holocaust, it is the immediacy of her work that I focus on. Anne wrote contemporaneously, and her thoughts and commentary on the situation miraculously survived and were returned to her father, Otto, after the war. By investigating the now definitive, unexpurgated version of Anne's diary, I am able to better understand the evolution of child-focused Holocaust representations.³⁷ She appeared in the earliest years and maintains a substantial presence over 75 years later. Her writing's significance has the ability to show the impact a child's voice can have on representational methods as well as public engagement.

Kluger's text, as memoir, is a bridge between Anne's writing and the fictional methods of Sebald. Much of the research already completed discusses her work in the context of translation, since she initially published her memoir in German, and it was almost a decade later when the English translation appeared on shelves.³⁸ My engagement with the work will focus on the English publication, which, due to the additions and amendments made in the process of self-translation, has a tone of finality. Some scholars have engaged with the child figure in the text, but strictly as it pertains to Kluger herself. These scholars thus look at the role of gender or examine the figure as autobiographical device.³⁹ I aim to distinguish myself from these works by separating the child from Kluger and discussing the figure of the child as a literary abstraction rather than a reflection of Kluger herself. This is a complicated task, since Kluger tends to insert her adult voice into the memoir, often contradicting the childhood perspective. Kluger's approach thus differs from other texts such as Elie Wiesel's *Night*, where the reader is formally left with

³⁷ As previously noted, Anne's diary was first published in Dutch in 1947 with the first English publication in 1952. However, some diary entries and comments were not published in the original versions at Otto Frank's request. The entire diary has now been published, including pages Anne had papered over. The Anne Frank House organization was able to finally read the pages without removing the paper in May 2018.

³⁸ The German version was initially published in 1992 with the English version appearing first in 2001.

³⁹ See Costello's previously mentioned text from 2011 for an example of autobiographical commentary and Sheridan's text "The Intersection of Gender and Religious Language in Ruth Kluger's *Still Alive*" from 2014 for a discussion on gender's role in Kluger's text.

Wiesel's childhood viewpoint.⁴⁰ She distinguishes between her childhood reactions and her adult retrospection. The child's voice that does emerge, however, as Linda Schulte-Sasse notes, challenges the notion of the innocent child and thus the known Holocaust paradigm.⁴¹

Sebald's work, on the other hand, is a fictional narrative engages directly with the adult figure of Jacques Austerlitz but with his childhood trauma at the center of the story. As I will argue, it is the rather evasive child voice who emerges through the adult's retelling, which allows for a working through of a traumatic past.⁴² The child figure is both within and outside the world of the Holocaust. Because Austerlitz was a part of the Kindertransport, he was not in the camps. His entire life, however, has been affected by the war and its atrocities. Sebald's child, although on the periphery of the narrative, is nevertheless a main focal point—the voice of a past lost but not yet forgotten. The child often emerges in moments of rupture within the text forcing the adult figure to encounter his past. The child figure, as I will show, speaks to the reader through the fictional narrative—when the adult encounters a fragment from the past—or through Sebald's use of historic photographs.⁴³ The child figure speaks from a middle space in the past and tells Austerlitz's history when he cannot.⁴⁴ I ask in this chapter how Sebald's layered text affects our mediated experience of Austerlitz's early years, and thus the reader's engagement with the Holocaust. The three texts speak to each other, navigating decades of Holocaust representation and the concept of innocence, and in their own ways elevate the child's voice to the middle voice.

⁴⁰ Although one could argue Wiesel's work is also tainted with adult knowledge due to when he wrote the text, his is not as easily parsed about as Kluger's reactions are.

⁴¹ Schulte-Sasse "'Living on' in the American Press: Ruth Kluger's 'Still Alive' and Its challenge to a Cherished Holocaust Paradigm."

⁴² White's "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth" will play a large role in my claims about the child figure in Holocaust literature, and I will argue for this precise point throughout the chapter.

⁴³ As we have seen in the controversial installment *Autel de Lycée Chases* by Christian Boltanski in 1986, images can invoke assumptions, here the death of children, if provided without context.

⁴⁴ Despite its modernist characteristics, *Austerlitz* has nevertheless become canon and popularized. As is noted in "As World Waits, Quiet on the West Wing Front" by Elisabeth Bumiller in the New York Times, Laura Bush was a known reader of the text. Mar. 17, 2003. Additionally, *Austerlitz* received the National Book Critics Award and is listed as one of the 100 German Must-Read texts

Chapter Two

The second chapter will examine filmic representations of children with a focus on Roberto Benigni's Italian black comedy *Life is Beautiful* (1998), Mark Herman's film adaptation of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008), and László Nemes's groundbreaking film on the Sonderkommando *Son of Saul* (2015). Since film is an inherently popular medium, I will engage somewhat in the problematics of filmic representations of the Holocaust that have arisen with creations such as the *Holocaust* miniseries (1978) and *Schindler's List* (1993). As David Bathrick and others have pointed out, it is their role as Hollywood products, products of entertainment, which often causes issues for critics and researchers. These films are also, unrightfully so, as Miriam Hansen has pointed out, often pitted against the works of Lanzmann and Resnais.⁴⁵ Hansen makes this observation in regard to *Schindler's List*: "To dismiss the film because of the a priori established unrepresentability of what it purports to represent may be justified on ethical and epistemological grounds, but it means missing a chance to understand the significance of the Shoah in the present."⁴⁶ Following Bathrick's and Hansen's comments, my work focuses rather on the figure of the child itself, and how it can be used to read the more controversial creations against the grain.

My discussion examines Benigni's film because of the unique and contentious role it plays in the discussion of the Holocaust, as it was created in the post *Schindler's List* world. I place particular emphasis on how Benigni uses the child figure, Giosuè, specifically as a storyteller. Much of the dispute surrounding the film deals with the cheerful depiction of camp life, fueled mainly by the game played between the father, Guido, and his son, Giosuè. However, I argue, as others, such as David Bathrick and Maurizio Viano have before me, it is precisely

⁴⁵ *Shoah* and *Night and Fog* respectively

⁴⁶ Hansen, "Schindler's List and Shoah," 312.

Giosuè's framing story that allows for this imagery, even though the viewer only learns of his narrator role at the very end.⁴⁷ The film's structure, and the story's absurdity, lessens the marginalizing nature of Guido's game with his son.⁴⁸ My theorization of the child figure shows the powerful effect the figure can have on a filmic narrative and, in its overdetermination, its ability to break the fourth wall and construct an alternative narrative. The story is Giosuè's and contains his memories of the lengths his father went to shield him from the horrific true nature of concentration camp life. My research will show how both despite and because of its controversial nature, Benigni's work plays an important role in the modern discussion of Holocaust representations. Because it takes place inside a camp but focuses on the father son relationship, the child figure traverses a world both within and outside of the Holocaust in Benigni's work. The imagery created by the balance between the life before and the life during is due to the child figure's presence which allows for an alternative perspective, humor, forcing the viewer to reckon with the absurdity of the Nazi regime.

I thus juxtapose Benigni's approach with Herman's highly controversial, and yet popular, film adaptation of John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, a narrative focused on a German child figure, Bruno, this time outside of the barbed wire looking in. Where Benigni uses comedic methods to overemphasize the Nazis' absurdity, Herman uses realist devices to split the narrative. Little Bruno, however, problematizes the child Holocaust narrative by directing the focus away from the victim and child figure counterpart, Shmuel's, perspective. The narrative rather accentuates a perpetrator perspective which in turn is only marked by the victim's perspective. Although there are two young child figures, the viewer's perspective is limited to a naive world of the Nazi child, a position which complicates Pinfold's theory of the child narrator.

⁴⁷ See Bathrick's "Rescreening 'The Holocaust': The Children's Stories" and Viano's "'Life is Beautiful': Reception, Allegory, and Holocaust Laughter"

⁴⁸ Viano, 31. Others have critiqued the film, because of the focus on the game and not what is transpiring around them, as marginalizing the horrors of the Holocaust.

As she states in her work, although normally an accepted literary trope, a naive child figure in literature representing the Nazi area can be problematic, as it is a highly unrealistic concept.⁴⁹ My work discusses the two child figures and how their roles and Bruno's perspective complicate Benigni's arguably modernist methods. Rather than using the split narrative and slapstick comedy, as Benigni does, Herman approaches the topic with a realist aesthetic, as I will argue, using the barbed wire fence to divide the boys and emphasize a problematic child figure's narrative.

Nemes's *Son of Saul*, on the other hand, pushes the boundaries of previous Holocaust representational limits and shows the viewer the life of a Sonderkommando member. The film is reminiscent of Sebald's approach with *Austerlitz*, as our child figure is not a physical character in the film, but rather an idea or concept. As I will argue, however, the child figure is what allows the viewer to enter the sacred space of the gas chambers. Nemes manages to navigate the most contentious spaces of Holocaust representation and even Lanzmann has praised his efforts. He approaches the most horrific of the Nazi atrocities, represents the victims' accounts appropriately, and provides insight into the ultimate grey zone of morality with a child figure at its center. I investigate not only how the child figure is capable of representing what was previously "forbidden" but also how the child figure has progressed in Holocaust film and the potential pathway forward, as fictional representations seem to be increasing.

My question, at the core, is not about high versus low art, but rather an exploration of how the cinematic child figure is constructed and subsequently opens up a new perspective for the viewer. The child figure navigates the filmic space, and in most cases allows the viewer access into the child's view of the Holocaust, a space in between knowledge and innocence with alternative perspectives of a known narrative.

⁴⁹ Due to the historically documented Nazi indoctrination methods, it would be unlikely that a child of a Nazi official would be as unknowledgeable as young Bruno. Pinfold, 6.

Chapter Three

In the third chapter, I focus on institutional representations of the child figure in the Holocaust focusing on *Daniel's Story*, a supporting exhibition within the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C. *Daniel's Story* is about a child and was created specifically for younger visitors.⁵⁰ The exhibition is, like Benigni's film, about a fictional character and a fictional life—complete with childhood bedroom, a hiding place in the ghetto, and a recreation of Auschwitz itself. *Daniel's Story* stands apart from Benigni's work though, as it is a tangible space rather than a filmic representation. It is an archive of the fictitious. The exhibition creates a space of known artifacts, but they are mere recreations of these artifacts. The D.C. visitor inhabits spaces which exist within Europe but are now represented in a cartoonish manner in this national museum and memorial. Such representations, which appear farcical, have been harshly criticized in the past for a multitude of reasons, some even suggesting it offers the chance for Holocaust denial. I question here, however, how much we can criticize such an exhibition if it is succeeding in its overall goal: to educate the next generation about the atrocities of the second World War.

Despite its cartoonish nature, *Daniel's Story* functions as a palimpsest of the larger permanent exhibitions constructed either by national governments or leading private counterparts. *Daniel's Story* presents a highly structured narrative, as it follows but one family and cannot therefore be nuanced enough to discuss all aspects of the Holocaust. Critics such as Marc Anderson have criticized the larger permanent exhibition at USHMM for this precise issue which they say prevents the visitor from working through the material.⁵¹ At the same time, however,

⁵⁰ 8 and up according to the museum website.

⁵¹ Anderson, "The Child Witness"

some scholars, most notably Alison Landsberg, promote the structure of this and other museums as necessary to keep the discussion of the atrocities understandable to the visitor.⁵²

My discussion puts *Daniel's Story* in conversation with the other Holocaust learning spaces, and how it is representative of these other constructions. With attention to national museums such as United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's (USHMM) permanent exhibition, Los Angeles's Museum of Tolerance, Amsterdam's Anne Frank House, Berlin's Jewish Museum, and London's Imperial War Museum Holocaust Gallery, I will evaluate not only how children are represented for the adult visitor, but also how these spaces communicate with one another across geographical and political lines. I investigate the methods these institutions use, such as narrative framework, physical structure of the space, and lighting techniques and how the child figure interacts with these elements. Considering the fact that audiences and boundaries continue to change, I also discuss the benefits and drawbacks to the technical choices, in order to provide a framework for future spaces and even digital creations. Alongside the institutions well-intentioned arguments, I work with modern theoretical concepts of memory, such as Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory, in order to determine the potential impact a space can have on a visitor. I pose the questions: What are these institutions doing to appeal to and, at the same time, effectively reach a potential one-time visitor? Are they informing the guest or are they showing a one-sided narrative?

By discussing *Daniel's Story* in relation to a space such as Amsterdam's Anne Frank Huis and Berlin's Ort der Information, I engage with the concept of Holocaust memorialization as a whole. *Daniel's Story* does not stand alone, nor should it. On a very basic design level, these

⁵² As I will argue throughout the museum chapter, Landsberg argues for an "accessible" approach to the Holocaust. Her claim, as I will elaborate on later, is the need for a "prosthetic" in the presentation, which allows for the visitor to attach to themselves to a memory or history once unknown to them without allowing the "outsider" to become one with the memory. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*.

spaces work together.⁵³ *Daniel's Story* pulls from its more prominent counterparts displaying a conglomerate of spaces and condensing it down into a single personal narrative. Furthermore, as having been created nearly simultaneously with its literary counterpart, the exhibit is also a unique space in many ways. My work investigates both its unique and reflective aspects to show how a child narrator in a museum or highly educational space helps guide the visitor through the complicated topic of the Holocaust.

Since institutions and representations are an essential part of the continuing discussion, it is important to ask exactly which of its features are working, which not, and why. How will the ways these institutions and popular works represent the Holocaust need to be further revised in the future? In exploring the child figure in these spaces, my work sees the potential for this figure's increasingly important role as Holocaust culture shifts into the world of digital media and mediation.

⁵³ As IWM began the process to renovate, their new designers traveled to other national museums and spoke with their design teams to investigate the spaces' most effective learning tools. As stated by James Bulgin, one of designers, of the new exhibition at the Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Jewish Civilisation at the Royal Holloway, University of London July 2018.

Chapter One

The Child as Literary Witness

*"I want to go on living ever after my death! And that's why I'm so grateful to God for having given me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and write, to express all that's inside me! When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived."*⁵⁴

The analysis of the child figure in Holocaust representations begins with literature—the oldest of the three mediums of representation investigated in this dissertation. It is also a primary source of documentation of the Holocaust. Although it did not take long after the war before films were made about the Holocaust, written documentation began during the atrocities.⁵⁵ One of the most well-known works from the time was indeed the work of a child: young Anne Frank. Anne, as one of the original survivor voices, will serve as an entry into the topic of child narrators. Her voice and story have existed in the public sphere since 1947, with the initial Dutch publication, and her popularity continues today in 2020, showing the power the child figure construct can have. From the historical child, such as Anne, writing contemporaneously, to fictional children written by an adult author and often also a simultaneous adult narrator, the child figure permeates many forms of Holocaust literary representations. In this chapter, I discuss how a child figure can intervene in a literary text about the Holocaust by complicating the known narrative. My primary case studies are Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Ruth Kluger's *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*, and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*. As I will show, there is often a culturally imposed perception of innocence which encompasses many of the child narrators simply because they are children, which draws the reader into the pages and allows the reader to witness an

⁵⁴ Frank, 5 April 1944

⁵⁵ That is not to negate the photographic evidence that will be discussed later in regard to film. Victims documented their experiences when they could, even throwing letters and notes from trains bound for concentration camps. Those who could kept diaries of their daily lives under Nazi rule. The men, women, and children who risked everything to document their experiences gave the world some of their first accounts of Jewish life under Nazi rule.

incomprehensible topic. By focusing on narrative techniques used by the authors, I will evaluate the child figure's ability to impact memoirs and fictional representations of the Holocaust through moments of witnessing. I will also explore the potential of seeing through the child's eye, a trope that is becoming more prominent for contemporary representations of genocides and especially of the Holocaust, as the majority of the survivors left were children at the time.

As Sue Vice states in the final line of her book *Children Writing the Holocaust*:

"Holocaust narratives by and about children are characterized by their narrator's innocence and inability to understand."⁵⁶ As was noted in the introduction, Vice has conducted a thorough analysis of child voices in Holocaust literature. I use her work on the literary child to foreground many of the chapter's observations of how specific narrative devices draw attention to the literary child and allow the child's voice to announce itself in the writing.⁵⁷ I develop Vice's focus on the child's voice and argue that the figure's presence, in particular its position between witnessing and not knowing, can allow access to the liminal space of the Holocaust narrative. In what follows, I will evaluate the child figure's ability to access the intransitive middle space of language, and thus examine its relationship to the historical material and how it can allow for a more modernist representation of an incomprehensible history. By beginning with Frank and ending with Sebald, I trace the trajectory of the figure through the decades and the figure's potential to navigate future representational spaces.

⁵⁶ Vice, 164.

⁵⁷ Vice's work is to date the most comprehensive on the child figure in Holocaust literature.

The Voice from the Annex

Since the 1950s, Anne Frank's story has become synonymous with the Holocaust, and she has taken on an iconic status in Holocaust culture. A smile of childlike innocence staring from a book jacket cover invokes the knowledge of a secret annex and a childhood stolen.⁵⁸ Her diary has been translated into 70 different languages, and in America at least she is often a child's introduction to the topic.⁵⁹ Her voice speaks from the past, and it is very much the voice of a teenager. She talks of her many suitors and the pressures of school. She fights with her sister and her mother. She names her diary Kitty.⁶⁰ Hers is, however, a voice with a heavy and important story to tell the world. Her words provide an uninhibited look into the daily life of a young Jewish girl in Amsterdam during Nazi rule.⁶¹ From the ever-encroaching antisemitic laws, the well-planned move into hiding, life in a secret annex, and finally capture, Frank documents an individualized experience of life leading up to the camp. Death is not discussed, but the reader knows her fate—a child's life cut short in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp just weeks before liberation.

⁵⁸ Her innocence and iconic status are even capitalized upon in a grotesque and commercial manner in today's world, as seen in fall 2017 when her cultural image was used as a Halloween costume—complete with beret and messenger bag. The costume was intended to memorialize the “heroine” but was swiftly rebranded “World War Two evacuee girl costume” after backlash from the public. This is but one of many controversial examples. “‘Anne Frank’ children’s costume sparks controversy” NBC News 17 October 2017.

⁵⁹ As is noted in *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, a person's understanding of or connection to the Anne Frank figure depends on geographical location as well as age and race. Her historical experience plays different roles based on a country's national narrative of the Holocaust. Barnouw, 112-113.

⁶⁰ Annemarie Pabel, one of very few, investigates “Kitty” as literary construct and how Anne interacts with Kitty often confiding, and yet, understanding that Kitty is not real. To date, very few have analyzed Frank's writing for its literary qualities. Pabel “‘I want the diary to be my friend’: The Imagined Friend in Anne Frank's Diary.”

⁶¹ It is now uninhibited, for the most part, after the release of the “definitive edition” which include previously omitted portions discussing Anne's emerging sexuality. And as of May 2018, even the hidden pages, those covered with additional paper, have been uncovered and are available to read. Of course, it can still be debated that Anne had already “edited” her diary for the public after rewriting portions with the intent to publish in mind.

Anne is cognizant of her diary's potential to represent the Holocaust in the postwar years and begins revising the text while the family is in hiding. On May 11, 1944 she writes that the diary will be the basis for the works she hopes to publish once the war is over.⁶² She wants the diary to remain an historical account of what she, her family members, and the other members of the Annex experienced while in hiding. Frank's diary was first published in the United States in 1952, seven years after the end of World War II.⁶³ However, it took only three years for the diary to be turned into a play, and an additional four before it became a film.⁶⁴ The film has been remade on numerous occasions, adapted to various media. In 2010, the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam permitted a graphic-novel version of her biography to be printed for educational purposes. In 2017, a second graphic novel, not affiliated with the memorial, was published in the Netherlands and Germany, containing the sexually graphic elements that Otto edited from the first edition.⁶⁵ With her singular text and as a child, Anne remains a symbol of strength during the Holocaust.

⁶² She states: "You've known for a long time that my greatest wish is to be a journalist, and later on, a famous writer. We'll have to wait and see if these grand illusions (or delusions!) will ever come true, but up to now I've no lack of topics. In any case, after the war I'd like to publish a book called *The Secret Annex*. It remains to be seen whether I'll succeed, but my diary can serve as the basis." Frank, 291 11 May 1944.

⁶³ Otto Frank first published the book in 1947 in Dutch, followed by French and German versions in 1950. The document was recovered by Miep Gies, one of the Frank's helpers, after the Nazi raid. She kept the diary safe and returned it to Frank's father Otto after he returned from Auschwitz, the sole survivor of the Annex.

⁶⁴ *The Diary of Anne Frank* was first performed on October 5, 1955 at the Cort Theatre on Broadway and written by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. They then adapted it for the screen. The film was released on March 18, 1959. It was nominated for eight Academy Awards, winning three. The productions were not without controversy. Holocaust deniers protested in front of the theatre in Linz, Austria in 1958, claiming her story was a fake and a ploy by Jews to receive restitution money. "Dieses Stuck ist ein Schwindel. Anne Frank hat niemals gelebt. Die Juden haben die ganze Sache erfunden um mehr wiedergutmachen herauszuschlagen. Glaubt nicht ein Wort davon! Es ist reine Erfindung!" From the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance Anne Frank exhibit. Deniers continue to argue the text is inauthentic as Barnouw notes in regard to copyright laws. The copyright should have expired in 2015, 75 years after Anne's death, but the Anne Frank Foundation has argued for Otto Frank's copyright over the text due to his editing work, extending copyright to 2050. Deniers have used this as evidence that Otto in fact "wrote" it. Barnouw *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, 113.

⁶⁵ It is now available in English.

Despite the powerful affect her writing has had on post-war culture, especially in the American context, her work is often relegated to the world of children's literature.⁶⁶ Although this may be the case, as David Barnouw's work, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank* shows, Anne did not necessarily write for children.⁶⁷ Even though Frank's literary contributions have been neglected at the academic level, her popularity has not waned and actually seems to be growing in recent years, maintaining her status as icon in Holocaust culture.⁶⁸ What can be done with this information? Her story obviously appeals to readers. What is it precisely that appeals to them?

Despite its extraordinary literary qualities, it is, arguably Anne's iconic child's perspective that has the ability to engage the reader and then allows an entrance into her insights on a life in hiding. We understand her lesser issues—fighting with family members—and thus listen to and learn from her larger ones—Nazi persecution. In the cultural imagination, Anne Frank represents purity and innocence, and she is indeed relatable to many readers. More precisely, however, Anne's experience, though individualized, contains numerous universal “lessons” on humanity for the reader. Her child's view of the world combined with her near unwavering faith in humanity is what can allow for a universalized reading of the text.⁶⁹

To begin with the act of writing itself, Anne's purpose, as she states, is not limited to factual observations of Annex life. Anne strives to discuss her life in general. The diary is her

⁶⁶ As Barnouw notes, Anne's writing is used in American schools to teach about good and evil, not about literature, and yet, an Anne Frank literature prize started in 1957. Barnouw, 108

⁶⁷ Barnouw, *The Phenomenon of Anne Frank*, 107.

⁶⁸ In a BBC article on the newest graphic adaptation of Anne Frank's diary, Anna Holligan notes that readership of the diary is increasing every year rather than dwindling. In an interview with a 14-year-old Scottish pupil, India, on a school trip to the Annex in Amsterdam, India states that she and Frank have similar personalities; they are both bookworms. Holligan notes, “like so many readers around the world, Anne Frank has helped her to understand an otherwise unimaginable and distant chapter of history.” Holligan, “Diary of Anne Frank transformed into graphic adaptation” 11 October 2017.

⁶⁹ Not only was her initial work censored by her father's edits, but the initial stage adaptation removed much of the text's Jewish touchstones in an attempt to make the “lessons” more relatable to a non-Jewish audience. The text became universalized within the American context. “The American history of the *Diary*, from its inception as a play until it appeared as a film, illustrates how the universalizing process began to take shape. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*, 66.

friend, and the writing functions as a form a catharsis for her. Shortly after receiving the diary she describes what she wants the writing to be to her:

Writing in a diary is a really strange experience for someone like me. Not only because I've never written anything before, but also because it seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested in the musings of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl. Oh well, it doesn't matter. I feel like writing, and I have an even greater need to get all kinds of things off my chest...To enhance the image of this long awaited friend in my imagination, I don't want to jot down the facts in this diary the way most people would do, but I want to the diary to be my friend, and I'm going to call this friend Kitty.⁷⁰

She doubts her ability to write something important, and yet she continues to write. As Annemarie Pabel notes, Anne's writing shifts from "life writing" to "survival writing" as the diary progresses.⁷¹ But it is in the act of writing that she gives voice to the historical reality around her. It is individual and perhaps "the musings of a thirteen-year old schoolgirl," but her cathartic exercise provides us with one of the first child voices in the post-war years. In building her "relationship" with the inanimate object, her diary, her story reaches the world even if only posthumously.

The reader is aware of her tragic end, and the lost childhood that is cut off from her future aspirations is present as dreams enter the text. "When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived! But, and that's a big question, will I ever be able to write something great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer?"⁷² As she discusses her future dreams, the reader, whether child or adult, is constantly reminded of what has been stolen because we know her tragic end. It is in the moments when her hopes and aspirations grace the pages and are contextualized by the readers own knowledge of what is to come that the innocent nature becomes highly apparent. Although all Holocaust victims were innocent, Anne, much like Dora's

⁷⁰ Frank, 5-7 20 June 1942.

⁷¹ Pabel, *The Imagined Friend*, 141.

⁷² Frank, 247 5 April 1944

comments on O.S.E.'s work in France, exemplifies the tragedy of the atrocities as she conveys a life stolen before she had even begun to live.

Her writing, however, allows a look at a life in confinement in the darkest of hours. Anne describes the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands and the rights and privileges subsequently lost, but she also provides insight to life in hiding. Not only is she a teenage girl (a time when rebellion and pushing boundaries is part of normal development), she is living in close quarters with her not only family but also four others.⁷³ They know their survival depends on the group's ability to survive together, but human emotions remain. Anne describes the arguments that happen between members and the resulting changes in attitudes and relationships among those in hiding. "At the moment, Mother's grouching at me again; she's clearly jealous because I talk to Mrs. van Daan more than to her. What do I care!"⁷⁴ The teenage, and human, indignance appears on the pages and adds a layer to the complex nature of hiding seven people in a small annex of a factory. And yet, Anne also tells the world of her growing strength rather than waning determination despite the odds.

I'm becoming more and more independent of my parents. Young as I am, I face life with more courage and have a better and truer sense of justice than Mother. I know what I want, I have a goal, I have opinions, a religion and love. If only I can be myself, I'll be satisfied. I know that I'm a woman, a woman with inner strength and a great deal of courage! If God lets me live, I'll achieve more than Mother ever did, I'll make my voice heard, I'll go out into the world and work for mankind.⁷⁵

Anne's writing allows access to a life cut short, but a life, nonetheless. She provides evidence of human emotion despite the need to work together to survive and asserts her independence despite the pervasive need to rely on one another. Anne, the child, has her say though, and she

⁷³ The Frank family shares the space with the Van Pels family (Hermann, Auguste, and Peter) and Fritz Pfeffer with whom Anne shares a room. She originally shared with her sister Margot, but after Fritz's arrival, Margot moved into the room with her parents. In the diary, the van Pels' are renamed van Daan and Fritz is Albert Dussel.

⁷⁴ Frank, 200 2 March 1944

⁷⁵ Frank, 259 6 April 1944

distinguishes herself from the adults around her, discussing the child experience during the Holocaust directly. For Anne, it was doubly difficult to be a child because her moral convictions are not as grounded as the adult counterparts.

So if you're wondering whether it's harder for the adults here than for the children, the answer is no, it's certainly not. Older people have an opinion about everything and are sure of themselves and their actions. It's twice as hard for us young people to hold on to our opinions at a time when ideals are being shattered and destroyed, when the worst side of human nature predominates, when everyone has come to doubt truth, justice and God...It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. It's utterly impossible for me to build my life on a foundation of chaos, suffering and death. I see the world being slowly transformed into a wilderness, I hear the approaching thunder that, one day, will destroy us too, I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better, that this cruelty too will end, that peace and tranquility will return once more. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals. Perhaps the day will come when I'll be able to realize them!⁷⁶

She is growing up in some of her most formative years and the world around her does not match with what she has been taught. She knows “chaos, suffering, and death” and yet she holds onto hope. The moments of near unwavering hope have remained part of her legacy and are used to show grace in the face of adversity.⁷⁷ The diary provides a look at a life in hiding in a singular instance and the perseverance of a single child to observe and resist.

Anne's iconic status in Holocaust culture shows the power of the child figure within Holocaust representation because of the innocence often attached to it by the dominant culture. Anne's work, as a contemporaneously written memoir, however, cannot be recreated outside of an imitation. Only another child's diary from the time can be considered a true equal. She navigates her world from an adolescent's perspective and allows the future reader a glimpse into an inconceivable world. Thus, she cannot be directly compared with the other texts examined in

⁷⁶ Frank, 328 15 July 1944

⁷⁷ As has been noted previously, her text's literary qualities are often ignored. There are obvious benefits to focusing on her message of hope, but it also has its pitfalls and lessons on bravery and hope can become too broad and miss being contextualized within Holocaust history.

this chapter, which in the case of Kluger concerns a past self and Sebald is a fictionalized figure. The authors in these instances, must instead mobilize semantic and narrative methods, such as irony, to give voice to their literary figures. The role of Anne, the child, however, in the greater Holocaust discussion is indicative of the importance of artistic and commemorative strategies that attempt to make us see through the eyes of the child.

The Non-Contemporaneous Child in Holocaust Representations

Vice's own research on the literary child in Holocaust representations began with Benjamin Wilkomirski's fictional memoir *Fragments* and the controversies which resulted from its content. Wilkomirski's memoir was originally published as a factual account of Wilkomirski's childhood experiences during the Holocaust. It was lauded as one of the best-written memoirs of the atrocities the world had seen—until it was debunked.⁷⁸ Vice took the Wilkomirski dilemma as fuel to research the literary child within Holocaust narratives. Wilkomirski's text had in fact captivated his readers. Was it the child figure at its center that did this?

Because of the child's viewpoint, the author was able to rely more on "acts of personal cruelty than on the institutional attrition," which as Vice argues led to the work's initial enthusiastic reception.⁷⁹ From the very beginning, Wilkomirski's childhood account appeals to the Holocaust researcher and educator:

I have no mother tongue, nor a father tongue either. My language has its roots in the Yiddish of my eldest brother, Mordecai, overlaid with the Babel-babble of an assortment of children's barracks in the Nazis' death camps in Poland. It was a small vocabulary; it reduced itself to the bare essential required to say and to understand whatever would ensure survival. At some point during this time, speech left me altogether and it was a long time before I found it again. So it was

⁷⁸ The memoir, published in 1995, won the National Jewish Book Award for Autobiography and Memoir, the Jewish Quarterly Literary Prize in Britain, and the Prix Memoire de la Shoah in France.

⁷⁹ Vice, 1.

no great loss that I more or less forgot this gibberish, which lost its usefulness
with the end of the war.⁸⁰

The child Wilkomirski portrays is reminiscent of the little child, Hurbinek, whom Primo Levi and Giorgio Agamben discuss in their theoretical works on the Holocaust.⁸¹ Hurbinek is a child Primo Levi encounters in the camps after Russian liberation. The child cannot speak. Language is lost to him leaving him incapable of witnessing except through Levi. Wilkomirski challenges this notion, seemingly, with his own child figure and uses language in his writing when he once could not.⁸² Although he is reduced to a non-verbal spectator, a witness to the most atrocious acts of man and unable to communicate, Wilkomirski gives the assumed past self a voice through writing that is extensive in its description. And as an initially perceived testimony, the reader felt shaken. Even a topic that has been so thoroughly researched as the Holocaust still held its horrors.⁸³ At one point he even comments on the effects of choosing his own life over another: “Just keep absolutely silent. I’m a coward. A murderer. I killed the new boy. I’m scared they’ll find me out. I mustn’t talk anymore. I’ll be an outcast, and it’ll serve me right, I handed him over, I’m guilty. I’m afraid of the revenge. I knew perfectly well that children’s revenge can be terrible.”⁸⁴

Throughout the text, Wilkomirski gives readers precisely what they, the researchers especially, want to hear, even, as shown above, discussing harrowing choices he made within the camp and the moral implications such choices might have. Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel, to name a few,

⁸⁰ Wilkomirski, 3.

⁸¹ Giorgio Agamben is an Italian philosopher known for his works on homo sacer, among others, and whose work is often informed by the concept of biopolitics. His book *Remnants of Auschwitz* engages with Primo Levi’s writings, who was a Holocaust survivor and author of numerous texts including *Survival in Auschwitz*.

⁸² Giorgio Agamben discusses this phenomenon in his text *Remnants of Auschwitz*. Agamben, 37-39.

⁸³ Wilkomirski’s text was not the only text to have such an impact and be followed by controversy. Jerzy Kosinski’s 1965 *The Painted Bird* was also graphically detailed and initially presented as autobiographical. Despite its fictional nature, and the controversy surrounding it, the book was adapted for film in 2019. It is directed and produced by Václav Marhoul and made its international debut at the 76th Venice Film Festival on September 3, 2019 with some viewers walking out in the middle of the viewing “‘Brutal’ Holocaust Movie *The Painted Bird* Prompts Walkouts at the Venice Film Festival” People Alexia Fernandez September 4, 2019.

⁸⁴ Wilkomirski, 66.

provide personal accounts of their own choices as well, often opening up a question about a grey zone of morality and the difficult choices victims had to make in order to survive the Holocaust. The discussion on the grey zone has progressed beyond personal memoirs, and Agamben himself theorizes the concept in his own work. It was thus all the more shocking to see these musings from someone who was so young while in the camps. Wilkomirski's work seemed, at the time, to be groundbreaking.

To write these words and claim them as truth seemed an act of pure betrayal to the Holocaust community (survivors, researchers, and learners alike).⁸⁵ That is not to say that there is no place for fiction in Holocaust literature. As Hayden White would argue, every testimony uses literary techniques to express its message. However, the problem with Wilkomirski's text was that it perpetrated a lie about the source. At the same time as Ruth Franklin has noted, it was this particular controversy which first allowed Holocaust researchers and critics to properly critique Holocaust literature with a focus on literary techniques.⁸⁶ Until this point, Franklin claims, critics were compelled to accept any and all testimony of the atrocities as factual.⁸⁷ There was a fear that critiquing works could give credence to Holocaust denial.⁸⁸ Vice herself admits to being one of those reluctant to accept the truth about Wilkomirski's work—that it was fabricated—but in the end she did and began investigating the power of the constructed child figure. "I wanted to know how unusual *Fragments* was as a representation of a child's fate during the war years; and how

⁸⁵ As Ruth Franklin notes in *A Thousand Darkness: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction*, his literary prizes were revoked, speaking engagements cancelled and writing removed from shelves after the fraud was exposed. Franklin 3. In fact, Wilkomirski's work can be difficult to find and is not included in the USHMM library in Washington, DC but can be found in the collections at the Library of Congress.

⁸⁶ Franklin, 2.

⁸⁷ Franklin, 8. This issue is also addressed in Eaglestone and Langford's book on teaching Holocaust literature and film. They claim, however, that even many students are hesitant to critique Holocaust works too harshly. Eaglestone and Langford, 2.

⁸⁸ A phenomenon that continues to occur despite educators and remembrance groups efforts.

unusual it was to use the disordered chronology and simple language of a child's perspective in order to represent this fate."⁸⁹

Similar to my approach in this dissertation, Vice discusses the functions of the works themselves and the child figures within them. Her book is divided into chapters determined by "the texts' own forms and structures."⁹⁰ Many are categorized by their narrative approach: split, choral, present-time, or fragmentary. Others are sorted by their theme: hidden children and lost memories. All of the texts succeed in giving voice to the child often using irony or even an adult narrator.⁹¹ In her discussion of choral narration, for instance, Vice shows how the multitude of voices present in works such as Asscher-Pinkhof's *Star Children* and Grynberg's *Children of Zion* talk to each other in order to represent a large group of children. Their voices are not lost among the adults, but rather their polyphonic nature is given equal status with the adults.⁹² Each chapter shows how different methods represent the child voice even when it is not the primary voice in the text.

The historical facts surrounding the atrocities can be written out, but the child figure can provide an alternative perspective because this figure witnesses or understands the situation differently than an adult. From Anne Frank herself or Wiesel's 1956 novel *Night* to Lucy Adlington's 2017 *The Red Ribbon* about a child seamstress in Auschwitz, a rather consistent theme of the child as storyteller persists throughout Holocaust representation. To make use of a child narrator would seem logical for literature aimed at younger readers. As Vice has shown, however, the child figure is not specifically relegated to youth literature. As noted in the introduction to the chapter, Vice states that "Holocaust narratives by and about children are characterized by their narrator's innocence and inability to understand." She continues, however,

⁸⁹ Vice, 1.

⁹⁰ Vice, 3.

⁹¹ As discussed in her introduction. Vice, 5

⁹² Vice, 46-7.

and adds, “In this way, child’s-eye-view texts are not unusual but exemplary representations of the event.”⁹³ Vice states that Holocaust literature which contains a child figure varies in representational mode and scope from Holocaust representations without child figures.⁹⁴ As she claims, there are experiences only children lived through and only they can speak to. It is with Vice’s comments on the variation of a child perspective that I will further explore the potential of the figure’s resistance “to make sense” of the unimaginable. By looking at Sebald’s and Kluger’s works, I will show that the child figure gives access to the liminal space between factual memoir and historical fiction.

Kluger’s memoir and Sebald’s novel⁹⁵ have become fairly standard throughout American college course syllabuses and for this reason they will be the focus of my analysis. They offer varying viewpoints—factual memoir and historical fiction—that serve as critical interventions into the possibilities opened up by the child’s eye view. Kluger’s text theorizes the child’s perspective by combining the child and the adult and exhibiting specific literary qualities revolving around the child figure such as split narration in order to balance the child and adult voices. Sebald’s text, in addition to being fictional, addresses the topic in an even more indirect manner—through repressed, and thus broken, memory.⁹⁶ Even when the events are remembered, the memories seem to be those of another person and not the main character. The child is constructed. In order to evaluate the child figure’s role in Holocaust literature and its ability to access the middle voice, I will explore these two iconic figurations of the child.

⁹³ Vice, 164.

⁹⁴ Vice, 2.

⁹⁵ The term “novel” is used lightly, as Sebald nor others have properly defined the text’s genre.

⁹⁶ This narrative technique is in opposition to Elie Wiesel’s writing, which often mixes his observations from the time of the camps and his retrospective (adult) thoughts on a situation—often without distinguishing the two. Kluger’s memoir, on the other hand, distinguishes, often only semantically, between an adult insight into her situation and her thoughts at the time. What *Night* shows is a combination of adult and child without distinction, but nevertheless presented as the child’s perspective. This approach to testimony is of course not wholly a negative, and the work merely points to a distinction between the two. The muddling is only problematic in the current discussion of the function of the child in literature, as it is often more difficult to distinguish differing opinions and too much credence could be given to the child.

The Child in Ruth Kluger's *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*

*"It is not Ruth Kluger's bent or her intention to dramatize. Her anecdotes are told not for their own sake but as the ground or illustration of her thought...Ruth Kluger responds to the extreme moment with eye, ear, nerve, and mind. And it is the habit of poetry, surely, that gives her prose its agility"*⁹⁷.

Ruth Kluger's personal story of Holocaust survival—both during and after the Nazi crimes were committed—is an uncomfortable and honest read. She provides no neat endings in her text. Rather than offering a succinct linear tale of her experiences, Kluger's text muddles emotions associated with the Holocaust, as she constantly and often seamlessly switches between her childhood and her adult perspective.⁹⁸ In the memoir's foreword, Lore Segal describes the predicament Kluger puts her readers in. When thinking about the Holocaust, we want the moral world to function as it should. The evils of the Nazi regime should be black and white. The perpetrators are uniformed men sneering with bloodlust in their eyes. The persecuted are pure and always righteous. As Segal states, the reader wants to imagine innocent babes harshly and unjustly torn from their home.⁹⁹ Kluger, however, contradicts this imagery and shows the problematic issues that already existed within her own family environment, and how the lack of pure innocence within that familial unit helped shaped her perspective of the world around her.¹⁰⁰

Kluger is certainly not Giosuè of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*,¹⁰¹ dazzling us with his infectious smile and childlike reactions to his father's game.¹⁰¹ And even though there may have been Giosuès that existed during the Nazi era—young and naïve—this was not the case for

⁹⁷ Lore Segal writes these words in the introduction to Kluger's memoir. Kluger, 11

⁹⁸ The reader thus jumps back and forth constantly between childlike indignation and a well thought out adult observation. See Costello's commentary on the performative nature.

⁹⁹ Kluger, 10.

¹⁰⁰ I will use the English version of her memoir for my close reading, as her deep involvement in the translation gives the text more authority than the original German version, as elements have been amended or added by her since the 1992 original German text.

¹⁰¹ Giosuè's role in the discussion of child imagery in Holocaust representations will be discussed in detail in the chapter on filmic representations.

Kluger. As Lisa Costello comments in her article “Performative Auto/biography in Ruth Klüger’s *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*”:

Klüger’s text can be classified within the body of Holocaust writing that specifically addresses childhood experiences. Well-known texts in this category such as Elie Wiesel’s *Night* and Anne Frank’s diary appeared in the middle of the twentieth century and present examples of how the private experience of one individual comes to stand for the public experience of ‘all’ the victims; the experiences of Wiesel and Frank have transformed into abstract symbols for ‘the child victim’ of the Holocaust.¹⁰²

Kluger challenges these abstract notions and presents an imperfect world—both with and without the presence of Nazi laws. Her familial turmoil, specifically that with her mother, is often the focus of the narrative rather than the Holocaust itself.¹⁰³ Moreover, she shows how her thoughts on her traumatic experiences from her early life have continuously shifted.

Nevertheless, Kluger lived through the Holocaust as a child. As a child, she remained outside the adult perspective, but she seems to have been more aware of the events around her than some of her child counterparts. Her child status during this time provides the readers with an inside look at the atrocities, but at the same time, her lack of worldly experience actually allows her to be more observant of the situation. Through the use of contradictions and a willingness to continue to discuss the Holocaust, Kluger provides the world with a problematic and at the same time pure view of Vienna, Theresienstadt, and Auschwitz. Both child Ruth and adult Ruth are present throughout the text, but it is the child’s voice during the Holocaust that remains the focus here. By investigating her representation of childhood and memory specifically, my analysis

¹⁰² Costello 240.

¹⁰³ In fact, Kluger chooses specifically not to focus on the Holocaust. Even though, she lived through the atrocities and suffered greatly, the Holocaust was not her entire life. Kluger refuses to limit her biography to one wholly encompassed by the Holocaust and she does not end it at the end of the war. Instead, she shows a life before, during, and after the Holocaust. Additionally, as Linda Schulte-Sasse argues in her article, “‘Living on’ in the American Press: Ruth Kluger’s ‘Still Alive’ and Its challenge to a Cherished Holocaust Paradigm,” it is because Kluger defied this black and white narrative that American readers did not accept the text as it had been accepted in Germany. She argues based on the text’s initial reviews which did not appreciate its narrative voice and that Kluger had touched a “tender nerve” of Holocaust discourse in the United States. Schulte-Sasse, 469.

shows how the child figure is capable of representing the atrocities as both a witness and someone who was not meant to survive.

A Childhood Nonetheless

*But I say, this, too, was childhood. I grew up, and I learned something, as every child does who grows up, who grows older...I would give a lot if I could look back on a different childhood. But it was what it was. And, I repeat, this, too, was childhood.*¹⁰⁴

One of Kluger's more prominent arguments throughout her text is that, despite the intrusions brought on by the Nazi policies, they did not steal her childhood.¹⁰⁵ As previously stated, child Ruth is often equally as assertive as adult Ruth. The child forces her way into the narrative and argues for herself and the decisions she made at the time. Kluger shows the reader an intelligent child, who yearns to learn more and is constantly striving for education and a voice in the world. At the same time, she fights with her mother (again a large portion of the memoir) and has disagreements with relatives—much as any other child or adolescent would. Kluger claims throughout that she had a childhood, though it was an unusual one. As she was only seven when the Nazis invaded Vienna, my close reading begins with how the child navigates the urban space in a nonsensical world.

Despite her claim for normalcy, Ruth was in fact denied a “normal” childhood, especially with regard to her extracurricular activities and education. For example, she was not granted access to swimming pools or schools (at first, she was moved between schools in Vienna before ultimately being denied access to education altogether). It is these moments of denial that provide a unique perspective to Nazism's ever encroaching dehumanizing tactics.

¹⁰⁴ Kluger, 122.

¹⁰⁵ The term “childhood” will be influenced by Kluger's notion of the term, and the chapter will look mainly at her time in Vienna and the camp system—when she was still classified as a child by the Nazis.

Suddenly I had become a disadvantaged child who couldn't do the things that the children in our circle usually learned to do, like swim in the municipal pool, acquire a bike, go with girlfriends to children's movies, or skate...and even today a gap yawns between me and those Viennese emigrants who have memories of moving freely and unselfconsciously about the city. Anyone who was just a few years older experienced a different Vienna than I, who at age seven wasn't permitted to sit on a park bench and instead could take comfort, if I so chose, in the thought that I belonged to the Chosen People.¹⁰⁶

She insists on having had a childhood and yet understands hers did in fact differ from others, including other slightly older children in Vienna. Ruth's childhood, and the moments of adversity she endured, brings the reader into a particularly broadened insight of the daily life of a Jewish Viennese resident in the 1930s. Not only does adult Kluger tell the reader the elders' reactions, or lack thereof, to the events as they unfolded, but the child's perspective testifies to a child's predicaments and how they differ from the adults. Kluger focuses on the initial actions of the Nazi party, which did dehumanize the Jewish citizens, but in recalling the growth and development opportunities that were stolen from her as a child, Kluger theorizes the child perspective as one that provides access to what the adults usually overlook.

Her language and how she reacts or retells her history contextualizes Jewish experience in Vienna by dramatizing her childhood memories as the child would view them. As she discusses the Hitler Youth singing about Jewish blood and her experience of going to a movie illegally, a new voice emerges from a space of understanding that is not lesser than the adults surrounding her, but nevertheless different because of her lack of worldly experience. Kluger gives full credence to her childhood opinion of the Nazi crimes against humanity despite writing the memoir as an adult, presenting the memoir as a split narration between past and present.¹⁰⁷ She not only notes the change in her opinion, but also recognizes the importance and validity of

¹⁰⁶ Kluger, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Vice discusses split narration in her book and examines Friedländer's *When Memory Comes*, Schlomo Breznitz's *Memory Fields*, and Georges Perec's *W or the Memory of Childhood*. She shows how works differentiate between past and present perspectives. Vice, 12-28.

her “in the moment” stances. In fact, child Ruth is rather a tenacious counter to her own mother’s seemingly near helplessness and/or ignorance to the dangers surrounding her and her child in 1930s Vienna. This dynamic is quite different from the child Vice describes as projecting innocence. Kluger complicates the stereotypical understanding of a naïve or innocent child figure, but nevertheless allows for an, as Vice says, “exemplary representation” of the Holocaust. Her child speaks retroactively from a space in between an adult’s knowledge and a child’s innocence and allows the reader to see a new perspective on the Holocaust in which the dual perspective provides access to the in between space and both viewpoints simultaneously.

Kluger mentions her childhood encounter with the Hitler Youth early in her memoir and how she feared them even when the adults in her life did not acknowledge their threat. Despite being a child, she rather acutely observes early on that it is not only adults that are in danger of the Nazis. She recalls:

The grown-ups pretended that only grown-ups die. But on the street, for all to hear, the Nazi boys were singing the song about Jewish blood spurting from their knives. That included my blood, didn’t it? And they were carrying sharp little daggers, weren’t they? You didn’t have to be very smart to get their meaning; on the contrary, it required some mental agility to ignore it, to shrug it off.¹⁰⁸

She is unapologetic in her observations and forcefully comments on the adults’ efforts to remain oblivious. She distinguishes herself from them. If she, a child, knew then, they should have known and reacted.

What Kluger observes in the above excerpt is an understanding of the very real danger that the Nazi regime imposed upon *her* life. Adult Kluger strategically shows the reader that child Ruth understands, better than the adults, that Jewish blood means all Jewish blood.¹⁰⁹ Kluger

¹⁰⁸ Kluger, 17.

¹⁰⁹ This was an additional issue with the elderly Jewish residents of the Reich that Kluger herself touches upon. Many younger Jews left behind their elderly relatives, believing that they would not be harmed due to their age. Kluger herself struggles with the idea of her older relatives dying within the gas chamber and cannot picture them fighting for life. This creates a conflicting memory for Kluger, as she did not always get along with them, and she struggles to even think of them fondly despite their tragic end.

condemns those who did not believe the Hitler Youth song heard in the streets, saying this should have been an easy one to understand. As she states, “You didn’t have to be very smart to get their meaning; on the contrary, it required some mental agility to ignore it, to shrug it off.”¹¹⁰

According to her, it should have been obvious.¹¹¹ This is one of the moments where Kluger makes the reader uncomfortable because this is the child’s voice. As a child she knew? How could others have not known? Kluger the author shows us that by her ability to not overthink, as the adults are, the child sheds new light to the situation. Her comments about the Hitler Youth problematize the situation, even if the reader still cannot pass judgement on other witnesses.

She elaborates shortly after this passage that she has included this particular memory in her memoir due to a response she received while retelling the story to a German colleague of hers who was in the Hitler Youth. After hearing Kluger’s story, he laments the fact that they were only given knives and not daggers as part of their uniform, and how he “would have preferred a real weapon.”¹¹² Kluger and her colleague were both children at the time, leading very different lives and with vastly different outlooks on the world. By presenting three perspectives (child Kluger, adult Kluger, and adult colleague) from the same situation, Kluger shows both knowledge and understanding on her side and a lack thereof on the colleague’s. Kluger was able to understand the situation, whereas he was not—and still does not seem to. At the same time, she nevertheless knew more than her own parents. Kluger’s writing dramatizes this precise point, and by allowing the child to speak, exposes the discrepancies in understanding.

It is precisely her child’s perspective that allowed her to see the pure intent behind their words. She has not been clouded by outside influences that would make her believe people are

¹¹⁰ Kluger, 17

¹¹¹ This is a stance and a claim only someone who has survived and witnessed the atrocities can make. As previously stated, it can be problematic to make these statements as retrospection aids our understanding of the events.

¹¹² Kluger, 17

not that hateful.¹¹³ Her position in society as child allows her to see the potential for unadulterated hatred. She takes the children at their word. On the other hand, it may be because they were children and not adults singing in the street. They are her peers, and she thus sees the potential results of their actions more clearly. If children are singing about such horrid actions, why is she, a child, safe? Her rather uninhibited outlook on life allows for what should be a naive understanding of the situation, to appear highly accurate. Kluger constructs a middle space of understanding by means of a voice outside of the adult realm that shocks in its disruption of the larger narrative.

It is in these moments throughout Kluger's text where White's concept of a middle voice becomes relevant. By means of the split narrative, Kluger's child figure speaks from an intransitive space. Her child figure is in fact her historical self, and the text is a memoir, but by allowing the historical self to speak and allowing it to rupture and thus complicate the stereotypical innocent child, a new space of knowledge and understanding reveals itself to the reader and learner. Young Ruth's direct interaction with a Nazi youth illustrates the implications that her child voice can bring to the broader discussion of Holocaust representation.

Ruth not only saw the Hitler Youth singing in the streets, but she also encountered Aryan children directly while attempting to see *Snow White* at the movie theatre—an act that had been outlawed for Jews by the newly imposed Nazi rule in Austria. In today's world and even in the early 1930s, a person would not think twice about a child going to see a Disney movie in the theater.¹¹⁴ The world of Disney was one Ruth knew. She states, "I had been weaned on Mickey

¹¹³ Himmler himself spoke about the issue of women and children in a speech on October 6, 1943 at Posen to the Gauleiters and Reichsleiters. He stated they too were included in the plan since children could grow up to avenge the deaths of their elders. As quoted in Fleming *Hitler and the Final Solution*, 57.

¹¹⁴ Disney was and still is a part of life for many young children (and even adults). The Nazis, however, took away the weekend pastime from the Jews.

Mouse shorts and traded pictures of Shirley Temple with classmates.”¹¹⁵ Although acutely American, Disney productions were a part of Ruth’s everyday Viennese life.

I groused and bitched about this unfairness, until finally my mother proposed that I should leave her alone and just go and forget about what was permitted and what wasn’t...My mother couldn’t accept the absurdity of blatant discrimination. She assured me that no one would care who sat in an audience of children. I shouldn’t think I was that important, and I should stop being a coward, because she was never a coward, not even when she was my age. So of course I went, not only for the movie, but to prove myself.¹¹⁶

Adult testimony can inform about the rehousing to ghettos, the cramped and often unsanitary living quarters, lack of access to everyday goods, the general stripping of humanity from their persons. Ruth, however, provides the child’s perspective. The movie theater was no longer available to her. But even more importantly, Disney was not available. This may seem insignificant in comparison, but it shows a detail a child would focus on. Her concerns throughout the text show a different view of life than an adult would give.

She also allows an entrance into two competing worlds in this excerpt—the known childhood (fighting with her mother) and the Holocaust childhood (being denied access to a children’s movie). This split experience even within childhood remembrance shows the reader the complexity of the situation. The familial issues did not fade when the Nazis appeared in Vienna. The familial tensions in the home remained and were simply surrounded and intensified by the Nazis infringing on Jewish rights. Until this moment, Ruth seems far more aware of the dangers of the situation than her mother. And then she goes to the movies. The childish indignation bubbles to the surface, a luxury that should be afforded a child on occasion. Ruth feels compelled to accept the mother’s challenge even though she seems to understand the consequences for doing so, and despite her mother’s inability to understand these consequences. The child is living in a dangerous world with actual laws forbidding her from going to see *Snow White*, however, the

¹¹⁵ Kluger, 45.

¹¹⁶ Kluger, 46.

familial tensions still remain and are oddly reminiscent of what many readers may have experienced in their childhood. Child Ruth is a literal figure trapped between two worlds, two lives. The child figure in these instances illustrates the coexistence and resistance of the two together. She distorts what a reader may already “know” about the Holocaust. In challenging the narrative, Kluger allows the reader to see and hear a perspective that until this point they could not.

From a literary standpoint, the transitions from the mother’s voice to Ruth’s child voice to Ruth’s retrospective adult voice are seamless throughout the text and, as is shown in the above excerpt, often combined into one moment. The adult is in the writing’s eloquence. “My mother couldn’t accept the absurdity of blatant discrimination.” Although this statement references the situation at the time, it is a reflection adult Ruth makes later. The adult voice appears in the description of the memory. The reader, however, is aware that the child knew her mother’s thoughts—just not how to express them eloquently at the time. “So of course I went, not only for the movie, but to prove myself.” She proves that she is not a coward, in addition to being right about the severity of the situation. The child figure battles with the mother, as any young child does and provides a perspective on the situation which goes beyond the historical facts as others have observed.

However, it is in the sentence immediately following the above excerpt where Ruth’s fears come to fruition. “I bought the most expensive type of ticket, thinking that sitting in a loge would make me less noticeable, and thus I ended up next to the nineteen-year-old baker’s daughter from next door with her little siblings, enthusiastic Nazis one and all.”¹¹⁷ Her encounter with the baker’s daughter reminds Ruth that she was correct in assuming the dangers of seeing the film. Perhaps more importantly, especially in regards to the discussion of children, is it was not a

¹¹⁷ Kluger, 46.

grown adult who catches and chastises Ruth for breaking the law, but another child like herself.¹¹⁸ This encounter could be seen as two children squabbling, but Vienna of 1940 was far from normal or righteous and the consequences of her actions were high.¹¹⁹ The Nazi children, too, know only this world and understand Ruth has broken a law. In the straightforward world of the child, there is no gray area on this. She berates Ruth in “her best High German” and “with conviction, in the manner of a member of the *Bund deutscher Mädchen*” explaining to young Ruth, “If it happened again she would call the police. I was lucky that she was letting me off this once.”¹²⁰ Innocence is, more often than not, not to be confused with naivety in Kluger’s text. She is succinctly aware of the dangers around her. The child figure allows the reader to witness Vienna after the Anschluss in a novel manner. The “severity” of the situation may have seemingly been lessened because, at the moment, the injustices take place in a movie theater and not a concentration camp, but this perspective remains in the child’s world. In doing so, it allows the reader to see and experience outside of the one they may know.

As an adult writing for a Western audience, choosing Disney could also be analyzed as a literary device. In using this particular film, and this particular situation, and analyzing it for its literary qualities, Kluger contextualizes the overarching Holocaust narrative in an appealing manner for her audience. Kluger then provides an analogy between real life and *Snow White* and the question it poses: “who is entitled to live in the king’s palace and who is the outsider.”¹²¹ The literary child, young Ruth, narrates an historical account which adheres to White’s theories on Holocaust representation, combining story with history. The situation happened, since Kluger is to be taken at her word, but it is also a story. A story where the child’s desires take over and enter

¹¹⁸ This of course is in line with Pinfold’s claims as to the problematics of child narrators and Nazi indoctrination. The reader wants or expects the children to be innocents, but many were taught hateful ways at a very young age.

¹¹⁹ The film was released in 1940 and thus before the implementation of the Jewish star requirement. She would have had to encounter someone who knew her and knew she is in fact Jewish.

¹²⁰ Kluger, 46-7.

¹²¹ Kluger, 47.

“the king’s palace” only to be threatened by its gatekeepers. The child figure emerges on the page as adult Ruth describes the situations, but it is the child’s viewpoint and perspective which emerges and speaks to the reader. The child is there and witnesses the antisemitic acts, but it is through Disney films. Adult Kluger forces the reader to question the “standard” Holocaust narrative (what we may expect from a child’s narrative on 1930s Vienna), and Kluger’s child figure presents itself in the middle space between what life should be and what it really was.

The Struggle with Memory and Memoriam

“The role that prison plays in the life of an ex-prisoner cannot be deduced from some shaky psychological rule, for it is different for each one of us, depending on what went before, on what came afterwards, and on what happened to each during his or her time in the camps. Though the Shoah involved millions of people, it was a unique experience for each of them.”¹²²

Throughout the entire memoir, both adult Ruth and child Ruth speak from the pages. Precisely by offering a different opinion or perspective, Kluger allows the child to speak to the contemporaneous experience and does not discard it as naive. As Costello states, “In her narrative, her recollections of the past are often framed through her perspective as a child. She then juxtaposes this outlook with her viewpoint as an adult in the present in order to re-evaluate the past through this new frame.”¹²³ It is this child whom Kluger brings back to life to act as the reader’s guide. Because Kluger can and does separate the two, even though she sometimes switches between the two mid-sentence, the reader can clearly see which reaction is the child and which is the adult.

The child’s voice throughout the text is unadulterated, reactive and often indignant, refusing to conform to what a reader may expect from a child narrative. Rather than erasing the

¹²² Kluger, 66

¹²³ Costello, 245.

child's emotions with retrospective comments, the reader lives in the moment with the child figure. In one particular scene, child Ruth rejects a Christmas sweet from her maid, a Christian woman. Adult Kluger does not immediately intervene in child Ruth's conflicted emotions and allows a complicated and tense history to present itself.

When I found out where this present came from, I ostentatiously spat it out. Nothing Christian should touch my pure lips. But then I noticed that I had hurt the feelings of a person I like a lot and was mortified and confused. I had wanted to make a point, perform a symbolic action, and learned that symbols are as volatile as weather vanes and point in every direction, depending on how the wind blows. I almost asked her for a second sweet to make up for the irretrievable first piece, which had been flushed down the toilet by my self-righteous, seven-year-old self. But that atonement would have required more humility that I had in me. I was left with the discomfort of a first discovery of the principle of moral ambivalence.¹²⁴

Adult Ruth does interject in the end, noting that atonement is generally needed in congruence with such a harsh reaction to a heartfelt gift. The reader, however, still feels the child's indignation when the child states, "Nothing Christian should touch my lips." This declarative from the past still stands and on its own. As she matures, however, the young Ruth learns such a reaction is not well received; but adult Kluger dismisses her acquired maturity momentarily and accesses a different history by nevertheless allowing the reader to see her initial reaction. In these moments, a rather knowledgeable child witnesses on the reader's behalf, but the adult reader knows what knowledge is missing. The exchange between the maid and child Ruth should be a remarkable one for the time period, but Kluger the author shows the reader that child Ruth, with her relative lack of understanding, experienced it differently. Kluger's construct of her past self is a theoretical intervention that allows the reader to see the potential of the child's eye view.

The adult, subsequently, is equally abrasive but more reflective and eloquent. Adult Ruth's more abrasive moments pertain to generalizations about the Holocaust and modern reactions to history. In one moment Kluger discusses some of the problematics of surviving the

¹²⁴ Kluger, 44.

camps: “Later in life, nothing offended me more than the generalization that the camps turned us all into brutal egoists, and whoever survived them must be morally defective. Again, the blithe refusal to look closely, to make distinctions, to reflect a little.”¹²⁵ She is, as an adult, still indignant but this time because of the inability of the general populace to acknowledge the complexities of the Holocaust and what she and others overcame. By including these moments in the book, the reader identifies the difference between reflective comments and the child figure’s perspective. The indignant feelings bridge the decades, but Kluger nuances them by having the two perspectives clash.

Presenting both voices and both perspectives as equally valid is one of the unique aspects of Kluger’s book. Unlike other reflective writings, such as Wiesel’s *Night*, she acknowledges the difference. Kluger’s varying voices provide an authentic and taxing discussion of the Holocaust and what it meant to experience it as a child. To appeal again to Vice’s work on child Holocaust narrators, Kluger backshadows so that “[a]ffective meaning [is] added retroactively.”¹²⁶ The child’s voice, in this instance, is made stronger by her adult interjections rather than weaker because she does not downplay her childhood opinions.

According to Debbie Pinfold, the child provides a unique look into Nazi crimes, as the reader sees the events unfold through innocent and uncomprehending eyes.¹²⁷ Kluger shows the reader a child whose eyes are not innocent and thus theorizes through her past self the potential for the lack of adult conceptual tools. As Lore Segal states in the foreword to Kluger’s memoir:

The early chapters of the memoir chart every child’s experience of contriving knowledge out of information half understood, information withheld. This child came into the knowledge that her fellow citizens wanted her dead, that her death was mandated by laws that made mercy punishable as a crime. Most children discover that their elders don’t know how to operate the world. Little Ruth

¹²⁵ Kluger, 77.

¹²⁶ Vice is referencing Saul Friedländer’s *When Memory Comes* when she discusses backshadowing and affective meaning. As she elaborates, it is the act of “seeing the past from the viewpoint of the present.” Vice, 14

¹²⁷ Pinfold, *The Child’s View of the Third Reich in German Literature*, 5-6.

learned that her mother would not safeguard her, that her father could not save himself.¹²⁸

Unlike her narrative counterparts, child Ruth complicates this notion of childhood “innocence” and seems fully aware of the consequences of the actions made by the adults surrounding her: “Later I realized that the grown-ups around me didn’t know much themselves, that they were entirely flummoxed by the turn of events, and that, in fact, I was learning faster than they. I got the impression that I shouldn’t trust my mother, that she had only bad advice for me.”¹²⁹ Ruth’s “innocence” does in fact allow her to see the dire situation differently. She seems to be able to understand the evils more rapidly than the adults. She has not yet experienced “good” in the world and thus does not doubt the evil. This is the world she knows and the world she understands. Adult Ruth allows the reader to enter that world, but it is child Ruth who guides the reader through 1930s Vienna, deportations, and concentration camps. The child figure shows the reader the world which never should have existed with an eerie accuracy. She appears from between adult Ruth’s interjections—from the middle.

Where with Anne the reader encounters a singular voice and with child Ruth a complex doubled one, speaking alongside her adult self, it is in Sebald’s work where the child speaks from the most hidden corners of the narrative. In the next section on Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, the child figure is turned into a pure abstraction, representing a childhood both within and outside the Holocaust.

¹²⁸ Kluger, 10.

¹²⁹ Kluger, 48.

The Child as Unrealized Focal Point in Sebald's *Austerlitz*

A lot has been written about W.G. Sebald and his works, especially their style and structure, which have been compared to Thomas Bernhard's.¹³⁰ Both writers narrate cyclically and often reveal small amounts of information with each cycle rather than writing in a linear fashion. At the same time, Sebald's technique helps depict broken memories or memory in general—a topic I touched on above in the section on Ruth Kluger's work. It is through these broken memories and the layered text that the discussion of Sebald's elusive child figure begins.

Sebald, the author, belongs first and foremost to the postgeneration as Marianne Hirsch classifies them, a group which also includes Art Spiegelman.¹³¹ This generation is not a direct witness to the Holocaust, but its members have a connection, often familial, to it. In Spiegelman's case, it is his father and mother who survived the Holocaust.¹³² Sebald differs from other writers in this group as he was born to non-Jewish German citizens at the end of the war. He was an infant at the time and carries no responsibility for the crimes himself, but he grew up learning about what his parents' generation had done. This description of Sebald the man also accurately describes his writings, which never engage directly with the atrocities (i.e. not within the camps or the Reich itself during the Holocaust) but are tangentially related either through memory or obscure topics. Sebald himself stated:

I knew that writing about the subject, particularly for people of German origin, is fraught with dangers and difficulties. Tactless lapses, moral and aesthetic, can easily be committed. It was also clear you could not write directly about the horror of persecution in its ultimate forms, because no one could bear to look at these things without losing their sanity. So you would have to approach it from an angle, and by intimating to the reader that these subjects are constant company; their presence shades every inflection of every sentence one writes. If

¹³⁰ Sebald himself has acknowledged Bernhard's influence on his work. For a further discussion see O'Connell's article "Why You Should Read W.G. Sebald."

¹³¹ Hirsch *The Generation of Postmemory*, 40

¹³² As is described in his own comic *Maus*.

one can make that credible, then one can begin to defend writing about these subjects at all.¹³³

Before *Austerlitz*, *Die Ausgewanderten* (*The Emigrants*) related most closely to Nazi genocide.

Both recount the lives of figures who emigrated from Germany, their attempts to recall their histories and narrate their stories later in life.¹³⁴

Austerlitz, on the other hand, presents the topic in a comparatively more direct fashion. The narrative though is still “indirect” in that it deals with the history of someone who escaped Germany by means of the Kindertransport, an event that removed the child from a large portion of the atrocities.¹³⁵ Although the Kindertransport was a direct result of Nazi policy, Sebald nevertheless constructs a story that is both part of the Holocaust, and at the same time disconnected from it. At the same time, he was affected by the camps as his mother died in one of them. Furthermore, Sebald places Austerlitz in what Hirsch has classified the 1.5 generation. Born in 1934, Austerlitz is a child survivor but has no memory of his past. Sebald “blurs generational boundaries” with Austerlitz’s character.¹³⁶ Because Sebald places his character both within and outside the Holocaust narrative the reader witnesses only tangentially, as Austerlitz did. As Todd Presner writes, “From the perspective of Austerlitz, the novel is the story of a recovered memory and the struggle to find traces of his past in the present, while from the perspective of both the author and the narrator, it is a story of ‘postmemory’ mediated by imaginative investment and creation.”¹³⁷ The child figure, I will argue, is the site of Sebald’s strategy with which he balances

¹³³ As quoted in Maya Jaggi’s article on one of Sebald’s final interviews.

¹³⁴ *The Emigrants* is the third part of the “Analogy Trilogy” series presented by Bill T. Jones, which began with *Dora* and was discussed at the start of this dissertation. Jones and his cast connect the broken memory of the historical Dora with Sebald’s fictional figures and the tragedy which befell them all. Jones “Analogy Trilogy”

¹³⁵ As was discussed in the introduction regarding the Hidden Children conference, many survivors who did not directly experience the concentration camp felt as if they were not true “survivors” or, at minimum, that their stories were not valid additions to the Holocaust narrative.

¹³⁶ Hirsch, 41.

¹³⁷ Many, including Presner, have argued that the narrator represents Sebald himself, as there are many similarities between the narrator’s and Sebald’s pasts. Presner, “What a Synoptic and Artificial View Reveals,” 349.

between the world of the Holocaust and the one just outside (both spatially and temporally). The child persists most importantly as an in-between figure in order to mediate the horrors.

Although the book cover is a photograph of a child, presumably Austerlitz, this child is not a developed character in the narrative—only the adult is. Because it is the adult Austerlitz whom the reader encounters, the child figure is never really present but simultaneously always is, as the text itself is about Austerlitz's memory, and the child is "hidden" within that memory. In order to access the horrors of Austerlitz's unremembered past, Sebald uses indirect discourse and has the narrator relay Austerlitz's memories rather than Austerlitz himself. As Presner describes it, "through the interactions between the narrator and the protagonist, Sebald stages the reality of an encounter with the remains of the Holocaust in the layered spaces of the present."¹³⁸ The figure of the child exists only between the lines of Austerlitz's testimony. Thus, the text does not speak from the child's perspective, as the previous texts have, but rather indirectly through memories produced from the encounters adult Austerlitz has with figures from his past. Nevertheless, the child figure in *Austerlitz* speaks to the reader from the past, hidden amongst the pained and troubled memories. The figure manifests itself, I will argue, in Austerlitz's storytelling in moments of narrative rupture, as well as in the photographic intrusions Sebald uses throughout the text.¹³⁹ Despite its elusive nature, Sebald constructs a child who alludes to a life forever impacted by the Holocaust.

¹³⁸ Presner, 345.

¹³⁹ I use "text" or "book" to describe Sebald's work because how one classifies this particular work is up for question as Sebald intentionally left the standard "Roman" seen on cover pages in German books out, adding additional uncertainty to the reading of the text.

The Hidden Child Austerlitz

Consistent with Sebald's other works, the opening pages of the book do not reveal the narrative core, but as Silke Arnold-de Simine comments, it is the Holocaust or void which "spurs this meandering narrative."¹⁴⁰ Austerlitz's story is a broken memory which is then mediated further as it is retold by the primary narrator. The Austerlitz figure learns his own history as he progresses through life and his tragic tale is then told to the narrator in a similar manner. In a series of meetings, spanning years, the narrator slowly discovers Austerlitz's past.

A child survivor of the Holocaust, the fictional Austerlitz was one of the close to 10,000 children saved via the Kindertransport organized primarily by the UK government.¹⁴¹ Austerlitz departed from Prague and was sent to live with a family in Wales. He was unfortunate, however, in that his host family hid his true identity and past from him.¹⁴² Austerlitz grew up with little to no knowledge of his heritage. His first trace of a past life came when he sat for his first official school exams, and the school revealed his real name to him.

Penrith-Smith hatte den Namen auf einen Zettel geschrieben...Am meisten verunsicherte mich zunächst, daß ich mir unter dem Wort Austerlitz nicht das geringste vorstellen konnte. Wäre mein neuer Name Morgan gewesen oder Jones, dann hätte ich das beziehen können auf die Wirklichkeit. Sogar der Name Jacques war mir aus einem französischen Liedchen bekannt. Aber Austerlitz hatte ich nie zuvor noch gehört, und ich war deshalb von Anfang an überzeugt, daß außer mir niemand so heißt, weder in Wales noch auf den Britischen Inseln, noch sonst irgendwo auf der Welt...Ich konnte mir nicht denken, wie er zu buchstabieren sei, und habe das seltsame, wie mir schien, einer geheimen Losung gleichende Wort drei- oder viermal silbenweise gelesen, ehe ich aufschaute.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Arnold-de Simine, "Memory Museum and Museum Text," 25.

¹⁴¹ According to "the Kindertransport and Refugees" page of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website as of September 19, 2019.

¹⁴² Such an experience was unfortunately not uncommon for children on the Kindertransport. Many of the host families were Christian and attempted to convert the children they took in—some were successful, and others were not. Sebald bases his fictional story on the BBC program *Whatever Happened to Susi?* about a Kindertransport survivor, Susi Bechöfer, who grew up in Wales and only learned about her past late in life.

¹⁴³ Sebald, 102-104. English: Penrith-Smith had written the name on a piece of paper...At first, what disconcerted me most was that I could connect no ideas at all with the word *Austerlitz*. If my new name had been Morgan or Jones, I could have related it to reality. I even knew the name *Jacques* from a French nursery rhyme. But I had never heard of an Austerlitz before, and from the first I was convinced that no one

At this point in the narrative, Austerlitz has no connection with his actual history. Even his family name is wholly unknown to him in any context. Thus, the reader learns about Austerlitz's past much like Austerlitz himself does. As Richard Crownshaw notes, the discovery process is layered once more for the reader through an act of indirect discourse. Austerlitz does not speak directly to the reader, but rather through the unnamed narrator who is listening to Austerlitz's tale over a thirty-year period.¹⁴⁴ It is a slow, frustrating, and deliberate discovery, but it tells the story of a childhood hidden away within the depths of his memory. In constructing the narrative in this manner, Sebald exposes the child figure as the point of convergence where the different traces of past and future meet.

According to Hirsch, *Austerlitz* becomes a familial story halfway through the text when he finds his way back to his childhood in Prague.¹⁴⁵ It could be argued though that it begins in a basic sense with the aforementioned discovery of the family name. It is at this point that Austerlitz must begin to work to come to terms with an unknown past. He struggles to accept the truth, as he has never heard the name. He has heard Jacques in fairy tales, but not Austerlitz—the true connection to the familial history. He struggles even to pronounce the name. In the end, his initial connection to it is historical and attached to the battle of Austerlitz, which he learns about in school: “Je öfter Hilary das Wort Austerlitz vor der Klasse aussprach, desto mehr wurde es mir zu meinem Namen.”¹⁴⁶ As Stefanie Boese discusses in regard to postwar belatedness in *Austerlitz*, his identification with a battle rather than anything familial shows an intertwining of histories. Sebald allows the figure to attach himself “not to a singular traumatic disruption but rather to a

else bore that name, no one in Wales, or in the Isles, or anywhere else in the world...I couldn't work out the spelling, and read the strange term which sounded to me like some password three or four times, syllable by syllable, before I looked up. *Austerlitz*, 67-8.

¹⁴⁴ Crownshaw “Reconsidering Postmemory,” 217

¹⁴⁵ Hirsch, 42

¹⁴⁶ Sebald, 110. English: The more often Hilary mentioned the word *Austerlitz* in front of the class, the more it really did become my own name. *Austerlitz*, 72

larger melancholic history.”¹⁴⁷ Sebald’s narrative structure forces a working through of the traumatic history that contains numerous obstacles. Despite being a battle in the larger European history, Austerlitz is also his family name, but at the moment there is no family, and thus no childhood, available to attach to it. The “hidden child” and its complexity transpires as Austerlitz’s history unfolds. Sebald’s child exists in the liminal space in between past and present but remains out of reach for the adult.

However, Austerlitz the name only serves to inform him that his known history is a lie. His first memories do in fact appear, as Hirsch notes, when he returns to his actual childhood home—Prague. It is only once he directly encounters the physical spaces of his childhood that the information becomes a reality/memory for adult Austerlitz. For example, the reader experiences Austerlitz’s first encounter with Prague, and his past, alongside him. He states, “kaum daß ich angekommen war in Prag, den Ort meiner ersten Kindheit wiedergefunden...war es mir, als sei ich auf diesen Wegen schon einmal gegangen, als eröffnete sich mir nicht durch die Anstrengung des Nachdenkens, sondern durch meine so lange betäubt gewesenen und jetzt wiedererwachenden Sinne, die Erinnerung.”¹⁴⁸ The encounter with his childhood that happens in this moment is essential to rebuilding Austerlitz’s memory. Before this point only factual knowledge existed. When he returns to Prague, he enters a space of memory. As the text progresses, he simply lists items and spaces he remembers: “der gleich neben dem Eingang in die Mauer eingelassene Blechkasten für das Elektrische mit dem Symbol des herabfahrenden Blitzes, die achtblättrige Mosaikblume, taubengrau und schneeweiß.”¹⁴⁹ After this moment, memory and understanding begin. The child finally reveals himself to the reader in the instant where past and present collide

¹⁴⁷ Boese, “Forever Just Occurring,” 109.

¹⁴⁸ Sebald, 220. English: no sooner had I arrived in Prague than I found myself back among the scenes of my early childhood...it was as if I had already been this way before and memories were revealing themselves to me not by means of any mental effort but through my senses, so long numbed and now coming back to life. *Austerlitz*, 150

¹⁴⁹ Sebald, 221-2. English: the metal box for the electrics built into the wall beside the entrance with its lightning symbol, the octofoil mosaic flower is shades of dove gray and snow white. *Austerlitz*, 151

and the child fractures Austerlitz's known past. It is a moment of *Jetztzeit*, as Walter Benjamin would describe it, where the present and the past become indistinguishable from one another.¹⁵⁰ Austerlitz does not inform the narrator *how* he knows or remembers "in dem alles gradeso war wie vor beinahe sechzig Jahren"¹⁵¹ but only acknowledges that a memory exists of the space as it was.

His childhood is hidden in these physical spaces that he now encounters. Austerlitz remembers and thus the child figure emerges. As Naomi Stead notes in her work on architecture and memory, "The overriding theme in *Austerlitz* is thus memory: individual and collective, forgotten and retrieved, the fragility of human memory in the face of the crushing forces of history."¹⁵² Stead's work discusses memory in relation to architecture and goes on to state that "Sebald's intense focus on memory lost and returned invites associations with Marcel Proust, but while Proust's flood of memory was provoked by a taste, Austerlitz has his repressed memories set free by an architectural space. This is memory served by and held in buildings."¹⁵³ Although the physical spaces spark his memory, Vera, Austerlitz's childhood nanny, is the physical (bodily) gatekeeper to Austerlitz's memory. She directs him to these spaces, and it is her directional cues that allow Austerlitz to then realize his loss. Vera tells Austerlitz his own history—how his life changed, when, and why. As is shown in the above quote, however, he "remembers." Although mediated, he knows the past he is remembering to be true. Because of Vera he remembers the personal—the people who cared for him. Vera even gives Austerlitz his mother again by providing a mediated memory of her. It is of course not his own, as those are

¹⁵⁰ Jens Brockmeier discusses the general collide of time in Sebald's work in regard to Benjamin's notion of the timeless *now* in his article "Austerlitz's Memory," 361

¹⁵¹ Sebald, 224. English: where everything was just as it had been almost sixty years ago, *Austerlitz*, 153

¹⁵² Stead "Architecture and Memory in Sebald's *Austerlitz*," 42

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 42

broken, but Vera creates a past for him.¹⁵⁴ His mother is no longer alive, but it is a loss he did not truly experience until this point.

Not only is the child present in spatial memories but in language as well. What was once not even a concept to adult Austerlitz reappears suddenly if not obtrusively in his life:

Mitten in dieser Bemerkung war Vera selber, unwillkürlich, wie ich annehme, sagte Austerlitz, aus der einen Sprache in die andere übergewechselt, und ich...auch im entferntesten nur auf den Gedanken gekommen war, vom Tschechischen je berührt worden zu sein, verstand nun wie ein Tauber, dem durch ein Wunder das Gehör wiederaufging, so gut wie alles, was Vera sagte, und wollte nurmehr die Augen schließen und ihren vielsilbig dahineilenden Wörtern lauschen in einem fort.¹⁵⁵

Although this sudden understanding of a forgotten language could not happen to an actual human being, Sebald uses it as a literary construct to frame the reappearance of the child. The language epiphany forces the child's knowledge onto the page. The language emerges and so does the child figure.

As memories continuously emerge in a non-linear fashion, Sebald offers a fragmented narrative to express the child's voice, rather than the forceful nature that Kluger uses. He allows the child's voice to appear through the fragmentation, a method used, as Vice notes, when the child referenced is very young. In so doing, Sebald is able to show what has been lost in the gaps that remain.¹⁵⁶ These moments of loss are the most crucial to witnessing the child figure throughout the text. Although Vera is still alive and is the one who reintroduces him to many of his memories, his encounter with her is one of loss—lost memories and of lost time. He sees a childhood that could have been: walks in Prague's parks and play times together that were torn from him by an evil that he does not even fully know. The gaps in his memory and his placement

¹⁵⁴ She also gives him the photograph of himself as a child that graces the cover of the book, a discussion had in the following section in regard to Sebald's use of photographs.

¹⁵⁵ Sebald, 227. English: In the middle of her account Vera...had changed from one language to the other, and I, who had not for a moment thought that Czech could mean anything to me...now understood almost everything Vera said, like a deaf man whose hearing had been miraculously restore, so that all I wanted to do was close my eyes and listen forever to her polysyllabic flood of words. *Austerlitz*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ Vice, 143

in Wales allowed him on some level to avoid the worst of World War II. At the same time, however, his childhood was tarnished by the evils of the Nazis and his entire life directly affected; he just did not know it at the time. The reason for and the knowledge of his familial loss were literally lost on him. When the child appears in these childhood spaces, the reader sees a world and a life destroyed. But the child figure speaks from this intransitive space of loss. It is a space based in memory, second hand at times, which questions what the truth is and refuses to allow the reader to engage directly with what has vanished, colliding with the present. It is a theorization of a vanished childhood transported away both literally and figuratively and of White's middle voice.

The figure allows an entrance into the reality of loss and the struggle of not knowing and understanding. The mediated manner in which Austerlitz and the reader discover his past greatly resembles how the current generation of readers learns about the atrocities. They obviously did not experience it, and the most direct way to access would be through history books or a survivor's memories.¹⁵⁷ As Presner states, Sebald's "concern is with the present, with what people born after the catastrophe know of what happened, how they gain knowledge of the catastrophe, what sorts of memories they create about it, and what kind of relationships they have to it—in other words, how they encounter, recall, and narrate the remains of the catastrophic past in the present."¹⁵⁸ The child figure provides a connection for the modern reader and additionally can show how even those who experienced the Holocaust struggle with the memory of it. In the end it is the child, and not Austerlitz, who "speaks" from the pages, providing an insight into what happened and ultimately what it means not to know. As the voice emerges through a fragmented narration, the objective reality becomes obscured, and a middle space of representation emerges. Not all can be known at once and from the beginning, and the learning

¹⁵⁷ These memories are also mediated of course as time continues to pass.

¹⁵⁸ Presner, 350.

must always continue. The middle space Sebald's child creates shows the struggle to represent and remember.

Factual Photographs and a Fictional Story

In addition to these layered histories, Sebald includes historical photographs in his fictional tale. The photographs add a sense of tangibility to the book, which J.J. Long claims creates a modern archive within the text. As Long notes, the alienation effect that an archival image within a fictional text should have is lost on the *Austerlitz* reader. For Long, an historical image within a fictional text should be jarring, drawing readers back out of the narrative and forcing them to recognize the fictional nature of the text. This alienation does not happen in Sebald, however, as the main character has his own camera and is presumably taking the photographs which grace the pages.¹⁵⁹ The images which Sebald uses provide a sense of authenticity to the fictional story. As Sebald himself has stated on his use of photographs in his texts, "The photograph is the true document par excellence. People let themselves be convinced by a photograph."¹⁶⁰ By including images, readers no longer imagine the spaces that the narrator and Austerlitz are discussing; they are now "actually" in Theresienstadt with Austerlitz. The "truthful" element, the photographs, alongside the fictitious story have the ability not only to provide a grounding but because of the fictional nature also to "create a space of *terra infirma*, which destabilizes both the reliability of memory and spectatorship."¹⁶¹ The images, in particular those including people connected to Austerlitz, allow for an examination of more than just

¹⁵⁹ Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, 149-50.

¹⁶⁰ Scholz, "But the Written Word is Not a True Document," 106.

¹⁶¹ Presner, 349.

Austerlitz's lost history, but by calling the objective reality into question, they represent the intransitive qualities of memory.

Sebald creates a world that the reader is drawn into not only through the gripping journey of a man rediscovering his history and a lost childhood but also by providing photographic evidence for a fictional life. One example occurs very early on in the text near the discussion of Austerlitz's backpack that he always carries with him. Because of the inserted photograph of a backpack, the narrator is no longer simply describing or discussing a backpack, giving the illusion of a reality that does not actually exist; rather, he is forcing the reader to witness the backpack as it exists in reality. The narrator states, "Ich glaube, es war vor allem der Rucksack...und von dem er behauptete, daß er das einzige wahrhaft Zuverlässige in seinem Leben gewesen sei."¹⁶² In the original German, the intrusion of the image is emphasized even more profoundly with the line break placed between "ruck" and "sack" respectively, a textual strategy that is most likely intentional.¹⁶³ As Stead notes, the "effect of the real" is heightened by Sebald's lack of citation or captioning underneath the photographs.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, though Austerlitz's photographs grace the pages, Austerlitz did not exist.

As White states, the lack of a clear objective reality is one of the characteristics needed to allow for an access to the middle voice. The use of authentic images within the fictional text, where they do not presumably belong, heighten the intransitive qualities of the story and obscure the objective reality known to the reader even further. The world shown in the pictures is real, but the people in them do not correspond with the fictional characters in the book. These places,

¹⁶² Sebald, 62-3. English: I believe it was mainly the rucksack...describing it as the only truly reliable thing in his life. *Austerlitz*, 40.

¹⁶³ Mary Griffin Wilson discusses the placement of the images in the German version and argues for Sebald's intentional line breaks surrounding the images. As she argues, it is not an isolated incident. Wilson, "Sheets of the Past," 56-59.

¹⁶⁴ Stead, 46

however, exist. These people exist(ed).¹⁶⁵ They are presented as part of the story—as if Austerlitz actually lived and this was truly his history. This structure with its allusion to fictionality could be perceived as problematic. For example, the woman presumed to be Austerlitz’s mother in the Theresienstadt video was indeed an actual woman trapped within the ghetto walls and forced to participate in the farce for the international delegates who visited the camp.¹⁶⁶ And yet, the “authenticity” the images create can simultaneously produce a tension, as they interject themselves into the story. They are both integrated seamlessly into the story line and at the same time, as the photographs interact with the text surrounding them, they intrude into the literary space making it difficult to ignore them.¹⁶⁷ It is their contradictory relationship with the text that demands an engagement with the motif of lost memory, and as I will show, the subsequent potential for illuminating the child through photography.

There is an obvious relationship between the architectural images and the overall text, as Stead notes, as they bridge the fictional world and the historical one, but it is the images which are related specifically to Austerlitz’s childhood—the two supposed photographs of his mother and the singular photo of himself—that allow the reader to examine the innocence lost outside of Austerlitz.¹⁶⁸ Although the child figure emerges through the memories described by Vera and the physical spaces of his past, the memories are further emphasized by the images which grace the pages. Much like the example of the rucksack, the architectural images bring a tangibility to the

¹⁶⁵ The fact that the images on the pages are not actually of the characters in the narrative is never acknowledged in Sebald’s work.

¹⁶⁶ It was a farce that would make the rest of the world believe life in Theresienstadt “wasn’t *that* bad” as Kluger discusses in her memoir. Christian Boltanski attempted a similar photographic representation in his 1986 art exhibition *Autel de Lycée*. Boltanski presented his audience with six individual photographs of Jewish Viennese schoolchildren from 1931. Due to the manner of Boltanski’s work, however, and the way in which they were presented, visitors assumed that these children perished in the Holocaust, as many their age did. He hints at the Holocaust without providing context. The literary world does not seem to find Sebald’s methods quite as controversial as many have found Boltanski’s to be, as it remains a staple of college syllabuses and even made the bestseller list in the United States.

¹⁶⁷ Wilson, 50.

¹⁶⁸ Stead comments on the architectural and narrative link in her article. Stead, 41

fictional life by contextualizing the narrative. The personal images, however, bring the fictional past to life. Although not images of Austerlitz himself, the images of his “mother” underline the stolen childhood. Two photos appear in the text, neither providing reconciliation for Austerlitz, but both can be read as representative of her and Austerlitz’s desire for her face, as Hirsch references it.¹⁶⁹

At one point in the narrative, Austerlitz scours Nazi propaganda tapes from Theresienstadt searching in vain for a shred of evidence that his mother existed in that space. As he searches via the perpetrator’s gaze, once more mediating the access to his past, a grainy photo with an unidentified woman tucked into a corner behind another unidentified man appears on the pages. Austerlitz describes his encounter with the woman’s face:

Gerade so wie ich nach meinen schwachen Erinnerungen und den wenigen übrigen Anhaltspunkten, die ich heute habe, die Schauspielerin Agáta mir vorstellte, gerade so, denke ich, sieht so aus, und ich Schauer wieder und wieder in dieses mir gleichermaßen fremde und vertraute Gesicht, sagte Austerlitz, lasse das Band zurücklaufen, Mal für Mal, und sehe den Zeitanzeiger in der oberen linken Ecke des Bildschirms, die Zahlen, die einen Teil ihrer Stirn verdecken, die Minuten und die Sekunden, von 10:53 bis 10: 57, und die Hundertstelsekunden, die sich davondrehen, so geschwind, daß man sie nicht entziffern und festhalten kann.¹⁷⁰

The image ruptures the text at in between “Frau” or woman and “erscheint” or appears, forcing the reader’s eye to the corner and immediately to her face, rather than the man located in the center of the photograph.¹⁷¹ Austerlitz believes he has found his mother. He attempts to capture the forgotten face from the moving image on the screen. It is an attempt to capture a childhood

¹⁶⁹ Hirsch, 46

¹⁷⁰ Sebald, 358-9. English: She looks, so I tell myself as I watch, just as I imagined the singer Agáta from my faint memories and the few other clues to her appearance that I now have, and I gaze and gaze again at that face, which seems to me both strange and familiar, said Austerlitz, I run the tape back repeatedly, looking at the time indicator in the top left-hand corner of the screen, where the figures covering part of her forehead show the minutes and seconds from 10:53 to 10:57, while the hundredths of a second flash by so fast that you cannot read and capture them. *Austerlitz*, 251-2.

¹⁷¹ In the English version, the image appears in between “in” and “dicator,” disrupting the word time indicator. As Hirsch notes the time stamp has an additional effect as it recalls the numbered tattoos of Auschwitz inmates and thus the fate that awaits the two historical figures in the photograph. Hirsch, 46.

lost. The child, who no longer exists, searches for a mother and a life which, much like the amount of time the woman appears, was far too short.

It is not enough to know that his mother lived and existed in Prague; Austerlitz wants to know what happened afterwards. He wants evidence of her existence beyond what Vera tells him. It is due to this need that he and the reader have such an attachment to even a potentially false mother. The result is that “rather than authenticating,” truth and reference, as Hirsch puts it, the supposed images of the mother “blur and relativize” such desired stability and certainty.¹⁷² Even as Vera shakes her head at the second photograph Austerlitz finds—this time from a newspaper archive—the text remains ambiguous. Despite Vera’s rejection, her image burns on the page. Both possible images of the mother speak to the existence of a child and of a childhood forever lost. They do not act as documents of the “real” but rather force the reader to encounter the past as Austerlitz does—in a search for the truth always underway. The images’ historical nature causes the reader to question the truth of the narrative. By blurring truth and reference, the focus on the mother and her image allow for the text’s middle voice to emerge and have the child give voice to the other victims.

Apart from the mother, however, there is only one image of Austerlitz. It is not only within the text but also serves as a greeting as it graces the cover of the book. This image represents Austerlitz the child in the narrative, and it is quite possibly the most important photograph in the book because of its cover placement. The photograph alerts the reader to the child’s presence from the very beginning. Much like Sebald’s narrative mode, the image provides information, but only gradually. At the start, it is only an image and the reader must make assumptions about its role in the larger narrative, but as more information is revealed, the image

¹⁷² Hirsch juxtaposes the images in *Austerlitz* with the two authentic images within Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*. In *Maus*, Art’s mother helps to individualize the story told on the pages. Sebald’s “mother” frustrates the memory. Hirsch, 44

from the cover still lingers demanding some kind of explanation. The figure has been present from the start.

The image of Austerlitz reappears within the text itself when he is with Vera. “Das Bild lag vor mir, sagte Austerlitz, doch wagte ich nicht, es anzufassen.”¹⁷³ It is a photograph they are looking at together and not a supporting photograph of a place being discussed as with some of the architectural images. Austerlitz cannot establish a connection with the image, regardless of how hard he tries. It is secondary to him, but a primary piece of information for the reader. The image shows that he lived at that time in Prague as well, as it was taken months before he left on the Kindertransport. Only the words his grandfather wrote on the back of the picture hold any meaning for Austerlitz. The singular image, which should allow a connection with the child instead frustrates the narrative because Austerlitz cannot connect to it. Mary Griffin Wilson discusses the photograph in relation to Roland Barthes’ function of photography, stating that the image of child Austerlitz does not act as a punctum as one might expect. Instead of showing something that has been, the image shows what is. “It is far more akin to a ‘that-is,’ a sense of the past as existing alongside what is present...It becomes contemporaneous to the scene that confronts us. The boy represents a third, ghostly figure within the room, a double...which Austerlitz so frequently imagines beside him.”¹⁷⁴ The child of the past remains just out of reach for Austerlitz but has guided the reader through the broken past.

By focusing indirectly on the child figure, Sebald provides a middle space from within which the reader can witness alongside this figure. Despite the “innocent” nature of Austerlitz, introduced through the initial photograph, and the focus on the lost childhood, Austerlitz allows the reader to see the larger implications of Nazi hatred, as the figure aids in mediating the horrors. A mother was forced to decide to give up her child. A family was torn apart forever. By focusing

¹⁷³ Sebald, 267. English: The picture lay before me, said Austerlitz, but I dared not touch it. *Austerlitz*, 183

¹⁷⁴ Wilson, 59.

on the singular figure, Sebald is able to provide access to both history and memoriam by allowing past and future to come together on the pages in the liminal space occupied by the child figure.

Conclusion

“...I had to learn to lie to survive. My mother had always taught me to be truthful. How do you explain such inconsistency to a child?”¹⁷⁵

This chapter began by discussing Anne Frank and the perceived image of innocence when it comes to child narrators. As Vice noted, authors have used child figures as a means to tell a complicated story of evil that beforehand would have seemed inconceivable—when, as best described by the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, California, “insanity became policy.”¹⁷⁶ As Debbie Pinfold notes, however, the child figure plays a large role in post-war representations, when many were attempting to make sense of the rubble that remained. The child figure placed among the dusty rubble navigates the destruction and aids in representing the guilt and shame of the reconstruction period. The child figure works to represent the problematics of the post-war era when perpetrator and victim had to once again share the same space. For the most part, post-war and Holocaust child representations are fairly similar, especially with regard to their ultimate goals. The child figures in both scenarios aid in representing a complex and problematic history. The child figure has the ability to be present and witness the worst.

The child figure witnesses but at the same time is separate from the actions.¹⁷⁷ For Anne and Kluger, this means being “protected” from conversations and certain realities as long as

¹⁷⁵ Pruitt, 38

¹⁷⁶ As stated by a video at the Museum of Tolerance in LA

¹⁷⁷ This could be seen as similar to Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* and the paradox of documenting and witnessing without stepping in. As Sontag states, the photographer is often in a problematic situation. Although it is the photographer’s duty, as she calls it, to document what she is witnessing, it is in witnessing that she also may be deemed complicit in a horrific action. However, if she interjects and attempts to hinder an action, she is no longer objectively documenting what is happening.

possible. As Kluger stated, she, as a child, was often left out of conversations about the situation in 1930s Vienna, and yet she was there. She witnessed it just like the adults, but with a different perspective on the world. For Austerlitz, this means being removed from the situation and kept from the history. Their ability to navigate a narrative is an option made possible by the middle voice. The child figure can provide a story of atrocity from an outside and yet at the same time experienced perspective. The child figure has the ability to rupture a narrative and allow access to both experience of and facts about a nearly incomprehensible history.

As the dissertation progresses to filmic representations of child figures, I will first linger on the discussion to the American pastime that is Anne Frank, in her non-literary incarnation. Anne's name is synonymous with hope in the face of evil, and she is the introduction to the topic for many, because of her popularity brought on by her adolescent reactions and poignant observations. This imagery can also be abused, however, as is illustrated in Wilkomirski's *Fragments*. Initially, the book was a success much like Anne Frank, but as previously mentioned, was swiftly condemned by the academic community when it was discovered to be a lie. And as Vice ends her work, she notes the vulnerability specifically attached to the child figure, which obviously can be abused, but can also be an important access point to the topic. Even on the perpetrator side, although the child is indeed fully integrated in the Nazi machine and experiences first-hand the unadulterated hate and terror that the adults bring into the world, the child may be unable to fully process the situation. Children are both firsthand witnesses and simultaneously potentially unaware of what they are witnessing.

And yet, precisely because of their inability to understand, they also have the ability to disturb or rupture a conventional narrative, based as it is on unified perspectives and the impetus to stimulate rational understanding of the world. The tendency to disrupt such conventions can be seen in both Kluger and Sebald. In *Still Alive*, the child figure challenges a known Holocaust paradigm, and in *Austerlitz* the child forces its way through the clouded memories reminding the

eponymous figure, the narrator, and the reader of the ever-present past. In these literary examples, the authors dramatize the child figure and thereby allow for the modernist narrative approach White found essential for the conscious writing needed for representing the Holocaust. In the following chapter, I will discuss the child figure in Holocaust films beginning with the added image of the child's face introduced in the discussion of Sebald.

Chapter Two

The Small Child on the Big Screen



Fig 1: Giosuè looks for his father¹⁷⁸



Fig 2: Bruno meets Shmuel¹⁷⁹



Fig 3: Spielberg's Girl in Red¹⁸⁰

*"The irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship appears to me in fact to be elsewhere [than totality]: not in synthesis, but in the face to face of humans, in sociality, in its moral signification."*¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Benigni, *Life is Beautiful* 1:49

¹⁷⁹ Herman, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* 1:05

¹⁸⁰ Spielberg, *Schindler's List* 1:08

¹⁸¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 77

The last chapter discussed the effect of a child's presence in Holocaust literature. At the filmic level of Holocaust representation, the image of the child adds an additional layer to its narrative capabilities. Not only is either a fictitious or an autobiographical child figure present in a narrative as in Chapter One, in film the child's cinematic presence returns the spectator's gaze. With a bright smile, an innocent, and yet mischievous flash of the eyes, filmic images of children can have a profound impact on the adult viewer. The figure has the ability to break down the fourth wall and create a face to face encounter wherein, as Levinas describes it, an "ultimate experience of relationship" emerges. Encountering the child's face, an "other," has the ability to evoke a radical difference in the viewer through a moment of rupture. As Melissa Schwartz explains, "according to Levinas's ethics, the other is the incarnation of radical difference. When an individual consciousness...encounters the other, a moment of pre-verbal relationality, or dialogue, is instigated."¹⁸² It is indeed not a synthesis or a simple identification that appears in this moment, but rather a rupture as the face of the other forces an encounter with the spectator and navigates the unrepresentable.¹⁸³ Starting with Steven Spielberg's little girl in red in *Schindler's List* (1993), this chapter traces the cultural history of Holocaust representations in a post-*Schindler* world and the potential of the child figure as narrator in filmic Holocaust representations. Due to their impact on Holocaust film and their prominent use of the child figure, my case studies will be Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997), Mark Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (2008) and Lazlo Nemes's *Son of Saul* (2015). In my readings of these films

¹⁸² Melissa Schwartz *The Language of Ethical Encounter: Levinas, Otherness, & Contemporary Poetry*, 2

¹⁸³ Others such as Claude Lanzmann may argue against this notion of "seeing" and "witnessing" and the need to encounter. Lanzmann works in realist and historical images and is quoted as saying: "If I had stumbled on a real SS film—a secret film, because filming was strictly forbidden—that showed how 3,000 Jewish men, women and children were gassed in Auschwitz's crematorium 2, not only would I not have shown it but I would have destroyed it." His anger, however, is also directed at works such as Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and Spielberg's attempt to fabricate an archive. Although I do not disagree with Lanzmann's statements, as silence and empty spaces can be powerful, as is seen in his own work *Shoah*, the child's face forces an encounter, as Schwartz notes, and I will argue for its presence in this chapter. Lanzmann, "Why Spielberg Has Distorted the Truth," 14.

I argue that the figure of the child navigates the cinematic space and has the ability to amplify cinematic dimensions by forcing an encounter with the Other—the child’s image.

As in literature, the child figure has been present since Holocaust film’s early years, beginning with the 1948 film, *The Search* and the early filmic representations of Anne Frank.¹⁸⁴ In 1993, however, the Holocaust film cannon gained a tiny girl in a red coat, a mute visual embodiment of child voices. This little girl in red holds a rather prominent role in academic literature on the topic.¹⁸⁵ Despite her brief role in the script, she featured heavily in the film’s marketing strategy. She appears on the VHS (and now DVD and Blu-Ray) covers, and even the movie’s advertising posters. One of them includes her hand and the sleeve of her red coat as an adult hand, presumably Schindler’s, pulls her up, appearing to rescue her.¹⁸⁶ The little girl was thus prominent from the beginning, both within the marketing techniques and the narrative itself despite her brief screen time.

The Little Girl in the Red Coat

Spielberg was not the first to create a Hollywood product using the Holocaust, nor was he the last, but his product played a role in the polarizing shift of popularized representations in the early 1990s.¹⁸⁷ Robert S. Leventhal’s work “Romancing the Holocaust, or Hollywood and Horror:

¹⁸⁴ *The Search* is a Hollywood production featuring Montgomery Clift where a young Czech boy, who survived the concentration camps, searches Europe for his mother in the post-war years. As was noted in the previous chapter, Anne Frank first appeared in English print in 1952. The first stage performance, in the United States, premiered in 1959 and the film adaptation, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, in 1959. The film starred Millie Perkins as Anne, chosen specifically due to her likeness to Audrey Hepburn. Otto Frank played a large role in the theatrical and filmic adaptations and wanted Anne’s story to be universally accessible. Doneson, *The Holocaust in American Film*.

¹⁸⁵ Robert S. Leventhal, among others, has discussed Spielberg’s overdetermination through the little girl in red, which will be discussed in the following section.

¹⁸⁶ Universal Pictures. Movie Poster. 1993.

¹⁸⁷ *The Search* could be argued to be a Hollywood “product,” but arguably the first major “product,” despite it being in the television realm, is the *Holocaust* miniseries, which aired over four episodes in 1978. For further discussion of the show’s impact on Holocaust “culture,” see Doneson, Landsberg, Kaes.

Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*" conceptualizes this particular shift, and furthermore, the progression of the role of the child in popularized Holocaust film. Leventhal, rather than seeing the benefit to the child figure, critiques Spielberg's contribution as oversimplifying the horrifying reality of the Holocaust and for approaching the horrors in a voyeuristic manner.¹⁸⁸ His analysis focuses on the little girl in the red coat, seeing her as a negative. Leventhal states: "The condensation, convection and metonymic displacement of *Schindler's List* is most evident in Oskar Schindler's psychic investment in and the overdetermination of the only color image in the entire film...that of the little girl in the red coat."¹⁸⁹ Her coat, and thus the child herself, are the only appearance of color amid the film noir aesthetic. The focus, which the singular use of color forces upon the viewer by breaking through the fourth wall, is unnecessary and damaging to Holocaust history, as Leventhal sees it. The figure of the little girl is indeed a condensation, as Leventhal notes, of the Holocaust, but at the same time, the little girl, as I will argue, allows for the very overdetermination Leventhal critiques.

Spielberg's little girl in the red coat is but a short moment in the larger narrative of Oskar Schindler's efforts and remains an undeveloped character without a name. And yet, her presence impacts the protagonist's narrative arc. The figure, marked by the red coat, is the mute embodiment of child voices portrayed on the big screen. She, as a singular marked figure, represents those who cannot speak for themselves. As an abstraction, she frames the entire

¹⁸⁸ The shower scene where the women presumably await their own deaths only to be "saved" at the final moments causes particular tension among critics. Libby Saxton comments on the voyeuristic nature of the peep hole installed on many of the gas chamber doors. For Saxton, it is this looking in and looking upon the death throws that is inappropriate (not to mention the sexualization of the women). In Spielberg's film, the viewer not only looks upon the women in the room, but they enter with them. From narrative structure (script mentions) to melodramatic non-diegetic music to the viewer's previous knowledge of the Holocaust, the viewer is led to believe that the women are headed for the gas chambers and not showers. For them, however, it is just a shower. The cathartic release when the water actually releases from the showerheads above them, rather than Zyklon B tablets from the roof, is for many overly deceitful. See Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* and Leventhal, "Romancing the Holocaust"

¹⁸⁹ Leventhal, 2

constructed narrative about Schindler's efforts, guiding the protagonist, and therefore the viewer, as the plot and Schindler's redemptive arc unfolds.

It is the little girl and her now symbolic red coat that is the focus of Schindler's observations of the Krakow Ghetto liquidation. He sits atop a hill on a horse overlooking the chaos and the fear of the scene below.¹⁹⁰ From a long shot perspective, presumably Schindler's, the unnamed child runs about, able to weave in and out of threatening arms and eyes due to her small stature, literally at times moving against the flow of prisoners. At this critical moment, the guards have less concern for someone so small and less menacing than an adult Jew—those of which the SS are actively shoving and threatening in the scene. The child figure evades her captors for now and her red coat calls attention to not only her panic, but also the terror of the masses. The other figures' lack of color alongside the distinct sound of children's voices singing a Yiddish lullaby, *Oyfn Pripetshik*, draw the spectator's eyes to the child's now unavoidable red coat tainted with mud.¹⁹¹ As Hansen argues, Spielberg's use of red is unoriginal: he is employing established film techniques which "belong to inventory of classic Hollywood cinema" in order to saturate the liquidation scene and open up different sensory experiences for the viewer.¹⁹² This moment of sensory experience is a turning point for Spielberg's *Schindler*.¹⁹³ The little girl in red

¹⁹⁰ The hilltop "exists" in reality, and although Spielberg did add a Hollywood touch to the scene, it is unnerving to stand there. The former ghetto is indeed visible and just behind that lies Krakow proper. Today it is a beautiful scene, and yet tainted by its past. On the other side of the hill are the vast fields that once contained Plaszow concentration camp.

¹⁹¹ The non-diegetic choir is singing *Oyfn Pripetshik*, a Yiddish song about a rabbi teaching children the alphabet and the importance and power of the Yiddish language for the Jewish people.

¹⁹² Hansen's quote in full states: "Let me repeat that I am not interested in defending *Schindler's List* on aesthetic grounds (the aesthetic narrowly understood as relating to the institution of art and its mass-mediated afterlives). Nor am I suggesting that the film's use of sound and overall narrational strategies are radical, unique, or original; on the contrary, most of these textual devices belong to the inventory of classical Hollywood cinema, from the midteens through the 1950s." Hansen, 305.

¹⁹³ This differentiation is necessary as Spielberg is indeed telling a narrative about the historical man, Oskar Schindler, and a Hollywood narrative at that. The little girl in the red coat is a conglomeration of memories from survivors compressed down into an affective narrative focal point.

appears to Schindler as she appears to the spectator and shatters the narrative thus far.¹⁹⁴ After this point, Schindler works to regain and then retain his workers as the liquidation process has taken his workforce from him, and he strikes a deal with Goeth, knowing he will treat the Jewish workers better. She functions beyond a simple turning point for the character, however, and the chaos and evil of the liquidation manifest themselves in this child construct and the accompanying voices—left unnamed but representative of the cruelty of the Nazi regime.



Fig 4: Schindler's girl during liquidation¹⁹⁵



Fig 5: Schindler's girl among the corpses¹⁹⁶

The child figure's role, however, does not end with the ghetto liquidation. Spielberg's constructed girl in red appears once more and in the most tragic manner—haphazardly thrown on

¹⁹⁴ The liquidation scene begins with a speech by Amon Goeth (Ralph Fiennes) telling his soldiers in their next task, they will eradicate six centuries worth of Jewish history from Krakow. As he states, "Today is history." *Schindler's List*, 1:59.

¹⁹⁵ *Schindler's List*, 1:08

¹⁹⁶ *Schindler's List*, 2:15

a cart with a similarly sized corpse destined for a burning mountain of bodies. Rather than by a children's choir, the corpses and the mass burning are this time accompanied by a full orchestra singing a requiem.¹⁹⁷ The non-diegetic source continues as what appears to be a point-of-view shot attempts to take in the scene, and the music heightens as the camera pans from corpses being exhumed to a conveyor belt depositing them into a fiery pit to a soldier screaming maniacally. The camera then gives a closeup of Schindler, with a shocked look on his face, before he sees the little girl destined for the same fate as the other bodies. Her red coat demands attention and frames the protagonist's conversion arc. She calls to him from death, no longer able to face him directly. The moment in which Schindler sees her corpse marks a shift. His previous efforts have not been enough. The child figure's two appearances divide the film into thirds, with Schindler's transformation perfectly framed by her appearance amid the ghetto liquidation and her eventual confirmed death. After he sees her corpse, Schindler truly begins actively working to rescue his workers.

Spielberg's use of red constructs an abstraction which is embodied by the angelic child figure. Spielberg ruptures his own noir aesthetic with the overdetermination of red. By running against the stream of victims, she marks Schindler's conversion to a savior figure. Her elevated status, or overdetermination, demands attention. The child figure marks the chaos of the liquidation scene and draws the eye around the scene, forcing Schindler to take in the entire scene. To truly see. Her muddy red coat marks the mountain of corpses. As Miriam Hansen states in her article on *Schindler's List* and *Shoah*: "Compared to the systematic way *Shoah* (in Shoshana Felman's reading) foregrounds the problematic of witnessing, such moments are perhaps marginal in *Schindler's List*, but they nonetheless deserve to be discussed in similar

¹⁹⁷ The music is once more aptly placed, as in the liquidation scene. Ash is shown falling on Krakow proper before the scene cuts to a field of Jewish prisoners digging. The requiem begins when the camera reveals the first body, and thus the prisoners' job—to exhume the corpses of Jewish victims.

terms—as an aesthetic attempt to engage the extreme difficulty (though not absolute impossibility) of giving sensory expression to an experience that radically defies sense.”¹⁹⁸ Hansen’s claim is that the “witnessing” in the film is done obliquely. In this particular moment of “witnessing,” when the little girl in red captivates Schindler, the child figure points to and exposes the countless horrors. Schindler stares directly at her. She captivates him, but he does not witness her death, nor does the viewer. With this construct, Spielberg creates a perhaps overdetermined image, as categorized by Leventhal, but one which engages with the difficult memory of the Holocaust and allows access to a sensory experience.

The little girl, like many, if not all, of the characters in the film, remains undeveloped in the narrative. As critics, such as Leventhal, have noted, this lack of development, as seen in characters, such as Schindler, Goeth, and Stern, can perpetuate negative Jewish stereotypes.¹⁹⁹ There is an even higher risk of oversimplification in character abstraction. Child figures are not the focus of *Schindler’s List*, and yet the little girl in red impacts the narrative with color and her constructed persona. Spielberg’s constructed child, in her brief moments on screen, reminds the viewer that many ignored the perils of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. The girl in red functions as a framing tool for the film and, at the same time, as an undeveloped embodiment of an angelic child figure.

It is through the synaesthetic configuration of the child with the choir and color that the cinematic child figure also opens up an interior and intransitive dimension to the action, here Schindler’s action. As White stated in his discussion of the middle voice, “a subject presumed *interior* to the action” has the ability to represent a modernist event on the scale of the

¹⁹⁸ Hansen, 305

¹⁹⁹ As Hansen herself states, Itzhak Stern’s (Ben Kingsley) character would never be seen shaving as his masculinity was never developed in the narrative and is only reserved for Goeth and Schindler. By increasing the masculinity of the gentile figures, the Jewish characters are thus further stereotyped. Hansen, 305.

Holocaust.²⁰⁰ The literary qualities of the middle voice created by the child figure manifest on the cinematic screen with the little girl in red. The child figure reveals a resistance to the standard narrative either through the narrative itself—Schindler’s conversion—or, a literal embodiment of a resistance as she maneuvers through the chaos. She balances between abstraction and corporeality and allows the viewer to focus on the singular while simultaneously accessing a larger history.

The power of the little girl in the red coat creates an echo chamber in Holocaust representations, marking the opening of interior spaces allows for a tracing of the child figure’s role as a cinematic middle voice in a post *Schindler’s List* world. Spielberg’s child and cultural contribution embodies the overdetermination of red in the film, and it is her presence which is echoed in the later works of Benigni, Herman, and Nemes where the child becomes the focal point. The child figures disrupt the historical narrative either through Benigni’s focus on the singular child, Herman’s duality of figures, or finally Nemes’s absent child. The filmmakers construct confrontations between spectator and the figures’ faces. It is these faces that are the main cinematic element, sharpening their narrative contributions. The films discussed in this chapter demonstrate how the child figure frames a narrative, either through rupture or narrative authority, and thus guides the viewer through the Holocaust narrative on the screen.²⁰¹ Through these overdeterminations and encounters, I will argue that the figure has the ability to navigate the cinematic space and provide the sensory experience that allows the figure to speak from White’s intransitive space.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ White “Historical Emplotment,” 48

²⁰¹ Once more the use of a child figure to narrate is not a novel concept in film as it was not in literature. The child played heavily in the Italian Neorealism movement, as was mentioned in the Introduction, acting as a narrative disruption and calling into question the status quo of filmic narrative.

²⁰² I will be using Miriam Hansen’s notion of sensory experience and its relation to Walter Benjamin’s concept of aura Hansen “Aura: the Appropriation of a Concept,” 113-137.

The Alternative Nature of the Child's Perspective

*"This is a simple story but not an easy one to tell. Like a fable, there is sorrow, and like a fable, it is full of wonder and happiness."*²⁰³

Different from the semi-biographical narrative of *Schindler's List*, Benigni's film is fictional in nature and shows a cheerful depiction of the concentration camp environment. The child figure is no longer simply a guide for the protagonist, but is, in a sense, the protagonist, guiding the spectator as he narrates, as an adult, about his time in the camps. By allowing the child to narrate, Benigni creates a world for the viewer that focuses on the love a father has for his son and the lengths that a parent will go to shield their child from the horrendous acts of man. The father, Guido, creates a game for his son, little Giosuè, in order to block him from fully comprehending the danger they are in when they arrive in the camps in the second half of the film. *Life is Beautiful*, as well as *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* and *Son of Saul*, are prominent and culturally impactful films that take the narrative device of the child figure to unprecedented levels by placing focus directly on the figure and allowing for the figure's perspective to speak to and provide an alternative perspective within the barbed wire.

From the very beginning, the narrative is introduced as a fable, a fairy tale, something that is not real. As noted by David Bathrick, Benigni's fairytale framing story is what allows for the child's voice to change the known narrative.²⁰⁴ Adult Giosuè introduces the fable concept, but it is a fable because he is allowing his child self to retell the story. The child's power over the narrative thus permeates the film's more controversial elements—the upbeat camp environment and the game played by the two main characters, seemingly skewing the horrors of the camp—and presents the Holocaust from an altered perspective. It is precisely Giosuè's voice that I will argue works to not only tell the story, but also to create the world presented on screen. Benigni's

²⁰³ Benigni, 0:39-0:49

²⁰⁴ Bathrick, *Rescreening 'The Holocaust': Children's Stories*, 57-58.

work thus builds upon Spielberg's unnamed little girl but pushes the abstraction to the point of a farcical representation, and in so doing creates an allegory of survival and resistance from an intransitive space within the narrative. By creating a fairytale framework, the child figure is able to disrupt the horror of the Holocaust narrative.

Splitting the Narrative

The structure of Benigni's film is often seen as diminishing Holocaust atrocities—not only because it shows a distorted fairy-tale-esque image of the camps, but also because the Holocaust is not the primary focus of the storyline.²⁰⁵ Indirectly discussing the Holocaust, however, is not a novel narrative approach for the topic and is a method even Kluger argued for in her own text, as was shown in Chapter One. Although an important part, the Holocaust was not her life. Benigni thus shows the viewer a life, which was tainted by the Holocaust. According to Viano, "*Life is Beautiful* successfully helps its viewers to imagine what many Italian Jews must have felt, the eruption of absurdity and the transformation of one reality into its opposite. This is how *Life is Beautiful* is faithful to reality — it dramatizes its deepest implication. It is faithful to reality in spirit and not in the letter."²⁰⁶ Much like Kluger, Benigni shows the viewer a life, a story, interrupted by the Holocaust. Giosuè, the spectator's access to the fictional narrative, is a child, however, even more so protected than Kluger from the atrocities, due to his father's tactics. Giosuè's life was "normal" in the beginning and was disrupted by the Nazi acts. By splitting the film into two halves, a love story and the "game," Benigni's work shows the absolute rupture that

²⁰⁵ David Denby's criticism, which appeared in *The New Yorker* in March 1999, is often quoted in works on Benigni. Denby went so far as to say Benigni's film lends itself to Holocaust denial and that Benigni treats the audience as Guido treats Giosuè, as children who cannot cope with the truth. David Denby, "In the Eye of the Beholder," *The New Yorker*, March 15, 1999, 96-99.

²⁰⁶ Viano, 31

the Holocaust represents. The child, however, is what powers the split, as the product of the first half and the driving force for the latter.

Benigni's film is thus a split narrative framed by the fairy tale. The first half focuses on Guido's attempts to win the affections of Dora, his principessa, and the subsequent life they build with little Giosuè. Only occasionally does the film refer to the increasing influence of fascism on the Italian Jewish daily life.²⁰⁷ Viano states it is Guido's entrancing of Dora that initially brings the viewer into the mythical world that manifests in the latter half. "By saying 'Buongiorno Principessa,' he spellbinds Dora into believing that she too is part of a fairy tale. 'Buongiorno Principessa' is the invitation to enter a mythical world in which our life overflows with secret connections and possibilities within our reach, provided that we awaken to them."²⁰⁸ Benigni gives the viewer an opportunity to understand the complex nature of the Holocaust by framing his chosen narrative from a new perspective: a split narrative expressed by a fairy tale.

Benigni establishes a cinematic need for a happy family environment in the first half of the film. From Guido's desire to please Dora and to make her laugh with his Principessa adorations and jokes, Benigni presents a man bent on providing those he loves with happiness. The film flashes forward, and little Giosuè is now a young child running through the garden after Guido and Dora have married. Once Giosuè appears the familial laughter only grows within the unit. In one scene, Giosuè hides in a small dresser so that he can avoid bathing.²⁰⁹ He has

²⁰⁷ When it is referenced, it is always in a comical manner. For example, the opening scene has Guido barreling through a small Italian village when the brakes have gone out in his vehicle. He attempts to signal to those awaiting the arrival of an Italian fascist official to get out of the way, and his signal is misinterpreted as a fascist salute. In another scene, he attempts to visit Dora at the school where she teaches. He acts as the awaited government official and must give a speech on genetics. Rather than the fascist approach to genetics, Guido makes fun of the ideology. "But let's continue. I want to show you something else...The belly button! Take a look at this belly button! What a knot! But you can't untie it, not even with your teeth! The racist scientists tried it. Not a chance! This is an Italian belly button. It's part of our race!" Benigni, 24:12

²⁰⁸ Viano, 32.

²⁰⁹ The concept of bathing or purity will become even more important in the second half of the film, as shown in the following paragraphs.

embodied his father's comical personality, and as the scene progresses, he proves himself capable of winning over his mother with his comedic stunts. To begin the film fully immersed in a distorted representation of the camp would be problematic because the reasoning would be less evident. As Benigni has structured the film, the reasoning behind the imagery in the latter half is evident—Giosuè's birth and the narrative shift.



Fig 6: Giosuè in Benigni's *Life is Beautiful*²¹⁰

It is only when the Nazis fully infiltrate the lives of the little family and take the grandfather, Guido, and little Giosuè away to the concentration camp that the need for the game between Guido and Giosuè arises. The narrative and even the language thus shift after this point. A text analyzer calibrated solely for “princess” and “game,” provides evidence to the split in the storyline at the halfway mark between love story and the game in the camps.²¹¹ After this point, the focus shifts to the relationship between father and son and protecting the family. The fact that the first half of the film focuses on Guido and Dora's love story allows for the continuation of the comedy once within the barbed wire fence.

²¹⁰ Benigni, 52:07

²¹¹ See Fig. 7.

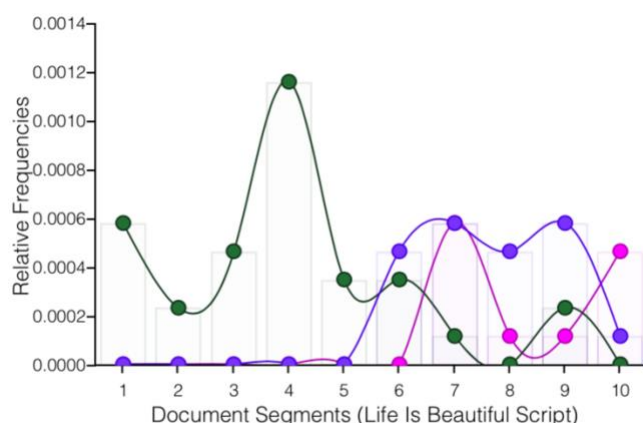


Fig 7: Voyant text analysis

As Viano states, it is the consistency of the perceived cheerfulness which allows for Benigni's approach to the Holocaust.²¹² Viano claims that if Benigni were to transition constantly between the dramatic and the comedic, the comedic elements would become highly inappropriate because it would lessen the emphasis on the dramatic.²¹³ Although the film is, at its core, examining the Holocaust, one of the most tragic events in history, the narrative majority is seemingly comedic and fantastical, examining the familial bond of the main characters.

Even once they are within the camp's walls, the film conveys an overall cheerful atmosphere with only a few moments that reference the depravity of Nazi crimes.²¹⁴ After a rather stressful scene where Giosuè hides in plain sight among children of Nazi officials, Guido carries his sleeping son back to the barracks. He takes a wrong turn and out of the fog a literal mountain of bodies appears on the screen—an acknowledgement to those who suffered. Guido stands in front of the bodies stunned and silent. It is a moment in the film that acknowledges those who perished—brief but poignant. It is also an image often shown in film, books, and museums in

²¹² Viano, 32.

²¹³ Benigni emphasizes the film's Italian roots in these moments and presents the material as a black comedy.

²¹⁴ These moments will be discussed later in the section. Most notably are the shower/gas chamber references, as well as the image of the mountain of bodies shrouded by smoke.

relation to the Holocaust. Here, however, the bodies look almost cartoonish. The bodies are not real nor are they created to look like real bodies. The corpses stand in stark contrast to Guido and a sleeping Giosuè both of whom remain in the frame.



Fig 8: Guido facing the mountain of corpses

Benigni distances himself from the realism which Spielberg embraced. Due to the comical, and fictional, nature of the majority of the film, showing realistic corpses on screen—even for a brief moment—would be highly problematic. To mix the two in this manner would in fact trivialize the topic.

It is in these moments that Benigni refers back to the source of information for this story—Giosuè. Giosuè as the one both present and yet unknowing thus speaks from the middle space, voicing what he knows to be true without having seen it. As Guido approaches the bodies, he is lost in the fog dreaming about eating cookies and making love to his wife, and Giosuè sleeps on his shoulder. Giosuè is in a space in between the comedic environment and the death that is the historical reality. Benigni thus nods to the atrocities in the most appropriate manner for his

narrative construct and offers a moment of silence to those who perished before returning to his “fairy tale.” The child figure’s perspective approaches the topic conceptually. It is perhaps a dream, as Guido mentioned briefly before. But the truth, in the most appropriate manner for this particular representation, is nevertheless present on the screen. Benigni cannot represent the space realistically, as Giosuè did not “witness” since he was asleep, so he does not try, maintaining Giosuè’s intransitive position throughout. The story is framed by adult Giosuè’s assertions that this is a fable and that this memory was his father’s gift, but it is the child that speaks and not the adult. The child figure’s voice allows an access to the interior of the narrative by maintaining the intransitive stance in moments where he cannot show because he did not himself see.

Fictionalizing the Holocaust

As the camera crosses into the concentration camp realm, the first moment of crossover between the two narratives appears. The narrative has shifted to one of survival, but the mystical elements from the first half still remain in the depiction of the space. Benigni constructs a balanced duality by splitting the narrative and representing it as a “spatio-tempo allegory,” as Viano notes: “Spatially the two opposites are kept separate and yet overdetermine one another, a bit like the Yin-Yang symbol, where the black and the white are well defined and symmetrically juxtaposed, but each contains a speck of the other as a memento of their interdependence.”²¹⁵ The two halves of the narrative balance one another and allow for the mystical elements to continue rather than realist depictions.

The train they arrive on, for example, enters through a gate which looks, in its most basic sense, fake.²¹⁶ The entrance looks like a movie set. It looks flat. Showing this arrival scene,

²¹⁵ Viano, 31

²¹⁶ This moment appears at minute 61. Almost precisely at the halfway mark for the film.

however, is not new imagery in Holocaust film. It is nothing out of the ordinary—only the how is. Most films, and to be fair literature and institutions as well, reference the moment the train arrives at a concentration camp.²¹⁷ Films discuss the daunting and confused feelings of its passengers and the hectic nature of the oft-referenced selection process when the prisoners disembark from the train cars. They are scared. The future is uncertain. Normally German Shepherd dogs bark in the background if they do not snarl and snap at the prisoners. Benigni, however, creates a contrast to these more iconic scenes, such as *Schindler's List*. The sun is shining, and the jovial nature of the scene is a farcical construct. That is the point. A man is recounting a moment he lived through as a child—a man with a father who did everything in his power to shield him from the horror. Once more, it is the narrative structure, which allows for this imagery. He reconstructs the scene for the viewer. The story has shifted, but the elements from the earlier half remain. They infiltrate the horror of the camp. The fairy tale impacted Giosuè so greatly that even when the horror arrives, that in this incomprehensible environment the fairy tale remains his point of reference. Giosuè's position in between witnessing but not seeing provides a middle voice to the film and allows the viewer to witness without witnessing.

In one particular scene, which brings all of the aforementioned elements together, and balances his love story and the camp, Guido takes over the radio to speak to his “principessa” in the camp. The communication scene comes at a pivotal moment for Dora. She has recently found out that the children in the camp have been deceived into taking showers and subsequently murdered in the unseen gas chambers. As she sorts through the clothing of the most recent victims and a cat, previously seen with a little girl on the way to the camp, wanders through the piles the clothes looking for its owner, she believes her own son to be among the dead. Her husband? Who knows? And then suddenly Guido and Giosuè's voices materialize over the

²¹⁷ Arguably, the most well-known is that of the Judenrampe at Auschwitz-Birkenau, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

loudspeakers, beginning with Guido's heartwarming "Buongiorno Principessa!" Dora's eyes brighten, hope is renewed, and the Offenbach leitmotiv plays.²¹⁸ Guido and Giosuè laugh as they discuss the game and how they will win. Dora smiles at the reassurance that they are alive and together—at least for today. The two boys must escape the room before the guards arrive. Despite its absurd nature, couples found ways to communicate with each other in the camps. Defying the impossible to hold onto what little humanity they had left.²¹⁹ Benigni's camp communication is hyperbolic of anything that may have historically taken place, but it is a remnant of his hyperbolic love and adoration from the first half of the film.

The likelihood that something like this could occur is slim if not impossible, but it is not meant to be real. Giosuè controls the narrative. Carlos Celli comments on Giosuè's unique status within the film and references the concept of *camera obscura*.

In *Life is Beautiful*, the child's point of view is expressed with camera work that is anything but documentary style. When Guido is taken for execution Giosuè is hidden in a utility box. Once Guido realizes that he is within the field of vision of his son, he performs a comic march with a broad smile for the benefit of his chuckling son. The camera shows Giosuè's reduced field of vision in a sort of rectangular camera obscura. In so doing, the film placed the boy in a filmgoer-like position... When Giosuè is in the camera obscura-like box, he, like the spectator, controls the world and is able to accept his father's version of reality.²²⁰

Not only is Giosuè's memory potentially faulty (as is any person's memory) but also the truth is left ambiguous.²²¹ Memory always begets caution, and Benigni, through his alternative camp

²¹⁸ Offenbach's Barcarolle carries through the film from the beginning of their love story to the very end of the film. It marks their love, their relationship, and their child—a product of their love.

²¹⁹ One of Anne Frank's friends, Hanneli Goslar, has stated she managed to sneak her scraps through the fence. Anne Frank Huis exhibit as of June 2019. The list of communications continues, all of which seem implausible, and yet despite the odds, they happened. It was never an easy task, but it was a risk taken by many and a reminder that those who they loved were still alive

²²⁰ Celli, 77. Celli goes on to state that this particular camera work is supported by the framing story of the fairy tale.

²²¹ These moments are the learning moments for viewers and students. Something like this can hopefully spawn an interest that would cause a student or viewer to research camp life further and see if something like this could occur. If they do not do this, it shows a representative acknowledgement of what love—for a spouse or a child—can cause them to do to reassure the other in a tragic situation.

environment, shows the viewer how a situation can change when a person's memory is different from an actual situation. Giosuè, as a child, provides but one sample memory, and the film's structure gives him authority to portray the overtly fictional aspects. A happy one completely encircled with tragedy with the child figure located in the middle. By centralizing Giosuè's memory, the "happy end" itself becomes an abstraction encircled as a Yin and Yang symbol by tragedy with Giosuè providing the balance.

Giosuè's observations of his world transcend to Guido's "work" within the camp—carrying anvils—and they are exaggerated in the film to the point of being comically nonsensical. In one scene he carries them up and down stairs, even asking what the point of their work is.²²² The viewer knows no more than this. It appears to be a meaningless task—a farce of the hard work the victims of the Holocaust had to endure. Benigni's work, however, is once illustrating the horror and simultaneous absurdity of the camps. Holocaust victims built factories, roads, and even their own cells. They worked in the factories and were the backbone of the Nazi machine. Many thus, and justifiably so, argue for representing the brutal agony the prisoners went through while "working" in the camps accurately rather than framing it in any satirical manner.²²³ Primo Levi, himself, goes into great detail about the work that was required of him in the camps and how dangerous it was. He describes the weight of the girders he was required to carry through the mud and the mental anguish a person goes through when they must push themselves past their breaking point in order to survive.²²⁴ At the same time, Guido's work, although seemingly comical with the anvils, rather than an obviously necessary piece of equipment, is not diminishing

²²² Benigni, 1:10.

²²³ Working is represented in quotations as their work was in fact slave labor

²²⁴ Primo Levi describes one day of work in which he and his group must carry 175 pound "sleepers." "The sleeper is coated with snow and mud; at every step it knocks against my ear and the snow slides down my neck. After fifty steps I am at the limit of what a person is theoretically able to support: my knees bend, my shoulder aches as if pressed in a vice, my equilibrium is in danger. At every step I feel my shoes sucked away by the greedy mud, by this omnipresent Polish mud whose monotonous horror fills our days." Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 67.

what people like Levi went through, but rather it is showing the issue of the slave labor. These men and women should never have been doing this work. It was indeed meaningless in the sense that they were forced into it with no concern for their well-being.²²⁵

At one point, Guido breaks down and states he cannot go on. When he learns what will happen if he stops, a sure death, he gets back up.²²⁶ His mannerisms seem comical as he carries the anvils, but the scene is far from humorous. It is representative of the disingenuousness and hypocrisy of the “work” camp. They are doing labor that has no benefit to them and will eventually most likely kill them in the end rather than “make them free.” Benigni’s work is black comedy and not comedy. The work scene is thus more reminiscent of slapstick comedy but correlates with the alternative perspective Giosuè provides and the relationship between father and son until this point: games and fun. The barbaric and monstrous nature of the Nazi crimes against Jews were all without a point, despite the Nazi claims for a “better” and “purer” world. At its core, it was antisemitic and racist.²²⁷ Benigni’s emphasis on comedy represents the absurdity of the Nazi’s own “game.”

Giosuè as a child figure construct is the epitome of purity. From the moment he appears on screen, he brings something more to the screen than even Guido and his comedic antics can. He embodies the purest aspects of Guido and Dora. There is pure joy and a lack of worry in his smiling face caused by the devotion of love by his two parents. He is inquisitive and wishes to

²²⁵ There have also been accounts of at least similar labor to that of Guido’s in the camps. Workers carried granite up the Stairs of Death from the Mauthausen camp in Austria often dying from the falling rock if someone above slipped or erred in any way.

²²⁶ Benigni, 1:10.

²²⁷ Nobody wants to think this way, but according to Nazi logic, there was indeed a point. It was a hateful, racist, and antisemitic driven one that should not be acknowledge as an actual argument. However, in order to prepare for a more peaceful future, society needs to understand the past. Although highly criticized, this is where Hannah Arendt’s work *The Banality of Evil* is important. She attempted to understand the reasoning of a seemingly “normal” man and his ability to follow such dastardly policies and only think or focus on the bureaucratic aspects of his job. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*

know what is going on around him, asking even tough questions as most children do.²²⁸ This level of purity is activated as the opposite of the Nazis' concept purity and cleanliness. His presence proves their racist policies to be absurd. Benigni once more uses his split narrative to show the absurdity of the Nazi regime, allowing instances from the first half to reappear within the nonsensical world of a Nazi concentration camp.

Elemental Powers: Water and Fire

At the same time, however, Benigni mocks Nazi policy directly throughout the film even as Guido's character goosesteps to his own death in one of the final scenes. His opposition continues at the allegorical level as well, and Benigni continues to combat the standard Holocaust narrative via elemental representations: water rather than fire. As Benigni portrays sunshine and games in the camps rather than starvation and death, he juxtaposes these scenes with moments of water throughout the film. The film combats the etymological origins of holocaust as well as the absurdity of Nazi racial and purity policies at all level, and Giosuè's perspective guides the viewer through it all. From Giosuè's resistance to baths to rain as narrative turning points, Benigni capitalizes upon his fairy tale framework and pushes back against the non-sensical nature of the Nazi regime.

To begin, Giosuè's hatred of baths is a primary example of Benigni's attempt to portray the absurd and diabolical nature of Nazi "cleansing." Shortly after his character's arrival in the narrative, he argues openly with his parents about needing to bathe. Giosuè's persistence, however, is another narrative plot point that is important to the overall narrative structure and

²²⁸ As shown early on in the film when he inquires about the sign saying Jews are not allowed to shop in a certain store. He asks his father about this and is told another white lie. Guido excuses the antisemitic hatred and says everybody has the right to their opinions and they will put a sign on their bookstore saying "spiders and Visigoths" are not allowed. Benigni, 51

message of the film. These arguments between parent and child begin before they enter the camp. Little Giosuè attempts to bargain with his parents, stating he took a bath on Friday, so he does not need one today.²²⁹ When the argument occurs in the initial scene, in the safe familial home environment, it seems comical. The same argument, however, within the frame of the camp structure suddenly becomes a life and death scenario. Giosuè, defying the rules, visits his father while Guido is working to protest the guards telling him to bathe. Guido tells his son to listen to the guards and bathe, but Giosuè's previously comical tenacity and bargaining proves now to be life-saving. After Guido gives in to his son's insistence, Guido tells him to hide on the work site until they can return to the barracks together.²³⁰ The viewer learns shortly thereafter that had he gone to the "showers" with the other children he would have been murdered. By creating the juxtaposition of worlds, Benigni creates an intransitive space of resistance which is framed by Guido's unconditional love for his son. Where Spielberg's girl in red remained detached, Benigni accentuates the bond between father and son and opens up the interior space of resistance from within the narrative.

So, what does this do to the film? How does it change it or make it different from other Holocaust films? It is in moments like these that help the viewer to see the depravity of the situation. The film uses a common situation and contextualizes it within the concentration camp. The earlier arguments contrast with those within the camp and the heartbreaking nature of the situation becomes even more deplorable. The child figure actively resists the Nazis attempts to "cleanse." The two levels provided by the narrative structure, life before and life in the camp, and Giosuè himself provide the viewer with a stronger attachment to life before. The mystical world crosses into the latter half of the film, but Giosuè allows for the bridge between the two. He traverses both worlds and creates the middle voice needed to represent the absurdity of the second

²²⁹ Benigni, 54:15

²³⁰ Benigni, 75:45

half and thereby represent and ridicule an aspect as despicable as active genocide via gas chambers.

On an even higher allegorical level, the weather throughout the film completes Benigni's sensory structure. As previously mentioned, the sun shines during what should be tragic scenes contrasting the general knowledge of the Holocaust. It only rains twice throughout the storyline. Once, when Guido is attempting to win over Dora, and again when Giosuè states he wishes to leave the camp. Rather than invoking sorrow in the viewer or even the Christian motif of cleansing, the moments of rain show a transition in feelings towards a situation. When they are caught in the rain, Dora truly becomes enamored with Guido. He shows her how to have fun and joke, something missing from her current life. For Giosuè, the rain is the moment he decides to remain in the camp and "win" after his father convinces him the rumors about the ovens are not true. It brings Dora and Guido together to save her from an unhappy future marriage, and it provides the necessary means for Guido to convince his son to fully play along. To save Giosuè. The rain, however, is lifesaving here and not sorrowful. Each element of the film, including the title, contradicts what is expected. Benigni does not depict fire and death, but rather water and life. The child figure works in sync with these elements and completes the absurd structure Benigni creates.

Absurdity and Play

The absurd structure manifests itself through the "game" Guido plays with his son and its correlation not only to Giosuè's middle voice, but also the film's allegorical approach. As stated previously, the game is at the center of everything. The game and Giosuè are always at the core of the film. Guido conceives of the "game" in order to save his son's life and to keep him from realizing the horrifying extent of their situation. In order for Giosuè to behave, and thus survive,

Guido tells him they are in the midst of a competition for the boy's favorite thing, a tank. The tank's importance to Giosuè is established in the earlier half of the film, and he is playing with it when he first appears on screen. He has lost it since their abduction and would like another. Once more it is a comical and relatable scenario, but this time with dire consequences for misbehaving. The game framework is what gives voice to Giosuè's perspective.

Giosuè may be an adolescent representation, but his fictional account does not vary greatly from historical ones. Factual accounts of children who lived through the Holocaust exist, and they understood, or at least were aware of, the dangers that surrounded them. It often depended on what the parents told them, but also simply on the child's character at the time. Did they strive to know more as Ruth Kluger and Anne Frank did? Whether they did or not is not part of this particular discussion though, as Benigni's work was not a realistic attempt in the first place. His methodologies therefore do not vary greatly from Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* and Jakob's lie to protect little Lena within the ghetto. This is what Benigni has done with his film. By way of an allegorical approach, he is illustrating the "game" all had to "play" in order to survive in the concentration camps.²³¹

The successful cover-up begins with the "rules" of the game, which are introduced when Guido and Giosuè first arrive in the barracks.²³² Until this point, Guido has been lying to Giosuè about where they are going and what they are doing; telling him it is a planned trip for his birthday.²³³ However, when they arrive in the barracks and the guard wishes to explain the life or death camp rules, Guido takes the opportunity to explain the "official" game rules to his son. He

²³¹ Naturally as Primo Levi, among others, points out, love was not always the key to survival. Many committed questionable acts in order to survive. These also cannot be judged by those who did not experience the camps. Again, Giosuè is but one tale among many vastly varying histories.

²³² The mother, who forced her way into the transport, was sent to the women's quarters. Guido's father, being older, was immediately sent to the assumed gas chambers. Benigni does not show this, but shows the grandfather undressing with a look of understanding on his face of what is to come.

²³³ He even pretends to complain about the travel accommodations when they arrive at the camp, saying they would prefer to take the bus back. Benigni, 1:03.

volunteers to translate for the guard for those who do not speak German. Guido does not speak German. His “translations” follow the motions of the guard, but do not come close to the severity of the situation. “Guard: Any sabotage is punishable by death, sentence carried out right here in the yard, by machine gun to the back.’ He points to his own back. Guido: ‘Scores will be announced every morning on the loudspeakers outside! Whoever is last has to wear a sign that says ‘jackass’ — here on his back!’” Giosuè shifts from skeptical to excited, the other prisoners look confused, and the guard does not seem to care. Benigni constructs a multi-layered slapstick scenario in what is typically a terrifying scene.



Fig 9: Giosuè facing the spectator as his father reads the rules²³⁴

It is comical, and Giosuè’s excitement is captivating, but two levels of meaning exist in this scene. The first is Giosuè’s response and the second is the other prisoner’s predicament. It is obvious Guido is lying. Even if the German words were not translated the lie is obvious. Despite its aforementioned kitschy feel, it is clear they have been sent to a concentration camp. Thus, Giosuè’s elated facial expressions are accompanied with a tinge of sorrow for other prisoners in the scene as well as the viewer. A response shown just before with the prisoner Bartholomew,

²³⁴ Benigni, 1:07

who, at the urging of Guido, lies to little Giosuè about where they are. It is in these moments that Benigni strikes a balance between the somber reality and how the child figure actually perceives the situation. And it is precisely the surrounding prisoners, the second layer, which do this. Guido is making jokes in order to help his son, potentially at the cost of all of the non-German speaking lives. Their confusion reminds the viewer where Guido and Giosuè are and the stakes of Guido's "game."²³⁵ As the scene cuts between Guido's performance and Giosuè's reaction, and the viewer watches for the child's response; his gaze.

Giosuè and his gaze juxtapose the standard narrative. Again, Benigni's work does not negate the historical reality of the camps. The mass grave he shows reminds the viewer what it will mean to lose the game. Millicent Marcus has written in defense of the "serious" humor of Benigni's work and discusses the scene in relation to the "game."

The image of the man holding his sleeping child against this phantomatic background presents, in nuce, the entire narrative of the film's second half. Guido's job is to keep Giosuè 'asleep' to the horrors that await them in the pit. The mortal stake of Guido's game emerges here, for Giosuè's survival is contingent upon his father's ability to skirt that pit, to keep the child from falling into the despair that would mean surrender to Nazi attempts at dehumanization.²³⁶

Giosuè's voice is capable of recanting his childhood story due to his father's devotion. Giosuè may have "fond" memories of his time in the camps, as they are represented on the screen, but as he retells his tale, it is clear that he knows the sacrifice his father made for him. As the adult Giosuè states, "This is my story. This is the sacrifice my father made. This was his gift to me."²³⁷ The fictitious child is thus offering the viewer a gift in return; the chance to witness the Holocaust from a space in between. It is precisely this structure, in the abstraction of the real, that a cinematic middle voice emerges. Benigni's film with its child narrator are a modernist construct.

²³⁵ As many accounts from survivors show, many risked their lives and lives of others to help their own. At the same time, some gave up, others benefitted, and still others took advantage in order to "win." Society does not fault these men and women behind the barbed wire and within this grey zone of morality as Primo Levi so aptly coined it.

²³⁶ Marcus, 155

²³⁷ Benigni, 1:52

As White states, the modernist middle voice “indicates a new and distinctive way of imagining, describing, and conceptualizing the relationships obtaining between agents and acts, subjects and objects, a statement and its referent—between the literal and figurative levels of speech and, indeed, therefore, between factual and fictional discourse.”²³⁸

The Implications of the Child Outside the Barbed Wire

“Childhood is measured out by sounds and smells and sights, before the dark hour of reason grows”²³⁹

After Benigni, the analysis turns to Mark Herman’s film adaptation of John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. The film is a distinctive manifestation of the child figure as it does not contain a singular child figure, but rather a duality of child figures with Bruno, son of a Nazi officer, outside of the barbed wire and Shmuel, a young Jew, confined within the fence.²⁴⁰ Both a perpetrator film, as well as a Holocaust film, it is a story about two children defying odds and becoming friends, showing the viewer that stereotypes and hatred are indeed learned and often nuanced. As Anton Kaes has noted, representations of normalcy among perpetrators should remain wholly in the perpetrator’s realm to avoid lessening Jewish suffering, but by including child figures from both sides of the barbed wire Herman mixes the two perspectives.²⁴¹ As it

²³⁸ White, 49.

²³⁹ John Betjeman as quote in the Herman’s *Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, 0:32

²⁴⁰ The film has not been discussed in as much detail as previous works, such as *Life is Beautiful* or even *Schindler’s List*. That is not to say it has not been researched and the film has reached its own level of notoriety and is often the introductory text/film to the Holocaust in American grade schools. And yet, even when discussing controversial filmic representations, Herman’s work is left out. Evidence of this can be found in the “Introduction” to the 2016 *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*. In a discussion of representations, including but not limited to, Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds*, among other problematic Holocaust representations, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* is not included in the list.

²⁴¹ Anton Kaes comments on this phenomenon in *Hitler to Heimat* and Edgar Reitz’s omission of Jewish persecution. Kaes states, “Auschwitz cannot be integrated into the continuity of German history as Reitz unfolds it.” Kaes, 186

combines perspectives from both sides of the barbed wire, the film is thus a particularly interesting example of controversial representation with child figures at its center.

Additionally, much like Benigni's Giosuè, the two children, Bruno and Shmuel, did not exist. That does not negate, however, that the atrocious acts depicted within the film did not happen to actual people. Historians have documented that children were hidden and miraculously survived the camps, much like Giosuè.²⁴² Evidence exists which shows officers' families lived near the camps, much like Bruno's.²⁴³ As Judith Butler has stated in regard to fiction, it is "fictional forms of narration that give us a way to understand what happens to the fundamental sense of time and space, of sequence and horizon, under conditions of unbearable suffering."²⁴⁴ Unlike Benigni, Herman exemplifies the overdeterminations in his film through realist techniques—most notably the barbed wire fence. Much like *Life is Beautiful*, though, the film also contains a narrative split, this time between the two perspectives with the two child figures in the middle. Consequently, the film avoids many of the modernist techniques of abstraction which were analyzed in the previous two films, remaining rather within the realm of realism. The narrative is thus fictional, but Herman employs cinematic realism to represent the boys' world. The children are literally divided, and the fence, until it is crossed by Bruno leading to both the children's deaths, maintains the division. With Kaes's representational argument in mind, the section examines the dualist child figure which is dramatized in a realist setting.

²⁴² According to records, Soviets discovered almost 700 children at Auschwitz, 500 under the age of 15, when they arrived. According to the "Fate of Children" section of the Auschwitz Memorial website. <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/fate-of-children/the-fate-of-the-children>. Accessed September 4, 2019.

²⁴³ One of Rudolf Höss's grandchildren, Rainer, visits Auschwitz in the documentary *Hitler's Children* to see where his father grew up. The commandant's house, although "guarded" by high walls was not far from the camp. *Hitler's Children*, <http://auschwitz.org/en/history/fate-of-children/the-fate-of-the-children>.

²⁴⁴ Butler, "Fiction and Solitude," 375

Juxtapositions and Duality

The mixing of the two perspectives, perpetrator and victim can problematize the dramatization. As Kaes's work shows, a perpetrator film performs its representational goals best when the victims are left on the periphery of the narrative, (if at all physically present) which is not the case with Herman's film. The Jewish victims and their plight are far too much of a focus to be able to argue for this to solely be a perpetrator film. And yet, it is also the lack of entrance into the Jewish perspective, which causes, in the end, as Bruno joins Shmuel in the camp and dies in the gas chambers, for the film to misdirect its constructed empathy. Although it is Bruno's perspective at the center, his perspective, and the positives and negatives that arise from it, are primarily focused on his friendship with Shmuel, a Jewish victim, thus introducing a duality of voices.

The director juxtaposes, and thereby presents, the two worlds, perpetrator and victim, from the immediate onset of the film, opening with little Bruno, child of a high-ranking Nazi official running through the streets with his friends. No year is given, but the film begins with a red background, which pans out to the Nazi flag, creating a tension for the viewer. Bruno plays, but the viewers know the current level of happiness cannot remain. As the lighthearted film score plays, the scene invokes happy childhood memories.²⁴⁵ As Bruno and his friends run through the streets pretending to be airplanes, little evidence exists to tell the viewer what is happening. People, including posted soldiers, smile as the children pass and then continue to go about their daily lives, as if nothing were out of place. It is not a strange scene by any means, and the viewer would not normally question what the children are doing. And yet, the image of the Nazi swastika has already been introduced. In a brief moment more armed officers appear on screen, and Bruno is now running between soldiers forcing citizens onto trucks—Jews, identifiable by their yellow

²⁴⁵ Score by James Horner "Boys playing airplanes"

stars. For a brief moment, barking dogs and angry German voices trump the score before cutting to images of Bruno's sister playing with her dolls. She sits inside of a luxurious home and the score once more becomes the prominent aural element. The power of the constructed childhood innocence strikes the viewer from the beginning.²⁴⁶ It foreshadows the imbalance between the two worlds that will manifest with Bruno's murder, as his purity seems to outshine the horror from the start.

From the beginning, Herman thus announces that the viewer will experience two different worlds occurring simultaneously with one overshadowing the other. Rather than a character reminiscing about the past, as in Benigni's film, Bruno is narrating the information in the present. He provides access to the story, and it is through his witnessing, and yet, protected eyes that the dysfunctional and hateful world of the Nazis emerges on screen. The Nazis rounding up Jewish citizens and forcing them out of their homes is a brief moment in the narrative, seemingly unacknowledged by Bruno. The antisemitic moments, however, are a reminder that even though Bruno was unaware, the atrocious injustices were occurring. The juxtaposing systems are the basis for Herman's narrative style. In the end, it is Bruno's inability to reconcile these two worlds which leads to his untimely and horrific death.

In multiple scenes, as Bruno and Shmuel meet, the two narratives are literally divided by a fence, and the imagery is profound. Bruno sits in clean clothes, looking well fed and slightly bewildered at what he is witnessing. On the other side of the fence sits young Shmuel. Dirty, unkempt, starving, and the object of Bruno's boredom. Bruno is convinced Shmuel and "the farm" where he lives is a game that he is unfairly not allowed to participate in. As Bruno states upon first meeting Shmuel, "It's not fair. Me being stuck over here on my own while you're over

²⁴⁶ Özcan "The Boy in the Striped Pajamas as a Representation of German Victimhood," 186

there playing with friends all day...Well that number. Isn't it part of a game or something?"²⁴⁷ In Bruno's eyes, the camp prisoners, the literal "other," remain "strange" and a fascination for him.



Fig 10: Bruno and Shmuel divided by the barbed wire²⁴⁸

It is through the confrontation, by way of the child figure, that the foundation for a middle voice begins. Despite his near daily contact with Pavel, the Jewish man, and former doctor, assigned to perform yard work at the house, and the "other" constantly confronting him, however, he does not understand the gravity of the situation. Even as the film progresses, Bruno on some level knows he should not be friends with Shmuel, but the lack of understanding persists. Bruno and Shmuel's friendship forces the absurdity of the Nazi policy onto the screen. He knows he is not allowed to play with the "strange" children from the camp. When he asks about playing with them, his mother responds, "I don't think so, Bruno, no. Like you say, they're a bit strange. A bit...they're different."²⁴⁹ And yet, the two are not dissimilar. Herman constructs the constant confrontation of the similar faces, illustrating the resistance to the reality around them.

²⁴⁷ Herman, 34:40- 34:47

²⁴⁸ Herman, 38

²⁴⁹ Herman, 17:50

Bruno lives in the Nazi reality, and yet, his character consistently resists its laws and beliefs in order to remain a child—to remain naïve. Debbie Pinfold has stated in her book, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature*, the naive and innocent Nazi child portrayed in post-war representations is difficult to reconcile because they would have been exposed to the Nazi ideology.²⁵⁰ The film, however, places an extremely heavy emphasis on the construction of a childhood innocence, but nevertheless engages with Pinfold's discussion of "innocent" Nazi children. Rather than avoidance, however, the film pursues the issues of indoctrination. Bruno is the only fully "naive" character in the storyline,²⁵¹ and he is naive to a fault. He actively resists the indoctrination; which Pinfold claims problematizes the child's image.

Bruno's character, because of his Nazi position and friendship with Shmuel, traverses both worlds from a middle space, but does not fully engage with Shmuel's world as he does his own, which, in this case, becomes detrimental. The innocence issue culminates about halfway through the film when Shmuel is assigned to cleaning duties in the commander's home.²⁵² Bruno's naivety and simultaneous fear of reprisal plays out on screen when he allows Shmuel to eat some of the food in the house, but when discovered, states he does not know Shmuel.²⁵³ When the SS guard discovers the two boys, Bruno knows he will be in trouble for talking to Shmuel and having befriended him. He thus lies, and Shmuel is subsequently badly beaten.²⁵⁴ The viewer, presumably, has the knowledge that Bruno does not and knows the friendship cannot continue in the current regime. By refusing to engage, Bruno remains unaware of what this friendship can lead to.

²⁵⁰ Pinfold, 6

²⁵¹ The mother could also be conceived of as naive, but hers is a willing ignorance. She knows to an extent what the Nazis are undertaking and remains proud of her husband, as is shown at the promotion party in the beginning. She has negative feelings about the camps, but only to the extent that she does not want the children to witness it. Once she learns about the crematoria, however, she becomes volatile.

²⁵² He is assigned to the house to clean drinking glasses because his small hands can reach inside better than a grown man's. Herman, 57:57-1:00:22

²⁵³ Bruno gives him food and laughs at how Shmuel eats the food like a starving animal.

²⁵⁴ Bruno only discovers this fact later when he sees Shmuel's bruises from the subsequent beating.

On the other end of the spectrum, Bruno's older sister embodies the indoctrinated Nazi child. There is a break between the two siblings as the film progresses. The sister "advances" in the Nazi ideology and gives up her childish ways, throwing her dolls in the basement as waste. She listens to the tutor and the soldiers and absorbs in the entire Nazi perverseness. She begins hanging propaganda posters on her wall, following Pinfold's indoctrination theory.²⁵⁵ Bruno, on the other hand, is mortified when he finds the dolls in the basement while searching for his ball—his own childhood toy. He rushes up the stairs, letting the ball fall back down. The ball tumbling forgotten down the stairs, each bounce echoing throughout the stairwell represents the childhood the sister has left behind, and the one Bruno could if he begins to believe the propaganda. He, however, chooses to remain in the imaginary world of his adventure books. Bruno is in between the two represented worlds, refusing to engage wholly or critically with either.

Nevertheless, Bruno and Shmuel are friends. Bruno resists the social norms which he is supposed to follow, the norms the sister partakes in, and refuses to see the differences in Shmuel.²⁵⁶ Despite the apparent motivation behind the friendship—loneliness and a lack of options—the relationship between the two boys represents a larger moral message for the viewer. Despite the odds and the literal obstacle, the barbed wire fence between them, the two continue to build their friendship throughout the film. They play games with one another. Bruno brings Shmuel food and visits often, but never fully understands the complexity of the situation. Although Shmuel conceivably has a better understanding, he also neglects to understand his full peril, evidenced by Shmuel asking Bruno to join him in finding his father within the camp. Shmuel knows the camp is dangerous and not a "farm" as Bruno believes it to be, but much like

²⁵⁵ The sister hangs multiple posters of the League of German Girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel) the female branch of the Hitler Youth, as well as posters of Hitler himself. As Özcan notes, the sister is more susceptible to indoctrination because she is not interacting with someone like Shmuel, but rather is infatuated with one of the SS officers stationed in their home. Özcan, 188.

²⁵⁶ This is even despite a private lesson from his sister, who informs him directly that it is a work camp for Jews, telling him they are "no good at anything. They're in there because they're evil. They're the enemy." Herman, 56:48

Bruno his lack of adult conceptual tools hinders him from seeing the implications of Bruno joining him on the other side of the fence or what the “showers” are, leading the boys to their tragic deaths. With Benigni’s film in mind, the conclusion of the film, Bruno’s death in the camp’s gas chambers, shows that shielding a child carries varying implications depending on what side of the fence the child is on.

The Perpetrator Child’s Voice

At the same time, Herman’s film contains the persistent presence of a family unit, as in Benigni’s work. However, as the family unit is outside of the barbed wire, rather than an all-loving wholly supporting family, Herman uses the fictionalization of the narrative to his advantage and is able to concentrate the complex nature of German complicity with the Nazi regime into a singular family unit. As the family dynamic is witnessed through Bruno’s naive perspective, the family dynamic, as it is shown, provides an interesting overview to the multiple layers of support, complicity, and rejection for the Nazi regime.

As a member of a constructed familial unit, Bruno is able to observe their actions from within. On one end of the spectrum, the grandmother is the most outspoken of them all, and openly denounces her son’s position in the government and even refers to his uniform as a “costume.”²⁵⁷ Her son, Bruno’s father, is undeniably the most supportive of the regime within the family unit, taking on the role of the commander of the killing site.²⁵⁸ He actively participates in the regime’s propaganda and approves a film made in his camp for distribution despite knowing it

²⁵⁷ It does not appear to be much of a protest, but they are indeed dangerous words for the time. She stands her ground, however, protected by the love her son has for her, as he does not report her to the authorities, as he should. The mother figure points out this oversight during the film.

²⁵⁸ He is aware of what his job entails and admits his willing acts when his wife asks about the murdering of Jews within the camp. He simply was not allowed to tell her.

is a lie.²⁵⁹ He also provides his children with a tutor, whom he knows will teach them Nazi ideology, and thus aids in disseminating the hatred to the next generation.²⁶⁰ Because of the instruction, the sister goes from naive like Bruno to a fully indoctrinated Nazi.²⁶¹

The mother figure, on the other hand, is perhaps the most intriguing and complicated of the family figures. She loves her family and her husband, but her allegiance is uncertain from the beginning. She is uncomfortable with the treatment of the Jews but remains quiet in her thoughts. She is unquestionably complicit, as is shown in her support for her husband's promotion, but it is clear in her anger that Bruno can see the camp from his room that she knows about the camp, just not the extent of its atrocities, when they move there.²⁶² She is conflicted in her stances, but it is the child figure's presence that ruptures her ignorance. Pavel enters as Bruno is present, forcing her to confront the implications of her position. She physically recoils at Pavel's appearance and health. And yet, she is human enough to appreciate the care he gives Bruno when Bruno falls from his swing. When Bruno injures himself, she must acknowledge the human in front of her, a man who cared for her son despite her husband's role in his impending death. Not only is there the opportunity for such a wide variation in perpetrator representation due to the film's fictional nature, but his role as child within a single familial unit allows him access to a wider range.²⁶³ He

²⁵⁹ In regard to the propaganda film, this shows that this camp is a conglomerate of actual locations. Although the family home resembles Rudolf Höss's villa outside of Auschwitz, the known Nazi propaganda films were made in the ghettos where there would not have been gas chambers. It is these moments, where there is an unnecessary inaccuracy of the film. This is different from Benigni's depiction from the child perspective and instead actively muddles the historical accuracy of the Holocaust.

²⁶⁰ This is similar in nature to the report of the Kommandant of Sobibor and Treblinka, Franz Stangl. His family was also unaware of the extent of his "work." At the same time, however, a distinction exists. The factual figure still argues against his specific involvement with mass murder. Purely police work. The fictional character does not deny but instead deems his work a necessity

²⁶¹ She believes his words about the evils of Jewry and is aided along in her learning by the soldier stationed in their home. Her indoctrination will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming section.

²⁶² "How was I to know he could see if from his bedroom?" Herman, 18:15 The father promised they would be far enough removed that the children would remain unaware of its existence.

²⁶³ Lanzoni notes the use of the "microscopic" focus in Benigni's work and the focus on one unit allows for the story to be convincing. Lanzoni "When Humor challenges History," 125-6.

observes with love for his family members and a naivety which allows for an uninhibited view of each member's role in larger society.

The Issues of the Constructed Perpetrator Child

The representational issues with the film arise from the tensions between the perpetrator and the victim, and the realist elements employed to attempt to navigate the space. Rather than provide a child perspective from within the camp, Herman only truly represents the perpetrator's view—the naive view of the Nazi atrocities from a child on the other side of the barbed wire. Shmuel's perspective is not represented, and Bruno is unable to represent the reality from inside the camp once he crosses the barbed wire. The realist element is unable to be crossed figuratively even if Bruno does literally.

Bruno's naivety is shown throughout the film, not only in his own comedy and clear lack of understanding—a farm instead of a camp and pajamas instead of prisoner uniforms—but through cinematic imagery. When he arrives at the family's new home near the camp, Herman produces a scene reminiscent of Giosuè inside his box. Bruno climbs atop the chair in his bedroom to peek out the window at the surrounding area. Rather than a full open window, his gaze is limited by thick wooden blinds. It is obstructed and limited, much like Bruno's worldview.²⁶⁴ It should be clear to the viewer from the very beginning that what Bruno is seeing from his window is not a farm but rather a concentration camp or killing site.²⁶⁵ Bruno's lack of

²⁶⁴ Herman, 14:30.

²⁶⁵ This differentiation might be unclear at this moment, but becomes undeniably clear when the mother, Vera, comments on the smoke from the camp. Even if the viewer is not a Holocaust researcher, the camps' existence is fairly well known. Again the New York Times survey might show a lack in the level of knowledge but basic facts, such as the existence of the camps, is known by the general populace. Astor, 2018. "Holocaust is Fading from Memory, Survey Finds" *New York Times* April 12. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/12/us/holocaust-education.html>

understanding is foregrounded from the beginning and foreshadows the resulting dangers of such naivety.



Fig 11: Bruno's gaze remains obstructed²⁶⁶

The situation the young character is in is a difficult one. Bruno resists the ideologies which his sister is embracing, and it hinders his awareness of the world around him, and yet, it also keeps him pure and without hate, allowing the friendship with the “Other” to develop. The film thus presents the viewer with a paradox. To accept the teachings could lead to hate or complicity (as the mother and sister show) and yet to remain unknowing can lead to one's own death, as is shown when Bruno enters the camp disguised as a prisoner. Bruno's perspective is tainted with the spectator's possible knowledge of the Holocaust, much as Giosuè's was. But unlike the profound joy and lack of knowledge of Giosuè, Bruno's perspective is problematic because of his position outside of the camp.

Bruno discovers the depravity and lies of his father's work in the final moments of the film—when he crosses the barbed wire. He viewed portions of the propaganda film his father

²⁶⁶ Herman, 14:37

created for the camp, showing outdoor eating areas and children playing.²⁶⁷ As he enters the camp, literally crossing under the barbed wire, Bruno is unable to represent the reality in front of him. Bruno even asks to go to the café from the propaganda film he still believes exists, leaving Shmuel bewildered. The worlds cease to be divided, but the disconnect between the two remains. As the boys are caught up in a group destined for the “showers,” the camera angled either below the boys looking up or a bird’s eye view of the mass makes the viewer feel the fear and confusion of the two boys. They are trapped among the much larger men and once more dogs bark in the background. This time Bruno is part of the group being contained. The film thus returns to the imagery from the opening scene. Bruno once more witnesses the injustices but is this time contained within them. And yet, he is still unable to reconcile what he knows about his father’s job.

The ending of the film is dramatic with multiple pieces culminating in a morbid finale. The boys’ fear combines with Bruno’s family and their fear when they discover Bruno has run away. The tension builds when they discover his clothes outside the camp fence.²⁶⁸ When the boys perish within the shown chambers and it dawns on Bruno’s family what has happened, the mother breaks down.²⁶⁹ As others before me have noted, it is the cross-cutting between Bruno and *his* family accompanied by his mother’s response places the focus on Bruno’s death. The viewer’s pain is thus misdirected.²⁷⁰ Due to the film’s heavy focus on Bruno’s perspective, the spectator’s feelings are misplaced. The loss of Bruno and what the Nazi atrocities have done to

²⁶⁷ Because of the images Bruno has seen of the inside, he believes the conditions cannot be that bad for Shmuel.

²⁶⁸ Shmuel’s ability to find a uniform in a child’s size so promptly is also problematic as numerous prisoners have commented on the difficulty they had finding clothing to fit them.

²⁶⁹ The boys enter the chambers with the other men and much like *Schindler’s List*, the lights flicker, and the panic is palpable. A masked man drops Zyklon B from above and shut the hole cover. From this point, the screams of those inside are off screen with only a shot of the outside of the steel door.

²⁷⁰ Özcan elaborates further, stating that the rain washes away the mother’s sins as an unknowing bystander, 190.

this one particular Nazi family and not the millions that perished at their hands is far more prominent.



Fig 12: Vera's pain becomes a primary focus²⁷¹

Herman attempts to remind the viewers of the actual victims of the Holocaust in the final shot of the film.²⁷² The changing room appears on screen one last time. No sound permeates this final scene—only the clothes hanging on their hooks. The only memory of those who perished. Herman, however, fails to redirect the emotion because of the narrative structure throughout the film—Bruno's perspective and the realist methodologies of the film.

²⁷¹ Herman, 1:28

²⁷² Guerra argues that the father's realization that his son has also died in the gas chambers allows him to understand what he has been doing to other human beings and is yet another attempt to manifest the victims' pain. Guerra "The Age of Truthfulness: The Cases of *La Vita è Bella* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*," 57.



Fig 13: The final scene of *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*²⁷³

The viewer thus empathizes with the perpetrator rather than the historical victims. The alternative narrative here hinders the representation of the heinous nature of the Nazi atrocities rather than illuminates as Benigni's did. Rather than representing a true middle both inside and outside the camps, Bruno's voice is heavily situated outside and is the viewer's only access to Shmuel. Bruno provides a naïve perspective of the Holocaust and the politics surrounding the Nazi "justification" for it. In doing so, the viewer is able to observe varying levels of complicity within the family dynamic and the costs, although excessive, of such involvement. His naïve perspective allows the viewer to witness the perpetrator's world from within and the victim's world from the outside looking in. The absurdity of the Nazi policies is apparent as the stark juxtaposition of Bruno and Shmuel appears on screen. Bruno's naivety and Shmuel's tortured situation contradict one another.

²⁷³ Herman, 1:29

Herman's film operates under similar methods, but it is in a sense the opposite of Benigni's film. With the two works contrasted, the literal barbed wire is defined. To shield Giosuè from the horrors is to protect him and allow him to survive. To shield Bruno from the world is to keep a person ignorant to what his own people are responsible for. It no longer seems the responsible or even ethical thing for the parents to do, as it did in *Life is Beautiful*. Benigni uses slapstick comedy, witnessed via Giosuè's memory, to point to the Nazi absurdity. He counters their absurd and seemingly unbelievable policies with a narrative equally if not more unbelievable than the policies themselves. Herman, however, grounds Bruno in cinematic realism. The literal barbed wire is the lasting motif, but when the child figure crosses it to enter the other world—an act which historically would have been near impossible—the realism of the film hinders the figure's ability to adequately navigate and thus represent the camp.

As Michael Gray's assessment of the film's impact on the United Kingdom's Holocaust education shows an argument could be made for the educational value of the film as an introduction to the topic for younger children. Due to the film's historical inaccuracies, however, it must be taught after an historical background is given.²⁷⁴ To read the film strictly for its filmic qualities and representational contributions, the film does not achieve what it could with its duality of child voices. The child figure has the potential to represent both sides of the barbed wire. Bruno, however, fails to cross the realist divide and adequately represent the injustices. To return to Fisher's theorization of the post-war filmic child: he shows the potential to disrupt and thus navigate the complex narrative of a returning perpetrator soldier. The potential exists to access Hansen's notion of "sensory experience" but by crossing under the fence without fully

²⁷⁴ As he states in his essay's conclusion, "It is therefore possible to use extracts and scenes from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in a pedagogically sound fashion, although teachers must ensure that they do not give the appearance of authorizing the wholesale content as historically inaccurate." Gray, "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas: A Blessing or a Curse for Holocaust Education?" 132.

developing the reality on the other side, the spectator is ultimately unable to access the camp and the history it is meant to represent.

Representing Holocaust Horror through Film

Both Benigni and Herman's films provide an alternative perspective to the Holocaust by way of the child, but the latter also signifies the dangers which still exist in representing the Holocaust on screen. It is in the gas chamber, the ultimate taboo of Holocaust film, where the perpetrator child reaches its representational limits.²⁷⁵ The gas chamber discussion is also a point of contention for the *Schindler's List* debate, and a recurring theme in the previously discussed films. Spielberg does not show Jews dying within the chambers, but he alludes to it in a debatably grotesque manner, as stated by many.²⁷⁶ The female prisoners in question are not gassed in the scene, but the way Spielberg builds the scene, through instrumentals and cutting, leads the viewer to believe that they will be.²⁷⁷ Spielberg is not alone in his choice to show the chambers, however.

²⁷⁵ One primary issue for Holocaust film thus far among critics has been whether or not to represent the gas chambers with Resnais and Lanzmann at the heart of the debate. Resnais chose to include images of the chambers in his 1955 *Night and Fog*. Images of how the chambers were when the footage was shot-after the Nazis were defeated and the camps were cleared. Resnais does not show victims dying within the chambers. Resnais does, however, mention the nail marks still in the walls of the chambers. This reminder of the lives lost is not one easily forgotten if a person has seen them for themselves. It reminds us of the cruel and evil Nazi policies. And on the other side of the once clear-cut debate is Lanzmann with his *Bilderverbot*, who refused to show camp structures, recreation, or documentary footage of the camps in his nine-hour 1985 documentary *Shoah*. Lanzmann once stated had he found footage of the gas chambers shot by Nazis, he would have destroyed it. The debate, however, is no longer so unambiguous, as Lanzmann began to soften his stance on the issues in the early 21st century. Lanzmann's changing stance is noted in Brad Prager's work on Holocaust documentary in the 21st century and the ways filmmakers are adapting to the changing landscape-lack of survivors and temporal distance from the event.

²⁷⁶ This of course is another debate in and of itself. Was his approach itself the grotesque? Would it have been better to show the scene rather than build the expectation in a horrific manner only to remove it entirely? In essence, Spielberg toys with the emotions of the viewers in a questionable manner.

²⁷⁷ As many will know, the women who were supposed to be "saved" by Schindler were accidentally rerouted to Auschwitz. They had heard the rumors of gas chambers, so when asked to disrobe and enter the showers, the women obviously feared the worst. Their fear and anxiety are intended to be felt, amid dramatic musical cues from the film creators, and then suddenly their undeniable relief when the shower heads turn on and water is released. This was an actual shower.

Many others have shown the obscene scenes from the gas chambers in varying degrees, including NBC's 1978 *Holocaust* to the 1999 film version of *The Devil's Arithmetic* and even Herman's *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*.

No guidebook exists on how to represent the center of destruction of European Jewry, but some have done so "successfully." As Libby Saxton states at the end of the chapter on *Death, Ethics and Spectatorship*: "Rather than the 'integral image' of the genocide imagined by Chéroux, films such as *Kornblumenblau*, *Amen*, *The Grey Zone*, and *Nuit et brouillard* offer fleeting glimpses of its horror which engages in a difficult, painful and open-ended processes of ethical reflection."²⁷⁸ To show the gas chambers or not thus continues to be a primary question for filmmakers. The figure of the child, appropriately constructed with its potential to look back at the spectator from within the camp, the chamber, has potential to navigate the unrepresentable by interjecting itself into the voided space and providing an opportunity to understand what cannot be understood. The most recent attempt has been Lazlo Nemes's *Son of Saul* in 2015. Nemes showcases the life of the Sonderkommando, as *The Grey Zone* also did, but rather than a part of the narrative focused on the uprising as is seen in the latter, Nemes's film prioritizes the child throughout the film in order to represent the most sadistic policies of the Holocaust.

The Child Figure and Holocaust Film Taboo

The more recent production of *Son of Saul* from Lazlo Nemes showcases a fictional child within the gas chambers of Auschwitz during the Sonderkommando uprising.²⁷⁹ Lanzmann called

²⁷⁸ Saxton, 91.

²⁷⁹ The uprising took place on October 7, 1944 and was a coordinated effort between the Sonderkommando in the different crematoria along with the women working in the clothing depot, Canada, who smuggled gunpowder to the Sonderkommando. Although the revolt was quickly put down by the Nazi guards and the Sonderkommando members murdered, they were able to damage Crematorium 4 beyond repair. According to the Jewish Virtual Library website under the "Auschwitz-Birkenau: The Revolt at Auschwitz-Birkenau" section as of September 4, 2019. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-revolt-at-auschwitz-birkenau>

his own creation *Shoah* a “fiction of the real” because he could not represent what cannot be represented nor should he claim to do so. Nemes’s work, however, performs what has until now been a taboo. Based heavily on the writings of the Sonderkommando, Nemes fictionalizes the obscenest of Nazi crimes. Lanzmann himself has lauded the work of Nemes, stating in an interview that his own work was a fiction, he cannot oppose Nemes’s creation.²⁸⁰ The fictional child construct, in this instance, navigates the literal site of destruction for millions, and yet, provides perhaps an affective blueprint in going forward with Holocaust productions.²⁸¹

Interestingly, even though a large portion of the film is based on factual accounts painstakingly recorded by members of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando, the story of Saul and the child is fictional. Unlike its filmic predecessors focusing on the Sonderkommando, however, Saul’s story does not directly focus on the uprising, but the resistant acts are nevertheless present. At one moment, Saul even becomes a part of the heroic picture taking event within Auschwitz, buying time and even hiding the camera for the historic Alex just before the Nazis arrive.²⁸² Within Nemes’s film, however, the uprising is secondary to Saul’s attempts to “save” a child.

The child, whom the spectator never actually meets, only seeing the corpse, is the primary focus throughout the narrative. It is Saul’s claimed son, and the one for whom Saul puts countless lives in danger in order to give him a proper burial. The two plots, the uprising and Saul’s quest, exist inharmoniously. The viewer is aware that something larger is at play, but it plays in the background—much like horror of the gas chambers does. The balance between historical reference and fictional storyline, however, make Saul’s child even more poignant. Saul’s quest is the primary narrative, and yet, he is a member of the Sonderkommando within

²⁸⁰ As is noted in Jordan Cronk’s interview with Lanzmann at the 88th Academy Awards and published in the *Hollywood Reporter* May 2, 2016.

²⁸¹ Its reception has varied by country with very few viewers in Germany. Nonetheless, elements exist, which are important to the claims about the child narrative.

²⁸² Alex is the Sonderkommando member known for taking the only four images that exist of the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Auschwitz at the time of the uprising. The child figure performs once more as a method of resistance, here to a Sonderkommando's historical role, and opens up an intransitive space which allows access to tabooed representational spaces.



Fig 14: Saul as he performs his duties²⁸³

The fictional story begins with a transport arrival to Auschwitz. Saul methodically goes through the motions of leading a new group into the changing rooms, keeping them calm, and eventually locking them in the gas chambers. His face shows no emotion. Afterwards, he begins to collect the belongings.²⁸⁴ Everything changes, however, when Saul sees, more appropriately hears, a child has survived the gassing. In the moment, it is not clear that he thinks it is his son. It could be that surviving is simply astonishing or it could be that this change in the routine has reawakened him to his surroundings. The guards kill the child immediately and Saul frantically searches through the belongings in the changing rooms to determine where the transport originated, hoping to discover if it is in fact his son. At some point, however, he proceeds as if it

²⁸³ Nemes, 3:42

²⁸⁴ As has been historically documented, all useable items were collected within the camp and then used within the Reich.

is his child.²⁸⁵ Saul makes numerous life-threatening decisions—for himself and those around him—for the sake of the child's soul, as he attempts to perform proper final rites for the child. The film ends with Saul losing the child's body as he attempts to flee the camp and the ultimate murder of Saul and his comrades. Where the girl in red creates an interior space of resistance in *Schindler* through a sensory experience and a focus on the child figure, *Nemes* creates the interior space through the figure's absence. Much like *Austerlitz*, the child's perspective is unknown; it is simply present. Although rarely seen and deceased for the majority of the film, the boy is the center, as the title suggests.

The spectator knows a larger more significant matter is at play, the uprising, but Saul's dedication to this child remains the focal point. As the camera follows Saul, so do the viewers. The child figure, much like *Schindler*'s little girl in the red coat, carries the viewer throughout the film until Saul loses the body while attempting to escape. He must let him go, despite his best efforts. The child woke something within Saul, who until he heard the rasping breath among the corpses in the gas chamber, moved mechanically and without emotion across the screen.

²⁸⁵ A moment even exists where one of his fellow Sonderkommandos argues with him about Saul even having a son. Saul claims he does indeed have one from another woman. The legitimacy to his claim on the child remains obscure throughout the film, but the viewer can accept it as truth or, at minimum, not deny him the belief it is his son due to his dedication.



Fig 15: Saul releases the child as he crosses the river²⁸⁶

The narrative never confirms if this is actually his child or not. Despite the child's central role, the plot leaves this detail open-ended. The uncertainty follows through to the final scene in the film, when a living child appears on screen. By leaving this fact ambiguous, the spectator is urged to believe Saul's claims as we witness what Saul is willing to do for the boy. It awakens something in him that until this point had been muted—an acknowledgement of life in a world revolving around death.

Saul, as a member of the Sonderkommando, leads people to their deaths regularly, knowing his own life will also eventually be taken as Kommando units are often liquidated. As Margaret Gibson and Amanda Howell note in the article "Son of Saul and the Ethics of Representation: Troubling the Figure of the Child," "Saul's subjectivity seems absent...He embodies the systematic erasure of Jewry that was the aim of the Holocaust."²⁸⁷ No longer are his

²⁸⁶ Nemes, 1:37

²⁸⁷ Gibson and Howell, 153.

actions muted and robotic after he encounters the child, but rather an urgency has emerged.²⁸⁸ It is the child that brings him back to some level of humanity. He exits survival mode and enters a protector's role. The film shows the lengths a person will go to "save" a child.

As previously stated, eventually Saul loses the child's body as he swims across the river and attempts to escape from the camp. But the child figure has not left the film completely. Saul once again finds himself among the resistance but without the child's corpse. As the remaining escaped Sonderkommando discuss joining the partisans while hiding in a shed in the woods, a child appears at the door. Saul is the only one who seems to notice, and Saul smiles. It happens slowly, and the camera remains fixed on Saul's face. His muscles do not even seem to move, but then suddenly the smile is there. The first and only smile he gives. Gibson and Howell end their observations of Saul's child in their article with this encounter, noting that this child "marks a moment of grace and generosity."²⁸⁹



Fig 16: Saul smiles at the child²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ At this point in society, seventy years after Auschwitz, it is unheard of to ascribe guilt to a Sonderkommando member. After decades of research, writings, and interviews, history shows there was no choice in their actions. Saul is not to blame for his robotic nature. The spectator is rather captivated in the saddest sense of the word to be witnessing his struggle.

²⁸⁹ Gibson and Howell, 160.

²⁹⁰ Nemes, 1:41

The child, however, flees the scene and as it is running away, runs past armed Nazi guards obviously on the trail of the escaped prisoners. He is held and muzzled by a guard briefly, so he will not scream. Shots fire in the background, but the camera follows the child—the free child—as he runs through the woods. This final scene is key to observing the importance of the child not only to representing the horrors but to those attempting to survive each day within the hells of the barbed wire. Saul smiled. It is not the child he was trying to bury, but it was a child free and running through the woods. Freedom and the hope for the future thus still exists somewhere within the same world that created the Sonderkommando. The film, in this moment, exemplifies, via the child figure, the hope many held onto even in the darkest of hours.

Naturally differences emerge between Saul's child and Giosuè, Bruno, or Shmuel. Departing from Annette Insdorf's observations of "the Jew as Child" in her work *Indelible Shadows*, Saul's child lacks the melodrama of Benigni and Herman's films.²⁹¹ There are no smiling angelic faces. No childlike naivety about the horrors of the Holocaust. The encounter between spectator and child only appears in the very end with the introduction of the "free" child. The camera enters the gas chambers where there can be no doubt or denial about the potential fate.²⁹² The film centers around a child facing a future that is unattainable and it is within this narrative construct that the gas chambers become the necessary framework.

The power of the child figure manifests itself in the film's ability to show the inside of the gas chambers. The much-contested chambers, when shown, are not the focus in any shot of the film. They are secondary and often blurry, as they were for the members of the

²⁹¹ Neither film is a purely Hollywood production, although it could be argued they are indeed highly influenced by Hollywood flair for the dramatic. For a further discussion about the Hollywood influence see Insdorf's *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*.

²⁹² Denial in a Jewish victim of the Holocaust sense of the word. Not denial in that the Holocaust did not happen, but rather denying the "rumors" of their existence at the time. Obviously, there were those who, in order to cope with their situation, rejected their existence and they cannot be faulted for this. Stemming from Lanzmann's work is Phillip Mueller's take on this when he states seeing the chambers and attesting to their existence was a paradox for as soon as you saw them, you were dead - either immediately from gassing or eventually during a liquidation of the Sonderkommando.

Sonderkommando. The camera angle shows the corpses to the side, an afterthought. The point of the film is not to represent what occurred within the Nazi built chambers, but rather the trials and tribulations of a Sonderkommando member in the midst of an uprising attempting to give his “son” peace. It is not Saul’s perspective that is shown but one that is either following him (over the shoulder) or staring him directly in the face (close ups). The world around him is presented the way he perceives it—muted and not a priority. It shows how someone in this position potentially functioned. Although a fictional story, the script is based on the few writings, which survived from the Sonderkommando hidden away in the hopes that someday someone would know their story. But a child was chosen as the focal point, as the counterpoint to death. The scenes unfold in the background, but they allow the spectator to witness the unthinkable. Although not the narrator, a child carries the viewer through the narrative and releases Saul in the end.

The child faces Saul, and thus the spectator, creating as Levinas noted an “irreducible and ultimate experience of relationship.”²⁹³ The figure, the face, confronts the spectator. The encounter with the “other” opens up the spectator to the sensory experience of the figure’s face. Narratively, the child and Saul encounter each other, but as the scene contains no wide shot the viewer does not “see” this encounter; it is implied. Due to this omission though, Saul and the child figure are also engaging the spectator directly. The child does not speak to the viewer as Bruno and Giosuè did. The boy’s presence, his constructed nature and, in the end, the sensory experience he creates through an overdetermination with the focus on the child, is what allows for a middle voice to emerge in the work. He is the catalyst and continued drive for Saul’s story. For the majority of the film, the child speaks to the viewer from the dead, for the dead, via Saul’s character. The child figure here ruptures Saul’s world and allows for an interaction with the

²⁹³ Levinas, 77

historical narrative, the life of a Sonderkommando member, without directly encountering it. Through the child's confrontation and simultaneous ambiguous existence, Nemes's cinematic child, guides the spectator, as he guides Saul, to access the ultimate void. As Saul offers the body, the child, to the viewer in the end, he gives a voice to those who perished within the barbed wire.

Conclusion

In the end, the child's presence is not solely about accessibility to a story or a history unknown to the viewer. The child's face, its perspective, its presence even, is a rupture in the narrative. It is a disruptive being in an already despicable history, which has the ability to break through to the viewer and forces the viewer to encounter the subjected "Other" and opens up a sensory experience for the viewer. The child's face forces them to confront the unjustifiable acts.

And the child figure has been present in Holocaust film from the beginning. It serves an unsettling purpose even in the British *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, with the original script written in the 1940s, and the film finally released in its entirety in 2014 by the Imperial War Museum. In the audio, the narrator introduces the idea of child survivors before the camera shows emaciated corpses being thrown into pits. By mentioning the children before this shot, another layer of empathy is attached to the imagery on the screen. The previous images of corpses are shocking—and there seems to be a never-ending stock in the film—but structurally the spectator now questions if the children's parents are among those bodies.²⁹⁴ The child's face on the screen contains an ethical implication. Returning to the Levinas quote from the introduction, the child figures break the fourth wall as they stare at the viewer. The spectator encounters the face directly constructing a moment of resistance within the narrative. The figure

²⁹⁴ Not to mention the 1948 Hollywood *The Search* about a young Holocaust survivor and his mother searching for one another across post-war Europe.

shifts the responsibility onto the viewer.²⁹⁵ And as is seen with the production of *Son of Saul* its power and presence has not diminished. The child's face does not appear until the very end, but the encounter is powerful. The spectator confronts what has been motivating Saul throughout the film, and we are forced to grapple with the ethical implications of a dead child—the catalyst which forced Saul, a Sonderkommando member, to break from his survival tactics.

The power of the child, the mere mention of child victims, intrudes on an already despicable history. The child figures in these works exemplify White's notion of a middle voice through cinematic dramatizations of the child's face and moments of rupture which contextualize an established historical knowledge in an alternative manner. The child figure overwhelms the interior and exterior divide between viewer and film and, as shown, has the ability to thereby create a farcical portrayal or represent taboo spaces. The figure's presence provides the viewer with a counterpoint to the machinery of mass killing and an interior space of resistance from the interior of the narrative, as the figure navigates the in between of myth and history: of Holocaust history. Its presence in a narrative can shift between an active and passive role from an intransitive space. The figures tell the story while simultaneously navigating the complexities Holocaust history and representation, breaking the fourth wall and forcing a confrontation with the past. In the next chapter, I investigate the child figure's didactic role in the physical and tangible space of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's (USHMM) children's exhibition *Daniel's Story*.

²⁹⁵ Forcing the viewer to encounter the "Other" is also not a novel concept. Alexander Kluge uses this precise technique in his film *Abschied von Gestern*, the first of the German New Cinema films. His main character, a young female, breaks the fourth wall forcing the viewer to see her and her post-war struggles. She stares at the viewer forcing them to confront the topic at hand.

Chapter Three

The Child Figure in the Educational Space

“And this museum is not an answer; it is a question mark”²⁹⁶

The final core content chapter of the dissertation draws upon the literature and film readings in order to examine the role of the child within Holocaust museums and memorials. Although not often discussed, the child figure is also prevalent throughout these spaces, whether through images, entire dedicated sections, or artifacts such as clothing or toys. The more iconic children persist throughout, including Anne Frank, the image of the boy in the Warsaw Ghetto, and the image of children heading for the gas chamber in Auschwitz, but in each instance the figures acts as a mediator between learner and understanding. They act as a middle voice within the institutional walls, once more navigating the space between innocence and knowledge, embodying the narrative construct.

The chapter will focus primarily on one exhibit, *Remember the Children: Daniel’s Story* (1993), at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) as not only a conglomerate of the previously discussed literary and filmic representations, but also of the prominent Holocaust museums and memorials.²⁹⁷ *Daniel’s Story* is a supplementary exhibition at USHMM, which tells the story of a fictitious German-Jewish family, and an enactment of a literary work

²⁹⁶ Elie Wiesel, USHMM

²⁹⁷ As a Holocaust researcher, *Daniel’s Story* mortified me during my first visit. I found it highly problematic with its almost cartoonish and simplistic representation of the atrocities that occurred, from the family store being named “Familien Geschäft” rather than an actual store name to its interactive and near “playful” moments, such as Daniel’s diary pages. I revisited the exhibit a few months later, and during the second examination, forced myself to keep in mind the intended audience - children. Children with little to no knowledge of the event. The perhaps more unusual observation is the vast number of adults who also visit the exhibit - some with children and some without. As this exhibit is always open to the public, some summer visitors may only see this portion of the museum if they are unable to obtain and advance or same-day tickets to the permanent exhibition. These elements will be taken into consideration in the discussion about the target audience and intended goals of a space. Thirty minutes is the amount of time recommend by the museum to commit to this exhibition.

which was simultaneously conceived within the museum space.²⁹⁸ Despite the multiple factual accounts of children in the Holocaust, this space instead uses a singular fictional narrative based on numerous testimonies to teach visitors about the Holocaust, creating a palimpsest of children's voices. Although the focus will be primarily on *Daniel's Story* because of its choral nature, and simultaneous focus on the child figure, I will discuss the interrelation of this children's exhibit, housed within USHMM and created by a team of experts, with popular and national Holocaust museums and memorials—the child figure's presence within them and the active learning moments the spaces create.²⁹⁹ It is through these interrelations, specifically of the child figures, such as the now iconic Anne Frank, that an “echo chamber” of child voices emerges in museum and memorial spaces. I, however, investigate these spaces with an eye on the digital's ever-increasing role in the museum space and the sensory dimension that the child perspective has the potential to open up as space's become digitized.

²⁹⁸ It is supplementary in nature because it is not the primary exhibition offered at the museum, which is the permanent exhibition or PE at USHMM. That is not to say that *Daniel's Story* is the only secondary exhibit in USHMM. Typically, a larger secondary exhibit is always there which changes entirely every two years or so. Additionally, the museum has spaces on other genocides as well as a smaller secondary exhibit next to the children's wall. The difference is *Daniel's Story* is located upstairs in the main hall across from the permanent exhibit entrance elevators, whereas the others are located on separate floors. *Daniel's Story*, the novel, was published in 1993 the same year of the museum's opening. The exhibit existed in as a traveling exhibition in the years leading up to USHMM's opening.

²⁹⁹ List includes USHMM (1993), Los Angeles's MOT (1993) and Museum of the Holocaust (1961 with most recent building in 2010), New York's Jewish Heritage Museum (1997), London's IWM Holocaust gallery (2000), Jewish Museum (2010) and Holocaust memorial (1983), Paris's Memorial de la Shoah (2005), Deportation Memorial (1962), Vel d'Hiv Memorial (1994) Children's Garden Memorial (2017), Drancy memorial (2012), Amsterdam's Anne Frank Huis (1957), National Holocaust Museum (2016), Jewish Historical Museum (1987/2007) and Hollandsche Schouwburg (1992), Brussel's House of European History (2017), Berlin's Ort der Information (2005), Anne Frank Zentrum (1998) and Jewish Museum (2001), Theresienstadt (2001), Krakow's Schindler Factory (2008) and Plaszow (2003), Auschwitz (1947), and Warsaw's POLIN (2013).

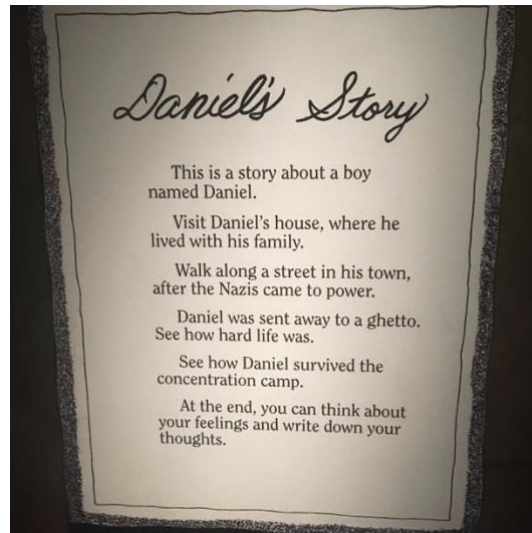
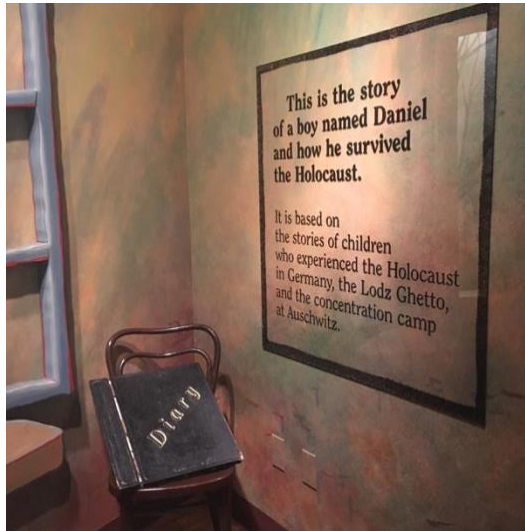


Fig 17: *Daniel's Story* Entrance³⁰⁰ Fig 18: Description at entrance to *Daniel's Story*

Digital additions, interactive screens and digitized survivor interactions to name a few, are slowly being integrated into these spaces as many of the most well-known and largest Holocaust museums, such as USHMM and the Museum of Tolerance (MOT), were created in the 1990s or early 2000s. The push to commemorate the Holocaust with national museums and memorials began in the late 1970s. Memorial committees formed under the Carter administration in the United States and eventually led to USHMM opening in 1993 under the Clinton

³⁰⁰ Museum images belong to the author unless otherwise noted.

administration. Between the museum opening, the release of *Schindler's List* and the opening of MOT in Los Angeles, California, 1993 has become known as the “Year of the Holocaust,” at least among American critics.³⁰¹ Of the museums created during this era many used barbed wire, train cars, gatehouses, and darkened colors in order to educate visitors about the atrocities.³⁰²

Although the museums from this period employ various representational modes, these images and artifacts are found in almost all of them. By way of their physical structure and wall color alone, the spaces become experiential sites. They are often intentionally dark and presented in smaller spaces compared to other subject matters, such as art galleries or science-based museums, attempting to create a somber experience whilst learning about the Holocaust. This era's memorials have the ability to make the visitor feel mournful as they learn about the atrocities.³⁰³

It is through these distinct methodologies that museums work to create a prosthetic memory within their walls, which guides the visitor to begin to come to terms with the topic of genocide.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ According to Michael Rothberg, this term was first used by the host of ABC's *Nightline*. MOT opened in February of 1993 and USHMM followed shortly thereafter in April 1993. Rothberg, “Roth and the Holocaust,” 54.

³⁰² Museums include USHMM, MOT, Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London, the Schindler Factory in Krakow, Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, Holocaust Memorial Museum in Houston, TX, etc.

³⁰³ The discussion is limited to “of this era” as the plans for the new IWM includes far brighter wall colors for their Holocaust gallery. They may, in the end, be alone in this choice, but I cannot make claims for the spaces which have not been remodeled to fit new learning techniques.

³⁰⁴ A term coined by Alison Landsberg in her 2004 book *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*.



Fig 19: Rise of Nazism Hallway at USHMM Permanent Exhibition³⁰⁵

Daniel's Story

As a pastiche of these larger institutional spaces, *Daniel's Story* employs many similar methodologies and even artifacts, but rather than a larger historical narrative, it is a choir of children's voices contained within a singular personal narrative. The space immerses the visitor in a conglomerate representation by way of Daniel's singular "story." The pre-adolescent son, Daniel, acts as the narrator for the space by way of a personal diary reminiscent of Anne Frank's own writings. Rather than retell personal experiences as Anne did, Daniel and his story simulate historical environments, such as a 1930s German home and a Lodz³⁰⁶ Ghetto apartment, which the visitors walk through, allowing them to immerse themselves in this complex topic.³⁰⁷ The visitor does not "experience" brief moments, such as a walking through a singular train car, within a larger space, but is rather wholly engrossed in Daniel's narrative. The simulations in

³⁰⁵ Property of USHMM

³⁰⁶ The chapter contains the spelling Lodz rather than Łódź to align with the exhibit's spelling.

³⁰⁷ Naturally the aforementioned experiential moments exist, which are at the heart of much of its criticisms. Rather than a train car within a darkened room, however, the visitor enters Daniel's world wholly. Additionally, this form of narrative with child as storyteller is not a new concept, especially in regard to atrocity literature. For a more in-depth discussion on the use of child narrators and the perspective they offer in post-war children see Pinfeld, *The Child's View of the Third Reich*.

Daniel's Story perform differently than spaces such as the recreated gas chambers at the end of the Holocaust exhibit at MOT. As Wendy Brown describes the chamber installation, “[a]t this point, we are no longer mere witnesses to the Holocaust but are *inside* the experience.”³⁰⁸ *Daniel's Story* does not reenact a space of murder, but rather it—through architecture and narrative for example—opens up the potential of a reenactment through the singular experience from a child's perspective.

Daniel's narrative is based on testimonies of actual children who lived in Nazi-era Germany, the Lodz Ghetto, and Auschwitz, creating an overarching narrative about the Holocaust and Jewish persecution. The space contains imagery and artifacts, such as the cattle car, that are present throughout exhibition spaces around the world. But rather than presenting events strictly as historical facts and figures, the way even the main exhibition at USHMM often does, *Daniel's Story*, because it was created with children in mind, combines multiple aspects of a complicated topic and compiles them into one narrative.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Brown, “Tolerance as Museum Object,” 139

³⁰⁹ This information can be found on the USHMM website under the appropriate exhibition listing. The space is recommended for those 8 and older, unlike the permanent exhibition, which is recommended for ages 11 and up. The minimum age recommendation thus suggests different levels of acceptability between this exhibit and the permanent exhibition. Child psychologists, such as Piaget and his work on the intellectual transition from adolescence to adulthood show that the topic must be approached in a different manner than a primarily adult audience. According to Piaget, children under the age of 11 are not capable of formal or abstract thought. They are still at the concrete thought development stage: “when placed in an experimental situation...[they] act directly upon the material placed in front of them by trial and error, without dissociating the factors involved.” Piaget, “Intellectual Evolution from Adolescence,” 42.



Fig 20: Looking from the deportation hallway into “Auschwitz”

In a summary of the exhibit, the museum states: “Visitors then enter realistic environments where they can touch, listen to, and engage in Daniel’s world as it changes during the Holocaust. The exhibition design, although about a fictional family, is based on historical imagery gathered from family photo albums, documentary sources, and pictorial diaries of the period.”³¹⁰ Since *Daniel’s Story* is but one narrative about one child, who did not exist, attempting to represent the many, the space does not overtly show distinctions in experiences by those who suffered in the Holocaust. At the same time, however, the historical background given to the younger visitor is comprehensive. Within thirty minutes, the visitor sees the family dynamic of what is meant to represent a “typical” German-Jewish home before the antisemitic laws came into effect, the progression to violence by neighbors, ghettoization, and finally the concentration camp.

As society shifts into a new age of Holocaust representation with fewer survivors to give testimony and an increase in digital approaches to education, this chapter is marking a moment in time when the question of how to mediate an atrocity, such as the Holocaust, is revisited.³¹¹ As

³¹⁰ According to the USHMM website “Remember the Children: Daniel’s Story” section as of March 1, 2019.

³¹¹ I will discuss the issue of holographic testimony in the conclusion of the dissertation.

stated above, many of these memorials and museums, including *Daniel's Story*, were created at least 25 years ago, but a shift has begun to update their presentational format. IWM in London is at the forefront of the shift to newer approaches, as they are currently in the design phase to completely overhaul their Holocaust gallery.³¹² Due to an increase in available digital tools and advances in educational theories, representational methods have changed. As the next generation interacts more regularly with digital tools, the visitors, and how they relate to these educational spaces, have thus changed. However, as this shift to a more digitized and interactive experiential approach occurs, it is important to provide an analysis of these institutions with a focus on child figures, as a primary experiential mediator. By exposing the interrelations between prominent national museums and memorials and *Daniel's Story*, the singular plural of Daniel's diary transpires and subsequently, the potential of the virtual dimension emerges through the space's structure.

As the exhibit is housed within a leading national memorial to the topic and in its full title is ***Remember the Children: Daniel's Story***, the exhibit is a primary voice of child figures within museum spaces. It thus demands a primary focus in the chapter in order to evaluate the child figure's ability to navigate the topic of the Holocaust in an influential public memorial space, as the figure engages with the potential for memory access to the complex nature of the Holocaust. As Allison Landsberg notes in regard to mass cultural productions and her own notion of prosthetic memory, these cultural productions do not "simply reinforce a particular group's identity by sharing memories. Instead, it [prosthetic memory] opens up those memories and identities to persons from radically different backgrounds."³¹³ The performative simulated nature

³¹² Interestingly enough, they are making these changes, despite the fact that this gallery consistently remains the most popular one at the free museum. As stated by James Bulgin, one of designers, of the new exhibition at the Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Jewish Civilisation at the Royal Holloway, University of London July 2018.

³¹³ Landsberg, 11

of *Daniel's Story* is examined in relation to the concept of prosthetic memory and the distinction between information and experience.³¹⁴

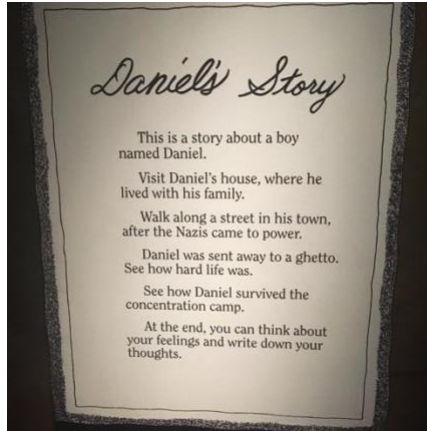


Fig 21: Welcome instructions in *Daniel's Story*

The creators of *Daniel's Story* are working within historically factual parameters, as they draw from a multitude of actual children's diaries and "Daniel" is the result. They are thus able to mold Daniel slightly in order to convey a heavy and complicated topic to a young visitor—and those adults who also visit—in a very finite amount of space and short period of time. As a literal child construct, since he did not exist, Daniel speaks to the visitor from a space in between knowledge and innocence. He is both acutely aware and, at the same time, naive to the world. As emphasized in the previous chapters, White's notion of the middle voice as a method for navigating the mechanized genocide has the potential to manifest itself in the child figure. Within *Daniel's Story* not only do we have a child figure literally guiding the visitor through the space and history, the exhibit and Daniel help to create a prosthetic memory by way of a narrative middle voice and as an interstitial space within the larger institution. The exhibit is perhaps

³¹⁴ In order to distinguish between the two, I will refer to Walter Benjamin's use of the two terms in his work "Der Erzähler" and bring them into conversation with Alison Landsberg's modern concept of a prosthetic memory.

supplemental on the surface, but it is an essential piece in the greater structure—much like Daniel.

The Museum within the City Space

In order to investigate Daniel's relation to the museum space, the museums must first be analyzed in relation to their geographical surroundings. From European museums, such as Berlin and Amsterdam memorials, located at sites of atrocity, to USHMM's location within Washington, D.C. and MOT in Los Angeles the Holocaust memorial space and the child figure within it navigate both the political and cultural influences on their exhibition formats.

Anne Frank, as argued in previous chapters, is one of the central child figures of Holocaust memory in both the United States and Europe. Thus, her home in the Netherlands, where she is perhaps even more influential than America, is where the discussion begins. The Netherlands itself has an interesting history with Holocaust representation. Although Dutch citizens, such as Dutch national railway employees, played a role in deporting their own Jewish citizens, as well as immigrant Jews, to camps, the narrative for decades focused on Anne Frank and in general on children.³¹⁵ Proof of this can be seen in the work of the Dutch researcher, Bart Nauta, on Dutch Sonderkommando members. Nauta himself has rebuked his title of "leading" researcher on the topic, commenting that others had previously attempted to research and discuss Dutch Sonderkommando members and were not accepted by the research community. As he

³¹⁵ The Nazis invaded the Netherlands in 1940 and attempts to hinder the Nazis legal advancements by Communists were shut down by the Nazis. In 1940, Amsterdam had about 75,000 Jews. By the end of the war, with the aid of the Dutch Nazi party, city administration, municipal police and the Dutch railway at least 80% of the Jewish population died during the Holocaust. For more information see encyclopedia.ushmm.org. In November 2018, the Dutch rail company began the process to pay individual reparations to the families of those deported. Corder, 2018. "Dutch Rail Company to Pay Reparations for WWII Deportations" *AP News* November 28. <https://www.apnews.com/d32f62be86e0476b801a3a5b382ec593>

explained, until now, Anne has been the heart of the Dutch national Holocaust narrative.³¹⁶ Until this point, the focus had been on a narrative for all ages, children, rather than a nuanced approach that can advance as the learner does. The city of Amsterdam itself provides further evidence with its six major Holocaust and/or Jewish learning sites—The National Holocaust Museum, Jewish Historical Museum, the Children’s Museum, the Portuguese Synagogue, the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and Anne Frank Huis—the majority containing a heavy focus on historical children,³¹⁷ including an interactive exhibit about children who perished represented via their deportation suitcases at the National Holocaust Museum.³¹⁸ The Dutch approach has thus far centered on the image of the child, including the most well-known of them and her family’s secret annex, which is now its own popular museum site.³¹⁹

Farther east is Berlin and the seat of perpetrator territory. Berlin itself contains numerous memorials and museums discussing World War II, the Holocaust, and the city’s own problematic past regarding the Nazi era. Within the city itself are the Jewish Museum, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe monument and Place of Information, and its own Anne Frank Zentrum along with countless memorials to the various minority groups who suffered under the Nazi regime.³²⁰ Outside of the city are Sachsenhausen, Ravensbruck, and Marzahn concentration camps among their many satellite camps. Each space approaches the topic in a specific and unique manner. The three at the center of this chapter are the Jewish museum, the Place of

³¹⁶ According to his talk in Berlin at the *Telling, Describing, Representing Extermination: The Auschwitz Sonderkommando, their Testimony and their Legacy* conference in April 2018. Talk titled “A Microhistory of Dutch Men in the Sonderkommando and the Waffen-SS at the Crematoria of Auschwitz.”

³¹⁷ As of May 2018

³¹⁸ The installation will be discussed in more detail in the section on tangibility.

³¹⁹ According to “The History of the Secret Annex” page on the Anne Frank House website, the Anne Frank House originally opened to the public in 1960 after escaping demolition. Her story’s popularity had grown, and the space was renovated, a foundation founded, and educational space created. The museum remains a popular site and requires a timed ticket (purchased two months in advance) to enter due to the annex’s limited space.

³²⁰ Memorials to persecuted groups include Memorial to the Sinti and Roma Victims of National Socialism (2012), Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under Nazism (2008), and the Memorial to the Victims of National Socialist Euthanasia Killings (2014).

Information, and the Anne Frank Zentrum, due to their prominence, either topically or architecturally, in Holocaust Studies as well as popularity with visitors.³²¹ The Jewish Museum maximizes learning through architecture, the Anne Frank Zentrum is reminiscent of its international counterparts with its singular child focus, and the Place of Information balances between architecture and personal narratives.

The city's history plays an important role in each space's presentation. As the heart of Nazi Germany, the origin of the Topography of Terror, and the seat of the Wannsee Conference, Berlin's monuments are aware of their Nazi past as national monuments to the atrocities.³²² They perform a balancing act in the interstitial space of Europe: between camps to the east and deportation sites to the west and as the hub of the machine which created both. They do not recreate spaces as D.C. and L.A. do, because they are the space. And the child is palpable in all of them. From Anne's own story in Anne Frank Zentrum to the familial focus of Peter Eisenman's subterranean Place of Information to the notably smaller faces among the *Fallen Leaves* exhibit within Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum structure, the child figure guides the visitor through not only the difficult history of the Holocaust, but also the history of the perpetrator city.³²³ The Berlin spaces acknowledge their monument's physical location and the simultaneous need to educate precisely because of the physical address.

³²¹ The Anne Frank Zentrum is located in the hip area of Hackescher Markt in Berlin and the aesthetics of the neighborhood seep into the exhibition space. Anne Frank Zentrum is an incredibly small space located in an alley but uses a large number of digital tools and will be discussed more heavily in the dissertation's conclusion.

³²² Sybille Quack, first director of the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin from 2000 to 2004, discusses the lengthy process the committees went through in creating the memorial and information center. Quack, *The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin and Its Information Center: Concepts, Controversies, Reactions*

³²³ As will be discussed in more detail later, the Eisenman Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is above ground while the Place of Information exhibition is located underneath the memorial. The *Fallen Leaves* exhibit by Menashe Kadishman is located in the Jewish Museum as part of the *Memory Void* section of the space. The exhibit consists of 10,000 open-mouthed faces cut from iron plates. According to the Jewish Museum website under the "Shalekhet – Fallen Leaves" page as of October 7, 2019.

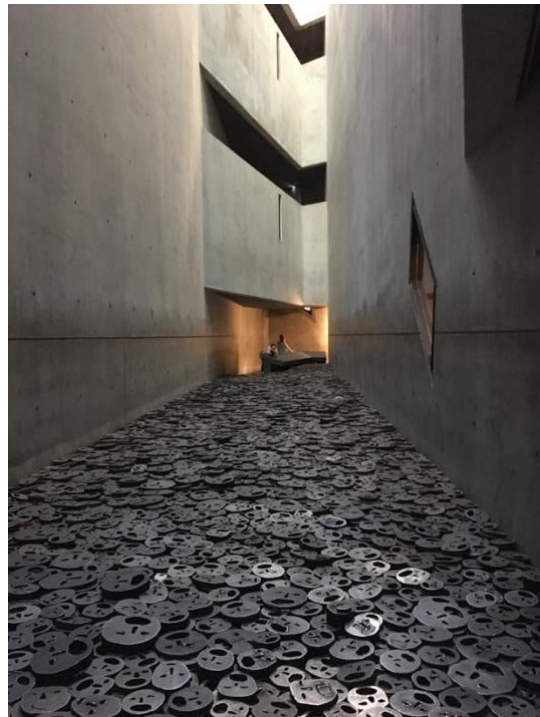


Fig 22: “Fallen Leaves” at Jewish Museum Berlin

Holocaust museums and memorials in the United States, however, are outside the realm of perpetrator site and their existence calls into question the ramifications for a national memorial and museum space in the United States. There have been numerous debates about the necessity of a memorial or museum dedicated to the Holocaust on American soil based on the fact that the Holocaust did not occur there.³²⁴ Stating in his article “America’s Holocaust: Memory and the Politics of Identity,” James Young sees the Americanization of the Holocaust as inevitable since this form of memorialization is simply inherent in the American way of remembrance. According

³²⁴ James Young’s article “America’s Holocaust: Memory and the Politics of Identity” in particular focuses on the process of selecting a location for the museum. The museum’s existence and location directly off of the National Mall points to a prominence in American society. Further information can be found in Flanzbaum, ed., *The Americanization of the Holocaust*.

to Young, the European museums and memorials are rooted in the atrocity simply by their location. The sites of atrocity where, he states, add a level of tangibility to their memorial and museum sites. Regarding memorials in particular he states, “unlike European memorials, however, often anchored in the very sites of destruction, American memorials are necessarily removed from the ‘topography of terror’...The meaning in American memorials is not always as ‘self-evident’ as that suggested at the camps, places of deportation, or destroyed synagogues. In this sense, American memorials seem to be anchored not so much in history as in the idea that generated them in the first place.”³²⁵ The reader can thus surmise Young’s concern for USHMM, which he is referencing specifically here, as America’s monument to educating about the Holocaust, and in addition, the general American tendency for memorialization.³²⁶ Since opening its doors in 1993, however, USHMM alone has hosted more than 43 million visitors, as of January 2018. Although 24% of those visitors have been school-age students, an overwhelming 90% of the total visitors are not Jewish.³²⁷ Despite location, there is an obvious desire to learn about the topic.

It is thus important to remember the physical location of USHMM, directly off of the National Mall in the heart of Washington, DC—the home of numerous and free museums. The city’s primary tourist attractions are its national monuments—which includes the large Smithsonian collection. Tourists often come to DC with the specific purpose of visiting these spaces. USHMM competes in a sense with its neighbors, so that visitors continue to visit. The average person may, may being the operative word here, view the more popular films at home or read novels on their own time, but they may still be missing key pieces of information, as the

³²⁵ Young, “America’s Holocaust,” 71.

³²⁶ America alone has multiple museums focused on the Holocaust. The most well-known being USHMM, although MOT opened a few months before across the country under the funding of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Other spaces include, but are not limited to, New York’s Jewish Museum, Houston’s Holocaust museum, and the installation in Skokie outside of Chicago.

³²⁷ As of August 20, 2019, under “Frequently Asked Research Questions” on the USHMM website.

films are not comprehensive. The museum provides a truly educational space for the visitor. The information presented within the institutional walls is an opportunity to reach a learner, and often in a very short amount of time and a very small amount of square footage, but as discovered through numerous encounters with museum docents and fellow researchers, they are tailored for its expected visitors.³²⁸ For example, MOT in Los Angeles is tailored to the Los Angeles visitor and competes with Hollywood and Disneyland. MOT's timed narrative, filmic qualities, and ride-like atmosphere are thus well situated for its intended Los Angeles visitor base. *Daniel's Story*, on the other hand, with its immersive elements and educational goals is reflective of its Smithsonian counterparts rather than the voided spaces of European spaces.

The child figure may be the heart of the Dutch national narrative, but the figure is present regardless of location. Each geographical location impacts its museum or memorial in a different manner. The European spaces interact with the historical space that surrounds them, whereas the American spaces create the history for the visitor. The museums interact with the city, but the child figure speaks from within the walls and has the potential to act as mediator in relation to the space. *Daniel's Story* and how it relates to the museum around it contrasts with the architecture of the European sites, but it is nevertheless framed by the space surrounding it.

The Children's Exhibit within the National Memorial Museum

In order to understand the importance and value of *Daniel's Story*, and the narrative it creates within the larger structure, it is necessary to first discuss intent vs. use in regard to the museum as a whole. USHMM's architecture was designed with a specific flow of visitors in

³²⁸ All physical descriptions of museum spaces are from my own personal experience within the museums unless otherwise noted. The intent behind the structure and flow of the exhibit, unless otherwise cited, is based on my own experiences in these spaces corroborated by discussions with fellow researchers, museum docents and staff, or website descriptions.

mind, including the building as a whole. The flow of the permanent exhibition (PE) remains fairly consistent even during the busiest moments, the larger architectural space, however, does not. The designers intended for visitors to enter through the 14th St entrance located on a busy six lane D.C. street across from the United States Department of Agriculture. After entering the building, the visitor should ride the elevator up, go through the exhibit, and work their way back down until they once more reach the main lobby. Afterwards, the visitor should exit on the opposite side of the building from the entrance and onto Eisenhower Plaza overlooking the Tidal Basin and Raoul Wallenberg Place. Despite the intentions, this is not how the museum functions regularly. The plaza entrance is often reserved for larger groups to enter and exit from and many of the daily visitors exit onto 14th St instead of the plaza and never see the architecture and memorial spaces on the west side of the building.

The actual use of the space shows how the supplementary exhibit, *Daniel's Story*, is in conversation with the PE, its much larger counterpart. According to the museum's website, *Daniel's Story* was developed by experts in the field and "has been reviewed by child psychiatrists, educators, and museum interpreters. Through the years since its inception, it remains one of the Museum's most popular experiences."³²⁹ USHMM receives a high volume of visitors between the months of March and September, when the number of visitors to Washington, D.C. itself increases. The numbers taper off after Labor Day, and at this time, visitors are allowed to enter the permanent exhibition when they please. During the high season, however, a visitor is required to obtain a timed ticket in order to enter the permanent exhibition.³³⁰ The timed passes are required since the exhibit itself has a designated path, and the

³²⁹ This information can be found under Current Museum Exhibitions on the USHMM website as of October 15, 2017. Additionally, at the end of the exhibit, the visitor is given a list of contributors—businesses and people—for coordination, design, research, graphics, fabrication, scenic treatment, AV production and installation, as well as a list of advisers.

³³⁰ Visitors can either do this online before their visit or arrive early on the day they wish to enter and hopefully obtain a pass for later in the day.

initial hallway, where visitors learn about the rise of Nazism in the 1930s, is especially cramped. The museum must thus stagger the number of visitors entering the space. Despite these requirements, visitors are allowed to enter the building without a ticket. They are only required to show a timed pass to gain entrance to the main exhibit. For those who are unaware of the system or are unable to obtain a ticket, the supplementary exhibits become their learning tools. It is in these precise moments that these interstitial spaces become so vital to the institution as a whole.³³¹

Daniel's Story is the space in between the primary exhibit and the general architecture of the building, but it is part of the larger whole and essential to the overall goals of the institution. It may be designed for children, but the exhibit performs for all. Much like the museums engage with their geographical surroundings, *Daniel's Story* engages with the museum space around it. Here though, at a site removed from the atrocities, the space must be literally created. It is not a space engaging with its historical roots, but rather it is within a larger structure already attempting to memorialize a history it does not geographically know.

Structure and Presentation

Of the national and more well-known museums and memorials in countries such as Poland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the United States, *Daniel's Story* is unusual in its combined structure and presentation method. No other space was so wholly immersive **and** directed in its methodology. Due to their use of the child figure throughout their spaces, the general structure of the permanent exhibition at USHMM, MOT, Anne Frank Huis in

³³¹ I do not intend to demean the importance of the secondary exhibits during the “off season.” However, as the museum suggests two or more hours to experience the PE, they only recommend 30 minutes to an hour in their secondary spaces. I question only the likelihood that they visit all of the exhibitions. Thus, if they are able to visit the PE, they may be less likely to visit the secondary exhibitions.

Amsterdam, and the Place of Information in Berlin will be discussed, as well as the similar elements found in them and *Daniel's Story's* unique state as a pastiche of their methodologies.

Daniel's Story begins with a video in a dark room where visitors are briefly introduced to Daniel and his family—father, mother, and sister Erika.³³² Visitors are then encouraged to learn more as they begin the exhibit and follow signs to “Daniel’s House.”³³³ The visitor enters a physical recreation of a home from 1930s Germany, where they are to imagine a young German-Jewish boy’s standard childhood at the time. The simulated kitchen space exemplifies what a stereotypical home from the time period might have included, including children’s toys in cabinets and the sounds of a family baking. After the kitchen is Daniel’s childhood room, where his personal interests—swimming, soccer, photography, and hiding objects from his sister—are on display.



Fig 23: Daniel’s Room

³³² The parents remain unnamed throughout the exhibit. The focus is truly on the children from the beginning.

³³³ Originally, children were encouraged to find Daniel’s “medal” as they progressed through the exhibit. Visitors learn about the medal his father gives him early in the exhibit, and it reappears a number of times during the story, eventually ending up on the ground behind the barbed wire fence at Auschwitz.

After his bedroom is one of the home's hallways, which shows the gradual policy changes that happened in the 1930s via window installations. The windows, which, when closed, show life before the Nazi policies, and when opened how life transformed for the home's inhabitants after the policies were implemented.³³⁴ For example, one window shows their family storefront, and when opened German soldiers appear outside the store showing the result of the boycott of Jewish businesses in 1933.³³⁵ The colors in the space darken, and the following "street" shows the aftermath of the November Pogrom in November 1938.³³⁶ The artificial storefront has a broken window and a bench states "Only for Jews."³³⁷ Lodz Ghetto appears next, which is also designed as a street complete with market noises playing in the background and ghetto rules pasted on the walls. The next scene is the family's now one room home within the ghetto. The space shows the physical evidence of how much their life from early 1930s Germany has changed, and how much this singular family suffers due to the hatred of others. After the ghetto room is yet another hallway, which represents deportation. It contains photos of children being separated from family members and a portion of a train car is set back in the wall. The final destination is Auschwitz, which is shown as a wintry and barren landscape, complete with barbed wire and a guard tower. While in "Auschwitz," a final video plays where the visitor once more learns the fate of Daniel's family. He and his father survive, and his mother and sister die in the camp. The visitor exits through a heavy curtain and into a final room, which much like USHMM's permanent exhibition

³³⁴ The images used are historical images from the time period and thus are stand ins for this fictional family. I will address the role of these conflicting historical images alongside the fictional nature of the exhibit later in the chapter.

³³⁵ The diary pages provide the date for the boycott, appearing on Daniel's diary page at the beginning of the section marked "Scary Changes." His diary entry is dated June 20, 1933.

³³⁶ Daniel does not provide the name of the incident but states his synagogue burned and his family's store windows were smashed. The historical event is introduced at the end of the "Scary Changes" hallway which began in 1933. The visitor must note that 5 years have elapsed in the small nook with a radio and their new passports. Daniel's diary notes they must now add a middle name to their legal names and dates the diary entry November 10, 1938. After the visitor exits the hallway the next hallway is labeled "Germany 1938" and begins with a boarded-up doctor's office door.

³³⁷ Ironically enough on one of my walk throughs, I witnessed a woman sitting on this bench on her iPad as her children meandered about the exhibit.

final space, is meant for reflection. They can listen to recordings, which recap the information, and younger visitors are encouraged to write down their thoughts on cards and “mail” them to Daniel.³³⁸ The designers fit 12 years of a complex history into a space that the museum suggests only requires 30 minutes to visit.

The exhibit’s structure is thus in opposition in size and scope to the permanent exhibition housed over multiple levels at USHMM, which requires one to three hours to visit, according to the museum’s website.³³⁹ The permanent exhibition (PE) provides a structured and information dominant narrative that begins with the rise of Nazism and continues to the liberation of victims and trials of Nazi officials. The PE is structured in that it is a “guided” exhibition. Very few open spaces exist in the PE, and visitors are directed through hallways.³⁴⁰ Visitors can choose to read sections or bypass them but minus one or two sections, they must walk by all installations in the exhibit. Its American counterpart, MOT comparatively is even more structured and leaves little to no room to avoid topics, as it is led by a narrator and timed. Wendy Brown comments on the phenomenon of MOT in her chapter “Tolerance as Museum Object.”

There is almost nothing at all to read, and hence none of the subjective, individual reflection that reading can invite. Instead, the experience inside the Beit Hashoah [Holocaust exhibition] is continuous and total, surrounding and suffusing. There are no silences, no pauses for questions, no points at which the visitor may seek more or different information, vote his or her viewpoint, or consider a matter from more than one angle. The account is delivered as both impartial and true, lacking even any staged disagreements that might gesture toward interpretive complexity in reporting and receiving meaning.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Visitors place their cards in an actual mailbox labeled “Daniels MAIL” and cards from previous visitors hang on the wall.

³³⁹ This information can be found under “Current Museum Exhibitions” on the USHMM website as of May 1, 2019.

³⁴⁰ The section on the November Pogroms and other victims as well as the space on Auschwitz are conceptually larger and visitors can walk around to different points in the room to read information. With this structure, they may miss some sections.

³⁴¹ Brown, “Tolerance as Museum Object,” 137-8.

The space is immersive or “surrounding and suffusing.” At USHMM, although the narrative is “chosen” and framed currently by America as the liberator of Europe, it is experiential rather than wholly immersive.³⁴² It is structured, but the visitor is still allowed to tailor their experience.



Fig 24: USHMM description Fig 25: MoT “presentation”

USHMM’s PE advances chronologically with the rise of the Nazi regime occurring earlier in the space and concentration camps later in the exhibit. The creators have a message they wish to convey in the space. A message based on immense amounts of historical fact with experiential elements, such as color choice, photographic imagery, and structural recreations,

³⁴² I do not know if they will address or change the framework of the exhibit during the exhibit remodel. The issue of Americans as liberators at the start of the museum is addressed further in James Young’s work on the exhibit. Young, “America’s Holocaust: Memory and the Politics of Identity,” 68-82.

included and geared towards triggering empathy in the visitor.³⁴³ The museum has received a mix of praise and criticism since its conception, but it nevertheless remains a source of vital information for millions of Americans who have visited.³⁴⁴ The exhibit ends in the Hall of Remembrance, allowing for a moment of reflection and peace before returning to the main entrance hall or the Hall of Witness.³⁴⁵ Although still experiential in nature, the PE provides a far more nuanced experience than *Daniel's Story*.

Despite its name, the Place of Information in Berlin does not hold such a vast amount of written information, unlike USHMM for example, but it is similar in overall size to *Daniel's Story*. The complex information is conveyed here through tailored methods. The underground center provides information with a focus on individuals rather than historical facts and figures. The initial background information to World War II, the rise of the Nazis, and the Holocaust is presented on panels alongside the left wall of a long hallway at the entrance to the exhibit. The pace of the visitors moves slowly, but the panels include the introductory information that can be found in most museums. The creators condensed down the vital information of the how and the why of World War II and the Holocaust, providing a needed background before delving into the nuances of the topics. The heart of the exhibit lies in the following rooms where the message of the Holocaust becomes focused and is broken down into four rooms: Room of Dimensions, Room of the Families, Room of Names, and Room of Places.

³⁴³ What, how, and the effectiveness of these tactics is much contested. For further discussion see Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, Berger, "Which Prosthetic?" Young, "America's Holocaust," Bernard-Donals, "Synecdochic Memory," Gigliotti "Cattle Car Complexes," et. al.

³⁴⁴ Some of the major contributors to the museum's analysis are James Young, Helene Flanzbaum, Michael Rothberg, etc.

³⁴⁵ One very important change to the set pathway has occurred since the opening of the museum - the placement of the train car that we so often see in Holocaust museums. In its original conception, visitors were required to walk through the car in order to continue through the exhibit. An option to bypass the car is now given to those who do not wish to have this haptic experience. Haptic is used here, as visitors are meant to embody the feeling of being in the train car. They can touch the sides. They are meant to become physically aware of the finite amount of space after just reading how many victims were often placed in the train cars at a time. It is a moving and possibly unnecessarily traumatic experience for the visitor.

After the hallway is a dark room with a low ceiling—the Room of Dimensions. Panels on the floor are the only light source. The panels, as the visitor will discover upon reading one, contain farewell letters from victims often written in the final moments of their lives and under much duress. The Holocaust has become individualized. It has become personal through excerpts about individualized fear during the Holocaust. The scale of the atrocity is shown on the room's walls, where they have listed the number of Jewish victims per country. In the next room, the Room of Families, the information given in the previous two rooms is applied to family histories. Panels hang from the ceiling intermittently throughout the room and on each one is the history of a family during the war — what they experienced, where they went, and which member(s) survived. The Room of Names is a sparse room which lists, one by one, the names of the known Jewish victims.³⁴⁶ The final room or Room of Places focuses on sites of destruction with a focus on the seven largest killing centers and Babi Yar. The narrative of the space is focused on the abstract Jewish individual and how his or her life was destroyed by the Holocaust.³⁴⁷

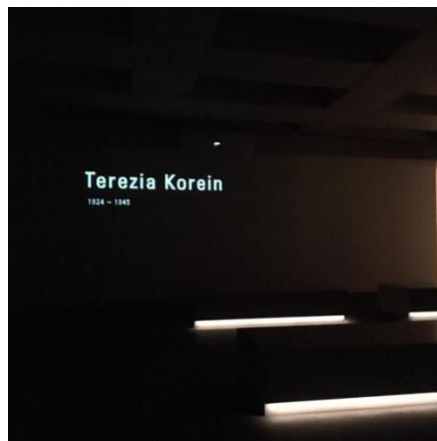


Fig 26: Place of Information: Room of Names

³⁴⁶This information can be found under “Raum der Namen” on the Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas website as of May 1, 2019.

³⁴⁷ It is abstract because although individualized by focusing on a few in the initial rooms, they do name multiple victims and in the Room of Names all of those which are known. They show scale while individualizing.

Anne Frank Huis in Amsterdam, on the other hand, focuses, for obvious reasons, on one narrative, but it is effective in its goal to represent the daily life of Jews in hiding under Nazi persecution during World War II.³⁴⁸ The visitor leaves the busy streets of Amsterdam and enters rooms containing light walls with very few artifacts—a distinct change from most other institutions. After some near empty introductory rooms, with white walls and grey floors, they enter the Opetka warehouse before ascending into the annex itself. The final rooms contain information about where the Annex inhabitants went after they were captured. With the space's often low ceilings and limited items combined with the white walls, the museum has managed to make the space feel both vast and cramped. In these spatially influenced moments, the visitor grapples with two concepts, confinement and the loss of potential. The visitor is meant to feel an inkling of what Anne and her fellow Annex inhabitants felt. The space is cramped. They are limited in what they can do.³⁴⁹ At the same time, however, the emptiness of the spaces demonstrates Anne's potential—of what she could have been had it not been for the baseless antisemitic hate perpetuated by the Nazi party. Anne's writing has been lauded around the world based both on her age and how much it developed while living in the Annex.³⁵⁰ She gave the world a gift with her diary. A look into the life of a Jewish family in hiding. In so doing, the visitor also sees what the world lost with her death. The Anne Frank Huis is the antithesis to the majority of other national spaces, which contain far more factual information for the visitor to

³⁴⁸ The visitor may feel as if they are about to enter a ride at Disneyland as they wait outside for their predetermined ticket time, but the atmosphere on the inside changes immediately and drastically. At the same time this “ride” feel to get into a museum cannot really be criticized. It is what it is, and it is a problem at many museums regardless if they are related to the Holocaust or not. Those with high visitation numbers and limited space MUST stagger their visitor numbers. There is no way around this, and it is simply a logistics issue for any museum. If people wish to come and learn they must do it in the most effective way possible.

³⁴⁹ Obviously, these feelings of confinement are heightened when visitors enter the actual living quarters, but the effects begin in the antechambers. I will address the actual Annex spaces in the following paragraphs.

³⁵⁰ Doneson, “*The Diary of Anne Frank* in the Context of Post-War America and the 1950s,” 66.

read but is mirrored in spaces like *Daniel's Story*. Although the visitor hears factual content through their audio guide, the space contains very little written information.

Much of what is witness is purely experiential in nature. The visitor inhabits the literal space where a well-known child victim lived out the final two years of her life in fear. In the second room the visitor encounters simplicity. Four photos. Young Anne smiling. A reminder of the innocence lost. Hers is but one story, but the museum, much like *Daniel's Story*, represents all of those like her who also suffered without cause or justification. The purpose of the architecture in all of the spaces discussed above is not explicitly stated, it is rather experienced and performs its goals for the visitor. The architecture tells as much of a story as the audio on the headset.

Although Anne Frank Huis is perhaps most similar in nature to *Daniel's Story*, due to its child narrative, it, much like the other European spaces, creates moments of abstract loss and voided memory to represent the history that surrounds it. From a broader standpoint, *Daniel's Story* is indeed drastically different with its simulated historical spaces, but its individual elements show that Daniel is in conversation with its European and American counterparts.

Tangibility and The Experiential Site

Examining the major Holocaust museums that have been created, for the most part, there is an experiential element present. Experiential learning takes the act of learning beyond reading and incorporates some form of lived experience in order to aid in the learning process from color schemes to train cars. Alison Landsberg deems USHMM specifically an experiential site, which, as she claims, demands involvement from the visitor. According to Landsberg, even though the spaces are unconventional at times with their experiential elements, they are “anchored” by the

historical accuracy of the exhibit.³⁵¹ *Daniel's Story* is equally “anchored” despite its fictional elements, as it is based on factual accounts and housed within the larger USHMM. Moreover, its immersive experience can be seen as an extension of Landsberg’s positive claims about the experiential learning space and its ability to create what she calls a prosthetic memory for the visitor.

In regard to the museum space in particular, Landsberg states that society’s way of learning has evolved, and continues to do so, and the experiential site might be more conducive to the population’s current learning process.³⁵² Landsberg states, “[t]his new form of memory...emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a...museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history.”³⁵³ According to Landsberg, it is the prosthetic memory that is “sutured” to the visitor allowing them to take on a history that is not their own whilst maintaining the knowledge that it is not their own. The history does not belong to them, but the prosthetic memory allows access to the unknown history, so they can begin to understand a concept—here the modernist rupture in human history. According to Landsberg, it is through the use of these spaces, such as USHMM’s PE, and even *Daniel's Story*, and the prosthetic memory they can create, that designers and educators are now able to not only speak to, but also reach a much wider audience, thereby increasing their understanding, and potentially, their involvement in a critical discussion of events. Landsberg thus argues for these specific types of creations and their abilities to engage the next generation in the deeper and more critical conversation of historical atrocities.

³⁵¹ Landsberg is referencing some of the more controversial segments of the museum, specifically the train car that visitors are required to walk through, forcing them to ‘experience’ this site of Holocaust horror. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 131.

³⁵² Additionally, Landsberg notes that much of the criticism - or here hostility, as she describes it- for the experiential form has come from ‘mostly on the part of academics and middle-brow journalists’ Landsberg, 131

³⁵³ Landsberg, 2.

Scholars, such as James Berger, have criticized Landsberg for her claims, stating the only difference between archival and mass cultural forms is “that the latter reaches more people” rather than building a connection with the viewer.³⁵⁴ James Young is similarly cautious about these spaces and the risk of overidentification they pose as the material’s level of relatability increases.³⁵⁵ In so doing, the visitor has an increased chance of relating too heavily with the victims and removing the critical distance needed to understand the historical ramifications of the Holocaust. At the same time, the experiential aspects can allow an access, which for a topic such as the Holocaust, is needed in order to enter an incomprehensible history. *Daniel’s Story* and its child figure perform as an interactive bridge across cultural and historical divides whilst maintaining a heavy focus on the Holocaust.

Daniel as the literal narrator frames the exhibit as a whole and advances Landsberg’s claims, as he guides the visitor through the space and ultimately the learning process. As Walter Benjamin stated in his discussion of the storyteller:

There is nothing that commends a story to memory more effectively than that chaste compactness which precludes psychological analysis. And the more natural the process by which the storyteller forgoes psychological shading, the greater becomes the story’s claim to a place in the memory of the listener, the more completely is it integrated into his own experience, the greater will be his inclination to repeat it to someone else someday, sooner or later.³⁵⁶

It is Daniel’s authority as storyteller and his story’s “chaste compactness” as he speaks from an interstitial space within the museum walls, which initially compels the visitor to learn.³⁵⁷ Daniel, from the beginning, engages and opens up the opportunity to experience the space, his story, in a fully immersive approach in order to begin to understand.

³⁵⁴ James Berger, “Which Prosthetic?” 605.

³⁵⁵ I will discuss Young’s claims further in the following paragraphs in relation to identification cards used at museum sites.

³⁵⁶ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 366-7

³⁵⁷ Elizabeth Wanning Harries’ *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairly Tale* discusses Benjamin’s concept of chaste compactness as referencing the structure of Grimm’s fairy tales and their simplicity.

It is in the tangible moments of the exhibit that Landsberg's work in prosthetic memory becomes most helpful in assessing the artificial nature of the space. Not only does the visitor hear ethereal laughter and sounds of baking in the kitchen, but the exhibit invites the visitor to open the cookie box and see how Daniel's sister, Erika, has written their names on the cookies.³⁵⁸ The plastic barriers around the home's closets even have holes where the younger visitor can physically touch Daniel's soccer ball. As previously discussed, the windows located in the hallway on the November Pogroms show images or activities from pre-Nazi life, such as Daniel and his friends at the swimming pool. Physically opening the window shows what life has become, and the images inside show protest, vandalism, and anti-Jewish propaganda. Rather than making a connection to a book or film, as Landsberg most often discusses, the visitor is invited to make a connection to specific objects and even sounds, in order to aid in the learning process. The visitor does not passively read a plaque next to a photograph but is instead required to engage in a haptic manner with the material in order to learn.

The continuously present tangible aspects, however, are Daniel's diary pages and how he tells the visitor his story. Although many of the pages are posted to the exhibit walls, the space invites the visitor to literally turn the pages of his diary in multiple locations. The pages interact with the story as well and deteriorate in congruence with the family's situation. The pages become darker and the writing more difficult to read. Daniel's growing despair over the family's worsening circumstances becomes palpable. He discusses the changes in the adults in one of his entries from Lodz: "Many people here don't want to remember anything from before. It makes them so unhappy. I want to remember how it used to be" (emphasis Daniel's). Daniel interacts with the visitor on a personal level and allows them into his diary, his life, his history.³⁵⁹ He

³⁵⁸ Visitors are literally invited to do these things as the signs in the kitchen alert them to these moments and what looks like a torn strip from the diary tells visitors to 'Look in the cookie box.'

³⁵⁹ In his final video in Auschwitz, he makes a final call to those watching, reminding them that those who died 'were like you and me.'

shares with the visitor what is normally tucked away from prying eyes so that they can learn—so that others can understand.

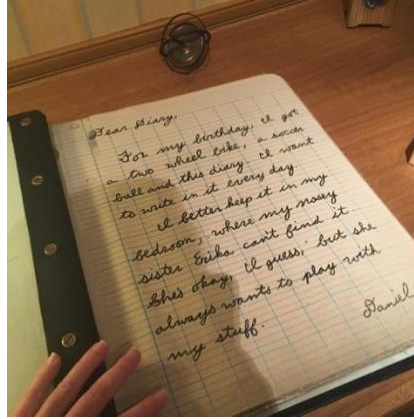


Fig 27: Daniel's diary in his bedroom

MOT employs a similarly tangible and interactive approach in the exhibit *Anne* but in the form of digitally interactive screens. Visitors are asked to leave a personal response to Anne's claims and questions found in her diary. In one instance the quote, "Now the trying part about me is that I criticize and scold myself for more than anyone else does" is projected on one of the tablets. Visitors are asked "What do you criticize about yourself?" Whereas, *Daniel's Story* asks the visitor to engage with Daniel, but maintains a distance and allows them to recognize this was his personal experience, *Anne* crosses the lines of identification James Young so often discusses in his work. Young states, "Imagining oneself as a past victim may not be the same as imagining oneself, or another person, as a potential victim, the kind of leap necessary to prevent other 'holocausts.'"³⁶⁰ Although it is implied in *Daniel's Story* that the visitor sees the similarities between Daniel's family life and their own, *Anne* asks for this identification explicitly.

If one aligns with Young's viewpoint, taking on the role of victim is counterproductive and denies the critical thinking process a learner needs to go through. Landsberg also comments on the issue of overidentification in her work on engaging the past. She states, "In this intense

³⁶⁰ Young, "America's Holocaust," 77.

identification — what I would call ‘overidentification’ — the viewer is not challenged. The viewer, here, gets to try out being someone else without having to grapple with or even understand the distance that separates him or her from that other person. Identification alone, in other words, is quite easy and does not necessarily produce condition and new thought.”³⁶¹

Daniel’s Story with its tangible learning moments creates a balanced space to connect with the fictitious character but maintains that this story is his. He narrates through these moments to tell the visitor his story, so they will tell others.

The experiential nature of these spaces is often criticized, but these moments must be considered for what they are. As Miriam Hansen states in regard to the dismissal of *Schindler’s List* by critics, “it means missing a chance to understand the significance of the Shoah in the present, in the ongoing and undecided struggles over which past gets remembered and how.”³⁶² In children’s museums and exhibitions, tangibility is essential to the learning process. The most visited museum in the United States, the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, is less than one mile from USHMM and contains a children’s section that is solely interactive and primarily tangible.³⁶³ Comparatively, *Daniel’s Story*, also a learning space for children, is lacking in its tangible and inviting aspect. Tangibility is normally a feature of a children’s museum that is expected in the learning process.³⁶⁴

For example, the Dutch National Holocaust Museum was nearing completion in Spring 2018, but it currently houses an installation by Dutch-American artist Willem Vokersz consisting of 172 handmade children’s suitcases and a neon sculpture of a young boy titled *In Memoriam*.

³⁶¹ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 35

³⁶² Hansen, “*Schindler’s List* Is Not *Shoah*: The Second Commandment, Popular Modernism, and Public Memory, 312.

³⁶³ As of October 24, 2017, on the “About” section of Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum website.

³⁶⁴ These are time-tested techniques known as flips and lifts and choices consciously made by the exhibit creators. Slesin. 1993. “Through a Child’s Eyes, History and Tragedy” *The New York Times*, June 3. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/03/garden/through-a-child-s-eyes-history-and-tragedy.html?pagewanted=all>.

The suitcases represent the 172 children, who attended the First Montessori School ‘De Wielewaal’ and were murdered in the Second World War. Each suitcase has a name and age of the child alongside the date and place of their death. Student groups are allowed to rearrange the suitcases how they wish after taking part in an educational program. It is an interactive learning installation focused solely around child victims for school groups and is reminiscent of Daniel’s tangible learning moments.³⁶⁵ The space allows learners to not only interact with the material as in *Daniel’s Story*, but also create their own mini museum by deciding where to place the suitcases. The ability to create, touch, in other words, actively learn, is more reminiscent of children’s museums around the world where physical engagement with material is priority.

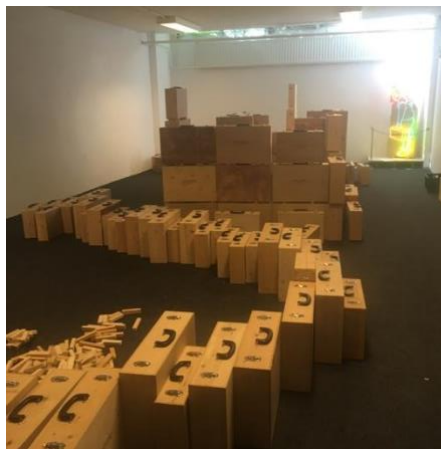


Fig 28: Boxes at In Memoriam May 2018

At the same time, the Holocaust is the mechanized genocide of millions of minorities not learning how rockets fly. Critics thus question the same approaches used for other topics out of fear the visitor, the learner, will have the incorrect response to the information. At the Dutch museum, the visitor interacts with an abstract object in order to create a monument. It does not ask to identify but rather participate in an experiential learning moment.³⁶⁶ The tangible moments,

³⁶⁵ The building where the exhibit, and now national museum, is housed was a former teachers’ training college where the resistance worked to rescue over 600 children from the Nazis.

³⁶⁶ As previously cited in the tangible aspects of *Daniel’s Story*.

such as the windows or the diary, in *Daniel's Story* bring the middle voice into the present moment by allowing narrative and present to collide. It is a physical learning moment where Daniel interacts with the visitor. As both Young and Landsberg have argued, a balance must be maintained due to the sensitivity and uniqueness of the topic at hand. *Anne* engages the visitor far more in its interactive moments by way of its personal questions, whereas *Daniel's Story*, in its narrative, allows for a distance to remain; it is still his story.

The Narrative at Play

Much like *Daniel's Story*, each Holocaust memorial or museum space has its own distinct “narrative,” whether it is heavily emotive via its architecture, an Americans as liberators approach, tolerance, or a child’s understanding of the atrocities as in *Daniel's Story*. The introductory video states that only Daniel and his father survive the Holocaust. The exhibit contains the trials and tribulations of the entire family, but the narrator is Daniel. It is thus a reflective piece told from the child’s perspective via diary pages, much like Anne Frank’s *The Diary of a Young Girl*. *Daniel's Story*, however, is a simplified version of the atrocities with its brevity and lack of biographical nuances (as it is a conglomerate narrative).³⁶⁷ *Daniel's Story* is thus in conversation with its Anne Frank counterparts in both the United States and Europe.

Daniel has recently had a birthday and received the diary the visitor reads from, which is the source of information about all of the family members—their personalities, interests, actions, etc. He is not an omniscient narrator, but his perspective allows a look into the life of an entire familial unit.³⁶⁸ The parents represent a Jewish archetype with their nuclear family, nice home,

³⁶⁷ I do not intend to claim the two are exactly the same as Frank’s is testimony, and the exhibit is about a fictional child. However, as many, such as White, have noted, testimonial literature often contains narrative elements, as they are written for an audience.

³⁶⁸ This technique is much like any narrative—whether Holocaust testimony (Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* and his comments on his fellow inmates to Ruth Kluger’s *Still Alive* and her discussion of her

and family owned store. Through the presentation of the home and Daniel's comments, it is evident that the children are well loved, and their family is not unlike the visitor's.³⁶⁹

Daniel is a young boy who enjoys taking pictures with his new camera, playing sports, such as soccer and swimming, and playing with the neighborhood children. He loves his family and enjoys the time he spends baking with his mother and sister. He reflects on these loving times with his family in his diary, showing the visitor that Daniel is much like any boy or child his age and establishing a connection before the changes to "normalcy" begin. After the implementation of antisemitic laws, Daniel's friends, who previously had no issue spending time with him, no longer play with him. He is not allowed to participate in the sports he once competed in. He is now branded with the yellow star and, much like one would expect, does not understand what he has done wrong.³⁷⁰ Daniel begins to change before the visitor's eyes and becomes increasingly somber as time progresses and the family's situation changes. From January 20, 1933 he writes: "Things are beginning to change. The Nazis are taking over more and more. Many people are following their ways. Now some of my friends won't play with me because I'm Jewish. I feel awful." The childish element persists and surfaces in small moments throughout the exhibit. From within the ghetto, Daniel discusses his family's food rations in a diary entry dated December 1942: "A pot of water with one turnip is cooking on the stove. Turnips. It's all we get. They stink." Daniel's seemingly innocent observation illustrates food was scarce and hunger prevalent and simultaneously how a child reacts when food options are limited. A child, an innocent, transforms as the narrative unfolds and in a surprisingly small amount of square footage,

mother) or fiction (Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* and the often-problematic perception of camp life due to Giosuè's narration). Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 87-108; Kluger, *Still Alive*. Benigni, *Life is Beautiful*.

³⁶⁹ The ability to identify enough to understand is precisely what Landsberg calls for in her work. Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.

³⁷⁰ Daniel's story is thus far more innocent than works such as Ruth Kluger's *Still Alive*, which even in its moments of a child's perspective from a retrospective standpoint is still highly, and at times eerily, observant. Of particular note is Ruth's understanding of the dangers of going to see a film after the antisemitic laws had been passed. Kluger, *Still Alive*, 48.

exemplifies the atrocious nature of Nazi crimes.³⁷¹ The singular child, here Daniel, performs a plural history of Jewish persecution during the Holocaust.



Fig 29: The family's room in the Lodz Ghetto

The museums most similar in nature, based on narrative methodologies, are thus Anne Frank Huis and *Anne* at MOT, but I will first focus on the site, Anne Frank Huis, rather than the simulation, *Anne*.³⁷² The initial rooms' simplicity described earlier is further echoed in the Opetka offices and particularly in the Secret Annex itself. The visitor learns, or maybe already knew, that the Nazis cleared the rooms after they arrested the inhabitants. What remains in these spaces is what was there when Otto Frank, the sole survivor, returned after the war. Only a few items, a book or a shopping list, have been placed into the museum space after being kept safe by one of the rescuers.³⁷³ The narrative centers on Anne's writings and interweaves historical facts which,

³⁷¹ The exhibit is housed within a 5,000 square foot space as noted in a *Jewish Journal* article on October 30, 1997; The building as a whole is 265,000 square feet and the Permanent Exhibition occupies 36,000 square feet of that. This information can be found under "Frequently Asked Research Questions" on the USHMM website as of October 10, 2017.

³⁷² *Anne*'s featured elements will be discussed later in the chapter.

³⁷³ The shopping list is of particular intrigue, as it is the last known handwritten note from the Van Peels. Miep Gies discovered it in the pocket of her coat after they had been arrested, as stated in the museum's description of the item.

by adding knowledge unbeknownst to Anne (movement of other Annex members and testimony from helpers or Otto), bolster Anne's accounts of Nazi occupation.

It is in her room where Anne's voice emerges from within the Annex.³⁷⁴ What remains in the room are Anne's pictures that she pasted to the wall during her years in hiding.³⁷⁵ They are magazine cutouts that Otto brought to the Annex ahead of the move and before Anne even knew about the hiding space. Inscribed in the glass is Anne's diary entry telling her audience about hanging these exact images. Although there is nearly nothing in this cramped and darkened room,³⁷⁶ these few images represent a life of aspiration. Anne made the space hers, a home, in a time of disaster. Her tenacity for life emerges in the images. The Anne Frank Huis, although centered around Anne's entire narrative, shows how a museum, or here a single room, about one person, a child, can convey the historical reality of the Holocaust, and the child figure's ability to perform as primary narrator. The Anne Frank Huis focuses on one child narrative, for obvious reasons, as Anne did exist unlike Daniel. Her life is not altered in the space, a space where she actually lived, to meet the demands of a specific narrative, and the experiential elements are limited to its existing architecture. The overall narratives contain similarities, but the differences between Anne Frank Huis and *Daniel's Story* are defined by the latter's fictional and choral nature.

³⁷⁴ The two sisters, Anne and Margot originally shared the space, but once Franz Pfiffer moved in with the two families who were sharing the space, Margot moved into Edith and Otto's room and Anne shared with Franz. From within the small empty room, the reality of a grown man and a young girl sharing the space, even with only meager belongings, comes to the fore.

³⁷⁵ The pictures are protected now by glass barriers, so that visitors will not touch them.

³⁷⁶ As the visitor walks through the space, all of the windows in the former Annex have black covers over them. An additional layer of authenticity for the visitor, as the windows were blacked out while the families were in hiding.

The Choral Nature of Victim's Voices

Anne Frank Huis and *Daniel's Story* are in stark contrast to the spaces which cover the history of the Holocaust, such as the PE at USHMM or MOT's primary Holocaust exhibition. The plurality of victim's voices is felt throughout these exhibits, as they do not focus on one individual as in *Daniel's Story*. Rather than infer the multiple voices, as *Daniel's Story* has, they make them explicit. However, the singular plural of the child figure is understood in Daniel's narrative, as it draws from both the singular nature of similar spaces, such as those based on Anne Frank's testimony and the plurality of the larger Holocaust exhibits.

As stated in the previous section, the Berlin's Place of Information begins with a basic timeline of World War II and the Holocaust, before delving into focused facts surrounding families and individuals who suffered during the Holocaust. In a finite amount of space, the creators show the mass scale in numbers but allow the visitor to connect with individuals via authentic letters, familial histories, and individual names and biographies. Berlin's Place of Information, however, manages to balance both the larger amount of historical information and the personal. Much like *Anne*, *Daniel's Story*, and Anne Frank Huis, Berlin's memorial shows the level of impact a personal story can have.

The Berlin memorial is in the heart of the city mere steps away from the Brandenburg gate, but the Place of Information is nevertheless "hidden" underneath the stone memorial designed by Peter Eisenman, which opened in 2005 with the museum portion added on to the original plans after the memorial had been approved. The memorial itself consists of 2,711 concrete slabs of various heights on a sloping field in a grid pattern. As the visitor stands on the edge, they are unable to tell that the slabs in the center can reach up to 15 feet in height. The

description markers that are there are discreet.³⁷⁷ The “museum” portion is located underneath the concrete slabs and the entrance is hidden away at the eastern edge of the memorial. The obscure aesthetic continues underground, where the ceilings designate where the slabs are, however, upon entering the Place of Information, the material and message become focused.

As stated in the structural section of the chapter, the Room of Dimensions individualizes the larger narrative by showing letters written to family members in the victims’ final moments. It is a plurality of voices, but nevertheless maintains a singular nature by allowing the individuals to speak to the larger topic of fear and persecution. The Room of Families presents the complicated nature of deportations on a small familial scale. The exhibit provides a biography of each family, providing detailed information about specific members. The visitor learns about life in different countries before the war — how the families earned a living, what the family structure was like, and for some even how they came to live in a certain location. Family origins range throughout the Nazi territory from France to Eastern Europe, and although it is limited to 15 families, the space shows, via a personalized map for each unit, a vast dispersion of the family members after the Nazi policies are implemented. It is not the child figure specifically which speaks here, but it is the family unit within which the child figure is understood.

Families were not sent from one home location to a single camp until they died or were liberated. The Frank family panel in the room alone shows the chaotic nature of the deportation system. Although all members of the Secret Annex were sent to Westerbork after that fateful August 2nd day, they were sent to multiple destinations thereafter. And even though Anne was

³⁷⁷ The memorial has been criticized for this precise aspect, as visitors more or less must know beforehand what the memorial is when they visit. Klein, *Schülerinnen und Schüler am Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Eine empirisch-rekonstruktive Studie*. There have also been multiple instances of questionable interactions with the space from inappropriate descriptions on social media sites to being used as the backdrop for Grindr profiles. These actions even inspired the project “Yolocaust” by Shahak Shapira which attempted to shame social media users, who had publicly posted geotagged photos of themselves smiling or jumping on the blocks to various sites. Shapira superimposed historical photos from concentration camps over the contemporary photos and posted them online. The only way to have a photo removed was to contact the artist directly, as is shown on the Yolocaust website as of August 20, 2019.

sent to Auschwitz, she did not perish there, but rather at Bergen-Belsen. By presenting a complex topic such as deportation as a family story, the singular is able to represent the plural. The historical deportation narrative of one family is able to represent the added narrative layer of children separated from their other family members.

The following room, the Room of Names, grapples once more with the simultaneity of mass scale and personal. The reading of individualized victims' names exemplifies, via soundscapes, the sheer magnitude of Nazi atrocities.³⁷⁸ The space balances between information and experience by focusing on the individual. The visitor does not have to—and could not realistically—listen to every name for the space to achieve its intended purpose. It is a voided space, in that the room only contains screens, which show the changing names and dates, and sound. The individual is the focus here, speaking to the visitor from the void. The concept of the void manifests itself in the Berlin spaces far more prominently than the others with both Eisenman and Libeskind creating deconstructed architecture. Libeskind's structure in the Jewish museum creates a void with multiple voids contained within it and is a driving concept of the museum. Eisenman functions similarly if not as explicitly with its underground conceptualized space. *Daniel's Story* does not create these voids but rather recreates or simulates the geographical locations in order to speak to both the scale and the personal nature of the Holocaust.

Studying these spaces together suggests the ability to tell the same history in many different formats. What *Daniel's Story*, Anne Frank Huis, and Ort der Information do is bring the larger narrative into focus. The child figure, or in the case of the latter, the concept of family and individual, emphasizes the narratives in the spaces. Rather than the more historically accurate and

³⁷⁸ To hear every name and short biography would take approximately six years, seven months and 27 days. According to the Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas website under the "Room of Names" page as of August 20, 2019.

complicated maps that are in the Place of Information, *Daniel's Story* maintains a very linear narrative and includes a basic map in his room to show the trajectory of his family's history. Nevertheless, he shows how Nazi policies progressed. Daniel acts as a singular guide to the complicated topic within the walls of the exhibits. He manifests the voided spaces of the European memorials and simulates a history from a middle space of knowledge and innocence. He is deemed knowledgeable, as the fictional guide situated within the larger institution. *Daniel's Story* and Daniel, as framed by USHMM, does not only perform as a middle voice as his literary and filmic counterparts have, but creates an interstitial space through his historic simulation rather than a void.

Colors and Flooring

It is not only the narrative that opens up access to the interstitial space, but as shown throughout the chapter, the simulated moments, such as color shifts and architectural elements, of the exhibit. The previously mentioned introductory video is played in the initial room of *Daniel's Story* with low lighting and thick curtains to block excess light from the atrium— foreshadowing the exhibit's ultimately devastating conclusion. The exhibit design thus demands the visitor's attention from the very beginning.

The mood shifts immediately from dark to joyful at the beginning of the exhibition, as signs point the visitor to enter Daniel's childhood home. A hallway with painted one-dimensional trees overhead connects the home with the video room and shifts the atmosphere from somber to joyful. The walls are painted yellow and the lighting scheme becomes brighter, emoting the happy familial atmosphere that was Daniel's home before the Nazis came to power. Rather unsettling sounds of ethereal laughter emerge from the kitchen, adding an additional layer of simulation potentially causing the visitor to imagine Daniel baking cookies with his mother and

sister.³⁷⁹ A childhood much like any child's is physically recreated within the museum space and is thematized by the aforementioned diary entries, including ones about his little sister pestering him. Daniel's toys tucked away on the shelves and the images of him playing with the neighborhood children create a representational life for the visitor and open up the narrative to a wholly immersive and sensory experience.

The space's physical characteristics show a slow and then rather swift transition to the atrocities—much like 1930s Germany. In the next hallway, the paint shifts from yellow to shades of dark green, showing a literal darkening of the times, and the visitor learns about the changing and ever more restricting laws Daniel's family is facing. The narrative discusses the family losing “Aryan” customers to having to legally change their names. Erika's passport sits on a table, where the visitor can sit and listen to the radio announcement, with ‘Sara’ now added and a large ‘J’ printed on it in Gothic script. By allowing the child to speak, to represent, the exhibit is able to take liberties with its representational format. By incorporating emotive color alongside tangible moments, Daniel immerses the visitor in his world—emotions and all.

The major historical and emotional shift comes with the November Pogroms in 1938. The lights and colors darken even more, and the destruction of the family's storefront confronts the visitor.³⁸⁰ The start of the hallway represents Daniel's street in 1938—a place where he once played with other children and which is now forbidden to him.³⁸¹ As the visitor continues, the walls are littered with flyers showing the increased perverseness of anti-Jewish legislation and the yellow star makes its first appearance, showing time progressing without announcing it.³⁸² It is in these moments that the space becomes far more immersive than simply experiential. The year

³⁷⁹ I found the cheerful laughter to be one of the many problematic elements of the exhibit. It is an unavoidable reminder of the joyful lives Jewish families led before the Nazis came to power. This aspect will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

³⁸⁰ The space exhibits a recreation of a fake storefront with simulated broken glass along with ‘Jew’ spray-painted in the corners.

³⁸¹ Signs are posted throughout the hallways forbidding Jews from sitting on benches or entering locations.

³⁸² The next noted time shift is about the entrance to “Łódź” which states “Ghetto 1941.”

change is not immediately clear and the time between 1938 and 1941 becomes blurred, as it might have been for a child at the time. The policies are ever increasing, and their rights are fading. Time is not necessarily significant.



Fig 30: Family's storefront with broken glass

After walking through a hallway of luggage, denoting a shift in location for Daniel's family, the entrance to Lodz Ghetto appears. The walls turn to wooden planks, symbolizing the prison like atmosphere of ghetto life. The yet more extensive laws persecuting the Jewish residents are posted to the walls showing a continuous decline in human rights.³⁸³ The exhibit's following room is the family's now single-room home. It is cramped, dark, and dirty and although there are moments conveying a childlike state—the comment about turnips—the childhood slipping from Daniel's grasp is illustrated as he comments on no longer attending school and having to work.

After another hallway containing far fewer suitcases than the earlier one, the exhibit ends in a final location—the concentration camp. A railcar door adorns the wall before the final space appears. "Auschwitz" lies before the visitor, and they learn once more the fate of Daniel's

³⁸³ The laws are posted in English for the visitor's comprehensibility.

family—his father and Daniel survive, and his sister and mother perish behind the barbed wire. It is a small room but is a mini recreation complete with guard tower, barbed wire, and a desolate wintery backdrop. A concluding video discussing Daniel’s survival and his time in the camps plays, and the visitor exits through heavy curtains. They emerge from the simulated history into the rest of the museum.

Anne at MOT performs similarly. As stated, the exhibit was designed chronologically. As her situation changes, so do elements of the space. One wall of the space contains artifacts, images, and information about Anne, and the other wall is composed of stacks of clothing from floor to ceiling, which run the length of the exhibit. In the beginning of the exhibit, the clothing is brightly colored, but as the Nazis close in on the family, the clothing becomes faded and darker. After exiting the “annex” the visitor learns what happened to the family members after they have been discovered in the hiding space, the clothing becomes striped and resembles concentration camp uniforms. As the visitor learns, the space tells them how to feel.

Both are a condensed and simplified version of the atrocities but created specifically for the visitor to fully experience the exhibit.³⁸⁴ The spaces consistently attempt to immerse the visitor in the life of a Jewish family during the Nazi era in Europe, and the exhibit contains specific physical aspects found throughout which further draw their attention to the world surrounding them and thus the wider history of the Holocaust.

Within *Daniel’s Story*, it is not only dimming lights and color that demonstrate the changes to Daniel’s life brought on by Nazi policies, but more intrusively, the flooring style changes throughout the exhibit. Flooring is not typically something a visitor would notice, but these particular shifts draw the visitor’s attention to shifts in the narrative and do so quite successfully. The shifts situate themselves within the experiential exhibit as additional learning

³⁸⁴ I found Landsberg’s discussion on the permanent exhibition as an experiential site to be equally applicable in this space if not more so due to its immersive nature.

mechanisms. The flooring actively demands the visitor take note to the narrative changes around them.

In the first notable instance in *Daniel's Story*, the floor shifts from flat surface to cobblestone as the visitor enters the Lodz Ghetto section. The visitor exits a darkened hallway and enters a recreated and well-lit marketplace. The visitor crosses the threshold intending to examine the boarded-up walls and look for the source of ethereal voices,³⁸⁵ and almost stumbles at the sudden change to faux cobblestone below them. The gaps between stones are precisely large enough to note a difference but still keep an unsuspecting visitor upright. As visitors step onto the cobblestone, they literally leave the streets of “Germany” and enter “Lodz.” Due to this experiential element, visitors are caught off guard by the sudden changes much like Daniel and his family were. The floor shift thus heightens the senses and insists visitors be aware of the space around them. It demands they take further notice of the rooms as they become more cramped and the odds of the family’s survival lessen. The family’s original home was spacious, and Daniel had his own room. The ghetto room, which the entire family now shares, appears even smaller than Daniel’s former bedroom.³⁸⁶ In forcing the visitor to be more aware, the flooring elements mandate an engagement beyond reading facts.

³⁸⁵ This time ‘indistinct sounds of a marketplace’ as indicated on a plaque for the hearing-impaired.

³⁸⁶ The precise measurements are not given.



Fig 31: Lodz Ghetto “ground” in *Daniel’s Story*

As the visitor enters the wintry landscape of Auschwitz, the floor shifts once more from a flat surface to rough stone.³⁸⁷ Visitors look down to see the physical elements of the shift and are once more guided to examine the physical space around them. The Auschwitz room seems to open up and expand as the ceiling drastically rises in comparison to the ghetto room before it. At the same time, however, the space shrinks because of the presence of the surrounding barbed wire fence. Due to the unavoidable shift in flooring, visitors are now more likely to take note of the physical aspects surrounding them. The exhibit is more than the narrative itself. The visitor experiences a physical space, which, concurrently, represents greater issues for those persecuted during the Holocaust. In this final room, the visitor become acutely aware of the vastness that was Auschwitz as well as the all-encompassing fear of being trapped within the Nazi machine.

Much like *Daniel’s Story*, the flooring choice plays a role in the learning process in the Annex of the Anne Frank Huis. The floors begin as slate tile in the introductory antechambers. Once the visitor climbs the small metal staircase into the former warehouse though, they stand

³⁸⁷ The flooring returns to a flat surface in the ghetto apartment.

upon authentic and uneven brick. The shift shows the visitor that they are here. This is no ordinary museum. Much like Auschwitz and other concentration and killing camps, there is a level of authenticity that cannot be recreated in a location away from the atrocities.³⁸⁸ At the same time, I acknowledge that these spaces are still recreations of what they once were. Auschwitz the museum is not the Auschwitz of Ruth Kluger, Primo Levi, or Elie Wiesel, but a difference exists between viewing images of the spaces in Washington, D.C. as opposed to standing on the selection ramp, and here the darkened tiny rooms of the Secret Annex. This brick and this flooring shift alert the visitor to this specific authenticity. They have entered the Opetka warehouse. This was the location of Otto Frank's once thriving business and his and his family's refuge until an unknown person betrayed them.³⁸⁹

The spaces rooted in the atrocity—Berlin, Auschwitz, Anne Frank Huis—do not need to reenact the horror for the visitor. The location itself does that. The Opetka warehouse stones, although they draw the attention of the visitor, are the actual stones. They are a reminder of where the visitor is. The Opetka flooring reminds the visitor of the space's authenticity before they enter the actual Annex rooms. The authenticity of Auschwitz is palpable in its dirt, dust, and still standing buildings. As the seat of the Nazi government, Berlin is its own site of atrocity. The prominent museum spaces within its limits need not use reenactments within their walls because they are seats or spaces of atrocity themselves.

Eisenman and Libeskind, on the other hand, focus on performance of the experiential through architecture, but not architecture that resembles or replicates, but rather structures that remind the visitor of the history. Libeskind's Holocaust Tower or "Voided Void" in the Jewish

³⁸⁸ See note about "Arbeit macht frei" sign in Auschwitz vs. in USHMM and Young's discussion on sites of atrocity.

³⁸⁹ The flooring in Amsterdam truly frames the entire space and announces the authenticity of what the visitor experiences. Before the visitor enters the warehouse, the flooring is large modern grey tiles contrasted by stark white walls. After the visitor descends the staircase out of the hiding space, the white walls and modern flooring appear once more.

Museum Berlin, for example creates a tactile phenomenon of oppression and anxiety. The tower is an isolated portion of the museum that is only accessible from underground. Once inside, the sole light source comes from a slit in the ceiling of the concrete room. When the door closes, the noises from the room outside become extremely muffled, and the sense of being cut off and trapped is intensified architecturally.³⁹⁰ The architecture creates an experiential encounter for the visitor in order to simulate a reaction to space rather than an artifact or a recreation.

Similarly, Eisenman's raised stones at the Berlin memorial expose the magnitude of the Holocaust from the edge of the memorial and its oppressive nature from within. The grid structure was designed to intentionally create a feeling of uncertainty for the visitor. As Eisenman himself stated, "the project shows the instability inherent in a system with an apparently rational structure and the potential for its gradual dissolution. It shows that a supposedly rational and orderly system loses reference to human reason if it becomes too large and grows beyond its originally intended proportions."³⁹¹ Eisenman much like Libeskind does not use nostalgia to create a Holocaust memorial, but as noted earlier, their approach is fitting based on their location in Berlin.

The stones found in the PE at USHMM from Chlodna Street in the Warsaw Ghetto exist to remind the visitor of the historical street and thus the ghetto's undeniable existence.³⁹² In the PE, since the visitor walks over them on a bridge rather than directly on them, they transport the visitor, perhaps only momentarily and artificially, to ghetto streets of Europe. With the stones below and artifacts such as a Krakow synagogue window and the door of the Lodz Ghetto hospital along the wall, they witness a different atmosphere as they read about the many sites of imprisonment. They are not the historical site, nor are they the voids created in Berlin.

³⁹⁰ As described on the Jewish Museum Berlin website as of August 20, 2019.

³⁹¹ According to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe website as of March 26, 2019.

³⁹² According to the USHMM Collections website as of August 20, 2019 they encompass 2,000 square feet of the exhibit.

In *Daniel's Story*, the flooring choices function rather as a device to maintain a visitor's immersion in the child's story. The designers transported the experience of the Opetka warehouse or the cobblestone streets of a European city to the visitor in Washington, D.C. As a space physically removed from the atrocities, the experience is heightened within its walls. They demand not only that attention be paid to the immediate space, but also to the exhibit's factual roots.

Manifestations of an Artifact

Many of the spaces I visited also incorporated the train car into their museums and memorials as a moment of experiential learning. Most notably in regard to this "experience," is the chance to walk through the physically recreated space. The learned experience here is to physically inhabit the "same" space the victims did on the way to the camps and to gain a tangible understanding of how small the space was.³⁹³ When the visitor walks through the cattle car at USHMM, they are able to visualize the space the victims had to share with hundreds of others. Obviously as they stand there very briefly, with maybe one or two other museum visitors, they cannot actually imagine what these victims went through.³⁹⁴ But it is a starting point in understanding this complex topic. IWM lessens the experience in comparison to USHMM, but their gallery nevertheless simulates a cattle car experience. In the London gallery, the visitor walks down a hallway created to resemble the inside of a train car with wooden floorboards and a

³⁹³ The negatives with this method of representation include the misleading narrative of the train car. Although many well-known Holocaust narratives describe the infamous train car ride: trapped among a mass of bodies unable to sit for days on end with no sustenance and often in either frigid cold or excruciating heat. However, this was not the case for all victims. For some the allusion of safety was maintained on the trip. Although cramped, some arrived - at their first camp at least - in a normal passenger car rather than a cattle car. Gigliotti, 261.

³⁹⁴ One incredibly moving addition to the train car artifact is maintaining the company stamp on the side of the car, an approach used at Drancy outside of Paris. The SNCF stamp on the side of the car reminds the visitor of the rampant and high levels of complicity in murdering millions of citizens.

recreated and expanded roof that spans the space. It is, however, far more spacious than an actual cattle car, and the visitor reads informational facts about the transports as they make their way down the hall. The space also includes a train car door set back into a wall halfway down the hallway. The way it is situated allows the visitor to stand next to the car rather than inside and allows them to understand the height from which the victims had to jump (or were pushed and/or pulled) from when they arrived in the camps. Albeit in slightly different scenarios, both spaces thus put the visitor in the victims' role when they encounter the train car. At the same time, confronting visitors with a tactile experience inside the train car presents the chance for over-identification, as both Landsberg and Young have cautioned against.³⁹⁵

These spatial recreations, such as the cattle car and within *Daniel's Story*, Lodz and Auschwitz, can have a profound impact on the museum visitor, but can also create a problematic encounter. Looking at the Auschwitz and ghetto rooms in particular, the space offers the visitor a very defined and limited narrative about the Holocaust. The simulations immerse the visitor which contains the risk of losing a critical distance, as Brown noted in regard to MOT, and yet, it remains a defined space in that it is Daniel's experience.

³⁹⁵ A potential solution to the dilemma can be observed at the new National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) located on the other side of the Washington, D.C. National Mall from USHMM, where they have created an interesting balance between the two extremes. In the section on the lunch counter sit-in protests during the Civil Rights Era in the United States, visitors are invited to sit at a lunch counter replica from the era. The updates to the scenario are seen in the counter itself, which has interactive screens - one for each stool. Visitors are asked questions along the lines of how they would react if an observer attacked them during a peaceful protest, giving options such as reacting with violence or remaining peaceful. If for example a visitor opts to react violently, they are told that doing so would have disrupted the message of the overall protest and that many protestors were subjected to beatings in the restaurants and chose not to defend themselves. What is perhaps most interesting is the follow-up the system provides. After explaining whether or not the visitor's response was fitting for the situation, they are given statistics on how previous visitors responded to the same question, allowing them to think about where their response fits into the general public's opinion. The visitor thus inhabits the physical space the protestor once did, forcing them to decide what they would do in a similar scenario, and then place their response within others' reaction to that specific situation. Although the museum approaches the scenario primarily from the victims' standpoint, the method of representation allows for a distancing effect from the victim, which provides a much-needed opportunity for critical reflection.

Beginning with the ghetto room: although dingy and cramped, the space is far nicer than the conditions many experienced and reported on afterwards. Daniel and Erika must work rather than go to school, and little food is available. Daniel's family, however, is "lucky," or, in the least, less affected than others in that they were the only family sharing the room and each person has his or her own bed. Additionally, the museum created a hiding space in the ghetto room with an illegal radio that the father listens to on a nightly basis. Although it is historically documented that some did have access to illegal foreign radio, this was not standard for those imprisoned in the ghetto. Because the exhibit contains no discussion or indication that owning radios in the ghetto was a rare phenomenon, it thus falsely, gives the impression that many, if not all, had access to outside sources of news.³⁹⁶ As illustrated in many first person testimonies, many did not know, or had only heard rumors, about the concentration camps and what they truly entailed.³⁹⁷ Although not explicitly stated, the museum visitor, could apply the narrative provided here on a more significant scale, thereby distorting the actual reality of many Jews during the Holocaust.

Secondly is the Auschwitz room where winter is used to represent the narrative's final destination or "Auschwitz." The representational choice evokes the feelings of hunger and cold which are often mentioned in Holocaust survivor testimonies. If the reader has visited a former concentration camp memorial outside the wintery months, however, he or she will know that a summery or flowery background can provide an even more unsettling experience than the cold barren winter landscape. The museum, however, has chosen the barren atmosphere of winter, remaining with the better-known overarching Holocaust narrative that the rest of the exhibit demonstrates. The barren landscape is almost stereotypical when discussing Auschwitz, as it

³⁹⁶ I am not arguing that those in Lodz had no access to outside news only that it was not available to all. For more detail see Michal Unger's *The Last Ghetto: Life in the Lodz Ghetto 1940-1944*.

³⁹⁷ Daniel's diary entry as they leave Lodz implies that they knew of the camps. Dated August 15, 1944 he states: 'I see men, women, children, and babies being forced into trains. Now, I know the end of the ride is a concentration camp. Daniel'

provides an additionally dismal element to the already present and well-known truths about what happened behind its barbed wire fences. The effects of cold, however, are efficient, and much like non-diegetic sound impacting a viewer's mood, the wintery landscape indicates the feelings of desperation and abandonment that many felt in the camps.

As noted previously by Young, the museums removed from the sites of atrocity are rooted in the ideas that generated them rather than the history. Due to this removed status, the artifact representation, as a part of the larger exhibit as a whole, works in congruence with the overall goals of the spaces. we can perhaps expect an alternative approach to representing artifacts. The visitor is in fact placed *inside*, as Brown noted those in the recreated gas chamber at MOT are, but they are inside *an* experience in *Daniel's Story* and not *the* experience. The immersive simulated elements of *Daniel's Story* seemingly erase the critical distance those such as Young and Landsberg have demanded, as it invites the visitor into "Auschwitz." However, although a risk, it is Daniel's ability to create an interstitial voice narratively from within the walls which ultimately allows for these simulations. By allowing a singular fictional construct to speak to the historical plural and creating *an* experience out of *the* experience within the historically grounded walls, Daniel's voice emerges in these immersive and simulated moments from in between to allow for the simulation to represent the historical.

Real vs. "Real"

As *Daniel's Story* is a fictional narrative, the use of authentic images to represent the fictional characters throughout is, at first glance, similarly problematic as the artifacts, as it blurs the lines between real victims and Daniel's family. The exhibit informs the visitor during the introductory video that Daniel and his family did not actually exist. Nevertheless, pictures of Daniel, Erika, and their parents exist throughout the exhibit. In order to depict the non-existent

family, the museum has taken photographs, some better known than others, from their own archives, as well as archives from around the world to represent its characters. The photographs add not only an element of authenticity, due to their factual grounding, but also a palpable level of identification, due to their often-familial nature, to the fictitious story of Daniel and his family.³⁹⁸

“Daniel” goes to the pool and plays soccer with his friends. The synagogue the family attends burns after the November Pogroms and German soldiers stand outside their family store telling people not to shop there. A little boy—“Daniel”—stands in the deportation hallway with a star on his back, reaching through a fence to those caught on the other side. These images and their use in this exhibit are a cause for concern as they were, in fact, actual people who existed, suffered, and potentially perished under the Nazi regime.

The presentation is not far from removed from works such as W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* and his use of photographs, often without introduction or reference.³⁹⁹ Much like Austerlitz, Daniel also has a camera, which the visitor first discovers in his bedroom. The photographs blur the lines between fact and fiction, but as shown with Sebald, this is not a new technique. The visitor reads a fictitious narrative, with constant reminders to its factual roots. As J.J. Long notes in regard to Sebald’s text, the alienation effect, which an archival image within a fictional text should have, is lost on the *Austerlitz* reader, as the main character has his own camera and is presumably taking all of the photographs the reader sees on the pages. Daniel is presumably taking all of the photographs that appear in the exhibit, as a way of documenting life and the Nazi atrocities.⁴⁰⁰ The constructed narrative justifies their use, but the blurring between fiction and reality remains.

³⁹⁸ This information is cited at the end of the exhibit with a list of used archives.

³⁹⁹ Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity*, 149-50.

⁴⁰⁰ The role of the photographs is more prevalent in the text version of *Daniel’s Story* where the character discusses his desire to document what is happening to the family. Matas, *Daniel’s Story*.



Fig 32: Photograph of “Daniel” in deportation hallway

I return at this point to the laughter heard in the family kitchen. Rather than recreate fictitious mannequins to connect with, the exhibit uses sound—here laughter and baking sounds—alongside the historical photographs to create a life within the space.⁴⁰¹ The designers have created a fictitious storyline, but seem to acknowledge some limits to Holocaust representation.⁴⁰² The visitor hears laughter and market noises in the Lodz Ghetto section next, but no physical recreations of Daniel or any of his family members other than the photographs exist in the space. The photographs then bring the characters to life. The space is not only a colorful house of fictional characters—it *represents* the actual people in the photographs. Although incredibly unsettling to the researcher because they will most likely recognize the photographs, for the casual visitor, it is yet another opportunity to make them stop and remember that although Daniel did not exist, people like him did.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Mannequins are a tactic used by MOT in its primary exhibit. As a guided tour, the visitor must stop at multiple points to read information and at times watch a re-created scene with mannequins as stand ins for historical characters. The cafe scene, where German citizens discuss the new Nazi policies, can be seen on the museum’s website.

⁴⁰² For a more detailed discussion of the limits of representation see *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, 21-28.

⁴⁰³ Better citation of the sources of the photographs could be helpful in separating fact from fiction, however, many of the photographs in the USHMM online archive cannot be properly cited, as the persons

To develop this concept of real vs. “real” further, the focus returns to Anne Frank as a bridge between the two concepts. Anne appeared in some form or another in almost every single space that I visited for this project. At USHMM’s main exhibit, she is rather ironically hidden in an annex designated to “Western Europe,” where the focus is on those who went into hiding in order to escape the Nazis. MOT, on the other hand, created, as I have mentioned, an experiential exhibit designated specifically to her life and writing, which traverses the line between real and “real” throughout. In the first instance, and much like MOT’s main exhibit, a narrator’s voice, here “Anne,” guides the visitor through the space.⁴⁰⁴ They begin in a hallway with images of Frankfurt, where Anne was born, before the images turn to those of Amsterdam. The exhibit progresses to an underground space where the museum presents Anne’s daily life in Amsterdam and how it slowly began to change under Nazi rule. “Anne” reads aloud from her diary pages, going into detail about the images and artifacts found along the walls. Obviously, the voice cannot be the actual Anne Frank, and it is indeed an actress reading excerpts from her diary.⁴⁰⁵ In order to physically enter the “annex,” which the museum has created, the visitor must open a bookcase in the wall. Within the space “Anne” narrates what life was like in the small space. MOT presents the visitor with a person’s history by way of a simulated Anne. The actual annex, where she and her family hid, is its own museum, and yet *Anne* at MOT still exists. In order to represent what does not exist in Los Angeles, a simulation is created. It is based on a factual person, but in these moments in *Anne*, it is clear it is a simulation.

In stark contrast to the use of images and the child figure in *Daniel’s Story* is France’s Mémorial de la Shoah and the image of the child’s particularly powerful role at the very end of

in the photograph cannot be verified. At times, multiple persons will be cited as families reach out claiming it is their relative.

⁴⁰⁴ “Guide” here references the time spent in the exhibit is determined by its construction. As the visitor enters the space, Anne begins to narrate, describing life as it relates to the item they are currently looking at. When she finishes speaking, the visitor moves to the next section.

⁴⁰⁵ The voice of Anne is in fact Hailee Steinfeld, American actress and musician. MOT website.

the space's primary exhibit via thousands of images. The French exhibition was completed later than many of the other Holocaust institutions discussed here, opening in 2004; however, its methods are still experiential in nature.⁴⁰⁶ The exhibit space is small in comparison to USHMM or the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London, but Paris is comprised of "twelve chronological and thematic sequences tracing the history of the Jews of France during the Holocaust."⁴⁰⁷ On one side of the rooms, the visitor reads information about World War II at the European and global scale, and on the other side of the rooms is historical information about France during the war and their role in the atrocities.⁴⁰⁸ The amount of information given is vast for such a small amount of square footage, and each section provides three different levels of interaction for the visitor: panel presentation providing mainly narratives, window presentation with images, and albums or interactive panels with physical artifacts. The visitor thus decides at which level they wish to interact with the material: reading texts, viewing images, or physically interacting with the space. After the penultimate darkened space with black walls designated to facts and figures, there is a small room covered floor to ceiling with images of children, 3,000 to be exact, backlit with a soft white light. These are the Jewish children deported from France to the east between 1942 and 1945 and taken from Serge Klarsfeld's book *Le mémorial des enfants juifs déportés de France*. In the final room, the museum's educational methods transition from high levels of information to prioritizing emotion.

The shift from dark to light is powerful. Unlike other installations, which may end on the positive note of liberation, relocation, or post-war success, this particular shift to "light" is not

⁴⁰⁶ A memorial to the unknown martyr, however, has been present on the site since 1956.

⁴⁰⁷ According to "The Permanent Exhibition" page of the Memorial de la Shoah website as of August 20, 2019.

⁴⁰⁸ The museum structure fits the new national narrative of complicity between Vichy France and the Nazis, a narrative which began under the political reign of Jacques Chirac beginning in 1995. Since then the Mattéoli Commission was founded which aids in researching the legacy of Vichy France. Dreyfus. 2001. "France Confronts the Holocaust" *Brookings*, December 1. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/france-confronts-the-holocaust/>.

positive.⁴⁰⁹ At Mémorial de la Shoah, the visitor encounters a brighter and softer light, but at the same time, they are surrounded by thousands of children's faces—innocents betrayed by citizens and neighbors after the Nazis took France. The lighting conflicts with the information conveyed—happy innocent smiles vs. facts of betrayal. The child figures on the walls speak to the magnitude of the information in the preceding rooms and the individual effects on Nazi policy.



Fig 33: Final room at Memorial de la Shoah

⁴⁰⁹ As some have critiqued, focusing on liberation *could* lead to the false understanding that the end of the war meant immediate freedom and reconciliation. As many know, antisemitism did not end with the war. Many Polish residents faced actual attacks when they attempted to return to their homes after leaving the camps and chose to remain in Displaced Persons (DP) camps, which were former concentration camps. Although social groups formed in these spaces and life was markedly better than the one led under Nazi control, relocating those that survived the camps was not an organized process. Some returned to their former homes, but many immigrated to new countries in order to restart their lives.

Daniel's Story uses similar photographs but rather than attaching historical victims to their image as in the Paris museum, *Daniel's Story* remains fictional. At the same time, it is contextualized by its home within its larger institutional home—USHMM.⁴¹⁰ USHMM as an organization provides an authenticity to *Daniel's Story*.⁴¹¹ The visitor knows the images within the exhibit are authentic in nature and are being used to create a narrative. Much like Anne's actual diary, the child constructs a narrative on a personal level that applies to the larger history at play. Here though, the space becomes more immersive than solely experiential, as the visitor physically enters the world of the child. The images used are not Daniel and his family, but that is known and recognized throughout the narrative. And much like in Benigni's film, Daniel's voice blurs the lines of fiction and reality creating a middle voice manifested in the interstitial space of the larger narrative of the institution which surrounds it.

Conclusion

The child figure in the museum space confronts the ultimate depravity of Nazi policy. The ultimate disregard of life. Seeing the child within the larger historical narrative illustrates how deep the hatred for the "other" went. The Nazi actions against adults were inhumane, but the child's clothing and shoes amongst the adult pieces stand out significantly. Like the red coat

⁴¹⁰ Or Georges Didi-Huberman's issue with the altered images of the woman outside Crematorium V when the alterations are not acknowledged within museums and exhibits. Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All*, 34.

⁴¹¹ According to the museum's website they state, "the Museum provides a powerful lesson in the fragility of freedom, the myth of progress, and the need for vigilance in preserving democratic values. With unique power and authenticity, the Museum teaches millions of people each year about the dangers of unchecked hatred and the need to prevent genocide. And we encourage them to act, cultivating a sense of moral responsibility among our citizens so that they will respond to the monumental challenges that confront our world." The museum presented itself with a daunting task, and even though it has faced fierce criticisms, it strives to meet its goals. USHMM website on the "About the Museum" page as of August 20, 2019.

amongst the pile of dead bodies in *Schindler's List*. The child is not only an entrance into a topic, but also an awakening or a reckoning.



Fig 34: Display of child photos and belongings at Auschwitz

As Marc Anderson's work on the child figure, as mentioned in the dissertation's introduction, inadvertently pointed out, the child figure feels overwhelming because of their perceived innocent status. The visitor feels (or should) for all who suffered, but as a visitor stands looking at a mass of images, the child's face, as Anderson's statements show, seems

prominent.⁴¹² The child's angelic face is activated to give access to the "sensory experience," a concept explored in the film chapter, but within the museum space, it is an access to information with the risk of overidentification and loss of critical distance. Children, either the construct of a perceived innocent like the fictitious Daniel or historical child figures like Anne Frank, could, however, be a potential answer to Young's dilemma about overidentification. The child figure as is seen in *Daniel's Story* has the ability to create a wholly immersive simulated history within an established institution; a potentially problematic narrative if created without the institution's grounding.

According to Landsberg, a distance should indeed remain, and it is through simultaneous connection and recognition of the "other" that her own prosthetic memory is achieved."⁴¹³ The "trees" outside of Daniel's home are painted and the broken windowpanes from the November Pogrom street are not made of real glass, creating an obviously simulated space. Daniel does not try to recreate the voided spaces of Eisenman and Libeskind in Berlin or the historically grounded spaces such as the Secret Annex nor does he confront the visitor with a notion of plurality as in the Paris exhibition. It is through the simultaneous singular plural of his narrative and his engagement with the museums and memorials from around the world that an archive of commemoration emerges through the child figure. Although *Daniel's Story* is an immersive space, it has the ability to manifest not only an educational prosthetic memory, but it shows the figure's ability to access the interstitial space of commemoration. He speaks to the visitor from within a perceived world of innocence and illustrates the figure's ability to navigate an immersive space as institutions advance to digital approaches.

⁴¹² Anderson's article on the child figure in the American remembrance of the Holocaust incorrectly claims the child figure is overly present at USHMM in the PE. Anderson, "The Child Victim as Witness."

⁴¹³ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 9

The child figure reemerges within USHMM's walls and its digitally focused secondary and temporary exhibit at USHMM, *Americans and the Holocaust*.⁴¹⁴ The museum attempts to bring the complex refugee narrative to the personal level, with nine personal narratives to choose from.⁴¹⁵ One of the options listed is the Frank family.⁴¹⁶ When the visitor engages with the screen and selects the "Old Friends" bubble, digital copies of the letters Otto wrote to acquaintances and family members in the United States appear, including the owner of Macy's. The letters provide evidence of his attempts to gain access to the United States for all of his family members. As the visitor scans the documents, they can zoom in or out on a specific text, and each click allows them to learn more detailed information about the person or group. The visitor scrolls through the documents, physically engaging with the "material" at hand, moving from the Frank family to a young girl in Pennsylvania, who successfully convinced her parents to help her Jewish pen pal's family come to America. As institutions progress to newer methods of representation, such as digital interactions within the exhibits, the child figure's presence continues to guide the visitor through the discussion, continuously balancing in its interstitial space between the sensory experience and a prosthetic memory.

⁴¹⁴ *Americans and the Holocaust* is the institution's current large-scale temporary exhibition. This particular space within the building is converted every two to three years into a new exhibition focused on a very specific topic. And does not educate solely on the Holocaust, but rather focuses on America's role and their response during the rise of Nazism, World War II, and the Holocaust. Unlike its long-established upstairs sibling, the permanent exhibition, the secondary exhibit provides multiple interactive moments for the visitor and learner. From video footage to digital screen interaction, the exhibit allows for a tangible learning experience throughout its entire space.

⁴¹⁵ In the immigration section, where the designers have created a condensed graphic installation paired with a digital element to discuss the complex topic of immigration processes from the time. In this portion of the exhibit, the combination of a stagnant graphic of suitcases to show scale with the digital representation of Jewish immigration out of Europe provides an impactful explanation as to why many did not "just leave."

⁴¹⁶ A visitor can select a specific family or individual person and learn about their attempts to immigrate to the United States and subsequently whether or not they were successful.



Fig 35: *Americans and the Holocaust*

Conclusion

“The representation of the thing is not the thing itself”
-Hayden White⁴¹⁷

From the written page to the cinematic screen to the physical space of the memorial or museum, child figures have the ability to provide a representation of the historic void that is the mechanized genocide of the Holocaust. As the quote above states, it is naturally merely a representation. I do not claim that the child figure is the singular answer to the decades long question of *how* to represent the Holocaust, nor do I believe there is or can be a single manner in which to represent the incomprehensible acts of Nazi genocide. But, as Hayden White has argued, among others, the middle voice is one way to begin to represent and ultimately avoid repeating the reprehensible history. As White stated in a work on narrative discourse, “Nothing is better suited to lead to a repetition of the past than a study of it that is either reverential or convincingly objective in the way that conventional historical studies tend to be.”⁴¹⁸ The question on how to

⁴¹⁷ White, “An old question raised again,” 396

⁴¹⁸ White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, 82.

continue to represent the Holocaust remains an ever critical one as we move farther away from the event.

The child figure, as I have argued, provides one possibility to access this middle space of narration and thus begin to represent the modernist event. White's notion of a middle voice to represent the modernist atrocities manifests itself in the literary, filmic, and museum child. Their position between knowing and witnessing can allow for a more nuanced approach to Holocaust representations, challenging a standard narrative and even allowing depictions of spaces considered taboo. The child figure permeates all three forms of media discussed here and can impact the representational modes similarly and yet remains unique to each mode.

The literary child speaks from the pages of the novel or memoir, interjecting its alternative perspective and often perceived innocence into the language on the page. The figure can both simplify with their perceived innocent nature and, at the same time, complicate in the literary realm by challenging the adult perspectives surrounding them. Its presence can provide the initial appeal to learn and discover more as shown through their ability to reach iconic status in the modern world (Anne). At the same time, as one reads Anne's own writing, we see a complexity perhaps not anticipated due to her age. The child emerges in Kluger's text in sudden tense changes or in Sebald's through memory interjections. The figure complicates here. What the reader anticipates is not what is. In order to bring the reader a middle perspective, the figure ruptures the narrative through linguistic turns. Child Kluger and Austerlitz interject themselves and interrupt the adult voice. They complicate the standard narrative by showing, in Kluger's case, a knowledge that a child is not expected to possess. And in regard to Sebald, the child in his quest to uncover his unknown childhood memories is able to represent the larger unknown history.

In film, once more an initial seemingly superficial simplification of the atrocities presents itself in Benigni and Herman's work with the child's gaze. But rather than a simplification in the

manner of trivializing the content, the confrontation with the child's face, the encounter with the other, as Levinas discussed, has the ability to produce a moment of reckoning which cascades into the narrative perspective. Benigni's film provides an alternative perspective on the Holocaust through the child's eyes. Once on the screen, the child figure impacts more than linguistics, but can rather change how an event is perceived through visual representation. Benigni allows Giosuè to show the viewer his version of the events. Herman's, however, allows for middle perspective of Nazi complicity, but problematically blends the narrative with a Holocaust child figure. In Nemes's production, the child figure exists only as an idea, and yet he drives the narrative and imagery shown and *represents* the taboo.

The child figure in *Daniel's Story* provides a narrative interjection in the spatial sense. Its relation to the physical structure surrounding it and its conglomeration of museal techniques allows for its singular plural and often cartoonish nature. His singular fictional narrative represents countless historical children's experiences. *Daniel's Story* speaks from its interstitial position to the larger museum and memorial. Its ability to communicate with the larger historical aspects of a Holocaust museum points to the future of Holocaust memorialization. The child figure can play a vital role in the digital shift, as it continues to impact the narrative.

Researching the child figure in digital approaches to the Holocaust is my future project, and Anne Frank is once more at the forefront of this research. Her annex has already been digitized in order for visitors around the world to access it. What once was reserved as part of the Amsterdam trip, is now entered from Indiana, Cairns, or even those a short way away in Germany. "Visitors" do not experience the streets outside of the antechamber rooms of the museum, but they are nevertheless allowed to enter her world for over two years from the comfort of their home or classroom. "Visitors" to this digital world interact with the space from a computer screen. They click on doors to enter rooms, or on play buttons to watch short clips about the artifacts which appear on the screen. The key difference between the virtual and the

actual space though lies precisely in the artifacts. As I mentioned in the museum chapter, the Annex in the Anne Frank Huis is empty. It is as it was the day Otto Frank returned from the camps. The virtual space, however, shows the Annex as it was when it was inhabited by its residents. The beds are in their places and made up. Peter's suits and bike hang on the walls of his bedroom. The board games are on the table waiting to be played. Digital technology allows you to "enter" a representation of a world which no longer exists. It can increase access to a topic in a manner that is relatable. Technologically adept users know how to navigate a virtual space, and it is a familiar approach with a perhaps unfamiliar topic.

Digital learning resources in Holocaust representations and memorialization are slowly being integrated into spaces, made available to educators for their classrooms, and can vary widely. Visitors and learners are able to experience history differently with these newly implemented tools. They are able to "experience" it in the same manner that they learn about other topics.⁴¹⁹ As shown in the works of Shimon Attie, by using technology, the world can see what once was. His work "The Writing on the Wall" projected pre-World War II photos of Jewish street life onto spaces in Berlin. Attie allowed spectators to see a world that once existed and was destroyed through hate. Other artists and designers have taken this idea one step farther and implemented augmented reality into spaces. Sites in Poland allow visitors to hold their phone

⁴¹⁹ One of the major developments has been computerized recreations of Holocaust survivors, the project known as Dimensions in Testimony, which allows learners to interact with a survivor without said survivor needing to be present. Learners ask the "survivor," or digital rendering of an actual survivor, questions about their experiences, and the "survivor" answers. The survivors shift in their seats, look around, even scratch their noses, as they wait for the next question. Naturally the interactions are not perfect, and the simulations have been "broken" by experts in the field, who have asked them complex questions the creators did not anticipate. At the same time, however, it is a method of preservation for when they are gone. Their testimonies exist of course, but this allows those more outspoken to continue to speak to students and learners long after they are gone. These recreations continue to grow in number, and as of 2019, 15 interviews exist, according to the most recently updated version of the USC Shoah Foundation website on the initiative. They have appeared at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, Houston's Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Skokie's Holocaust installation. The survivors' original video testimonies still exist and will forever be useful in discussing the Holocaust, but this approach provides a level of "interaction" which, creators claim, will soon be lost.

up to a geographical location and see a building that was previously there and learn about what happened. Augmented reality has even been introduced in the Tower of Faces at USHMM, where visitors are able to scan the photos with their own devices in order to learn more information about the people in them. We can use the technology already at hand to learn about a complicated topic. The next step is virtual reality where people are able to immerse themselves in a world while located thousands of miles away. As the Annex has already been adapted for virtual online access, the foundation also created a virtual reality option where you can physically move through the space while wearing a headset. I myself have visited “Auschwitz” from Washington, D.C., gone to Majdanek with Pinchas from New York, and explored the Secret Annex from Egham.⁴²⁰ The Holocaust has been updated for this next generation.

Digital for the digital’s sake is of course not the answer to the growing question of how we *continue* to represent the Holocaust in this evolving world. Todd Presner’s work, *The Ethics of the Algorithm* shows the complications that can arise in a digital environment associated Holocaust research, as there is a risk of reducing a victim to “quantized units and structured data.”⁴²¹ At the same time, he argues for digitization’s benefits, as it may allow for lesser known testimonies to be heard, as they become more easily searchable. As Alison Landsberg argues, it is in these moments of digital learning or “translation” from the originals that we can create the distance needed for learning—the distance Young feared would vanish in USHMM. Landsberg states, “there is and should be a fundamental tension between the original and the translation, the past and the present. This is similar to the oscillation between the experience of proximity and the sense of distance that together are conducive to historical thinking and the production of historical

⁴²⁰ The most powerful I have yet to experience, however, is the virtual recreation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was a computer rendering of the space - greyscale with each building a white block and no fences - used by the authors of *Geographies of the Holocaust* during their research.

⁴²¹ Presner, “Ethics of the Algorithm,” in Fogu, 170.

consciousness.”⁴²² In this challenge to oscillate between proximity and distance, the child figure has the ability to access the middle voices and spaces—in the attempt to keep the historical consciousness of this most horrific modern event alive.

⁴²² Landsberg, 153

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- British Association for Holocaust Studies (BAHS) July 2018, Leeds, England, “*The Problematics of Child Storytellers in Holocaust Film: Giosuè and Bruno’s Distorted Camp Imagery*”
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