

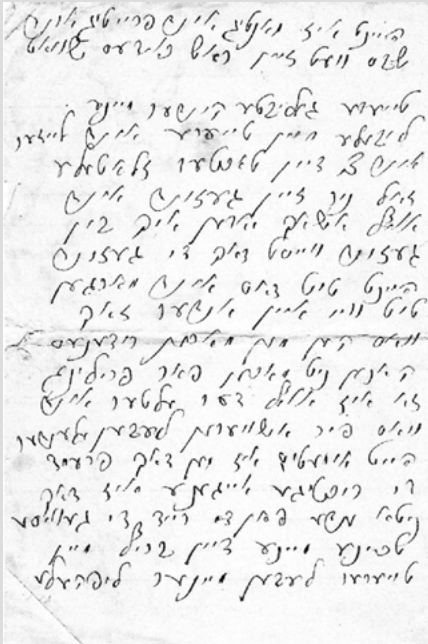


Fig. 1: A letter from Hannah-Rebecca Ississ Plen, Lithuania, 1941

"טייערע, געליבטע קינדער, מיין לעבן, מיין טייערע ליבעלע און לייזר, זלטקעלע די קליינניקע, מיין זייער, טייערע קליינניקע"

(Yiddish: "Dear, beloved children, my life, my dearly beloved, and my dear Lazer, tiny little Zlatkele, who is so dear to me"). When I first encountered the letters, my mother had kept and asked that we only read after she passed away, I discovered. . . All those years I always said that in my generation we did not have grandfathers or grandmothers. And suddenly I discovered that I did have a grandmother, not only before but also after I was born... And what a grandmother! In those letters – although she could not see or meet me, and knew it was impossible and that she never would – she nevertheless wrote to me and described me, described how she imagined me grow up, imagined my first word, my first smile, my first baby steps. . .

We, who were born in the war but far away from it, as well as all the generations born since, possess a knowledge that is partly imagined knowledge, a knowledge that has been elaborated. We did not go through the terrible experience of the Holocaust. We heard and read about it. We heard about it from parents or grandparents who survived, and it was preserved as a sort of act of memory, a pool of knowledge located somewhere between real and fiction – in fantasy, in stories, something that may or may not have happened. And *that* is something that I often hear from the Second generation, that we are bearers of memories which we do not even know. . . and when we are fortunate enough to find a real piece of evidence, like a letter describing the story, then fiction becomes reality and enters the flow of life as an extremely positive experience.

Yolanda Gampel

Memory of the Present

Preface

The ability to remember everything is the same as the inability to remember something specific; remembering too much or remembering nothing at all both constitute the same disorder. What's important is forgetting, which is why we need a mechanism that can make us forget, both at the rational and emotional levels—an entire world whose past is doomed to extinction. A world without a past can become poor, empty, and atrophied. The tension between the past and future is fertile and necessary. It is that tension that creates our state of mind as individuals and as a society, driving our aspirations and our evolution. Memory is a principle of unity, of continuity; it is a bridge that ensures the link, the connection between the subject and his experience.

Blanchot defines the essence of memory and oblivion after the catastrophe of the Holocaust. He makes a distinction between knowledge of the disaster and knowledge of a disaster and defines the boundaries between the self of a witness who experienced the disaster and the listener's unharmed self. While the knowledge about the disaster coils around the event's subversive essence, knowledge of a disaster confirms the disaster's intrusive influence. "No one looks directly at the sun" was Aharon Appelfeld's reply when asked why he did not write directly about the horrors of the Holocaust. Struggling to extend a bridge into an inaccessible world is the common denominator of all attempts to describe, talk about, show, or understand the Holocaust. It is a nearly impossible, and yet necessary bridge between remembering and forgetting.

The impossible traumatic nature of the Holocaust revolves around the struggle between the impulse to touch the core of that burning experience and the instinct to preserve oneself and keep one's distance; distancing makes it possible to represent the situation. How can one transmit the metaphor, which the Nazis turned into reality? Historic or quantitative descriptions are not enough to define the previous century's calamity of mass destruction; rational explanations and linguistic descriptions are required, too. Therefore, to transcribe history, a different thinking about memory is required, a new path.

Family and People, Memory, and History

I have lived to the age of 74 knowing that I belong to a generation that started its life together with Nazi genealogy. The Nazi genealogy started in the form of genocide and deprived part of my generation of the emotional experience of grandparenthood. Of course, the Nazi's thinking and iniquities had nothing to do with emotional well-being; all the Nazi thinking wanted was to eradicate the Nazi's fear of the Jews, which made them feel uncanny. Their goal was to annihilate and completely erase the existence of the Jews from the face of the earth and leave no trace behind them, to literally make them disappear in a cloud of smoke; but the vestiges keep incarnating in the universe in different and surprising ways.

Jewish tradition instructs: *"And on that day you will tell it to your son, 'This is done because of what the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt'.* Therefore, on the face of it, Jewish culture is imbibed with history. Indeed, dealing with the collective memory is part of a regular ritual that is carried out year after year, repeatedly, cyclically; but the collective memory preserved inside that ritual is transformed, each time, into a continuous present in which the community lives anew, time and again. This is not about the real past or its documentation.

Jewish-American historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi studied the nature of Jewish historical consciousness in his famous essay *Zakhor*. At the heart of his text lies the paradox he wishes to decipher:

Although historic meaning has always greatly preoccupied Judaism across generations, for Jews, historiography [i.e., the detailed investigation of historical events] was, at best, an accessory [to other studies] and for the most part played no role at all; accordingly, while the memory of the past has always been central to the Jewish experience, its main preserver was not the historian.

It was only at the age of 74 that I first read the letters my mother had kept for me, from my grandmother and my mother's sister, describing in detail all that happened to them and to other members of our family who remained in Europe. That was when I first discovered that in my early childhood, until the age of 2, I did have a grandmother, who carried me in her consciousness, in her thoughts, and her heart. Her lullabies enveloped me from a distant time and place.

I think my mother was that bridge without words who transmitted to my consciousness what had transpired in the Holocaust. She had the words and the emotional experience, but she could not speak them out or convey the experience to me in a symbolic way. Her hugs, her gestures, and her mother's songs were passed on to me. It may be that this was when my journey started, a journey of over forty years of research and work with adults who were children during the

Holocaust, and with their descendants. I also think that this is what led me to live here, in Israel, and later also to work with Palestinian colleagues.

Here in Israel, Holocaust survivors were able to find continuity, a link – not always conscious – to their parents' wishes. Here they also found protection, since in other places in the world something seemed to have been severed. The fear that people might find out they were Jews kept existing almost immanently, and outside of Israel, they did not have the enveloping protection of a framework that provided a place for and a recognition of the past, of the legacy that had been targeted for annihilation. Indeed, this mental envelope allows us not only to *survive* but also to try to *live* in this country, despite all its complications, vicissitudes, and wars.

For many, giving birth to children in Israel is a way to prove to those who committed genocide that generations continue, that we exist despite everything that happened; and the traditional “you will tell it to your son”, is a call to transmit memory from generation to generation, was now endowed with horrific contents: Auschwitz, Uprooting, Shoah. We are a generation whose legacy is a profound historic revolution.

I wish to focus again on personal memory: these bits of memory accentuate how personal memory is on the border of history. The nurtured history will be assimilated in that unidimensional static collective memory. This history does not settle for mere symbolic stabilization but presumes to do much more, it proposes to embed itself as a memory that ensures redemption. Yerushalmi places *memory* and *history* as opposed poles on the time continuum; and at the end of his book, he emphasizes how the detailed study of Jewish history – i.e., Jewish history as a stand-alone object of research – constituted a new type of approach. The historiographic approach knowingly sets itself opposite to the Jewish memory which is embedded in worship and tradition. The modern preoccupation with history arises from the continued decay of that collective memory, following the collapse of traditional Jewish ways of life in modern times and the great fall experienced regarding their past. The main and fundamental Jewish experience in the twentieth century is that of uprooting.

Structuring Memory, Structuring Identity

I now wish to relate to memory based on my personal experience as a psychoanalyst and researcher who, for 40 years, dedicated a great deal of thought to the question of dealing with the memory and oblivion of those who children during the Holocaust were – and with situations of social-political violence after the Shoah.

Psychoanalysis has focused on those aspects of memory that provide structure to our lives in conscious as well as unconscious ways. Memory stems from an attempt to connect various stimuli and sensations, which are scattered in the sensory apparatus and converge in the present moment via action. We may therefore define memory processes as a structuring of meaning in connection with the other. This means that structuring a memory also means constructing an identity, as in constructing a conscious subject who connects with the scattered components of the past and creates a narrative out of them.

Taking a testimony is an attempt to carry out a critical act; it is an act of taking ethical responsibility, whose purpose is to lead to a process of acquiring and structuring meaning; an act that aims to overcome unconscious resistance. What is the place of psychoanalysis in the transference which is activated by such a testimony? Are we worthy of being entrusted with guarding those memories? Psychoanalysis uses language, speech, and words that operate on memory and in turn, give rise to other memories. This means that during therapy, a process of remembering evolves in the transferential space, and events that were forgotten, distorted, or modified by history, time, imagination, and the narrative – arise again. The words we say, the speech we use to tell the story, are expressive of our subjective state, our being. We may see psychoanalysis as a historical-graphical anamnesis in a movement of interpretation and appropriation. In this process, the memory's envelope is re-woven and re-built, in a way that ensures the self's sense of continuity over time and identity. This process revives forward-looking anticipation and preparation for the future.

When survivors seek psychoanalysis or come to give testimony to a historian, a social psychologist, a journalist, or a legal practitioner, they are engaged in seeking an almost impossible knowledge about themselves. Giving testimony is a modality of remembering, but remembering is a discovery of the self and an effort to rebuild a continuity in life. This movement leads to facing the inevitable failure of such an effort, which is impossible no matter what. Author Charlotte Delbo says: "I have a feeling that that self who was in the camp was not mine, it's not the person you have here in front of you. No, that is entirely unbelievable. And everything that happened to that self, the one from Auschwitz, has nothing to do with me now. It is not my concern. They are so different, the deep memory and the common memory". In such situations "the right thing to do" loses its relevance and the question arises if we are not in fact in search of an understanding that can no longer be reconciled with our other perceptions, if our search does not lead us not to the connection we sought but, on the contrary, to severance. The disaster of the Shoah cancels many formulas we used to believe in as Jürgen Habermas put it, Auschwitz destabilized the foundation of our lives and altered the principle of life's continuity in history.

How can we connect interpersonal processes with the building of collective stories, such as myth, mythology, or history?

It is an endless intergenerational memory, given to constant transformation, where each story keeps changing all the time; it is hard to fully grasp this occurrence and write it down as history because then we would need to write a historic memory that changes each day, by the place or time we look from.

Memory and the Shaping of the Present

Are these topics currently relevant? Are they more relevant today than ever, with a nuclear threat lurking overhead? How must we relate to our present, given the current political situation and state of war? How are the forking paths of the relations between Israelis and Palestinians narrated today, and how will their explanations and meanings be transformed in the future? Is the topic at hand only about memory, remembering, and oblivion? Do our questions about memory and the past mask the dark side of the present? We know that such darkness exists in our time; do we have the courage to look that darkness in the eye? Do we dare think of our current time and capture the dot of light in the darkness, that light that comes toward us but also keeps getting away, as we feel like we are witnessing an occurrence that must not be missed or taken for granted? For we are walking on a tightrope: our response may come prematurely, or belatedly, not yet, or not anymore. Currently, studying the present to live in indicates that what's past is, to a certain extent, the shadow of the hypothesis of the present. To live in the present, in the *now*, means *doing*, which comprises action, work on that which is present and takes place here and now. In Hanna Arendt's words: doing, and that which makes the human subject human.

The fissures that appear between the past and the present help us define temporality, the nature of different times. The present and the future are not just a repetition and transformation of an experience we already experienced, but something new which in turn keeps renewing every day. In the new present, there is no connection with memory. For example: David came for a session after he stayed in New York on 9/11. When he greets me, he declares that there is no connection between the fact that he saw the collapse of the Twin Towers at breakfast, through his hotel room window which was facing the scene, and the fact that he was born during the Holocaust. A thinking whose object is the present time, as Janine Puget already maintained some time ago, takes us away from a world of *representation* and leads to a world of pure present, a present that is facing us, a world of *presentation*. Our being in a state of present presence causes us to mo-

mentarily let go of the representation. As psychoanalysts, we see David's statement as a denial, a defense against the pain he felt in the past – a view that comes from a world of concepts that is based on linear, deterministic thinking. We interpret his words as an expression of the difficulty to relate to the present as it exists in front of us, and to painfully look with eyes wide open at the terrible current event.

Auschwitz and Hiroshima showed mankind that death and violence belong to the most intimate parts of our identity. These monstrous and painful memories left a load behind, a burden that destroys not only victims' but also uninvolved bystanders' perception and representation systems. Those memories create a legacy that causes violent identifications in those who were victims, and in their children. Thus, survivors' children do not have their memories of the Holocaust but an inner reality that is created in them of the loss their families suffered, a reality of suffering and humiliation, which has been deposited through intergenerational transmission not only in the survivors' children but in all of us.

Let us now relate to a type of memory that shatters into smithereens, a memory that is transmitted from generation to generation and monstrously scatters in time and space. Borrowed from physics, the term "radiation" is a metaphor for the monstrous effects of social-political violence; radiation makes us think of violence, cruelty, the terrors of war, and different forms of social violence; it allows us to perceive the war generated by those words and images which the media bombard us with daily. The memories of those who were children during the Holocaust exist in their everyday reality, which contains some representations of those times; but they also have frozen, sealed aspects, which they cannot express in words, and which constitute radioactive vestiges that cannot be transformed into memory. These aspects are not necessarily repressed but it is almost impossible to turn them into representations or to invoke their ghosts. Psychoanalysis, however, has focused on those aspects of memory that, consciously and unconsciously, give structure to our lives – and on the sensory memories that are created out of the attempt to gather and connect stimuli and sensations that are scattered throughout the sensory apparatus and communicate in the present through action. The violence and torture used in the Holocaust destroyed man's ontogenetic development and brought him back to a state of primordial helplessness. The fissure undermined the stable conceptual constructs of order and values in the inner and in external worlds.

How can we perceive, grasp, or understand the "radioactive nucleus"? It is an endlessly accelerating process in which anything can be given shape or disappear as soon as it appears. The "radioactive nucleus" is a form of "virtual emptiness" that contains all the possibilities for change, constantly appearing and disappearing. We might say that the "radioactive nucleus" is like being and non-being coex-

isting side by side, with a bias in favor of non-being, destruction, and extinction. Destruction and extinction may produce a destructive experience characterized by a movement of appearing and disappearing, a movement that disappears as soon as thought tries to capture it. We must still learn how the radioactive remnants penetrate consciousness, which permanently operates to maintain its organization and find areas and forms for self-expression. Radioactivity may move in unexpected ways, without touching anyone. Radioactive identification is made of external elements that were assimilated, fixated, and internalized as a false reality or as unconscious fantasies, and could suddenly be validated in moments of extreme traumatic tension. When carrying this metaphoric radioactivity in one's psyche or body, as a trace, as the nucleus of identification, or in any other form, one may become trapped in it in a way that may not allow him or her to live.

Memory, Fiction, and Narrative

The Holocaust confronted victims with such excessive emotional experiences that it caused the disintegration of thought processes and left the survivor wordless, speechless.

Between silence and words, there is a space that no testimony can cross, which may be also the clash zone between ethics and survival. In Eli Wiesel's words, "The Shoah is a sacred domain, no one can enter and then suddenly realize that you had to be there to understand. No one can ever understand, but we nevertheless must keep trying". Primo Levi adamantly claimed that the compulsive need to testify has a twofold goal, one that is looking backward, and one that is looking forward. One goal is to try to answer the terrible question "is everything that took place in the world of the concentration camps decipherable and translatable"; and the second goal is to find an answer to the question "What can every person do to prevent such atrocities from occurring again in the world, which remains saturated with harsh violence".

How can we find the right words to speak about the Holocaust? One of the dangers related to speaking about the Holocaust is related to how the listener hears things, how he receives the survivor's discourse. The listener's silence has the power to determine the meaning of the discourse. Once the listener assumes the role of the speaker, the power becomes shared, but, only to a point. Listening to the survivor is an asymmetrical dialogue in which the listener is always silent in the face of such horror. The listener is left almost wordless.

But leaving the survivor imprisoned in his or her frozen narrative implies a no lesser danger, of the formation of a sadistic scene expressed in a visual hallucination.

To avoid such terrible imprisonment, the survivor must walk the narrow path between the original terror and its representation in words. Psychoanalysts can help the survivor who takes this path to build an alternate thinking process, which would serve as an intermediary space between the horror and the act of looking at it.

Bion writes: “Psychoanalytic jargon was being eroded by eruptions of clarity. I was compelled to seek asylum in fiction. Disguised as fiction the truth occasionally slipped through. Fiction provides shelter from the barrage of basic assumptions. The seed of an idea may strike root and grow out of the grasp of answers, examples, and scientific facts”.

In the absence of evidence, the literary narrative operates as a space where a process of mourning can be facilitated, thus challenging history’s amnesia. I think that not only writing but also cinema, painting and any other type of fiction are like a reexamination of the negative impact of Holocaust materials, intended to bring into existence a sort of “counter-memory” that allows us to discuss the political, social, and psychological aspects or the aesthetic value of loss and trauma. All that is the result of a display that operates through various languages and narratives and allows to find and reconstruct loss through a variety of mourning rituals. Fiction in the broad sense, and more specifically texts, operates at several levels. At the first level, every author, in his or her perspective, chooses and relies on different forms of repetition of the loss, by selecting textual themes and constructs. At a second level, the figure, the character, the drawing, the photograph, or the picture recreate the mourning pattern as the author faces the loss and the mourning process again. That is to say, the characters, the paintings, the photographs, and the pictures reconstruct a textual mourning pattern, which confronts the loss and the process of mourning. Finally, the products – the novel, the film, the play, the painting – are a way, or at least an attempt, to force the author, the reader, and the viewer to confront the circumstances of the loss. Over the years it turns out, through research, writing, and clinical work, that the history of the wound of the Holocaust remained, in many cases, a scar; the history of the wound, which remained unrecognized and defiant, forces an understanding, through literary or metaphorical language, which allows to listen to the story.

Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoa* (France and UK, 1985) is a 9-hour long documentary on the Final Solution, in which he interviews a variety of figures – Nazi officers, passers-by, and survivors. In these interviews, he focused and relied almost entirely on the power of personal memories as they manifested in the interviews themselves – direct and spontaneous memories, as opposed to written and edited memories. Lanzmann’s work consists of detecting and reconstructing distant destruction; it is an act of construction and deconstruction, testimonials that grasp, coax, and eventually lead to disillusionment.

The Holocaust is a legacy of absences. Lanzmann explains that “everything started with absences. I knew a lot about the Shoah but I had not been deported so I had to start from scratch, from nothingness, to find the images of nothingness. Using words and images, Lanzmann created presence out of absence. *Shoah* brings life into memory; through art, he brings back to life a language that the Nazis took away and revives the ability to speak and transmit the truth, even those truths that cannot be represented or spoken out. Lanzmann was ethically committed to carrying out this mission, dedicating 10 years to writing, shooting, and editing his film. The faces, the places, and the views are a tapestry of words and pictures that keep coming out of an interplay of images, screaming voices, and silence, an interplay of concealment and nameless dread. The film is nine hours long and contains no melodrama or pathos; the journey towards memories, the journey of the memory, continues. The film does not contain a single archive picture from the periods it depicts, as it shows the extermination sites as they are today.

I wish to briefly mention the Israeli film *Waltz with Bashir* (Israel, 2008), an animated journey exploring the depths of Israeli director and scriptwriter Ari Folman’s consciousness, which brings up that which has been forgotten and repressed from the days of the first Lebanon war. When the repressed event of the massacre is shown on screen, the traumatic memory makes its appearance, and the animated characters turn into real photographs of real living, screaming, suffering people.

Memory can also be seen as the structuring of the presence of that which is absent. That which was destroyed survives as a space, an essence, some sort of “being” in the present. Memory allows for that which was destroyed not to disappear from consciousness. The disappearance of that which was destroyed in the Holocaust is also the disappearance of memory. To cancel something – a state, a sensation, a social link, a people – is not enough to destroy it since memory will conserve and reconstruct the missing parts in the present. To maintain the disappearance another presence is required to fill the absences, the void. The absence remains, then, and opens the way for the historian or social scientist to read and interpret the present through the lack, the void, the absence, through that which could not exist.