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### “Adapt or Resist?”

*Narratives of Implication and Perpetration in the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam*

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PARA LOS NAVEGANTES CON GANAS  
DE VIENTO, LA MEMORIA  
ES UN PUERTO DE PARTIDA  
E. GAIBANO

Edited by Ihab Saloul, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso  
and Cristina Demaria

# Questioning Traumatic Heritage

Spaces of Memory in Europe  
and South America

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Questioning Traumatic Heritage

# Heritage and Memory Studies

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# Questioning Traumatic Heritage

*Spaces of Memory in Europe and South America*

*Edited by*  
*Ihab Saloul*  
*Patrizia Violi*  
*Anna Maria Lorusso*  
*Cristina Demaria*

Amsterdam University Press

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# Table of Contents

Introduction	7
Questioning Traumatic Heritages and Spaces of Memory <i>Ihab Saloul, Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso and     Cristina Demaria</i>	
1 Constant Consensus Building	21
Art and Conflict in the ESMA Museum and Site of Memory <i>Alejandra Naftal</i>	
2 Why Matter Matters	39
Doris Salcedo's Material Memorial Movements <i>Mieke Bal</i>	
3 Trauma and Allegory	61
Truthfulness in Fact and Fiction and Making a Private Archive Productive <i>Lars Ebert</i>	
4 Hypermnesia and Amnesia	81
Remembering (with) the Body and Post-Conflict Memorials and Architectures <i>Andrea Borsari, Giovanni Leoni</i>	
5 Art and Memory: Magdalenas por el Cauca	101
<i>Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril</i>	
6 "Adapt or Resist?"	125
Narratives of Implication and Perpetration in the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam <i>Mario Panico</i>	
7 Entanglements of Art and Memory Activism in Hungary's Illiberal Democracy	145
<i>Reka Deim</i>	

8	Memory, Art and Intergenerational Transmission	173
	Artistic Practices with Young People in Memory Sites in Argentina	
	<i>Lizel Tornay, Victoria Alvarez, Fabricio Laino Sanchis, Mariana Paganini</i>	
9	Representing the Trauma of Colonialism in Museum Exhibitions	195
	Cape Coast Castle and the International Slavery Museum	
	<i>Sarika van Slooten</i>	
10	The Dogma of Irrepresentability and the Double Bind of Holocaust Memory	215
	<i>Valentina Pisanty</i>	
11	Entangled Memories of Colonialism and Antisemitism	225
	The Scandal of Taring Padi's "People's Justice" at Documenta 15 (2022)	
	<i>David Duindam</i>	
12	Objects Despite Everything	243
	Testimonial Objects Between Memory and Trauma	
	<i>Patrizia Violi</i>	
	Index	253

## 6 “Adapt or Resist?”

### Narratives of Implication and Perpetration in the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam

*Mario Panico*

#### **Abstract**

The main goal of this chapter is to investigate how the Verzetsmuseum in Amsterdam, using micro stories of ordinary people, thematises Dutch responsibility and implication in the violence committed by the Nazis during the occupation of the country in the Second World War. In particular, using the category of the “implicated subject” as proposed by Michael Rothberg in his seminal work on this topic in 2019, I consider the “meaning-effect” that the museum proposes by narrating not only the lives and the anti-Nazi actions of resistance fighters but also the ones of those who made different choices, directly or indirectly helping the Nazis. In the first part of this contribution, I discuss the “interrogative tone” adopted by the museum, aiming to emphasise the ethical and moral dilemmas (e.g. “Adapt or Resist?”) that preoccupied the Dutch people during the Nazi occupation. In the second section, I deal with how the museum exhibits micro histories and personal lives to represent and discuss a collective event. In the last part of the chapter, I consider the way in which the perpetrators are represented in the museum and what kind of risks are involved in “quoting” the perpetrator when his life is told in the same space of the victim.

**Keywords:** Implicated subject; Verzetsmuseum; victims and perpetrators; Dutch resistance; responsibility.

## Between Macro and Micro Histories

What happens when a museum dedicated to the memory of an anti-Nazi resistance gives voice not only to the fighters and victims in that movement but also to the Nazi perpetrators who were responsible for such crimes? What kind of effects underlie the syntagmatic relationship obtained when juxtaposing the life of a young Jewish girl and that of her Nazi killer? What kind of reflection on public and national memory does that museum propose, by choosing micro-lives and micro-perspectives to narrate collective trauma and suffering? This chapter addresses these questions in relation to the new displays of the Dutch Resistance museum, the *Verzetmuseum*, in Amsterdam. Since its opening in 1984, the main objective of the museum has been to remember the brave actions of the Dutch Resistance fighters during WWII and to recount painful, quotidian life in the Netherlands under the Nazi occupation. After having been hosted for many years in the former Lekstraat Synagogue, in the southern part of the city, the museum was relocated to the Plancius building in the district of Plantage in 1999, in a site that was previously used as a Jewish cultural and singing centre. It is named after a geographer, Petrus Plancius, a leading figure in the Dutch golden age.

In these pages, I limit myself to the new display, inaugurated in December 2022. In it, the more generally historical narrative, focusing on the collective experience and the crucial events of the Second World War, dedicates much room for the exhibition of micro, personal stories. Indeed, what makes this museum very interesting in debates on the role of memory sites in the construction of accountability and past awareness is precisely the fact that it mixes macro history with micro histories (Ginzburg 1992). In other words, it gives space to the lives of ordinary Dutch people, stressing, in the narration, the moment in which they decided to do something “apparently banal” for or against the occupiers and, consequently, compromising (or not) the safety of persecuted Jews and minorities or the activity of the resistance fighters.

The macro historical frame is “portrayed” using six videos (one at the beginning of each section or “chapter” of the museum), which provide the visitor with information on the central events in the history of occupied country through the use of documents and animated reconstructions. For example, they focus on the unexpected invasion of the Netherlands by the Nazi German troupes on 10 May 1940; the *februaristaking*, the railway men’s strike organised in February 1941 against the occupiers; the rounding up and deportation of Jewish people; and the liberation of the country by the

Canadians. It is worthy of note that the museum's videos and displays also weaves not only the Japanese occupation of colonised territories in Indonesia (at that time called Dutch East Indies) into its collective narrative, but also the Indonesian War of Independence which, also following international pressure on the Netherlands, resulted in the liberation of the country in 1949. A further emphasis on the macro perspective is also provided by additional information in the display texts about the lives of the Dutch people involved in the narration. For example, the story of Wim Henneicke (1909 – 1944), a man who was paid by the Nazis to capture Jews, is linked to a more general context: "Jew hunters across the country captured a combined total of around 15,000 Jewish people in hiding"<sup>1</sup>. This demonstrates how personal narratives are mediated in the museum, not only as prototypical stories but also as representative of certain attitudes and behaviours that were rooted in Dutch society of the time.

For what concerns the micro stories, these are recounted with the help of photographic material (portraits of the people involved), material objects that function as indexes and archaeological traces of the life being told, and written descriptions of how and why people decided to adhere or not to Nazi orders. The museum gives space to different kinds of lives: the courageous story of Willem Arondéus – a gay artist from Amsterdam who helped to plan and carry out an explosion at one of the offices where the Nazis registered Amsterdam residents, including Jews who would later be transported to concentration camps. But also Elisabeth Keers-Laseur – a radical member of the The National Socialist Movement in the Netherlands (*Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, NSB*) who supported the Netherlands being annexed to Germany, sharing in the pursuit of the Nazi idea of the pure Aryan race. If in these two cases the narrative positioning of these subjects is evident in the

1 Another interesting example of this interrelation between the individual life and the reference to the collective context is the one of the artist Mary Dresslhuys (1907 – 2004) who decided to register her theatre company with the Chamber of Culture as imposed by Nazis. The caption accompanying her photo reads: "Our initial reaction was: don't do it, stop. We give up!", said actress Mary Dresslhuys when her theatre company was required to register with the Chamber of Culture, founded by the German occupiers. Jews were excluded from membership. Anyone who didn't register would no longer allowed to work. Mary soon decided to register anyway. She explains: "No one had any money. We had an entire company to maintain." Her theatre group could no longer perform pieces by modern American or English writers, but was otherwise unaffected by the Chamber of the Culture. Mary had no regrets: "When you're responsible for so many people, you don't have much of a choice" *42,000 artists ultimately registered with the Chamber of Culture. A small minority refused.*

All subsequent quotations from the museum are reproduced word for word from the relative displays, unless otherwise indicated.

dynamic of memory, what I find particularly interesting is the space given to people, actions and beliefs that are not easily ascribable to the “good vs bad” binarism. This is the case, for example, of Jacob Lentz – a public official who helped the German Nazis to implement a very complex system of identity cards, therefore making the falsification of documents very complex for resistance groups. In addition to this personal history, the museum tries also to construct a “justifying” but not absolving narrative, highlighting how Lentz had been an advocate of the identity cards even before the occupation, and that when he was sentenced to three years in prison after the War, “he remained convinced that he had done nothing wrong”.

Through the display of these kinds of lives, the museum sets up an interesting narrative operation: it avoids nationalist romanticism by representing Dutch citizens not as a united, heroic body that stood up against Nazism, but as a partitive unity composed of individual subjects (or small groups) with their own political ideas, aspirations and fears, and with their own (often problematic) idea of solidarity. Moreover, this (much discussed and criticised<sup>2</sup>) choice continues to fuel the debate on the indirect responsibility of the non-Jewish Dutch in the extermination of the Dutch Jewish community (cf. Ensel and Gans 2019) and, consequently, questions a certain public imaginary whereby all Dutch people were part of resistance groups and unanimously opposed by the German Nazis. It is not my aim to conduct a historical reflection on the public and academic debate on that national narrative (on this topic, see for example, Hansen and Zarankin 2011). Adopting a critical perspective on the study of memory museums (Williams 2007, Violi 2017, Sodaro 2018), my goal is to study the rhetorical and aesthetic strategies implemented to effectively thematise implication, focusing in particular on the potential risks of these choices when they are adopted in the representation of less ordinary people: the Nazi perpetrators.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first, I deal with what I call the museum’s “interrogative” tone, which aims to emphasise the moral dilemmas faced by Dutch people during the occupation. Then, following the debate on the implicated subject (Rothberg 2019), I consider, how on this occasion, this category is preferable to that of the bystander (cf. Hilberg 1992, Cesarani and Levine 2002, Cole 2005, Morina and Thijs 2019) because it avoids the risk of semioticing the actions of non-perpetrators and non-victims as too passive. In the second part, I deal with how the Verzetsmuseum “exhibits” lives that are considered prototypes of more general behaviours, trying to represent

2 See, for example, the debate summarised in Siegal, “Nuance Is Difficult When It Involves Nazis, a Museum Finds”.

the collective through specific individuals. In the same section, examining the personal stories related to the post-war period and the Indonesian War of Liberation, I discuss how the museum interprets the category of the implicated subject not as an ontological feature but as a contextual characteristic, mainly related to the situation in which the person acted. In the third part, my reflection then shifts towards the representation of perpetrators. Taking a specific section of the museum as an example, I observe how giving voice to the point of view of one individual subject can produce a risky levelling of responsibility when dealing not with ordinary citizens but with those subjects who had an active responsibility in the persecution of Jews and Dutch resistance fighters.

## Dilemmas

Upon entering the museum, the visitor reads on a panel that the rooms will present the *dilemmas* that common people faced during the War<sup>3</sup>. The word "dilemma" in the welcome panel preludes a pivotal narrative isotopy, a sort of semantic repetition that will be present throughout the museum in various ways. It refers to the morally complex doubts and choices faced by ordinary people in the Netherlands, especially in relation to the persecution and deportation of Dutch Jews. As I already mentioned, these were quotidian choices that were not directly related to the committed violence. In other words, they were not orders given by perpetrators but actions with no apparent collective consequence, such as signing a document to declare that you are not Jewish so as to obtain a much-needed scholarship, knowing, however, that this will mean that Jewish students will be excluded.

From the very first room, the museum adopts an interrogative tone to frame the choices of the Dutch people it talks about. There are questions written on the signs directing the visitor's path, and on the glass boxes containing the people's pictures and objects asking, for example, "Adapt or resist?" (Fig. 30), "Cooperate?", "Remain in office?", "Register with the Chamber of Culture?", "Signature of a scholarship?". The meaning conveyed by these apparently open questions – the answers to which evidently do not not necessarily have criminal consequences – serves to represent, on the one

3 The "welcome" panel reads as follows: "In this exhibition, one hundred personal stories paint a picture of occupation and resistance in the Netherlands during the Second World War. Over the course of six periods, we take you back into the past. Each period starts with a film. The emphasis lies on the dilemmas that people faced under the dictatorial occupation. The stories illustrate that resistance was not an easy choice. The exhibition does not provide a complete picture of the people and events of the resistance".



Figure 30 One of the “questioning” signs directing the visitor’s path in the museum (photo by the author)

hand, the pervasiveness of Nazi rule during the occupation, but also, on the other, to layer the national narrative about the war with a different kind of subject than the resistance fighters (whom are nonetheless also valued and commemorated by the museum). The reference is to those people whom it is difficult to frame narratively, precisely because they challenge the binarism of good vs evil, presenting themselves both as non-perpetrators and as non-victims, let alone as resisters. They were ordinary Dutch people who, by putting their priorities first and perhaps not recognising at the time the problematic nature of their choices, indirectly contributed to the extermination of 75% of the Dutch Jewish population.

This way of reflecting on national responsibility with such a great number of non-perpetrator and non-victim subjects is particularly innovative for a memory museum. Worldwide, there are many museums that represent the figure of the “bystander” (see Williams 2007), but this case in Amsterdam reinvigorates the terms of this process, overcoming the unrealistic passivity usually attributed to the bystander and centring on the agency of the people. Doing so, the *Verzetsmuseum* integrates the category of the implicated subject, as proposed by Michael Rothberg (2019) into the debate on museum studies.

For Rothberg, the implicated subject tries to go beyond the memory triangle of victim-perpetrator-bystander, focusing not so much on the ontological

characteristics that define these subjects in dynamics of violence, but on the "positionality" they have when some their specific actions are enacted. In this sense, the focus is entirely on responsibility and on the privilege of those who were indirectly part of the violence. In the introduction to his book, Rothberg writes:

The implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less "actively" involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the "passive" bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators (Rothberg 2019, 1).

Developing a theory of the repercussions of the implicated subject's assumed agency, Rothberg implements a new perspective on the category of the bystander, rather than on the perpetrator and the victim (cf. Knittel and Forchieri 2020). This is especially the case when he deals with the synchronic implicated subject, who unlike the diachronic one, acts in the present in which the violent situation takes form. Given these premises, it is evident how the Verzetmuseum can thus be defined as a platform that theorises the implicated subject and the relationship between personal choice and collective accountability. Indeed, it focuses specifically on the impact that the choices made by some Dutch people had on the traumatic history of the country, proposing a reflection on responsibility more than complicity or culpability. The museum thus does not treat implicated subjects as the appendix to a more general war narrative or as a story that is inferior to other subjectivities (perpetrators and victims) in the dynamics of violence. Even though the "tone" of the museum is not accusatory towards the Dutch people it named, the visitor can construct their own judgment in relation to what is told. "Entering" into the lives of others and getting to know their moods and reactions to the occupation puts the visitor in an interesting position: one can either carry out an exercise of identification, wondering what they would have done in that same situation, one can set themselves up as a sanctioning subject: they can decide, according to their own experience and value system, whether they considers a choice to be understandable or absolutely unacceptable. The museum, in this sense, leaves the viewer

free to make one's own interpretation and judgment of the lives of the implicated Dutch people chosen to narrate the Nazi occupation. This aspect can be further stratified if one considers the nationality of the visitor: if it is a Dutch person, that sense of identification can certainly be followed by diachronic implication, as one recognises the potential to directly inherit the history and the responsibilities that are being articulated. Providing the possible receptions of the museum to the empirical visitor and expanding the discourse it proposes, the goal is not to "construct the antagonist", i.e., another ordinary perpetrator in the national discourse on the war, or to judge actions of people we know very little about and who live in very precarious war times. The museum is instead more committed to challenging a de-responsibilising narrative according to which there is an indistinct collective mass, a sort of passive crowd, that lies between perpetrator and victim. It tries to do so by configuring the grey zone of the "ordinary people", not as a blurred collective but as a partial unity composed of highly recognizable and visible subjects with names, jobs, agency, and priorities.

### Exhibiting the Implication

Considering the great number of lives that the museum showcases, it is impossible, on this occasion, to render the polyphonic complexity of the site. As such, I have opted to concentrate on one display, as a main case, a display that tells a story of collaborationism with Nazism and a subsequent repentance. I refer to the space that in the site is devoted to a policeman, Jo Karelse (1910 – 2006). His story is told in these terms:

As a policeman, Jo Karelse had the task of detaining Jews. He received this note with names<sup>4</sup>, addresses and instructions. He was told to check the number of family members and their luggage, take the key and lock the house. Did he dare refuse? Anyone who refused would lose their job, or worse... And would it help the Jews if he refused? Jo decided to go.

The scenes were often heartbreaking. In his report, he wrote: "Mrs Eisendrath was so upset that she collapsed and fainted". Two days later, Jo received another list. Once again, he followed his orders.

In 1943, police officers were required to swear an oath to Hitler. Jo refused and joined the resistance. Throughout his entire life, he blamed himself for having followed German orders.

4 The reference is to the piece of paper exhibited alongside his personal photo.



Figure 31 The display which tells the story of Jo Karelse (photo by the author)

Dutch police officers also followed other German orders, but they often used their position to help the resistance as well. Over 300 were killed for working with the resistance.

This is a meaningful case as it combines collaborationism and the anti-Nazi Resistance, allowing the visitor to reflect on the fact that very often resistance fighters became such after a personal journey of confrontation with the occupation. Heroism is not an ontological trait, but a narrative characterisation given to actions that were undoubtedly courageous, but also the result of different needs, experiences, beliefs and contexts. The story of Jo Karelse, like many others in the museum, challenges stereotypical memory characters to stress the human variability of actions that can be driven by opportunists or noble feelings. It does so with no hasty justification, without using the argument that everyone decides to behave according to their own ideologies or intentions, but instead recognises that a lack of solidarity the lack of recognition of the privilege of one's position in a historical moment can lead to a disastrous social consequence. This "ordinariness" of the implicated subject is also expressed through the setting of the story. As the image below (Figure 31) illustrates, the main visual element accompanying the written texts (in Dutch and English) is a black and white photographic portrait of Karelse wearing his uniform.

This photograph is quite different from those usually displayed in memorial museums. It is likely the photograph was taken to give an official but not serve as representation. The policeman's gaze is not turned towards the viewer, as in the case of victim photos (often taken by the victimizers themselves) or perpetrators (depicting officers in uniform, perhaps doing

their jobs) (Violi 2022). This seemingly irrelevant aspect reveals a lot about the visual construction of the implicated subject as a common and ordinary man. Usually, in a museum, the photo of a victim evokes the moment that precedes death or a happy memory of life before the war (or trauma). In these two cases, the photo can therefore transmit sorrow (in the first case) or a sort of “nostalgia” for the unrealised future (Panico 2019). For an image of a perpetrator, on the other hand, museums often use the ID card-style photograph to transmit austerity and symbolise the bureaucratisation of violence. On this basis, a photograph of a man who is not the victim and who is smiling – maybe an image taken to be placed in the living room, as a manifestation of pride – undermines this logic, in the same way that the implicated subject likewise troubles the “good vs bad” memory rhetoric. Indeed, the picture contributes to the actorialisation of the implicated subject as a “quotidian” person, presented neither as a frightened subject about to die, nor as an algid, emotionless beast. The implicated subject is visually proposed as someone who can be recognised as familiar by the visitor, as closer to them (cf. Ricœur 2000). In other words, while questioning the polarised narrative of the demonisation of the perpetrator and the heroisation of the victim (Giensen 2004), providing this less binary reading forges the possibility for the audience to recognise (but not justify) certain familiar features in the implicated subject.

In addition to the personal portrait, a group photo of a Dutch police force is also presented. This picture returns us to the individual-collective dynamic I discussed earlier. The photograph places the individual subject in a collective group to which he belonged. This serves to consider the implication also from a quantitative and not only qualitative point of view, insisting that the action of these subjects was socially replicated and not isolated. The last showcased object is a piece of paper with the names of Jewish families written on it, like those the policeman evicted when carrying out the Nazis’ orders. A simple piece of paper takes on a testimonial configuration that is particularly important for the museum’s objectives. Besides being an index, the paper can also be regarded as a trace, conclusive and traumatic proof of the subject’s responsibility. It is exhibited as a document of implication that leaves no room for alternative interpretations to that of responsibility. In a metaphorical manner, one might suggest that, with no direct communication implied between the gazes of the photographed policeman and the visitor, an I-you dialogue is realised by the yellowed sheet, whose names “stare” at the visitor – who, in the meantime, has moreover become aware of another mechanism of implication and who reads what Jo also read and enacted some time before.

As I already mentioned, the museum has been criticised because, according to some of the people who visited it and commented on the experience, it does not give much space to the heroism of the resistance, and it adopts a justifying attitude towards those who do not take a firm stand against the Nazi perpetrators. Although it is true that space is taken away from the stories of resistance, the proposed operation is very interesting and does not belittle the stories of courage. Indeed, as we read in the last sentence of Karelse's description – written with a different lettering to visually indicate the switch from the private to the collective – many Dutch policemen indeed helped Resistance operations, and Jo himself refused to swear an oath to Hitler. Moreover, the fact that the Resistance does not always have narrative centrality does not detract from the work of the resistance fighters, but places the narrative on a more realistic dimension of the past, in which those resisting were united in groups that had to operate in a polyphonic social fabric that was also made up of collaborationism and complicity with the occupiers.

This way of narrating the implicated subject produces at least two effects. First of all, it allows the visitor to decide how to judge and how to emotionally deal with the various actions that are mentioned. The museum does not give a specific or explicit sanction: in Karelse's case, for example, the fact that he "only" obeyed orders (a quotation that echoes Eichmann's 1961 justification of his actions) is not judged as positive or as negative, it is just left as an open question that is not addressed to the visitor (a question that is perhaps impossible to answer, given the impossibility of reliving the phenomenological experience of the subject) but merely represents the internal emotional state of the represented. As a second effect, this narration makes explicit the very clear and violent consequences that a lack of solidarity – in favour of an apparently legitimate self-interest – can have. This point is moreover quite evident in another story, of Mary Dresselhuys (1907 – 2004), an actress who, during the occupation, decided to register her theatre company with the Chamber of Culture, founded by the German Nazi to control artistic activities in the country. As the panel affirms, she is just one of the "42,000 artists [that] ultimately registered with the Chamber of Culture". This balance between singular life and plural actions makes clear that violence against humanity should not be understood merely as the action of a single individual, but as the complex result of a dense network of behaviours that are apparently small and unconnected, but which helped to enable the real crime.

In lieu of a more definitive conclusion to this discussion of the implicated subject in the museum, it is important to mention that the fluidity of this

context-dependent category is rendered in the last part of the site, which is dedicated to the early post-war period, Dutch colonialism, and the Indonesian War of Independence. An emblematic example is the story of Jan Kuiper, a young Dutch man who went to Indonesia after the liberation of the Netherlands to fight against the Japanese. When he arrived, Kuiper discovered that the Japanese had already retreated from the islands, and the celebrating Indonesian people were also fighting for the liberation from the Dutch coloniser. Through this person, the Verzetsmuseum makes visible and legitimises the Indonesian people's struggle for freedom and the trauma caused by Dutch colonialists, pointing out the contextual and complex dimension of the implication – i.e., that it can affect a person even when they have been a victim in a different situation. The box dedicated to Kuiper's thoughts and his story reads:

“So then I went to Indonesia anyway, with the idea that we were needed to restore peace and order”. But after a while, Jan began to have doubts. “Maybe I'm fighting on the wrong side?”

When Jan arrived home in 1949, the street was festively decorated in his honour. But when he looks back himself, he says: “History will know us as war criminals.”

The last section of the museum is entitled “And now?”. The visitor enters a section where portraits of contemporary people are projected on the wall with a sentence summarising their idea of resistance. Some of these stories relate to the Nazi occupation, others to contemporary oppressive contexts. On the adjacent wall there are blank sheets of paper, on which the visitor can write something to answer the question written on the wall: “How about you?”. At the end of the visit, after showing many lives of others the museum invites the visitor to have one's own say. It has a specific aim: although apparently only dealing with the synchronic implicated subject, the museum also invites the visitor (who, in most cases, was born after the Second World War) to reflect on their contemporary positionality, thus questioning their own diachronic implication, with a focus on the events of the past but also on those of the present.

### Quoting the Perpetrator

Having seen how the museum enacts an interesting profiling of the subjects involved, I now turn to look at how it deals with the representation of Nazi

perpetrators and NSB officers. Those people in the museum who could be considered the highest ranking perpetrators with positions of power, including political power, during the occupation are the Dutchman Anton Mussert (1894 – 1946), leader of the NSB; the Germans Emil Rühl (1904 – unknown), agent of the Sicherheitsdienst, and Karl Berg (1907 – 1949), SS-Schutzhaftlagerführer of Kamp Amersfoort<sup>5</sup>. In this instance, I do not focus on the portrayal of Wim Henneicke, defined as the Jew hunter, or Gerard Mooyman, the 17-year-old indoctrinated by propaganda who signed up to fight against Russia, or Anton van der Waals, the collaborationist who sabotaged the operations of the resistance by pretending to be one of them. Certainly, this is not to suggest the violence they committed was unwilling or unintended. Rather, I believe they are to be considered as gears, voluntarily implicated subject, in a larger system of perpetration. They were “helpers” of the Nazis – if one wants to adopt this Proppian narrative category – who contributed to the consolidation of the perpetrators in power, ensuring that their position was nurtured and invigorated.

Following this reasoning, the remarks I propose regarding these perpetrators and looking at the example of the Verzetsmuseum are twofold. The first relates to the meaning effects produced by the syntagmatic relationship of victim-perpetrator in the museum space. In other words, how the meaning of both is modified (or compromised) when their stories are told in function of each other. The second concerns the risks inherent to narratively “treating” the perpetrator with the rhetoric of the point of view, as is provocatively done in the so of the implicated subject. Is it really the same thing, from the point of view of museum’s meaning-making and cultural memory, to quote the perpetrator insofar as he is a collaborator, without sanctioning his statements? In the three perpetrators mentioned, the only one that seems to offer a way of developing these communicative risks, of this unintended “condescending” effect, is, from my point of view, the case of Emil Rühl. Before proceeding with this last case, let us see how the first two are represented.

Mussert is the first man to be presented in the museum. His display case includes, among other objects, official photos of him giving the Hitler salute, medals of honour, and the propaganda poster of one of his speeches in Utrecht. He represents an individual but also the expression of the pro-Nazi context of those years. He is presented as a great admirer of Hitler, as a leader

5 Although there is no display with his story, the commander of the Westerbork transit camp, Albert Konrad Gemmeke, is also represented in the museum. In the same section where the policeman I mentioned is located, a video commissioned by Gemmeke himself is screened, showing the commander at work with other Nazis.

of the NSB and as a man who is not highly esteemed by the Dutch and whom the occupiers never really made influential. In front of Mussel's display is a picture of Amsterdam after a Nazi bombing. The image is accompanied by the story of an 11-year-old girl, Tootje de Jonge, who lost a leg during one of the bombings. The relationship creates a correlation with pro-Nazi people and the Nazi destruction of their country.

Karl Berg's story, on the other hand, is told in relation to that of Loes van Overeem (1907 – 1980), a Red Cross volunteer who had many contacts among the German Nazi high-ranking, which allowed her to enter the camps in Vught and Amersfoort and help the inmates. The pictures and descriptions of Berg and van Overeem are presented as two parts of the same display, surrounded by barbed wire, to represent their close relationship and the context in which they acted. The syntagmatic relationship created by Berg and van Overeem does not follow the executioner-victim logic; rather it allows different dynamics present in the Dutch concentrationist universe to be included in the museum narrative, giving an account of one of the well-known commanders and one of the most discussed and implicated figures in the occupied Netherlands<sup>6</sup>.

The part of the museum that I want to consider in greater detail deals simultaneously with Hannie Schaft (1920 – 1945) and Emil Rühl (1904 – unknown), respectively a Dutch law student who was an ardent opponent of Nazism and an agent of the German Sicherheitsdienst who hunted her down for months. In a dedicated room, on the left side of the black wall three photographs of Hannie are presented: a portrait showing her smiling, a photo showing her with black hair and glasses, both adorned in order to avoid recognition. The last photo depicts a scene with her friend and resistance fighter, Truus Oversteegen, who disguised himself as a man during anti-Nazi missions, pretending to be Hannie Schaft's partner, again so as not to be noticed. Symmetrically opposite to the portrait of Schaft is a profile photo of Rühl who appears to be looking in the direction of the girl, with his face caught in an expression of outrage (the source or the context of the picture is not mentioned).

At the bottom of the glazed display case, we see reconstructed sand dunes representing the place where Schaft was shot on 17 April 1945, after being interrogated for days by Rühl. Two objects are placed on these dunes: eyeglasses and a gun, objects-metonyms of the victim (Figure 32). The gun, in this case, could also correspond to the figure of the perpetrator, but there are reasons to think that this is a reference to the resistance fighter because in the display's narrative of her life it is specified that she was carrying a

6 It is important to note that the story of Loes van Overeem is also told in the Nationaal Monument Kamp Amersfoort.



Figure 32 The display that tells the story of Hannie Schaft and Emil Rühl (photo by the author)

gun when she was captured. Moreover, in the comic poster of the museum in which she is portrayed (used as publicity but also available in the gift shop), a similar gun is depicted, making us think that the object is exhibited in relation to her life as a fighter.

What is unconvincing about the construction of the responsibility of the Nazi perpetrators in this corner of the museum is the symmetrical operation that places the two sides as alternatives of the same story, leaving the perpetrator's statement without a sanctioning frame or without really problematizing his words. The text about the perpetrator reads:

“Reports kept coming in about acts of sabotage – and later, liquidations – involving a girl, a woman with long red hair”, said Emil Rühl, agent of the German *Sicherheitsdienst*, after the war. He spent months hunting for this “girl with the red hair”: Hannie Schaft. One day, when she was stopped at the checkpoint on the street and found to be carrying illegal newspaper and a gun, she was recognized. Emil interrogated her for days and night on end. “To us she was a terrorist who shot and killed our people”. Hannie admitted to her part in the resistance. On 17 April, three weeks before the Netherlands was liberated, she was taken to the dunes and shot. After the war, Emil Rühl was sentenced to 18 years of prison.

It is important, before proceeding, to read it in comparison with that of the young resistance fighter:

Firm in her convictions, the red-haired law student Hannie Schalt chose the most extreme form of resistance: she joined a group of communist resistance fighters who shot traitors.

Hannie often carried out her mission together with Truus Oversteegen. This photo shows them shortly after one such mission. "I had disguised myself as a man so that Hannie and I could pretend to be a couple in love", Truus explained. "Shooting traitors was a terrible thing. But it had to be done. After all, we couldn't put them in prison". After learning that the German were looking for a red-haired girl, Hannie dyed her hair black and began wearing these eyeglasses.

But in March of 1945, Hannie was caught anyway. A German named Emil Rühl interrogated her.

*During the occupation, at least 550 traitors, NSB members and German were shot and killed by the Dutch resistance.*

As can be gathered from the reading of these two texts, the museum on this occasion places the two stories in direct dialogue both visually and verbally, though it lacks excessive descriptive detachment. What it recounts places the visitor before an aseptic account of the facts: resistance fighters shot Nazis, Nazis shot resistance fighters. If this is true on the level of basic historical events, it is problematic from the point of view of the transmission of traumatic memory and Nazi complicity and culpability. The museum tackles the perpetrator by offering his perspective on the actions committed without, however, attempting to take sides or recount more generally (as it does with the girl's story) the torture and despicable actions committed by the Nazi secret service against the resistance fighters. The museum adopts a symmetrisation strategy that naively posits the two parties involved as two alternative voices of the same story, without problematising the perpetrator's statements and without legitimising correctly the memory of the resistance fighter, who is narrated only as a counterpart of her hunter. The phrase "to us she was a terrorist who shot and killed our people", while consistently following the laconic style granted to the subjects of other displays, fails to produce the same result or adopt the same pedagogical purposes.

As much as it is appreciable that the museum tends to investigate the nuances behind the choices of those involved, one cannot fail to recognise that perpetrators and victims need a less fluid narrative: one that is not stereotypical, but also not entirely free of judgement. Here, the risk, in my

view, is to go too far with the idea that everyone – even those who were accomplices and who practised violence in the name of a supposed ideology – can consider themselves legitimised by their ideas. If cautiously assessing certain actions as good or bad is an interesting experiment for more “ordinary” stories, which perhaps enable the visitor to reflect on its synchronic and diachronic implications, can this also be applied as rhetorical mechanism to the perpetrator? How much does this risk delegitimising the victims? Is there a risk of homogenising the parties involved? All the people involved in the story have certainly constructed a narrative to justify their actions, because they believed it or because it was convenient to think they believed it. Is this the same for a young resistance fighter and for a Nazi secret agent? Depicting the perpetrator in the museum is always a complex task, perhaps the most difficult one because it is necessary to create a balanced narrative that is not dehumanising (and potentially thereby corresponding to an unrealistic distancing of the visitor) but also not too condescending. Rühl will certainly assume he had his reasons to act like a perpetrator (like most of the perpetrators did during their trial); the challenge here remains how to mediate these motives in a museum, inserting them into a general frame in which the issue of direct responsibility, complicity and deplorable violence must emerge.

## Conclusion

The Verzetmuseum uses polyphonic stories in its narration of anti-Nazi resistance and Second World War trauma, proposing different meaning effects in relation to the issue of indirect responsibility for or complicity in acts of violence. As I have sought to argue, in this sense, the museum is an interesting example of how the figure of the implicated subject can be musealised as a main leitmotiv, not only to stratify the classical narrative opposition between victim and perpetrator but also to re-centralise the issue of responsibility in memory museums. The various stories the museum offers allow the visitor to reflect on the complexity of the grey area from both historical and personal perspectives, activating various emotions and reflections that depend on the visitor’s situatedness. To aspire to achieve this effect, the museum guides the visitor along a path in which the main isotopy is that of the dilemma faced by some Dutch people, materialising the collective impact of personal, everyday life choices in the context of war and genocide. At theoretical level, if the representation of synchronic implication is particularly effective when dealing with “ordinary” people, this becomes more problematic for the representation of the perpetrator.

Presenting the perpetrator's point of view in a memory space is a very tricky and risky rhetorical practice. There are many memoirs that, in recent years, have decided to focus their reflection precisely on the forms of transmission of the negative memory of compromised personalities, such as perpetrators. This entailed a radical subversion of the classical imagery (cf. Anderson 2020), proposing a less demonised vision of the criminal and of power – certainly not seeking to deputise the actions committed, but rather to avoid an “othering” process in which violence and sadism are perceived as alien and non-human traits.

With respect to the construction of this complex national “we”, which was (and is) resistant but also accountable, and the occupying “other”, the museum is a medium not only devoted to representing the past, but challenging Dutch national representation in relation to the Second World War. By insisting more on the responsibility of an “us” than on the construction of an “other occupier”, the museum puts the image of the Dutch as victims and as resisters in a different light, also offering examples of violent Dutchmen or those who made personal choices that contributed to the growth of Nazi power in the country. This evidently entails a necessary revalorisation of the past narrative, through which Dutch people in the present are also invoked. Within this narrative, heroism is thematised not as an attitude that was present but not widespread throughout the nation, but as something that is more nuanced. As Giensen writes, in relation to the trauma of the perpetrator for a community (in his case, the German community in relation to Nazism): “if a community has to recognize that its members, instead of being heroes, have been perpetrators who violated the cultural premises of their own identity, the reference to the past is indeed traumatic” (Giensen 2004, 11). Although the reference in our case is more to collaborationism than perpetration, this reasoning can be extended to the case study in this chapter, which is based above all on the problem of self-representation and emotional self-sanction for those who feel that they are heirs to and diachronically implicated with a difficult history.

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