Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a site of memory

Duindam, D.A.

Citation for published version (APA):
Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory

investigates the postwar development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, an in situ Shoah memorial museum in Amsterdam. During World War II, over forty-six thousand Jews were imprisoned in this former theater before being deported to the transit camps. In 1962, it became the first national Shoah memorial of the Netherlands and in 1993, a small exhibition was added. In the spring of 2016, the National Holocaust Museum opened, which consists of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and a new satellite space across the street.

This dissertation deals with the question how this site of painful heritage became an important memorial museum dedicated to the memory of the persecution of the Dutch Jews. It is argued that this former theater was not a site of oblivion before 1962 but rather a material reminder of the persecution of the Jews which at that time was not an articulated part of the hegemonic memory discourse of the war in the Netherlands. The memorial was gradually appropriated by important Jewish institutions through the installment of Yom HaShoah, an educational exhibition and a wall of names. These are analyzed not by focusing on material authenticity, but instead a case is made for latent indexicality: visitors actively produce narratives by searching for traces of the past. This entails an ongoing creative process of meaning-making that allows sites of memory to expand and proliferate beyond their borders.

An important question therefore is how the Hollandsche Schouwburg affects its direct surroundings.
SIGNS OF THE SHOAH
THE HOLLANDSCHE SCHOUWBURG AS A SITE OF MEMORY

DAVID DUINDAM
**Colophon**

Cover design by Marrigje Rikken
Cover artwork by Machteld Aardse and Femke Kempkes
Cover photograph by Andrea Jutta Röell
Printed by Uitgeverij BOXPress || Proefschriftmaken.nl
SIGNS OF THE SHOAH
THE HOLLANDSCHE SCHOUWBURG AS A SITE OF MEMORY

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op dinsdag 28 juni 2016, te 10:00 uur

doctor David Arthur Duindam
geboren te Leiden
Promotiecommissie:

Promotor: prof. dr. F.P.I.M. van Vree Universiteit van Amsterdam
Copromotor: prof. dr. R. van der Laarse Universiteit van Amsterdam

Overige leden: prof. dr. N.D. Adler Universiteit van Amsterdam
prof. dr. M. Hirsch Columbia University
prof. dr. J.C.A. Kolen Universiteit Leiden
prof. dr. J.J. Noordegraaf Universiteit van Amsterdam
prof. dr. A. Rigney Universiteit Utrecht
dr. P.A.L. Bijl Universiteit van Amsterdam
dr. I.A.M. Saloul Universiteit van Amsterdam

Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen

This research was supported by Fonds 21 (formerly SNS Reaal Fonds), the Rothschild Foundation Europe and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). It was a collaboration with the Jewish Historical Museum Amsterdam and part of the research program “The Dynamics of Memory. The Netherlands in the Second World War”, an independent research line within the NWO thematic program Cultural Dynamics.
# Table of Contents

Prologue ................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: The Dynamics of Sites of Memory ................. 17

1. Performing Memory and the Remediation of the Past .... 17

2. Remnants of the Past: Heritage and the Museum ......... 25

3. The Spatial and Performative Character of Urban Memory 31

Chapter 2: The Construction of an In Situ Memorial Site: Framing Painful Heritage 39

1. National Framing and Silent Memories: The Persecution of the Jews as Part of Collective Suffering 42

2. Honoring the memory of victims: pride and national debt 49

3. Addressing Painful Heritage: Representation and Appropriation 61

Chapter 3: The Performance of Memory: The Making of a Memorial Museum 75

1. Place-Making and Spatial Narratives: Early Commemorations 77

2. A Public Memorial ........................................... 84

3. Yom HaShoah as a Dutch-Jewish Commemoration .... 92

4. From Memorial to Memorial Museum ...................... 100
Chapter 4: The Fragmented Memorial Museum: Indexicality and Self-Inscription 125

1. The In Situ Memorial Museum: Mediation and Latent Indexicality 134
2. Conflicting Scripts, Routing and Self-Exhibition 142
3. Performing the Site: Walking and Self-Inscription 155

Chapter 5: The Proliferation of Spatial Memory: Borders, Façades and Dwellings 169

1. Proliferation and Demarcation of Sites of Memory 172
2. The Façade and the Passerby: Dissonance and Interaction 179
3. The House as Index, the House as Dwelling: Collaborative Memory Projects 188

Epilogue 199

Summary 213
Samenvatting 217
Previous publications and co-authorship 221
Acknowledgements 223
Bibliography 225
Prologue

The lush, green avenue feels like a retreat from the hectic city center of Amsterdam. There are no hordes of tourists here and both the scale and architecture of this district seem pleasant. The road is divided into three lanes: one for bicycles, one for cars and in the middle a tramway. At first sight, there is nothing special to be observed in this everyday scene. On the left hand is a tram stop and across the street stands a stately building (see figure P.1).

Dutch sounding words Hollandsche Schouwburg are written on the façade in large silver letters, partially concealed by a tree. According to the brochure of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, it is the ‘National Holocaust Memorial’. From the outside, this Shoah memorial resembles a functioning theater.1 Its 19th century façade is

Figure P. 1. Photograph David Duindam

1 Throughout this dissertation, I use the term Shoah to refer to the Nazi persecution of the Jews instead of Holocaust, unless Holocaust is used by the quoted party. Neither term covers the underlying historical processes in their full complexity. Holocaust carries the Christian meaning of burnt offering, implying that the persecution of the Jews was a sacrifice. Shoah means catastrophe and carries the Hebrew tradition of destruction with it, and as such turns away from the methodological and organized Nazi genocide. However, as we address the memory of these events, I believe it can be justified to use the term preferred by a large part of the older generations of the Dutch Jewish community and the staff of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. See also chapter 2.2.
adorned with classicist figures. Venus, the embodiment of love and beauty, is the central figurine of the pediment and cherubs adorn the frieze. Without any previous knowledge, or the brochure in hand, one could expect to find a theater inside. Nothing indicates that during World War II, more than forty-six thousand Jewish citizens were detained in this building before their deportation via Dutch transit camps to Eastern European concentration and extermination camps.

Upon entering the memorial, one notices that inside, little of the former theater has remained the same. The central entrance hall provides access to several spaces. On the left, a movie is screened; on the right books and DVD’s about the Shoah are displayed on a table next to the reception desk. If you are a first-time visitor, it is not entirely clear what to do next. One can start by watching the movie and walk to the adjacent wall of names, or go straight out into the back where a large open space holds a commemorative pylon. Another option is to go upstairs where an exhibition has been installed. The building that seems intact as a theater from the outside is quite a maze once you enter. There is no clear routing and it does not have a univocal function. Do people go here to commemorate or to find out more about the history of this building? Out of curiosity, or simply as part of a tourist sightseeing excursion?

We usually do not ask ourselves why we go to historically significant sites when we visit a city, since it is such an obvious part of getting to know a place. *In situ* sites of memory such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg seem to automatically embody their own past because of their history. However, when we investigate how this former theater came to be a memorial museum we realize that there is nothing self-evident about its current status. The authenticity of this site is not located in its materiality alone. As I will demonstrate, this authenticity is staged by its presentation and produced by the visitor. The events that took place here are not immediately accessible, but mediated through architectural interventions and museum technologies and imagined by the visitor. Visitors want to be at the very spot where history took place and, although the event itself cannot be perceived or experienced; visitors may look for traces and other signs of the Shoah. My dissertation examines these processes in order to better understand how meaning is constructed at this site of Shoah memory. This prologue provides a concise historical overview of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, discusses the issue of Shoah representation in relation to sites of memory, addresses my own implication in the history and presentation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and concludes with a chapter outline.
The Hollandsche Schouwburg was established in 1892 in the Plantage district, an area bordering on Amsterdam’s old city center. The district was not developed as part of Amsterdam’s characteristic concentric system of canals and became a green zone instead. In the second half of the nineteenth-century, the city went through a period of economic prosperity and the Plantage district was transformed into a wealthy green area with several venues of entertainment and offered luxurious homes to the nouveau riche. This included successful Jews who had thrived during the rise of the diamond industry, as the district was near the main synagogues, a park, four theaters, the city’s zoo and a panorama-building. To this day, the area still breathes an architectural coherence unique to Amsterdam, combining an eclectic building style with a spaciously designed main avenue, the Plantage Middenlaan. The Hollandsche Schouwburg served as a theater until 1942 in spite of financial struggles, offering mostly light genres – operetta and revue – and at times more serious work by Herman Heijermans, a renowned Dutch-Jewish playwright. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was never an exclusively Jewish theater, even if a great deal of the affiliated actors, playwrights and directors were Jews. Both the district and this particular theater were examples of the integration, or assimilation, of Jews before World War II.

Although the Dutch were often reassured that the Jewish population would not be harmed, measures were taken that explicitly targeted Jews. One of these measures prohibited Jews from visiting and performing in the same theaters and concert halls as non-Jews. Several locations throughout Amsterdam were designated as so-called Jewish locales where an exclusively Jewish audience would be able to see Jewish artists perform, as in the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg (Dutch Theater) which was renamed Joodsche Schouwburg (Jewish Theater). For several months it was the main venue for Jewish performers who had been forced out of their orchestra’s and theater groups, until the building was seized for the registration and incarceration of Jews. When in 1942 the mass deportation of Jews to the so-called work camps in Eastern Europe began, the Amsterdam Jews were first summoned to report in tranches at various train stations. When this proved to

---

2 One of the reasons the district was not developed for private housing was a decreased interest due to an economic fallback in Amsterdam during the last quarter of the 17th century. See Fred Feddes, 1000 jaar Amsterdam: ruimtelijke geschiedenis van een wonderbaarlijke stad (Bussum: THOTH, 2012), 66.
3 Richter Roegholt, Wonen en wetenschap in de Plantage. De geschiedenis van een Amsterdamse buurt in driehonderd jaar (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1982), 49.
be ineffective – as many people did not to show up – it was decided soon after that the deportees needed to register at an assembly center where they were to await their deportation to the transit camp in the North of the Netherlands near the village of Westerbork. Initially, the Portuguese Synagogue was selected for this purpose, but because there was no electric lighting and it was difficult to darken this large building, it was decided to use the Hollandsche Schouwburg instead. The building was easy to darken, not far from the train tracks and near the old Jewish district. In June 1942, the theater was turned into *Umschlagplatz Plantage Middenlaan*. The newly created center was managed by a Jewish council under German supervision, copied from the Polish ghetto model. The council appointed Walter Süskind as director of the center, guarded by German troops and Dutch policemen.

For the duration of sixteen months the Hollandsche Schouwburg was used for the registration and deportation of more than forty-six thousand Jews from around the country. After large numbers of Jews from were deported, Jews from surrounding municipalities and cities such as Utrecht were forced to move into vacant homes in designated Jewish areas within Amsterdam before they were required to register at the assembly center. Although one might suppose that deportees would only stay for a few hours or days – a stay in the Schouwburg could last for up to several weeks. The building had previously accommodated 800 visitors as a theater and now held up to 1,300 people at a time, and for which it was of course in no way equipped: there were no beds or sufficient sanitary facilities, in spite of some provisional arrangements such as the installment of two shower cabins. From October 1942 onwards the nursery across the street, called the Crèche, was appropriated to harbor all children less than 12 years of age, separately from their parents. Policies at the deportation center changed over time. For instance, newcomer registration was organized at one point on the stage and at another in the cloakroom. During the summer of 1942, detainees were able go outside onto the small courtyard behind the stage for some fresh air where some of them had contact with the people living next to theater. A series of illegal photographs demonstrate the thin line between inmates and bystanders during this airing. In this early period when the deportation center had been in operation for only a few months, individuals were able to leave the building for a few hours if others vouched for them. At a later stage, the rules became more restrictive: the

---

Gringold accounts for a minimum of 46,104 Jews who were held there. For a more elaborate account of the assembly center, see Annemiek Gringold, “Het gebouw der tranen. Zestien maanden verzamel- en deportatieplaats,” in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 118–52.
courtyard was no longer accessible, windows were barred after a suicide and it was made impossible to leave the building even for a short amount of time.

During the deportations, more than a thousand people escaped and hundreds of children were rescued with the help of Walter Süskind and several resistance groups who successfully hid them with non-Jewish families in other parts of the country. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the names of adults were removed from the registry to cover up their flight. Children, especially babies, were smuggled out of the Crèche, amongst others by the nurses who took care of them, after their parents at the Schouwburg had previously agreed. However, as people were faced with the uncertain prospect of having to go into hiding or having virtual strangers take away their children; the majority of detained Jews were deported to the transit camps Westerbork and Vught, including Süskind who died on one of the death marches that departed from Auschwitz near the end of the war. When Amsterdam was declared *jodenrein* in the autumn of 1943, the assembly center was closed and the building was left empty for several years.

In 1944, two businessmen bought the theater and reopened it five months after the end of the occupation in November 1945. They were met with protest: using this former deportation site as a place of entertainment was considered disrespectful by many people. An action committee organized a fundraising campaign, acquired the building and donated it to the city of Amsterdam in 1950 with the stipulation that it would not become a place of entertainment. As the city council did not find an appropriate purpose for the theater, it stood again empty and dilapidated. In 1958 the council decided to establish a commemoration site. Due to its bad state, a large part of the building was demolished and the old stage walls and bricks were used to construct a ruin-like courtyard. In 1962, the first national memorial dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims of the war was opened. The front part of the building was more or less preserved. On the first floor, a *chapelle ardente* was installed, a small and intimate memorial. The other floors were rented out as office space. The former theater hall was transformed into a courtyard that mimicked the ground plan of the former theater: the center, where once the seats had been, now was a grass lawn. Instead of walking on the grass, visitors were expected to walk through the side galleries towards the former stage. Here, a large commemorative pylon rested on a base in the shape of a Star of David, encircled by the stripped original stage walls. In the courtyard, the national May 4

---


8 Gringold accounted for a minimum of 46,104 Jews who were incarcerated in the Schouwburg during the sixteen months it served as an assembly point, see Gringold, “Het gebouw der tranen,” 134–136.
tribute and the Yom HaShoah commemoration were organized. The architectural and stylistic design of the memorial was abstract and did not confront the visitor with direct images or narratives of the Shoah out of respect for relatives and survivors.

During the 1990s, the Jewish Historical Museum took over management of this site and began renovations in order to address and educate younger generations. The grass lawn was replaced by a stone pavement, allowing for larger commemorations. Inside, the *chapelle ardente* was replaced by a wall of names and a museum exhibition about the persecution of the Jews was installed on the first floor. The presentation was not abstract, but remained subdued in its tone. In the spring of 2016, the National Holocaust Museum will be established. The intention is to renovate the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a memorial and to establish a new permanent exhibition across the street in an old school building, adjacent to the former Crèche.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg currently is a memorial museum that mediates the events that took place here. This dissertation deals with the cultural memory of the Shoah and therefore relates to the issue whether we can properly represent the Shoah in an artistic or museum form without harming the historic complexity and the absolute alterity of the victim’s position. How do you, or should you even try to, explain events that defy the very notion of human understanding? According to some thinkers, the organized persecution and murder of Jews took away the victims’ ability to testify to their own deaths, and speaking in their place can be seen as a moral conundrum. Philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that eyewitnesses who survived the Shoah may paint an accurate picture of the conditions of the concentration and death camps, but cannot truly testify to what happened to those who were murdered. This leads psychoanalyst Dori Laub to characterize the Shoah as an event without a witness.⁹ One could therefore argue that most victims of the Shoah did, or course, not have a chance to testify as they were murdered. Along this line of reasoning, appropriating their speaking position would entail another silencing. Remaining silent altogether, however, is also an impossible solution. Historian Saul Friedländer points out that because the Nazi perpetrators have willfully tried to remove all traces of their crimes, we are obliged to bear witness and try to represent the Shoah.¹⁰ He describes a paradoxical

---


situation: on the one hand, we need truth, testimonies and attempts at understanding; on the other hand, the Shoah does not allow for traditional realist representations that claim to fully depict what has actually transpired, as these might offer facile forms of identification understanding and closure.

According to filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, any claim that it is possible to make the Shoah wholly understood is obscene. This paradox – we can never fully understand, but are nevertheless driven to keep trying to make sense of the Shoah – has fueled the debate about Shoah representations for several decades. Friedländer observes a recurrent strategy that circumvents this issue, namely:

the exclusion of straight, documentary realism, [and instead] the use of some sort of allusive or distanced realism. Reality is there, in its starkness, but perceived through a filter: that of memory (distance in time), that of spatial displacement, that of some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid. Lanzmann’s influential film SHOAH (1985) is a prime example of such distanced realism. He interviews survivors, bystanders and perpetrators, sometimes in situ and at other times in artificial situations that emphasize the fact that these testimonies are displaced in time and space. The realist genre of the testimony is transformed in order to create a critical distance: we need these narratives to try – and ultimately fail – to understand the Shoah. We should however remain aware that these narratives were mediated and reconstructed four decades after the war. SHOAH refuses to provide definitive answers and demands an active participation on behalf of the viewer: there are no facetious ways of understanding and processing the Shoah. The audience must truly and critically engage with these representations.

One of the problems of this approach is that it rejects any closure and simultaneously demands continuous engagement. It does not allow for an imaginative interpretation that makes sense of these events, since that would possibly distort the past. According to literary theorist Ernst van Alphen, there is a taboo concerning the use of figuration as opposed to the objective language of

---

12 Friedländer, Probing the Limits of Representation, 17. According to literary researcher Michael Rothberg, there are two general camps in the debate about Shoah representations. On the one hand, realists try to place the Shoah within everyday life and try to understand the events. On the other hand, antirealists such as Wiesel and Lanzmann argue that the Shoah is unique and can ever be understood. Michael Rothberg, Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 4–6. The term antirealist however might be understood as a retreat from the real, whereas the term distanced realism underscores the attempt of Lanzmann to connect to the real, even if this attempt is doomed to fail.
science when it comes to Shoah representations. For certain critics, fictional and imaginative representations are only deemed acceptable when they evoke the past as unrepresentable, such as the non-narrative poetry of Paul Celan. ‘But as soon as Holocaust art or literature introduces narrative elements that relate to historical “reality,” post-Holocaust culture has its guard up. Narrative imaginative images or texts are considered to be in violation of a strict taboo.’\(^\text{13}\) According to Van Alphen, this taboo is grounded in a false dichotomy between objective historical and imaginative aesthetic discourse, where the latter is considered undesirable because it replaces the past with something stylized that has no actual basis in reality. However, imaginative discourse does not necessarily need to use metaphoric substitution in order to refer to something that could also be said literally; some events can only be conceived through figuration. ‘This approach to figuration makes imaginative discourse not suspect, but absolutely necessary. Only figurative discourse allows expression of that which is unrepresentable in so-called literal, factual, historical language.’\(^\text{14}\)

There indeed seems to be a certain amount of uneasiness when it comes to too facile and imaginative renderings of the Shoah. Not only because of the threat of substituting the past with a stylized narrative, but also because of a fear of what the audience might construe of it. Will the audience, after seeing LA VITA È BELLA (Roberto Benigni, 1997), in which a father fabricates an ingenious story to protect his son from the horrors of everyday persecution, believe that life in the camps would have been manageable if you embraced an imaginative perspective? Here we return to the age old issue of pedagogic reception: does the viewer or reader get the right message? The ‘correct’ reception of Shoah representations is important according to many critics because the obligation to bear witness implies we should honor the memory of the victims. Misinterpreting these representations and coming to the ‘wrong’ conclusions seems to be impious, and perhaps even an amoral act.\(^\text{15}\)

The notion of ‘distanced realism’, the taboo of figurative language and the pedagogic effect on the audience all relate to the longstanding Platonic distrust of artistic representations. Can a linguistic or artistic expression truly represent reality? According to linguist Ferdinand de Saussure a word consists of two parts: a signifier, the material element such as the sound of a word, and the signified, the mental concept to which this sound refers. The relationship between the two parts


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{15}\) According to literary researcher Berel Lang, literary texts can be judged as moral acts because they affect the reader. See Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 117–161.
is arbitrary and habitual: we know what a word refers to because we have learned this through habituation. This can be extrapolated to all sign systems and complicates any claim of realistic depiction. However, according to the American linguist C.S. Peirce, there are also signs that have an extralinguistic quality. He argues that there are three different kinds of signs: the icon, the symbol and the index. The icon represents an object through similarity, the symbol through an arbitrary and habitual relationship, and the index through an actual relationship of contiguity or continuity. A footprint is an example of an indexical sign of a person no longer there; there is a causal relationship between these two. These indexical signs are always indirect; a knock on a door announces an arrival, but does not signify the arrival itself. The displacement in space and time demands an active interpretation by the observer, since there is a gap between the signifier and what is being signified. So on the one hand, an indexical sign can act as a form of evidence, as there is an assumed causal, actual relationship between the signifier and the signified; on the other hand, there is a gap between these two. The signified always remains absent and the relationship between these two must be actively produced by the interpreter. This also holds for icons and symbols, however for these, the relationships are based on similarity or convention, not on contiguity or continuity.

Within the gap between the indexical signifier and what it signifies two oppositional forces are at work which attract each other because of the promise of causality. Once you see a footprint, it is almost impossible not to expect a human body. On the other hand, it is possible you will never find out if that footprint belongs to an actual physical being. This tension is played out in the famous fragment of Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, in which the shipwrecked protagonist finds a footprint on an island that, to his knowledge, is deserted:

It happened one day about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man’s naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand: I stood like one thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an apparition; I listened, I looked round me, I could hear nothing, nor see any thing; I went up to a rising ground to look farther: I went up the shore, and down the shore, but it was all one, I could see no other impression but that one [.... ] [A]fter innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused, and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man; nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes an affrighted imagination represented things to me in; how many wild ideas were
formed every moment in my fancy, and what strange unaccountable whimsies came into my thoughts by the way.\textsuperscript{16}

The gap between the footprint and the absent person is cause for paranoia, a heightened awareness of the environment and an imaginative investment on the part of Robinson Crusoe, who even considers the possibility of a ghost. It is precisely this quality of the indexical sign that allows it to act as evidence of something absent, different from symbolic or iconic signs. That does not mean that indexical signs are more precise: because they do not make present what is absent, the interpreter fills in this gap. Indices are often fragmentary and depend on an active and imaginative process of appropriation. Literary scholar Marianne Hirsch argues that photographs have an indexical quality that allows for an imaginative investment on behalf of the viewer. ‘They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past’s existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance.’\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{In situ} sites of memory such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg are characterized by material traces of the past, such as the old brick walls in the courtyard. By interpreting these not as authentic embodiments of the past that offer a kind of immediate experience, but rather as indexical signs that refer to a past that is no longer there, we emphasize the active interpretation of the visitor and the role of both displacement and absence. The gap between the sign and what it refers to is filled up by the visitor’s imagination, a process that encourages the visitor to inscribe his or her own biography and imaginations, allowing for a stronger affective engagement.

The epistemological insecurity – does this index really mean that we have any knowledge about what happened here? – can make visitors hypersensitive, just as Robinson Crusoe’s imagination turned bushes into humans. A state of heightened perception and imaginative investment transforms every detail into possible indexical signs. This is what I call the latent and contingent indexicality of \textit{in situ} sites of memory: as visitors expect to find traces of the past they actively look for and may interpret non-authentic fragments as indexical signs. This indexicality is both latent, as it can be traced back to specific events that took place here, and

\textsuperscript{17} Marianne Hirsch, \textit{Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23. Hirsch also warns us of the potential effects of this active appropriation. ‘[Photographs] can tell us as much about our own needs and desires (as readers and spectators) as they can about the past world they presumably depict. While authentication and projection can work against each other, the powerful tropes of familiality can also, and sometimes problematically, obscure their distinction. The fragmentariness and the two-dimensional flatness of the photographic image, moreover, make it especially open to narrative elaboration and embroidery and to symbolization.’ Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” \textit{Poetics Today} 29, no. 1 (2008): 117.}
contingent, as the imagination of visitors cannot be foreseen and often emerges by chance. A good example is the brick walls in the courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. These are not completely authentic: they are constructed from original bricks, but the current design stems from 1962. Still, these walls are strongly associated with the war by most visitors, since they expect to see an original deportation center. The latent and contingent indexicality of in situ sites of memory is based on the promise and expectation of authenticity, regardless of the fact that this authenticity might be (partially) staged or mediated. The question is then; does this indexicality refer to a stable narrative of the Shoah? Or in terms of the debate about Shoah representations, should we mind an imaginative and therefore possibly historically inaccurate appropriation of the Shoah? Here we come to an important difference between indexical signs and other kinds of texts, as formulated by historian Frank Ankersmit:

The monument does not tell us something about the past, in the way that the (metaphorical) historical text does, but functions rather like a (metonymical) signpost. Put differently, the monument functions like an index: it requires us to look in a certain direction without specifying what we shall ultimately find in that direction. [...] [It] invites us to project our personal feelings and associations on that part of the past indicated by it.  

The index may initiate a process of searching for meaning and allow people to affectively connect to the past, but it does not provide context or information. The question is whether visitors need additional context in order to ground their visit in a broader historical understanding. Most in situ memorial museums seem to stop the progress of these two notions: emotional investment of the visitor and informing them about the past.

With this dissertation, I will demonstrate the necessity for studying the historical and material development of sites of Shoah memory in relation to the ways in which visitors have appropriated them. I will combine a synchronic critical analysis of the current presentation and a diachronic investigation of architectural and curatorial interventions over time. The Hollandsche Schouwburg does not offer immediate access to the past, but is an indexical sign of the Shoah: it allows visitors to envision past events by pointing out the absence of the victims. Sustaining this imaginative investment is the most distinguishing characteristic of in situ memorial museums and may even lead to a proliferation or sprawl of spatial memory.

As any researcher, I am strongly connected to my research object. I was involved by the Jewish Historical Museum in the formulation of the renovation plans for the

National Holocaust Museum. Throughout the years I attended various meetings with different stakeholders about the renovation plans. Joël Cahen, director of the Jewish Historical Museum and the Hollandsche Schouwburg from 2002 until 2015, has been and remains an important driving force of this process. Staff member Annemiek Gringold and Esther Göbel developed a concept for a new permanent exhibition based on a chronological dramaturgy. I worked closely with them and Hetty Berg, manager of museum affairs, in particular in preparing a monograph on the Hollandsche Schouwburg. I was involved in several events such as the annual May 4th commemorations at this memorial site, the Museum Night of 2013 and an educational program in the context of the exhibition Selamat Shabbat. The Unknown History of Jews in the Dutch East Indies (2014-2015). I interviewed several key figures in the making of the museum, some of whom were involved in the renovation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in the early 1990s: former director of the Jewish Historical Museum Judith Belinfante; former interim director of the Amsterdam Historical Museum Norbert van den Berg; staff members Petra Katzenstein and Peter Buijs; and designer Victor Levie. Others who are involved in the current affairs and renovation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg include: Joël Cahen, Annemiek Gringold, former head of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and currently curator of the Shoah, and Denise Citroen and Machteld Aardse who developed two memorial projects discussed in the last chapter.

The culture and atmosphere I encountered at the museum was one of intense personal investment and dedication, especially when it comes to the topic of the Shoah. There was a culture of cautious deliberation in order to create consensus and broad support, which also lead to a certain amount of indecisiveness. Furthermore, the museum depends on a strong network and grants and private donations, which at times resulted in expedited decisions. Even though the Jewish Historical Museum addresses a broad and inclusive (inter)national public, it always has a special relationship with the Jewish community, both in Amsterdam, the Netherlands and internationally. Former museum directors Belinfante (1976-1998) and Cahen (2002-2015), who played major roles in shaping the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a memorial museum, organized broad support within the Jewish community when executing their plans. Belinfante oversaw the transfer of the memorial to the Jewish Historical Museum and the subsequent renovations in the early 1990s, in which she played a decisive role. Because of her experience at the Jewish Historical Museum, the overall design of the Hollandsche Schouwburg would remain restrained – there was no explicit visual material of

---

19 Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam, eds., De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).
Nazi cruelty for instance – out of respect for first and second generation survivors. Soon after Cahen became director, he formulated the ambition to create a national Shoah museum that was more outward looking and socially engaged. One of the first steps was to hire Annemiek Gringold to develop active engaging programming at the Hollandsche Schouwburg that would address a larger public. He combined his network in the Netherlands with his international experience and as such was able to propel the Hollandsche Schouwburg in a new direction. Now that he has been succeeded by Emile Schrijver as director, he remains actively involved as Project-Director for the National Holocaust Museum and will continue to help determine its future course.

Additionally, I have investments on a more personal level. When beginning this project, I had no personal ties to the memory and/or history of the Shoah. Two years into my research, there was an unexpected turn of events while I was preparing for a trip to see my family in Indonesia; precipitated by doing some research into the background of my late Indonesian grandmother. One day, I was standing in front of the wall of names. Instead of observing other visitors – as a proper distanced researcher would do – I took out my own camera to take a photograph of the name Van Beugen (see figure P.2). There it was, lodged between Beugeltas and Beuth, a toponym referring to a small Dutch town near the German border. Van Beugen is the family name of my maternal grandmother and I knew

Figure P. 2. Photograph David Duindam
very little about this side of the family. After some investigation I found out that Elias van Beugen was my great-grandfather. He was born in 1878 in The Hague as part of an orthodox Jewish family of twelve children. Elias moved to the Dutch East Indies in 1897 where he was successively a soldier, journalist and administrator for the Dutch government until his death in 1935. He was married to an Indonesian woman and had 5 children, one of them my grandmother. At least four of his brothers and sisters back in the Netherlands would be murdered in Sobibor and Auschwitz during World War II. When I asked my mother to show me the family archive – an old suitcase full of unorganized photographs and papers – I found a JOKOS-file Eliazer van Beugen; a claim presented to the Federal Republic of Germany after the war regarding looted household contents. The claim was granted and the list of recipients provided insight into the globally dispersed family, who lived in Enschede, New Jersey and Jakarta, amongst other places.

A short while after this discovery I visited Indonesia, where I met the thirty-year old Toar Palilingan, great-great-grandson of Elias van Beugen. When he found out about his ancestor at the age of 15, he decided to convert to Judaism, took the name Yaakov Baruch and now runs one of the few synagogues in Indonesia. He brought me to the grave of Elias onto which he had placed a tombstone engraved with a Hebrew text and an incorrect year of death. When I pointed this out, he shrugged his shoulders and said he would correct it. The apparent ease with which he shaped the memory of our common ancestor was fascinating. Does the actual relationship to his heritage allow such a large investment in Judaism? Or does his imagination run amok? It was not much different from the way I had appropriated the family name at the Hollandsche Schouwburg. It is precisely the lack of knowledge that spurs our curiosity and allows for a personal and emotional engagement. It also demonstrates how the Hollandsche Schouwburg is part of an ever-expanding network of memory which constantly produces new connections.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg may at first appear to be a straightforward object of analysis. It is clearly demarcated, is heavily implicated with the memory of the Shoah and presents its visitors with distinct commemorative rituals. However, when investigating how these elements came about and how they currently function, we will find that the memory of this site is not stable, that rituals are not given but coproduced by visitors, and that its borders are not fixed demarcations but rather permeable contact zones.

---

20 Coincidentally, Yaakov Baruch was part of the aforementioned Jewish Historical Museum exhibition Selamat Shabbat as one of the few remaining Jews in Indonesia.
In order to come to a better understanding of how the past is made present at this site of memory, this dissertation combines a synchronic and diachronic approach. Chapter 1 frames the topic within several important academic fields, namely memory, heritage and museum studies. How do physical remnants of the past remediate that past? The issues of authenticity and historicity of the museum as a collection of media and other technologies are addressed, as well as that of spatial memory. Chapter 2 focuses on the postwar debate about the purpose and physical appearance and reconstructions of the Schouwburg. Was the former theater during the seventeen years prior to the establishment of the memorial in 1962 a site of silence or rather an important facilitator in the creation of a public memory of the Shoah? Chapter 3 investigates the commemorations that were held in and around the Schouwburg. Did these entail a complete appropriation of this site, radically changing its meaning? Or did the site enable and coproduce the performance of divergent memories? This chapter will also investigate visiting practices that developed along with, but also in contrast to the official purpose of this site, and how the memorial was renovated under the supervision of the Jewish Historical Museum in the early 1990s. Chapter 4 analyzes the current presentation of the site, with a focus on its historical and material development, and the active role of the visitor in the production of memory and meaning. The current memorial museum is not a discrete medium that transmits a coherent narrative, but rather a spatial configuration of multiple media and technologies that at times compete with each other. The result is a fragmented narrative that forces visitors to make sense and appropriate it on their own terms. The final chapter delineates the spatial borders and addresses the persistent expansion of sites of memory and the way they interact with their environments and local inhabitants.
Chapter 1: The Dynamics of Sites of Memory

An in situ memorial museum mediates a specific narrative relative to the history of its specific location. The question is whether the memory of such a site is inherent to its materiality, or whether this memory is constructed and projected by architects, curators and visitors. This raises various issues which this chapter addresses while situating them within broader academic fields and concerns: particularly memory studies, with a focus on the remediation of memory; critical heritage; museum studies; and the spatial turn. Memory studies investigate many ways in which the past is actively shaped in the present. The study of the remediation of memory focuses on the involved medial processes. It is important to stress that in situ sites of memory are not comprised of one coherent discrete medium. Rather, they are spatial configurations that allow visitors to create affective, real and imaginative connections between the past and present. Critical heritage studies emphasizes that heritage is a process in the here-and-now. However, if heritage is merely a construct in the present, why do we attach so much meaning to authenticity? It is therefore important to trace the development of heritage sites. In order to do so, we turn to museum studies and the museum script. This allows us to combine both a synchronic and diachronic perspective by investigating the historical development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg into a memorial museum while analyzing its current presentation. We do so cautiously, aware of the fact that the present situation both embodies and mediates the past, but is not fully determined by it. In the last section, the spatial turn is addressed. The importance of spatial and material characteristics of sites of memory has been underscored by several important memory scholars, a perspective that places these sites within larger networks and landscapes of memory. However, how can we actually account for the dynamic nature of spatial memory?

1. Performing Memory and the Remediation of the Past

There is continuous debate over the fundamental concepts and methods of memory studies. The intellectual wealth, unremitting urgency and multi-disciplinary nature of memory studies are testified by various academic journals, handbooks and anthologies.¹ The proliferation of critical concepts such as post-memory; prosthetic

¹ Important publications include History and Memory and Memory Studies; Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, The Collective Memory Reader (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, Cultural Memory Studies: An International and
memory; traumatic memory; social memory; communicative memory; and cultural memory has led to productive approaches, but also to a fragmented field without common ground. Historian Alon Confino comes to the conclusion that memory studies ‘lack a clear focus and have become somewhat predictable’. Several scholars warn us of ‘terminological profusion’ and a subsequent loss of ‘precise meaning’ of the ubiquitous term memory, that can lead to political ‘abuses of memory’. One answer to these doubts and objections has been to formulate a very broad definition of the central term: memory as ‘the ways in which people construct a sense of the past’, memory as ‘the ability to retrieve some impression of some past experience or some past event that has had some impact on our minds’, or cultural memory as ‘the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts’. This dissertation acknowledges the great variety and interdisciplinary character of memory studies and rejects the idea of an overarching readymade theoretical framework. In this section several relevant notions and developments within memory studies are discussed, namely collective memory, lieu de mémoire, cultural memory, performativity and remediation.

Memory studies is based on an extensive metaphor, that of human memory, including the related phenomena of forgetfulness; repression; distortion; trauma; self-deception; and misrepresentation. This metaphor has proven to be extremely productive in order to study the different ways in which the past is represented in the present – but it also has its limitations. This becomes apparent when we look at one of the foundational concepts in memory studies: collective memory. This concept is problematic because it evokes the image of a well-defined community with a collective memory that functions according to the mechanisms of individual psychology, including collective trauma and amnesia. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs coined the term in order to argue that individual memory is always shaped by the subject’s position in society and that his or her actions are structured by social arrangements. ‘[I]t is in society that people normally acquire

their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories. Halbwachs argues that we have individual or autobiographical memory; collective or historical memory, those events that we only experience indirectly. For instance, we all have personal memories of the country we grew up in, but we also have memories of this country through books, movies and history lessons. According to Halbwachs, these two strands of memory are intertwined, and at some point can no longer be disentangled. The latter is strongly connected to the formation of collective identities: the way the American Civil War is remembered plays a key role in the American identity, just as the Second World War is important to the very notion of being Dutch. This demonstrates the political nature of collective memory, since it relates directly to a politics of identity and subsequent mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. Historian Ernst Renan already argued in 1882 that one is obliged to forget painful parts of the past in order to create and maintain a nation.

There is a crucial problem with this conception of collective memory. It assumes that there is such a thing as a collective; a well-defined social group that has a common memory. Halbwachs has been criticized for his anti-individualist approach where one well-bound social group has one or various shared memories. Some researchers stress that Halbwachs never argued that collective memory is a product of a group mind that precedes individual memories, but rather that the collective memory is carried by individual members of the community. Even if that were the case, the problem remains that this collective memory seems to be preformed rather than constructed by either a collective or individuals. There is no collective memory that predates the collective; rather, it is in the process of creating a shared image of the past wherein communal ties are forged. The term collective memory acquired a life beyond Halbwachs’ work and became a common place for group memory that functions detached from society with all the characteristics of an individual’s personal memory, such as amnesia, repression and trauma. Here, we need to be careful of the limitations of memory as a metaphor: a society does not function the same way individuals do. Historian Amos Funkenstein rightfully argues that ‘memory can, after all, be attributed only to individuals who act, are aware and remember. Just as a nation cannot eat or dance, it cannot speak or

---

remember.’

This dissertation does not employ the term collective memory in order to prevent connotations of a predetermined and coherent entity that underlies a fixed and stable community.

To demonstrate the shortcomings of collective memory and amnesia as conceptual tools for the purpose of this study, it is useful to examine how World War II in the Netherlands was dealt with during the first two decades after liberation. In this early post-war period, commemorations and memorial policy put an emphasis on the heroic efforts of the resistance movement and the Dutch army. The Netherlands was depicted as a small country invaded by its giant neighbor, and collaboration was portrayed as the appalling behavior of a small group that needed to be punished in order to purge society. Within this hegemonic view, there was little room for the persecution of the Jews, as this would put too much strain on the reconstruction of an inclusive and unified Dutch nation. One could argue that the memory of the Shoah was willfully forgotten or repressed. However, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, it would be too simplistic to argue there was one Dutch society that held one collective memory of the war, and that the persecution of the Jews was forgotten or repressed, only to be revealed in the 1960s by historical research. Rather, there was a hegemonic narrative, supported by historians, such as Abel Herzberg and Lou de Jong, by the memorial policy of the government, by commemorations and popular culture. Within this narrative, the persecution of the Jews was manifest, however framed within a nationalist memory discourse of unity and resistance.

Halbwachs’ work has a lasting influence in the academic field, in particular the notion that individual memory is always socially shaped. Another important insight is his attention for the spatial dimension of memory formation: ‘space is a reality that endures: since our impressions rush by, one after another, and leave nothing behind in the mind, we can understand how we recapture the past only by understanding how it is, in effect, preserved by our physical surroundings.’ Here, memory is depicted as a process of actively recapturing the past in interaction with an external reality. Historian Pierre Nora further develops this idea in his seminal Les Lieux de Mémoire. Nora is much criticized for choosing the French nation as a frame for his work and his almost nostalgic approach to modernity and the end of what he calls memory-history. However, his concept of lieu de mémoire is

10 Funkenstein, Perceptions of Jewish History, 4.
important, as it shifts our focus from a fixed collective memory to the appropriation of specific media of memory. For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are not necessarily geographic places such as the Bastille, but also entail symbolic and cultural artifacts such as the French flag or Jeanne d’Arc. Literary scholar and editor of the English edition of *Les Lieux de Mémoire* Lawrence D. Kritzman, defines the *lieu de mémoire* as ‘a polyreferential entity that can draw on a multiplicity of cultural myths that are appropriated for different ideological or political purposes’. On the one hand, these *lieux* provide continuity with the past, on the other they are empty containers of meaning that can be appropriated at will. Nora stresses that the past is always already mediated. ‘Our knowledge of the past is less a question of our empirical grip on the past than on our apprehension of the past as we represent it through the lens of the present.’

*Lieux de mémoire* are over-determined, which makes them susceptible to multiple interpretations. An example is Jeanne d’Arc, a well-known historic figure who is used by both left-wing and right-wing contemporary political parties in France. Where the left frames her as a critic of ecclesiastical power, right-wing parties frame her as an antagonist of foreign influences. Importantly, Nora does not propose to examine which view is correct and debunk the myth, but rather examines the processes of appropriation. He argues that a *lieu de mémoire* ‘enables successive generations to mediate their cultural myths by inculcating them with their desires.’ They thrive only if they can adapt to new and unforeseen conditions. As such, they are not fixed referents, but rather vessels of an endless multitude of possible meanings. Nora departs from Halbwachs’ claim that the past is preserved by our physical surroundings.

It is important to stress that Nora does not provide us with a method for analyzing actual sites of memory such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a concrete memorial museum, but only in as far as these have been appropriated and invested with meaning over time by different groups. For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are not *realia* with an immediate actuality:

*lieux de mémoire* have no referents in reality; rather, they are their own referents – pure signs. This is not to say that they are without content, physical presence, or history – on the contrary. But what makes them *lieux de mémoire* is precisely that which allows them to escape from history.

---


14 Ibid., xii.
15 Ibid., xiii.
The fact that the French flag can be studied as a *lieu de mémoire* clarifies how this approach does not focus on the thing itself, but rather on processes of appropriation. It is also the reason why Nora examines the most canonical historical sites related to the French nation-state, rather than those on the fringe of society. The *lieux* he examines could not be ‘more banal or more extraordinary. The topics are obvious, the material is standard’.[17] *Because* they are well-known, they can function as vessels of multiple interpretations or references. His method is not akin to that of Renan, who argues that the historian can unmask the myths of the nation by focusing on the process of active forgetting. It is not about shedding light on important sites that have fallen into oblivion.

Despite Nora’s well-wrought argument, his concept *lieu de mémoire* has been subjected to inflation. In his last contribution to the volume, Nora acknowledges that his concept has ended up as a *lieu de mémoire* itself, a pure sign that has been appropriated by others and no longer holds the very specific meaning he had once intended. ‘No sooner was the expression *lieu de mémoire* coined than what was forged as a tool for maintaining critical distance became the instrument of commemoration par excellence.’[18] An example of this conceptual inflation is the Dutch version of the *lieu de mémoire* project, which mainly focuses on historical narratives of geographic sites, some of which had been forgotten and were supposed to have been saved from oblivion by this project, rather than studying the internal dynamics of *lieux de mémoire*. [19] In spite of the fact that the term *lieu de mémoire* has lost its critical edge, Nora continues to influence the field of memory studies. His insight that the past is mediated through cultural artifacts that are actively invested with meaning in the present has incited an important shift within memory studies towards the study of cultural memory. However, the term itself is not a guiding concept for this study, since the physical site is central. To mark this difference, we use the term ‘site of memory’, not as a literal translation of *lieu de mémoire*, but to refer to specific sites where the past is mediated, such as memorial museums. If a part of this past has occurred at this site, we speak of *in situ* sites of memory.

For both Halbwachs and Nora, memory is related to the transfer of specific narratives of the past. Where Halbwachs only incidentally pays attention to

17 Ibid., 20.
mediation, Nora specifically mentions that lieux de mémoire mediate cultural myths. Both thinkers influenced the conception of cultural memory studies which investigate cultural artifacts that embody a specific account of the past. Memory scholars Jan and Aleida Assmann distinguish two types of memory that are not directly related to individual memory: communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory is passed on by oral transmission and can move between three or four generations. It is lived and embodied memory communicated in vernacular language. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is mediated by texts, icons and rituals, in a formalized language, and can in theory travel over several millennia.\(^{20}\) Though it is important to take the mode of transmission into account, this typology evokes a binary opposition between unmediated and direct face-to-face contact versus indirect and detached cultural transmission.

Literary scholar Ann Rigney argues that it ‘makes more sense to take mediated, vicarious recollection as our model [...] rather than stick to some ideal form of face-to-face communication in which participants are deemed to share experience in some direct, unmediated way.’\(^{21}\) According to her, cultural media do not preserve and transfer the past, but rather generate ‘shared memories through processes of selection, convergence, recursivity and transfer.’\(^{22}\) She criticizes the view of ‘memory as something that is fully formed in the past (it was once “all there” in the plenitude of experience, as it were) and as something that is subsequently a matter of preserving and keeping alive.’\(^{23}\) Memory is not a thing but an active process in the present and we should pay attention to the intricate processes of mediation.

Cultural memory studies examine the way cultural artifacts mediate the past. The premise is that memory is a performative act, ‘as much a matter of acting out a relationship to the past from a particular point in the present as it is a matter of presenting and retrieving earlier stories.’\(^{24}\) Historian Jay Winter stresses how this process can be charged with affect.

The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in it its sticking power, its resistance to


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 11.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{24}\) Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2009), 2.
erasure or oblivion. Hence affect is always inscribed in performative acts in general and in the performance of memory in particular.²⁵

Cultural theorist Mieke Bal emphasizes that this process does not only relate to the present, but also to our desires for the future.²⁶ If we look more closely at commemorations we will find that stories about past events are reiterated and rituals are performed that foster an affective bond with the past, such as songs, prayers and collective silences. At the same time, the past is adapted to accommodate current events and attitudes. This is an indispensable characteristic of commemorations: they need to relate to the socio-cultural environment of individuals in order to remain relevant and alive; and at the same time provide hope for a better future. They both mirror and co-produce societal changes and developments. When they fail to do so, they are doomed to become obsolete.²⁷

Visiting a site of memory is a performative experience that cannot be reproduced just anywhere. That does not mean that such sites are unmediated. Rather, the opposite is true: for without specific media, this would not be a site of memory at all. Literary scholars Astrid Erll and Rigney argue that it is essential to look at the medial processes that are involved. ‘[I]t is then through the inter-medial reiteration of the story across different platform in the public arena (print, image, internet, commemorative rituals) that the topic takes root in the community.’²⁸ Different technologies afford different modes of storytelling. Erll and Rigney use the concept remediation introduced by media scholars Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin to investigate how the introduction of new media influences the way a story is told. Remediation implies that new media always follow the logic of prior media forms. According to Bolter and Grusin, media have continually been ‘commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all.’²⁹ At the core of this process is the paradoxical double logic of remediation. ‘Our culture wants to multiply its media and erase all traces of mediation; ideally it wants to erase its

---


²⁶ According to Bal, cultural memory is ‘an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future.’ Mieke Bal, Jonathan V Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, Acts of Memory. Cultural Recall in the Present (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), vii.


²⁸ Erll and Rigney, Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory, 2–3.

media in the very act of multiplying them’.

New media claim to provide a more immediate access to reality, but at the same time do so by adding a new layer of mediation, which leads to a form of hypermediacy. These insights are helpful when we investigate sites of memory. Media try to be invisible in their attempt to provide access to the past. However, the past is always mediated, also at in situ sites of memory. By focusing on the interaction of media, we can trace a historical development. ‘Virtually every site of memory can boast its genealogy of remediation, which is usually tied to the history of media evolution.’

It is important not to take a teleological stance when we frame the development of sites in such a way that the development of new media replaces older ones. Instead, we must look at the interaction, assemblage and coexistence of various media strategies.

Memory studies addresses the different ways in which the past is made present. There is no preformed collective memory of a historical period such as World War II, which is subsequently remembered, forgotten or repressed by a stable community. Rather, the past is appropriated and invested with desires from the present and for the future. Cultural artifacts mediate the past in a continuous process of reiteration and transformation in an effort to bring the past ever closer. The past is made present, but at the same time the gap between past and present continues to grow. One of the challenges for curators, writers, artists and other producers of books, movies, museums and artworks that deal with the past is to find the balance between immediacy and hypermediacy.

The focus on the performance and remediation of cultural memory stresses that the past is always mediated and actively performed in the present. However, such a presentist outlook might not do justice to the historical development and complex character of sites of memory. Furthermore, it is important to take into account that such sites do not present one discrete medium, but rather comprise a multitude of media, spaces and technologies that are held together by the implied authenticity of the historic site. To better understand these issues, we will turn to the fields of critical heritage and museum studies.

2. Remnants of the Past: Heritage and the Museum

Where cultural memory studies investigates all kinds of artifacts that mediate the past, heritage studies focuses on those remnants of the past that are selected to construct or support a particular narrative of that past. This process is implicated in a politics of identity because it demarcates what seemingly has always already

---

30 Ibid., 5.
been recognized as an important part of society. Especially when these remnants are physical, they can be instrumentalized as societal foundations in order to naturalize a certain account of the past. This is the reason why authenticity is deemed so important: when heritage is authentic, it can be used as proof that certain historical events have taken place. However, authenticity at sites of memory is a problematic notion, as we will see throughout this dissertation. Authenticity is either actively preserved and mediated, for instance with the help of a reconstruction or a simple sign that points out the authenticity; or performed and imagined by visitors, who actively look for traces of the past in their search for a meaningful connection to a particular site. The term heritage suggests that these objects, traditions and other cultural phenomena are handed down to us and that we are merely custodians. This suggestion attempts to depoliticize heritage by presenting it as a natural phenomenon. It turns a blind eye to the fact that heritage is produced in the present and is often involved in a political debate about past and present.

Critical heritage studies therefore assume that heritage is not about custodianship, but rather about the active production of a narrative of the past. Heritage is not a fixed set of objects and traditions that need to be preserved, but rather an open and intangible process in the present. This resembles the presentist and constructivist perspective of cultural memory studies which argues that cultural artifacts actively produce rather than pass on an already fully formed account of the past. Though this critical approach enables us to investigate how the past is used in the present, the focus on heritage as a process in the present can lead to a disregard for its historical development and could treat physical artifacts as passive containers that can be filled with any meaning whatsoever. It is therefore important to study both the material and technological development of in situ memorial museums.

The past has always been used to create a firm foundation for the present. One way of utilizing the past is through the production of heritage. Robert Shannah Peckham argues that heritage was instrumental in the rise of the nation-state and as such ‘signifies the politicization of culture and the mobilization of cultural forms for ideological ends.’ According to historian David Lowenthal, we ‘need a stable past to validate tradition, to confirm our own identity, and to make sense of the present.’ He is highly critical of some of the underlying assumptions of such a stable past. It seems to suggest antecedence and thus a temporal continuity of

culture and history. This can be instrumental in discussions about historical and political entitlement. Cultural artifacts play an important role in this process because they ostensibly provide a direct access to the past. Secondly, by keeping the past at bay and turning it into a foreign country, it can no longer threaten us. Furthermore, a stable past offers a sense of continuity that allows us to organize our personal identity.

Because there is so much at stake, heritage often leads to conflict over the recognition of historical events and is often tied to an identity politics of inclusion and exclusion. Lowenthal rightfully claims that ‘heritage by its very nature excites partisan extremes. Ready recourse to patrimony fills many vital needs. But it also glamorizes narrow nationalism.’\(^\text{34}\) Social scientists J.E. Tunbridge and G.J. Ashworth likewise argue that conflict is central to heritage. ‘At its simplest, all heritage is someone’s heritage and therefore logically not someone else’s’.\(^\text{35}\) They argue that heritage leads to disinheritance and the marginalization of the historical experiences of others. Sociologist Michael Landzelius takes this to its radical consequence by claiming that the creation and display of heritage often follows a ‘politics of institutionalized amnesia, nonrepresentation, and nondisplay.’\(^\text{36}\)

The naturalization of heritage is an attempt to de-politicize this phenomenon. In line with this more traditional conception, heritage is presented as a stable selection of authentic artifacts and sites that offers direct and unmediated access to the past. The discourse of authenticity prohibits any alteration of heritage, since this would diminish its authentic status. However, these are erroneous assumptions. Peckham states that in order for heritage to become authentic, it needs to be taken out of its dynamic context and reintegrated into a static environment. Moreover, authenticity is actively performed and imagined by the visitor. This is especially the case when we take sites of memory into consideration. Here, the entire environment is potentially authentic: the expectation of authenticity leads to a hypersensitive mode of perception where any detail can be interpreted as an original trace of the past.

Another important problem of this more traditional view is the idea that our heritage is already fully formed and handed down to us. In reality, it is a product of socio-historical, legal, cultural and economic forces. Brian Graham, G. J. Ashworth and J. E. Tunbridge argue that ‘heritage is that part of the past which we


select in the present of contemporary purposes, be they economic, cultural, political or social’. Though this perspective is a bit too reductive – for instance, who is this collective ‘we’? – it does emphasize that heritage is constructed rather than passively inherited. This premise has incited critical heritage studies to reject heritage as the preservation of a given set of artifacts and instead focus on the intangible and performative nature of heritage.

Laurajane Smith claims that there is a discourse that maintains a culturally homogeneous community by naturalizing the practice of heritage preservation and the production of knowledge and expertise. ‘At the same time, the “work” that “heritage” “does” as a social and cultural practice is obscured, as a result of the naturalizing effects of what I call the “authorized heritage discourse”’. According to Smith, this discourse privileges the heritage expert and monumental, celebratory sites of heritage that are aesthetically pleasing. The public is framed as passive and empty vessels that consume what they are presented with, and should be educated in order to function as good citizens. Smith presents an alternative vision, heritage as a cultural process that at its core is intangible and ‘engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present, and the sites themselves are cultural tools that can facilitate, but are not necessarily vital for, this process.’ According to her, heritage is something that remains to be performed by an active public.

The critique on the conception of heritage as a fixed set of artifacts is very important, because it opens up the field to alternative narratives of the past. As such, heritage is no longer a political tool of exclusion, but may also become an instrument of recognition and plurality. However, by focusing on heritage as a process in the present, we might easily disregard the historicity and materiality of historical objects. David Harvey claims that if we do that, ‘the only referent that matters is the present, which some have seen as representing a defeat of history and a closing off of any meaningful relationship with the past’. By tracing the material development of sites of memory, we can achieve a better understanding of the interplay between elements that have remained unaltered and those that have been modified or added over time. Furthermore, by investigating how the ideal

39 Smith, Uses of Heritage, 11.
40 Ibid., 44.
visitor has been inscribed in the script of the design, and how actual visitors created new practices that are subsequently incorporated into this design, we may trace the role of visitors in this process.

In order to investigate the interaction between the material site and the visitor, it is constructive to now turn our attention to museum studies. The museum exhibition can be conceived as a mass-medium that tries to regulate the conduct of its visitors by making them move through a space in a certain manor. By ordering artifacts in a specific way, a narrative is created that visitors need to relate to spatially. However, by looking at the museum exhibition as a mass-medium that produces a spatial narrative, we might lose track of two important factors: the material historicity of the museum and the active performance of the visitor itself.

The nineteenth-century museum has often been associated with the increased importance of scientific objectivity, rationality and evolutionary progress of its time. Relatively new sciences such as paleontology and geology made the past visible by placing physical remnants in a coherent narrative. This firmly grounded the present in the past through the prism of evolutionary progress. As a result ‘new objects of knowledge were ushered forth into the sphere of scientific visibility.’42 The museum provided an important space for the public display of these objects. Museum researcher Tony Bennett warns us that we should not reduce the museum to an objective and neutral instrument that, in the name of evolutionary progress, enlists the visitor as progressive and willing subjects. ‘This view devalues the effects of the museum’s own specific materiality and the organization of its practices.’43 A museum is not an ahistorical white cube and its material history influences the way it displays its content and interacts with its visitors.

One way to study how a museum organizes the practices of the visitor is to look at its script, the set of implied instructions that are inscribed in the physical layout of a museum that addresses the ideal visitor. Media scholar Julia Noordegraaf investigates the general historical development of the museum script and argues it had a seminal role in the development of the museum throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, the museum was both a mass medium and a place for knowledge production for a select group of people. Objects were hung on the wall or encased in transparent vitrines; which simultaneously made them visible while separating them from the public, allowing for large groups of people to pass through the exhibitions. Noordegraaf describes the rise of a new type of museum during the first half of the 20th century under the

43 Ibid., 179.
influence of new democratic principles. New display principles were introduced and objects were more often shown in isolation. This allowed visitors to appreciate individual artworks and enabled identification with their creators. The museum became a place of quiet contemplation and its architecture should not interfere with observing the artworks. The consequence was an easily understandable floor plan and labels that provided just enough information for initial appreciation.

In the second half of the twentieth century, this ideal of the transparent museum grew more pressing and the mediating role of the exhibition and the museum was made invisible as much as possible through the introduction of functionalist architecture. ‘In the transparent, post-war museum, all elements of the script were placed in the service of a direct, unmediated experience of the art works on display.’\textsuperscript{44} Not only the museum, but also the visitor was idealized as a disembodied eye that had no physical presence or influence and had to be guided by an invisible script, which was criticized in the late twentieth century, when ‘the mediating role of the script of presentation was made visible again.’\textsuperscript{45} The rise of the spectacular museum, such as the creations of Frank Gehry or the Jewish Museum in Berlin by Daniel Libeskind, and the so-called experience museum are exponents of this development. The former emphasizes the architecture of the museum and the latter does not transfer knowledge by displaying objects in the context of a traditional (art-)historical narrative or in isolation, but rather ‘in action’, allowing visitors to almost automatically understand them. ‘As in the theatre, the story is told with the help of props and décor. Consequently, the amount of written information is greatly reduced. Instead, the qualities of the objects are suggested by the setting in which they are staged.’\textsuperscript{46} Noordegraaf further argues that in the experience museum, authentic objects and props are no longer fundamentally opposed and new media technologies are employed to meet the expectations and tap into the daily lives of visitors.

By looking at the general historical development of how museums address their visitors, we get a sense of how the ideal visitor has been envisioned and inscribed in the material layout of museum exhibitions. However, the original museum script does not determine the behavior of actual visitors who might not understand or choose to disregard this set of instructions. It is therefore essential that we also look at the visiting practices. Bennett suggests that we should ‘view the narrative machinery of the museum as providing a context for a performance that [is] simultaneously bodily and mental (and in ways which question the terms of

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 197.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 219.
such a duality). Noordegraaf stresses that the script of museums is constantly modified in reaction to the behavior of visitors, and therefore is coproduced by curators and visitors.

The museum exhibition is not a neutral medium that is constructed ex novo, but rather a palimpsest embedded within the physical layout of the museum. The in situ memorial museum is a special type of museum since it essentially exhibits its own history. It therefore must be physically inserted into its narrative. It is unproductive to identify this type of museum as a discrete and identifiable medium. It is more instructive to understand the in situ memorial museum as a fragmented spatial configuration of multiple media, technologies, scripts and artifacts. By doing so, we can see how various scripts have been introduced over time and can compete with each other, accounting for the material historicity of this site type. This allows us to understand how the visitor transforms small fragments and details of the building into indexical markers that provide a connection to the past that is imagined and affective rather than presented as part of a coherent narrative.

3. The Spatial and Performative Character of Urban Memory

This section explores the intricate relations between memory and space, which has been a recurring topic within the field of memory studies. The stabilizing quality of space has often been employed to stratify certain accounts of the past, similar to sites of heritage and cultural artifacts. However, space is also actively constructed, both by architects and city planners as well as by its users, as argued by philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Michel Foucault. Space is always part of a larger network and is constantly used by city dwellers in old and new ways. Historical events leave only fragmented traces that need to be contextualized by either architectural or artistic interventions. It is important to take the construction of space into account, because it allows us to understand why memory and heritage have the ability to spatially proliferate, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5.

The relationship between space and memory dates back to a long tradition of mnemonic strategies. Historian Frances Yates demonstrates how Medieval and Renaissance orators envisioned imaginary spaces in order to memorize speeches. An essential element of this technique was the sequential ordering of spaces, for instance rooms in a building, where every room held a cue to a specific part of a speech. People would reuse the same imaginary space for different speeches. For

47 Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 179.
them, the imaginary space was a tool that enabled the memorialization of a predetermined narrative, and had little to do with the transmission of memory in an actual space. However, it does point to several crucial notions of spatial memory: the role of imagination; the active performance of the person who is doing the remembering; and the fact that one space can both hold different memories at once and simultaneously provide a sequential narrative. Philosopher Edward Casey argues that memory needs places in order to endure.

It is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability. An alert and alive memory connects spontaneously with place, finding in it features that favor and parallel its own activities. We might even say that memory is naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported.49

Nora acknowledges this. ‘Memory fastens upon sites, whereas history fastens upon events.’50 Memory scholar Jan Assmann argues that communities try to stabilize their shared identities by localizing them. ‘Any group that wants to consolidate itself will make an effort to find and establish a base for itself […]. Memory needs places and tends towards spatialization.’51 Dolores Hayden argues that such places of memory have a dual function: ‘places trigger memories for insiders, who have shared a common past, and at the same time places often can represent shared pasts to outsiders who might be interested in knowing about them in the present.’52

Space seems to be the adversary of time: where our memory fades in time, we might battle this amnesia by connecting it to concrete spaces. A paradoxical logic underlies this idea: we may use spaces to stabilize our memory; but we need to construct or alter these spaces in order to do so. The constructed nature of sites of memory refutes the idea that these places somehow provide immediate access to a fixed and stable past, even if their material nature suggests a self-evident permanence.53

53 Laurajane Smith points out that in the Western tradition, the material basis of heritage is often emphasized in order to naturalize a specific account of the past. See Smith, Uses of Heritage. M. Christine Boyer terms sites that support national myths rhetorical topoi that are ‘civic compositions that teach us about our national heritage and our public responsibilities and assume that the urban landscape itself is the emblematic embodiment of power and memory.’ M. C. Boyer, The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 321.
The assumed stabilizing quality of space offers both an opportunity and a risk. It can bring certain pasts to the forefront, but at the same time leave other pasts unexposed. Absence is thus at the basis of every presence, a dialectical relationship that is always unsettled and potentially unsettling.\textsuperscript{54} Urban space in particular has been connected to the production and materialization of modern memory, since this particular space seems to provide something of a public realm that abounds with traces of the past.\textsuperscript{55} Walter Benjamin introduces the literary figure of the wandering flâneur for whom every city-street can offer a ‘vertiginous experience’ and where ‘far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment’.\textsuperscript{56} For Benjamin, the flâneur symbolizes the individual who was able to counter modernity’s urban condition of constant flux, stimulus and change by finding fragments and discovering marginal places that allowed a form of remembering that was not necessarily born out of personal experience. The constant shifts of attention, inherent to urban life, provide the possibility of a critical awareness of the intermingling of present and the past.\textsuperscript{57}

For Halbwachs, the city is an important place for the construction of collective and individual identities.\textsuperscript{58} According to him, all memory is socially constructed around some concept of space, since spatial imagery provides a much-needed stability that puts us in contact with the past. He turns to the city of London to demonstrate his argument, describing how during his first visit to London he seems to remember most of the landmarks through the mediation of Charles Dickens and others.

Many impressions during my first visit to London – St. Paul’s, Mansion House, the Strand, or the Inns of Court – reminded me of Dickens’ novels

\textsuperscript{54} Architect Peter Eisenman, designer of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, uses the notion of presence in absence in his work. He is criticized for his too facile and anti-humanist position by John MacArthur: ‘Eisenman’s play on absence contests the canon only to restate it and claim its authority. His is not so much a deconstruction of presence as an appropriation of the rhetoric of absence.’ John Macarthur, “Experiencing Absence: Eisenman and Derrida, Benjamin and Schwitters,” in Knowledge And/or/of Experience, ed. John Macarthur (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1993), 107.

\textsuperscript{55} Art historian Mark Crinson describes the city as a ‘collective spatiality’, a realm that is not purely private but rather shared with others. See Mark Crinson, Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City (London: Routledge, 2005), xiii.


\textsuperscript{57} Uta Staiger, Henriette Steiner, and Andrew Webber, Memory Culture and the Contemporary City: Building Sites (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 4. The flâneur, whose modern reincarnation is the city dweller, is characterized by mobility and creative imagination, and is a highly privileged and male subject. For a critique on the male character of the flâneur, see Janet Wolff, “The Invisible Flaneuse. Women and the Literature of Modernity,” Theory, Culture & Society 2, no. 3 (1985): 37–46.

\textsuperscript{58} Halbwachs, The Collective Memory. For a critical review of his work, see Gedi and Elam, "Collective Memory - What Is It?"; Echterhoff and Saar, Kontexte und Kulturen des Erinnerns: Maurice Halbwachs und das Paradigma des kollektiven Gedächtnisses. See chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of Halbwachs’ work.
read in childhood, so I took my walk with Dickens. [...] I can [...] recognize in myself many ideas and ways of thinking that could not have originated with me.59

Both Benjamin and Halbwachs argue that in the city, ideas and memories emerge that are not entirely individual, but are rather formed in contact with the urban environment, in streets, districts and neighborhoods. The city does not hold a fixed and readable collective memory, but rather provides a concrete and somewhat stable place where individuals can produce individual experiences that somehow connect to past, present and future experiences of others.

The Italian architect Aldo Rossi is greatly influenced by Halbwachs’ ideas and argues that a city is not the product of a blueprint design, but rather of the historical events that took place there. He therefore rejects the modernist architectural agenda that sees the city as a tabula rasa, and rather envisions the city as the unique result of its own past.

For Rossi, the city is a theater of human events. This theater is no longer just a representation; it is a reality. It absorbs events and feelings, and every new event contains within it a memory of the past and a potential memory of the future. Thus, while the locus is a site which can accommodate a series of events, it also in itself constitutes an event.60

Rossi touches upon an important characteristic of space that was already recognized by Benjamin, namely that one site can accommodate different events. Benjamin terms this ‘the colportage phenomenon of space’, where one space refers to different historic events and in which the flâneur ‘experiences an uncanny thickening and layering of phenomena, an effect of superimposition, in which remembered events or habitations show through the present time and place.’61 In a similar vein, Foucault argues that we are ‘in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition [...].’62 According to him, every culture has heterotopias, concrete sites that are symbolically connected to other relevant cultural sites and can represent, contest or invert those. Examples are the cemetery, where state, religious and individual relations come together, and the theater that can hold an infinite number of other (imaginary) spaces.

These notions of simultaneity, colportage and the city as theater underscore how sites of memory can be appropriated by city dwellers to construct a narrative of the present and the past. The question is then, how much of this is

60 Peter Eisenman, “Editor’s Introduction,” in The Architecture of the City, by Aldo Rossi (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 7, original emphasis.
performed by the visitor and how much is inherent to the site itself. Memory scholar James Young stresses that the meaning of a monument is always related to a larger, topographical network, be it urban, regional or global, that provides some contextual frame. A site of memory according to Young is:

one node among others in a topographical matrix that orients the rememberer and creates meaning in both the land and our recollections. For like narrative, which automatically locates events in linear sequence, the memorial also brings events into some cognitive order. In this sense, any memorial marker in the landscape, no matter how alien to its surroundings, is still perceived in the midst of its geography, in some relation to other landmarks nearby.\footnote{James E. Young, \textit{The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.}

The traces of the past are fragments that are only brought together in the eyes of the beholder and this network is not fixed, but actively produced by the ‘rememberer’. Literary scholar Andreas Huyssen argues that we read and write cities and buildings as palimpsests full of traces of past events. In spite of Freud’s remark that the same space cannot hold two different contents, an ‘urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is. The strong marks of present space merge in the imaginary with traces of the past, erasure, losses, and heterotopias.’\footnote{Andreas Huyssen, \textit{Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 7.} The city is not a fixed text that can be read straightforwardly, but rather something that we actively write while simultaneously preserving older traces.

The idea that memory is the active process of reconstructing the past; rather than a passive and neutral retrieval of stable historical narratives, also holds true for space. It is not a static sign that refers to a fixed and readable past, but rather a dynamic network in which people can perform the past. There is a difference between the intended and actual use of spaces. Certeau distinguishes space from place to indicate this difference. Where a place is the designed and intentional function of, say, a city park, this park only becomes a space when it is actively used. In his terms, a space is an actualized place, a relationship that may be compared to an isolated word on paper versus a spoken word. In ‘speaking’ the city, individuals are able to appropriate places and insert ambiguity, allowing for a slippage of meaning. ‘In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a “proper.” In short, space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by

\footnote{James E. Young, \textit{The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.}
Where the city planner tries to define the practices of the city dweller and for instance prevent illegal practices such as walking on grass by placing fences or other borders, inhabitants can ignore these rules.

A similar discrepancy can be found at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. One could argue that the function of this site is to commemorate the victims of the Shoah. However, the open design and lack of stated meaning invites visitors to play around, jump from stone to stone and insert their own narratives. Here, the behavior of visitors and the meaning of the memorial are not predefined by the architect Peter Eisenman. "The architect prefers that the pillars, though stone-like, remain underdetermined and open to many readings [...]." Nor did he condemn playful and even potentially disrespectful practices such as jumping from stone to stone and graffiti-tagging. In spite of his wishes, the foundation responsible for the memorial has posted rules and hired guards to prevent such behavior and applied an anti-graffiti layer to the stelae. Here we find a looping system: the unwanted behavior of visitors is counteracted by the managing party. The model of Certeau does not account for such a circular interaction. In contrast to Certeau, Lefebvre argues that spaces are simultaneously lived, conceived and perceived. If we use Certeau’s terms against himself, we could argue that there is no place before space. If you look at the example of a park, it is conceived of as a place for recreation, it plays an important part in our collective perception of what a healthy city should have, and in practice can be used for both recreation and criminal activities. Where for Certeau, the practice of (mis-)interpreting the city against the design of the city-planner and broader cultural schemes enable moments of resistance, for Lefebvre the three realms of lived, conceived and perceived space are interconnected.

Lefebvre’s triadic structure has been criticized for being too reductive. When we turn to in situ sites of memory, Lefebvre’s triadic scheme indeed cannot account for the role of past events and the complex issues of mediation of cultural

---

68 “That the lived, conceived, and perceived realms should be interconnected, so that the ‘subject’, the individual member of a given social group, may move from one to another without confusion – so much is a logical necessity.’ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 40.
69 Sociologist Edward Soja stresses that we should not stop at these three terms. “The “third” term [...] is not sanctified in and of itself. The critique is not meant to stop at three, to construct a holy trinity, but to build further, to move on, to continuously expand the production of knowledge beyond what is presently known. Lefebvre organizes The Production of Space around just such a thirding of his own longstanding interest in the dialectic of the lived and the conceived, the “real” and the “imagined”, the material world and our thoughts about it.’ Edward W Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 61.
memory. However, his point that different imaginations and usages of spaces can coincide and intersect is indeed instructive. We should not focus merely on the intended and conceived function of memorial museums, but should also recognize that city dwellers appropriate such sites on their own terms. In the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, they may interpret it as former theater, a memorial, a museum, a beautiful building or a non-place. The relationship between building and city dweller can be described in similar terms as the museum script, where the curator and visitor co-produced the exhibition. In the case of the building’s role in the cityscape, there is a fundamental simultaneity of conceived, perceived and lived space; in the eyes of the curator, architect and visitor. Within this dynamic field, the memory of the building is co-produced by different actors, as will be described below.

In spite of the great diversity of opinions these thinkers bring to the surface, there are some points of agreement in their ideas of urban memory that are relevant for the study of in situ memorial museums: simultaneity; fragmented traces of the past; collective imaginaries and connectedness to other places. Space has both a dynamic and stable character that allows people to imagine a direct link to past events. The imagined simultaneity of past, present and future is an important characteristic of in situ sites that enables both individuals and institutions to bring these three together. The premise of chapter 5 is that this process of meaning production can easily spill over to neighboring structures of such sites, possibly undermining the initial intention of stabilizing and specifying a past event by coupling it to a specific location. The spatial proliferation of memory can either become a problem or offer an opportunity to bring the memory in contact with the public sphere and the urban dweller.

In situ memorial museums provide a spatial arrangement of artifacts, media and technologies that allow visitors to imagine how past events have taken place. As we have seen in this chapter, these sites present us with various complex issues. Though the past is actively mediated by these sites, they should not be understood as discrete media that are legible, but rather as spatial configurations that provide a context for visitors to perform a connection and understanding of the past. Sites of memory are not stable anchors of the past, but nodes in larger and every-changing networks. The dynamic nature of these sites does not mean we should disregard

---

Merel de Kok examined the name recognition of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in 2011 and 2012. About 70% of Amsterdam inhabitants were familiar with the site, versus 40% of Dutchmen outside of Amsterdam and 5% of foreigners. Merel de Kok, “Een nadere kennismaking. Bevolkingsonderzoek en publieksonderzoek, september 2011 - februari 2012,” Visitors survey (Amsterdam: Hollandsche Schouwburg & Joods Historisch Museum, February 29, 2012), 21–22. Many people I encountered had no idea what the history of this site was, and wondered what kind of theater it was.
their historical, institutional and material development. Why does a building such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg become a site of memory in the first place? How is this painful heritage framed in the hegemonic memory discourse? And how can we trace these developments in the current presentation of these sites? These issues are investigated in the following chapters before we turn our attention to the proliferation of spatial memory in the final chapter.
Chapter 2: The Construction of an *In Situ* Memorial Site: Framing Painful Heritage

The symbolic center of the memorial complex at the Hollandsche Schouwburg is situated at the rear of the open courtyard. In the middle of the stage of this former theater, a large pylon is placed atop a base in the form of a Magen David or David’s Star. Behind this memorial needle stands an inscribed stone wall dedicated to the memory of victims that were deported during the Nazi occupation. These sculptural elements are surrounded by crumbled and eroded brick walls that, in contrast to the pylon and inscribed wall, provide a sense of authenticity (see figure 2.1). The visitor now stands at a site where an essential part of the persecution of the Jews took place. Where the pylon and grey wall are markers that remain external to the visitor’s experience, the brick walls create a semi-enclosed and affective space which may be entered in order to somehow make contact with an absent past. The staged authenticity of the walls is evoked by the bare and rough bricks pointing towards the sky and is further reinforced by traces of bricked-up doors and other openings, suggesting that these walls have had previous lives. There is no enclosing roof: the top of the walls are unevenly finished and blackened by erosion. Most of

![Figure 2. 1. Courtyard. Photograph David Duindam](image_url)
this courtyard has clearly been designed after World War II; however these walls appear authentic, as if they stood the test of time and now serve as silent witnesses to the tragic events that previously unfolded within this space.

The suggestion of the walls’ authenticity enables and even facilitates an affective experience: what visitors see resonates with their expectations, in this case, absence staged through the trope of the ruin, a technique more often employed at Shoah sites.¹ The result is convincing because of the building’s history: persecuted Jews awaited deportation within these very walls that are now stripped back to their material essence. However, as literary scholar James Young points out, the ruin can be a problematic form of representation at sites such as the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum where the debris of gas chambers represent victims through the intended destruction of evidence by the Nazis.² Ruins have a long tradition in the Western world and are intricately related to modernity’s historical self-awareness. The aestheticizing quality of ruins begs the question of whether they can truly represent human suffering. They are paradoxical by nature and oscillate between a radical rupture with the past and a sense of continuity, absence and presence; both fragment and whole.³

Visitors often ask if the walls are original to the theater. Some wonder if the building was bombed, destroyed or burned down during the occupation, while pointing at black erosion above. Others realize that the walls are designed to be part of the memorial, because of the regularity of the crumbling. Both reactions demonstrate a familiarity with the ruin trope at similar sites and relate it to the issue of authenticity. To answer the question is rather complex: the current brick walls are only partially the original walls of the former stage. The ruinous character was not a direct consequence of warfare violence, but rather of its aftermath.

Subsequent to the building being used for the assembly and deportation of more

---

¹ For a discussion of the ‘geënsceneerde leegte’ (staged emptiness) of the Anne Frankhuis, see Rob van der Laarse, De oorlog als beleven: over de musealisering en enscenering van Holocaust-erfgoed (Amsterdam: Reinwardt Academie, 2010), 25. For the notion of absence employed at former camp sites in the Netherlands, see Roel Hijink, Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering: de monumentalisering van de Duitse kampen in Nederland (Dissertation. University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, 2010), chapter 6.
² Young, The Texture of Memory, chapter 5, in particular p. 132.
³ Literary scholars Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle therefore argue that the ‘beholder defines the ruin, and the ruin could not exist without such creative appropriation.’ Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., Ruins of Modernity (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 7. Also see Aleida Assmann, Monika Gomille, and Gabriele Rippl, eds., Ruinenbilder (Munich: W. Fink, 2002). For James Young, this openness to multiple interpretations can be problematic in the case of former concentration camps, since ‘their simple reality as ruins unfortunately works to corroborate all historical explanation—no matter now insidious or farfetched.’ James E. Young, Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 175. In chapter 4, this openness to multiple interpretations is argued to be an opportunity for the visitor to inscribe him- or herself into the narrative of the site rather than a dangerous source of misinterpretation.
than forty-six thousand Jews, it was sold in 1944 to two businessmen who
reopened the theater shortly after the liberation of the Netherlands. A group
of concerned citizens argued this was an insult to the memory of the victims of Nazi
terror. A committee was formed that successfully collected funds to purchase
the theater and donate it to the city of Amsterdam. The city government however was
unable to find an appropriate destination; as a result, the theater stood empty for
almost a decade. When in 1958 a final decision was made, the building had to be
largely demolished. The architect used the original walls as far as they
accommodated his design. Some parts were reconstructed using original bricks
salvaged during demolition.

The walls are thus materially authentic and integrated as such into the
memorial inaugurated in 1962. As part of this design, they stress the material
historicity of the site and provide a counterpoint to those sculptural elements that
are manifestly not authentic, such as the pylon and the grey memorial wall. Where
these elements suggest a radical break with the past through representational
substitution, the walls both embody and signify a material and spatial continuity
with that very same past. The Schouwburg, like other in situ memorials, is an
assemblage of both the embodiment and mediation of the past in the present. They
are not two exclusive categories: the case of the walls – partly authentic, party
reconstructed – demonstrates that the current site is both a remnant and a
rearrangement of the past. Here, past and present have a reciprocal rather than
unidirectional relationship. The figure of the ruin turns the concept of heritage as a
selection of the past around: the present as a material rearrangement of the past,
even if this past is radically transformed.

This chapter addresses the postwar development of the Hollandsche
Schouwburg from a site of painful heritage into the first national Shoah memorial
in the Netherlands. In order to understand this process, we will examine how the
debate over the use of this theater in local and national newspapers influenced the

---

4 Nicole Ex introduces a pragmatic taxonomy of authenticity for practices of art and architectural
restoration. She identifies seven different forms: material, conceptual, contextual, functional, ahistorical
and historical. Nicole Ex Wetering, Ernst van de, Zo goed als oud: de achterkant van het restaureren
(Amsterdam: Amber, 1993), 93–129. If we follow this classification, these walls are exclusively
materially authentic. Her taxonomy deals with the restoration of intentional works of art, not with in situ
memorials, but nevertheless demonstrates the diversity and complexity of this term. I prefer to use the
term ‘staged authenticity’, or a temporary authenticity effect that is accomplished mainly by the
location and several materially authentic elements which enables a sense of being-there. See chapter 1
for an in-depth discussion of indexicality as an alternative approach, and chapter 4 for an analysis of
how this is deployed as an essential source in the current presentation.

5 For a detailed discussion of presentism in certain conceptualizations of heritage, see chapter 1.2.

6 This chapter partly overlaps with a chapter I co-wrote with Esther Göbel. David Duindam and Esther
Göbel, “Theater van onmogelijke herinneringen. Van ‘schandvlek’ tot herdenkingsplaats,” in De
Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty
Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 162–89.
decision-making process. Here we follow the observations of two memory scholars. James Young argues that every case must be studied in its own local context since there is no universal definition of Shoah memorials. Furthermore, Peter Carrier investigates the messy procedures that involve the construction of what he calls dialogical monuments. The outline of the chapter is threefold: first, the early postwar memory discourse in the Netherlands is discussed. In these early postwar years, emphasis was placed on national unity with little room for critical self-reflection. The question is how the persecution of the Jews was framed in this period of national reconstruction. Section two investigates the collection of funds to acquire the Hollandsche Schouwburg to prohibit impropriety. This issue was framed in the national unifying memory discourse, alienating Jewish institutions and individuals. The final section examines the toilsome debate over the destination of this former theater. In the 1950s, several plans were debated, such as the establishment of a historical museum, a church or university hall, and, most prominently, the founding of an Israel Center. None of these plans mustered enough support from important Jewish institutions and it took until 1958 before the city government decided to construct a memorial dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims of the war. Gradually, the discourse of unity was unraveled and the Hollandsche Schouwburg became a site where the exceptionality of Jewish suffering during the Nazi occupation was first expressed. Many Jewish individuals and institutions continued to feel and act ambivalent in regards to this site, as will be demonstrated in chapter 3.

1. National Framing and Silent Memories: The Persecution of the Jews as Part of Collective Suffering

It has been argued that the memory of the persecution of the Jews was either forgotten or repressed until the 1960s, when the persecution of the Jews gradually became a more articulated part of the hegemonic narrative of WWII, both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. The publication of major historical studies and the internationally covered Eichmann trial in 1961 are frequently mentioned as important catalysts on both national and international levels. This seems also true

---

7 Young, The Texture of Memory, viii.
8 Carrier, Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures, chapter 8.
9 See Jan Bank, Oorlogsverleden in Nederland (Baarn: Ambo, 1983); Frank van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz. Herinneringen, beelden, geschiedenis (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 1995), chapter 1; for an international comparison of Belgium, France and the Netherlands, see Pieter Lagrou, Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chapter 13; for a study of the awareness of the Holocaust in American culture before the 1960s, see Peter Novick, The Holocaust in American Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); for a study of the Israeli case and the seminal role of the Eichmann trial, see Tom Segev, The Seventh
for the Dutch memorial policy, since the first public memorial dedicated to the memory of Jewish victims with a national bearing was inaugurated at the Hollandsche Schouwburg only in 1962. However, if one looks at the production, publication and reception of books, movies and historical studies that address the persecution of Jews in those early years, it is difficult to uphold this argument. The persecution of the Jews was not forgotten, but on the one hand framed in a national discourse of collective suffering and on the other silenced by a considerable part of the Jewish community.

Memory scholar Aleida Assmann argues that after a military conflict, memory politics tend to prioritize actively fallen victims (soldiers and resistance fighters) over passive ones. ‘Traumatic experiences of suffering and shame are only admitted to memory with difficulty, since they are hard to integrate into a positive individual or collective self-image.’ The first years after liberation were dedicated to national reconstruction of the Netherlands. The dominant narrative of the occupation involved a black-and-white story of the resistance fighting Nazis and their henchmen. According to historian Pieter Lagrou, this happened in France, Belgium and the Netherlands: ‘glorification of the contribution of the resistance movements was the only basis available for a true national myth’. There was little to no room for memories that endangered this national myth, such as a self-critical assessment regarding the massive deportation of Jews in the Netherlands, which outnumbered that of other Western European nations under Nazi occupation.

The construction of memorials was an essential instrument of postwar memory politics. Most war-memorials were the result of local and private initiatives. The government exercised control through a network of committees that

---


10 Translation by the author, original quote: ‘Traumatische Erfahrungen von Leid und Scham finden nur schwer Einlass ins Gedächtnis, weil diese nicht in ein positives individuelles oder kollektives Selbstbild integriert werden können.’ Aleida Assmann, Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik (Munich: Beck, 2006), 75. In Israel, for instance, survivors of the death camps were treated as slaughtered lambs, whereas the ghetto fighters from Warsaw were glorified as national heroes. See Segev, The Seventh Million; Idith Zertal, Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

11 Lagrou, Legacy of Nazi Occupation, 26. The specific national contexts were disparate. In the Netherlands for instance, the resistance, in particular the Communist Party was unable to obtain a real political power base, different from France and Belgium. For a discussion of black-and-white historiography and the postwar myth, see J. C. H. Blom, In de ban van goed en fout? Wetenschappelijke geschiedschrijving over de bezettingstijd in Nederland (Bergen: Octavo, 1983); H.W. von der Dunk, In het huis van de herinnering. Een cultuurhistorische verkenning (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2007), 303–305.

12 73% of Jews who lived the Netherlands in 1941 (both native and immigrant) were murdered, compared to 40% in Belgium and 25% in France. Marnix Croes, “The Holocaust in the Netherlands and the Rate of Jewish Survival,” Holocaust and Genocide Studies 20, no. 3 (December 21, 2006): 474.
examined the plans before giving permission. In general, permission was granted to memorials dedicated to the ‘actively fallen’ and withheld when initiatives sought to commemorate specific victim groups, such as Jewish deportees. This policy was based on the notion that the population as a whole had suffered equally; the persecution of Jews was framed as only a part of this collective suffering. The unique character of the extermination of Jews on the basis of the Nuremberg race laws was rejected on principle by the government which was unwilling to discriminate between Jews and non-Jews. In addition to these private initiatives, the government installed twelve national monuments which ascribed to the same notion of national suffering. In 1947, a national memorial wall was inaugurated at Vught, a transit camp where both Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners had been held. The names of 329 executed, mostly non-Jewish resistance fighters were inscribed in the wall; there was no mention of the 12,000 Jews and Jehovah’s witnesses deported from this site. The plan to erect a national memorial at the former transit camp for Jews in Westerbork was cancelled because it would stress the Nazi terror, rather than the national spirit of resistance.

In this same period, the Jewish Orthodox Church in Amsterdam (NIHS) was not given permission to build a memorial to the Jewish victims of the persecution. It was to be located at the J.D. Meijerplein, the former Jewish religious center of Amsterdam. The memorial would never be realized, because the responsible alderman did not want a memorial built exclusively for Jewish victims. Instead, the NIHS built a memorial at the Jewish cemetery of Muiderberg.

---

13 See Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, chapter 2; Lagrou, Legacy of Nazi Occupation, 69–77; Hijink, Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering, chapter 2; Rob van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte. Herdenkingscultuur in Nederland (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2011), chapter 1. Van Ginkel disagrees with Lagrou, who ascribes a ‘dirigiste’ memorial policy to the postwar government. The debate about the Hollandsche Schouwburg attests to Van Ginkel’s insight that an essential part of the Dutch memorial culture was not organized top-down, but was instead driven by local initiatives. In practice, it was always an interaction between individuals, governments and other interest groups.

14 Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, chapter 4.

15 Several historians argued that this, in combination with an anti-Semitic atmosphere in a few post-liberation newspapers and everyday life, led to the contradictory situation in which Jews were on the one hand treated as equals by the government and received no extra aid but were also expected to show gratitude to the Dutch population for having been rescued. They were treated as equals and simultaneously as others. See J. Presser, Ondergang: de vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse Jodendom, 1940-1945 (Den Haag: Staatsuitgeverij Nijhoff, 1965), vol. 2, p. 512; Dienke Hondius, Terugkeer: antisemitisme in Nederland rond de bevrijding (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1990); Evelien Gans, “Vandaag hebben ze niets – maar morgen bezitten ze weer tien gulden’. Antisemitische stereotypen in bevrijd Nederland,” in Polderschouw. Terugkeer en opvang na de Tweede Wereldoorlog. Regionale verschillen, ed. Conny Kristel (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2002), 313–53; Evelien Gans, De kleine verschillen die het leven uitmaken. Een historische studie naar joodse sociaal-democraten en socialistisch-zionisten in Nederland (Amsterdam: Vassallucci, 1999), 567–568.

16 Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 57–104; 90–91.

17 Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, 94.

which was inaugurated in 1948. During the first ten years after liberation, some seventy Jewish memorials were constructed throughout the country, all of them at Jewish sites, mostly graveyards.\textsuperscript{19} None were located at prominent or public sites to act as exhortations towards the non-Jewish population.

The first two memorials in the public sphere that mentioned the persecution of the Jews were both in Amsterdam: the Monument of Gratitude, a stone wall with a sculptural bas-relief surface inaugurated in 1950; and the Dokwerker, a statue of a sturdy man unveiled in 1952. The former was an initiative of several Jewish camp survivors and an expression of Jewish gratitude. Its inscription is a textbook example of how the persecution of the Jews was framed as part of a collective suffering. ‘1940-1945 / To the protectors of the Dutch Jews during the occupation / acquiescent in God’s will / united with you in defense / protected by your love / strengthened by your resistance / in mourning with you’. It must be noted that this memorial was not supported by the Jewish community at large. The NIHS was not present at its inauguration because it argued that the Jewish community had already sufficiently demonstrated its gratitude and that the committee responsible for the memorial did not properly represent the Jewish community.\textsuperscript{20} The memorial was never appropriated as a significant site for commemorations.

The Dokwerker commemorated the 1941 February Strike and is located at the very location where the NIHS had wanted to construct its memorial. The strike was a source of national pride and solidarity between Jews and non-Jews because it was seen as the largest general protest in Europe against the persecution of the Jews. Its initiative was a point of controversy between the communist party (CPN) and anti-communists.\textsuperscript{21} The inscription on the memorial subscribed to the second interpretation, labeling the protest as an ‘act of resistance of the bourgeoisie’.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, the memorial stressed resistance against Nazi terror and only indirectly commemorates Jewish victims.\textsuperscript{23} Two editorials published in the weekly Jewish newspaper, the \textit{Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad (NIW)}, claimed it would have been more appropriate to commemorate Jewish victims, rather than celebrate their rescuers, especially at this square which had always been a center of Jewish

\textsuperscript{19} Van Ginkel, \textit{Rondom de stilte}, 117–122.
\textsuperscript{20} NIW February 17 and 24, 1950. The NIHS argued that this committee was not officially endorsed by Jewish institutions and was the initiative of random camp survivors.
\textsuperscript{21} Annet Mooij, \textit{De strijd om de Februaristaking} (Amsterdam: Balans, 2006).
\textsuperscript{22} Stigter, “Beelden om nooit te vergeten,” 44.
\textsuperscript{23} Historian Ido de Haan claims that there was a complex relationship of competition and reciprocal interdependence between the postwar resistance movement and the Jewish community. Ido de Haan, \textit{Na de ondergang. De herinnering aan de jodenvervolging in Nederland, 1945-1995} (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1997), 80.
religious life.\textsuperscript{24} The annual February 25 commemorations were well-attended, but were not appropriated in the early years by the Jewish community as ‘their’ commemoration.

In spite of the national narrative that underlies these memorials, it must be pointed out that the persecution of the Jews was not repressed or forgotten in the early postwar period.\textsuperscript{25} From 1946 onwards, several impressionistic studies and diaries were published, sooner than in surrounding countries.\textsuperscript{26} Internationally, the Anne Frank diary, the Nuremberg trials and movies such as the Polish \textsc{The Last Stage} (1948) and the French \textsc{Nuit et Brouillard} (1955) attest to an early interest in the topic.\textsuperscript{27} Furthermore, in 1950, the first systematic study of the persecution of the Jews appeared, entitled \textit{Kroniek der Jodenvervolging} by Abel Herzberg.\textsuperscript{28} Most of these films and publications did not focus on the painful issues of passive collaboration, the role of their own governments, political systems or administrations and were therefore framed within a national unity discourse.

\textsuperscript{24} Joop Melkman ‘Rondom het Meyerplein’ \textit{NIW} May 2, 1952; M.H. Gans, ‘Ons Monument’ \textit{NIW} December 19, 1952.


\textsuperscript{26} Sam de Wolff, \textit{Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland, laatste bedrijf} (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers, 1946); H Wielek, \textit{De oorlog die Hitler won} (Amsterdam: Amsterdamsche Boek- en Courantmij., 1947). Both Ido de Haan and Conny Kristel argue that these publications appeared sooner than in surrounding countries. De Haan furthermore argues that the historiographical production on the persecution of the Jews was only stalled in the 1970s and picked up again in the 1980s. See Ido de Haan, “Breuklijnen in de geschiedschrijving van de Jodenvervolging. Een overzicht van het recente Nederlandse debat,” \textit{Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden} 123 (2008): 31; Conny Kristel, \textit{Geschiedschrijving als opdracht. Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser en Loe de Jong over de jodenvervolging} (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1998), 17. To mention just a few diaries that were published: Siegfried van den Bergh, \textit{Deportaties: Westerbork, Theresiënstadt, Auschwitz, Gleiwitz} (Bussum: Van Dishoeck, 1945); E De Wind, \textit{Eindstation - Auschwitz: waaraan toegevoegd: verslag van de Staatscommissie der U.S.S.R., belast met het onderzoek naar de toestanden in het concentratiekamp Oswiecim (Auschwitz)} (Amsterdam: Republiek der Letteren, 1946); Anne Frank, \textit{Het achterhuis. Dagboekbrieven van 12 Juni 1942 - 1 Augustus 1944} (Amsterdam: Contact, 1947); memoirs that only partially deal with the persecution, but offer much insight on the Hollandsche Schouwburg Henriëtte Davids, \textit{Mijn levenslied} (Gouda: J. Mulder, 1948). For an extended list of memoirs, see Martin Bossenbroek, who argues that there was a surge of publications related to the persecution of the Jews, both by Jews and non-Jews, until 1947 when public interest in ‘barbed wire reading’ disappeared. He argues that, in spite of these publications, many camp survivors could not talk about their experiences and where, in the words of G.L. Durlacher, travelers poor of words. M. P Bossenbroek, \textit{De meelstreep: terugkeer en opvang na de Tweede Wereldoorlog} (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2001), 501–508.


\textsuperscript{28} Abel Herzberg, \textit{Kroniek der Jodenvervolging} (Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1956). This last book was published as part of a series about the war. It was reprinted as a separate book in 1952, 1956, 1960, 1978 and 1985.
Nonetheless, their very existence refutes the notion of complete silence on the topic of the persecution of the Jews, especially during the early postwar years.\textsuperscript{29} The persecution of the Jews was indeed not forgotten, but integrated into a dominant narrative that supported postwar reconstruction of the Dutch nation-state, in line with the previously described memorial policy.\textsuperscript{30} One important characteristic of this narrative was the equalization of the memory of civilian victims and the externalization of evil.\textsuperscript{31} The abovementioned study by Jewish historian Herzberg is a poignant example of how the persecution of Jews could be framed without condemning the Dutch government or society at large. He interpreted the persecution as an attack from outside rather than as a Dutch event when he writes that:

The persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, though executed on Dutch territory, is not an actual Dutch history. It did not arise out of Dutch circumstances. One could even say that this would have been impossible.

The resistance against the persecution has been a Dutch issue.\textsuperscript{32} Herzberg’s position is an example of the difficult and ambiguous position of Dutch Jews who needed to reconcile their will to move forward with the reality of recent events. In spite of the fact that Jews had been integrated into the fabric of Dutch society for many decades before World War II, many more Jews living in the Netherlands had been murdered than in any other West-European country.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{29} Van Vree argues that ‘unwanted’ memories are absent but not forgotten when there is no appropriate social space or ideological framework to support or in which to articulate them. The reasons are manifold: a desire for continuity and reconstruction, political repression, but also feelings of shame, embarrassment, loyalty or gratitude. Frank van Vree, “Absent Memories,” \textit{Cultural Analysis} 12 (2013): 1–12.

\textsuperscript{30} Van Vree argues that the fate of the persecuted was either suppressed or annexed in a national discourse, see Van Vree, \textit{In de schaduw van Auschwitz}, 91.

\textsuperscript{31} The externalization of evil was not exclusive to the Netherlands: even in Germany and Austria similar processes occurred. Historian Jörn Rüsen argues that in postwar Germany, Nazism and the persecution of the Jews were both ex-territorialized as un-German occurrences. ‘The Nazis were demonized and ex-territorialized into a realm beyond the main lines of German history. Nazism and Nazi dictatorship shrank into an invasion of a relatively small group of political gangsters coming out of nowhere and occupying Germany.’ Jörn Rüsen, “Holocaust - Memory and German Identity - Three forms of generational practices,” \textit{Textos de História} 10, no. 1–2 (2002): 95–106. Historian Alexander Prenninger demonstrates that in Austria, the \textit{Anschluss} was interpreted as an external event for several decades. He quotes a history manual from 1970 in which the authors argue that World War II was not an Austrian war, but a world war, and that Austria did not partake in the war itself. Alexander Prenninger, “Zelfbedrog en dubbelspraak. De ‘verbannen’ herinnering aan de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Oostenrijk,” in \textit{De dynamiek van de herinnering. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context}, ed. Frank Van Vree and Rob van der Laarse (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009), 265–87. This perspective is reminiscent of Abel Herzberg’s view in the 1950s, as will be discussed below.

\textsuperscript{32} Herzberg, \textit{Kroniek der Jodenvervolging}, 7, emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{33} This phenomenon has been called the Dutch paradox, see De Haan, “Breuklijnen in de geschiedschrijving van de Jodenvervolging,” 33–34.
the war, the returning Jewish camp survivors and those who had survived in hiding were met with bureaucratic indifference and anti-Semitism.34

In this climate, Jews needed to redefine their position in Dutch society. Even before the war, it was impossible to speak of a united Dutch-Jewish community. The massive persecution and murder of the majority of Jews in the Netherlands had eroded this notion of a single-minded Jewish community even further. Jewish institutions needed to rebuild themselves and individuals reconsidered both their Jewish and Dutch identities. Several thousand Jews migrated to Israel, the US and other countries, but the majority remained in the Netherlands.35 Historian Bart Wallet argues that the result was a diverse group of individuals and institutions that could best be described as a ‘family of communities’, rather than one coherent Jewish community that spoke with one voice.36

The experience and recollection of the war were painful for those who had survived. Most Jews mourned the loss of loved ones and had to deal with the fact that the Dutch nation had not been able to protect them. However, as former secretary-general of the Dutch Jewish Orthodox Church (NIK) Joop Sanders argues, one recurrent strategy was looking forward.37 Commemorating loved ones who were murdered during the war was a private or religious matter, not a public one. Historian F.C. Brasz argues that in many families the persecution and murder was not discussed, or only in euphemistic terms such as ‘not-returned’.38 For many Jews, the painful memory was not forgotten but rather silenced because it was too painful to be expressed freely and publically. Jay Winter argues that:

we cannot accept the commonplace view that silence is the space of forgetting and speech the realm of remembrance. Instead, we offer the following definition of silence. Silence, we hold, is a socially constructed space in which and about which subjects and words normally used in everyday life are not spoken. The circle around this space is described by groups of people who at one point in time deem it appropriate that there is

34 Hondius, Terugkeer; Gans, “Antisemitische stereotypen in bevrijd Nederland.”
36 The memory of the persecution played an important role; in the first decades it was rather a divisive issue and only later it became an essential and even binding element of what it means to be Jewish. Bart Wallet, De ketting is nog ongebroken. Joden in naoorlogs Nederland. (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, Forthcoming); Bart Wallet and Hetty Berg, “65 Jaar Joods Nederland,” in Wie Niet Weg Is, Is Gezien. Joods Nederland Na 1945 (Zwolle: Waanders, 2010), 6–19.
37 Sanders, “Opbouw en continuïteit na 1945.”
38 Brasz, “Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog,” 400.
a difference between the sayable and the unsayable, or the spoken and the unspoken, and that such a distinction can and should be maintained and observed over time. Such people codify and enforce norms which reinforce the injunction against breaking into the inner space of the circle of silence.\textsuperscript{39}

Winter describes these silences in spatial terms, because they are present whether or not they are desired. ‘Topographically, they are there whether or not they come to the surface; and their re-emergence into our line of sight can occasion a reiteration of the interdiction on talking about them or the end of the interdiction itself.’\textsuperscript{40} The Hollandsche Schouwburg turns out to be a site that cannot not be ignored. Painful memories of the persecution surfaced publically and became a hotly debated topic. As such, the Schouwburg was not a site of oblivion or silence but rather a site of debate, conflict and a cacophony of opinions and voices. It was a painful site for two reasons: because of past events and the blatant disregard for the memory of the Jewish victims. The successful collection of funds to buy this theater attested to a collective will to honor the memory of the victims by framing it as an issue of national unity, piety and honor. However, when the city of Amsterdam failed to find an appropriate destination in the 1950s, it again became a site of disgrace. The decrepit building had by then turned into a constant reminder of the incapacity of the Amsterdam government to provide an appropriate solution.

\section*{2. Honoring the memory of victims: pride and national debt}

In several early postwar newspapers reporting about the persecution of the Jews, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was used as a metonym for the mass deportation of Jews, similar to Auschwitz and Westerbork, at a time when the terms Holocaust and Shoah were not yet commonplace.\textsuperscript{41} In an early postwar article published in the formerly illegal resistance newspaper \textit{Paraat} on May 6, 1945, two days after the German troops occupying the Netherlands capitulated, the story of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the Crèche and the resistance efforts of Walter Süskind was recounted. The Schouwburg was also part of the early historiography on the persecution of the Jews. H. Wielek dedicated 23 pages to the tragedy at the


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} Before the first broadcast in 1978 of American televisions series \textit{Holocaust}, the term Holocaust was completely absent in the European and American memory discourse. It means burnt offering and has a religious connotation of sacrifice, implying that the Jews had to be sacrificed in order for the Christians to be saved. Therefore the term Shoah is preferred in certain Dutch Jewish circles. See Van Vree, \textit{In de schaduw van Auschwitz}, 165–167.
deportation center and Henriette Davids discussed her memories of this deportation site over 36 pages. Herzberg devoted 9 pages to the Schouwburg and included a picture illegally taken of the prisoners who were awaiting their deportation on page 109.

It would be incorrect to argue that the history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a deportation site was forgotten. Rather, it enabled people to talk about the recent past in a very concrete way. When the theater was reopened after liberation, it soon became a site of contestation. The early debate was initiated by the communist paper De Waarheid and the Jewish weekly NIW. Where the former took an unproductive anti-government stance, the latter inscribed the issue in a discourse of national pride and unity. This foreshadowed the work of the wide ranging committee established by the Christian social-democrat journalist Johan Winkler in September 1946 that raised money with a similar appeal to national unity and pride.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg, or Dutch Theater in the Plantagebuurt of Amsterdam, had been a regular performance theater between 1892 and 1941. In 1941 it was renamed Joodsche Schouwburg to serve as the main venue for discharged Jewish artists who performed for an exclusively Jewish public. From June 1942 onwards it served as a deportation center, guarded by German soldiers and Dutch policemen and administered by the Jewish Council, who appointed Süskind as its manager. From October 1942 onwards, children under twelve were brought to a separate kindergarten across the street and separated from their parents. In total, more than forty-six thousand Jews from around the country were incarcerated awaiting transportation to one of the two transit camps in the Netherlands, Westerbork and Vught. Hundreds of children and adults were able to escape because of the efforts of Süskind and several cooperating resistance groups. However, most Jews were eventually murdered in Nazi death camps.

---

42 Wielek, *De oorlog die Hitler won*, 262–285; Davids, *Mijn levenslied*, 102–138. The former is a documentary account that was initiated by two journalists, H. Minkenhof and H. Heymans, who were deported and murdered during the occupation. H. Kwekzylber finished their work under the pseudonym H. Wielek. This work is cited two times by Herzberg (pgs. 120 and 187) and many times by Presser and De Jong. The account of Davids is cited once by Presser, but not about the Hollandsche Schouwburg. De Jong cites her several times, once with a half-page quote, see L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, 13 volumes.* (Den Haag: Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1969-1988), vol. 6, Juli ’42-mei ’43: eerste helft, p. 30.

43 This photograph was also included by Presser, prior to page 281, before he dedicated a paragraph consisting of three pages to this deportation site, see Presser, *Ondergang*, vols. 1, pp. 285–287. De Jong mentions the Schouwburg on several occasions, and dedicates two small paragraphs to this deportation site. He included three photographs by the same photographer of the courtyard of the Schouwburg. Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*, vol. 6 Juli ’42-mei ’43: eerste helft, pp. 29–31, 256–259.

44 Amsterdam had the largest Jewish population of the Netherlands: out of 140,000 Jews in the country, about 77,000 lived in the capital. However, Jews were also brought to the Schouwburg from other parts
After the last deportation on November 19, 1943, the theater stood empty. Its owners were deported and the building was auctioned off by the mortgage holder in 1944 and bought by two businessmen from Deventer, the Linthorst brothers. Shortly after the liberation they contracted an operator, J.P. Senff, to prepare the theater for its reopening under the new name Piccadilly. Their actions were critically followed by several journalists who argued that it was a disgrace that this site of terror would be used for popular entertainment. The publicist Peter van Steen voiced his disapproval in the formerly illegal communist newspaper *De Waarheid* when he writes that:

The most depressing and sinister tragedy since time immemorial took place in the Schouwburg. [...] The Jewish drama had to be completed until the bitter end. [...] The German directors did not take the slightest notion of their actors. They orchestrated away all the Jews. The theater hall was left behind. And in that hall the smell of fear, sweat, dread and terror lingered on. Everything was drenched, the seats [...], the corridors, the balconies. Fear and dread dripping from the walls. The performance was completed until the last sinister act. Afterwards the theater was closed. They tried to cover the incurable wound. There are people who pretend as if there has never been such a wound. Among them is Paul Ostra, singer by profession, binding servant of the German directors of the Jewish drama. [...] [He] has the audacity, in collaboration with some meat producer from the province, to sing his sickening songs at this site of horrors, this monument of human suffering.  

Van Steen, famous for his indignation, employed the metaphor of the theater and specifically mentioned the Jewish drama. His article started a lasting commitment of *De Waarheid* to the cause of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Together with the Jewish weekly *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad* (NIW), it continued to report on this issue more than any other newspaper.
Where the communists took an outsider’s perspective and framed the persecution of the Jews as part of fascism that continued after the war, for instance in the imperialist colonial policy of the Netherlands in the Dutch East-Indies, the NIW approached this issue from a Jewish perspective. Editor Jaap Soetendorp wrote a similarly passionate plea:

[The Hollandsche Schouwburg] is a name that will make every Dutch Jew shiver and evokes a very unpleasant association for non-Jews as well. [...] Shame overpowers you when you think of the henchmen who helped the Nazi’s. The Schouwburg signifies all of this. [...] They are going to exploit the theater once again. [...] In a hall where every chair is a memory, where every step leads to the shadow of the worst suffering. Where parents and children went on the journey to their destruction, where people sobbed and begged for their lives and their freedom, where men died of fear and terror, where people who had been in hiding were brought in and illusions vanished, this is where theater is offered. [...] They should either turn this building into a museum or demolish it. Execution sites where resistance fighters were killed are now revered. The holiest human feelings are taken into consideration. This is why we demand that the site where the execution of our deceased began is not made a mockery.48

A week after these publications, the mayor of Amsterdam revoked the permit for public performances at the Schouwburg, a decision that was commended by the NIW. Soetendorp repeated his idea to establish a museum in the theater in order to ‘ensure that our posterity would not be unfamiliar with the consequences of Nazi tyranny and unpredictability. We know this, but may future generations never forget.’49 Site of horrors [oord van verschrikkingen]; every chair a memory [iedere stoel een herinnering]; journey to their destruction [tocht naar den ondergang]; never forget [nimmer vergeten]: words and metaphors that reappeared throughout of 1946, the formerly illegal social-democrat newspaper Het Parool became an important actor, especially through the writings and actions of editor Johan Winkler. De Waarheid was the organ of the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and had the highest newspaper circulation in the first postwar year before the communist party was isolated and ostracized. See Van de J. van de Plasse and Wim Verbei, Kroniek van de Nederlandse dagblad- en opiniepers (Amsterdam: O. Cramwinckel, 2005), 115; Ger Verrips, Duars, duivels en dromend: de geschiedenis van de CPN : 1938-1991 (Amsterdam: Balans, 1995), 233–234. The Jewish weekly NIW, established in 1865 and censored by Nazi authorities during the occupation, was not related to a specific political party; in 1948, it refused to place political advertisements during the election because it argued that, being a general Jewish organ, it should not choose one political side. See Isaac Lipschits, Honderd jaar NIW. Het Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad, 1865-1965 (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 1966), 225. Het Parool was not allied to one specific prewar political party, such as the social-democratic SDAP, but had argued for a progressive break with the prewar political situation in 1944, see Lydia E. Winkel, De ondergrondse pers, 1940-1945 (Utrecht: Veen, 1989), 197–205. De Vlam and Paraat both published one article about this issue in this period. 48 J. Soetendorp, NIW August 24, 1945. 49 J. Soetendorp, NIW September 14, 1945.
the debate. For Soetendorp, the Schouwburg embodied the past and should therefore be treated with respect, in line with Van Steen’s description of the walls dripping with fear and dread. For Soetendorp, this building offered an ideal opportunity to educate future generations and prevent the obliteration from memory of past crimes that occurred at this site.

In spite of these objections and the revoked license for public performances, the owners continued to rent out the auditorium for private events. The Mayor and Executive Board of Amsterdam had prohibited all forms of entertainment at this theater, public or private. However, private meetings with an appropriate character were allowed. There was a shortage of venues and the Hollandsche Schouwburg was in great demand for events ranging from weddings, sport games, business parties to meetings organized by the Dutch Communist Party (CPN) and other organizations. All requests were assessed by the police and critically followed by the newspapers. When an opera was planned for April 14, 1946, the NIW successfully called for the city government to revoke its permission, reminding it of the ‘memory related to this site of deportation’.

The communist party and its party organ De Waarheid were among the first to stress Jewish victimhood as a particular category and to take offense at reestablishing a theater at the Schouwburg, together with the Jewish NIW. Literary scholar Michael Rothberg argues that:

communism provided one of the discursive spheres, both in the United States and elsewhere, in which the articulation of genocide and colonialism could first be attempted – and this long before the intellectual vogue for either Holocaust or postcolonial studies. However, the communists would not have a significant role in the committee established by Winkler in 1946, on the one hand because of their anti-governmental stance and on the other hand owing to a strong anti-communist attitude in the postwar Netherlands. On December 11, 1945 De Waarheid published an editorial, entitled The memory and the money, wondering how long before the first public entertainment would be staged at this theater ‘used by the Germans to incarcerate the Jews before transporting them to Poland’. This moral outrage did not prevent the CPN from using the theater as a conference hall on

[50] NIW April 5, 1946.
[52] Lagrou, Legacy of Nazi Occupation, 248–250. The only significance the communists had in this issue was through CPN-member and city alderman Ben Polak, who had a troubled relationship with the party, and with the continuous scrutiny of De Waarheid.
several occasions. Only six days after the editorial was published, the next party congress was announced, in part held at Piccadilly.\textsuperscript{53}

The communist party was able to express its moral outrage and at the same time make use of the theater because it interpreted its own existence as part of the continued anti-fascist and anti-imperialist struggle.\textsuperscript{54} During the war, the communists fought against the persecution of the Jews, and now they opposed the colonial policy of the Dutch government. When the nationalist student group Perhimpunun Indonesia celebrated the first anniversary of the Indonesian declaration of independence at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the communist party was represented at this meeting by various prominent members such as Berend Blokzijl and A.J. Koejemans, editor in chief of \textit{De Waarheid}.\textsuperscript{55} Both the CPN and Perhimpunun Indonesia stressed the right of autonomy of a people in their speeches, an unalienable right that had previously been taken away from the Jews.\textsuperscript{56} The CPN saw its commitment to the cause of the anti-colonial movement as a continuation of their former struggle against the fascist persecution of the Jews, which was stressed by the location of this anti-governmental celebration.

The Jewish newspaper \textit{NIW}, differently from the communist party, made an emotional plea against any use of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, which could be reconciled with the hegemonic national discourse of unity. Soetendorp argued that people should refrain completely from using this venue in order to force the operator to shut down his theater. He suggested that the former theater would be treated with the proper respect normally reserved for resistance fighters:

People lay flowers at execution sites of freedom fighters […]. People take off their hats in honor of the victims of terror and persecution. Most Jews were murdered far away, in the East. Why not treat the Schouwburg as an execution site? We do not expect flowers, nor a solemn salute. We ask respect for the memory of our fallen [\textit{onzer gevallen}].\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{De Waarheid} December 11 and 17, 1945. When \textit{De Waarheid} wrote critically about the use of the Schouwburg, they used the name Schouwburg; when the CPN made announcements of gatherings at this same site, it used the name Piccadilly. Other CPN-related meetings at the Hollandsche Schouwburg include: a CPN board meeting (\textit{De Waarheid} October 22, 1945); a propaganda film for dock workers, cancelled because of technical issues, (\textit{De Waarheid} November 15, 1945); Joop van Santen organized an election event (\textit{De Waarheid}, May 14, 1946); the mainly communist trade union EVC had regular meetings here, see Archive of the Police (5225), Artistheater Piccadilly (4862), City Archives Amsterdam for an overview of all events at Piccadilly.

\textsuperscript{54} Verrips, \textit{Dwars, duivels en dromend}, Chapter 17; Dunk, \textit{In het huis van de herinnering}, 306–307.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{De Waarheid} August 18, 1946.

\textsuperscript{56} On September 5, 1945 a column appeared about the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the fate of the Jewish people. ‘A scattered, disarmingly people, which has contributed enormously to mankind in every field, science and literature, music and sculpture, law and philosophy […] has been banished and burnt, beaten and trampled.’

\textsuperscript{57} J. Soetendorp, December 21, 1945. Soetendorp uses the word \textit{gevallen}.
Soetendorp framed the Jewish victims as actively fallen; sacrificed, rather than passive victims. He effectively inscribed his plea into the prevailing nationalist memory discourse, rather than take an anti-governmental stance. This strategy would prove to be successful for the future committee established as a response to the plan to reopen the theater under a new name in November 1946.

The owners did not consider the building to be heritage and disavowed any public claims. However, they recognized the public indignation and introduced a new plan that attempted to negotiate between their financial interests and the call for piety in the newspapers. Piccadilly, a reference to the entertainment area in London, would be transformed into a serious theater, the Artis Theater that would house a new theater company, Het Zuid-Nederlands Toneel. The victims of the war would be commemorated with a plaque. The planned opening production Oranje Hotel was written by Eduard Veteran, a former resistance fighter and theater director who had been active in the Joodsche Schouwburg during the occupation. The owners turned to a play about the memory of the resistance, in the hope that it would be accepted by the general public. The city government initially granted permission, arguing that the law did not allow for a continued prohibition. However, the plan backfired: the owners claimed that Veteran, who had died in a car crash shortly before, supported their plans. However, they were contradicted by several close friends of Veteran, who argued Veteran had vehemently opposed the reopening of the theater just before his death and had argued the building should be demolished completely. The issue was widely covered by several newspapers and as a result, the theater troupe withdrew from the plan.

The plan to install a memorial plaque failed as well. This initiative was the first serious attempt by the owners to commemorate the victims of the war. A broad group of notables was invited to discuss the plan at the office of Alderman Ben Polak on September 24, 1946, amongst them, chief rabbi Justus Tal, catholic pastor Willem Nolet and protestant minister Jan Buskes. Just a day before the meeting took place, the Christian social-democrat Johan Winkler published a scathing

---

58 Aleida Assmann argues that in a post-conflict society, the commemoration of sacrificia (soldiers, resistance fighters) is often prioritized over that of the victimae (civilian casualties), since the former can be integrated more easily into a more positive national self-image. Assmann, Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit, 75 ff.

59 Prinsestad November 2, 1946; De Waarheid, November 3, 1946.

60 NIW September 13, 1946; De Waarheid September 26 & October 12, 1946; Het Parool September 26 & October 3, 1946; Het Vrije Volk September 28, 1946; Vrij Nederland October 5, 1946.

61 The invitees were: acting Chief Rabbi Justus Tal, pastor W. Nolet, protestant minister Jan Buskes, H.M. Randwijck (journalist, resistance fighter), protestant minister Hazenbroek, CPN-alderman Ben Polak, Jaap Parser Parsee (member of the Jewish orthodox church council), Albert van Dalsum (actor), Siem van der Linden (initiator), J.P. Senff (operator) and S. Attema (business partner of Senff). Letter of C.F. Helms to Siem van der Linden, September 16, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives.
article in the former underground newspaper *Het Parool* in which he recounted two stories from the deportation time in the Schouwburg: the suicide by Professor Mannheimer and the singing of Hatikwah, the later Israeli national anthem.\(^{62}\)

Winkler argued that the plaque was an empty gesture:

> The Hollandsche Schouwburg will become a cinema or theater, a place of entertainment. Step by step this tragedy unfolded, the tragedy of our unimaginative impiety, our mentality of “let us quickly forget, quickly laugh again, quickly make money again”. Step one: a private meeting; step two: a private serious performance; step three: a private, slightly less serious performance; step four: a small party; step five: a wedding. Yes – we party and celebrate weddings on the Golgotha of the Jews; we turn a graveyard into a carnival. [...] Should we not honor the memory of those who found themselves in this hell? Not just a little bit, not with some small plaque which later will accidently be covered by a poster, but completely? [...] Should we not, collectively if necessary, buy the building [...] in order to give it a truly worthy destination? Museum, library, it does not matter what exactly [...] as long as silence will prevail.\(^{63}\)

Winkler’s plea had an effect and the owners’ initiative for a memorial plaque would not be endorsed by the committee’s members as long as the theater was still in operation.\(^{64}\)

Winkler would play a key role in a new committee that would formulate an alternative plan: the complete suspension of any theater at this site of memory. He had asked virtually the same group that had rejected the plan to install a memorial plaque. However, he excluded the owners and their partners and included more Jewish members.\(^{65}\) Winkler acted as secretary and the renowned 69-year old

---

\(^{62}\) Both incidents are recounted slightly differently in H. Wielek’s book that was published several months later. Sam de Wolff wrote that Hatikwah was sung in front of the Big Synagogue at the J.D. Meijerplein during the raid in the night of May 25, 1943, and that the socialist song *Morgenrood* was sung in front of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Wolff, *Geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland, laatste bedrijf*, 95, 105. These two accounts do not necessarily rule each other out, though it is possible that they were mixed up. The incident of Mannheimer’s suicide and the singing of Hatikwah are mentioned here because they were both mentioned several times in subsequent newspaper articles and other publications.

\(^{63}\) *Het Parool*, September 23, 1946.

\(^{64}\) *Het Parool* and *De Waarheid*, September 26, 1946. Both articles mention the establishment of a new committee of five members to look for a new destination for the building.

\(^{65}\) The committee members were: Sam de Wolff (chairman), Johan Winkler (secretary), J.J. Buskes, Siem van der Linden, S. Lissauer, priest W. Nolet, Jaap Parsser, Ben Polak, E.A. Rodrigues Pereira (Portuguese Jewish Community), acting Chief Rabbi of Amsterdam Justus Tal, L. Vromen and L.W. Wildervanck (treasurer). Official call of the committee, December 10, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives. In comparison to the ‘first’ committee, this committee had more Jewish members. The chairman, secretary and treasurer were all new. Siem van der Linden would have a minor role in the committee according to Winkler, see Letter J. Winkler to Jan
Zionist and socialist Sam de Wolff was the appointed chairman. The committee was, in their eyes, a representative group of both religious and non-religious Jewish leaders and politicians, together with Christian dignitaries and had warm ties with the media. De Wolff was a well-known publicist and journalist for the leftist newspaper De Vlam and Winkler was deputy editor of the progressive Het Parool. Minister Buskes was famous for his radio speeches for the VARA, a social-democrat public broadcasting company, and was a regular contributor to the socialist Het Vrije Volk and De Vlam. The honorary committee included prominent members such as Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, an important figure for the former non-communist resistance movement, the Minister of Education, the Governor of the Province North Holland and the Mayor of Amsterdam. The committee of recommendation consisted of fifty-one members, mainly journalists and politicians from different backgrounds. This broad set-up and support was of great importance in a country still characterized by so-called ‘pillarization’, the almost complete vertical separation of society in integrated systems of politico-denominational institutions, organizations and media. This is why Het Parool described the committee in the following terms:

A committee that holds all political and religious movements and is sanctioned by an honorary committee [...] is trying to collect 300,000 guilders [...] a protestant pastor, a catholic priest, a communist, a liberal, a banker and a journalist, joined together in their cause [...].66

The comprehensiveness of the committee was praised in the papers: ‘the composition of the committee attests to the possibilities of solidarity – something which did not have to be discussed during the occupation and is perhaps not mentioned enough presently.’67

When the committee issued its call for donations, it was simultaneously published in several newspapers:

The Hollandsche Schouwburg – place of torture for tens of thousands of Jews, last station on the way to Westerbork, Auschwitz, etc. – cannot become a site of entertainment. [...] The committee asks everybody for a contribution to bring together the necessary 300,000 guilders. This is needed to purchase and redevelop the parcel to come to an exploitation that is not in conflict with the memory of the inexpressible suffering that took place there. The aim is to form a historical center that deals with the contribution of Jews to Dutch history [...]. In addition, this center should

Roelfs, May 11, 1971, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives.
66 Het Parool December 13, 1946, most likely written by Johan Winkler.
67 De Groene Amsterdammer November 2, 1946.
contain a memorial to those that were killed. [...] We owe it to the memory of those who suffered in the Hollandsche Schouwburg, to ensure their memory is not defiled by turning it into a site of entertainment once again. 68

The call was often accompanied by an editorial urging readers to donate money. These editorials appealed to a sense of national pride and the fact this issue was a debt of honor, and stressed that as many people as possible should contribute. 69 Het Parool called for the ‘entire population’ to join in, while Buskes argued in Het Vrije Volk that it was not up to only the Jews but the entire population to contribute money. In addition, he argued that although large donations were important, in order to have a ‘truly national memorial, we need many small donations.’ 70 One year later, the nation-wide certificate-action, designed to raise money for national war memorials, employed a similar collective strategy, this time with little success. 71

The appeal to the entire nation rather than the Jewish community put the latter in a quandary: should Jewish institutions and individuals contribute to the cause, either by joining the committee or donating money? Since the committee had Jewish, catholic and protestant leaders and journalists from De Vlam, Het Parool and Het Vrije Volk amongst it ranks, it would have made sense to invite NIW editor Soetendorp who had followed the issue closely for over a year. There is no evidence whether or not he was invited. However, Soetendorp had argued in September, before Winkler and De Wolff had established the committee that Jews should not ask for piety. He repeated this argument in his accompanying editorial when the NIW placed the call for donations in December. 72 Piety should not be

68 Official call of the committee, December 10, 1946, Archive Comité Hollandsche Schouwburg, inventory 624, Amsterdam City Archives. It was published in different forms in several newspapers: Het Parool, De Nieuwe Dag, Het Vrije Volk and De Waarheid December 13, 1946; NIW December 27, 1946.
69 One article disapproves of the use of the theater in the following terms: ‘Do theater companies have so little decency? [...] They could not have offended the Dutch people even more.’ Prinsesstad, November 2, 1946. De Stem van Nederland used an illustration of the Hollandsche Schouwburg on its cover for its issue of February 8, 1947, with a caption reading: ‘A national debt of honor: the Hollandsche Schouwburg in Amsterdam.’ Frank van Vree argues that the memory of the persecution of the Jews was framed as a ‘debt of honor’ in those first postwar years, see Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, chapter 4.
70 Het Parool, December 13, 1946; Het Vrije Volk December 14, 1946.
71 This nation-wide action was organized between November 11, 1947 and February 1, 1948 and symbolically sold twelve million square centimeters of Amsterdam’s Dam Square for 50 cents each. The intended six million guilders were to be used, for among other things, to build national monuments. Only 2.2 million was collected, of which more than 10% was used for overhead expenses. Van Ginkel argues that the population was not as willing because many had already contributed to local and private initiatives, such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg, see Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 57–61, 74–75. It must be noted that according to Bossenbroek, the end of 1947 was also the turning point for interest in publications that dealt with the persecution of the Jews. See Bossenbroek, De meelstreep, 501–508.
72 NIW September 13, 1946.
asked for by the Jews but should be offered by the Dutch people. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not an issue of self-pity, but an honorary debt of the nation. Soetendorp asks:

Will the [Dutch people] truly realize what a great injustice has been done at this site, and will this recognition of a debt of honor lead to a [collective] donation? With minister Buskes, we believe this will be the case. This is why we deplore the fact the committee has so many Jewish members. They should have trusted the sense of honor of the Dutch [...]73

Ies Spangenthal, editor of the Zionist paper De Joodsche Wachter followed the same argument. He writes that:

If there is enough piety in the Netherlands for what happened to the Jews, people will no longer use [the theater] for entertainment. If this is not the case, they should do whatever they want to do. But we Jews should distance ourselves from this cause, since such an action will ask for pity. [...] One could ask, are we not Dutch as well? Yes, we are Dutch, but we were persecuted as Jews and Jews exclusively [...].74

Similar considerations were expressed by the Jewish Orthodox Church in Amsterdam (NIHS) and the Zionist Bond (NZB). The board of the NIHS contacted Buskes, not chairman de Wolff, in November of 1946, to discuss the role of the two orthodox committee members. It was agreed that Tal and Parser would not need to step down, but could only voice their opinions in their personal capacities. Furthermore, the NIHS would not contribute to the cause – not surprising considering it was still waiting for permission to establish a memorial on the J.D. Meijerplein. De Wolff, prominent member of the NZB, was criticized for his active role in the committee. The NZB argued that all available Jewish funds should be allocated to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. When de Wolff was rebuked by the board of the NZB, he replied that his activities for the committee were none of its business and he continued to serve as its chairman.75 The positions of the NZB, NIHS and the NIW would remain ambiguous, which turned out to be a critical point during the early-1950s when the city of Amsterdam was unable to find a satisfactory solution for the Schouwburg.

The committee’s strategy to appeal to the entire Dutch population was successful. Newspapers continued to publish and republish the call in different forms.76 Wielek, who was preparing his upcoming publication De Oorlog die Hitler

---

73 NIW December 27, 1946.
74 De Joodsche Wachter November 19, 1946.
75 With thanks to Bart Wallet, who pointed out the correspondence of the NIHS to Buskes. For the latter incident, see Gans, De kleine verschillen, 651.
76 The catholic daily De Volkskrant published the call on January 23, 1947 stressing the catholic members of the committee of recommendation. The liberal daily Algemeen Handelsblad published a
Won, wrote a plea in *De Vlam*: ‘To use this theater again would mean desecration of the dead. […] We should all help to realize this goal [of the committee]. With the help of the entire nation, […] the committee will acquire the building.’\(^7\) In addition to this, he introduced his account of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in his book with the following aspiration: ‘May the Schouwburg never reopen as a renewed theater. Which actor and what theater play could even portray what has unfolded here?’\(^8\) Donations came from all over the country and charities were organized by Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. People went door-to-door for collections, such as Ms. Duyf, who had written a poem and collected 205 guilders and 13 cents in Zaandam. A letter from a small town in North-Brabant, Dinteloord, lists all donor names, including their religious domination – all Catholic or Protestant – and occupation.\(^7\) On January 17, 1947, Queen Wilhelmina stopped her car in front of the theater for one minute of silence and donated 500 guilders.

The owners of the theater and their partners resisted all committee activities and claimed in December 1946, when the campaign had just begun, that the group had no backing in society. ‘If the people have no interest in your actions, you should not impose your will upon the people; this is not democratic and smells like dictatorship.’\(^8\) They were proven wrong: the media continued to pay attention to the issue and donations from Jews and non-Jews alike ensured that the committee collected enough money. When approximately 200,000 guilders had been collected by May of 1947, an anonymous donation of 100,000 guilders was made. Only posthumously was it made public that benefactor Bernard van Leer made this contribution.\(^8\)

Negotiations about the purchase of the building were started in May 1947. In November 1947, a provisional deal was struck after the Mayor of Amsterdam intervened. Due to legal issues – the heirs of the prewar owner claimed that the sale...
of the theater during the war had been illegal – it took two more years before the building was actually transferred to the committee. The building was offered to the city of Amsterdam on several conditions: no entertainment for at least 25 years; a dignified destination for the building; and the establishment of a mourning chamber holding an eternal flame. The accommodation of the famous Jewish Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana was mentioned in the deed of transfer, but this was not a requirement. The council accepted the donation under these conditions after a debate on May 9, 1950. During this session, it was emphasized that the negative goal, no more entertainment, had been realized, and that the city government now needed to find a positive destination. Several possibilities were mentioned: to name one of the spaces after resistance fighter Süskind; to inscribe the names of all Jewish victims from Amsterdam; to establish a Jewish cultural center or library; or to use the building to promote Israeli-Dutch relations. All of these initiatives would be discussed in the following years to no avail however; the structure remained vacant for the next decade.

3. **Addressing Painful Heritage: Representation and Appropriation**

State-sponsored memorials are usually constructed to bring a sense of unity to a post-conflict society and to affirm rather than criticize the nation’s birthright or renaissance. As James Young argues, ‘to do otherwise would be to undermine the very foundations of national legitimacy, of the state’s seemingly natural right to exist.’ The postwar memorial policy in the Netherland is an example of this: civilian casualties were to be commemorated collectively, for an emphasis on Jewish or other specific victim groups might cause social discord. The early discussions about the Hollandsche Schouwburg were not about the construction of a state-sponsored memorial, but rather about dealing with sensitive and painful heritage. This is a fundamental difference: where state-sponsored ex novo memorials are usually political instruments that symbolize an idealized national community – such as the National Monument located at the Dam Square in Amsterdam, the symbolic center of the Netherlands – sites of painful heritage refer to events whose memories might undermine such a political project.

---

82 Gemeenteblad Amsterdam, afdeling 2, March 9, 1950, p. 201-205
83 Young, The Texture of Memory, 2.
84 Archaeologist Britt Baillie argues that after certain unresolved conflicts, such as in former Yugoslavia, monuments are used as instrument to continue the conflict. Rather than describing this period as post-conflict, she describes it as conflict-time. Britt Baillie, “Capturing Facades in ‘Conflict-Time’: Structural Violence and the (Re)construction Vukovar’s Churches,” Space and Polity 17, no. 3 (December 2013): 300–319. In the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, however, the conflict about the Hollandsche
The debate about the Schouwburg was initially framed in a discourse of national pride and unity. Jewish victims were on the one hand nationalized and on the other hand particularized. This ambiguous perspective was supported by Jewish newspapers and institutions, who argued that the Jewish community should not contribute to but also not turn away from this cause. In the words of the Zionist Spangenthal, Dutch Jewish victims had been Dutch nationals as well, but had been persecuted exclusively as Jews. The Hollandsche Schouwburg could hardly symbolize a nation of equals, since it had been used to isolate and deport Jews in order to murder them. On the other hand, the collective effort to raise money demonstrated a broad consensus that this building should no longer be used for entertainment and a small memorial space should indeed be installed.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was transformed from a site of painful heritage to a site of national piety by separating the actual persecution of Jews, a process that had demonstrated a fundamental split between the Jewish and non-Jewish population and was therefore potentially divisive, from honoring the memory [nagedachtenis] of those victims within a national and unifying framework. This separation enabled the Hollandsche Schouwburg – symbol of deportation and persecution – to be reinterpreted as a symbol of honor, piety and national unity that should not be demolished but rather rescued from the embarrassment of being used as a site of entertainment. Large parts of the Jewish community were unable to fully accept this discourse of national honor; they mourned the loss of loved ones that had left a palpable emotional gap rather than a symbolic scar in the national tissue. Their position towards the destination of the Hollandsche Schouwburg would remain ambiguous: on the one hand, they agreed that the memory of the victims should be honored, on the other many of them said they would never be able to enter this building, whatever destination it would have, because of the painful emotions attached to it.

The initial plans for this rather large building involved the establishment of a destination in line with its wartime history: a Jewish library, a center about the historical significance of the Jews in the Netherlands or the housing of the Westerbork archives. Other suggestions were the establishment of a university lecture hall, student cafeteria, a church, or a depot for large paintings in the Rijksmuseum collection. Jewish newspapers and institutions did not take a leading role in this process but they did follow the discussion closely. After three years of indecisiveness, the city government invited the former De Wolff committee to formulate a plan, under the assumption that this mixed group of both Jews and

Schouwburg was fundamentally different from that of the war itself: it was not about the victims, but the memory of the victims.
non-Jews could represent the general population, including the Jewish community. The NIHS and NZB challenged this and distanced themselves from this advisory committee. The conflict reached its peak when in 1953 the building was offered to Israel for the establishment of an Israeli center. When this plan fell apart, the advisory committee was disbanded and the theater remained empty until 1958 when it was decided to build a memorial in memory of the Jewish victims of the war.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not an important national issue until its postwar reopening as a theater was contested by several journalists in 1945. Suddenly, there was public outcry that successfully challenged the use of the theater and appropriated it as a site of national significance. The committee of de Wolff and Winkler had elicited broad support by framing the issue of the Schouwburg as a national debt of honor. As such, it differed from other possible sites of heritage related to the memory of the murdered Jews such as Westerbork, Vught, the former Zentralstelle in Amsterdam and the synagogue complex at the J.D. Meijerplein. None of these sites elicited such an intense public reaction as the Schouwburg did during these early postwar years.

The former transit camps were soon put to use after liberation as prison sites for Germans or collaborators and later for the accommodation of repatriates from the East-Indies. Only at a later stage would these be monumentalized in order to commemorate the persecution of the Jews. An example of painful heritage within Amsterdam is the infamous Euterpestraat where several Nazi institutions instrumental in the persecution of both Jews and resistance fighters had been located. In addition to the memory of these institutes, the street was bombed by allied forces, causing dozens of civilian casualties. During the first postwar city council meeting, the street was renamed after the resistance fighter Gerrit van der Veen. However, the buildings in question – one destroyed, the other now a school again – were not turned into sites of memory. The last example is the synagogue complex at the J.D. Meijerplein. It was badly damaged during and after the war and

---

85 It has been argued that all heritage in contested, because there is always a group that is disinherited. See Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*.
86 Former Nazi camps in Europe were often used for new purposes after the war. The camps in the Netherlands were memorialized at a rather late stage, see Hijink, *Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering*, 175–177.
withered away only to be restored decades later when the Jewish Historical Museum took up residence in the complex.

For various reasons, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was different from these sites. First of all, it was located right a neighborhood where many of the Jewish victims had lived and furthermore in the city where most surviving Dutch Jews had settled after the war. Because the site was located in an urban environment, it was more visible than the former camp sites that were situated far away. Secondly, these camps were owned and used by the government, rather than by a commercial party. In comparison to the Euterpstraat, the history of the Schouwburg could be molded into a narrative of agency. The acts of persecution and resistance that had taken place in and around the former theater could be brought together in a coherent narrative of agency where Nazi violence was countered by acts of resistance. In the case of the Euterpstraat, both Nazi and allied casualties were to be mourned over. Here, there was no heroic Dutch reaction to be commemorated, only a failed attempt that lead to the tragic deaths of citizens. Lastly, the synagogues were not directly connected to the history of the persecution of the Jews.

Once the establishment of an entertainment center was prevented and the building transferred, the city of Amsterdam was saddled with the responsibility of finding a proper destination that could be reconciled with the history of this site. It was one of the first sites of heritage that the government needed to manage that was specifically related to the persecution of the Jews, at a time when such sites were not considered to be evidently valuable. Four years later, in reaction to international commotion about the eminent demolition of the Anne Frank House, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns argued that the Dutch government could not intervene because the building was not a monument of historic or artistic relevance and because it was private property.\(^8\) The limited definition of heritage employed by Luns was characteristic of that time and the Anne Frank House was only saved after a non-governmental committee eventually intervened.

In a similar vein, the city of Amsterdam did not consider the Hollandsche Schouwburg to be valuable as an historic structure or otherwise and therefore looked for a new destination. It struggled with asking the fragmented Jewish community for formal advice. Several institutions claimed to represent the Jewish community at large, in particular the Dutch Jewish Orthodox Church (NIK) and the Zionist Bond (NZB), in spite of the fact many Jews did not feel represented by

\(^8\) Jos van der Lans and Herman Vuijsje, *Het Anne Frank Huis: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2010), 66.
either of them. The NIK saw itself as the natural representative of the Jewish community. In 1955, the Permanent Committee (the daily board of the NIK, the national orthodox Jewish community) claimed: ‘We represent the entire Jewish community in the Netherlands. [...] Our religious community has always been and will continue to be based on the Torah and Tradition.’ A controversial claim, since it implied that only people with a Jewish mother were to be considered Jews. Additionally, the postwar Jewish community was characterized by processes of secularization and religious pluralism, rather than an attachment to a unified and orthodox denomination.

On the other hand, the Zionist Bond had gained more support after the occupation. The prewar notion that assimilation would lead to a safe environment where Jews were protected against anti-Semitic violence had been invalidated by the Nazi persecution. The alternative Zionist ideal of Israel that a sovereign state that could defend Jews world-wide had gained traction. In the words of Abel Herzberg, without Israel, every Jew is an uncovered check.

Several thousand Jews migrated to Israel, but this did not mean a diminishment of NZB sentiment during the first decades following the war. A third important actor was the Jewish weekly NIW. Before the war, it had been anti-Zionist; after 1945, this changed and in 1947 the NIW argued that the NZB was the most important Jewish organization in the Netherlands. The influence of this newspaper was considerable. During city council meetings dealing with the Hollandsche Schouwburg, its editorials were often cited. In addition, the letters to the editor section offered a platform for both institutional players and individual opinions. As such, the NIW provided something of a public realm for the otherwise fragmented and diverse community.

A few days after the donation was accepted by the city council, the NIW published an editorial expressing the opinion that:

Nobody seems to know what to do with the building. The Jewish community, which is the obvious choice for putting the building into use,

89 It is important to stress that the Zionist and orthodox community in the postwar Netherlands were not radically opposed but intimately intertwined. Evelien Gans argues that there was a ‘zionist march through Jewish institutions’ from 1945 onwards, see Gans, De kleine verschillen, 591–596.


91 Wallet and Berg, “65 Jaar Joods Nederland.”


93 F.C. Brasz argues that at least 1500 Dutch Jews migrated to Israel between 1948 and 1953. Zionism was not the main motivation, but rather the desire to leave the Netherlands. Brasz, “Na de Tweede Wereldoorlog,” 366.

doesn’t need it any longer, since plenty buildings are available to its decimated population. [...] We can conclude that in the Netherlands, the heritage of the war and the memory of that period is dealt with ineptly. While we now have a monument to the protectors of the Jews and soon a new one will be established in memory of the February strike, the building through which most Jews from Amsterdam were transported to Westerbork stands vacant, and no memorial exists for those who truly matter: the tens of thousands of Jews who were deported and murdered.  

However, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was not readily accepted as such a memorial by the aforementioned Jewish institutions. The city government was sensitive to their opinion and in an interview, the Mayor of Amsterdam said:

[we] takes seriously the prevailing opinion in Jewish circles that the building in its entirety cannot be used as a commemoration site. The remainder of the Jews [...] want to live with the living, strive for a safe future and rather put their effort into Israel than unproductively mourn their dead.  

This statement reflected both the position of the orthodox community and the Zionist Bond, and was repeated on several occasions in the NIW. The orthodox community wanted to commemorate its victims within its religious institutions and not at a negative and secular site such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg or Westerbork. This did not mean the orthodox community rejected the idea of a memorial on a secular site; however, such a memorial addressed another crowd. Chief Rabbi Tal, member of the committee, argued that a memorial had two functions: to commemorate the dead and to remember what has happened. He contends that:

We, Jews, do not need a memorial. Every hour of every day we remember those who have passed away. [...] The memorial is necessary for those, who need to be reminded. It is an indictment, not of the Jewish people, but to the failure of all the good people could have done. The memorial reminds the world of its neglect.  

The initial plans to construct a library, university hall or canteen became stranded by practical, moral and financial objections. The idea to establish a memorial was

---

95 NIW March 24, 1950.
96 Elseviers Weekblad May 20, 1950.
97 Quoted in Wim Ramaker and Ben van Bohemen, Sta een ogenblik stil .... Monumentenboek 1940/1945 (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 132. Tal spoke these words at the unveiling of a memorial within the Jewish cemetery in Muiderberg, which was built because an older initiative, a memorial at the J.D. Meijerplein in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood had been frustrated by the city of Amsterdam, see Stigter, “Beelden om nooit te vergeten,” 41–42.
98 Het Parool October 10, 1951.
rejected by Joop Melkman, editor of the *NIW* and future director of Yad Vashem in Israel. He argued that the Schouwburg could not be considered an adequate memorial for the Jewish community, and that the J.D. Meijerplein was the appropriate site to commemorate the Jewish victims. A few months later, a survivor who had been incarcerated in the Schouwburg wrote in a letter to the editor, stating that he would never set foot in the theater again and asserted that there are enough memorials at Jewish graveyards. Near the end of the year, *NIW* editor-in-chief Max Gans dedicated another editorial to this issue. All of the plans for a new destination had proved to be too costly for the city government. Gans’ solution was straightforward. He simply asks:

> Why don’t they tear down the building? For now and for the future, this is the best, most pious and definitely the cheapest solution. A simple public garden and commemorative plaque, possibly with an image of the Schouwburg, would be a solution we Jews would be very grateful for towards the city council.

This editorial was mentioned explicitly by the Jewish social-democratic politician Ben Sajet during a city council meeting where he argued it was disgrace that the building was in such a bad shape and that the city should come quickly to a solution. He pleaded for the installment of a representative advisory committee. Alderman Van der Velde agreed; and, in order to hasten the process, decided not to install a new committee or to ask Jewish institutions for their formal advice, but asked instead the former De Wolff committee for advice. Chairman De Wolff stressed that the members of this committee did not represent Jewish institutions but were invited to speak in their personal capacity. This would prove to be a misjudgment, since the NZB and the orthodox community felt sidestepped and continued to question the representativeness of the advisory committee of De Wolff, in spite of the fact that prominent individuals from both institutions were members.

In the meantime, a new and promising opportunity had presented itself to the Mayor of Amsterdam. Zionist A. van Santen, a friend of Alderman Van der Velde, had contacted the Israeli envoy Michael Amir. His plan was to establish an Israeli Center to promote the cultural and economic achievements of this young

---


100 *NIW* May 2, 1952.

101 *NIW* July 25, 1952.

102 *NIW* November 7, 1952.

103 *Gemeenteblad Amsterdam*, afdeling 2, December 2, 1952, p. 1292-1300.

104 Proceedings of the advisory committee, March 11, 1954, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, IISH.
Amir was keen to realize this project, which he saw as an exquisite opportunity to represent this young state in one of the oldest Jewish centers of Europe. The mayor told Amir that he had been unable to find a solution that would please the Dutch Jews and that he expected that a proposal by Israel would be accepted more readily. This corresponded to Amir’s self-perception: as representative of Israel he clearly expected he could count on the support of the Jewish community in general, and Dutch Zionists in particular. The orthodox community in diaspora was considered to be a vanishing category and would eventually merge into the Jewish state. An Israeli Center could be instrumental in this process, and to establish this center at a site that had been used to deport Jews was a symbol of Jewish renaissance through Zionism. This was in line with early Israeli memory discourse that linked the Israeli independence war directly to the ghetto uprising in Warsaw, and used the persecution of the Jews as a *raison d’être* of the Jewish state.  

Without consulting any Dutch Jewish organization, Amir looked for support in Israel. Only when the accord was ready to be announced he began to seek support in the Netherlands, starting with the De Wolff committee, which had now been expanded to include several Jewish leaders, such as Chief Rabbi Aron Schuster and the chairman of the NZB, Izak de Vries. The committee discussed several plans, including the housing of the Rosenthaliana library which by then had been incorporated into the University Library of Amsterdam. Rabbi Schuster preferred this last plan, which was in line with orthodox wishes to revive a sustainable Jewish community in the Netherlands. However, he did not veto the Israeli Center as long as there would be no entertainment at this site. De Vries supported the plan for an Israeli Center on the condition that only serious lectures and exhibitions would be programmed. He argued that the new destination should ‘not only be determined by the past, but also by the fact the future more or less sprouts from the past,’ linking the Zionist state with the memory of the persecution. Notary E. Spier, chairman of the Permanent Committee of the NIK and together with De Wolff one of the confidants of Amir, went even further, arguing that this plan focused on ‘that part of Jewry that has continuity, that is, Israel.’

---

105 For a detailed account of this plan, see Bart Wallet, “‘Een levend gedenkteken’. Israël, joods Nederland en de herinnering aan de Sjoea,” in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 190–99.


107 Proceedings of advisory committee, June 29, 1953, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, International Institute of Social History (IISH).
the committee gave its unanimous support. The city council would discuss the plan on July 22, which seemed only to be a formality.

In the meantime however, the Israeli Center was intensely discussed in the newspapers. This began with a long, dismissive letter in the *NIW* written by Jewish opinion maker Henriëtte Boas, who published both in Dutch newspapers and the Israeli daily *The Jerusalem Post*. Her argument against the plan was that the Hollandsche Schouwburg had never been considered Jewish heritage before the war, such as the dilapidating synagogues at the J.D. Meijerplein undeniably had been. Because of its dark history, many Jews would never set foot in this building, which probably was too large for its suggested purpose anyway, and too costly to renovate.\(^{108}\) Most reactions in the *NIW* were negative and followed Boas’ arguments: too expensive, too negative, and why not spend money on the synagogues instead?\(^{109}\)

Eventually, both the NIHS and the NZB distanced themselves from the plan, arguing that the unanimous support of the De Wolff committee did not reflect their official position on the issue. Boas and Melkman, who had previously argued against the Schouwburg as a memorial site, managed to reduce Amir’s support in Israel. Amir was forced to withdraw his support of the plan just before the council meeting on July 22. His official argument was that an estimated 20% of the Dutch Jewish community had negative sentiments towards the plan.\(^{110}\) The letter of rejection was accompanied by a conflicting oral statement contending that if the city council decided to go through with the plan, Israel would in all probability accept the proposal.

The council meeting was chaotic and emotional, with interruptions from the public gallery and several references to newspaper articles, in particular several editorials of the *NIW*. Liberal council member Le Cavelier even argued that the decision should be postponed because the issue had ‘not fermented enough in the press.’\(^{111}\) The proposal was accepted by a vote of 26 to 11, however the debate continued in the newspapers. The *NIW* covered the council meeting in great detail and argued in an editorial that the Israeli envoy should not intervene or represent the sentiments of the Jewish community of Amsterdam. ‘This is none of Israel’s business, but rather of the Dutch Jewry.’\(^{112}\) According to the editorial, Amir had overestimated his position in the Netherlands. The editorial board writes that:

\(^{108}\) *NIW* July 10, 1953. A shorter version appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* on July 20, 1953, suggesting that Israel would have to provide most funds for the center.
\(^{109}\) *NIW* July 17, 1953.
\(^{110}\) *Het Parool* July 22, 1953.
\(^{111}\) Proceedings of the city council, July 22, 1953, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, International Institute of Social History (IISH).
\(^{112}\) *NIW* July 24, 1953.
many unpleasantries would have been avoided if the contact between the Israeli Legation, Jewish organizations and the Jewish press would have been closer. With timely consultation directly after the plans were first made, the sentiments amongst the Jewish public could have been assessed better.\textsuperscript{113}

Not much later, Israel withdrew from the plan entirely, much to the reluctance of envoy Amir. The debate about the Israeli Center had turned into a struggle over the ownership of the memory of Jewish persecution and the issue of representation. Although the Dutch Jewish organizations did not come to a joint solution, they did agree on the fact that Israel could not altogether bypass the Dutch Jewish community living in the diaspora. The NIW repeated its call for the demolition of the theater; the NIHS stressed that the synagogues abutting the J.D. Meijerplein should receive priority.

The De Wolff committee assembled for a final meeting on March 11, 1954, without much success.\textsuperscript{114} Several members pleaded for demolition; according to historian Evelien Gans they were disappointed with the national memorial policy that had prevented the establishment of a specific Jewish memorial at the J.D. Meijerplein in 1947. Max Gans and Rabbi Schuster argued that a majority of Jews were against any positive destination for this building, to which De Wolff replied that he – as a statistician – could not take this seriously. Tearing down the building was unacceptable for De Wolff, who continued to argue that it was not a Jewish but a national issue. The committee was unable come to an agreement and was disbanded.

It took another three years before the city council was able to come to a decision. During this time, there was little attention in the newspapers. In 1955, the city council discussed a rapport about the Schouwburg and the synagogue complex at the J.D. Meijerplein. The NIW focused mainly on the latter and merely repeated its earlier plea for the destruction of the former theater. For the NIW, religious heritage had become more important than the heritage of the war. In 1957, newly appointed city architect Jan Leupen suggested shifting focus from the building to the terrain, enabling a partial demolition that could still be reconciled with an appropriate destination.\textsuperscript{115} Leupen’s insight cleared the path for his final design. One year later, on July 16, 1958, Israeli President Ben-Zwi commemorated the Jewish victims of the war on the steps of the closed theater. A large crowd, who had

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Proceedings of advisory committee, March 11, 1954, Archive Sam de Wolff, inventory 14, International Institute of Social History (IISH).
\textsuperscript{115} F. Boode, “‘Hollandsche Schouwburg’ als algemene herdenkingsplaats,” Ons Amsterdam 16 (1964): 156.
congregated both on the street and tramway, had to move away every time a tram passed. It demonstrated the unsuitability of this site for larger public ceremonies.

A few months later, Leupen’s design for a commemoration site was finally accepted by the city council. The meeting of November 27, 1958 was emotional and partially held behind closed doors. Many of the former arguments were reiterated. However, there was little discussion in the newspapers compared to the heated debate five years earlier. The NIW even refrained from writing a commentary because it did not want to undercut the process of decision-making.116 Leupen’s plan called for the demolition of the former theater hall, with the exception of the walls that surrounded the stage. The result was an open courtyard that followed the structure of the former theater.117 The seats, where once the audience sat and later the Jewish detainees awaiting deportation were replaced with a grass field symbolizing the absent victims. Nobody tread on this field, out of respect for the dead.

The grass field was surrounded by two corridors that led to the former stage. The stage was transformed into the symbolic center of the memorial and supported a large pylon with a base in the form of a Magen David. It was circumscribed by the jagged and partially authentic walls (as previously described) and a smooth dark-colored natural stone wall with the inscription ‘5700-5705 / In memory of those who have been taken away from here / 1940-1945’. Behind the rear wall stood fast-growing Lombardy poplar trees which offered a scenic backdrop. Enclosing the memorial, growing trees symbolized the rejuvenation of the Jewish community after the war. The courtyard design successfully merged the two historical functions of this site, theater and deportation center. It represented the absence of the victims and the continuation of Jewish life after the war. Moreover, it turned the former theater stage into a stage for performances of memory.

The front part of the building, which once housed the lobby and cloakroom among other parts, was completely renovated. The first and second floors were rented out as office space, and on the first floor an additional memorial was installed, the *chapelle ardente* that was mentioned in the deed of transfer. The former De Wolff committee that had donated the theater in 1950 was responsible for this space and asked Léon Waterman to design its interior. He consulted Soetendorp, the former journalist who, after a period living in Israel, had returned

---

116 *NIW* December 5, 1958.
117 For a detailed account of the architectural history of this memorial, see Coert Krabbe, “‘Spreken tot de bedroefden’. Architectuur van de herdenkingsplaats,” in *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering*, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 210–17.
to the Netherlands to become a liberal rabbi.\textsuperscript{118} The result was a small and intimate room with three stones representing a seminal family (father, mother and child). A lamp holding an eternal flame was attached to the side wall. On a small patch of Israeli soil stand several plants, also from Israel. Above these plants stood a Psalm text in Hebrew and Dutch, ‘My soul weeps because of grief; Strengthen me according to Your word’.\textsuperscript{119} De Wolff had been involved in this design until shortly before his death in 1960, but his suggestion to place a Psalm that addressed both Jews and non-Jews was not followed and instead a more religious text was chosen.\textsuperscript{120}

The historic façade, dating from the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, was largely maintained and repaired; except for a new, open steel entrance that allowed passers-by to glimpse a view of the courtyard from the street. There was a small shield next to the entrance that read ‘Former Hollandsche Schouwburg. Memorial to the fallen Jewish compatriots in 1940-1945.’ After the memorial was established, this text became controversial, especially the definition of \textit{fallen} Jewish compatriots [\textit{gevallen Joodse landgenoten}]. In the early postwar debate, this term was considered as an acknowledgement of Jewish victims. As I discussed before, \textit{NIW} editor Soetendorp had compared the Hollandsche Schouwburg to execution sites where resistance fighters had been shot and described the Jewish victims as our fallen. This was an attempt to inscribe the persecution of the Jews in the national memory discourse that prioritized actively fallen over passive victims.

In 1966 this strategy was no longer tolerated by a group of Jewish and non-Jewish journalists who took offense to what they argued was a euphemism for the industrial murder of more than 100,000 Jews. Henri Knap, Max Gans and Nico Scheepmaker took up the issue and organized a petition to have the text changed. Their main argument was that the Jewish victims were described as fallen heroes, rather than murdered victims. The critical stance towards the nationalistic discourse was partly due to the recent study by Jacques Presser that had been presented at this site one year earlier. Gans argued that the text on shield should be changed. ‘In reaction to the publication of professor Presser’s \textit{Ondergang} we have already pointed out that he rightfully called the persecution of the Jews murder, and not an act of war.’\textsuperscript{121} The text was changed to those ‘taken away and not returned’ in accordance with the text on courtyard wall. Scheepmaker wrote that in

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 214.  
\textsuperscript{119} Scripture taken from the New American Standard Bible, Copyright by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.  
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{NIW} March 18, 1966.
his opinion this new text was only a small improvement and that he had spoken to Jews who preferred the term ‘never returned’ over murdered. This compromise was part of an ongoing negotiation comprising the meaning and framing of the Hollandsche Schouwburg.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not a site of oblivion between 1945 and 1962, but rather a constant and physical reminder of the persecution of the Jews and its place in the Dutch memory of World War II. In the words of historian Peter Carrier, the debate about the Hollandsche Schouwburg enabled a ‘metadiscussion on the present-day political function of historical symbols [...]. [S]uch disputed sites of memory thus offer a basis for the public negotiation of historical memories and their political function.’ The long and painstaking decision process about its destination did not entail the repression of memory but rather expressed a multitude of voices.

The meaning of this site changed over time, sometimes in accordance with hegemonic memory discourse. First, it was framed as a national debt of honor; after that, it became a site of contestation on the part of several dissenting Jewish institutions which prohibited a consensual destination. When the site was finally inaugurated in 1962, this negotiation continued and as a result, the shield next to the entrance was changed. In the decades that followed, this process continued and the site was gradually appropriated by several Jewish institutions. From 1966 onwards, the Zionist commemoration of the persecution of the Jews, Yom HaShoah, was organized in the courtyard, which will be examined in the following chapter. In the early 1990s, the Jewish Historical Museum took over management and installed a small museum exhibition, which will be analyzed in chapter 4. However, the Hollandsche Schouwburg always remained a public site that never exclusively focused on the Jewish community. Alongside Yom HaShoah, the national Remembrance Day was organized and the Jewish Historical Museum aimed at educating the Dutch youth in general. The structure’s hybrid character is still visible in the current presentation of the memorial museum and attests to the continuous dynamics underlying the processes of contestation, appropriation and heritage formation that took place at this site.

122 Carrier, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory Cultures*, 214.
Chapter 3: The Performance of Memory: The Making of a Memorial Museum

From the early months after liberation up to the present day, the Hollandsche Schouwburg has been presented as a moral and spatial anchor referring to the persecution of Jews.¹ The inescapable presence of this particular building, used for the registration and deportation of tens of thousands of Jews, renders it difficult to discard or ignore it as a physical trace and evidence of a painful past. It was and remains an indexical and metonymic sign that refers to the persecution and murder of Jews that had been organized throughout Europe. As such as sign, it constantly oscillates between the actions and events that took place there, at the specific spot, and elsewhere, geographically dispersed over the European network of Nazi terror. In spite of this, the fact that the Hollandsche Schouwburg became a commemoration site dedicated to the memory of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution cannot be taken for granted. First of all, it was used as a theater directly after the liberation and only became a site of heritage after much deliberation. Secondly, there are other elements of its past that could have been highlighted, such as its theater period, perpetration and collaboration, or acts of (Jewish) resistance to name but a few. Thirdly, an important part of the Jewish community was not in favor of using this former theater as commemoration site because of its painful past. Nevertheless, the Hollandsche Schouwburg became a site of commemoration, after which it became somewhat of a tourist destination and eventually a memorial museum. Parallel to the institutional history of this building until the inauguration in 1962, previously discussed, this chapter investigates how it was appropriated and influenced by commemorative and visiting practices.

Sites of memory such as the Schouwburg are never simply there but rather produced over time as they are invested with meaning by performances of memory.² Such practices have greater impact if they allow the public to appropriate the site through an affective investment, be it a collective and organized commemoration or a private visit. The relationship between site and performance is always reciprocal. If we take for example the early commemorations at the doorsteps of the building, we see how, on the one hand, that the structure provided

¹ In a newspaper article in Paraat as early as May 6, 1945, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was already used in reference to the suffering of the Jews. It served as a concrete and demarcated referent, similar to sites such as Westerbork and Auschwitz, before the terms Holocaust and Shoah were commonly used.
² Winter, “The Performance of the Past.”
a unique spatial framework for these ceremonies: people assembled at the very spot from which Jews were deported during the occupation. On the other hand, the Hollandsche Schouwburg became a meaningful site because of these commemorations and other performances that could have been held at other locations. It is impossible to speak of a fixed and spatial memory that is inherent to the material building and that precedes performances of memory. Rather, the Hollandsche Schouwburg is a site where the memory of the persecution of the Jews has been and continues to be actively reproduced through collective, individual, official, informal, traditional and innovative practices. Where the previous chapter dealt with the institutional development of the memorial complex, this chapter traces performances of memory that both attached meaning to and derived meaning from the Hollandsche Schouwburg, beginning as early as 1948. These performances co-created, defined and altered the Hollandsche Schouwburg as an important site of memory. Some of these practices – such as the early commemorations on the doorsteps in the late 1940s – foreshadowed its future destination as a site of commemoration. Other practices were made possible by the installation of the memorial, in particular early visiting practices. As such, these performances are both related and run parallel to the institutional development of the building as discussed in the previous chapter, challenging, following and at times expediting this process.

In order to better understand the character of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as both a public and Jewish site of memory which was turned into a memorial museum in the 1990s, four topics are addressed: small-scale commemorations; presenting a public memorial; adopting Yom HaShoah; and visiting practices and the installation of a museum exhibition. The first section focuses on the early postwar May 4 commemorations that were held on the doorsteps of the closed theater. These ceremonies must be considered in light of the open character of Dutch Remembrance Day which enabled local histories to be embedded in a nationally unifying ceremony through site-specific spatial narratives. The second section addresses the public character of the commemoration site during the first few years after the memorial was officially established in 1962. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was not solely a national or Jewish site of memory, but rather offered a platform for the city and the national government to demonstrate their involvement in producing and maintaining a living memory of the persecution of the Jews. The third section investigates a

---

3 Parts of this chapter are elaborations of a previously published chapter, David Duindam, “Stilstaan bij de Jodenvolging. De Hollandsche Schouwburg als plek van herinnering.” in De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering, ed. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, and David Duindam (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 218–45.
similar negotiation between Jewish and Dutch identities through the installation of Yom HaShoah. This commemoration implied the gradual appropriation of this site by several important Jewish institutions and led to conflicts within the Dutch and international Jewish communities about the authority over the memory of the Shoah. The last section examines early practices of tourism that were made possible when the memorial was opened daily to visitors, not all of them necessarily well-informed about the history of this site. These visitors heralded a museum function that was institutionalized in 1993, when the Jewish Historical Museum (JHM) took over the management and turned the Hollandsche Schouwburg into a memorial museum. The JHM had always had an exhibition on the persecution of the Jews since its postwar reestablishment in 1955, but the Hollandsche Schouwburg offered an opportunity to fundamentally expand this topic without overshadowing its permanent exhibition.

1. Place-Making and Spatial Narratives: Early Commemorations

Memory studies investigates how the past is recounted and remediated by people, media and sites of memory, performed by individuals and institutions in order to be nurtured and kept alive. Commemorations are a specific type of performance that often includes prayers, music, speeches, silences and other symbolic elements. As the geographers Kenneth E. Foote and Maoz Azaryahu argue, such ceremonies attempt to reify the past by both placing it within the regularity of the calendar and choosing a significant place to render it material and inscribe the memory into the landscape. However, if we take the performative and repetitive character of these ceremonies into account, we can understand how their meaning is constantly exposed to change and transformation. Jay Winter writes:

> When individuals and groups express or embody or interpret or repeat a script about the past, they galvanize the ties that bind groups together and deposit additional memory traces about the past in their own minds. These

---

4 There is a vast body of literature on the dynamics of memory. For a collection of influential texts, see Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy, *The Collective Memory Reader*. This dissertation focuses on mediated cultural memory and performances of memory, see Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*; Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (Munich: Beck, 1999); Erll and Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies*; Erll and Rigney, *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*; Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree, and Jay Winter, eds., *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); Frank van Vree and Rob van der Laarse, eds., *De dynamiek van de herinnering: Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2009).

renewed and revamped memories frequently vary from and overlay earlier memoires, creating a complex palimpsest about the past each of us carries with us.\textsuperscript{6}

The initial narratives about past events are repeated and transformed over time, similar to how the performance of a theater play is both a reiteration and an interpretation of the original text. Winter argues that these performances of memory intend to ensure an affective connection to the past:

The performative act rehearses and recharges the emotion which gave the initial memory or story imbedded in it its sticking power, its resistance to erasure or oblivion. Hence affect is always inscribed in performative acts in general and in the performance of memory in particular.\textsuperscript{7}

The location of these ceremonies provides an interpretive framework of the past, irrespective of whether or not a physical memorial has been installed. For instance, a commemoration held within the boundaries of a religious institute, such as a church or synagogue, differs from one held at a national memorial site such as the National Monument in Amsterdam. Not only will the community of participants and the symbolic elements vary, the underlying interpretation of the past and how to deal with it in the present are often quite different. \textit{In situ} sites, where a part of the violent historic events took place, such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg, provide yet another framework. Such sites have a latent indexicality because of their spatial and often material relationship to the past and as such can evoke strong emotional reactions.\textsuperscript{8} There is no strict demarcation between these three categories, for national and religious elements may very well be, and often are, included in the design of \textit{in situ} memorials. In addition, sites can be appropriated over time through ceremonies and spatial interventions, sometimes radically changing the reasons why a memorial exists.

It must be stressed that any memorial, \textit{ex novo} or in situ, is constructed as a site of memory and not naturally given. Geographer Karen E. Till speaks of place-making: ‘\textit{Places of memory} are created by individuals and social groups to give a shape to felt absences, fears, and desires that haunt contemporary society.’\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{6} Winter, “The Performance of the Past,” 11.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{8} Memory scholars Van der Laarse, Mazzucchelli and Reijnen argue that such places often have a “high density” of historical traces, which are susceptible of being monumentalized, transformed, restored, dilapidated, destroyed […].’ Rob van der Laarse, Francesco Mazzucchelli, and Carlos Reijnen, “Introduction. Traces of Terror, Signs of Trauma,” \textit{VS Quaderni Di Studi Semiotici}, no. 119 (2014): 5. Patrizia Violi stresses the indexical link to past events and the fact that they ‘exist factually as material testimonies of violence and terror that took place here.’ Patrizia Violi, “Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory. Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum,” \textit{Theory, Culture & Society} 29, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 37.

\textsuperscript{9} Karen E. Till, \textit{The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 9.
process of place-making does not necessarily entail the establishment of an official and permanent memorial. Cultural anthropologist Irene Stengs observed that in reaction to the violent death of the Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh an ephemeral memorial emerged in the interaction between practices of mourning, the site of the attack, and the news media. This temporary memorial disappeared after a while without any protest. It could be argued that every memorial is essentially ephemeral, in line with heritage researcher Laurajane Smith’s claim that all heritage is intangible. However, it is precisely the permanence and spatiality of these sites that provide a concrete link with the past, even if this link is evoked in the moment. To deny their materiality is to miss the point: it is rather the reciprocity of location and practice that enables a meaningful performance of the past.

Directly after the liberation of the Netherlands, there was no adequate commemoration culture in place that answered to the early postwar needs of the Dutch government and population. Different from the policy regarding the establishment of monuments, which would become more or less nationalized through the network of provincial and national committees, the government did not determine when and how the war would be commemorated. It left the initiative to private and public institutions and interfered only sporadically when support was asked to implement a plan nationwide. An example of governmental interference is the refusal of the proposition to commemorate the occupation and celebrate the liberation on one day, May 5. The National Institute, an organization of former resistance fighters that regularly provided the government with advise on issues regarding the memory of the war, had made this suggestion. The government did not support this plan but instead supported the protocol of Jan Drop, a former resistance fighter, who had sent an unsanctioned document to all

---

10 These ‘ephemeral memorials may be considered ritualized sites that not only “are,” but at the same time “act” and interact with the social reality through which they are constituted. In other words, ephemeral memorials are performative practices.’ I. L. Stengs, “Ritual Mediations of Violent Death. An Ethnography of the Theo van Gogh Memorial Site, Amsterdam,” in Grassroots Memorials. The Politics of Memorializing Traumatic Death, ed. P.J. Magry and Cristina Sánchez Carretero (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 72.

11 Smith, Uses of Heritage; Smith and Akagawa, Intangible Heritage.

12 Rob van Ginkel argues that the early post-war memory policy in the Netherlands was not centralized in a dirigiste manner, as Pieter Lagrou claims, but that the government merely had a final say in memory projects that were often private or semi-private initiatives. See Lagrou, Legacy of Nazi Occupation, 69; Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 166–167, 726–730. Raaijmakers argues that the national government influenced the planning of commemorations, but did so quietly in the background. The government argued that private initiatives would reflect societal demand better than governmental programs would. Over time, the government was more openly involved, culminating in the establishment of the Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei in 1987 and coinciding with a shift towards a more universal and less nationalistic character of the national commemoration. Ilse Raaijmakers, De stilte en de storm. 4 en 5 mei sinds 1945 (Dissertation. Maastricht University, Maastricht, 2014).
Dutch municipalities in which it was suggested to commemorate the victims of the war on the eve of liberation day. His protocol prescribed all stores to close at six o’clock and called for citizens to hang the national flag at half-mast. It further suggested that a silent march was organized along an important historical site, such as an execution site, military cemetery or a site that had been bombarded. The crowd would silently stand still shortly before eight o’clock; church bells would chime at eight sharp; thereafter two minutes of silence would be observed. An essential characteristic of this protocol was its depoliticized character: speeches, banners or flags were to be avoided and wreaths were not allowed in order to avoid any conflict. Drop’s plan was adopted in six-hundred municipalities throughout the country and continues to be part of the annual commemoration until this very day.

By 1950 about seven-hundred local committees were established that organized ceremonies throughout the country. Most guidelines were followed, however the plea for depoliticisation was gradually ignored and speeches, banners and wreath were introduced over time. Committees were able to emphasize a specific historical event that was important to the local community. During the two minutes of silence the site-specific historical circumstances transcended into an abstracted and unifying moment of reflection. The dual framework allowed committees to emphasize local circumstances without having to undermine the national character of the remembrance. It did not entail a homogenization of the commemorative culture, but rather allowed for a spatially dispersed landscape of heterogeneous ceremonies that were nevertheless unified through the nationally observed two-minute silence. The spatial character of the silent marches enabled the insertion of locally specific histories. At the same time it limited the scope: victims without a grave or execution site nearby, such as persecuted Jews who were murdered in Eastern Europe, could not be remembered in this fashion. It is for this particular reason that NIW-editor Jaap Soetendorp argued in 1945 that the Hollandsche Schouwburg should be treated as an execution site: to give Jewish victims a site of commemoration. It also demonstrates the latent and contingent indexicality of in situ sites of memory: they can become powerful signs through active commemoration or spatial interventions.

It is important to stress the interaction between site and performance. There is no such thing as inherent and authentic spatial memory that performs itself. Rather, a site where something took place has the potential to become a site of memory because of an indexical relation to that specific event. This relationship remains to be performed, for instance through commemoration. On May 4, 1948, a

13 See Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 177–186; Raaijmakers, De stilte en de storm, chap. 1.
14 See chapter 2.2.
group of people attending a silent march paused at the doorsteps of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. A wreath was laid in honor of the Jewish resistance fighter Walter Süskind who had helped hundreds of adults and children to escape from this former deportation site. After this short ceremony, the group continued its procession to centrally-located Dam Square where at eight o’clock; two minutes of silence were observed in memory of all Dutch victims of World War II. The NIW published an article that stood out from the rest of the newspaper because it was set in large type (see figure 3.1).

![Figure 3.1. NIW 5 May, 1948.](image)

The text is accompanied by a photograph of the closed doors of the theater. It stated that:

At different locations in Amsterdam people assemble to form a group, holding flowers and wreaths. However, this group is not heading to a party; it is quiet and taciturn, serious and weighty. The city is darkened by the twilight of the passing day. And in that twilight, everything seems as if the bygone years return, as if we once again live in fear and dismay. Slowly these processions move towards their assembly point at the central Dam square.

One of these processions [slowly moves] through the Plantage Middenlaan, past the theater that now again is called the Hollandsche
Schouwburg, but that awakens so many sad memories from the time it was called the Joodsche Schouwburg. There, wreaths and flowers are laid in memory of the resistance fighters and the nearly one-hundred thousand Jews who were deported from there and never returned.\(^{15}\)

The commemorative silent march is described as a kind of traumatized return to the occupation years, but now from a safe distance, only ‘as if’ the past had returned. The Hollandsche Schouwburg ‘awakens’ memories that are apparently already formed, addressing those who experienced the horrors themselves. The narrator’s position shifts between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic modes: on the one hand, he distances himself from the scene and writes as if he is an objective reporter; on the other hand, he positions himself as part of the larger collective (‘as if we once again live in fear’). This ambiguity is also demonstrated by the active role the NIW took in this commemoration. In the photograph we see a bed of flowers and three wreaths that are laid in front of a closed door. One of these wreaths has been provided by the NIW and is dedicated to Walter Süskind and his friends. The caption of this picture reads: ‘In memory of Walter Süskind ... commemorating the resistance in the Schouwburg.’\(^{16}\) The previous chapter demonstrated how the NIW positioned itself as an important agent in the postwar debate about the destination of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and that it was certainly not a distanced or objective news medium. The wreath provided by the weekly newspaper, the ambiguity of the narrative form and the layout of this article all attest to a similarly active role in this commemoration.

The wreath was dedicated to Süskind, who enabled the escape of many Jews from the theater and died during one of the Nazi death marches departing from Auschwitz, rather than to all Jewish victims who were deported from the theater. This was in line with the Dutch national hegemonic memory discourse that prioritized resistance fighters over civilian casualties. However, it also connected to recent events in Israel. The article was published on the eve of the Israeli declaration of independence, an historic event that was specifically mentioned during the ceremony in front of the theater. ‘We commemorate, we who are still young and not yet have achieved the age of commemoration. [...] Beyond the commemoration, the thoughts of those who were present went out to the new task at hand that will eliminate the need to commemorate [...]’.\(^{17}\) Past, present and future were united in the image of the Jewish resistance fighter.\(^{18}\) This Zionist

\(^{15}\) NIW May 14, 1948.
\(^{16}\) Ibid.
\(^{17}\) Ibid.
\(^{18}\) This foreshadowed early Israeli memory discourse, in which the memories of Jewish resistance fighters were actively used in the practice on nation building. See Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*; Segev, *The Seventh Million*. 
perspective, with its focus on the heroic Jewish resistance fighters, did not undermine the Dutch hegemonic narrative of the occupation. It resurfaced throughout the history of this site of memory, both in the plans to build an Israeli Center, when Israeli president Ben-Zwi visited the theater in 1958 and after the memorial was established during the Yom HaShoah commemorations from 1966 onwards.

The 1948 ceremony in front of the building was part of a procession that led to Dam Square, where other processions also ended, bringing together divergent spatial narratives to the symbolic center of the nation. However, within the predominant commemorative culture of that time, this particular ceremony on the doorsteps of the Hollandsche Schouwburg emphasized the role of Jewish resistance and Jewish victimhood to the fullest possible extent without criticizing the national frame of unity and resistance. In the following years commemorations continued to be held in front of the closed theater. At a later stage, these were no longer part of a silent procession that continued towards Dam Square, a small but significant change. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was no longer only one stop on the way to Dam Square, but rather the site where people assembled at eight o’clock for two minutes of silence. Karien Anstadt – who attended these commemorations as a child – remembers laying flowers and associating it with the absence of her Jewish family. Ron Hijman and Mirjam Loonstijn, also children at that time, both recall how the traffic would come to a complete standstill precisely at eight. All three stress the small and intimate character of these gatherings that was directly related to the history of this former theater.

The early commemorations at the Hollandsche Schouwburg must be considered in the context of a commemorative culture that accommodated local differences through spatial narratives within a national and unifying ceremonial structure. The importance of sites of memory such as this cannot be stressed enough: they functioned as indexical markers and provided physical contact zones in which one may come into contact with the past. However, these sites did not automatically function as such: only during a ceremony did they reach their full potential as sites of memory. The dualist framework of May 4 supported local pluralism as long as it did not come into conflict with the hegemonic national memory discourse. It even enabled a more Zionist perspective, linking the

---

19 The Dam is an important square in Amsterdam that was considered the symbolic ‘heart of the nation’; in 1947 a temporary memorial was erected pending the installation of the permanent National Monument in 1956. See Warna Oosterbaan, “Herdenken op de Dam,” in Het Nationaal Monument op de Dam, ed. Menno Landstra (Amsterdam: Landstra & Spruijt, 1998), 9–27; Hijink, Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering, 54–60; Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 67–84 and 205–207.

resistance against the Nazi persecution with the struggle for independence, as long as this did not undermine the national discourse. The early commemorations in front of the building would never grow out to be a manifestation of a significant part of the Jewish community, which was indeed realized later with the installment of Yom HaShoah. It was not an appropriate site for large-scale gatherings. In 1960, the building was in such a bad state of disrepair that the municipality needed to carry out emergency stabilization work only a few hours prior to the commemoration, because parts of the building were in danger of falling down, which caused a public safety hazard. However, these early ceremonies do point to the latency of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a site of memory and stage for commemorations.

2. A Public Memorial

With the establishment of the memorial complex in 1962, the city of Amsterdam purged what was considered to be a wound on its urban landscape. Being the legal owner of this former theater, the city was responsible for its renovation, with exception of one room, the *chapelle ardente*, which was financed and designed by the Stichting Hollandsche Schouwburg, the legal successor of the committee of Sam de Wolff. The overall design was not specifically Jewish, but rather a public memorial that juxtaposed Zionist, religious Jewish and non-Jewish symbols. As argued in the previous chapter, there was not ‘a’ Dutch Jewish community that spoke with one voice, but rather a plethora of organizations and individuals with often conflicting opinions. Concerning the memory of the persecution of the Jews, there was little consensus on how it should be addressed. However, if we look at several important Jewish organizations that identified themselves as important representatives of Dutch Jewry, such as the orthodox Jewish community and the Zionist Bond, we observe an initial reluctance in accepting the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a commemoration site. During the first few years after its inauguration, the building was mainly used for official events organized by the city and national government. Jewish institutions were always represented at these events, demonstrating a reserved tolerance of the commemoration, but were never the main organizers. Only with the introduction of Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron from 1966 onwards, important Jewish organizations appropriated the site to a fuller extent, which certainly does not imply that the entire Jewish community collectively embraced this commemoration site.

---

21 See Pandenarchief, sector middelen, dossier Hollandsche Schouwburg, report 516, City Archives Amsterdam.
22 See chapter 2.1 and Wallet, *De ketting is nog ongebroken*; Wallet and Berg, “65 Jaar Joods Nederland.”
The previous chapter demonstrates how during the first post-war years the persecution of the Jews was framed as part of a collective and national suffering, which led to a successful nation-wide action to collect funds for acquiring the Hollandsche Schouwburg in the late 1940s. It also triggered ambiguous positions of several Jewish institutions. Without rejecting the work of the committee altogether, the orthodox Jewish community, the Zionist Bond and the NIW argued that Jews should not contribute to this cause. They further claimed it could never be a proper commemoration site for the Jewish community because of the negative and painful memories. This reluctance was demonstrated by the fact that the small and intimate commemorations in front of the Hollandsche Schouwburg were not fully endorsed by these organizations. The involvement of the NIW in 1948 was an exception that can be explained by editor-in-chief Jaap Soetendorp’s personal involvement and early attempt to inscribe the issue of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in the hegemonic national memory discourse. After Soetendorp migrated to Israel later that year, the NIW distanced itself explicitly from the Schouwburg in the 1950s, illustrated by a dismissive editorial in 1952 that called for the demolition of the theater. This also explains why the small-scale commemorations after 1948 were not mentioned in the NIW, with the exception of a letter to the editor in 1952 complaining that a non-Jew had recited a Christian prayer.23

The debate about the destination of the Schouwburg culminated in the proposed establishment of an Israeli Center in 1953. Israeli envoy Dr. Michael Amir did not consult with the Dutch Jewish institutions arguing that he could speak on behalf of Dutch Jewry. His actions estranged the usually loyal Zionist Bond, forcing Amir to retreat from this plan. The Dutch orthodox and Zionist institutions did not allow the memory of the Hollandsche Schouwburg to be appropriated by Israel at that time.24 Five years later, Israeli president Ben-Zwi and his wife visited the Netherlands. Their program focused on official state dinners, Jewish institutions and historic sites. Ben-Zwi visited the grave-monument of Jewish printer Menasseh Ben Israel in Ouderkerk and his wife visited the Anne Frank House with Otto Frank.25 In the morning of July 16, Ben-Zwi laid a wreath at Dam Square and afterwards attended a commemoration ceremony organized in front of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. The building had withered for years but had been

23 NIW, November 7 and May 9, 1952.
24 Bart Wallet argues that a fundamentally different outlook on the politics of memory cause this conflict, see Wallet, “Een levend gedenkteken.”
25 De Telegraaf July 17, 1958. In the 1950s, people could visit the Anne Frank House only under supervision. On May 3, 1957, a foundation was established to ensure the future existence of this building. On June 12, 1958, the mayor of Amsterdam started fundraising for its renovation, which was ongoing during Mrs. Ben-Zwi’s visit. The Anne Frank House opened to the general public on May 3, 1960. See Van der Lans and Vuijsje, Het Anne Frank Huis, 65–83.
painted for the occasion. Chief Rabbi Schuster recited Yizkor, the prayer for the dead, and Ben-Zwi addressed the crowd. The ceremony was reported on by several non-Jewish media including the cinema newsreel company Polygoon. In stark contrast, the NIW did not mention the visit in its report and instead wrote extensively about Ben-Zwi’s visit to the Portuguese Synagogue as a silent form of protest. However, Schuster’s central role demonstrated that the orthodox community was no longer adamantly against using the theater for such ceremonies.

Several months after Ben-Zwi’s visit, the city council decided to establish a memorial complex. In spite of their initial reluctance, many Jewish notables were present at the inauguration of the memorial by the mayor of Amsterdam on May 4, 1962. The NIW published a detailed report, as did other news media. The guests included the Council-General from Israel, the leaders of the Orthodox, the Portuguese and the Liberal Jewish communities and the Zionist Bond, as well as non-Jewish former resistance fighters and local politicians. The mayor gave a short speech in which he mostly touted the Jewish community. ‘Amsterdam lost that part of its population during the war that bestowed fame to and adorned the city [dat roem en kleur aan de stad heeft gegeven].’ Furthermore, he stated that ‘it was an unbearable thought that the occupiers had separated Jewish from non-Jewish Amsterdammers,’ and expressed the hope that the city would continue to be called Mokum, a well-known Jewish term of endearment. He attempted to integrate the image of Amsterdam as Mokum with the heroic image of Amsterdam as the city of the February Strike. The mayor’s speech did not contain any self-criticism nor did he refer to any painful memories attached to the site. After the speech, Chief Rabbi Schuster recited a psalm in Hebrew and Dutch. After the mayor lit an eternal flame in the chapel, the doors were opened to the general public who had been waiting outside to visit and pay their respects.

The attendance of Jewish officials at this inauguration demonstrated a gradual acceptance of this memorial, but not a complete embrace. This ambiguity was illustrated by an interview Schuster gave shortly after the ceremony. The Chief Rabbi continued to state that, even if some individual Jews found the site acceptable, for many it was still too painful to even consider visiting. It was therefore not a suitable site for collective commemorations. ‘We have our own

---

26 Leeuwarder Courant May 24, 1958
28 There was a detailed 2-page report of Ben-Zwi’s visit, NIW July 18, 1958.
cemeteries with memorials where we can retreat in silence’. Schuster left open the possibility of making use of this new memorial, without discarding the already existing sites at graveyards that were imbedded in the religious infrastructure while ignoring the negative feelings individuals might have towards this site. This ambiguity can explain why the Schouwburg was not the most prominent site for Jewish commemorations in the first few years after its establishment. The ceremonies held annually on May 4, organized by a neighborhood committee, were not covered by national newspapers or the NIW. Only with the installment of Yom HaShoah in 1966, did the NIW begin extensive annual reporting, quoting speakers and describing the ceremonies in great detail.

For the city, the establishment of the memorial complex had removed a site of disgrace [schandvlek] in the words of an alderman of Amsterdam. Where Ben-Zwi’s visit in 1958 painful pointed out the shortcomings of the Amsterdam government to properly address this site, then the Israeli ambassador was the first foreign official in 1963 to lay a wreath at the Schouwburg under more appropriate circumstances. The intervening five years had been a constitutive period for Israel’s institutionalization of the commemoration of the persecution of the Jews; a process that was characterized by bitter conflicts and intricately related to the production of nationhood. Yad Vashem, appointed by the Knesset in 1953 for the study and commemoration of what was to be called the Shoah, gradually expanded its infrastructure over time. Yad Vashem’s first building housed archives, a library and administrative offices and was established in 1957, the same year that Dutchman Joop Melkman became its general director. In 1961, the Hall of Remembrance was inaugurated, followed in 1962 by the commencement of the Avenue of the Righteous along which trees were planted in honor of non-Jewish helpers. Another important event was the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the Nazi ringleaders who had helped organize the mass deportation and murder of Jews. The process, held in Israel, had a world-wide impact, as it was one of the first internationally televised media events. The many oral testimonies, in addition to being used for the persecution of Eichmann, provided an overview of the immensity of the Nazi persecution of the Jews throughout Europe.

31 Haagse Post May 12, 1962.
32 Alderman Van ’t Hull used this term during the decisive council meeting, see Algemeen Handelsblad November 27, 1958.
33 NIW May 25, 1963.
34 Young, The Texture of Memory, pt. III; Zertal, Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood; Segev, The Seventh Million.
35 Young, The Texture of Memory, 250.
36 Over one hundred witnesses were heard, from every occupied region in Europe. Some testimonies were not directly related to Eichmann’s responsibilities but rather served to provide a full picture of the Shoah. See Judith Keilbach, “Mikrofon, Videotape, Datenbank. Entwurf einer Mediengeschichte der
first time in Israel and abroad, the voice of the survivor was heard in a public setting. It had a great influence on Israeli memory discourse which had previously emphasized the heroic narrative of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters. However, it also impacted countries beyond Israel’s borders. As sociologists Levy and Snaider argue, ‘the coverage of the trial was produced locally, but its reception was global.’

The trial thus put Israel at center stage of the production of memory of the persecution of the Jews, even if the reception of the trial differed greatly from country to country.

In the Netherlands, newspaper reports on the trial initiated a debate on passive collaboration of the Dutch in the persecution of the Jews. In the same period, the Dutch production of and interest in books, films and television documentaries that dealt with the occupation in general and the persecution of Jews in particular had increased. International films about this topic were well-attended as well as the theater and film adaptations of Anne Frank’s diary. In 1961, Dutch news-media followed the Eichmann trial closely and De Bezetting (1960-65), a television documentary by Loe de Jong, was received as a ‘national monument’. The Anne Frank House opened its doors in 1960 and the Hollandsche Schouwburg was transformed from a dilapidated building into a memorial complex that offered a ceremonial platform for official events.

The increased interest in the persecution of Jews did not automatically entail a fundamental break with the hegemonic exculpatory perspective. In various cases people continued to frame the persecution of Jews in an uncritical discourse, as illustrated by the inaugural speech of the Hollandsche Schouwburg by the
mayor. However, the self-critical notion of passive collaboration gained traction, a process that could have undermined the role of the nation in the debate about the memory of the persecution. The Hollandsche Schouwburg turned out to be an important site, as it was an acknowledgement of the extraordinary suffering of Dutch Jews without placing this history outside the confines of the shared public space. As such, it had two functions: it was both a commemoration site in memory of the Jewish victims of the war with a national scope, and a physical reminder for the society as a whole of what had happened at the site. This duality was at the root of the hybrid character of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as both a national and Jewish site of memory, something that was constantly being negotiated and redefined. Rather than a site with a fixed identity based on an already fully formed memory, as described in the 1948 NIW article, the character of this site was and continues to be performed, both collectively during ceremonial events and individually during personal visits.

In this light, an important ceremony was the presentation on April 22, 1965 of the long expected study by Jacques Presser. In the courtyard of the Schouwburg, Jewish choirs accompanied the newly appointed Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work Maarten Vrolijk. After a remarkable speech, Vrolijk presented the first copy to the mayor and laid a wreath at the foot of the pylon to conclude the ceremony. The two-volume monograph entitled Ondergang. De vervolging en verdelging van het Nederlandse jodendom 1940-1945, had been commissioned in 1950 by the State Institute for War Documentation (RIOD) and was one of the first major state-sponsored studies worldwide that focused solely on this topic. The first printing of 11,000 copies was sold out in three days and 141,000 copies were distributed in the first year alone. Historian Conny Kristel argues that Dutch historiography on the persecution of the Jews distinguished itself from that of other countries, where most studies were initiatives by Jewish organizations or individual researchers. In the Netherlands, the RIOD, headed by Jewish historian Loe de Jong, played a central role by publishing three important works: Herzberg (1950), Presser (1965) and De Jong (1969-88). Where Herzberg exculpated the Dutch authorities, arguing the persecution had not been a Dutch history, Presser addressed the responsibility of public institutions and the general population during the occupation.

41 Het Vrije Volk April 22, 1965 and De Telegraaf April 23, 1965.
42 De Tijd March 26, 1966 and De Haan, Na de ondergang, 28.
43 Kristel, Geschiedschrijving als opdracht, 17–18.
45 Conny Kristel, “Survivors as Historians. Abel Herzberg, Jacques Presser and Loe de Jong on the Nazi Persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands,” in Holocaust Historiography in Context. Emergence,
This self-critical perspective was reiterated in the remarkable speech given in the courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg by Minister Vrolijk and written by RIOD director Loe de Jong. The Dutch, non-Jewish population was asked to scrutinize its own role during the war, for one could not simply argue that one knew nothing of Auschwitz and the gas-chambers. De Jong writes that:

One knew, or at least could have known if one would open himself to such knowledge, that an enemy, in his brutal ruthlessness that had been demonstrated over and over again, was intended on deporting people to places where, at best, only the strong ones would survive and the weak would surely perish. This knowledge forces us to ask, personally, whether we, with exception of those who did act, have protected the persecuted to our greatest ability.\(^{46}\)

The original text by De Jong was edited and toned down: the phrase ‘passivity as cooperative guilt’ was removed.\(^{47}\) Nevertheless, it was in stark contrast with the mayor’s inaugural speech three years earlier, which aligned Jewish and non-Jewish suffering and characterized Jews as colorful adornments to the city.

Delivered by the Minister of Education, it was a rare public moment of self-reflection, a fact emphasized in local and national newspapers. In the reviews of Presser’s study, the issues of passive and active collaboration were hotly debated.\(^{48}\) The NIW summarized most of these reviews one week after the presentation and systematically looked for differences between Jewish and non-Jewish reviewers. It was noted that only the catholic newspaper De Volkskrant had asked a Jewish journalist to reply to Presser’s book, Abel Herzberg. He was critical of the work and repeated his position dating back to 1950 that the persecution was not a Dutch history. In addition, he argued that Presser had neglected to discuss the years before the occupation, indispensable for a historic understanding. Differently from Herzberg, non-Jewish reviewers did not voice fundamental critique, calling it a true monument to the memory of the persecuted, and instead focused on the passive guilt of the Dutch population. ‘This last is the tenor of almost all reviews: the sense of guilt that, for the first time or once again, has emerged.’\(^{49}\) Vrolijk’s speech had provided a frame for the reception of Presser’s study in terms of passive collaboration.

---

46 Het Vrije Volk April 22, 1965.
47 Kristel, Geschiedschrijving als opdracht, 245–246.
48 A year before, the Eichmann trial had incited a similar yet more abstract debate about culpability, since the trial pertained to the situation in the Netherlands to a lesser degree than Presser’s study. Ibid., 237–239.
49 NIW April 30, 1965. See also Ibid., 251–257.
The question remains whether Presser was a Jewish historian writing about a Jewish history, or a national historian writing about a national history. Historian Ido de Haan argues that, in spite of the intention to integrate the history of the persecution of the Jews into the national historiography, this was not realized in its implementation. 'Non-Jews wrote about Dutch history, Jews wrote about the history of the persecution, but the histories did not converge.' In spite of these observations, it cannot be denied that the publications of Herzberg, Presser and De Jong were state-funded, an exceptional situation compared to surrounding countries. The researchers that were commissioned by the RIOD were not strictly bound to a national framework and inserted much of their personal identities, opinions and persuasiveness into their work. Similar to the NIW that categorized the reviewers of Presser’s work as Jews versus non-Jews, De Haan qualifies Herzberg, Presser and De Jong as Jewish-rather than Dutch-historians. However, their Jewish identities were not static, nor did their Jewish identity a priori preclude a Dutch one. Kristel convincingly argues that their biographies played an essential role in their perceptions, including their struggles with their Dutch-Jewish identities. The argument that they were either Jewish or Dutch historians cannot be sustained, since their identities were constantly in flux and ambiguous. The persecution of the Jews was a crucial topic in redefining their relationship with the Dutch nation, as was the case for many Jews. The fierceness of the debate about the Hollandsche Schouwburg in the 1950s only proves how crucial this issue was for many Jews. Now that the memorial was established, a parallel issue surfaced: should Jews commemorate the persecution at a secular site located in the public realm? Over time, the Hollandsche Schouwburg did not become an exclusively

50 De Haan, Na de ondergang, 33. According to De Haan, this separation was asymmetrical: Jewish historians applied notions that were central to the non-Jewish history of the occupation, such as collaboration and resistance, to the actions of the persecuted themselves. The result was an emphasis on Jewish passivity and collaboration in the works of Presser and De Jong: De Haan counts nine pages in the work of De Jong that deals with role of the Dutch government, churches and the general population, as opposed to twenty-four on the role of Jews and fifteen on the particular case of Friedrich Weinreb, a Jewish writer who was imprisoned after the war for collaboration and whose actions were at the center of a heated national debate for several decades. As director of the RIOD, De Jong was asked to write a report about Weinreb in 1970, which was published in 1976.
51 Anthropologist Richard Handler argues against an essentialist notion of identity: ‘the uttering of every statement about ‘who we are’ changes, if only slightly, our relationship to who we are. Thus to talk about identity is to change or construct it, despite the dominant epistemology of identity, which specifies immutability.’ Richard Handler, “Is ‘Identity’ a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?,” in Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity, ed. John R Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 30. Rather than given, identity is performed. Commemorations play an important role in this process.
Jewish but rather a public commemoration site where an important part of the Jewish community chose to perform its commemorations without placing itself outside of the Dutch society. As such, it was not an exclusively national or Jewish site but a public stage where national and Jewish narratives clashed, converged and interacted.

3. Yom HaShoah as a Dutch-Jewish Commemoration

‘There is a direct line from Auschwitz and Sobibor to Latrun. There is a connection between that part of our people that perished in 1940-1945 and those who established a new existence in 1948 risking their own lives.’ In his memorial speech, Chief Rabbi Schuster aligned the Nazi death camps with an important 1948 battle in the struggle for Israeli independence. After him, prominent historian Abel Herzberg discussed Jewish resistance during the war and emphasized that all Jews should organize themselves, as was currently being done in Israel, in order to prevent future persecution. These words were spoken at the Hollandsche Schouwburg on April 24, 1966 during the first combined commemoration of Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron, Israel’s national Memorial Day. It was the first major event at this commemoration site organized specifically by Jewish organizations: nine Dutch-Jewish orthodox and Zionist youth clubs. Attended by representatives from the Zionist Bond, several orthodox religious communities, Israel, the city of Amsterdam and the Dutch army, it can be characterized as a Jewish gathering where non-Jewish institutes were present to pay their respects.

Before, Jewish representatives had been only invited guests during the inauguration and the presentation of Presser’s study one year prior; now they were the initiators and organizers. As such, the commemoration can be considered the first institutional appropriation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a site of commemoration by a significant part of the Jewish community; a view that continues to be held up until today in a strikingly similar fashion.

The first Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron commemoration at the Schouwburg was a bricolage of different ceremonies: the names and date were

54 NIW April 29, 1966.
55 Yom HaShoah commemorates the victims of Nazi aggression on 27 Nisan. Yom HaZikaron commemorates all fallen Israeli soldiers and civilian victims of terrorist attacks on 4 Iyar. For an account of the Israeli commemorative calendar and especially Yom HaShoah, see Young, *The Texture of Memory*, chapter 10. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, these two commemorations were combined until 1980. From that year onwards, the ceremony at the Hollandsche Schouwburg was Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron was organized elsewhere and on a different day.
56 The organizing youth clubs were: Benei Akiwa, Hanoar Hazioni, Haschomer Hazaier, Hasjalchelet, Ichoed Haboniem, Israëlische Studenten Organisatie, Jongeren groep van het Verbond, NZSO and Scopus, see NIW March 25, 1966.
57 NIW April 29, 1966.
copied from Israel, but most ritual practices were recycled from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorations that had been continuously organized in the Netherlands as early as 1946. As Ann Rigney argues, new commemorations are often recycled and adapted from preexisting ones:

Models of remembrance, like Foucault’s utterances, are repeated, transformed and appropriated in new situations with the help of ‘mobile’ media. This means that one act of remembrance can stimulate comparable acts in other situations and within different social frameworks. The language in which memories are articulated is recycled, providing an intellectual hook with which relics of the past can be “fished” out of the archive and brought into working memory.58

The 1966 commemoration abounded with Dutch, Jewish and Israeli symbols, such as the two national anthems and both national flags, and the Jewish memorial prayer Jizkor. A Torah text about the revival of the Jewish people (Ezekiel 37: 1-4) was recited in Dutch and Hebrew. Six candles were lit, symbolizing the six million victims of the Nazi persecution. They were placed on a copy of Yad Vashem’s famous candelabra designed by Zahara Schatz which had been mass-produced from 1961 onwards with the intention to be distributed throughout the diaspora.59

Starting in 1963, the candle holder had been part of the prescribed Yom HaShoah-program at Israeli schools.60 At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, however, it was only used during the first commemoration later to be replaced with six separate larger candleholders.

This observation leads us to several important questions: why was this combined Israeli commemoration organized at the Hollandsche Schouwburg? Did this ceremony result in a moving away from Dutch towards the Israeli memory culture, or was the Israeli ceremony embedded in the Dutch commemorative culture? In order to answer these questions, we must turn our attention to the early Warsaw Ghetto Uprising commemorations, both in Israel and in the Netherlands. In order to understand how the ceremonies at the Hollandsche Schouwburg both resemble and differ from these, we will consider several memorial speeches and controversies that arose over time. It is argued that the introduction of the combined Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron commemoration at the Hollandsche Schouwburg was a reaction to a politicized and divisive commemorative culture in the Netherlands. Over time, these ceremonies demonstrated a strong allegiance to Israel, but at the same time repudiated control over the ceremony from abroad.

58 Rigney, “Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory,” 23.
59 NIW February 17, 1961.
Yom HaShoah was installed by Israel’s parliament in 1951 as Yom HaShoah Umered Hagetaot, or Shoah and Ghetto Uprising Day. Its name was changed in 1959 to Yom HaShoah VeHagvurah, Shoah and Heroism Remembrance Day, in order to include other acts of heroism as well. In spite of this alteration, it is important to note that Yom HaShoah has its roots in commemorating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, a key act of Jewish armed resistance during World War II. The uprising was triggered by Nazi forces that started to clear out the Warsaw ghetto and deport all remaining Jews to Treblinka. The Jewish resistance defended itself to the last man, in spite of their poor resources. The major attack on the Jewish population started on April 19, 1943 or 14 Nisan, the eve of Pesach. The battle lasted for several weeks, after which the remaining inhabitants were deported in order to be murdered in Nazi death camps. The uprising played a crucial role in the postwar Zionist memory discourse, since it embodied the ideal of Jewish resistance under the most dreadful circumstances. As such, it was the antitype of the alleged passive victimhood of Jews. Idith Zertal demonstrates how, in spite of its lack of military success, the uprising was soon propagated as a key event throughout the Jewish Diaspora. She writes that:

Defeat and death prevailed. And yet, the uprising was a huge, enormously portentous event [...]. For this was the most extensive and important Jewish military endeavor, and the first mass rebellion in any of the occupied countries, in fact the largest direct rebellion in the annals of Nazi dominion. Moreover, those who launched this great uprising were the weakest, the most persecuted, tortured, and annihilated of the Nazis’ victims.\textsuperscript{61}

The heroism was particularly relevant for Zionist fighters in Palestine and the early Israeli state. According to Zertal, the uprising was directly linked to the struggle for a Jewish state and ‘became Zionism’s “official” history.’\textsuperscript{62} This entailed a celebration of heroes and a denouncement of the so-called great masses that had supposedly collaborated with their \textit{Judenräte} and had been led to the camps like “sheep to the slaughter”.

However, the early memory discourse in Israel was not homogeneous and soon after the state was established alternative views on how to commemorate the Nazi persecution emerged. Some orthodox religious groups inscribed the memory of Nazi terror in the traditional cycle of religious holidays. In 1949, Israel’s rabbinate decided to use 10 Teveth, a somewhat dormant fasting day, and by doing so, linked the Nazi persecution to other great catastrophes such as the destruction

\textsuperscript{61} Zertal, \textit{Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood}, 27.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 29.
of the First and Second Temples. The underlying interpretation was that the Nazi persecution was a punishment by God for the sins of the Jews, which for many Israelis was unacceptable. When in 1951 the installment of Yom HaShoah was discussed in the Knesset, religious groups protested vehemently against the date of 14 Nisan, since this collided with the celebration of Pesach. The Knesset came to a compromise and picked 27 Nisan, a date that had no religious significance and was close to the national remembrance and independence days. According to James Young, this decision 'emplotted the entire story of Israel’s national rebirth, drawing on a potent combination of religious and national mythologies.' Within a period of three weeks, the liberation from Egypt, the Nazi persecution and the establishment of Israel are commemorated.

In the Netherlands, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was commemorated as early as April 18, 1946. It was not organized by the Zionist Bond, an organization that could have claimed to represent a broader group of Zionist Jews with different backgrounds, but rather by the Yiddish cultural organization Sch. Anski, later accompanied by Het Verbond voor Oost-Europese Joden in Nederland. Yiddish was not a common language within the Dutch Jewish community, and these organizations therefore did not represent, nor intended to represent, the Jewish community at large, but rather to keep the declining Yiddish culture alive. The fact that they organized the Ghetto Uprising is therefore quite surprising, given the significance of this event for a larger part of the Jewish community. Sch. Anski simply was the first to organize the commemoration, and after several years their authority, ability and intention to organize a truly collective Jewish commemoration was openly questioned.

The first Ghetto Uprising commemorations were held at secular locations not directly related to the persecution of Jews, such as the convention center Het Minerva Paviljoen and the Parkhotel. The Gregorian date of April 19 was followed without taking Shabbat or Passover into account; which at times made it difficult for observant Jews to attend. The ceremony incorporated a minute of silence, Hatikwa – the later Israeli national anthem – and the Yiddish partisan song Zog Nit Keynmol. Later, the Yizkor was included and six candles were lit. The gatherings, in addition to their commemorative function, were manifestations of Yiddish culture through songs, poetry and theater in a language only a few Dutch Jews could understand. As such, the uprising was appropriated as the product of

---

63 This day is currently still observed by ultra-religious Jews in preference over Yom HaShoah.
64 Young, The Texture of Memory, especially chapter 10.
65 Sch. Anski was a Russian Jewish writer. Het Verbond voor Oost-Europese Joden can be translated as The Federation of East-European Jews in the Netherlands.
66 In 1948, a theater play about daily life in Palestine was performed, see NJW April 30, 1948. For a photograph, see Duindam, “Stilstaan bij de Jodenvervolging,” 231.
East-European Jewry, something which was also reflected in the memorial speeches. The Jewish historian and librarian Leo Fuks, a regular speaker and one of Anski’s board members, emphasized the glorious past of East-European Jewry and only mentioned the struggle in Palestine at the end. In 1946, just before the first commemoration, he published an article in memory of the uprising, beginning his account with the crusades and the first establishment of Jews in Poland, only to mention the ghetto uprising in the final paragraph, arguing that with the murder of the Warsaw Jews, ‘a thousand years of Polish Jewry ended.’ Four years later, his memorial speech focused on the history of the uprising itself and only mentioned the struggle in Israel in the last instance.

Fuks’ perspective was focused towards the past Polish Jewry, rather than forwards to the future of the promised land. This was in line with Sch. Anski’s main goal to conserve and pass on Yiddish culture and language. However, since not all Jews in the Netherlands were of East-European decent, and even less understood Yiddish, many Jews were alienated from this commemoration and in spite of the significance of the Uprising, these commemorations played only a minor role in Dutch memory culture. Sam de Wolff, chair of the action committee that had acquired the Hollandsche Schouwburg, held several memorial speeches in which he denounced the passivity of West-European Jews in light of the Ghetto Uprising. In his famous polemic tone, he stated in 1950 that ‘[e]very heroic act is an indictment against the West-European Jew, who was not capable to act in such a way.’ One year later, when the commemoration was held on April 19, he asked himself ‘whether the West-European Jew has the right to speak about the Ghetto Uprising.’ He criticized those who did not attend for religious reasons, because it was the evening of Bedikat Chametz in preparation of Pesach. The NIW condemned De Wolff’s harsh words and argued that if the organization wanted a truly collective commemoration, it should take the beliefs of observant Jews into consideration and put less emphasis on the spiritual driving forces of the ghetto fighters.

---

67 Other speakers included: mr. and mrs. Rafalowitch, Sam de Wolff, Joop Melkman, Ben Sajet, Abel Herzberg, Lies van Weezel, H. Wielek, Simon Wiesenthal and prof. Dresden. Over time, the speeches would focus more on current events, such as the rise of neo-Nazism in Germany, and the fate of Israel.
68 NIW April 12, 1946.
69 NIW April 28, 1950.
70 Fuks was born in Poland and migrated to the Netherlands in the 1930s. His work for the Jewish Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana was considered to be important for the renaissance of Jewish culture in the Netherlands. Shlomo Berger argues that he did not ‘see his task as one of revival, but rather as continuation.’ This does not invalidate the observation that according him Jewish life had ended in Poland. Fuks would not move to Israel and remained in the Netherlands until his death in 1990, see Shlomo Berger, “The Library as a Bet Midrash: Leo Fuks and the Rosenthaliana, 1946-1971,” Studia Rosenthaliana 38/39 (January 1, 2005): 107–108.
71 NIW April 28, 1950.
72 NIW April 27, 1951.
73 Ibid.
The Ghetto Uprising commemoration had become a polemic and divisive event. In spite of efforts by the orthodox community and the Zionist Bond to cooperate by joining the organizing team, Sch. Anksi’s chairman continued to stress the role of East-European Jewry throughout the 1960s. Rather than boycotting these gatherings altogether, a new commemoration was established, combining the two Israeli remembrance days. It was unclear which organization had taken the initiative and it was presented as a truly collaborative effort organized by both Zionist and orthodox Jewish youth organizations. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was the chosen location because it was a site of both Jewish victimhood and resistance. Ceremonial elements were taken from the former, such as the Hatikwa, Jizkor, one minute of silence and the lighting of six candles. However, several important elements were changed. Memorial speeches no longer focused on East-European Jewry and were not polemic in nature. They rather focused on a collective future of the Jewish people, underscored by the fact that the event was organized by Jewish youth organizations. The Yiddish cultural program was removed and, in addition to Hatikwa, the Dutch national anthem was introduced, indicating a shift away from a divisive East-European Jewish past towards a shared Dutch background. This served two goals: it brought together Dutch Jews from different backgrounds and framed Israel as an equivalent to the Netherlands.

In spite of the fact that until 1980 this commemoration combined Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron, emphasis was put on the former. The Shoah was central to these ceremonies, demonstrated by the lighting of six candles, the Hollandsche Schouwburg as location and the content of the memorial speeches. Israel was referred to as an important symbol of the embodiment and future of the Jewish people. However, the victims of Israeli wars and other conflicts, commemorated by Yom HaZikaron, were never discussed in detail. Instead, the holy country was presented as a shared goal to bring together the Dutch-Jewish community and in particular to unite orthodox and Zionist perspectives. This is essential in understanding how the Dutch version of Yom HaShoah brought together two different positions. Chief Rabbi Schuster’s aforementioned speech was an example of this negotiation. He connected the battles at Latrun, instrumental in Israel’s narrative of the independence war, to the Nazi death camps. Linking the heroism of the ghetto fighters to the establishment and defense of the Jewish state

74 The Ghetto Uprising commemoration continued to be organized until 1969. Attendance started to decline after Yom HaShoah was established at the Hollandsche Schouwburg.
75 *NIW* April 27, 1951. Already during the 1951 Dutch Ghetto Uprising commemoration, six candles were lit in memory of the Nazi victims. It would take several years before Yom HaShoah became a widespread ceremony.
was a recurrent strategy in Israeli and Zionist memory discourse, as demonstrated by Herzberg’s speech. However, Schuster linked the battles of Latrun to the death camps rather than the heroic Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Furthermore, he embedded his narrative in a religious context, arguing that both victims from the Nazi’s and the independence war sanctified God’s name. He stated: ‘In both events, we can detect a governing Hand.’ Such an interpretation would have been impossible at a Ghetto Uprising commemoration organized by the relatively secular Sch. Anski.

From its inception, the commemoration at the Hollandsche Schouwburg served to bring together Jews from different backgrounds, however on basis of orthodox and Zionist principles. The group of institutions responsible for the organization of this ceremony was gradually expanded throughout the 1970s to include other organizations, which led to a bitter conflict in 1978 when the Jewish liberal community (LJG) joined and their cantor Paolo Gorin recited Yizkor. Several orthodox rabbis refused to say Kaddish and Chief Rabbi Just argued that the role of the liberal – and therefore by definition un-devout – cantor would be unacceptable to those victims who had remained devout until their deaths. ‘Many of these murdered would not want a man like Gorin, in a mixed marriage and conducting his life in his own way, to say Yizkor for them.’ This led to fierce reactions in the NIW and reflected a fundamental conflict over the authority over the memory of the victims. The dispute became subdued and the LJG remained involved, however future cantors would be orthodox rather than liberal. This incident demonstrates the willingness to include a larger and diverse Jewish community, however only on the terms of the more conservative organizing parties.

In 1980, the commemoration was officially reduced to Yom HaShoah; Yom HaZikaron was organized elsewhere and on a different day. The memorial speeches at the Schouwburg continued to connect the Nazi persecution with contemporary forms of anti-Semitism and the fate of Israel. The 1980 commemoration was widely reported on because of the attendance of Queen Juliana. The NIW reacted with great approval. ‘The involvement of the royal family with the Jewish community is once again expressed.’ The presence of Prime-Minister Ruud Lubbers eight years later again underlined the significance the ceremony had gained over time. Yom HaShoah at the Hollandsche Schouwburg had become a Dutch tradition that had become somewhat autonomous from the Israeli commemorative practice. This was demonstrated by a conflict over a new ceremonial element that was suggested by an Israeli organization. In 1989 a request was made by Irgun Olei Holland, the Israeli

---

77 NIW April 29, 1966. In reaction to this speech, a dismissive letter to the editor was published by the NIW: ‘If this were true, than Hitler would have been an instrument of God […]’. NIW May 13, 1966.
Association of Dutch Immigrants, to read out the names of individual Jewish victims during the Yom HaShoah commemoration. The Israeli initiative was meant as a protest against the pardon of two war criminals in the Netherlands; an affront to the memory of the victims as they argued. The reading of names was implemented in fifteen countries worldwide, however not in the Netherlands. NIK-board member Joop Sanders and NZB-chairman Moëd argued that the Dutch ceremony had its own tradition and claimed that the reading of names would be too emotional.\textsuperscript{80} A few years later, when the debate flared up again, it was argued that the persecution of the Jews was a more sensitive topic in the Netherlands than even in Israel: Dutch Jews had lost family members and for Israeli’s it was merely ‘a symbolic ceremony’. One heated reaction from Israel read: ‘This all seems to testify to a lack of courage. Apparently they do not want to awaken sleeping anti-Semites, a shtetl mentality from which we in Israel have liberated ourselves.’\textsuperscript{81}

Yom HaShoah at the Hollandsche Schouwburg had its roots in both the Dutch and Israeli Ghetto Uprising commemorations. From its inception, the commemoration aimed at the broader Dutch Jewish community rather than the smaller Yiddish-speaking element. However, this inclusiveness was not without boundaries, as proven by the incident with the liberal cantor. Israel was an important referent in memorial speeches and was evoked for that same goal: to strengthen the Jewish community living in the Netherlands. The organizers did not indiscriminately follow instructions from Israel. The Yad Vashem candelabrum was used only once and when an Israeli organization suggested changing the ceremony in protest of the Dutch government, this was rejected several times. In spite of its close ties to Israel’s commemorative culture, Yom HaShoah at the Hollandsche Schouwburg turned out to be a typical Dutch Jewish ceremony. One reason the Dutch and Israeli commemorations are fundamentally different is the simple fact that in Israel Yom HaShoah dominates the entire country and consists of several ceremonies that are spread throughout the day, whereas in the Netherlands Yom HaShoah is only observed by a small part of the population.\textsuperscript{82} The commemoration at the Hollandsche Schouwburg was initiated and continues to be organized by and for the Dutch Jewish community. It is associated with Israeli memory culture but at the same time strongly embedded in the local Dutch context. The site-specific character of the Hollandsche Schouwburg plays an important part, since it specifically ties the commemoration to the history and fate of Dutch Jewry. The fact

\textsuperscript{80} NIW April 28, 1989.
\textsuperscript{81} NIW April 5 and 26, 1991.
\textsuperscript{82} James Young notes how Yom HaShoah is commemorated differently throughout the United States, either organized by religious or Zionist organizations and even by a catholic priest in Tennessee. Young, \textit{The Texture of Memory}, 272.
that it is a national commemoration site allows for Dutch representatives to visit and pay their respects. The installment of Yom HaShoah at the Hollandsche Schouwburg therefore has not entailed an alienation from Dutch memory culture, nor the import of an Israeli ceremony that was foreign to the Netherlands.

4. **From Memorial to Memorial Museum**

There is an inherent paradox to *in situ* sites of memory. On the one hand, they seem to automatically embody their own history and therefore are not in need of contextualization or mediation. Most people visit Auschwitz in the first place to be at the site where unimaginable horror took place and to pay their respects, not primarily to be informed about the site’s history. On the other hand, if there is no marker or context, a site is unable to tell its own story. The apparently self-evident character of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as an anchor of the past is demonstrated by the early commemorations on the doorsteps in the late 1940s and the discourse in newspapers about the building’s destination in which it was argued that the physical building and its interior embodied the events that had taken place there. At that same time, however, it was also recognized that the building could not speak for itself, especially to those who had not experienced first-hand persecution. The commemorations were supplemented with speeches and flower wreaths, both marking the site and providing a broader context. We cannot speak of spatial memory in the essentialist sense that a site holds its past in its materiality and that this simply remains to be extracted by its visitors. Rather, a building such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg provides a platform for performative practices, such as visits and collective or individual commemorations, and needs to be framed by spatial interventions, such as plaques, memorials and educational exhibitions. The issue at stake is not whether these practices and interventions are authentic or not, but rather to what extent they appeal to the visitor and invite him or her to appropriate the site and emotionally invest in it. In the following chapters we explore the building’s current presentation and several contemporary practices that make use of the building’s latent and contingent indexicality. In this section we will look at how the building developed from a memorial site in 1962 into a memorial museum in 1993.
Before the memorial was established in 1962, the Hollandsche Schouwburg had been closed for over a decade, leading to its dilapidation. In the meantime, the façade of the building had become somewhat of a visual icon. One of the major interventions by architect Jan Leupen was the opening up of this historical façade without radically disrupting its appearance (see figure 3.2). Due to the poor state of the building, most of the structure was demolished and only the front building was preserved. Behind the preserved façade, a small and intimate memorial was installed, the *chapelle ardente*, designed by architect Léon Waterman and financed, for the most part, by the foundation that had donated the building to the city of Amsterdam (see figure 3.3). It was a space for individual commemoration, infused with both Zionist, Jewish religious and other symbolism. The room held three stones, an abstract representation of the seminal family and the only sculptural reference to the victims of the Shoah. On back wall a Torah proverb was displayed
in Dutch and Hebrew. A small strip of space was reserved for Israeli cacti that were planted in Israeli soil.\(^8^3\) On the left side, a bronze lamp with a Hebrew inscription taken from the Book of Proverbs was mounted, holding an eternal flame. This flame could be interpreted both as a religious and as a national symbol. The custom of the eternal flame can be traced back to the ner tamid, a sanctuary lamp that hangs inside of the ark of every synagogue and represents both the menorah of the Temple in Jerusalem and God’s eternal presence. Many Catholic and Lutheran churches also feature an eternal flame placed above the altar. In the 20\(^{th}\) century, the eternal flame began to be used as a commemorative symbol within the secular and militarist framework of the nation-state. Examples are the Arc de Triomphe, where an eternal flame was installed in 1920 in honor of the unknown soldier, and the Neue Wache in Berlin, which held a Soviet anti-fascist memorial with an eternal flame between 1969 and 1993.\(^8^4\) The bronze lamp in the Hollandsche Schouwburg

Figure 3. 3.

---

\(^8^3\) The text read ‘Mijn ziel druift van kommer, richt mij op naar Uw woord.’ ‘My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.’ Psalm 119:28, New International Version, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20119:28 accessed on 3 August 2015. Soil is often used in Dutch war memorials in order to bridge the geographical distance between a site of commemoration and other significant sites. For instance, the Dutch National Monument holds urns containing soil from all provinces and former colonies, because this memorial is supposed to represent the whole of the Dutch kingdom. The placement of an urn containing soil from Auschwitz at a Jewish cemetery was delayed for several decades because orthodox religious leaders did not allow it. The urn was eventually placed at the Auschwitz Memorial. See Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 127.

had a religious character but the memorial as a whole was framed in a militaristic memory discourse in which the Jewish victims were referred to as fallen compatriots.\textsuperscript{85} The combination of various religious and secular symbolic elements can be seen as a compromise between several memory discourses.

The upper two floors of the building were rented as office space and were not part of the memorial. The former theater hall was demolished and transformed into a courtyard. Here, Leupen’s larger and more public memorial was constructed, making use of the outline of the former theater hall (see figure 3.4). A grass field covered the area where the audience once sat. Visitors were directed to walk along the galleries, underneath the former balconies, and not stand on the grass. This route led them to the former stage, holding a large pylon erected on a base in the shape of a Magen David, another combination of a Jewish symbol and a more triumphant interpretation of the war.\textsuperscript{86}

In the first year after its opening, the Hollandsche Schouwburg received over 50,000 visitors, which raised issues of mediation, contextualization and minor curatorial practices, a foreshadowing of the memorial museum that was to be realized in 1993.\textsuperscript{87} Most of these visitors were familiar with the history of the site.

\textsuperscript{85} In 1938, a *chapelle ardente* was set up in the hall of the Hollandsche Schouwburg for the actor August Kiehl. See *Het Vaderland* November 28, 1938.

\textsuperscript{86} For an historical architectural account of this memorial, see Krabbe, “Spreken tot de bedroefden.”

\textsuperscript{87} See *Algemeen Handelsblad* June 10, 1963. Between 1998 and 2010, the number of visitors rose from 20,000 to 45,605; after that year, the number fluctuated between 40,794 (2011) and 43,466 (2012). See
and framed their visit as a form of paying respect. Others, however, had no idea what to expect and could not make sense of the site. The memorial was intended to conserve its self-evident meaning for future generations and provide a suitable space for the abovementioned practices. It referred to a past that was considered to be well-known and the result was an abstract sculptural complex with little additional information that contextualized its own history. There was a shield next to the entrance that read in Dutch: ‘Former Hollandsche Schouwburg. Commemoration site for fallen Jewish compatriots in 1940-1945’. In the courtyard behind the pylon was another inscription: ‘5700-5705 In memory of those who were taken away from here in 1940-1945’. These texts referred to assumed prior knowledge rather than providing a historical context.

Between 1962 and 1987, the memorial was managed by the city’s Department of Cemeteries and Crematoria that had little to no curatorial experience. However, there was a porter who interacted with the visitors, could answer questions and at times denied access to some suspicious individuals. It was not a fully developed museum, but at the same time more than just a memorial. In a newspaper interview five months after the memorial opened its doors, the porter Nijmeijer stated that most visitors were Jews from the Netherlands, Israel and the United States. A visitor from the US voiced his opinion of the memorial. ‘I’m traveling through Europe and visit all war memorials that come across my path. This is not the most beautiful, but it is the most impressive one.’ The porter described some of the visiting practices: people prayed at the eternal flame, but more often at the pylon in the courtyard, which was still, months after the inauguration, buried under flowers. Nijmeijer also observed that, due to a lack of information, visitors coming unprepared could hardly make sense of the site: ‘they only understand it is a half-demolished theater with a miraculously sacred atmosphere. In vain, they look for the name on their maps and in their guides.’ Nijmeijer sometimes swayed people to come inside, because the public character of the site was unclear to them. ‘They look around somewhat anxiously inside the *chapelle ardente* and continue, under the balconies and the flapping laundry hanging from the surrounding houses, to make their round alongside the old theater walls.’

---

88 The first text read ‘Herdenkingsplaats van de in 1940-1945 gevallen Joodsche landgenoten’ and was changed in 1966 (see chapter 2 and below). The second text is still present today and has three lines. First, the Jewish dates of the beginning and ending of the occupation of the Netherlands 5700-5705. In the center a text line in capitals, ‘ter herinnering aan hen die van deze plaatsen werden weggevoerd’; and below the dates 1940-1945.

89 *Het Vrije Volk* September 29, 1962.

90 Ibid.
During the first year that the Hollandsche Schouwburg was open, two important items were introduced that could be described as curatorial interventions in reaction to visitor behavior and needs. As such it foreshadowed the small museum exhibition that was to be installed in 1993. A flower stand in the form of a Magen David was designed to accommodate the many flowers and wreaths. In addition, a small folder containing postcards of the memorial (see figures 3.2-3.4) and a separate explanatory text in five languages was made available by the city’s information office. The office took great care to avoid any speculations of turning a profit: instead of a concession stand, these folders were made available through a machine for a price that was below production costs.91

The accompanying text functioned as a catalogue and targeted both Dutch and foreign visitors. The first edition differed slightly from the second edition: where the former began its historical narrative in 1941 with the prohibition of Jews to participate in the cultural life, assuming a general knowledge of the history of the persecution of the Jews, the latter started out by stating German Nazi’s killed six million Jews, 105,000 of them from the Netherlands. Another addition was a list of anti-Jewish measures to gradually isolate the Jews, without mentioning passive or active collaboration on the side of the Dutch population. The rest of the editions are similar: the role of the Hollandsche Schouwburg is explained, first as a Jewish Theater and secondly as an assembly center. Both versions concluded with the estimation that approximately 50,000 deportees had been held at this site. The establishment of the memorial complex is also briefly discussed, without mentioning the nationwide collection of funds in the late 1940s. The building itself is described, starting from within the courtyard, as a ‘place of introspection’, which is connected to the outside world by the front hall. The chapelle ardente is described in detail, explaining every symbolic element separately. The three stones symbolize a family; the text on the wall and inscribed into the lamp holding the eternal flame are documented and it is explicitly mentioned that the soil and plants were imported from Israel. This meticulous explanation implied that these elements did not speak for themselves. What is striking is that the photographs of the six postcards are void of people, except for two ladies looking at the façade. They were not intended to be sent as mail items, but rather to be used as souvenirs for visitors, especially from abroad.92

Besides these minor interventions, the site itself remained a rather passive and abstract memorial complex where commemorations were held and only little

---

91 Trouw June 6, 1963.
92 Het Vrije Volk June 10, 1963
information was offered to those who were not familiar with its history. When in the late 1980s the Department of Cemeteries and Crematoria was about to be shut down, the Amsterdam Historical Museum was asked to take over the management of the site. The two floors that had until then been used as office space could act as museum depots, and the rest of the memorial would remain the same. Norbert van den Berg, acting museum director, visited the memorial. In an interview a few days before the exhibition opened, he argued that his prime motivation to renovate this old memorial was its inability to convey the history of the persecution to a new generation:

I felt that something had to be explained. It was hard for people who had not experienced the war themselves to understand the memorial. The memorial was established in 1962. Perhaps the grief was still too much present and people were unable to tell their story. Now, fifty years later, you need to explain something at this site. This place has an emotional significance.93

When I interviewed him, he remembers his amazement at the bad state of this otherwise important memorial:

I had been there before, but was astonished by the sorry sight of it all. Especially the [chapelle ardente] with the nearly-dead cacti. It was an unworthy situation for this place with such a terrible history. I talked to the owner of the neighboring café who told me that some visitors were confronted with a closed memorial and asked him to lay their flowers at the memorial at a later time instead.94

Van den Berg argued that the Amsterdam Historical Museum was not the appropriate institute to take on this project. He approached Judith Belinfante, the director of the Jewish Historical Museum (JHM). Belinfante shared Van den Berg’s assessment of memorial. In our conversation, she recalls that ‘[the memorial] was below any kind of standard, it was terrible and embarrassing. There was a gentlemen who did or did not open the door. It was poorly maintained and we needed to start all over again.’95 In spite of the urgency of a proper renovation, Belinfante was reluctant to place the memorial under the museum’s wings and did so only after much deliberation. The JHM had always been careful not to become a Shoah museum and preferred to focus on the prewar history of Dutch Jewry and the active postwar Jewish community. After much discussion, the museum took on this project in order to educate the youth, which coincidently also had been an important reason for the combined Jewish organization to initiate the first

93 *NIW* March 12, 1993.
94 Interview with Norbert van den Berg, October 8, 2014.
95 Interview with Judith Belinfante, August 5, 2014.
combined Yom HaShoah and Yom HaZikaron commemoration nearly three decades earlier. The focus on education had direct consequences for the exhibition. It was based mainly on visual material and held no gruesome photographs of stacks of bodies or other material that was too confronting for the general public. The narrative of the exhibition was framed in a message of survival, hope and personal responsibility and was future oriented rather than fatalist in tone. To better understand both the reluctance of the JHM and the paradigm shift within the museum’s tradition of exhibiting the Nazi persecution of the Jews that took place with the installation of this educational exhibition, some knowledge of how the persecution of the Jews was exhibited in the JHM during the previous decades is relevant.

The JHM was established in 1930 and opened in 1932. It shared the historic building De Waag with the Amsterdam Historical Museum. According to researcher and curator Julie-Marthe Cohen, the founders aimed at creating a Jewish museum for a general public. This was supported by national newspapers which wrote that the museum was relevant for both the Jewish and non-Jewish public. Museum researcher Robin Ostow argues that in this early period, the museum ‘presented pre-war Dutch Jewry as a confidant minority, proud of its past and looking toward the future.’ During the war, De Waag was forced to close and the collection of the JHM was eventually confiscated by Alfred Rosenberg’s Institut zur Erforschung der Judenfrage in Frankfurt. After the war, part of the collection returned to the Netherlands. As the Jewish community was gradually restoring several of its prewar institutions, a new museum board was installed in 1947.

It took eight years before the museum was reopened, during which the collection’s future was debated by the board. In 1951, board member Louis Polak suggested the returned objects, most of which were in need of repair, should be donated to Israel due to a lack of interest in the Netherlands. He was opposed by board member Jaap Meijer who argued that the collection should remain in the Netherlands and be expanded in order to adequately reflect postwar Jewish life as well. These two fundamentally different perspectives were emblematic of the discussions occurring within the Jewish community at the time: should Jewish heritage objects remain in the Netherlands to support the rebuilding of a strong Dutch Jewish community, or would they better serve the establishment of the

young Jewish nation? For Meijer, Dutch Jewry did have a future in the Netherlands and the museum should expand the collection to include recent developments. He suggested establishing the museum at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, which at that time stood empty, and claimed that the city would make the Hollandsche Schouwburg available for this purpose. It was pointed out, however, that this location would give rise to too many objections. Eventually, the JHM returned to De Waag in 1955, where it occupied the top floor, sharing the building once again with the Amsterdam Historical Museum.

The 1955 exhibition mainly comprised ceremonial objects. In addition, one room held medals and paintings by both Dutch Jewish and non-Jewish artists. One small cabinet was dedicated to the war period, curated by Louis Polak. The persecution of the Jews was already part of the first permanent exhibition, even though it was placed in an isolated room. The forward to the English summary, printed as addendum to the museum’s catalogue, demonstrates the reluctance and caution with which this topic was included:

> It was felt that some reference to this disaster which befell Dutch Jewry should not be missing from the reopened Jewish Historical Museum. However, exhaustiveness has by no means been aimed at. The documents on view – largely on loan from the State Institute for War Documentation – only want to give a very summary historical survey of the anti-Jewish measures during the war years, as well as of the assistance which the Jews received from some quarters, and of some Jewish cultural manifestations during that period, in spite of all.

In spite of this careful formulation, the persecution was not absent from the museum. In fact, the foreword concludes with the following lines:

> The present exhibition [...] is modest evidence that this Final Solution, despite the untold suffering it inflicted and the vast number of victims it made, has not succeeded altogether, and that also today there is a Jewish community in Holland, caring for its past as well as for its future.

The museum staff had to bear these two considerations in mind. The first exhibition, based on the open display of documents, was soon replaced by twelve books in a room that had a more subdued and commemorative character.

---

98 As Bart Wallet and Hetty Berg point out, directly after the war many religious objects, such as Torah scrolls and even entire synagogue interiors were moved from the Netherlands to Israel. Wallet and Berg, “65 Jaar Joods Nederland,” 7.


100 Jewish Historical Museum Summary (Amsterdam), not paginated.

101 Ibid.
In the first exhibition from 1955, the Nazi persecution was exhibited with the help of documents, objects, newspapers and photographs that were laid out in six vitrines. The first two dealt with the gradual removal of Jews from public life, their molestation and the way they were driven from their homes, ending with the establishment of the Joodsche Schouwburg on the note that – in spite of discrimination and persecution – Jews remained to make ‘the best of this life’. Vitrines three and four were dedicated to the establishment of the Jewish Council and the beginning of the deportations of Jews, and included a photograph of the courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg taken by Lydia van Nobelen-Riezouw. Vitrines five and six were dedicated to camps in the Netherlands and abroad. The exhibition concluded with the list of all Dutch war victims as estimated by the State Institute for War Documentation. In addition to these cases, there were several wall-mounted showcases holding photographs and documents, including a photographic triptych with the text: ‘they fought’, showing a photograph of the memorial the Dokwerker, dedicated to the February Strike; ‘they worked’, showing a photograph of the resistance at work; and ‘to help them’, showing a photograph of 4,000 Jewish child-survivors.

According to Frank van Vree, the exhibition did not deviate from the hegemonic national narrative of World War II. Voiced prominently by the Jewish historian Abel Herzberg in his influential 1950 study Kroniek der Jodenvervolging, this narrative can be summed up as follows: the persecution was an evil force from outside and there were sporadic moments of relief and resistance. The exhibition reiterates this perspective, only once referring to the Dutch population in a negative way, when the betrayal of Jewish subterfuges is mentioned. It was therefore no coincidence that Herzberg wrote the accompanying essay to the first exhibition, in which the survival of Dutch Jewry was attributed to the non-Jewish resistance. The triptych, in which survival of Jewish children was attributed to the February Strike and the resistance movement, was the most obvious example of how this exhibition was framed along the exculpatory narrative of gratitude and indebtedness. The Monument of Gratitude (1950) and the Dokwerker (1952) had ascribed to a similar frame, as discussed in chapter two. There was, however, a significant difference between these two memorials and the JHM exhibition. Where

---

102 Van Nobelen-Riezouw made several photographs of the courtyard during the summer of 1942, when Jews were incarcerated at the Hollandsche Schouwburg and were allowed to go outside for some time. One photograph was included in Abel Herzberg’s Kroniek der Jodenvervolging (1950), in this exhibition (1955, 1957), and afterwards also in Jacques Pressers Ondergang (1965) and Loe de Jong’s Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden. See chapter 2.2.


the two memorials focused on the resistance rather than the persecution and addressed the nation as a whole, the exhibition brought together documentation on the persecution of the Jews and placed it within the history of Dutch Jewry.

Polak continued to improve the exhibition and in 1957 the vitrines were replaced with twelve large books that could be consulted in private. Though these books were more comprehensive than the previous exhibition, their content was no longer openly displayed.105 Some of the wall cases, such as the triptych, remained and others were replaced with new ones, including a photograph of a burning synagogue in Apeldoorn and Jewish children engaged in the Jewish circular horah dance in the transit camp Westerbork, stressing the continuity of Jewish cultural life under the pressure of persecution. The main reason for Polak to use books was to present the documents more systematically to the visitor. However, it also provided the opportunity for visitors to avoid this part of the museum. Art historian and curator Edward van Voolen concludes that this transformation from transparent vitrines to closed books implied that it was still too early for an ‘open confrontation with the past.’106 This claim is too strong, however, since the cabinet was an essential part of the permanent exhibition. Researcher Anne Douqué argues that the transformation attested to a deep sensitivity of the museum towards its visitors. The solemn setting and the absence of contextual information added to the commemorative atmosphere of this small cabinet, which according to Douqué was a truly Jewish space of commemoration.107 The cabinet was a kind of prototype of the currently more common form of the memorial museum, where informative and commemorative functions are combined.

In 1975, after the Amsterdam Historic Museum moved out, the JHM had De Waag entirely at its disposal and a new and innovate exhibition was created. In spite of this, the exhibition on the war changed only minimally: it was moved to another room that was better connected to the rest of the exhibition, but the documents remained located in closed folders. According to Belinfante, who began working for the museum as a curator in 1969 and became the director in 1976, nobody dared to change this configuration. As she recalls in our interview:

105 In the first English summary, the exhibition is described as a series of 6 showcases. In 1957, Polak changed the exhibition, and in a later English summary, this new exhibition is described as a series of 12 books. In 1965, these books were published as a catalogue, see L. Ph. Polak and L. van Weezel, Documenten van de jodenvervolging in Nederland, 1940-1945. (Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Gennep, 1979). See also Douqué, “Traditie in overleven en doorgeven.”
Those documents were placed in closed folders [...]. If you wanted to see into the folders, you had to do that yourself. Only the mere suggestion to use more photographs was met with protest. Nothing should be visible upon entering the room, that was simply too sensitive.\textsuperscript{108}

The small cabinet neither appealed to the general visitor nor did it function as an individual memorial site. It was difficult to exhibit this part of history openly and directly. However, there were other objects that referred to the Nazi persecution of the Jews in a less direct and therefore possibly too painful way also. The museum had received a chest full of artifacts belonging to a Jewish antiquarian, Sigmund Seligsberger, that was taken into custody by an acquaintance before he was deported and eventually killed in Sobibor in 1943. Belinfante remarks: ‘We had placed all the objects in a showcase as some kind of remnant, a time capsule. [...] One of the objects, a small dish, was broken. I wanted to include it like that.’\textsuperscript{109} These fragments were presented with only a minimal amount of information and as such, were not exhibited to inform the visitor, but rather to engage him or her, demanding an active interpretation. They implied, rather than explicated, a story of loss and preservation, and involved the visitor in an active narrative cooperation.

Additionally, almost any object could trigger an emotional response. Belinfante regularly talked to visitors and vividly recalls one afternoon in the museum:

Once I saw a man looking at a [prewar] photograph, completely bewildered. I approached him, asking him what the matter was. ‘It is my grandmother, it is my grandmother. [...] Nothing survived, nothing survived, I have nothing of her.’ [...] That photograph had nothing to do with the war, but it did for him. This often happened in that period: objects that seemed unrelated to the war in fact were.\textsuperscript{110}

As the 1955 catalogue suggested, the persecution during the war was so pervasive that any object could be involved in a personal narrative of loss and survival. Literary scholar Marianne Hirsch argues that photography can have an important role in the re-embodiment and re-individualization of cultural and archival memory. She convincingly argues:

When we look at photographic images from a lost past world, especially one that has been annihilated by force, we look not only for information or confirmation, but also for an intimate material and affective connection.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} Interview Belinfante.
\textsuperscript{109} Interview Belinfante. In the online catalogue of the JHM, 49 objects from this box are listed, see http://www.jhm.nl/zoeken?subject=Seligsberger,+Sigmund+(1875-1943)&s=collectie/museumstukken&p=2, accessed on January 16, 2015.
\textsuperscript{110} Interview Belinfante.
Photographs that enable a personal engagement with the photographed subject can be powerful tools, particularly when they encourage an emotional investment of, and active appropriation by the viewer. Belinfante was aware as museum director of the great potential quality of objects and photographs to impress visitors on a personal level. Every artifact has a latent and contingent indexical quality that cannot be anticipated by museum staff. The fragmentary and coincidental nature of this process cannot provide the visitor with a complete narrative of the persecution, but it does allow for a strong emotional involvement. Both the chest and the photographs are examples of fragments that implicate the visitor in coproducing a narrative. In the first case, this was the museum’s intention; in the second case, it was more or less a coincidence that pointed at both the potential of familial photography and the pervasive presence of the destruction of Dutch Jewry in everything the museum exhibited. The consequences of this strategy is a move away from a coherent and closed narrative that focuses on the transmission of prearranged information towards a more fragmentary and uncontrollable process where objects can have great potential in engaging the visitor.

In 1987, the JHM moved to a new location, the synagogue-complex that had been largely unoccupied since the war. The fact that this was once the religious center of Ashkenazim Jewish Amsterdam unavoidably pointed to the Nazi destruction and its aftermath. The museum gave this important Jewish heritage a second life and was catering to a new generation, trying to create a continuity between them and their murdered grandparents by telling the stories that the dead could not tell anymore. The museum was about life, not about death, according to Belinfante. The persecution of the Jews was made part of the permanent exhibition and was exposed in an open room rather than in twelve closed books. At the same time, visitors should be able to choose not to be confronted with this part of the exhibition. The result was an installation of rather small photographs and documents that floated in the air, attached to wires and accompanied by explanatory texts to educate younger generations. On one side of the installation was a large painting, a triptych by Han Mes, symbolizing the despair and pain caused by wartime persecution. One the other side was a memorial called Light, consisting of two glass parts around a lamp, inscribed with a sentence from the Talmud that functioned as the museum new motto: seeing leads to remembering; remembering leads to doing.

112 The museum was established on the grounds of four Ashkenazim synagogues, built between 1670 and 1751, facing the Portuguese Synagogue on the Jonas Daniel Meijerplein. Architects Jan Vonk and Roy Gelders were responsible for the renovation.
The painting and memorial framed the small exhibition by offering an artistic and commemorative response to the persecution. The exhibition itself consisted of photographs that were not overly shocking. They were small in size, so visitors could pass without looking directly at them; if viewed, they forced people to actively approach and address them personally. The narrative of the exhibition did not change much in relation to the 1957 exhibition, however more emphasis was put on Jewish resistance in order to part with the hegemonic narrative from the 1950s that Jews had been passive and were mainly saved by non-Jews. An important part of the exhibition was reserved for photographs of Jewish life in occupied Amsterdam, rather than pictures of death and destruction. According to Belinfante, the museum focused on the lives and not on the deaths of Jews. ‘I never felt the need to exhibit stacks of dead bodies, because once people are murdered, the story is no longer about them.’ In this new setting, the persecution of the Jews was made part of the museum route and thus inscribed into the general narrative of the museum, rather than placed in a separate cabinet. However, the photographs and documents were rather small in size, for those who wanted to avoid the topic. The reason to do so was not to scare away visitors who did not want to be confronted, but to avoid becoming a Shoah institute rather than a museum about Jewish tradition, religion, life and culture.

Taking over the management of the Hollandsche Schouwburg was met with reluctance by the JHM. However, there was a national and international change in the policies of war-related museums in the early 1990s. These museums increasingly focused on new generations and therefore developed innovative ways to appeal to a younger public. According to historian Erik Somers, by the mid-1980s the Dutch government had come to the conclusion that youngsters had too little knowledge of the war and the persecution of Jews. The government therefore developed a new policy where both schools and museums such as Westerbork, the Anne Frank house and the JHM would have a pivotal role. In the 1990s, these institutes became increasingly professionalized by setting up research agendas and organizing lecture series. During the same period leading international institutions prepared to address new audiences: the Jewish Museum in Berlin and Israel’s Yad Vashem started major renovations in 1992 and 1993; and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was established in 1993, setting a new international benchmark.

114 Interview Belinfante. She is quoted by Ostow qualifying this exhibition along similar lines. ‘Our Holocaust section is organized on a survivor basis, not a death basis’. Ostow, “Mokum Is Home,” 54.
For the JHM, the Hollandsche Schouwburg thus presented both a dilemma and an opportunity. The project was eventually taken on in order to properly maintain the memorial as a site of remembrance for older generations and in addition to set up an educational exhibition for younger generations. The building was transferred to the Municipal Development Company and a new foundation was established for the management of the site. The foundation had three central objectives: to preserve the memorial and the building known as the Hollandsche Schouwburg; to keep the memory of its history, in particular that of 1942-45 alive; and to provide information about this history, in particular to the youth. Especially the last two goals would have major implications, since up to that moment the memorial complex had been a rather passive site of commemoration offering only a small booklet that provided some historical context. The new foundation set out a new course and initiated a large renovation. On March 18, 1993 the Hollandsche Schouwburg was reopened as a memorial museum, combining two functions in one building that were more or less spatially separated.

\[116\]

Initially, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was financed by the city of Amsterdam and the Department of Public Health as part of the trust for war victims, until 1997 when it was placed under the responsibility of the Department of Culture as a partner-institution of the JHM. The museum managed the site under the supervision of the city. See letter to the Parliament by Minister of Public Health, Welfare and Sports Els Borst-Eilers, “Jeugdvoorlichting over de Tweede Wereldoorlog in relatie tot het heden; Brief minister over de actuele stand van zaken m.b.t. de voorgenomen afbouw van de structureel subsidie aan de oorlogs- en verzetsmusea.” August 29, 1997. https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-19958-14.html accessed on January 19, 2015; Rachida Chaouqui, “Hollandsche Schouwburg. Een bedrijf in drie aktes: een verslag van de naoorlogse periode van de Hollandsche Schouwburg,” Placement report (Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam & Joods Historisch Museum, 2009), 33, Joods Historisch Museum.

\[117\]

The board of the foundation had five members: the mayor of Amsterdam, the director of the JHM, one other appointee by the JHM and two additional members. See the Memorandum of Association of the Stichting Hollandsche Schouwburg, February 27, 1992. In 2010, this foundation was transformed into a Board of Supervision without the director of the JHM. The director of the JHM was also the director of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. See the Annual Reports of the JHM of 2010, 2011 and 2012.

\[118\]

Architect Roy Gelders was responsible for the construction part of the renovations, which was paid for by the city. For the interior refurbishments, paid for by the Stichting Hollandsche Schouwburg, the museum staff was assisted by designers Victor Levi and Monique Rietbroek and architect Jan Vonk. Van Edward van Voolen, “De Hollandsche Schouwburg,” in Een open zenuw. Hoe wij ons de Tweede Wereldoorlog herinneren, ed. Madelon de Keizer and Marije Plomp (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010), 231; Martin Harlaar and Jan Pieter Koster, Stilstaan bij de oorlog: de gemeente Amsterdam en de Tweede Wereldoorlog 1945-1995 (Bussum: Thoth, 1995), 57.
The entrance hall was completely redesigned and refurbished, creating an open space from which the visitor could navigate either upstairs, to the exhibition, to the wall of names or to the courtyard, which remained largely unchanged. The *chapelle ardente* was replaced with a wall designed by Victor Levie, holding 6,700 family names of all the murdered Jews deported from the Netherlands (see figure 3.5). One of the reasons to choose the last names rather than all the individual names was that the list of victims was not completely accurate. Another practical reason was the lack of space for individual names. The space has the same dimensions of the *chapelle ardente* and also holds an eternal flame, which was placed on the floor in the middle of the room. The family names were printed on twelve tablets referencing the twelve tribes of Israel. In the middle of the space there is an alcove holding an Israeli plant; underneath there are twelve small openings where people can leave artifacts. Next to the names is a short and poetic explanation in Dutch and Hebrew written by Judith Belinfante:

*These are the family names of / fathers and mothers / aunts and uncles / brothers and sisters / cousins, nephews and nieces / grandfather and*
The courtyard was largely left intact. Belinfante tells me that she wanted to remove the grass field because this suggested that this was an outdoor space, while it actually had been an enclosed theater hall. To evoke its former function, a stone pavement was laid with embankments that represented the former seating arrangement (see figures 3.6 and 3.7). The walls of the galleries and the back of the building shell were plastered. Metal holders in the galleries held small wooden tulips, where visitors could attach messages as part of an educational program or other occasions. The rest of the courtyard remained similar to the 1962 design.

The exhibition at the Hollandsche Schouwburg was different from the one at the JHM. In the museum, the persecution was imbedded in a narrative about Jewish history, whereas at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the entire exhibition focused on the persecution of the Jews. Belinfante comments that:

Poem by Belinfante. Original text: ‘dit zijn de familienamen van/vaders en moeders/tantes en ooms/broertjes en zusjes/neven en nichten/grootvaders en grootmoeders/104.000 mensen/104.000 joden/velen vanuit Amsterdam/uit Nederland/weggevoerd, en zinloos/vermoord’.

Figure 3. 6. 1994. Photograph Doriann Kransberg.

Figure 3. 7. 1994. Photograph Doriann Kransberg.
We have always tried to be a museum that is not a Holocaust institute. [Taking on the Hollandsche Schouwburg] breached that principle. The aim was education, and the educational staff found it difficult to deal with. They wanted to work on the basis of continuity, not on the basis of a burdened past. The result was a chronological exhibition that focused on teenagers between 10 and 16 years old and which is still largely intact until this very day. It began with a visual prologue and epilogue in the staircase: along the wall, black and white photographs of Jewish life before, during and after the war were vertically arranged over three floors, framing the exhibition on the persecution of the Jews within the history and continuity of Dutch Jewish life. Museum staff member Peter Buijs, who carried out research for the exhibition, remembers his disappointment with the underwhelming result in our interview. ‘We had collected thousands of family photographs; I thought it would become some kind of grand collage. However, somewhere in the designing process things went differently.’ Family photographs have often been successfully used at memorial museums, as they allow for an affective investment on part of the visitor. In this case, however, the photographs were displayed in the narrow staircase, a space that visitors walk through rather than stand still and take the time to engage with these pictures.

Figure 3. 8. Photograph David Duindam

Figure 3. 9. Photograph David Duindam

---

120 Interview Belinfante.
121 Interview with Peter Buijs, August 22, 2014.
The chronological exhibition began on the first staircase landing with a small display about the history of the prewar theater, exhibiting theater props and programs (see figure 3.8). According to Buijs, the aim was to stress the contrast between the comfortable and entertaining prewar theater and its use as deportation site. Next to the entrance of the main exhibition a picture displayed a mass rally of the Nazi party at Nuremberg under the caption ‘Nazi ideology’. Adjacent to this photograph, an old newspaper was placed, announcing the invasion of the Netherlands (see figure 3.9). Both Belinfante and Buijs argue that there was not enough space for additional historical contextualization. When I interviewed Buijs, he told me: ‘In the end, we chose these two images. It could have been expanded but we needed to focus.’

The main exhibition hall was divided into two parts, one about the deportation period and one about resistance and the rescue of children. Buijs: ‘Dark and light, not just misery but also hope.’ It consisted of photographs, documents, videos and artifacts, such as the contents of a suitcase packed for the concentration camps in the first section and children’s clothes in the second section (see figure 3.10-3.13).

---

123 Interview Buijs
124 Ibid.
There was a rather straightforward routing, but until this day many visitors remain disoriented when they enter this room. Buijs remarks that ‘the exhibition
opposes the normal reading direction, which apparently is unusual, but otherwise it would not have fit our concept.¹²⁵

The first section was set in darkly colored tones and chronologically exhibits the persecution of the Jews in several phases: towards isolation (May 1940–June 1941); isolation completed (February 1941–June 1942, with an view on the courtyard); the beginning of the end, the Jewish star (May 1, 1942); and From Westerbork to Auschwitz (July 1942–September 1944). The second section, in lighter tones, told the story of hiding and resistance with a focus on children in hiding. These two sections were separated by a replica wall. A cardboard cutout of a woman reaching over the replica wall in order to hand over a child, symbolized how children were saved from persecution (section 1) and survived (section 2; see figure 3.13). Belinfante aimed at providing a positive message of agency and personal responsibility. ‘We wanted visitors to think about the question of whether or not they would take up the child that was being handed over. The exhibition is a visual composition with a question: this is what can happen, and if this happens, will you be standing on the other side or not?’¹²⁶ When you exit the room, the last text above the door reads Liberation (May 5, 1945).

Figure 3. 9. Photograph David Duindam

¹²⁵ Ibid. According to Peter Buijs, the layout of the building forced them to choose this routing, otherwise the main exhibition would have started in the bright part of the exhibition space near the front windows. Personal correspondence with Peter Buijs, January 22, 2016.

¹²⁶ Interview Belinfante.
Remarkably, there were no text panels providing information as one might expect from an educational perspective. Petra Katzenstein was involved as member of the museum’s educational staff. As she said in an interview for the NIW days before the exhibition opened: ‘There is little text in the exhibition; the artifacts need to speak for themselves. Children are visually oriented.’ In spite of this aspiration, many of the objects were documents and letters that needed to be read by the visitor in order to be understood. The educational staff was also restricted by the reluctance to show the horrors of the persecution. The historical narrative ended with the deportations to the death camps. Instead of a section about the physical destruction of the Jews, there was a map of Europe where the main death camps and the important routes were made visible with red tape, accompanied by a list of numbers of murdered Jews categorized per country. When I interviewed Katzenstein, she relates this cautious approach to the JHM’s reluctance to exhibit terror:

Belinfante wanted to make [the Hollandsche Schouwburg] a symbolic site. She did not want to show any corpses or other horrifying photographs. This was a site where people were assembled and from which they were deported. The only thing that referred to that was that map. Judith did not want to go any further. Soon, the problem arose, how do we explain that red tape of Victor Levie [who made the map] signified a concentration camp? […] However, we could go no further than that. There was a clear boundary.

There was a friction between remaining abstract in order not to offend the older generations, a position taken by Belinfante, and being concrete in order to educate younger generations, taken by Katzenstein amongst others. The poem at the wall of names, written by Belinfante, led to a similar discussion:

I disagreed with the choice of the poem, and I still do. ‘Zinloos ver / vermoord’ [senselessly / murdered far away]. Would it not have been senseless if the killing took place nearby? I really did not like it. I admire what she has done with this site, but I could not cope with this poem. Judith told me that I did not understand it, but if that is the case, I still don’t understand it. And a lot of people don’t understand it as well, zinloos ver vermoord. I thought it was aesthetic, poetic perhaps, but that completely misses the point.

The Shoah exhibition was different from the earlier ones the JHM had produced. First of all, it was not part of a larger exhibition on Jewish history, therefore it did

---

127 NIW March 12, 1993.
128 Interview with Petra Katzenstein, August 7, 2014.
129 Interview Katzenstein.
not need to take unwilling visitors into account, nor would it overshadow the larger objective of the exhibition. Secondly, the exhibition was aimed at younger visitors and was therefore different regarding its configuration. The consequence being that the presentation was visually oriented and provided a chronological overview of Jewish persecution in Amsterdam. At the Jewish Historical Museum, the part of the exhibition that dealt with the Shoah was presented in such a way that visitors could ignore it. At the Schouwburg, it was impossible to disregard the history of the persecution in the presentation. However, there were also some striking similarities. There was a central role for family photographs of Jewish life and (copies of) documents that are not visually appealing; there were no shocking photographs; and both presentations did not conclude in the camps, but rather with the continuation of Jewish life in the Netherlands.

An important aspect of the exhibition in the Hollandsche Schouwburg was the notion of agency and responsibility, addressing both younger and older visitors. As Belinfante observes, ‘in the end, the person holding the baby is an adult. And the person grabbing the baby as well, since a child cannot reach for it.’ Where the 1955 presentation was appropriate to the then current hegemonic and apologetic narrative of the war, and the 1987 JHM exhibition stressed Jewish resistance to break away from this narrative, the exhibition at the Hollandsche Schouwburg focused on responsibility and agency, directly addressing the visitor without incrimination. The question is not: what have you done during the war, but rather, what would you do if there was a war. As such, it has a future-oriented arrangement.

The memorial museum consisted of several spaces with separate functions. According to Katzenstein, one reason for this was a fear of mixing commemoration and education:

What if the noise of school classes would impede on visitors who wanted to commemorate in silence? Aren’t commemoration and education mutually exclusive? We therefore separated these two functions. However, in practice these two coexisted very well. If anything, visitors are glad that younger generations pay attention to this history.

Over time, the spatial separation of these two functions faded and became fully integrated. For instance, the wall of names was made interactive with the help of computers and an application called the Ikpod, turning this commemorative space into an information center. The next chapter will further investigate the blending of

130 Interview Belinfante.
131 Interview Katzenstein.
these two functions and other transformations that took place after the 1993 renovation.

The fact that the Hollandsche Schouwburg is an important in situ memorial museum that addresses the Shoah from a Jewish perspective and caters to a broad Jewish and non-Jewish public is not obvious given its postwar development. The previous chapter demonstrated the difficulties with this venue when it was turned into a commemoration site while the Jewish community observed this process with ambivalence. How did parts of the Jewish community appropriate this site? This chapter focused on how performances of memory put this site on the map to begin with, and allowed for a gradual appropriation by key Jewish institutions. An important characteristic of the site was its public character, both as a building that was easily accessible, secular, and offered a somewhat national stage for commemorations and state visits. Yom HaShoah was instrumental for the gradual appropriation of a large part of the Dutch Jewish community. An important reason why this site became a memorial museum were the visiting practices that arose after the memorial was opened to the public in 1962. The abstract idiom proved difficult to understand for visitors who had no prior knowledge of its history and in the 1990s an exhibition was added to provide additional context. The JHM took this opportunity to create a more comprehensive Shoah presentation than it had done before in its own permanent exhibitions. In spite of its objective to install an educational exhibition that would address and inform a younger public, there was a certain restraint that prevented too concrete and confronting representations of the Shoah in order not to offend older generations. In the next chapter we will look more closely at the current presentation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, taking into account the combined function of education and commemoration.
Chapter 4: The Fragmented Memorial Museum: Indexicality and Self-Inscription

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was originally constructed as a theater; during the first fifteen years after the occupation, although dilapidated, the fabric of the structure remained largely unchanged (see figure 4.1). In 1962 its main hall was dismantled and replaced by a courtyard (see figure 4.2). Two memorials were installed: in the front of the building was a reception hall with an intimate *chapelle ardente* on the East side. The upper floors were not part of the memorial and were rented out as office space. Passing through the reception hall, the visitor entered the courtyard which contained a central rectangular grass field. On the North side of the building, where the stage was once located, a large pylon was erected on a plinth in the shape of a Magen David. Behind the former stage, trees were planted.
in a small garden area that was not open to the public. Over time, the abstract visual language and lack of contextualization ceased to appeal to a large part of the visitors and a major renovation took place in the early 1990s (see figure 4.3). The *chapelle ardente* on the first floor was replaced by a wall of names and the grass field in the courtyard was substituted with stone pavement. The office space on the North side of the building made way for a small museum exhibition on the first floor and a multifunctional room on the second floor, for group-instruction and other types of meetings.

Looking at these three ground plans, drawn by architect Maarten van Kesteren, it becomes clear how the current situation was not designed from scratch, but evolved over time, superimposing older structures and functions into a fragmented and somewhat chaotic memorial museum. The result is a site that is experienced by many visitors as authentic and evocative by using traces, signs and other markers that have a direct and actual connection to the past that they mediate. These indexical interventions emphasize the feeling of being-there, at the site where part of the persecution of the Jews was executed. These indices are not necessarily authentic, unaltered or unmediated traces of the past. Instead, they are

**Figure 4.2.** Hollandsche Schouwburg as a memorial, Leupen & Waterman. Made by Maarten van Kesteren
a conjunction of the site’s promise and the visitor’s expectation to find traces of the past that underlies both latent and contingent indexicality. This overall quality of the Hollandsche Schouwburg encourages visitors to look for fragmentary and material signs of the Shoah that sometimes have been explicitly curated as such, and at other times are actively imagined by visitors. Indexical signs are thus strictly taken neither as completely authentic, nor always inherent to a material environment. However, they are highly affective and allow visitors to re-imagine their relationship with the past and potentially inscribe their own biographies in the museum’s narrative. This process is a creative interplay between the site’s materiality, exhibition strategies by the architect and curator, and the imaginative appropriation of the visitor.

An example of this complex interaction is the historic photograph placed

![Figure 4. 3. Hollandsche Schouwburg current situation, Gelders, 1992](image-url)

on a large panel in the garden behind the courtyard, on the very spot the people in this picture were standing in 1942 (see figure 4.4). A girl depicted in black-and-white waves at you, smiling, standing in a disorganized courtyard. Her hand is blurry, her smile genuine. A boy in front of her has a somewhat defiant, but playful posture. A man in a suit with a white armband is drinking from a teacup and in the
background a police officer is talking to someone. People are sitting alone in the sun while others are talking to each other.

The photograph is blown up to life-sized proportions and stands in the middle of a rather empty garden. You are now backstage, behind the former theater stage that holds the large pylon. It is quiet here, the city’s noise is drowned out and you can hear rustling leaves and singing birds. The garden has no pavement and seems artless, almost natural. The surrounding houses are so near you can peek into the living rooms and almost enter their private gardens (see figure 4.5). At the back of the photo display, overlooked by many visitors because of its strange position, is an interview excerpt in Dutch and English:

I could clearly see her from the upstairs window of the house where we lived. Then I took a few photos as a keepsake, for when she returned but for myself as well – so I had something to remember her by [...]. Yet at a certain moment, the courtyard was empty. Greetje was gone.
Underneath the excerpt the caption reads: ‘Lydia van Nobelen-Riezouw in an interview about her friend Gretha Velleman (Amsterdam 1924-Auschwitz 1942).’ The photographer is identified and the girl addressing the spectator with her wave now has an age, a place of death and a name. When you try to reconstruct from what angle and when the photograph was taken, it is hard to locate it precisely. It must have been during the deportation period at this spot from one of the neighboring houses, but where are all the buildings you can see in the picture? How could Lydia have been able to take this picture during the occupation? And why is Greetje waving and smiling rather than distressed and anxious? The casual, almost friendly atmosphere in the picture dispels conceptions of fear, chaos and hostility usually associated with a deportation center. It takes some extra context to understand that it was taken from the house on the left side, that the current garden previously held structures such as an annex for stage props that have long since been dismantled, and that the policy at the Hollandsche Schouwburg during the first months of the deportations was not as restrictive as it would be later on and allowed captives to take in some fresh air during the warm summer days.

---

1 This text is based on an interview by Mark Schellekens. This video, produced by Frame Mediaprodukties in 1993, has been available at the memorial from 1993 onwards.
When you turn around, you see again the pylon that occupies the courtyard you just crossed to get into the garden (see figure 4.6). The large object is suddenly framed differently: it seems to come from nowhere, emerging from the brick wall you are facing. Several people told me that from this perspective the pylon reminded them of a chimney from the death camps. In the courtyard, the pylon, mounted atop its Magen David plinth suggests a triumph over terror and the resurrection of the Jewish community after the Shoah. Standing backstage; the same object looks rather threatening and looming, somehow out of place.

Another black-and-white photograph is visible on your way back to the courtyard, this time with no additional text (see figure 4.7). It is not immediately clear what you are looking at: most of the photograph shows a sidewall, three small balconies, a narrow alley and some neighboring gardens separated neatly by fences. What is most noticeable; however, are the tens of people looking at a man climbing over a fence into a neighboring garden. The photograph shows a side of the theater where people could apparently get in or out of the Schouwburg. There is contact
between the captives and the neighbors, embodied by a white arm that helps the man in black to climb over the fence. The assumed thick line between victim and bystander is breached in this photograph, pointing to the proximity of the neighbors to this site of terror.² Their houses, so intimately close, remain in place as silent witnesses. In the corner of the photograph, we see the thumb of the photographer who could do little more than register what was happening.

Most visitors I spoke with described the garden as the most moving and authentic space of the memorial. One woman felt cheated when I told her the trees were not there during the occupation but planted afterwards as part of the memorial complex in 1962. She thought of them as the most authentic elements of the memorial complex.³ The expectation of authenticity of the garden space is

---

² Historian Raul Hilberg introduced the influential categorization of victim, perpetrator and bystander Raul Hilberg, Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945 (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992). The line between these categories is often permeable, as argued by historian Guus Meershoek, Guus Meershoek, “Driedeling als dwangbuis: over het onderzoek naar de vervolging van de joden in Nederland,” in Met alle geweld: botsingen en tegenstellingen in burgerlijk Nederland, ed. Conny Kristel and J. C. H. Blom (Amsterdam: Balans, 2003), 144–61. Ido de Haan argues that nevertheless, these categories remain useful, De Haan, “Breuklijnen in de geschiedschrijving van de Jodenvervolging,” 40. The historic photograph not only shows the physically thin line between victim and bystander at this deportation site, it also makes the current neighboring houses part of the exhibited history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. See David Duindam, “Het lange leven van Raul Hilbergs standaardwerk,” Onderzoek Uitgelicht 1, no. 2 (2012): 6–11.

³ Conversation with Saskia Polderman, December 10, 2013.
evoked by the seemingly scarce human interventions: you are standing on bare soil that is uneven and often slippery because of the combination of dead leaves and rain. The trees function as living, natural and therefore innocent witnesses and the few curatorial interventions that display the historic events are clearly marked. Furthermore, the garden evokes the feeling of authenticity: visitors often assume they see the real and unmediated backstage area of a site that nevertheless is highly mediated and staged.4

The garden is one of five spaces that currently make up the Hollandsche Schouwburg, together with the entrance hall, the wall of names, the courtyard and the small museum exhibition. As demonstrated in previous chapters, these spaces were introduced and altered over time, with major constructions taking place in 1962 and 1993. In addition to these renovations, other modifications were made in reaction to existing visiting practices. The garden is currently one of the most evocative spaces of the complex, but was only opened to unguided visitors after the two abovementioned photographs were installed in 2010. Prior to that, small groups were sporadically guided into the garden as the final part of the educational program about the Shoah.5 The photo-displays thus were a reaction to a preexisting visiting practice, supplementing the guided visits, and transformed the garden into one of the five central spaces of this memorial complex. They make use of the indexical relationship between the historical photograph and the exact location at which the visitor is standing. The waving girl invites the spectator to connect to her, both to the girl in the courtyard and, once you read the back of the panel, to the girl murdered in Auschwitz. It is important to stress that both the garden and these photographs need to be contextualized. The fact that they are ‘authentic’ does not guarantee an involvement of the visitor.

4 Erving Goffman points out the importance of back stages for performances of the self. ‘A back region or backstage may be defined as a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course.’ Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956), 69. Dean MacCannell introduced this concept to tourism studies, see Dean MacCannell, The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Schocken Books, 1989). He argues that backstage areas are opened to the public to bring them into touch with real life; however, the very opening of these areas to the public implies that they are intentionally made part of the tourist experience and thus provides ‘staged authenticity’. Dean MacCannell, “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings,” American Journal of Sociology 79, no. 3 (November 1, 1973): 593–596. The garden of the Hollandsche Schouwburg provides a similar experience of staged authenticity. However, it is not as intentionally staged as the examples discussed by MacCannell, such as open kitchens or the space craft center at Cape Kennedy that are made available to visitors to see the ‘inner workings’ of these institutions.

5 This was a rather gradual process: the garden was not officially opened with a ceremony. The two photographs were installed for the first Museum Night on November 6, 2010. Personal correspondence with curator and former head of the memorial Annemiek Gringold, January 21, 2014.
The current Hollandsche Schouwburg is an *in situ* memorial museum and a site of dark heritage. As such, it both embodies and mediates its own past. It is not a discrete and fixed medium, but rather an ever-changing spatial configuration of media, artifacts, technologies and spaces. The past is made available to the visitor in different ways, through historical superimposition, latent and contingent indexicality and self-exhibition. This is not a linear process where authentic artifacts or surfaces speak directly to the visitor; but a complex process in which the visitor, curator and site interact and the past is actively reconstructed. The staged authenticity of the courtyard walls, discussed in chapter 2, demonstrates how different pasts – theater and deportation – are brought together in the image of the ruin in order to produce a sense of being-there, at the very spot where historic events took place. The layering of different pasts, historical superimposition, is a recurrent strategy at this site.

The spatial configuration has been assembled over time by architects and curators, in reaction to visitors and other stakeholders, as demonstrated in the two previous chapters. The result is a site that does not have a coherent and unambiguous museum narrative leading visitors through a logical and more or less inevitable route. Rather, the site has a fragmented and spatially dispersed narrative that demands an effort and enables its visitors to inscribe themselves and perform this site through walking around. There is a radical openness that allows visitors to insert their own stories and biographies. It is thus, like any other site of memory, a place of real and imagined connections.

In order to come to a better understanding of how meaning is produced at this site, this chapter discusses three related themes. In the first part, we deal with the notion of the *in situ* memorial museum. These sites are not built from scratch, but evolve over time. The memorial and museum functions are natural extensions that develop in reaction to visitor practices. The authenticity of these *in situ* sites does not mean they tell their story without any interference, but rather allows for a different kind of mediation compared to *ex novo* sites. They contain fragmentary elements that may function as signs or markers on the basis of an actual connection to which they refer. This process is fueled by the visitor’s expectation and imagination that may turn any physical detail into a remnant of the past. In the second part, the museum narrative is analyzed with a focus on material and spatial scripts, rather than human guides or educational programs. In line with the previous chapters, we look at how actual and envisioned visitor practices have been integrated into the site’s layout. The five spaces all have their own scripts that at times complement, contextualize and distort one another. The result is a fragmented narrative where meaning is produced through historical superimposition and museum technologies that serve to exhibit the site itself. In
the last section, we turn to the performances and practices of the visitor, who actualizes and interprets the site. The active role of the visitor is especially relevant because of the fragmented and ambiguous museum narrative. Visitors are encouraged to inscribe their own biographies into this site in an attempt to affectively connect to its history.

1. The In Situ Memorial Museum: Mediation and Latent Indexicality

The Hollandsche Schouwburg is an in situ memorial museum: the events that unfolded in this building and beyond during the occupation of the Netherlands are both told and commemorated at this very site. According to museum specialist Paul Williams, there has been a world-wide rise of memorial museums in the last few decades. Eric Somers observes a similar trend in the Netherlands, where memorial museums have increasingly been established since the 1990s, especially at authentic historical sites, a process reflected in the overlapping topography of historic events and current museum sites. Somers demonstrates that on the one hand, memorial centers have been established at former camp sites and on the other hand, war museums, both at historic and non-historic locations, took on commemorative roles. He argues that several ex novo museums incorporated memorials to provide a moral framework because these museums lacked a site-specific historical significance.

An important issue is how the memorial function, which usually focuses on commemoration, and museum function, that emphasizes contextualization and education, interact with each other. Williams opposes these two views. According to him, memorials have the difficult task of being both specific and unique to the event commemorated, and at the same time universal enough to be appropriated by the general public. People do not visit memorials because they are beautiful, out of sheer curiosity or fascination, nor to learn more about a topic. ‘Instead, we come in respect, bringing with us a sense of history, often loaded with familial significance. [...] World War memorials act more as staging points for mourning and reflection than as destinations that explain the significance of an event.’ In opposition to the memorial, Williams situates museums that collect, exhibit and interpret objects on a critical basis. In spite of the observation that the line between

---

6 ‘I use the term memorial museum to identify a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind.’ Paul Williams, Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 8 original emphasis.
7 Somers, De oorlog in het museum, 170–179, 228–234.
9 Williams, Memorial Museums, 6.
memorial and museum is often blurred, the alleged opposition of memorial and museum is central to his project. ‘On initial consideration, the memorial museum spells an inherent contradiction. A memorial is seen to be, if not apolitical, at least safe in the refuge of history. [...] A history museum, by contrast, is presumed to be concerned with interpretation, contextualization, and critique.’

Williams’ essentialist approach provides an a priori frame of analysis: it is likely that you find these seemingly contradictory functions in every memorial museum. In practice, no memorial is apolitical, and no museum is solely concerned with a critical approach. Memorials can be enjoyed for their aesthetic properties and the rise of counter-monuments, as described by James Young, defies most of the memorial characteristics mentioned by Williams. Furthermore, his definition of the museum as an objective and scientific institution is oversimplified. Museums have long been used as political instruments, especially in constructing a version of the past that supports hegemonic conceptions about society. Secondly, as Ann Rigney and Astrid Erll argue, the memory of the Shoah is not completely formed in the past, but produced in the present and ‘the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication.’ Cultural memory addresses processes of collective and personal identity formation and can be understood ‘as an ongoing process of remembrance and forgetting in which individuals and groups continue to reconfigure their relationship to the past and hence reposition themselves in relation to established and emergent memory sites.’ A museum that concentrates on the persecution of the Jews offers its visitor the opportunity to actively engage with the past. We should therefore not see the memorial and museum as opposite functions, but rather as each other’s logical extensions; since both enable visitors to produce a meaningful relationship with the past.

What happens at World War II sites or museums that do not have a formal memorial function? Two important locations in Amsterdam that do not have an official memorial function and where no annual commemorations take place are the Anne Frank House and the Resistance Museum. However, it can be argued that many visitors interpret their visit to the Anne Frank House as a commemorative act in itself. The strict routing and deliberately staged emptiness of the building point

10 Ibid., 8 original emphasis.
11 Williams refers to Young’s counter-monument, as developed in Young, The Texture of Memory, chap. 1. However, he does not incorporate this into his notion of the memorial museum.
13 Rigney, “Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory,” 12, 14.
14 Erl and Rigney, Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory, 1–2.
15 This argument is supported by the survey of researcher Merel de Kok, who interviewed 30 visitors in 2011. When asked whether they came to commemorate or look for information, 7% answered the former, 27% the latter and 63% answered both. De Kok, “Een nadere kennismaking,” 59.
to a ritualized, stylized and highly orchestrated experience.\textsuperscript{16} A visit has a weighty affective potential and can be concluded with the writing of a commemorative message in the guestbook. In the case of the Resistance Museum, Somers points out that this site is embedded in an urban district saturated with memorials such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Auschwitz Memorial.\textsuperscript{17} As such, the museum is not an encapsulated and isolated site but part of its direct surroundings, an issue further explored in the next chapter.

To conclude, memorial and museum functions often go hand in hand as they reinforce and supplement each other. We are not dealing with a fixed and knowable past, but rather with the active creation of Shoah memory that people relate through commemoration among other strategies. Even sites that are not official memorials can take on a commemorative function for individual visitors, as this makes it possible for people to place their visit in a meaningful and ritualized framework.

We usually distinguish between two types of memorial museums: those \textit{in situ} sites where the commemorated events have (partly) taken place and those called \textit{ex novo} sites that are established elsewhere, such as the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. or Yad Vashem in Israel. Standing at a site such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg can be an overwhelming experience: you are there, at the site where once thousands of Jews were being held before their deportation. Memory theorist Aleida Assmann warns us that we should not conflate being there in the here-and-now and being there during the deportations:

\begin{quote}
Der Hiat zwischen dem Ort der Opfer und dem der Besucher muß sinnfällig gemacht werden, wenn das affektive Potential, das der Erinnerungs ort mobilisiert, nicht zu einer ‘Horizontverschmelzung’ und illusionären Identifikation führen soll.\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

The contrast between these two dimensions can be so stark that the past might be rendered even more distant. Assmann refers to Walter Benjamin’s concept of aura as the opposite of proximity:

\begin{quote}
‘A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, “to have an horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it.’ Hans-Georg Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method} (New York: Continuum, 1997), 302.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Van der Laarse, \textit{De oorlog als beleving}, 24–25.
\textsuperscript{17} Somers, \textit{De oorlog in het museum}, 234. For a description of several nearby memorials, see David Duindam, “De dynamiek van de herinnering: vijf oorlogsmonumenten,” \textit{Auschwitz Bulletin}, 2012.
\textsuperscript{18} Assmann, \textit{Erinnerungsräume}, 334. Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that one has to be familiar with one’s own horizon, or present life interpretation, to be able to try and understand the position of another human being. ‘A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, “to have an horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it.’ Hans-Georg Gadamer, \textit{Truth and Method} (New York: Continuum, 1997), 302.
Ein auratischer Ort in diesem Sinne macht kein Unmittelbarkeits-Versprechen; eher ist es ein Ort, an dem die unnahbare Ferne und Entzogenheit der Vergangenheit sinnlich wahrgenommen werden kann.\(^\text{19}\) Though Assmann is correct in pointing out the hiatus between the now and then and the fact that these sites do not offer a direct contact with the past, many visitors are greatly affected by standing at such a site where it all took place. This does not mean that we should ignore Assmann’s points about the fundamental gap between then and now and the impossibility of immediacy. There is a difference between \textit{in situ} and \textit{ex novo} memorial museums, but that does not mean the past is unmediated and that we can experience ‘how it really was’ by visiting Auschwitz or the Hollandsche Schouwburg.

If the past is not immediately accessible and needs to be mediated at both \textit{in situ} and \textit{ex novo} sites, what then precisely is the difference between these two? It is informative to look at the indexical nature of these sites. The index is a sign that functions on the basis of contiguity or continuity, an actual relationship with what it refers to; such as smoke and fire. It cannot be simply copied and can function as evidence of past events. Well-known sites of memory have a paradoxical character: being signs of the past, the meaning or memory that they are attributed with, seems to be naturally given. Auschwitz for many people has become synonymous with the persecution of the Jews. However, as heritage academic Rob van der Laarse argues, Auschwitz has not always been the universal symbol of the Shoah, and its future role might change depending on important political processes within the European Union.\(^\text{20}\) Both Auschwitz and the Hollandsche Schouwburg functioned within various hegemonic memory discourses. In spite of this, \textit{in situ} memorial museums have an extra-linguistic quality that distinguishes them from \textit{ex novo} institutions. Semiotician Patrizia Violi argues that \textit{in situ} sites, which she term trauma sites, provide a direct link with the past:

we, as visitors, are located in a different time with respect to the traumatic events that took place at the site, a direct link with the past seems to be activated by the indexicality of the places and the objects present there: they are signs of a very particular nature – traces of the past, imprints of what actually happened there.\(^\text{21}\)

By focusing on these traces as indexical signs and not as authentic and unmediated objects, Violi is able to make a clear distinction between the position of the current

---

\(^{19}\) Assmann, \textit{Erinnerungsräume}, 338.


\(^{21}\) Violi, “Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory,” 39.
visitor and past events without denying a real connection to the past. She emphasizes that semiotic objects are never exclusively indexical, but often carry iconic and symbolic elements in them as well.\textsuperscript{22} One such example of a mixed semiotic object at the Hollandsche Schouwburg is the courtyard walls: they are traces of the past that are transformed into an indexical sign that have an iconic resemblance of the former theater stage and a symbolic ruinous character. These walls are more evocative to present-day visitors than the pylon, a sign that has only a symbolic value that is no longer supported by a national discourse of victory over the Nazi cruelties.

An indexical sign functions on the basis of promise and expectation. The index refers to something or someone that was once present, and it does so through its absence. Take for example a footprint: it does not show the person itself, but it promises that at one time, a person was there. As such, the index can function not only as a sign, but also as evidence. Violi therefore argues that \textit{in situ} sites function as witnesses of the past:

The past they reveal to us is not a reconstruction or a ‘re-evocation’ of what is no more, as is the case in more commonplace museums or memorials, but something much more cogent, something they have directly \textit{witnessed}: these places are themselves \textit{testimonies} of the past.\textsuperscript{23}

Even though the indexical quality of such sites is powerful indeed, this characterization might suggest that these sites can speak for themselves without any intervention. Literary theorist Ernst van Alphen has written about the work of the Dutch artist Armando that often contends with the challenge of representing World War II. According to Van Alphen, Armando uses indexical signs to overcome this issue, such as the trees that have witnessed the cruelty of war:

Armando ‘encircles’ the unspeakable quality of ‘the’ war by voicing, or representing, what is contiguous to it, what touches it. Just as the footprint is a silent witness to the presence of a human being, so the signs Armando employs are indexical traces of the unspeakable and unrepresentable.\textsuperscript{24}

Armando looks at the edge of the forest as a living and culpable witness to cruelty and declares the trees guilty of both refusing to testify and covering up past crimes. ‘The trees’ growth demonstrates and embodies the work of Time: time produces forgetting, just as nature overgrows the place of action.’\textsuperscript{25} The indexical sign makes something present through its absence. According to Armando, this is the only way

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} ‘No semiotic object is entirely reducible to one form of signification, as it always simultaneously embodies indexical, iconic and symbolic elements; clearly, re-presentational memorials cannot be seen as purely indexical.’ Ibid., 41.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 39.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Ernst van Alphen, \textit{Armando: Shaping Memory} (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2000), 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 11.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
we can hold on to what is no longer there. It must be stressed that the promise of the index does not need to be fulfilled. The person who sees a footprint expects that somebody else once was there, but at the same time might never find out if that person was actually there. The index therefore partially depends on an imaginative and benevolent investment on part of the observer.

Indexicality can play a major role at ex novo memorial museums that display authentic artifacts or might even use train wagons that were used for the deportation of Jews as part of their routing. The main difference between these two types is that, in situ sites have a latent or contingent indexicality. The fact that you are at the same location where part of the persecution of the Jews took place is foregrounded and underlies the entire visit. The promise of this indexicality transforms the entire material environment of the site, and visitors will look for possible traces of the past that support their expectation. It is this powerful quality that cannot be produced at ex novo sites. At those sites, the indexical nature of authentic artifacts is emphasized. Such mobile indices leave little room for discovery and creative investment on behalf of the visitor because they are curated and framed as part of a larger museum narrative and usually have a very specific and predetermined role.

A categorical separation of in situ and ex novo sites might suggest that primary sites can testify for themselves and in essence are not constructed or mediated but immediately accessible and comprehensible.26 As Violi rightfully argues, no object is purely indexical and even the most important authentic element, such as the walls in the courtyard, need to be marked over time by a shield or by other means and are always staged to some degree. The in situ Anne Frank House is void of furniture; a conscious decision by Otto Frank who argued the house was ransacked during the war and so should it remain. Van der Laarse argues that this emptiness, however natural it might seem, is staged: it mediates the past and simultaneously enables the large amount of visitors to walk through this small house.27

We also should not underestimate the importance of location at ex novo sites. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is situated along the National Mall in Washington D.C., the symbolic heart of the nation. Michael Berenbaum, former director of the USHMM, hoped this would work two ways: the Holocaust is Americanized and at the same time US history is framed in a different perspective: ‘When people leave the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the

26 James Young argues: ‘In confusing these ruins for the events they now represent, we lose sight of the fact that they are framed for us by curators in particular times and places.’ Young, The Texture of Memory, 128.
27 Van der Laarse, De oorlog als beleving, 24–25.
monuments to democracy that surround it – to Lincoln and Jefferson and Washington – will take on a new meaning.’

28 The Mall is a significant location that places the memory of the Shoah at the symbolic heart of the nation. Another key example is Yad Vashem’s intertwinement with Israel’s territory. Sociologist Erik Cohen argues that this site connects the history of the Shoah directly with modern Israeli society, making it a site in populo rather than in situ. He argues that ‘primary sites do not ensure authenticity and secondary sites do not preclude it.’

Both the USHMM and Yad Vashem are significant sites inscribed in the nation’s imaginary that both receive from and assign meaning to their symbolic locations. On the other hand, not all in situ sites are sufficiently marked and do therefore not automatically testify to the past. For example, the former death camps that have been destroyed such as Sobibor and Treblinka hold very little to no remaining original structures above ground. This has inspired researchers to dig for the past in search of authentic edifices and artifacts.

Other in situ sites were reopened after the war, such as the Ernst Happel Stadion in Vienna where over a thousand Jews were held before they were deported. In 2003 a commemorative plaque was unveiled, but otherwise the dark past of this football stadium remains invisible.

In short, a binary categorization of primary versus secondary sites of memory might turn a blind eye to the staging of authenticity and the mediation of the past. Nevertheless, Violi’s argument that the indexicality of these sites offers visitors a sense of place that is different from other sites is an important point.

Independently of how much remains of the past, and how carefully it is preserved, visitors know they are in the very place where terrible events occurred, and this knowledge contributes to a complex, multifaceted perception of it. Visitors not only see something of this terrible past, they also imagine that which cannot be seen.

---

28 Quoted in Young, The Texture of Memory, 347. For an account of this museum’s establishment, see Oren Baruch Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).


31 Holocaust archaeology has been developed over the last few years to examine underground physical traces. See Caroline Sturdy Colls, Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution. (Dissertation. University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 2012). Iris van Ooijen is preparing her PhD dissertation on Dutch WWII memorial camps as contested space, in which the different functions of this new type of archaeology is critically addressed.


33 Violi, “Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory,” 39.
This imagination, though considered to be ambiguous by Assmann because of the danger of illusionary identification between visitor and victim, is not something to be prevented, but rather a powerful source for in situ memorial museums. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, visitors are encouraged to actively inscribe their own biographies in the fragmented museum narrative, which is discussed in the third section of this chapter.

To conclude, it should be emphasized that the memorial and museum functions of in situ sites of memory supplement each other in the active mediation of the past. Secondly, in situ and ex novo sites are different not because in the former, the past is directly accessible and in the latter, location and the visitor’s experience are inconsequential. Rather, it is the latent and contingent indexicality of in situ sites that allows for the imaginative interpretation of material traces by the visitor. With this in mind, we can look at the various museum strategies that are employed at the Hollandsche Schouwburg to mediate the past and the active role of its visitors. Because Violi looks for ‘overall meaning effects’ in her case studies, she treats these sites as discrete, intentional and finalized texts separated from the actions of the visitor. This is based in her theoretical and methodological separation of enunciation, the museum, and interpretation by the visitor. It takes the museum as a static given, rather than an emergent configuration of media, techniques and historical textures with which visitors interact. It furthermore neglects the role of the visitor in the production of these signs. It is precisely the anticipation of the visitor to come in contact with a historic site that turns every trace into a possible sign. The expectant observer looks at the trees and walls and sees witnesses of the past. And it is that same visitor who wants to enter the garden and to be informed about its history. It is not the indexicality of signs, but rather the latent indexicality that may turn the smallest detail into a possible remnant of the past.

Visitors are not passive observers, but rather active performers. Their imagined and actual practices have been accommodated by architects and curators. When we look at the Hollandsche Schouwburg from this perspective, we can understand how the current presentation is the result of a long interaction between site, designer and user. Considering this, we should not try to determine all possible indexical signs, but rather recognize the fact that the latent and contingent indexicality evokes awareness on the part of the visitor that may turn the smallest detail into an imagined or actual trace of the past. Visitors constantly look for clues.

34 Ibid., 59.
The black erosion on top of the walls is often interpreted as a trace of aggression – was the building bombed or burned down during the occupation? Traces of bricked up walls and windows in these walls further enhance the feeling of authenticity and can be imagined to be remnants of the past. Latent indexicality and staged authenticity are thus intricately related phenomena: where the former makes the visitor hypersensitive to traces of the past; the latter provides fragmented clues that can be interpreted as such.

2. Conflicting Scripts, Routing and Self-Exhibition

The museum is not a neutral institution that exhibits authentic objects that speak for themselves. As we have seen in chapter 1, the museum places artifacts; texts; technologies; media and visitors in a spatial relationship with one another. The visitor must interact with this narrative machinery by moving through this space and interact with these items. If we look at the museum as a collection of exhibition technologies, we can use the concept of a script as the implied instructions of an object or space based on an ideal user. The notion of the museum script allows us to trace the interaction between site, curator and visitor as a looping system that is constantly in development. In the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the visitor is confronted with different and sometimes conflicting museum scripts that have emerged over time, some more successful than others. The result is a fragmented and incoherent museum narrative that both forces and enables visitors to interpret this site for themselves. Both the site and the visitor are changed and re-imagined in this process. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the essence is not the exhibition of artifacts, but rather the exhibition of the site itself.

Museum specialist Carol Duncan argues that in art museums, artifacts and architecture work together to form a coherent ensemble that, like any technology, has an (unwritten) manual or script:

I see the totality of the museum as a stage setting that prompts visitors to enact a performance of some kind, whether or not actual visitors would describe it as such [...]. Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention – in this case, for contemplation and learning. One is also expected to behave with a certain decorum.36

Different types of ritual spaces, such as graveyards, churches or memorials, can stimulate specific behavior. Architectural spaces organize the movement of people. In the case of a museum or a memorial, an unambiguous routing can support a linear narrative or a specific ritualized behavior. The 1962 design of the courtyard is a good example of a space with a clear script that set up a unidirectional route directing visitors to walk in a circle around the grass field, enter the former stage through a small door and arrive at the pylon, the ritual center of the memorial (see figure 4.8). Here, flowers could be laid and prayers said before people continued their route. The grass field in the middle was not tread upon out of respect and symbolized the absent dead. Once the visitor exited the courtyard, the spatial and ritual performance, a small and site-specific version of the silent procession that was central to the Dutch commemorative culture as described in the previous chapter, was finished and marked off. The script of the courtyard did not only orchestrate the spatial performance of the visitor, it also connected and contextualized the disparate elements of this courtyard resulting in a coherent and meaningful ensemble. The courtyard was an inverted theater where visitors occupied the former stage rather than the chairs where the public had sat before the deportations. The grass field was an indexical sign that stood for the absent dead and was complemented by the trees behind the former stage that symbolized the continuity of the Jewish community. When visitors performed their commemorative ritual they were symbolically observed by both the absent dead and future generations. As such, the 1962 courtyard superimposed the theater and
the deportation period and offered the visitor a contact zone with both the past and the future.37

This analysis of the physical layout of the courtyard offers us a good starting point, but has its limitations. By focusing on the intended design, we disregard adaptations to the courtyard and the visitor’s understanding of and willingness to follow the script. Even though Duncan admits that people continually misread or resist the museum’s cues, this has little bearing on her method of analysis. Media researcher Julia Noordegraaf argues that Duncan treats visitors as ‘passive victims who are subjected to the ritual of the museum.’38 Noordegraaf is interested in the active contribution that visitors have in coproducing the museum script. Rather than interpreting a script as part of the theater metaphor and the museum ensemble as a stage setting, she proposes to look at ‘the notion of “script” as developed in the field of the sociology of technology.’39 In this field, the script is not a theatrical metaphor, but rather allows us to examine the interaction between designer, user and object.

Noordegraaf is inspired by the work of sociologist Madeleine Akrich who tries to find a middle-ground between technological determinism and social constructivism in her study of how technological objects are developed, used and transformed. On the one hand, not all possible usages are inscribed in and therefore determined by an object and its designer: users may always find new ways to use them. On the other hand, technological objects cannot be used for everything: their material properties restrict their range of uses. She argues that in order to examine this negotiation between designer and user, we need to investigate how the object acts as a mediator between these two. She introduced the concept of the script as a set of implicit instructions a designer inscribes into a

---

37 The concept of superimposition is related to the work of Walter Benjamin and the figure of the flâneur. Benjamin argued that the figure of the flâneur could sense different times in one place. ‘We know that, in the course of flânerie, far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment.’ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 419. Literary theorist Howard Eiland has described this experience as the ‘uncanny thickening and layering of phenomena, and effect of superimposition, in which remembered events or habitations show through the present time and space, which have suddenly becomes transparent [...].It is a dreamlike effect, [...] a “felt knowledge” that is not yet conceptual.’ Eiland, “Superimposition in Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project,” 122. Here, the concept is used as the explicit and intended layering of different historical textures in order to produce a sense of being at a historic site.


technological object based on a set of presuppositions about the world, its inhabitants and the ideal user:

Designers thus define actors with specific tastes, competences, motives, aspirations, political prejudices, and the rest, and they assume that morality, technology, science, and economy will evolve in particular ways. A large part of the work of innovators is that of ‘inscribing’ this vision of (or prediction about) the world in the technical content of the new object. I will call the end product of this work a ‘script’ or a ‘scenario.’

Technological objects thus attempt to predetermine both its users and its future usage, which may or may not be codified in manuals or user contracts. For instance, a bench in public space is made to sit on, but not meant for people to sleep on. If this unwanted behavior occurs, the designer can subsequently use this feedback to modify the object and for instance add an extra armrest in the middle to prevent people from lying down. This process is a continuous negotiation between users and designers, in which alternative interpretations and uses are developed by users and often re-inscribed onto the objects by the designers in an attempt to either steer or support the behavior of these users.

Noordegraaf suggests that we can use this notion to investigate how the actual use by visitors has an effect on the materiality of museums. If we look at the example of the 1962 courtyard, we can see how its original script implied an observant visitor who understood the design and was willing to follow the route. However, other practices not in line with the spirit of this design were also taken into account: the Hollandsche Schouwburg was closed at night and a porter observed the behavior of daily visitors. Unforeseen behavior of visitors led to a material amendment. A year after the site was opened; a flower stand was introduced in reaction to the overwhelming amount of flowers that were brought in by visitors. The stand both recognized and in a sense encouraged this behavior, and at the same time regulated the practice in order to prevent an untidy courtyard.


41 Bruno Latour argues that technologies can act as substitutions of human rules or utterances that are translated into material expressions since they ‘produce meaning via a special type of articulation that crosses the commonsense boundary between signs and things.’ Bruno Latour, “On Technical Mediation,” Common Knowledge 3, no. 2 (1994): 38. This demonstrates the extra-linguistic potential of objects that do not simply communicate human statements but rather gives shape and produces meanings and practices according to their own material specificities. Latour’s argument resonates with Violi’s notion of the indexicality of in situ memorials that, in opposition to ex novo memorials, provide an actual, non-symbolic connection to the past that cannot be copied or replaced with other media. Both Latour and Violi argue that objects can produce meanings that are fundamentally different from linguistic statements.
The concept of the museum script allows us to understand how curatorial and visiting practices are inscribed in the materiality of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Furthermore, it brings together a synchronic and diachronic understanding of how this site has emerged as an assemblage of technologies, since older scripts are not always completely erased, but often amended or overlaid by new ones. Because each museum is a spatial and material configuration where a multitude of visual, architectural and media technologies interact with the behavior of visitors, it cannot be avoided that different scripts operate alongside each other and even counteract one another.

Routing is an important technological strategy for museums. Visitors need to understand the general lay-out of the building: how the reception hall functions, where to buy tickets, the way rooms are connected with corridors and staircases and the difference between toilets, wardrobes, exhibition spaces and restricted areas. They need to orient themselves intuitively, aided by room designs, signs boards, floor plans and museum guards. When it comes to an exhibition, this routing is closely related to the narrative set up by the way objects are placed in a spatial relation to one another. The ideal visitor follows a route in order to understand and perform this narrative. However, an exhibition can also have an open floor plan, allowing visitors to coproduce their own personalized narrative. If one looks at the practice of routing, the different strategies of an open versus a unidirectional floor plan can coexist in a single museum, sometimes by design and sometimes as the unintended consequence of various extensions to the initial floor plan.

An example of the former is the German in situ museum Topographie des Terrors, where between 1933 and 1945 several central institutions of Nazi persecution and terror were housed. Currently, there are two permanent exhibitions that address the history of this site. Outside, fifteen stations reveal the history of the site before, during and after the Nazi era. It is laid out in a non-chronological and unidirectional route that leads the visitor throughout the terrain. The first station elucidates the history of the Berlin Wall that ran along this site; the second station comprises the former prison cells which have been excavated and exposed as archaeological findings. The last two stations explain the production of this site of memory which began in 1985 with the private initiative Nachgraben (Digging for the Past). All of these stations frame material traces as indexical signs and use them to reveal, layer by layer, the complex history of this site as an example of self-exhibition.

---

42 This description is based on two visits in the summer of 2010 and a personal conversation with curator Andreas Sander.
Inside, the permanent exhibition about the National Socialist period has an open floor plan that seemingly compels visitors to walk around freely and choose to either look at the exhibition panels or make use of the computer stations. Nevertheless, the exhibition is organized in five themes and several subthemes that are numbered 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 et cetera. The themes are somewhat chronologically organized, starting with the Nazi takeover and ending with the end of the war and the postwar era. Visitors are not forced but nevertheless stimulated to follow a predetermined route. In the process, they are confronted with an overwhelming amount of textual and visual information. The Topographie des Terrors is an example of a highly constructed and curated museum. It has the appearance of an open structure, but there is little room for real interaction and personal engagement.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg has been constantly renovated and, as a more or less unintended consequence, has a fragmented floor plan. The fragmentation occurs on several levels and has different consequences. The most prominent example is the script of the 1962 courtyard that is breached by the 1993 renovation, when the grass field was replaced with a stone pavement onto which, later, benches were placed (see figure 4.9). In the corridors, metal holders with wooden tulips were placed where visitors could leave private messages on pieces of paper (see figures 4.10 and 3.7).

Though the removal of the grass field made room for larger crowds at commemorations, it also transformed the courtyard from a commemorative space with a straightforward routing and clear script into an open area that is harder to make sense of.\(^{43}\) Initially, the grass was replaced by sixteen stone slopes that looked like symbolic graves (see figure 3.7). Later, this design was replaced by a pavement that copied the former floor plan of the theater hall and included six benches. In contrast with the former grass field, the benches invite visitors to sit at the very spot where detainees once sat. However, they are not meant to evoke a sensationalist experience; the stone benches do not look or feel like theater chairs at all and are mostly used during commemorations, guided tours and by individual visitors who simply want to sit down. The wooden tulips in the corridors invite visitors to walk down the corridors and continue to be filled with personal messages full of emotions, hope and empathy.\(^{44}\) Two similar benches are placed here as well.

\(^{43}\) None of the people I talked to over a period of five years understood they were standing in the former theater hall. Only after pointing out the outline of the former seating arrangement, did this become clear to them.

\(^{44}\) A photograph taken in 1994 by Doriann Kransberg shows that these tulips were already used to attach messages soon after the 1993 renovation, see figure 3.6
The script of the 1962 courtyard provided a symbolic coherence that was radically changed with the installation of the benches. Where the grass evoked a
humble attitude and the script directed the visitor along a clear route, with the pylon as the epitome of the memorial; the current open space has a less obvious route and is equipped for groups of visitors that listen to a guide or want to leave a personal message. The pylon does not have the same narrative function as before, when it formed the center of a rite of passage and expressed the victory over Nazi terror. This victorious symbol was preceded by a walk through the corridors and the narrow doorways, alongside the absent victims. Without these elements, the pylon is a mere fragment that embodies a de-contextualized component and therefore a sense of victory that is harder to place. In the previous setting, the commemorative performance had a spatially laid out narrative: first the victims were commemorated, and then the victory over Nazism was remembered. In the current setting, this is replaced by symbolic elements that are not aligned and therefore do not provide a clear routing. As a result, the ruinous walls of the former stage and the grey stone wall that refer to the deportees seem overshadowed by the victorious pylon. Here, two conflicting scripts clash, turning the pylon into a potentially offensive sign that could be interpreted to symbolize the victory of the Dutch nation based on the sacrifice of the Jewish population, a sense that is further strengthened by the fact that the pylon stands on a plinth in the form of a Magen
David. In spite of the fact the pylon has lost its initial narrative quality as part of a spatially laid out narrative, it still evokes commemorative practices. Its star-shaped plinth is used by visitors to leave behind flowers, stones, chestnuts or other objects in order to mark their visit (see figure 4.11).

There is an important aspect to in situ memorial museums that prohibits renovations that are too radical. Essentially, these material sites exhibit themselves. Designers and curators therefore need to conserve as many material traces as possible that create a sense of authenticity and being-there. In the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, modifications that were made after the war such as the courtyard memorial have now gained an authentic status themselves. Somers observed a similar process at the Frisian Resistance Museum that moved to the Frisian Chancellery building in 1995, a building with no significant historical ties to the war. Two memorials were established, one in memory of the former resistance fighters and one in memory of the Jewish victims from Frisia. Later, two more memorials were installed. ‘The memorials at the Frisian Resistance Museum have gradually become meaningful museum objects themselves.’ The memorials were not replaced by new installations and Somers comes to the conclusion that they have been given an even more significant role in the museum presentation since its relocation in 2013.

The preservation and juxtaposition of various memorials on one location is even more widespread at memory sites which are spread out over larger terrains. The former concentration camps Westerbork, Vught, Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen have become repositories of memorials. Some of these memorials have lost their original evocative power, such as the outdated and large Soviet-realist memorials at German sites. There, victorious character seems at odds with the current post-unification and more reserved German memory discourse. Others still retain their initial intact expressiveness, such as the iconic broken train tracks at Westerbork designed in 1970 by Ralph Prins. Sachsenhausen has dedicated an entire wing to the Soviet memorials and has a memorial garden that holds a few dozen memorials, as if you are standing in a graveyard. In the former cell building of Ravensbrück, several national exhibitions were installed in 1959. These are still in place and since 2006; a new permanent exhibition explains the history of these national memorials. The postwar histories of these places as memorial sites have been included in the museum narrative as a way of exhibiting the site itself. The

---

45 The word Holocaust, which means burnt offering, has Christian religious roots and is considered offensive by some since it implies that the sacrifice of the Jews was somehow beneficial to the Christian population. The term Shoah (Sjoa) is preferred by a large part of the Dutch Jewish community. See Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, 165–167.
46 Somers, De oorlog in het museum, 230.
Hollandsche Schouwburg is different from these former camp sites because it does not have extended grounds or multiple structures. Instead of creating a separate space or exhibition, the postwar memorial is fragmented; parts of which have been recycled into new configurations. An example is the courtyard: there was a reluctance to demolish the entire courtyard, and other important sculptural elements of the 1962 memorial were preserved during the 1993 renovation. As a consequence, there are conflicting scripts that can confuse visitors. On the other hand, the historically layered character of this courtyard contributes to a sense of historicity. The various commemorative forms that have defined this site of memory over time are integrated into its current constellation. It is a different, more implied form of self-exhibiting the postwar history of this site.

Another form of self-exposure can be found in the exhibition, which enables the visitor to relate to the site from a new perspective. The exhibition constructs a spatial narrative with the help of original artifacts, photographs and copies of letters, newspapers, maps and legal documents, and is accompanied by a pamphlet that provides information about the 110 museum objects. The visitor’s movement is organized by a design that sets up a unidirectional and chronological

Figure 4. 10. Photograph David Duindam
route. This design however is not entirely convincing for several reasons. One the on hand, it does not allow for much interaction, on the other hand it does not provide enough clarity. Important stations that contextualize the main narrative about the deportation period are located in the staircase. Black-and-white photographs depicting the lively cultural history of the Dutch Jewish community before, during and after the war are spread-out over three levels in order to express the continuation of Jewish life (see figure 4.12). The theater period is exhibited on the landing (see figure 3.8) and the Nazi ideology is symbolized with a single picture of a Nuremberg Rally just before the main exhibition hall (see figure 3.9). Because the narrow staircase is a passageway, visitors are not encouraged to take their time and look at these displays. Furthermore, there is not enough room to look at the collage of photographs from a distance, making it difficult to understand how they are related. The lack of time and space makes it unlikely that visitors will interact much with these stations.

Upon entering the main exhibition room, the visitor needs to make a sharp right turn. Because there are no clear indications, many visitors walk straight ahead and miss the chronological setup. The first part of the exhibition addresses the persecution of the Jews and is set against a backdrop of dark tones. The historical narrative is divided into four periods: ‘towards isolation, May 1940-June 1941’, ‘isolation completed, February 1941-June 1942’ and ‘beginning of the end – the yellow star, 1 May 1942’ and ‘via Westerbork towards Auschwitz, July 1942-September 1944’. The second part, in lighter blue tones, addresses people in hiding and acts of resistance in and around the Crèche. These two parts are divided by a low wall with holes through which the visitor can peek and a life-sized photo-cutout of a woman carrying a baby over the wall from the dark side to the lighter side (see figure 3.13). Former director of the Jewish Historical Museum Judith Belinfante had the final responsibility for the design. ‘The exhibition is a visual composition with a question. [...] This is what can happen, and if this happens, will you be standing on the other side [to accept the baby] or not?’ This question however is posed too soon: it is positioned at the end of the first part, across from the map of the concentration camps, before the visitor has seen the part on resistance and hiding. Because most of this exhibition addresses the historical narrative rather than the responsibility of the visitor in the present, the fact that nobody is there to accept the baby might be misconstrued as a negative message – nobody was there to take the baby – rather than a question that addresses the visitor. Furthermore, the question seems to involve the visitor, but leaves little room for reflection or real agency.

47 Interview Belinfante.
Enlarged photographs, authentic objects and reconstructions are juxtaposed without prioritizing authentic artifacts. The aforementioned wall with a photo-cutout, a scale model of the city of Amsterdam, videos, facsimiles of newspapers and other documents are placed next to an original rucksack with its contents used by Erna Katan who survived Bergen-Belsen and the baby clothes of Jaap Wertheim who survived the war as a young child in hiding (see figures 3.10-3.12). The suitcase and baby clothes act as indexical signs through which the visitor can imagine a meaningful relationship with the past. However, the exhibition is not mainly based on the authenticity of these particular objects. I interviewed designer Victor Levie, who was involved in the plan for the exhibition and the wall of names. He relayed that the team of designers was not particularly concerned with this issue. ‘We did not think that original objects were better. If an artifact will be displayed for twenty years under these circumstances, it is impossible to use originals.’ According to museum staff member Peter Buijs, who carried out research for the exhibition, several original documents were replaced with

Figure 4.11. Photograph David Duindam

---

48 Roel Hijink made a similar observation about the memorial museum at former camp Vught. ‘Original relics, non-original objects and reconstructions are mixed in order to stage “concentration camp Vught”. [...] Whether or not objects are authentic does not matter according to the script.’ Hijink, Het gedenkteken, de plek en de herinnering, 278–279.
facsimiles after a few years because of their sensitivity to light.

The most important authentic element is the site itself, which has been incorporated into the exhibition in two ways. In the middle of the chronology, as part of the theme ‘isolation complete’, a large window looks out onto the courtyard, a window that was installed in 1993. Next to the window hangs a photograph of the courtyard during the occupation that is described in the information pamphlet as follows: ’65. The courtyard of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. The Hollandsche Schouwburg was then still in use as the “Joodsche Schouwburg”.’ In front of the window is a picture of the former theater floor plan: ’66. Seating plan of the Hollandsche Schouwburg after the renovation in 1930. Today, the courtyard.’ The window is further contextualized by a curtain with a print of the seating arrangement, which is not prominently visible since it is usually closed (see figure 4.13). Here, the memorial is literally framed as part of the exhibition. It inserts a physical distance and a window frame in order to exhibit and reveal the historic layers. In addition, a new visual perspective is introduced; in the courtyard, you look up to the pylon and walls, from behind the glass window you have a broader overview and look down upon the monument.

A similar strategy is employed at the other side of the exhibition which delves into the Crèche across the street, the building where Jewish babies were kept and from which several hundreds were rescued. The original building is no longer there, but a photograph of the old building is accompanied by a short explanation about where to look ’104. The building was demolished in 1976 and replaced with a colorful new construction by architect Aldo van Eyck.’ The visitor looks at a building that is no longer present. At the same time, he looks at a busy street with a tram stop – the same tram stop that was used to transport Jews to the train stations. An innocent scene of everyday life is inserted into the exhibition and juxtaposed with the terrible events that unfolded in this former theater. The busy street is a metonymic sign of the continuation of everyday life after the war, whereas the courtyard stands for the absence of the dead. 50 In both instances, places that have been seen before are made available for a newly contextualized visual consumption by the visitor.

---

50 Sociologist John Urry argues that museums can de-familiarize those objects with which we seem to be familiar. Furthermore, he argues that the tourist gaze is a complex phenomenon. ‘We do not literally “see” things. Particularly as tourists we see objects constituted as signs. They stand for something else. When we gaze as tourists what we see are various signs or tourist clichés. Some such signs function metaphorically. [...] Other signs, such as lovers in Paris, function metonymically. Here what happens is the substitution of some feature or effect or cause of the phenomenon for the phenomenon itself. [...] The development of the industrial museum in an old mill is a metonymic sign of the development of a post-industrial society.’ John Urry, The Tourist Gaze, Theory, Culture & Society (London: Sage, 2002), 117.
In order to understand how the experience of visitors is regulated by the design of the Hollandsche Schouwburg we have investigated the museum script. The Hollandsche Schouwburg employs several strategies in order to produce a sense of ‘being there’, at a site where a crucial part of the persecution of the Jews was executed. Visiting the Hollandsche Schouwburg is similar to visiting a museum, a spatial performance that is orchestrated by the physical lay-out, information shields and other technologies that together form a script that may (or may not) be followed by the visitor. What is different from, say, a white cube gallery, is that the material site itself is being exhibited. Renovations therefore always needed to incorporate previous designs. In the courtyard we observed that several elements of the 1962 memorial were preserved during the 1993 renovation, leading to conflicting scripts that may confuse visitors but that also provides a sense of historicity. The exhibition juxtaposes the memory of the victims, embodied by the first large window that looks out onto the former theater hall, with the memory of acts of resistance in and around the Crèche and the continuity of life in the busy street. This message of hope and agency, however, depends strongly on the routing and the design of the exhibition, both of which are not always entirely convincing. Another important issue is how the visitor is addressed and involved; the critical moment being the baby being carried over the wall. The visitor is asked to perform a historic role and simultaneously reflect on how the issue of personal responsibility relates to the present. Aside from its premature positioning within the route and complex formulation, the question does not leave much room for critical reflection. Leaving the baby hanging ‘in mid air’ is framed as an immoral rejection of personal accountability and the installation functions rather as a suggestion than an open-ended question.

3. Performing the Site: Walking and Self-Inscription

An in situ memorial museum is a spatial configuration of material traces of the past, artifacts and museum technologies that invite visitors to enact some kind of performance. In the previous section we unearthed how certain parts of the design of the Hollandsche Schouwburg envisioned an ideal visitor, a corresponding performance and how these designs were either fragmented or not entirely convincing. This section investigates how some of the five main spaces encourage more open-ended performances that are not necessarily inscribed in, or prescribed by, the design. As a whole, the Hollandsche Schouwburg does not have a coherent, linear and readable museum script but rather many scripts that can either support or counteract each other. Because there is not one mandatory narrative, and because of the latent and contingent indexicality of this site, visitors are stimulated to make sense of the site on their own terms. This can either leave visitors
disoriented or motivate them to establish a personal and sometimes imagined relationship with this site by inserting their own biographies.

The architecture of spaces attempts to orchestrate the behavior of its users, for instance by prohibiting unwanted acts or by making people move in such a way that their spatial performance correlates with the function of a space. According to Walter Benjamin, the way cities are planned can be closely aligned with ideological power structures.\textsuperscript{51} However, as we have seen in chapter 1, the notion of space that has an inherent meaning or function that must be read or followed by its user is problematic. First of all, there is often a gap between the intention of the designer and the practice of the user. Spaces can have narrative elements, but that does not mean that these are always legible, as we have seen in the case of the exhibition at the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Secondly, spaces, or buildings, can acquire other functions over time: a theater can become a memorial museum. The material durability of this particular building has led to a layered site that superimposes various (historical) functions, a phenomenon that is inherent to inhabited environments. Thirdly, the design of a space cannot encompass all (possible) future uses. Spaces are thus not mere ideological instruments that force people to act in a uniform way, but rather material environments that allow for performances and interactions that cannot all be predicted or inscribed.

In order to understand the interaction between the Hollandsche Schouwburg and its visitors, we need to look at how visitors actively perform their relationship with this site. Philosopher Michel de Certeau argues that urban spaces do not determine the behavior of the pedestrian. Instead he describes the city as a space of enunciation where the planner is a mere grammarian and the dweller performs the city by walking around. The practice of walking is a form of rhetoric for Certeau, in which the pedestrian ‘condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance and composes with others spatial “turns of phrase” that are “rare,” “accidental” or illegitimate.’\textsuperscript{52} By walking around a city you compose your own narrative by selecting your own personal route, interacting with certain elements while ignoring others and making connections that others might not do. He therefore argues that walking around a city is not a matter of ‘reading’ a space, but of speaking it: walking enunciates the space, performs it. ‘Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it “speaks”. […].’\textsuperscript{53} Every spatial element has a trajectory, a function or a script, but pedestrians can

\textsuperscript{51} Benjamin argues that Baron Haussmann, the 19th century city planner of Paris, tried to prevent future protests in the form of barricades by introducing wide boulevards. ‘Widening the streets is designed to make the erection of barricades impossible, and new streets are to furnish the shortest route between the barracks and the workers’ districts.’ Benjamin, \textit{The Arcades Project}, 12.

\textsuperscript{52} Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, 99.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
always chose not to follow them. Two stylistic figures can be discerned in this rhetorical and spatial process: synecdoche and asyndeton. The former takes a smaller element in order to stand in for a larger whole and the latter leaves out connective elements and selects parts of the cityscape in order to reshuffle it:

Synecdoche makes more dense: it amplifies the detail and miniaturizes the whole. Asyndeton cuts out: it undoes continuity and undercuts its plausibility. A space treated in this way and shaped by practices is transformed into enlarged singularities and separate islands.\textsuperscript{54}

The pedestrian is not subjected to the will of the city planner but enunciates the urban space with the help of selection, fragmentation and distortion.

By moving from the city as a readable image to the city as a space of enunciations Certeau locates most of the agency with the individual pedestrian. This is somewhat problematic, since there is no city dweller that exists before the city does. Every pedestrian is born out of interaction with the city and to a certain degree, the city produces the pedestrian. We should therefore be wary of ascribing too much agency and autonomy to these subjects. Secondly, the metaphor of enunciation is helpful, since it describes the city as a space of endless potential combinations that need to be enunciated by individual dwellers. However, it also implies that the behavior of the dweller is linear, coherent and has a certain trajectory, just as enunciations are usually meaningful and conscious utterances. The way people move about in a city is often tentative and exploratory: people get lost, go out for coffee and end up with a pair of shoes, or accidentally walk into a theater that has become a museum. The grand narrative of the city planner is often not replaced with a coherent micro-narrative of the dweller, but rather with a spatial practice that is fragmented, inconsistent and imaginative.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg is not the same as a city space, but Certeau’s insights are relevant because they help us understand how visitors can walk around this site while developing a personal relationship with the location itself. There are certain similarities. First of all, the Schouwburg is not designed as a memorial museum \textit{ex novo} but rather emerged over time. Just as there are multiple trajectories in the urban space, there are various scripts that can be performed, misunderstood or ignored by the visitor. Furthermore, there is no master route that leads visitors through all the spaces and which creates one coherent narrative. Visitors must orient themselves through the building and within the five separate spaces.

When you walk into the Hollandsche Schouwburg, you first enter a lobby. In the back on the West side is a reception desk manned by volunteers. On the East

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 101.
side is a projection screen. For several years, sound carried throughout the room if a film was running. In 2014, headphones were installed in order to prevent noise disturbance. You walk up to the reception to get a ticket and try to orient yourself. Where to start? The volunteers working at the reception can answer your questions. However, there is no preferred route and from reception onwards, there are several possible starting points. For the better part of 2013, an educational film entitled No Return: Sixteen months of deportation from the Hollandsche Schouwburg was screened, featuring video testimonies, photographs, diary fragments and other film footage. The video was a helpful introduction of the history of the site. However, its presentation was not very inviting since it was located in the entrance hall where talking people walked through; a hindrance to concentrating visitors. For a long time, there were no chairs to sit while watching. When the film was already running, you had to wait until it was finished. Alternatively, you could go out into the courtyard where the central monument is; upstairs towards the small museum exhibition; or directly walk into the small space adjacent to the lobby where the wall of names is located. There is also a small installation in the lobby where you can watch a video featuring testimonies recorded in 1993.

The lack of a clear route that leads along every station calls for the visitors to make their own personal choices. Only a few people interact with all elements. Researcher Merel de Kok conducted a visitor survey in 2011, where the behavior of 313 people between October 18 and December 16, 2011 was observed. 17% watched the movie presentation in the lobby; 93% visited the wall of names where 26% used the faccompanying Ikpod; 44% visited the exhibition and 75% went into the courtyard. Only 7% watched the recorded testimonies that were available in the corner of the lobby. The sequence of visiting has a great impact on how you interpret the site. Every space of the memorial museum provides another context to help the visitor relate to the past and to other parts of the memorial museum. In order to see how this function works, we explore two possible routes. The first starts with the exhibition before entering the courtyard and the second one begins with the courtyard and continues with the garden.

The exhibition produces a linear historical narrative that juxtaposes the history of the persecution of the Jews with acts of resistance and survival and asks the visitor: what would you do? The past is represented from a distance and the site itself is made available for visual consumption through the window frame. It would make sense to start your visit here, since it provides a historical context that grounds the second part of the visit: looking at the material remnants of the site

and commemorating the Jews that were here incarcerated. The Hollandsche Schouwburg is presented as but one cog in a bigger and inhuman machine, where human agency and responsibility could possibly provide a way out. The scale model and map of Amsterdam, the map of concentration camps in Europe and the tram stop in front of the building embed this location in urban, national and international networks of persecution and destruction. The Hollandsche Schouwburg is presented as a synecdoche for the larger Nazi system of destruction. This presents itself at most iconic in situ sites of memory: their role within the material and historical geography is foregrounded in order to represent a larger historical process. The fragmentary nature of these sites, the fact that only a part of a complex, geographically and historically dispersed process took place here, is not a problem: the site functions as an indexical sign that points to something that by definition will always be absent. In their presentation, however, they do suggest that they may stand in for this larger narrative. For instance, the Anne Frank House and the Hollandsche Schouwburg are not killing sites themselves. However, the fate of the victims is implied, otherwise these would not be meaningful sites. Emphasizing the connections to a larger geographical network also happens at a killing site such as Auschwitz. The actual mass murder that took place here is framed within broader historical and geographical networks of persecution by the national pavilions.

An alternative is to first visit the courtyard, to contemplate the ruinous walls and the pylon. The courtyard itself does not offer a clear historical narrative, but rather represents the loss and absence of Jewish victims. It provides a sense of place, of ‘being there’ and frames this experience with an abstract memorial dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims. Due to the lack of information shields or other curatorial interventions, it is likely that people try to make sense of this site on their own terms. As we have seen before, every material detail may be interpreted as evidence of the past. If you have little knowledge of this site, it is tempting to interpret both the brick walls and the trees as traces of the past. Because this process is not completely inscribed in the monument, it depends on the willingness and perceptiveness of the visitor to interact with this site. When I guided people through the Schouwburg, I usually began in the courtyard, because in this space you can tell and show the history of this particular site quite well. Before I started, I often asked them what they saw. Most people focused on the authenticity of the walls: their demolition resonated with the overall destructive character of the war. However, it tells us little of the history of the deportation site, since this part of the building was not demolished until 1959. The courtyard places the history of this site in a commemorative setting and by employing the figure of the ruin, frames it in a larger narrative of destruction. This is juxtaposed by the
trees behind the stage, symbolizing the continuity of life, and the wooden tulips with messages attached, which demonstrate that the memory of the victims is actively kept alive by children and other visitors. As opposed to the exhibition, the overriding message is not agency and individual responsibility, but continuity and the importance of commemoration. Where the exhibition provides a historical context, the courtyard offers no answers but instead raises questions: who are the people we are commemorating? And what was the role of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in their persecution? What is similar to the exhibition is that the site itself is presented as a synecdoche of the destruction of war and tells us little of the particular site and the actual victims that were incarcerated here.

From this point there are several routing options. If you choose to go straight to the exhibition, it might answer some but not all of your questions, since it does not address the history of this particular site in great detail. This sequence is therefore not the most productive one. Another option is to go into the garden behind the gray stone wall. The problem is that this garden was designed as a restricted area. The doorway leading to the garden is intentionally invisible from most perspectives and if individual visitors do notice the narrow entrance they wonder if they may enter this backstage area. If they do, however, they find two large photographic displays that show details of how people were incarcerated (see figures 4.4 and 4.7). Here, the conditions during the deportation and the individual faces of some of the incarcerated Jews are displayed. The installations show people sitting in the sun, waving at the photographer, and people climbing over the fences, either into the neighboring gardens or back into the Schouwburg. Both these images go against the predominant view of a deportation site as a site of misery, isolated from its direct environment. The site neither stands in for the evil Nazi machine, nor for the demolition of war. The photographs might not answer all the questions visitors might have, but they do address the particular history of this site and give a face and name to at least one of the victims.

There is no singular coherent or linear narrative and the way people walk around influences how the narrative is presented to them. The question is then, if and how do visitors interact with these elements? If they follow the intention of the design, the figure of synecdoche enables them to connect this site to larger narratives and phenomena. On the other hand we have the latent and contingent indexicality of this site. The lack of contextualization in the courtyard stimulates people to transform material details into authentic traces of the past. Because the site is no longer intact as a former deportation site, visitors focus on small and isolated fragments that function as evidence of past events. An example is the bricked-up door in the walls of the former stage. I have had several discussions with visitors who thought that this door was bricked up when the theater was
turned into a deportation center. In reality this happened before the occupation began because it caused a draft. Another example is the group of trees in the garden: for many people I spoke to, these trees acted as symbolic witnesses to the crimes that took place here. One of my students felt cheated when I told her they were planted in 1962. Visitors connect these fragments with other, shared or personal narratives through synecdoche, making them stand in for larger processes, and through asyndeton, disconnecting these fragments from the museum’s narrative.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg enables people to create a meaningful and personal connection to the memory of the Shoah. One way of doing so is by leaving behind an object or message, a common practice at commemoration sites. In the courtyard there are two locations where this occurs. As we have seen before, not long after the memorial opened in 1962 a flower stand was introduced because visitors brought flowers, a good example of how a visiting practice was inscribed into the memorial. Till the present day, people lay stones and chestnuts on the base of the pylon, even if this was not its original intended use (see figure 4.11). The wooden tulips in the gallery of courtyard are part of an educational program, at the end of which children attach a personal message. Most of these express sadness, hope, ‘never again’, ‘never forget’ or peace symbols. Others address the history of deportation and in particular the Jewish identity of the victims (see figures 4.10

Figure 4.12. Photograph David Duindam
Although every message is unique, you can recognize the educational tools they were given – such as messages of tolerance and peace – with which they try to come to terms with the history of the Shoah. These messages are acts of commemoration and at the same time are exhibited for other visitors to see.

The wall of names is the other main commemorative space. Underneath the panels that hold 6,700 family names of the 102,000 individual Jews who were deported from the Netherlands are small alcoves that are often filled with objects such as painted stones, commemorative candles and other objects (see figures 4.17 and 4.18). According to its designer Victor Levie, these alcoves were not intended for this purpose:

Isn’t it great? I never thought of that. The alcoves are there because the staff needs to be able to clean the glass panels. If you would close this space, dust and moisture mount up. Three days after the opening two stones and a rose were placed. Only then did it occur to me that people commemorated individual victims, as I had designed this wall as a collective memorial.57

The practice of laying stones was not inscribed in the design, but invented afterwards by visitors. Levie argues you cannot anticipate how a space will be used.

57 Interview Levie.
‘It is satisfying when you see that something like that occurs. Apparently the design has enough openness to allow for such possibilities.’

The most important elements of the wall of names are the twelve panels that list thousands of names. Where the memorial in the courtyard symbolizes the victims through their absence, here every victim deported from the Netherlands is made present by his or her family name. Interestingly enough, the wall was envisioned by Levie as an abstract memorial. ‘The wall of names was intended to be as abstract as possible, whereas the photo-collage [of Jewish life on the opposite side of the first floor] was as concrete as possible.’ In practice however, the wall of names has more impact on visitors than the collage. The interplay of these two walls is not fully realized because there is barely a line of sight visible between these two exhibits. Furthermore, the collage remains abstract because there is no additional information about the people in the photographs. ‘It was a selection out of all the visual material that was available, we never intended for all the depicted

Figure 4. 14. Photograph David Duindam

---

58 Ibid.
people to have a name or a biography. This selection could be replaced by thousands of other possible collages, so it had to remain somewhat anonymous.\textsuperscript{59} Because the collage functions as a synecdoche, standing in for all Jews before, during and after the war, it remains abstract and provides little insight into the lives of these particular people.

The wall of names is an affective space because it provides a physical proximity to the victims of the Shoah. It was important for Levie that people would be able to touch the wall. ‘I saw a documentary about the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Some visitors would use a piece of paper and a pencil to copy a name by scratching over it. People always physically relate to a wall of names.’\textsuperscript{60} Visitors often touch the wall and photograph specific names to which they relate. As such, the names allow for the commemoration of specific victims. ‘In the first place, the wall was intended for people who were related to the names.’ In addition however, the wall also functions as a museum display for visitors who do not come with the intention to commemorate particular person. They search for names to which they can relate. Some non-Jewish visitors are surprised that a widespread Dutch family name such as De Vries, which is not a typical Jewish name, is listed. Children

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4_15.png}
\caption{Photograph David Duindam}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
sometimes see the maiden name of their mother and wonder if she might be Jewish.\textsuperscript{61} They do not realize that Jews have been integrated into Dutch society for several centuries now and that a family name does not necessarily determine one’s identity. The museum staff told me that these questions often lead to a discussion about the identity and integration of Jews in Dutch society.

As a space of commemoration, the wall of names provides room for commemorative practices, even if some of these are not inscribed in the original design. As a museum installation, the wall of names triggers visitors to think about the victims of the Shoah, but also leaves many questions unanswered about the individual victims. A solution has been sought in the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands, which is online since 2005 and has been constantly updated ever since.\textsuperscript{62} Every individual Jewish victim has a personal page that holds information, such as the date and place of birth and death, and a last-known address during the occupation. The Jewish Historical Museum manages the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4_16.jpg}
\caption{Photograph David Duindam}
\end{figure}

website and tries to supplement the personal pages with as much personal details

\textsuperscript{61} Conversation with Annemiek Gringold, May 25, 2010.
as possible. As a form of crowd sourcing, an additional website was created, the Jewish Monument Community, where family members, lay historians and other interested persons can exchange stories, documents and photographs of the victims. The information shared on this interactive platform is checked by the museum before it is published on the Digital Monument.

Digital humanities scholar Paul Arthur investigates the interaction between digital and physical memorials. According to him, ‘there is a trend towards an increased emphasis on spatialisation of digital environments for historical information.’ The first effort to make the Digital Monument accessible was the installation of two computer terminals that are still available to this day. Visitors can use these to find more information about individual victims. The design of these terminals is not integrated with the wall of names: when you sit down to use the computer, you turn your back to the wall. The use of these terminals is neither part of the script of the wall nor is it ritualized. As such, it does not differ much from using a computer at home.

In 2010, the IkPod was presented, a small device based on an amended IPod that visitors can place against the wall. It recognizes its location and displays the family name it is held in front of. By clicking on the family name, you are linked to the Digital Monument and can find information about individual victims. Different from the computer terminals, the IkPod only functions in relation to the wall of names. It elaborates on the commemorative practice of touching the wall and uses this to turn the static wall into a dynamic and interactive memorial. Due to technical issues, the device does not always run smoothly, which interferes with the commemorative function of the space. In theory however, the IkPod offers the opportunity to create a personal narrative. Arthur argues, ‘Digital history is more about creating pathways through information and interpretation than about achieving a whole picture or a final product.’ Storyteller and memory academic Anna Reading emphasizes that the choices people make using digital databases usually follow patterns that are gendered, socialized and connected to personal biographies. ‘This suggests that the extent to which visitors will actually extend or have challenged their knowledge and socially inherited memory of the Holocaust [...] may be limited.’ The names that visitors will look up are inescapably related to preexisting knowledge and their personal lives. The IkPod is not meant to

64 Ibid., 41.
challenge visitors to revisit their views on the Shoah, but allows them to form a personal connection to the otherwise abstract wall of names.

At the wall of names, visitors are invited to inscribe their biographies in order to produce an emotional and personal bond with this site. Aleida Assmann argued that an illusionary identification might conflate the status of the visitor and the victim. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg this is encouraged without any fear of such conflation. If anything, the visitor is asked to identify with the victims, to commemorate and remember them, look up information and personalize history rather than put it at a distance.

There is a gap between the construction of the memorial museum and visiting practices. As we have seen in chapter 3, two conflicting perspectives influenced the renovation of 1993: one of representational restraint out of respect for older generations; and one of exhibiting the past for educational purposes. This resulted in an exhibition that did not provide much historical context and was separated from the memorials on the first floor. This conflict does not play a major role in the way visitors interact with this site. Certain curatorial interventions simply do not come across, such as the routing or the photograph collage in the staircase. Other more abstract choices, such as the use of family names rather than individual names, invite visitors to invest this site with their own expectations and biographies. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, commemoration and exhibiting the past go hand in hand. The site has a fragmented character: its narrative, spatial layout and routing do not present a coherent whole and various scripts have been introduced over time, which interfere with each other. Visitors therefore need to construct their own understanding of the site and are encouraged by the promise of indexicality that transforms every detail into a potential trace of the past, a process based on an interaction between the site, museum technologies and the active performance of the visitor. The site has an openness that allows for a creative appropriation and imaginative self-inscription. In the following chapter we will look at how the Hollandsche Schouwburg relates to its direct environment and is embedded within larger urban networks.
Chapter 5: The Proliferation of Spatial Memory: Borders, Façades and Dwellings

‘God bless all six of you, thank you for all the joy you brought. If we do not meet again in the future, please think of us with the love of a child. Goodbye all six. Father and mother.’ Handwritten words are projected onto the façade of the Hollandsche Schouwburg (see figure 5.1). The art installation *Last Words* by Femke Kempkes and Machteld Aardse was part of the Amsterdam Light Festival that lasted from December 6, 2013 until January 19, 2014. The two Dutch artists employed correspondence that was sent from the Hollandsche Schouwburg by Jews who were awaiting deportation in 1942 and 1943. After the war, these historic documents became part of the collection of the Jewish Historical Museum. The abovementioned example was a handwritten letter by Herman and Mathilde Chits addressed to their children (see figure 5.2).
*Last Words* brought the inside of the memorial complex outside, temporarily transforming the otherwise blank façade into a spectacular projection screen, countering Robert Musil’s observation that there is nothing in the world as invisible as a monument.¹ Passersby were confronted with the history of this site, whether they wanted to or not. The artist included a letterbox where people could leave their comments. Some of the reactions demonstrated indignation, claiming it was disrespectful to openly exhibit such private and painful messages. However, the great majority of the people described the work as impressive and commended the project for keeping the memory of these people alive. An interesting consequence of the artwork’s public character was that it addressed a different crowd than the memorial museum usually does. People who visited the light festival and followed the *Illuminade* route, which led along eighteen different light artworks, were often struck by the serious and tragic nature of *Last Words*,

especially since most of the other installations were more lighthearted. In addition, people who coincidentally passed by the Hollandsche Schouwburg or exited the tram that stops directly in front of the building could hardly miss the illuminated art installation. Where the former group could have anticipated this artistic intervention, the latter was temporarily shaken out of its daily routine. As such, *Last Words* had a similar effect as Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine*, the stumbling-blocks that address people who are not consciously looking for a memorial, but rather come across and stumble over them unexpectedly. It resolved, even if only temporarily, an inherent problem of sites of memory such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg that become invisible after a while. The light projection intervened in the public space and expanded the memorial complex’ scope.

In the first chapter, we discovered that space has both a dynamic and stable character that allows people to imagine a personal connection to past events. In the previous chapter, the traces of the past, the affective experience of ‘being there’ and the imaginative self-inscription of the visitor played a central role in the construction of a meaningful relationship with the past inside the memorial complex itself. The premise of this chapter is that this process of meaning production is not encompassed by a site, but can spill over to neighboring structures and spaces, overriding the border between private and public realms. This spatial proliferation of memory can either become a problem of conflict and transgression or offer an opportunity of integrating this living memory with public and private spaces and bringing it into contact with the urban dweller. In the first section, the spatial proliferation of memory is discussed. In spite of the natural attempt to fix memory to one specific site, demarcations and borders do not stop this proliferation. Memory spills over to other neighboring structures, possibly leading to conflict and contestation as will become clear in the case of the town of Oświęcim. The interaction with neighbors is therefore a crucial aspect of memorial sites. In the second section, the interaction between the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the city dweller through the façade is discussed. Despite the fact the exterior of the building does not reflect its commemorative function; the façade provides an interface that brings passersby in contact with the memory of this site. This interaction remains limited however, and in the last section of this chapter we will investigate the collaborative project Open Joodse Huizen which strategically places this interaction with the public and local inhabitants at its core. The question is then whether these forms of spatial memory proliferation can be seen as the overtaking of public spaces at the expense of other practices, uses and memories, or whether these projects are temporary, non-invasive and offer room for negotiation.
1. Proliferation and Demarcation of Sites of Memory

The borders of sites of memory are unstable and permeable. According to political scientist Margaret Farrar, we cannot categorically distinguish private from public spaces when it comes to sites of memory: ‘in their slippage between public and private, porous landscapes contain and communicate both individual and social memory that influence thought and action at an almost subterranean level.’ It is precisely this slippage that can cause conflict and which needs to be addressed by memorial museums.

The Hollandsche Schouwburg is located in a densely populated city district, a fact that is emphasized by the photographic installations in the garden as described in chapter 4. The realization that the assembly of Jews was organized in the middle of a city, and not exclusively at remote transit camps, presents visitors with a dilemma: how was this possible? Why did the former neighbors allow this to happen? It might also raise some self-critical questions: what would I do? Did these people have any agency? The enlarged historic photograph by Lydia van Nobelen-Riezouw confronts them with an image of Gretha Velleman who is cheerfully waving at the photographer only several months before she was murdered in Auschwitz (see figure 4.1). The photograph suggests a direct connection between past and present: we are at the very spot where Gretha was standing, a historicist fallacy about which media theorist Siegfried Kracauer warns us.

When this large panel was introduced in 2010 as part of the Museum Night festival, it faced the neighboring residence from where the photograph was taken, thereby reenacting the visual relationship between Lydia, the photographer, and Greetje. After the festival, the panel was not removed but kept in place for visiting groups that were taken into the garden. When a neighbor filed a complaint, arguing he did not want to see the photograph on a daily basis, it was rotated 90 degrees. The photograph no longer faces the neighbor but rather the visitor directly upon entering the garden.

---

2 Margaret E. Farrar, “Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory,” Political Research Quarterly 64, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 731. She borrows the term porosity from Walter Benjamin, who described the city of Naples as a theater of memory, Walter Benjamin, One-Way Street, and Other Writings (London: NLB/Verso, 1979), 167–176.

3 ‘On the whole the advocates of such historicist thinking believe that they can explain any phenomenon purely in terms of its genesis. That is, they believe at the very least that they can grasp historical reality by reconstructing the series of events in their temporal succession without any gaps.’ Siegfried Kracauer, “Photography,” Critical Inquiry 19, no. 3 (April 1, 1993): 424–425.

4 A complaint was filed on 25 November 2010, arguing that the enlarged photograph with a bright blue frame was too visible, which the neighbor experienced as unpleasant. The director of the museum had a meeting with the neighbor and decided that the installation would be repositioned. Personal communication with Joël Cahen and Annemiek Gringold, June 19, 2014.
The story of the rotated panel has become part of the narrative of the tour guides and appeared in a weblog in 2012, in which it was directly linked to the issue of passive collaboration:

The photograph [of Gretha Velleman] is not placed correctly, but was rotated. Not because it could not be positioned as such, but rather because the neighbor did not want to constantly see the Jewish girl from his balcony. This makes you wonder. ‘Wir haben es nicht gewusst.’ Or maybe it is a continuation of something else: we did not want to know.’\(^5\) The visitor asserts that the correct placement involves the reenactment of the angle from which the photograph was taken. The current position, in which the visitor sees the photograph directly rather than having to walk to one corner of the garden, is interpreted as a displacement caused by the unwillingness of the neighbor to be confronted with the past.

In its initial position, both the visitor and neighbor are addressed by the photograph, however fundamentally different. Where the former visits the Schouwburg, the latter is interpellated on a daily basis which can be experienced as a disturbance and even an accusation.\(^6\) Anthropologist Karin Barber uses literary theorist Mikhail Bakthin’s concept of addressivity to argue that any kind of coherent complex of signs produces a specific kind of public. ‘The addressivity of texts – their ways of “turning to” an audience – not only reveals cultural assumptions about how people exist together in society, but also plays a part in constituting audiences as particular kinds of collectivity.’\(^7\) The photographic


\(^6\) The term interpellation was used by Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser who argues that state ideology constitutes concrete individuals as subjects by addressing them in a certain manner. For him, this ideology has been naturalized and internalized by individuals. He gives an example of a police officer who calls out hey, you there, without you knowing he was specifically hailing you. ‘Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject. […] Naturally for the convenience and clarity of my little theoretical theatre I have had to present things in the form of a sequence, with a before and an after, and thus in the form of a temporal succession. There are individuals walking along. Somewhere (usually behind them) the hail rings out: ‘Hey, you there!’ One individual (nine times out of ten it is the right one) turns round, believing/suspecting/knowing that it is for him, i.e. recognizing that ‘it really is he’ who is meant by the hailing. But in reality these things happen without any succession. The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.’ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation),” in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174–175. Althusser’s focus on state ideology has been criticized, for instance by Michel Foucault who argues Althusser neglects to investigate how for instance the body is effected by power, see Michel Foucault and Colin Gordon, Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 58. However, the notion of interpellation is still relevant for our case, especially since we consider how public objects address both people who come to visit and those who are confronted with it unintentionally.

installation was initially turned towards the neighbor and juxtaposed – almost conflated – with the proximity of the neighboring houses in the current and historical situation. It therefore is not surprising that the neighbor wanted it removed. His balcony does not face a busy street, but rather a quiet courtyard garden: not entirely private, but also not completely public.

The decision by the museum management to concede to the neighbor’s wish to rotate the photograph was an act of diplomacy. In doing so, the museum directorate acknowledged the fact that the people who live in the direct vicinity are also affected by the actions, designs and events organized at this memorial site. For years, it has been the museum’s policy to take the neighborhood into consideration: before special events, such as the Yom HaShoah and May 4th commemorations, neighbors are informed by mail to ensure there is no inconvenience either way. Different local neighborhood committees have been involved with the May 4th commemoration. When there are disturbances, these are often experienced as transgressions by commemorating visitors. In 1998, a couple of bare-chested students observed the Yom HaShoah commemoration while hanging from their window. A NIW-reporter resented their disrespectful behavior and confronted the residents, who showed little interest in the matter.

In general, the historical embedment of the neighborhood and the policy of the museum’s management to take neighbors’ wishes into consideration prevent major conflicts. At other sites of Shoah memory, the interaction with the direct environment has been cause for conflict. Demarcation commonly is an important regulatory element: beyond these lines, different rules apply. However, as we have seen above, memory tends to spill over, especially when sensitive issues such as passive collaboration or appropriation of victimhood play a role. An example of a highly problematic form of memory spill can be found in the town of Oświęcim. Sociologist Geneviève Zubrzycki demonstrates how national and religious debates continue to flare up around the delimitation of Auschwitz and takes the eight-meter high papal cross just outside the grounds of Auschwitz as a starting point for her study. She argues that the actual geography of the camp sites around the town causes many controversies. According to her, there is a continuous struggle

---

8 According to the commemoration brochure, the 4th of May commemoration of 2014 was organized by the Plantage-Weesperbuurtvereniging, the Vereniging Vrienden van de Plantage, the IVKO-school that was formerly located across the street, and the Stichting Hollandsche Schouwburg. In 1987 and 1992 it was organized in collaboration with the local 4 & 5 mei Comite Watergraafsmeer (the greater city district to which the Plantagebuurt belonged), see De Waarheid April 18, 1987 and NIW May 1, 1992. For more on the local character of this commemoration, see chapter 3.
9 The inappropriate behavior during commemorations was already a topic in the early years after the liberation. The organization of former political prisoners, Expogé, had to enforce such behavior through ‘commemorative education’, see Van Ginkel, Rondom de stilte, 205.
between non-Jewish Poles and Jewish Poles and other groups defending the memory of Auschwitz pertaining to the borders of the camp:

Poles clearly demarcate the physical site of Auschwitz I from its surroundings, Oświęcim, whereas for many Jews the containment of “Auschwitz,” the symbolic site of the Shoah, within the physical space occupied by the former camp Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II Birkenau is not appropriate. Since the entire area is filled with Jewish ashes, “Auschwitz” extends well beyond the physical walls of Auschwitz I; it spreads its sacredness into every corner of Oświęcim, which Poles in turn regard as an unfair imposition.11

The Dutch artist Hans Citroen and his wife, the Polish architect Barbara Starzyńska, demonstrate a similar friction in their exploration of Auschwitz / Oświęcim. In this case, the West-European observer Citroen, whose grandfather was murdered in Auschwitz, confronts local inhabitants who grow flowers on former camp grounds and use barracks as workshops for cars. His indignation contrasts sharply with the apparent indifference of locals who seem ill-informed and disinterested in the stories Citroen brings with him. They interview the director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, who claims that given the fact there were more than forty sub-camps, it would impossible to fill the entire landscape with signs.12 Starzyńska, who grew up in this area, argues that she was brought up with the idea these two imagined landscapes were completely separated realms: ‘Auschwitz is the camp and Oświęcim is the city’.13 However, after decades of examining her hometown, she comes to the conclusion that it is impossible to distinguish between the two.

In both these works, the separation of the historic site Auschwitz and the current town Oświęcim is a key strategy to inhabit the landscape after the war. Delimiting the site is essential in order to maintain a livable environment for local inhabitants. At times, however, this conflicts with the notion of the Shoah as an event that cannot be delimited, the Shoah as concentrationary universe or planet Auschwitz where fundamentally different norms apply.14 Zubrzycki argues that

13 Ibid., 24.
14 The French Buchenwald survivor David Rousset coined the term concentrationary universe in 1946, see David Rousset, L’univers concentrationnaire (Paris: Éditions du Pavois, 1946). This term was picked up by Hannah Arendt in her work on totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966). In his testimony during the Eichmann trial, Auschwitz survivor and writer Yehiel Dinur, who published under the name Ka-Tzetnik, used the term planet Auschwitz to describe the total rupture between his incarceration and life before and after. Omer Bartov argues that throughout his oeuvre, Dinur in the end came to the conclusion Auschwitz was not another planet, but part of this world; however, this is not how his work is usually received. Omer
non-Jewish Poles try to enclose the site by relying on physical demarcations; while for many Jews Auschwitz signifies a universe in itself that cannot be confined. It might be more productive to analyze this conflict in terms of local inhabitants opposed to outside visitors, rather than non-Jewish versus Jewish Poles, as Citroen and Starzyńska have done. Their project raises other issues, for instance that of the patronizing West-European and American perspectives.

In situ sites such as Auschwitz are more than mere representations of the past. They have a dual nature as indexical markers that both embody and represent the past, as discussed in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, the impossibility of demarcating Auschwitz relates to the well-known argument that the Shoah cannot be fully represented. For writer Elie Wiesel and filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, the total destruction of the Nazi persecution can never be properly represented since nothing can ever stand in place of the unimaginable event itself. Literary researcher Andreas Huyssen puts it somewhat more nuanced. ‘Memory as representation, as making present, is always in danger of collapsing the constitutive tension between past and present [...].’

This conundrum is at the core of a lot of contemporary art, memorials and architecture related to the Shoah. These often do not aim to fully represent, but rather, in the words of Jean-François Lyotard, to make present ‘the existence of something unrepresentable’. Here, we turn to the unique character of sites of memory. According to philosopher Dylan Trigg, such sites are negative spaces that absorb the places that were previously there and are ‘defined not only by what has ceased to exist, but also what cannot be accommodated spatially.’ For him, sites of memory do not display the past, but rather the absence of that past, an unbridgeable void between past and present that cannot be overcome.


For a critical review, see Anika Walke, “Review of Citroen, Hans; Starzyńska, Barbara, Auschwitz-Oświęcim: The Hidden City in the East” (H-Urban, H-Reviews, June 2012).


On the representation of the Shoah, see Friedländer, Probing the Limits of Representation; Dominick LaCapra, Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Berel Lang, Holocaust Representation. Art within the Limits of History and Ethics (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

Huyssen, Present Pasts, 10.


The impossibility of fully representing the past has been discussed in the previous chapter when we looked at the category of the index. According to Van Alphen, Armando’s art circles around that which cannot be represented through a continuous or contiguous relationship. Thus, the footprint makes a person present through signaling his or her absence by encircling the space once occupied by an actual foot. The indexical sign does not aim at standing-in for that what it refers to, collapsing past and present; but is based on a spatially and materially defined relationship with the past. At sites of memory, we are dealing with latent and contingent indexicality, traces of the past that remain yet to be mediated and performed in the present, a process that requires the active engagement and imagination of the visitor. These traces or sites are meaningful because they were once contiguous with historical events. They cannot actively tell the entire story of the past, but function rather as neighboring bystanders, or silent witnesses. This relationship is a spatially defined negative of what is no longer there. It is not surprising that Armando spoke of the guilty landscape: these traces cannot speak or bear witness to the horrible past and even cover up the past by literally growing over sites of memory. However, this approach conflates the spatial and temporal continuity of the index, as if these traces could provide direct access to the past because of an authentic and uninterrupted link to that past. This relationship to the past is always already mediated; the index is a sign that does not replace its referent. It is not the index that bears witness, but the visitor or the observer that bears witness through the index.

The indexicality of sites of memory is not predetermined, and therefore delimited, by an unbroken link to past events, but rather enables the active construction of a spatially defined relationship with the past in the present. This means that this process cannot be easily restricted or predicted: almost everything at sites of memory can be transformed into meaningful traces of the past, and since the site itself is negatively defined by what no longer exists, its borders are potentially limitless and often the subject of negotiation and conflict. This certainly has been the case at Auschwitz. For some people, delimiting the site conjures up notions of belittling and relativism and the continuation of any life in the near vicinity of the death camps can be seen as sacrilegious. Clearly distinguishing the historic camps from the current town is seen by some to be an attempt of finding closure and putting the history of destruction at a distance. However, sites are more than mere representations or palimpsests to be read.\textsuperscript{21} They are actual places that enable divergent usages and practices.

The conflicts discussed above are based on a model of competition where only one interpretation of the meaning and usage of a specific site is allowed.

However, in spite of the seemingly stable nature of space, it is precisely its polysemic, layered and open character that allows for memories to attach to sites. Michael Rothberg describes two models of memory politics, competitive and multidirectional memory. The former is based on the logic of scarcity and strongly connected to identity politics: ‘many people assume that the public sphere in which collective memories are articulated is a scarce resource and that the interaction of different collective memories within that sphere takes the form a zero-sum struggle for preeminence.’ He suggests to look at memory as a more dynamic and multidirectional process that is ‘subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative.’

Rothberg stresses that both identity and the public sphere are constructed in this process:

> pursuing memory’s multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions but actually come into being through their dialogical interaction with others; both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction.

The notion of multidirectionality might suggest that there is no competition or conflict, and that issues over the use of space and interpretations of the past are all discursive practices without real consequences. In practice however, both memories and other interests clash in the public sphere. It is important to leave open the possibility of competing memories and conflicting uses of public space in order to prevent the appropriation by one party that imposes its own narrative. Conflicts about the demarcation of sites of memory can often be framed as conflicts about private and public space. If we return to the neighbor who wanted the photograph removed, his argument was that he did not want to see the photograph on a daily basis when opening his curtains. For him, his view was a private privilege disturbed by this large panel. The museum initially argued that the photograph was placed on their property and needed to face this private home in order to demonstrate from where the picture was taken. As a consequence, the panel appropriated this house as part of the public museum narrative, transgressing the border between private and public space. By complying with the neighbor’s request, the museum acknowledged its responsibility towards its neighbors.

---

22 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 2–3. This is reminiscent of Certeau’s concept of poaching as the active interpretation and borrowing of the ideas and properties of others at the basis of everyday life. ‘Everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others.’ Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xii. See also chapter 12, “Reading as Poaching”.

2. The Façade and the Passerby: Dissonance and Interaction

Rather than demarcating and closing a site of memory, borders function as spheres of interaction with the direct environment. Memory is not encompassed by a site, but instead proliferates, transgressing the commonsensical boundary between private and public space. As we have seen in the previous section, this proliferation can easily lead to conflicts. However, it can also provide an opportunity to address a broader public and open up a dialogue with both neighbors and passersby. In the previous section we looked at the relationship between the courtyard of the memorial and the adjacent private homes. In this section we study the façade of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and how it interacts with passersby on the street.

Little remains of the original theater built in 1892. The largest part of the building has been changed beyond recognition. When it became a memorial museum in 1962, the former theater function remained part of the design through historic superimposition, as we have seen in the previous chapters. The courtyard, constructed in 1962, mimicked the former theater hall; the view from the window on the first floor was augmented in 1993 with a transparent curtain imprinted with a photograph of the former hall in 1930; and the garden overlaps with the former backstage area and has a similar contrasting function in relation to the rest of the memorial museum. The former theater functions are employed as a metaphor in order to demonstrate the absence and loss of Dutch Jewry and commemorate the

![Figure 5. 3. Photograph Mara Jong Kon Chin](image)
deportation period.

The most prominent material remnant of the original theater, however, is the façade (see figure 5.3). Strict building regulations and the monumental status of the Schouwburg have prohibited radical changes to the exterior. Nonetheless, there have been alterations over time. Before the war, the partially brick façade was painted white. After the war, five large statues on top of the building and a baluster were removed. When the memorial was constructed in 1962, the front doors were replaced with an open fence, which in turn was replaced by glass doors in 1993. In spite of these changes, the building’s appearance remains theater-like rather than a memorial museum. The fact that the building continues to carry the old name of the theater reinforces this. This begs the question whether the white façade, which people might associate with high culture and entertainment, does not conflict with the commemorative function of this site of memory. In order to explore this question, we will look at how the façades of buildings relate to their urban environment and how this process allows for both an accretion of dissonant functions and memories and affords different uses, performances and interpretations by artists and passersby.

In chapter 1.3 we have seen that there exists a tension between the stabilizing potential and the performative character of an urban space. On the one hand, city landmarks such as St. Paul’s, to use to Halbwachs’ example, or the Eiffel tower, offer a fixed framework of understanding and orienting oneself in a city. On the other hand, these landmarks do not predetermine the experience of city dwellers, since they do not orient themselves merely on the basis of known sites but may also interpret the façade of buildings in order to understand with what they are dealing. In his description of walking through London, Halbwachs makes the following observation: ‘An architect directs my attention to the character and arrangement of city buildings.’ This refers to the 19th century architectural conception that a character of a building should correspond to its true function. A prison should look austere and fortified, while a house of culture, such as a theater, must trigger another, more cultural set of associations. The façade is a building’s main interface and enables the city dweller to interpret and understand the function of a building at first glance. The cityscape can be seen as an architectural arrangement that allows people to orient themselves and interact with the urban built environment.

Urban planner Kevin Lynch used this idea to investigate the mental images of cities held by its citizens. His work concentrates ‘on one particular visual quality:

---

24 For a full account of the architectural changes, see Krabbe, “Spreken tot de bedroefden.”
the apparent clarity or ‘legibility’ of the cityscape. By this we mean the ease with which its parts can be recognized and can be organized into a coherent pattern. The process of reading a city is based on both landmarks and generic structures. According to Lynch people reduce a city to such a legible pattern in order to feel safer. People understand that this image is a reductive representation, and it is (ideally) an open structure, adaptable to change and communicable to others. The idea of the legible cityscape describes the initial interaction between the city and its visitors and is based in an almost modernist belief in functional city planning. In practice however, the city is not a text that is laid out in order to be read, but rather an ever-changing realm of potential, yet-to-be-invented interactions and functionalities. What happens when the legibility of a façade fails?

The façade of the Hollandsche Schouwburg has the appearance of a theater or another cultural institution. City dwellers who do not know the history of this site and after finding out that it is a Shoah memorial museum are sometimes shocked by this dissonance; which begs the question whether the façade properly represents the building’s function. However, changing the façade would entail destroying an iconic image. This is a central problem when we look at urban sites of memory that had different functions before, during and after the event that is being remembered, such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg. You cannot erase these other functions without removing a crucial part of the site’s history. The consequence can be a sharp dissonance between an initial reaction to a building and a subsequent realization of its ‘true’ function.

Lynch’ legible cityscape is based on a static relationship between the built environment and the city dweller. Another way to look at the interaction between a façade and the passerby is in terms of affordance: the passerby can interpret the façade in unforeseen ways. Affordance is used in technology studies as a middle-ground between determinism (the possible applications of an artifact is determined by its design) and social constructivism (the use of an artifact is determined by its user). Sociologist Ian Hutchby explains:

Affordances are functional in the sense that they are enabling, as well as constraining, factors in a given organism’s attempt to engage in some activity; for instance, walking, or hiding, photocopying a document, and so on. Certain objects, environments or artefacts have affordances which enable the particular activity while others do not. [...] The relational aspect, by contrast, draws our attention to the way that the affordances of an object may be different for one species than for another. Water surfaces

28 ‘A highly [legible] city in this peculiar sense would seem well formed, distinct, remarkable; it would invite the eye and the ear to greater attention and participation. [...] Such a city would be one that could be apprehended over time as a pattern of high continuity with many distinctive parts clearly interconnected.’ Ibid., 10.
do not have the affordance of walk-on-ability for a lion or a crocodile, but they do for an insect waterboatman. Affordances can be learned: an amateur photographer is unable to use a camera in more sophisticated ways than a professional photographer. And affordances can emerge after something was constructed: the television and telephone cables that are now used to access the Internet were in existence even before the internet ever existed. Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and philosopher Brian Massumi apply this concept to buildings. ‘The façade of a building is [...] an affordance.’ They argue that most people know how to interact with generic types of buildings, but at the same time this relationship needs to be developed and actualized in practice:

The relation always arrives [...] in advance of its next sequential unfolding.

In other words, its arrival is a promised event that has yet to occur: an

---

appointment with a known by not yet actually afforded outcome. To afford oneself of the outcome is to eventuate the relationship, to perform it, to follow through with its actual step-by-step unfolding.\(^{31}\)

The relationship between a building and a passerby may be conceived of as a durational unfolding and not an act of properly ‘reading’ a façade and connecting it to the correct function of the building. This resonates with the notion of latent and contingent indexicality that is based on a similarly emerging relationship between an in situ memorial museum and the imaginative investment on the part of the visitor.

By separating the façade from the function of a building we can better understand how to cope with possible dissonance. The façade suggests possible ways of interaction, for instance to maintain a comfortable distance or to come closer. It does not necessarily need to predetermine all forms or interaction, and certainly not the function of the building, since this can change over time. In the context of the original function of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the theater façade was designed to draw people closer in order to look at the program next to the entrance. Here, the memorial museum has placed bright blue posters with the motto ‘Geen voorstelling van te maken’, translated as ‘scenes beyond imagination’ and a photograph of people waiting for their deportation (see figure 5.4).\(^{32}\) Victor Levie who designed these posters told me: ‘There was a clear need from within the Jewish community not to make this monument too visible. It is quite present already, this façade, very different from the memorial in the Wertheimpark that is flat and horizontal.’ He was commissioned to find a solution for the traditional poster holders. ‘I thought this was a good idea. To reconstruct the entire façade would have been too drastic. It needs to be a balance between a theater and a deportation site.’ His idea was that the two posters holders were visible from the other side of the street and the curious would actually cross the street to take a better look. ‘Some people must think, what kind of play is on? This confusion is productive.’\(^{33}\) The passerby expects to find a theater program but instead is confronted with intolerable cruelty that would not easily be represented on stage. The posters make clever use of the information affordance of the façade in order to enhance rather than diminish the dissonance between the theater and memorial. The relationship between the façade and the passerby needs to be performed in time and space and therefore surpasses the model of legibility.

---

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) The motto plays with the double meaning of the Dutch word voorstelling, which means both a theatrical performance and imagination. According to Annemiek Gringold, the building official employed to enforce the code regarding the external appearance of buildings initially did not allow these posters to be placed because the color deviated too much with historical façade and the alderman of Cultural Affairs Carolien Gehrels had to intervene to make this possible. Interview with Annemiek Gringold, August 6, 2014.

\(^{33}\) Interview Levie.
The new posters use an affordance which the old façade offered in order to communicate its new commemorative function without radically changing the external appearance of the building. The façade is not a medium that transmits a static message but rather a dynamic interface between the building and passersby. In the winter of 2013 and 2014, artists Machteld Aardse and Femke Kempkes used the façade in a different and novel way to bring the inside of the memorial outside and to trigger an interaction with the city dweller with their light projection Last Word. Aardse and Kempkes were approached by the Jewish Historical Museum to develop an artwork for the Hollandsche Schouwburg as part of the Amsterdam Light Festival. I interviewed Aardse, who was especially touched by the stories of Jewish victims who tried to continue their lives under the most deplorable conditions:

When we visited the exhibition, we saw these short letters by people who had been incarcerated in the Hollandsche Schouwburg and tried to communicate what was happening to them. Jaunty notes, full of hope and love. We now know what happened afterwards. Those letters hit home, you can place yourself in the author’s position. [...] Even though they are disconcerting, the letters carry hope to their neighbors, friends and family.34

Figure 5. Photograph Andrea Jutta Röell

After their visit they came up with the idea to project a selection of these letters, together with fragments from diaries, onto the façade. The selection of twelve letters and fragments was made in collaboration with curator Annemiek Gringold.

34 Interview Machteld Aardse, July 16, 2014.
The texts were prepared for projection with the help of the graphic editing program Photoshop. ‘The letters are authentic, but we needed to manipulate them in order for them to work on the façade. For instance, we inverted black and white. And then there was a tree to consider, […] we had to take the leaves into account.’ Some of the letters had been dictated and typed out at the Hollandsche Schouwburg when it was used as deportation center (see figure 5.5); others were handwritten, both in the Schouwburg and elsewhere (see figures 5.1 and 5.6). Aardse liked the combination. The typed letters were more legible site-specific, but the handwritten fragments were more direct. ‘One letter was the most gruesome of all. It reads ‘I have taken cyanide’, it is a suicide note. You see scrawling, the difficult and stress of the moment. The letter is very hard to read and almost becomes a drawing instead of a letter.’

Gringold wanted to add something to the projection to make sure the installation would not become too abstract and to ensure the memory of the actual victims. As a compromise, they added a series of portraits of victims in the alcoves underneath the larger projection. The slides did not run parallel to the letters and some of them did not contain a portrait. ‘We wanted the public to realize that there were many other people besides the authors of these notes.’

Compared to the posters, the projection was spectacular and brought the inside of the memorial outdoors. Where the posters try to draw people in, the memorial museum was closed during the projections and people could not go inside. Last Words addressed people who happened to pass by more actively than

\[35\] Ibid.
\[36\] Ibid.
the posters do. ‘People will think, “what is this?” and when they see the date next to the message, they will realize what it is. We hoped that people would take the time to stop and perhaps even share stories in front of the building, which turned out to be the case.’\textsuperscript{37} The façade itself was used as a projection screen, but because another public was addressed – not only the mindful and curious city dweller who notices the posters, but also people who were not paying attention to their environment – it made the Schouwburg more visible. The installation provided a platform for sharing stories:

Throughout the process, people constantly approached us with their own stories about the Holocaust and the Hollandsche Schouwburg. [...] I was talking to an architect who was working in the building opposite to the Schouwburg, who was very moved by our project. He told me that his own father had picked up letters that were thrown out of the trains near Vught in order to send them along to the addressees. And here we were, working with these letters.\textsuperscript{38}

![Image of handwritten notes]

\textbf{Figure 5. 7.} Copyright Femke Kempkes and Machteld Aardse, \textit{Last Words} (2013)

Visitors also shared stories in front of the Schouwburg. In order to collect these, the artists placed a mailbox for reactions. The artists have shared 75 copies of notes with me, some with several reactions (for an impression, see the collages of figures 5.7 and 5.8). Judging by these messages, visitors were mostly impressed by the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
project. Many of them were already familiar with the history of this site, but nonetheless heavily struck by the projection. Some of the letters contained similar language to the messages attached to the tulips in the courtyard, discussed in chapter 4.3, such as an appeal ‘never again’ and ‘never forget’. One note related it directly to the conflict in Rwanda and Syria. Another person found the projections too public and disrespectful, arguing that these letters belong in the archive.

*Last Words* made use of two indexical markers: the Schouwburg and the letters. The façade of the immobile theater was used as a projection screen. Because the slides were adjusted to its irregular shapes, it was not reduced to a neutral and flat surface. It had an active role in the illuminating artwork and provided a sense of ‘being there’. The letters were indexically linked to their authors and especially the handwritten notes are bodily traces of the moment of writing.39 One of the visitors left the following note behind:

> It takes some moments getting used to. [Unreadable handwritten text.] But when a typed letter appears, something magical happens. Words are simultaneously legible and illegible. They seem to disappear constantly. The [...] physical reality of the Schouwburg seems to provide a bridge to the disappearing hope of the author.40

---

39 Van Alphen argues that the postcards Armando uses are indexical traces because of contiguity between the card and the author. Van Alphen, *Armando*, 12.

40 Note 10, provided by the artists.
The artwork set up a playful circulation of indexical signs and offered viewers the
opportunity to participate in this circulation. The fact that the letters were highly
mediated and modified and the façade was used as a projection screen did not
prohibit people from imagining a connection with the history of the site and the
authors of the letters. Their own participation however was restricted to leaving a
message, but there was no follow-up: the circulation of letters ended with the mail
box. In the next section we will look at a memory project that is more collaborative,
the Open Joodse Huizen.

3. The House as Index, the House as Dwelling: Collaborative
Memory Projects

In the first section of this chapter we investigated the porous borders of sites of
memory that due to the encircling character of indexicality play a crucial role in the
production and mediation of memory. Sites of memory interact with their direct
neighbors and therefore conflicting interests may arise. In this section, we will turn
our attention to other types of memory projects: interventions in the public sphere
that employ the latent indexicality of urban spaces. Rather than looking at how
memory proliferates from one central site, we will study decentralized projects that
use the entire cityscape or landscape: the Stolpersteine, Shimon Attie’s light
installations and the Open Joodse Huizen project. Since these projects have no
spatial boundaries, the issue regarding the interaction with local inhabitants is even
more crucial. All these projects raise serious issues concerning the possible
tensions between the house as a public indexical marker of the Shoah and as a
private dwelling.

Gunter Demnig’s Stolpersteine commemorates the victims of the Shoah in
front of the buildings in which they lived before their deportation with engraved
brass plaques measuring 10 x 10 centimeters. Currently, there are almost 50,000
memorial plaques placed throughout Europe, emblazoned with the names,
birthdates and places where victims were murdered. The plaques turn these
buildings into indexical signs by pointing out the absence and therefore the murder
of their former inhabitants. Entire neighborhoods can be transformed into a
network of memorials. Initially, several citizens and city administrations were
reluctant, arguing that the Shoah was memorialized enough already and that these
stones could be dangerous for the flow of pedestrian traffic. Several homeowners
argued that the price of their property would be diminished and that they did not

41 The stones can be found in Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Czech
Republic, Russia, Croatia, France, Poland, Slovenia, Italy, Norway, the Ukraine, Slovakia, Switzerland
want to burden their children. However, as the project grew, this reluctance was no longer voiced publically. Munich is the only large city where Stolpersteine are not allowed, because Charlotte Knobloch, former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, argued it was offensive to walk on the names of the dead. In other German cities, new dedications are in general supported by local politicians and find little formal resistance.

Anthropologist Rob van Ginkel inventoried several reactions to Stolpersteine in the Netherlands, where most initiatives were taken by homeowners who want to memorialize the history of their own residence. Though most people were enthusiastic about the project, others criticized the fact people and pets could walk over these names. One person is quoted as saying ‘Why should I be confronted with this all the time? Would you want to have such a sign in front of your house?’ Van Ginkel argues that some of these critics applied the Not in My Backyard-principle: they support the commemoration of the Shoah, but not if it intrudes in their daily lives. However, reducing their objections to this principle provides only a limited understanding of the motives of these people and makes it easy to discard their objections as selfish. As we have seen in the previous section, people find it difficult to live in a space that is simultaneously a memorial. Stolpersteine transforms a building into an indexical sign that points to the absence, and execution, of its previous inhabitants. Objections should therefore not be discarded but taken seriously. A more productive approach would be to involve local inhabitants in these types of memory projects.

An important characteristic of the Stolpersteine project is that it turns both the house and the passersby who ‘stumble’ over these plaques into passive observers of that unspeakable crime. This passivity can be experienced as highly problematic: what can you as a passerby do with this minimal information? The script of the stone inculcates you as a witness but offers no ritual form to help cope with this situation. Being condemned to passivity can be experienced as an accusation: not Armando’s guilty landscape, but the guilty passerby who does not know how to act.


Memory specialist Kirsten Harjes argues that the Stolpersteine provide little context. This can frustrate local inhabitants who, in turn, may be annoyed by such an intrusion:

The stumbling stones have to strike a difficult balance between being a public monument, i.e. a public, official piece of collective memory standing for the dead and for the city's wish to commemorate the dead, and being located in the semi-private space right in front of people's doorways. [...] Forcing people of various ages and ethnicities to integrate the memory of the Holocaust into their daily lives – or to actively ignore it – does not necessarily have positive effects [...].'

Harjes argues that, these small memorials should be contextualized. Dedication ceremonies and commemorations can provide more information for local inhabitants, as well as brochures, websites and smartphone applications. Rather than making city dwellers stumble, taking them out of their daily flow, and confront them with the past without giving them a means to properly commemorate, they should be actively involved and given the opportunity to enter into a meaningful relationship with the past. Even if this is not possible on a permanent basis, annual commemorations could provide such a platform.

The permanency of the Stolpersteine can be experienced as an intrusion in the urban space and daily lives of citizens. Conversely, temporary installations can also cause conflict. Between 1991 and 1996, the American artist Shimon Attie constructed a series of light installations throughout Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, in which he projected historic photographs onto façades and other surfaces in different cities. When Attie first arrived in Berlin during 1991, he observed an unexpected absence of the murdered Jews, while his imagination was already repopulating the city streets. He searched for historical documents and projected them throughout Berlin. These installations were subsequently photographed and circulated as independent artworks. James Young argues that his work reflects on the notion of mediation and public space:

Attie recognizes at the outset that public spaces, even the dreariest in our day-to-day lives, also reflect meaning and significance back to us. They also

---


become ‘art’ in the eyes of the beholders, at once framed and composed by our reflective gaze.\textsuperscript{48}

One of these places was the train station of Dresden where Attie projected portraits of murdered Jewish victims onto the literal means of deportation. Here, postwar Germans were confronted with the memory of an American Jewish artist. For his 1995 project in Amsterdam, \textit{The Neighbor Next Door}, he used projected films that were clandestinely made by Jews in hiding. In these films, we see Nazi soldiers and collaborators marching along the street, observed by Dutch bystanders. The films were projected from the windows of an apartment on the Prinsengracht onto the pavement, staging the historical perspective of the hiding Jews and confronting today’s inhabitants with an image of passive collaboration.

During the installation of one of his projections in Berlin, Attie encountered a furious resident and they had this exchange of words:

[he] came running out of the building shouting that his father had bought the building ‘fair and square’ from Mister Jacobs in 1938. ‘And what happened to this Mr. Jacobs?’ Attie asked the man. ‘Why, of course, he was a multi-millionaire and moved to New York.’ Of course.\textsuperscript{49}

The incident was filmed and broadcast on national television. Though it is tempting to dismiss the resident’s arguments as anti-Semitic and ignorant, they point to the importance people attach to their direct environment. Attie himself argues that his ‘point was to intervene in a public space and project right onto those space’.\textsuperscript{50}

However, the public nature of these spaces is not simply defined. Harjes argues that memorial projects such as the Stolpersteine transgress the borders of public and private spaces. Her claim that, aside from the legality of the matter, the fact that people experience pavements in front of their residences as semi-private spaces; is crucial to her argument. The accusatory tone of Attie’s project that tries to break into the daily lives of local residents and confront them through the juxtaposition of past and present will move some people; but also aggravate others who dismiss his artworks as provocative. As such, there is little room for people to critically interact with Attie’s projects. Projecting a photograph onto the façade of a house without informing the resident is a rather aggressive strategy, especially when the subsequent confrontation is filmed, broadcast and as such made part of the performance.

The abovementioned projects transgress the notions of public and (semi-)private space. The interaction between these is central to the organization of society and intricately related to political thought. As urbanism specialist Ali

\textsuperscript{48} James E. Young, \textit{At Memory’s Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 70.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 72.

\textsuperscript{50} Attie quoted by Young, ibid., 67.
Madanipour argues, the private and public sphere are interdependent in spite of the fact that these two are often presented as each other’s opposite. The boundaries between these two realms are often ambiguous and contested, which can lead to contestation and conflict. According to urbanism specialist Martijn de Waal, the sharp and essentialist distinction between public and private spaces as the foundation of societal exchange is crucial in the political conceptions of Hannah Arendt, Richard Sennett and Jürgen Habermas. According to De Waal these three describe the public sphere as rational and impersonal where strict protocols and rational arguments should overcome private identities and personal motivations. For Sennett it is precisely a certain remoteness that allows city-dwellers to live together. Other thinkers, such as Marshall Berman and René Boomkens, argue instead that the public realm is not a rational and objective sphere, but rather an environment where the messiness of everyday life takes place.

Both Madanipour and De Waal argue that a binary opposition of public and private is too crude. The former argues that ‘the establishment of neighborhoods can extend the private realm by creating a semi-private, semi-public realm, where a smaller number of urban residents may be aware of each other and of their differences from the rest of the citizens.’ De Waal has a similar argument but stresses the temporary and performative nature of these intermediate spaces. He uses the term parochial to describe places such as gay bars or a particular bench in a public park that is part of the public sphere and accessible to everybody but at specific times and under certain circumstances, are appropriated by particular and often exclusive groups. De Waal describes how city spaces are subjected to processes of change and appropriation where a public bench can become private or parochial through a particular use or performance.

If we reconsider the cases above in these terms, we see that the conflicts regarding the borders or locations of memorial sites are often framed in terms of public and private space and in a competitive model of either/or. The key lies in finding a mode of coexistence and in employing the polysemic and open character of space. De Waal’s suggestion to look at spaces as processes can be helpful. When memory spills over to proximate buildings or structures, or when the past is mediated through spatial and artistic interventions, it is important to consider the interaction between public and private realms. The conflict between Attie and the Berlin resident foreclosed a real interaction between these two parties, and the projection on the façade crudely appropriated this residence as a part of the public realm. In contrast, the complaint of the neighbor concerning the photographic

52 Martijn de Waal, The City as Interface: How New Media Are Changing the City (Rotterdam: Nai010 Publishers, 2014), chapter 4.
53 Madanipour, Public and Private Spaces of the City, 209.
54 De Waal, The City as Interface, 16.
installation was resolved with diplomatic tact. In the case of the Stolpersteine, one can see how the growing awareness of this project caused a decline in formal objections. Nowadays there are more requests than Demnig can process and since he insists on being personally involved in every stone-laying, this has resulted in long waiting periods. Because of their modest size, they can navigate between being visible and invisible memorials, enabling locals and passersby to temporarily turn the sidewalk and the building into an indexical marker; regardless of the private or public status of the space. However, the international scale of the project is not so modest and might suggest completeness where completeness is impossible.

When a memorial project enters the public realm and is not encompassed by one specific and demarcated location, it needs to take the other functions and users of that realm into account. Traditional site bound memorials often create a semi-closed space where visitors can withdraw themselves from daily life in order to commemorate in silence, such as the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. Others are more integrated into public space and function as memorials mainly during annual commemorations, such as the National Monument on Amsterdam’s Dam Square. In both these cases, there have been conflicts about proper behavior, ranging from the rebellious Damslapers in the 1960s who used the National Monument to sleep on and the Damschreeuwer who disturbed the annual commemoration in 2010, to people jumping from stone to stone and using the memorial as a barbecue-site in Berlin, which led to the introduction of a code of conduct. When we look at a decentralized project such as the Stolpersteine, the issues of spatial demarcation and proper conduct are different because of the ubiquity of these plaques and the lack of contextualization. Because the plaques point to the location where victims of the Shoah lived during the war, the building itself is made part of the memorial, breaching the border between the public sidewalk and, often, private residence. The great potential of this project is also its weakness; it transforms a large part of European urban spaces into a latent memorialscape with no clear boundaries. It does not prescribe or prohibit any behavior, vandalism aside, even if some people take offense by literally stepping on the stones. In this sense, the Stolpersteine allow other than commemorative usage of the spaces they inhibit. However, they fail to involve local inhabitants from the outset.

Joodse Huizen is an example of a collaborative, decentralized and non-permanent commemorative project that involves local residents. It was an initiative of Frits Rijksbaron, an inhabitant of Amsterdam who discovered the history of his newly acquired home when he read the property deed. He contacted the Amsterdam’s 4 & 5 Mei Comité the municipal organization responsible for the annual commemoration and celebration of World War II, to further develop his idea. Together with Mediamatic, a cultural enterprise that develops new media technologies, the Jewish Historical Museum and Het Parool, a metropolitan
newspaper that has its roots in the resistance movement during World War II, a list was compiled, containing the addresses of residences from which Jews were deported based on the information of the digital Jewish Memorial. On April 22, 2011 this list was distributed as a supplement with Het Parool. Included was a poster with the text: ‘1 of the 21,662 houses where Jews lived who were murdered during World War II’. Locals were asked to see whether their house was a ‘Jewish house’ and if so, to hang this poster visible to passersby on the 4th of May (see figure 5.9). Many Amsterdam residents did so and the poster remained visible on different locations after the 4th of May. One year later, the project was repeated, now complemented with the option to print out a personalized poster. People were encouraged to visit the Digital Monument to the Jewish Community in the Netherlands where they could look up their own address and automatically print a poster featuring the first names of the former residents in large print, their last names, place and date of birth and death and the address in smaller print (see figure 5.10). Different from the Stolpersteine and Attie’s projections, this project was a collaborative effort that was only possible with the involvement of local citizens. Its aim was not only to make the posters visible from the street, but also to have residents investigate the history of their own dwelling. This form was not a permanent marker on the sidewalk installed by an external organization, but rather a temporary poster suspended as an act of commemoration.

Figure 5.9. Muiderstraat 6-1 in Amsterdam. The families of Isaäc Kampie and Abraham Lopes Cadozo were deported from this address. Photograph David Duindam
In 2012, a new project was launched; Open Joodse Huizen, an initiative of Denise Citroen who had previously been coordinator of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute in the Netherlands. She collaborated with the Jewish Historical Museum to develop this grass-roots commemorative project. It was inspired by the poster project Joodse Huizen but had a different approach. Rather than using posters telling passersby that a Jewish victim of the Shoah had lived here, the current inhabitants of these so-called Jewish homes host small-scale commemorative meetings. Each meeting is organized by volunteers and follows a general scenario. During the first 15 to 20 minutes, either a relative, an (amateur) historian or the current inhabitant recounts the life of the family that lived there. They are encouraged to use different forms, such as reading from letters or diaries, a musical performance or a poem recital. During the following 15 to 20 minutes, there is time for questions and remarks by the visitors. This interactive part offers a platform not only for questions but also for other stories and enables these meetings to be dialogical and communal. The private home is temporarily transformed into a semi-public site of memory in collaboration with the current owner. Due to its
success, the project that began in Amsterdam was extended to 12 other municipalities, encompassing 164 locations in 2015 and accommodating nearly 9,000 visitors.\textsuperscript{55}

Over time, Citroen visited many homes with a history connected to the Shoah. When I interviewed her, she describes how, as an outsider consciously looking for traces of the past, she is perceptive of the smallest details that current inhabitants often do not notice:

Strangers invited me to their houses and showed me all kinds of things. They opened up cupboards because there was something hidden in the back. Often they said, ‘Don’t mind the mess’, but I wasn’t there for the mess, I was trying to look back in time, look past the interior and transformation, looking for old details such as door knobs or small holes and realized that there once had been a mezuzah. [...] I do this together with them, they often have questions; they live there and feel the vibes of their own house.\textsuperscript{56}

This demonstrates a clear sensitivity to the latent and contingent indexicality of these residences. In collaboration with the current inhabitants, Citroen looks for material clues that may help to put the past into a meaningful context.

The strength of this commemorative project resides in the decentralized organization that not only involves local citizens but depends on their active collaboration. Different from both the Stolpersteine and the poster project Joodse Huizen, where the passerby receives significant but also a small amount of information that is not contextualized, people are invited inside to hear more about the lives of these victims. By opening these private homes to a small public, the border of private and public space is blurred which creates an intimate and informal setting with a low threshold for interaction. An important part of these commemorations are questions and remarks from the public, something which is more difficult to include in a more formal and larger commemoration. Furthermore, the information that somebody who was killed during the Shoah has lived in a house does not tell the entire story. This information is only a snapshot in time: you do not know whether these people lived at this address for a long or short period of their lives, or that this is the address from where they were taken.\textsuperscript{57} Most people however will associate this knowledge with vivid images of forceful deportations, which might only be part of the story. Citroen goes on to say:

\textsuperscript{56} Interview with Denise Citroen, July 8, 2014.
\textsuperscript{57} The address information on the digital monument is based on several sources. The most prominent sources are the register lists of Jewish residents that each municipality had to provide to the Nazi occupiers, most of them drawn up between February and May 1941. See http://www.joodsmonument.nl/page/274122?lang=en, accessed on July 18, 2015.
Many people, most often non-Jews, who live in these houses immediately associate this piece of information with boots on the staircase and violence. [...] I respond with the remark that you don’t know if that is what happened in this specific residence. It is important to get to the right story, or at least as close to that story as one possibly can. [...] Every house as a right to its own history. This is important for everybody, also for the current residents.\textsuperscript{58}

The problem of this association with violence is that one remembers these people first and foremost as victims, rather than as citizens who had ordinary lives. This is why the setting of these commemorative meetings is so essential: they are not held at a site of persecution, but rather in their former private environments where their life stories are shared.

The question remains then, why do current residents have a natural tendency to want to know more about the lives of former inhabitants? Literary theorist Ernst van Alphen provides two possible reasons. People want to appropriate the house by creating continuity with its past and adding their own history to the house in order to no longer feel like a stranger. Alternatively, they are unconsciously afraid the house is haunted and try to dispel the threat of the dead’s uncanny return by familiarizing themselves with the past.\textsuperscript{59} This issue is relevant for Van Alphen himself because he currently lives in a house built and inhabited by the Jewish architect Harry Elte. Elte lived here until 1942 when he was deported to Theresienstadt where he died in 1944.\textsuperscript{60} In his book \textit{Caught by History}, Van Alphen investigates how this knowledge influenced his own experience of living in that house. The danger is that the public memory of the Shoah may overshadow any private memories. Van Alphen explains that:

The memory of the Holocaust is bearable, and even then hardly, only in an institutionalized form: in the form of official memorials, in the form of Holocaust museums, in the form of an annual day of commemoration. The memorial and the museum are public places that convey memory – a collective memory, that is. Collective spaces can be the bearers of such memories because they don't affect me, my life, privately. The issue of these collective spaces, then, is the maintenance of privacy itself.\textsuperscript{61}

Residents can experience the proliferation of spatial memory as an invasion of their private space. Nothing is more private than your own home and when that home is transformed into a sign of the Shoah, this can become unbearable. Learning more about the life of this former inhabitant may replace the abstract and bare fact of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{58} Interview Citroen.  
\textsuperscript{59} Van Alphen, \textit{Caught by History}, 169.  
\textsuperscript{61} Van Alphen, \textit{Caught by History}, 203.  
\end{flushleft}
victimhood with a more elaborate biography. It is not enough to place the history of these houses in a larger historical framework, since this does not provide room for self-inscription and re-appropriation on a personal level. As we have seen in chapter 4, this self-inscription is a creative process that is based on imagining a connection to the past. The Open Joodse Huizen meetings are open to other forms of sharing stories, such as musical performances and other recitals. By revitalizing the memory of the former inhabitants, a moment is created where one can envision how these people had lived their daily lives. This can subsequently enable a cohabitation of two living memories: that of the former and current inhabitants.

The latent and contingent indexicality of sites of memory allows people to imagine a connection with the past. This type of memory proliferates spatially and cannot be delimited by a particular location. We have seen that the borders of sites of memory are more often realms of interaction and contestation than of demarcation and closure. The subsequent memory sprawl can lead to conflict when the semi-private space of citizens is invaded, but can also offer opportunities when memory projects are truly open and collaborative. In the case of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, its façade addresses the passerby through the dissonance of its architectural composition and its current function, a tension that is played out for example by the mock theater posters. The artwork *Last Words* turned this façade into a spectacular projection screen, confronting the passerby with the intimate and private last words of Jews who were incarcerated here during the war.

The memory sprawl of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a former deportation site goes beyond its direct environment as it is part of other networks of persecution. Initiatives such as the Stolpersteine and the (Open) Joodse Huizen create decentralized networks of micro-memorials that have an enormous potential range in geographical terms. These projects transform everyday buildings into indexical signs of the Shoah, a phenomenon that can possibly violate the privacy of local inhabitants. It is therefore important to involve citizens in co-producing new narratives of the past. The Hollandsche Schouwburg, as part of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, has an important institutional role as facilitator and hub for the production, collection and sharing of personal life stories of victims and the imaginative self-inscription of local residents.
Epilogue

I am in a dark gymnasium, part of a former school across the street from the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Since the school moved out some time ago, the building has been used as a temporary residence. Today, however, about fifty people are gathered here for the Open Joodse Huizen on national Remembrance Day. Annemiek Gringold, curator of the Jewish Historical Museum, tells us about the history of this location as it relates to the Jewish children who were kept at the Crèche two doors down. Several hundred of these children were rescued and one of the smuggling routes passed through this building. Next to the Crèche was Huize Frank, an elderly home that stood empty in January 1943. The building was taken into use by Walter Süskind as office space and by Virrie Cohen, one of the nurses who took care of the children at the Crèche during the deportations. On the other side of Huize Frank was the Kweekschool, the building we are currently visiting, at that time a training college for schoolteachers, run by Johan van Hulst. As the Crèche became too small to accommodate all the children, Cohen asked Van Hulst if he could use one of the classrooms as a dormitory.

At this moment in her presentation, Gringold points to her left in the general direction of this classroom. The audience collectively turns its heads despite the fact there is nothing to see. Some people keep looking in vain, as if they expect to find a trace of these events.

Gringold continues her story. The gymnasium dates from 1953 and during the occupation it was a garden through which dozens of Jewish children were smuggled out into hiding. She points out that this route was the opposite direction of the path that we took going into the room. The children were taken outside through the main entrance of the Kweekschool. The passing of the tram was used as a diversion for the guards who stood in front of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Further down the street, another member of the resistance pulled the children into a portico. Another tactic was to take a group of children out for a walk, have some of them taken away and upon returning, grabbing some children who had not been outside to make sure that the headcount was correct. Once they were no longer incarcerated, the resistance placed these children in the care of host families across the country. After the war, Huize Frank was torn down and incorporated into the Kweekschool. The former Crèche was used by a cleaning company and demolished in the 1970s. Of these three neighboring buildings, only the Kweekschool remains somewhat the same, however with several alterations such as an entirely new floor on top of the old building and the gymnasium in the backyard.
After the talk, the audience asks questions and goes outside onto the patio of the former school. People try to locate the classroom Gringold referred to and look for other traces of the past. They do not pay attention to the new buildings where once the former Crèche and Huize Frank were located, but focus on the Kweekschool in spite of the fact that this building has been thoroughly renovated and played a smaller role during the occupation in the rescue operations of children. These visitors only need a few clues in order to arouse their curiosity. One of the participants tells me she likes the fact that this patio is still cluttered as it takes away the feeling of being constructed as a memorial.

In addition to being a commemorative event in the context of Remembrance Day, this afternoon is also an experiment for the museum. The city council offered the Kweekschool as a location for the National Holocaust Museum. The Jewish Historical Museum laid out two phases. During the first phase, as the funding for this plan remains to be secured, the Kweekschool will be used for events such as this Open Joodse Huizen gathering, lectures, theater plays and contemporary art exhibitions. This phase is planned for 2015 to 2018. The second phase entails the establishment of a new museum in the Kweekschool. The Hollandsche Schouwburg will be adjusted to meet the demands of this new museum. The Kweekschool will hold, amongst other functions, a new permanent exhibition about the Shoah in the Netherlands within a broader European context. The focal point of this new museum will be this new location. There are plans to use the tram stop located in between these two buildings as a binding element.

In this epilogue, I look back on the dissertation and forward to the renovation plans by answering the following questions: what are the unique characteristics of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a site of memory? And what are the opportunities and challenges for the future National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam?

The aftermath and memory of the persecution of the Jews were difficult to reconcile with the postwar discourse of national unity that aimed for the reconstruction of a nation where Jews would be treated like any other citizen, both in the present and in the narratives of the past. The policy regarding the Dutch memorial landscape was strongly shaped by this particular discourse. The suffering of the Jews could not be presented as different from the suffering of the Dutch nation as a whole. Memorials dedicated to the persecution of the Jews highlighted Dutch resistance against Nazi rule. Two of the earliest and most prominent memorials nationwide that refer to the persecution of the Jews date from the 1950s and were established in Amsterdam, the city where the largest part of Dutch Jewry lived before and after the war. The Dokwerker statue and the Monument of
Gratitude both celebrate the Dutch resistance and the protection offered by the citizens of Amsterdam to the Jewish population. They fail to mention both active and passive forms of collaboration, that the Nazi ideology specifically targeted Jews, and that around three-quarters of the Dutch Jewish population was eventually murdered during the occupation; an exceptionally high percentage compared to other European countries. A request in 1947 by the Jewish orthodox community in Amsterdam to establish a memorial on the very spot where the Dokwerker was to be erected was never granted, and instead this memorial was realized on the Jewish cemetery in Muiderberg.

In the cases of the Dokwerker and the Monument of Gratitude the memory of the persecution was integrated into a national narrative that obscured those aspects that were considered too painful or potentially harmful to the idea of the Dutch nation. Jewish institutes established memorials dedicated to Jewish victims of the persecution within their own institutional structures, but not in the public realm. Early national commemorations of the war were similarly devoid of concrete references to the suffering of particular victim groups or any element that could potentially politicize these gatherings, such as speeches or banners. A fear for division, both between Jews and non-Jews and various political factions, characterized the postwar policy concerning public commemorations and memorials. The persecution of the Jews was only articulated through the frames of resistance or national suffering. As a result, Jewish institutes established alternative commemorations and memorials; some families commemorated within their private spheres.

The physical traces of the persecution of the Jews in the public realm could not be easily integrated into this national discourse of unity. Yet, these traces were too visible to ignore or downplay, especially in Amsterdam. The old Jewish neighborhood was in ruins: most residences had been deserted after the deportations officially ended in 1943 and ransacked during the remaining years of the occupation. Important Jewish heritage stood decrepit and there was little money for restorations. One of the iconic deportation sites was still there; a painful reminder of how the persecution had started with the gradual isolation of Jews in the cultural sector. The Hollandsche Schouwburg, once a theater where Jews and non-Jews performed side by side, had been Amsterdam’s main venue for Jewish artists during five months before it became the deportation site where more than forty-six thousand Jews were registered and incarcerated before they were deported to camps and murdered.

Of all the sites in Amsterdam related to the persecution of the Jews, it was this particular building that caused controversy soon after the occupation ended. The new owners reopened the theater and offered light entertainment. This led to
public debate about the appropriate use of this building. Most people agreed it would be impossible to take all locations that had been part of the Nazi machinery out of use. However, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was strongly associated with the deportations, and light entertainment was deemed offensive in the memory of the victims. In order to gain wide support and collect funds to acquire the building, the theater was not framed as a site of resistance, even though many people and children escaped the Schouwburg with the help of several resistance groups. Instead, the suffering of Jewish citizens was foregrounded. The appropriate use of the Hollandsche Schouwburg started out as a local issue, but soon became a broader concern. The nation as a whole was called to donate money in order to prevent the erasure of memories attached to this building and the action was framed as an issue of national debt.

The construction of memory in the public realm is always informed by contemporary interests. It is not a process of retrieval or amnesia, but rather an active production in the present. Physical remnants play an important role in this process, not because they are able to communicate an authentic, immediate and unaltered narrative of the past, but because of their latent indexicality. At any given time, they can become traces of the past that may act as evidence of unthinkable events which took place at that very location. The memory of the Hollandsche Schouwburg proved to be difficult to integrate into hegemonic memory during the first postwar period and the theater building stood empty until its transformation into a memorial in 1962. In the meantime, however, the building was not a site of amnesia. People organized small-scale commemorations on Remembrance Day, honoring the Jewish victims of the war as a separate victim group.

The undeniable there-ness of this building helped shape a more articulated memory of the persecution of the Jews that did not depend on the notions of Dutch resistance and resilience. Its visible decay was an unwelcome reminder of the incommensurability of the painful memory of this site and the uncritical memory discourse of unity. Its contested character was even more emphasized during the 1958 state visit of Israeli president Ben-Zwi, who held a commemorative ceremony in front of the closed and decrepit theater. Not long after this public ceremony, the city council of Amsterdam decided to take action and to establish two memorials dedicated to the memory of the Jewish victims of Nazi terror; a smaller one inside that held an eternal flame and a Torah proverb on the wall, and a larger one outside suitable for larger commemorations with an inscription that referred to the victims who had been deported.

The establishment of this memorial complex can be seen in light of a broader international development in that same period. Israel’s remembrance authority Yad Vashem established its Hall of Remembrance in 1961. In Paris, the
Memorial to the Martyrs of the Deportation was inaugurated by President Charles De Gaulle in 1962. As well as the two memorials of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, both these memorials had an abstract and modernist design. The commemorated events were not described and the victims were not explicitly named. The Hall of Remembrance held an eternal flame and 22 names of Nazi murder sites were engraved on the floor. The memorial in Paris also held an eternal flame and several poems adorned the walls. Here, the victims were not addressed as persecuted Jews but rather as national martyrs, in similarly understated – though even stronger nationalistic – terms as in Amsterdam. However, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was also different. First of all, the two memorials in Israel and in Paris were located on nationally important places, Mount Herzl and the Île de la Cité. Secondly, the Hollandsche Schouwburg was a material part of the history of persecution, a physical trace of the events that were commemorated. Even if the designs of the two memorials inside this former theater were abstract, the building itself was the most concrete referent to the deportations. As such, it was and remains to be a unique Shoah memorial that is recognizable as a theater and is located in a residential urban area.

The abstract language of the memorials at the Hollandsche Schouwburg prevented a dissonance with the national memory discourse: the persecution of the Jews was not explicitly described. However, it was also not concealed as the large pylon in the courtyard rested on a Magen David and the smaller memorial inside held a Torah proverb in Hebrew rather than Dutch. This memorial complex was different from the Dokwerker and the Monument of Gratitude. One of the reasons of the abstract design and subdued language was to prevent first generation Jewish survivors from being offended. Before the memorial was established, several Jewish organizations argued that they did not need a memorial to remember what happened, and that some of their members would never set foot in this former deportation site. In order to appeal to this sensibility, the memorial became a ceremonial and abstract site rather than a museum-like place where visitors would be confronted with images and stories of the events that took place here. The entire structure of the theater hall was stripped down to a routing where the visitor would walk alongside the former seats, where once the deportees were held, onto the former stage. Here, visitors could commemorate the victims. The design thus focused on the performance of the visitor instead of narrating what had transpired at this particular site. This allowed visitors to appropriate the site according to their own narratives of the past, without being too abstract, since the theater metaphor directly related to the building’s history.

The balance between a specific yet open design allowed for the active appropriation of this memorial complex by an important part of the Jewish
community. Younger Jewish generations were expected to keep the memory of the Shoah alive with the help of annual commemorations, in particular Yom HaShoah. These were organized by Jewish youth organizations at the Hollandsche Schouwburg from 1966 onwards. Most of these ceremonies had one older speaker who provided a historical or political context, and a younger speaker who often recited a poem. This originally Israeli commemoration at a Dutch in situ site of memory was an important tool for the intergenerational transmission of Shoah memory for a part of the Jewish community. In spite of a strong allegiance to Israel, the ceremony developed its own traditions. The fact that so many of the Dutch Jewish victims had been incarcerated at this site strengthened the unique character of this commemoration and gave its organizers the confidence to deviate from a set of suggested alterations regarding the commemoration received from Israel in a struggle over the control of Yom HaShoah and more broadly speaking, the memory and heritage of the Shoah.

In the 1990s, the abstract idiom of the memorials of Hollandsche Schouwburg no longer appealed to most of the younger generations, whereas the Shoah had gradually become a more pronounced part of the hegemonic memory of World War II, both in the Netherlands and abroad. In the United States, the Shoah had become an essential part of American culture and between 1988 and 1993 the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) was constructed in the center of the nation’s capital. The museum focused on educating a broad and inclusive public and made use of all kinds of technological innovations to tell its story. The establishment of this museum marked a general shift towards a more informative and educational representation of the Shoah that aimed at a broad public of both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors. In the Netherlands, the Jewish Historical Museum had already addressed the Shoah for several decades with the utmost reluctance and consideration for older generations. When it took over the management of the Hollandsche Schouwburg it began renovations, it tried to find a balance between addressing a new generation without offending visitors who had survived the persecution themselves. It explicitly did not want to follow in the footsteps of the USHMM. According to Ted Musaph, the then chair of the Jewish Historical Museum board, the bluntness of the American museum lacked any respect for the feelings of survivors.\footnote{NIW, 29 January, 1993.} The result of this restraint was an educational exhibition that showed the gradual persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, but did not explicitly exhibit the horrors of the concentration camps. In order to ensure that older generations were not disturbed by younger visitors, the exhibition was separated from the memorial in the courtyard. Another important addition was the
wall of names that listed approximately 6,700 family names that represented more than a hundred-thousand individual victims. This strategy also struck a balance between indirect and concrete references to individual victims.

The exhibition and wall of names were far from unique in an international perspective. What made and remains to make the Hollandsche Schouwburg special is its \textit{in situ} location, the fact that at this site, people can come to commemorate, to inform themselves and to visit the historic location where part of the Shoah took place. Knowing that at this theater, thousands of people awaited their deportation, infuses every visitor with a particular sensitivity for original details and subsequently allows for an emotional investment. This authenticity could be staged as part of the site’s design, or actively imagined by the visitor in a search for an unmediated trace and experience of the past. This is why the small garden, the area behind the courtyard that holds two large historic photographs illegally taken of the deportation site, is often experienced as one of the most affective spaces of this memorial complex. It functions as a backstage area where the visitor can look behind the memorial, an area that is framed by these two photographs that invite you to look for traces of the past. It must be stressed that this area is carefully curated by the museum, but in a way that does not interfere with the visitor’s expectation of authenticity.

Every visit to the Hollandsche Schouwburg is heralded by the knowledge that here something terrible happened. It is this knowledge that allows for the latent and contingent indexicality of the site, which in turn makes visitors highly perceptible to real or imagined traces of past events. The memory of the Hollandsche Schouwburg is therefore strongly attached to its location and at the same time actively imagined by its visitors. The – often personal and emotional – investment of visitors cannot be entirely predetermined by the memorial museum’s design, as visitors constantly develop alternative uses and interpretations. Just days after the wall of names was inaugurated, visitors began to leave little objects such as stones in the alcoves under the names, an unintended but welcome visiting practice. The museum staff observed how visitors reacted to the wall of names. Some would see their own last name, or that of a neighbor or colleague, and started to wonder if and how this site related to their own history or that of people in their direct environment. This might not be the ‘correct’ interpretation of this memorial, but it demonstrates how the names invite visitors to relate to the history of the Shoah on a personal level. The interaction between the site and the visitor can be best described in terms of dynamic scripts, where established visiting practices are reintegrated into the material environment and other curatorial solutions. Some of the questions regarding the family names can now be answered by the computer.
stations and the IkPods that provide information about individual victims; and the practice of stone-laying has been integrated into the educational program.

Visitors expect to find material traces of the past and try to progress beyond the mediated and curated character of the memorial complex, which explains the success of the garden area. As we have seen, this space is carefully curated. Visitors want an authentic experience, which is often the product of the interplay between design and visitor expectations. So on the one hand, authenticity is staged, whereas on the other, it needs to be discovered by visitors in order to fulfill the expectation of a personal and unmediated experience of the past. Two important mechanisms are at work. First of all, the entire site has a latent and contingent indexicality, which means that any visit is grounded by the notion of ‘being there’. Secondly, visitors look for traces of the past that support their expectations. Indexical signs function on the basis of contiguity or continuity, or the expectation of a causal relationship between traces and events, the signifier and signified, or the present and the past, a gap that can never be closed as the loss of victims can never be reverted. Furthermore, the gap can be filled with expectations and emphatic investments of visitors. Sometimes, the indexical nature of this building is carefully curated, such as the photographs in the garden. At other times, indexical signs are actively produced by the visitor. When I asked visitors why they thought the tops of the ruin-like walls in the courtyard were blackened, most of them answered that the building was probably burned down by the Nazi’s to cover up their crimes, or bombarded by the Allied forces to destroy the deportation site: where there is soot, there must have been fire. Both trains of thought fit in with their expectations of finding traces of violence. Only a few observed that the walls are too symmetrical and understand that they were constructed as part of the memorial in 1962.

There is another consequence of this latent indexicality, namely the spatial proliferation of memory. The history of the deportation site is strongly embedded in its direct environment: the Crèche across the street; Huize Frank and the Kweekschool; the residences around the courtyard through which some of the deportees would go outside for a short amount of time and from which the series of illegal photographs were taken; the café next to the Hollandsche Schouwburg that was connected to the former theater and where during the deportations an infirmary was installed; and the tram rail that was used to transport Jews to and from the Hollandsche Schouwburg (even though most transportation was accomplished by truck or by foot), and also used as a diversion by the resistance to smuggle out children. Most of these elements are already involved in the current presentation: the photographs in the garden connect the Hollandsche Schouwburg with the surrounding residences and the exhibition frames both the former Crèche
and the busy street life as part of its story about the rescue of children and the continuation of life after the war. These connections can be cause for conflict with neighbors, as we have seen with the photograph that faced the neighbor to re-enact the original position of the photographer. The neighbor complained that he did not want to be confronted on a daily basis with this history, and therefore the photograph was rotated. However, the proliferation of memory also carries the potential to expand the story told by this memorial complex, and to address a broader public. The light-art projection Last Words used the façade of the Hollandsche Schouwburg to facilitate the letters to break out of their museum frame and escape into the public realm. It addressed passersby that did not come to visit the memorial but were nevertheless confronted with its layered history. The façade can act as an important and interactive interface that connects the Hollandsche Schouwburg to its direct urban environment and thereby expand its potential public considerably.

This brings us to the challenges of and opportunities for the National Holocaust Museum (NSM), which will open in the spring of 2016. The Hollandsche Schouwburg will remain as commemoration site and across the street in the former Kweekschool a new satellite will be established with permanent and temporary exhibition galleries. Together, these buildings will be the NSM. One of the challenges is to raise the number of annual visitors considerably.² It will be part of the Jewish Cultural Quarter that also includes the Jewish Historical Museum, the Children's Museum and the Portuguese Synagogue. This quarter is part of the old Jewish neighborhood, although strictly speaking the Plantage district falls just outside of this area. Nevertheless, the NSM will be an important addition to the Jewish Cultural Quarter, especially since the other locations do not extensively deal with the history of the Shoah. Currently, visitors buy combination tickets: if you visit one of these sites, you can enter the others with the same ticket. It is likely that this will motivate people to also visit the NSM after they have been to the JHM or the Portuguese Synagogue. As the NSM is located just outside of walking distance, a shuttle service might offer a solution. In terms of its direct environment, the NSM is more closely related to the Plantage district, which is being prepared to play a larger role in the growing tourism sector of Amsterdam. The NSM can facilitate this process and provide a broader historical context of both Amsterdam and this

² Over the last few years, the Hollandsche Schouwburg had between 40,000 and 45,000 annual visitors. According to the feasibility study of the consortium XPEX, Hypnos and Aronsohn, conducted in 2011 and 2012, the new NSM would need to attract 120,000 annual visitors to the Hollandsche Schouwburg and 80,000 to the Kweekschool. See XPEX Experience Experts, “Commemoration through Narration. Feasibility Study Summary” (Amsterdam: XPEX Experience Experts, 2012).
particular neighborhood to these potential tourists. It could also profit from the nearness of the Dutch Resistance Museum and the envisioned Holocaust Memorial of Names, which is currently planned for the nearby Wertheimpark and will hold all 102,000 individual names of Dutch victims of the Shoah, including other persecuted victim groups such as the Roma and Sinti.3 In addition to the institutional context of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, it is important to deliberate with these organizations in order to come to a fruitful cooperation or *modus vivendi* that clearly positions the various profiles and missions.

An important challenge of the NSM will be the connection and integration of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Kweekschool. These two buildings are separated by a busy street, which includes a bidirectional tram line, two car lanes and two bicycle lanes. There is no organic relationship between these two buildings. Currently, most visitors find it hard to locate the Hollandsche Schouwburg as its sign posts are discrete and integrated into the streetscape. The NSM will need to find a visually recognizable architectural intervention that allows people to easily find the main entrance of the NSM, which will be located at the Kweekschool, to immediately and intuitively grasp its relationship with the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and to safely navigate visitors across the street. The best solution would be a subterranean connection, which would allow for a spatial expansion of the museum and the actual integration of these two buildings. It would prevent a visit to the museum from being cut into two autonomous parts. Furthermore, it would manage the flow of visitors and encourage them to visit the entire complex rather than merely one of two buildings.

A consortium of three companies, XPEX, Hypso and Aronsohn, carried out a feasibility study in 2012 for the establishment of the NSM. The study concluded that the best scenario was a renovation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and the construction of a satellite space in the Kweekschool. It suggested more or less separating these two locations into two functions. At the Schouwburg, the guiding principle should be that storytelling would become an important part of remembrance (*vertellen=herdenken*). The stories of individual victims were to be told by different technological means, and as such, the former theater would retain its commemorative function. Information would be made accessible via computer screens and an auditorium would be constructed in the former basement. The garden should be maintained as an outdoor area for visitors to relate to the surrounding buildings. Across the street, the Kweekschool would have a more traditional museum function. Here, a permanent exhibition would convey the story

---

3 The city council of Amsterdam has announced a decision concerning the location of this new memorial in the course of 2016.
of the Shoah in the Dutch and European context. This exhibition would function ‘as context for the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and the Hollandsche Schouwburg would function as a concrete example and lieu de mémoire.’ The consortium further suggested creating a new wall of names on a portion of the façade of the Kweekschool to visibly mark this site as memorial museum. The tram stop in between the two buildings could be used to visually connect these two buildings.

Since this study was published, the plans for the establishment of the NSM have been further developed. However, the choice for the Kweekschool has been a guiding principle. Currently, the renovation process is split into two phases: from 2015 until 2018, the former Kweekschool will be prepared with a minimal budget for temporary exhibitions and events. The goal of this phase is to finalize the plans for the permanent exhibition and secure the necessary funds to establish the NSM in the second phase. This planning allows the museum to generate publicity and to experiment with curatorial interventions. A major challenge for the NSM will be to clearly define the role of the Hollandsche Schouwburg within this new museum complex. If the main exhibition is located in the Kweekschool, will visitors take the time and effort to cross the street and go to the Hollandsche Schouwburg? Especially considering that they need to exit from the first location, put on their overcoats if the weather is inclement, look for the pedestrian crossing and present their entrance ticket for a second time. Therefore, the routing of this museum complex needs to be carefully considered.

Another issue is whether the concept of vertellen=herdenken is strong enough to attract visitors and does not dwell on the past too much. I interviewed Gringold, curator of the Shoah of the JHM, who argues that the idea that storytelling leads to remembrance is inadequate:

[The NSM] should have an important societal role aside from telling the story of the past. This public urgency is extremely important. The notion that storytelling is a form of remembrance dwells too much on the past and does not reflect on the present. Someone once said, to tell a story is to remember is to act.

She pleads for an interaction between the remembrance of the past and pressing current issues. The NSM should be socially relevant and address all visitors:

This means that if the NSM wants to be an inclusive and meaningful museum, it should accommodate every visitor. This is only possible if it gives people the opportunity to be who they are and to give them the space

---

5 Interview Gringold.
for whatever motivates them. There should also be space to talk about those issues that do not relate directly to the Shoah.\(^6\) For Gringold, this does not mean that the Shoah can be compared to every other form of discrimination or injustice: to compare the persecution of the Jews to school bullying would take the Shoah too far out of its historical context. According to her, every visitor has his or her own background and moral benchmark and the NSM has a social responsibility in the present, not merely in the past. An important issue will be how to address competing or conflicting memories and interests that might at first seem to diverge from or even counter the main narrative of the museum.

The notion that to commemorate is not enough is a significant shift in the policy of the Hollandsche Schouwburg if we take its historical development as a site of memory into account, but not one without precedence. The 1993 renovation already geared towards a more presentist approach with the exhibition that posed the question: what would you do in this situation? However, at that time, the concern for older generations prevented an even more radical change. The notion that to commemorate is not enough breaks with the idea that the Hollandsche Schouwburg is first and foremost a site of commemoration. This also allows for artistic interventions that, according to Joël Cahen, might include installations that address a topic such as the history of slavery. ‘Critics might wonder: what does slavery have to do with the Shoah? But if it is a good installation, art experts will applaud it. Furthermore, it will address another public.’\(^7\) The NSM will aim to be more inclusive by offering room to address other topics, without trying to argue that the Shoah is similar to other genocides, and by listening to its visitors and their various backgrounds. It remains to be seen whether this institute can truly be inclusive, as it is intricately bound by the history of its location.

What can we learn from the current presentation of the Hollandsche Schouwburg in relation to these renovation plans? The strength of this memorial museum is that it allows visitors to invest the site with their own expectations and backgrounds. A past that cannot be grasped in its totality is present in its most concrete and material form. Gringold’s ambition to offer room for individual backgrounds and motivations has already been put into practice if we look at how visitors invest the site with their personal expectations and biographies. This can be further elaborated in a new educational program and permanent exhibition. However, I would be cautious in separating the Hollandsche Schouwburg as the authentic site

\(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Interview with Joël Cahen, July 24, 2014.
where personal stories are told, and the Kweekschool as a museum satellite that provides historical context and actualization. What I noticed during the Open Joodse Huizen gathering at the Kweekschool was the strong desire and willingness of visitors to look for traces of the past that related to the story of the Shoah, even after they were told that the Kweekschool had a lesser role during the deportations than the surrounding buildings. The story of the Shoah and the victims of persecution did not stop at the former theater, but continued across the street and included the Kweekschool. As such, the building also has a latent and contingent indexicality which should be carefully curated. My suggestion would be a strong emphasis on the historical role of this building, curating it in a similar way as the Hollandsche Schouwburg. This entails an integrated design that treats both locations as concrete remnants of the past, rather than a functional division of labor. If the museum wants to address international tourists, it should focus on the local history instead of unfolding the entire history of the Shoah and only provide a global context for those who are not familiar it. The permanent exhibition should interact with the material history of both locations and therefore be distributed over the two buildings, in the best possible scenario connected by a subterranean tunnel.

The challenge will be how to emphasize the latent indexicality of the Kweekschool. A good example is the garden at the Hollandsche Schouwburg, where a physical environment has been maintained that feels like a backstage area but at the same time is carefully curated. The garden is not authentic in the sense that it looks the same as during the deportations. Furthermore, the indexical gap between the signifier and signified allows for an imaginative investment. At the Kweekschool, both the former classrooms and the smuggling route could play an important role. The curatorial design should not spell out what visitors should be seeing, as this would remove the feeling of discovery, but rather provide clues as how to interpret or relate to this site. Both the historic photographs and the wall of names are good examples of such open suggestions; but also the light-art projection Last Words and the Open Joodse Huizen solicited an active contribution from the visitor. The development of such curatorial interventions demands a careful process of experimentation that can be carried out during the first phase of the renewal project.

If we look at the general development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, one might argue that this site of memory was initially framed by a national memory discourse with a focus on first generation survivors and gradually moved towards broader international concerns with the education of younger generations in the 1990s and onwards. From this perspective, the advent of the NSM seems to completely place the Schouwburg within an international memory discourse, and
even perhaps transform a very specific site into a more generic memorial museum. However, this point of view obscures the importance of site-specific memory practices that are developed over time and in collaboration with local stakeholders. There will always remain a certain restraint concerning the representation of the Shoah because of its spatial proximity: there is no need for an all too revealing and literal representation, since this would overshadow the latent indexicality of this site. It is precisely the embeddedness in and interaction with the neighborhood that has been the strength of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and should remain the driving force in the development of the National Shoah Museum.
Summary

*Signs of the Shoah: The Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory* investigates the postwar development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, an *in situ* Shoah memorial museum in Amsterdam. During World War II, over forty-six thousand Jews were imprisoned in this former theater before being deported to the transit camps. In 1962, it became the first national Shoah memorial of the Netherlands and in 1993, a small exhibition was added. Currently there are plans for the establishment of a National Shoah Museum, which will consist of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and a new satellite space across the street. How did this site of painful heritage become an important memorial museum dedicated to the memory of the persecution of the Dutch Jews? How was it appropriated by the Jewish community? Do *in situ* sites of memory such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg naturally embody or actively mediate their past? And how does the site interact with its direct environment? After an outline of the theoretical framework in the first chapter, I investigate the postwar development of this site in chapters 2 and 3. Chapter 4 is a critical analysis of its current presentation, and chapter 5 concludes with a reflection on the proliferation and expansion of spatial memory.

Chapter 1 explores the dynamics of sites of memory within the disciplines of memory, heritage and museum studies. The memory of the Shoah is actively shaped by cultural objects and practices such as testimonials, films, memorials and commemorations. An important question is whether the memory of *in situ* sites such as the Hollandsche Schouwburg, Auschwitz and the Anne Frank House is inherent to their materiality, or instead actively produced in the present. As traces of the past, these sites are often framed as material evidence and memory anchors. At these locations, the Shoah seems local and concrete, and visitors may come into direct contact with the past. However, upon closer investigation, these sites do not provide an unmediated experience: an *in situ* memorial museum is always an assemblage of museum technologies, media and artifacts that are given weight by their very location. Instead of looking at these sites as legible and unambiguous media that hold one specific message, I argue that we should look at them as spatial configurations that provide a material environment for visitors to create a meaningful relationship with the past. Visitors may introduce innovative and unpredictable interpretations and practices. I argue for a combined synchronic and diachronic approach, by investigating the institutional and material history of these sites in relation to the current presentation.
Chapter 2 focuses on the early postwar history of the Hollandsche Schouwburg between 1945 and the establishment of the memorial in 1962. Was this former theater a site of oblivion during these seventeen years, the same period in which the persecution of the Jews was not an articulated part of the hegemonic memory discourse of the war in the Netherlands? In order to answer this question, this chapter explores three interrelated topics. Firstly, the early postwar memory discourse in the Netherlands is analyzed, in which an emphasis was placed on national unity and collective suffering, rather than the victimhood of Dutch Jews or other civilian groups. Secondly, the debate about the use of the Hollandsche Schouwburg is discussed. Soon after the war ended, its owners wanted to reopen the theater. They were opposed by a committee of concerned citizens that successfully collected funds to buy the theater. The committee donated the building to the city of Amsterdam in 1950 to ensure it would never be a site of entertainment again. Thirdly, the toilsome debate about the purpose of this theater is examined. An important factor was a lack of consensus within the Jewish community; as several organizations argued that this site of terror could never be a proper commemoration site. In conclusion, I argue that the Hollandsche Schouwburg was not a site of oblivion, but rather a physical reminder of the incommensurability of the memory of the Shoah in the hegemonic narrative of World War II.

Chapter 3 turns to the performances of memory at the Hollandsche Schouwburg and its gradual appropriation by important parts of the Jewish community, culminating in the Jewish Historical Museum (JHM) taking over its management in the early 1990s. I argue that the relationship between sites and performances of memory is reciprocal: commemorations are often held at symbolically or historically significant sites, and at the same time, these sites gain significance because of these commemorations. The first section of the chapter addresses early ceremonies during the night of the 4th of May, being National Commemoration Day, in front of the closed theater that began as early as 1948, long before the Schouwburg became a memorial. These gatherings turned the location into a commemoration site and did so within a national commemorative framework. The second section investigates the role of the Hollandsche Schouwburg as a public memorial after 1962, as it offered a platform for the city and national governments to demonstrate their dedication to the memory of the persecution of the Jews. The third section studies the gradual appropriation of this site by important Dutch Jewish institutes with the installation of Yom HaShoah in 1966. Instead of opting for a location within the religious or Zionist infrastructures, these institutes chose for a public site directly related to the commemorated events. The last section examines early visiting practices, the establishment of an educational exhibition and a wall of names by the JHM in 1993, which should be
seen in the light of a reluctance of the museum to openly display the horrors of the Shoah.

Chapter 4 investigates how meaning is produced at the Hollandsche Schouwburg in relation to its location and the interaction between its design and the visitor. *In situ* sites represent the past amongst others by using indexical signs. These signs function on the principle of an actual relationship to what is being referred to, such as a footstep that refers to an absent person. Because of this actual relationship, indices may act as evidence. However, what occurs at the Hollandsche Schouwburg is the general phenomenon of latent or contingent indexicality. Visitors expect to find physical remnants of the past. It is this expectation that may turn a nearly physical detail into a possible trace of the past, also those details that might not be entirely authentic or even at all. This indexicality is actively imagined and performed by visitors and allows for an affective investment and personal appropriation by inscribing their own biographies into this site. Some of these visiting practices were not envisioned by the original design, but have subsequently become incorporated by later curatorial interventions.

Chapter 5 discusses the proliferation of spatial memory. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, visitors actively look for traces of the past and in doing so, may interpret non-authentic elements as signs of the Shoah. This means that the memory of the Hollandsche Schouwburg is not inherent to its material environment and may expand beyond its direct borders. The question is whether this proliferation is invasive and takes over public space, or offers room for negotiation and collaboration with local residents. In the first section of the chapter, the notion of borders is reevaluated. Boundaries do not encompass sites of memory, but instead act as contact zones. This can lead to conflict and contestation over private and public space which must be taken into consideration by the involved institutions. The second section addresses the façade as an interface for the passerby. It discusses the case study of an art installation in 2013-2014 that brought the inside of the Hollandsche Schouwburg outside by projecting the last words of prisoners of the Hollandsche Schouwburg onto the façade for all to see. The last section turns to a collaborative memory project, Open Joodse Huizen, which temporarily transforms private dwellings into sites of commemoration by involving their residents.

In the epilogue, I consider the current plans for the establishment of the National Shoah Museum. In order to expand the museum, a new satellite space is opened across the street. This former school building was not part of the former deportation center, however, children were smuggled through its garden, and one of its classrooms was used to detain Jewish children who were separated from their parents who had been imprisoned across the street in the Hollandsche
Schouwburg. I argue that it is essential that these two locations are physically integrated and that the latent indexicality of this new space must be carefully staged in the future presentation.
Samenvatting

_Tekenen van de Sjoa: De Hollandsche Schouwburg als een plek van herinnering_ bestudeert de naoorlogse ontwikkeling van de Hollandsche Schouwburg, een _in situ_ Sjoa herdenkingsmuseum in Amsterdam. Tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog zijn meer dan zesenvierenduizend joden in dit voormalige theater opgesloten geweest voordat ze naar de doorgangskampen werden gedeporteerd. In 1962 opende hier de eerste nationale Sjoa herdenkingsplaats en in 1993 werd er een kleine tentoonstelling aan toegevoegd. In de lente van 2016 is het Nationaal Holocaust Museum gevestigd, dat zowel de Hollandsche Schouwburg als een nieuwe vleugel aan de overkant van de straat omvat. Ik heb onderzocht hoe deze plek van pijnlijk erfgoed een belangrijk herdenkingsmuseum werd dat gewijd was aan de herinnering van de vervolging van Nederlandse joden. Daarbij heb ik geanalyseerd hoe de joodse gemeenschap zich deze plek heeft toegeëigend. De vraag of _in situ_ plekken van herinnering zoals de Hollandsche Schouwburg hun eigen geschiedenis op natuurlijke wijze belichamen, of dat zij deze narratieve actief mediëren, staat centraal. Als laatste is de wisselwerking tussen deze plek en haar directe omgeving nader onderzocht. Na het eerste hoofdstuk dat het theoretische raamwerk uiteenzet, bespreek ik de naoorlogse ontwikkeling in het tweede en derde hoofdstuk. Hoofdstuk vier omvat een kritische analyse van de huidige presentatie en het vijfde hoofdstuk bestudeert de uitbreiding van plekken van herinnering.

Het eerste hoofdstuk behandelt de rol van plekken van herinnering binnen de academische domeinen van de herinneringscultuur, erfgoed en museologie. De herinnering aan de Sjoa wordt actief gevormd door culturele artefacten en praktijken zoals getuigenissen, films, monumenten en herdenkingen. Een belangrijke vraag is of de herinnering van _in situ_ plekken zoals de Hollandsche Schouwburg, Auschwitz en het Anne Frankhuis inherent is aan hun materialiteit, of juist actief in het heden wordt vormgegeven. Omdat het sporen van het verleden zijn, worden deze plekken vaak gepresenteerd als tastbaar bewijsmateriaal en herinneringsankers. Op deze locaties lijkt de Sjoa lokaal en concreet en zouden bezoekers in direct contact staan met het verleden. Als we dit proces echter kritisch in ogenschouw nemen, blijkt dat er altijd sprake is van een indirecte, gemedieerde ervaring: een _in situ_ herdenkingsmuseum is een assemblage van museale technologieën, media en artefacten die extra betekenis krijgen vanwege hun locatie. In plaats van deze plekken te beschrijven als eenduidige media die één narratief vertellen, beargumenteer ik dat het productiever is om ze te zien als kaders die een ruimtelijke omgeving creëren waarbinnen bezoekers een betekenisvolle relatie
kunnen aangaan met het verleden. Hierbij kunnen bezoekers nieuwe en onvoorziene interpretaties en gebruiken bedenken. Het is van belang om bij de bestudering van dergelijke plekken een synchrone en diachrone benadering te combineren door zowel de institutionele als materiële geschiedenis naast de hedendaagse presentatie te leggen, zonder daarbij een dwingend causaal model te hanteren.

Het tweede hoofdstuk handelt over de vroege naoorlogse ontwikkeling van de Hollandsche Schouwburg van 1945 tot en met de oprichting van de herdenkingsplaats in 1962. Een belangrijke vraag is of dit voormalige theater een plek van vergetelheid was gedurende deze zeventien jaar, aangezien de Jodenvervolging toen geen uitgesproken onderdeel was van de dominante herinneringscultuur in Nederland. In de vroege naoorlogse herinneringscultuur stond een vertoog van nationale eenheid en collectief leed centraal, waarin het slachtofferschap van joodse Nederlanders of andere bevolkingsgroepen niet werd benadrukt. In deze context kunnen we het publieke debat over het gebruik en de bestemming van de Hollandsche Schouwburg zien. Vlak na de oorlog wilden de nieuwe eigenaren van deze voormalige deportatieplaats het theater heropenen. Een actiecomité van bezorgde burgers vond dit ongepast en zamelde geld in om het gebouw te kopen. Alle burgers van Nederland werden aangesproken op wat volgens het comité een nationale erekwestie was. In 1950 werd het theater aan de gemeente Amsterdam geschonken onder de voorwaarde dat het geen plek van vermaak zou worden. Het debat omtrent de bestemming van het gebouw zou tot 1962 duren. Ik toon aan dat deze moeizame besluitvorming kwam door een gebrek aan daadkracht van het gemeentebestuur en tweespalt binnen de joods gemeenschap: verschillende organisaties stelden dat deze plek van terreur nooit een acceptabele herdenkingsplaats zou kunnen zijn. Naar aanleiding van deze discussies concludeer ik dat de Hollandsche Schouwburg geen plek van vergetelheid was, maar juist een teken van de onverenigbaarheid van de herinnering aan de Jodenvervolging en het dominante vertoog omtrent de Tweede Wereldoorlog.

In het derde hoofdstuk onderzoek ik de herinneringspraktijken in en rond de Hollandsche Schouwburg en de geleidelijke toe-eigening door belangrijke joodse organisaties, een proces dat culmineerde in de overname van het beheer van deze herdenkingsplaats door het Joods Historisch Museum in de jaren negentig. De relatie tussen plekken en herinneringspraktijken is wederkerig: herdenkingen worden vaak gehouden op symbolische of historische locaties, en tegelijkertijd neemt het belang van deze plekken toe vanwege deze herdenkingen. Het eerste deel van het hoofdstuk behandelt de vroege 4 mei herdenkingen die binnen het nationale herdenkingskader werden gehouden en al vanaf 1948 voor de gesloten deuren van een dichte Hollandsche Schouwburg plaatsvonden. Nadat de
herdenkingsplaats officieel opende in 1962, gebruikten verschillende overheidsinstanties de Hollandsche Schouwburg als podium om hun toewijding aan de herinnering van de Jodenvervolging te tonen. Vanaf 1966 eigende een deel van de joodse gemeenschap zich de herdenkingsplaats toe door de organisatie van Jom Hasjoa. Door deze van oorsprong Israëlische herdenking op een nationale herdenkingsplaats te houden, en niet binnen de religieuze of zionistische infrastructuur, koos men voor een publieke locatie die direct verbonden was aan de geschiedenis van Jodenvervolging. Als laatste bespreek ik de vroege bezoekerspraktijken en de oprichting van de educatieve tentoonstelling en de namenwand door het Joods Historisch Museum in de jaren negentig. Deze ontwikkeling wordt bestudeerd in de context van de vroegere terughoudendheid van het museum met betrekking tot het tentoonstellen van de gruwelen van de Sjoa.

Het vierde hoofdstuk analyseert de wijze waarop betekenis tot stand komt in een constant interactie tussen de locatie, de inrichting en de bezoeker. Ik toon aan dat in situ herdenkingsmusea het verleden onder meer presenteren met behulp van indexcale tekens. Anders dan bij symbolen, waarbij de relatie tussen het teken en hetgeen waar naar verwezen wordt arbitrair is, of iconen, waarbij er sprake is van een zekere gelijkenis, is er bij een index een directe contigue of continue relatie. Een voorbeeld hiervan is een voetstap in het zand die naar een afwezig persoon verwijst. Door deze feitelijke relatie kunnen indices functioneren als een vorm van bewijsmateriaal. Ik stel echter dat in de Hollandsche Schouwburg sprake is van een veelomvattender fenomeen dat ik latente of contingente indexicaliteit noem. Omdat bezoekers verwachten materiële overblijfselen te vinden wordt elk detail een mogelijk spoor van het verleden en daarmee een teken van de Sjoa, ook details die mogelijkerwijs niet authentiek zijn. Deze latente of contingente indexicaliteit wordt actief door de bezoeker ingebeeld en biedt ruimte voor een grotere betrokkenheid en toe-eigening door het invoegen van biografische elementen. Sommige bezoekerspraktijken waren niet voorzien in het originele ontwerp, maar werden pas geïncorporeerd door latere aanpassingen aan de inrichting.

Het vijfde hoofdstuk behandelt de uitbreiding van plekken van herinnering. Bezoekers van de Hollandsche Schouwburg zoeken actief naar sporen van het verleden en kunnen niet-authentieke elementen als tekenen van de Sjoa interpreteren. Het belang van deze plek is dus niet volledig inherent aan de tastbare overblijfselen van het verleden en kan zich daardoor uitbreiden voorbij de grenzen van het voormalige theater. Een belangrijke vraag hierbij is of deze uitbreiding invasief is en publieke of private ruimtes overneemt, of dat dit een wederkerig proces is waarbij er samenwerking wordt gezocht met buurtbewoners. Ik
beargumenteer dat plekken van herinnering niet worden omvat door hun grenzen, maar dat deze grenzen juist functioneren als contactzones. De uitbreiding deze plekken kan een bron van conflict zijn over de status van private en publieke ruimte. Het is daarom van belang dat museale instellingen zich hier rekenschap van geven. Vervolgens analyseer ik een recent kunstproject waarvoor afscheidsbrieven van joden die opgesloten zaten in de Hollandsche Schouwburg op de façade werden geprojecteerd. Hierdoor werd het verhaal van de Hollandsche Schouwburg aan iedere voorbijganger ongevraagd aangeboden. Het laatste deel richt zich op een collaboratief en jaarlijks terugkerend herdenkingsproject, Open Joodse Huizen, waarbij woonhuizen tijdelijk tot herdenkingsplaatsen worden getransformeerd door de bewoners hierbij te betrekken.

In de epiloog beschouw ik de huidige plannen voor de vestiging van het Nationaal Holocaust Museum. Om de huidige museale ruimte uit te breiden, wordt een nieuwe vleugel aan de overkant van de straat geopend. Eén van de lokalen van dit oude schoolgebouw werd in de oorlog gebruikt als slaapzaal voor joodse kinderen die gescheiden waren van hun ouders in de schouwburg. Het verzet smokkelde joodse kinderen weg via de tuin van dit gebouw. Ik bearbargumenteer dat het voor het optimale gebruik van deze locatie van belang is deze twee locaties ruimtelijk te verbinden en om in de toekomstige inrichting gebruik te maken van de latente indexicaliteit van deze voormalige school zoals dat is gebeurd in de Hollandsche Schouwburg.
Previous publications and co-authorship

Parts of chapters 2 and 3 have been published in the contributed volume *De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering* (eds. Frank van Vree, Hetty Berg, David Duindam, Amsterdam: AUP 2013). Chapter 2 partly overlaps with a chapter of this contributed volume, “Theater van onmogelijke herinneringen. Van ‘schandvlek’ tot herdenkingsplaats,” which I wrote in close collaboration with museum researcher and publicist Esther Göbel. Chapter 3 partly overlaps with another chapter of this contributed volume which I wrote without co-authors, “Stil staan bij de Jodenvervolging. De Hollandsche Schouwburg als plek van herinnering.”
Acknowledgements

Like any book, a dissertation has many beginnings. The conception of this research project took place before I even entered the stage. My supervisors Frank van Vree and Rob van der Laarse set up the research program “The Dynamics of Memory. The Netherlands in the Second World War”, an independent research line within the NWO thematic program Cultural Dynamics, in which my position was co-sponsored by the Jewish Historical Museum, SNS Reaal (now Fonds 21) and the Rothschild Foundation Europe. Frank van Vree gave me all the support one could ask for, and then some. He gave me the confidence to follow my own instinct, constructive feedback when I needed it and devoted much of his time to other projects I took part of, and in the process molded me into the academic I am today. Rob van der Laarse has always been generous in sharing his ideas and his network and pushed me to look beyond my own horizon in order to improve my work. I was also able to benefit from the experience and feedback of the program members: Bart Wallet, Iris van Ooijen, Claartje Wesselink, Erik Somers, Dienke Hondius, Esther Captain, Rob van Ginkel, Kees Ribbens, Ralf Futselaar, Roel Hijink and Rosa Lehman.

My research would have been impossible had it not been for the warm welcome at the Jewish Historical Museum and I owe Joël Cahen and his staff members a special thanks for sharing their invaluable knowledge, time and energy. I was furthermore able to learn from Hetty Berg, Annemiek Gringold and Esther Göbel in publishing the monograph De Hollandsche Schouwburg. Theater, deportatieplaats, plek van herinnering (2013) and also thank the other contributors: Frank van Vree, Joost Groeneboer, Coert Krabbe, Joosje Lakmaker, Pauline Micheels, Mark Schellekens, Bart Wallet and Evelien Gans. During my research I met and interviewed many people to whom I owe my gratitude: Ted Musaph, Jaap van Velzen, Bloeme Evers, Judith Belinfante, Petra Katzenstein, Norbert van den Berg, Victor Levie, Machteld Aardse, Femke Kempkes, Denise Citroen and Peter Buijs. I was able to benefit from the work done by Rachida Chaouqui, Merel de Kok and Maarten van Kesteren.

Right from the start I felt at home at the Department of Media Studies. Here, I went through the doctoral stages – optimism, writer’s block, denial and starting over – together with my colleagues Ellen de Vries, Maryn Wilkinson, Leonie Schmidt, Daisy van de Zande, Dymph Verdiesen, Anne Helmond, Emiel Martens, Hanna Surma, Sebastian Scholz, Jennifer Steetskamp, Martijn de Waal, David Nieborg, Flora Lysen and Eva Sancho.
The Huizinga Institute allowed me to broaden my scholarly perspective and meet my bright, wonderful and talented wife. I thank Paul Koopman, Anne Hilde van Baal, Jantine Beuvens, Tessel Bauduin, Sara Polak, Suze Zijlstra, Pieter de Bruijn and Geerte Savenije. Furthermore, I thank Ilse Raaijmakers and Iris van Ooijen for setting up the network ‘Herinneringscultuur van de Tweede Wereldoorlog’.

This dissertation also had several endings. During the last phase, the Department of Literary Studies offered me academic shelter. I thank Mireille Rosello, Murat Aydemir, Boris Noordenbos, Daan Wesselman, Niall Martin, Jules Sturm, Hanneke Stuit, Noa Roei, Joost de Bloois, Annemarie van der Veen and my students. Michael Katzberg helped me with the definitive manuscript. And I thank my friends and family who have been supportive and patient with the many announced endings. If you are reading this, I can really promise you the end is near.

And with the finish line in sight, I would like to thank Marrigje Rikken for her support in every imaginable way possible. Her relentless eye for detail, her willingness to read and improve my work and her high standards made me push myself even more. Without her academic and moral support, I would not have been able to bring this dissertation to a successful end. Now we can start a new beginning as a family.
Bibliography


Farrar, Margaret E. “Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory.” Political Research Quarterly 64, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 723–35.


———. *De vatenman: Bernard van Leer (1883-1958)*. Amsterdam: Contact, 2002.


