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

Duindam, D.A.

Citation for published version (APA):
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. 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 a 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. 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 installment 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); Erlr and Nünning, *Cultural Memory Studies*; Erlr 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 \textit{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}

\begin{itemize}
\item Winter, “The Performance of the Past,” 11.
\item Ibid., 12.
\item 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, Francesca Mazzucchelli, and Carlos Reijnen, “Introduction. Traces of Terror, Signs of Trauma,” \textit{VS Quaderni Di Studi Semiotici}, no. 119 (2014): 5.
\item 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.
\item Karen E. Till, \textit{The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 9.
\end{itemize}
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 nationalist 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

---

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).

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 3.1.** *NIW* 5 May, 1948.

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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textit{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.’\textsuperscript{16} The previous chapter demonstrated how the \textit{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 [...].’\textsuperscript{17} Past, present and future were united in the image of the Jewish resistance fighter.\textsuperscript{18} This Zionist

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] \textit{NIW} May 14,1948.
\item[16] Ibid.
\item[17] Ibid.
\item[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, \textit{Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood}; Segev, \textit{The Seventh Million}.
\end{footnotes}
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 & Spruit, 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 chapelle ardent, 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 alley 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. For the

---

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


39 Van Vree mentions the success of DER NÜRNBERGER PROZESS (1959), DIE BRÜCKE (1960), MEIN KAMPF (1960) and TOTALE OORLOG (1960) amongst other films. See Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, 78, note 67. The American theater adaptation of Anne Frank’s diary, introduced in the Netherlands as theater play in 1956 and as film in 1959, was popular in spite of harsh critique for its Broadway-approach, the universalization of Anne Frank and subsequent trivialization of the persecution of the Jews, see Van der Lans and Vuijsje, Het Anne Frank Huis, 57–64; David Barnouw, “Anne Frank,” in Een open zenuw. Hoe wij ons de Tweede Wereldoorlog herinneren, ed. Madelon de Keizer and Marije Plomp (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2010), 55–56.

40 Frank van Vree demonstrates that De Bezetting, though dedicating much attention to the persecution of the Jews, embedded this history in a national narrative. Jewish survivors were not interviewed and notions of passivity and collaboration were barely addressed. Van Vree, In de schaduw van Auschwitz, chapter 3.
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.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.62 This entailed a celebration of heroes and a denouncement of the so-called great masses that had supposedly collaborated with their 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

---

61 Zertal, Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood, 27.
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 *NIW* 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.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.’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.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

80 NIW April 28, 1989.
81 NIW April 5 and 26, 1991.
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, *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. 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 20th 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. The bronze lamp in the Hollandsche Schouwburg

Fig. 3. 3.

83 The text read ‘Mijn ziel draait 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. 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.

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. Most of these visitors were familiar with the history of the site

---

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

the report Kerncijfers 1999-2003 by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the annual reports from the Jewish Historical Museum.
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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{92}

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

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Trouw} June 6, 1963.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{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 to 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
gentleman 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 coincidentally 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 befel [sic] 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.

\footnote{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, “Jeugdvoorzichting 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 Welldoorlog 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.\textsuperscript{120} 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 arraigned 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.’\textsuperscript{121} Family photographs have often been successfully used at memorial museums, as they allow for an affective investment on part of the visitor.\textsuperscript{122} 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.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure_3_8.png}
\caption{Figure 3. 8. Photograph David Duindam}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Figure_3_9.png}
\caption{Figure 3. 9. Photograph David Duindam}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{120} Interview Belinfante.
\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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?’\textsuperscript{126} When you exit the room, the last text above the door reads Liberation (May 5, 1945).

\textbf{Figure 3. 9.} Photograph David Duindam

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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 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 Ipod, 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.