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

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Chapter 4: The Fragmented Memorial Museum: Indexicality and Self-Inscription

The Hollandsche Schouwburg was originally constructed as a theater; during the first fifteen years after the occupation, although dilapidated, the fabric of the structure remained largely unchanged (see figure 4.1). In 1962 its main hall was dismantled and replaced by a courtyard (see figure 4.2.). Two memorials were installed: in the front of the building was a reception hall with an intimate *chapelle ardente* on the East side. The upper floors were not part of the memorial and were rented out as office space. Passing through the reception hall, the visitor entered the courtyard which contained a central rectangular grass field. On the North side of the building, where the stage was once located, a large pylon was erected on a plinth in the shape of a Magen David. Behind the former stage, trees were planted.

*Figure 4.1. Hollandsche Schouwburg 1930, Bakker. Made by Maarten van Kesteren*
in a small garden area that was not open to the public. Over time, the abstract visual language and lack of contextualization ceased to appeal to a large part of the visitors and a major renovation took place in the early 1990s (see figure 4.3). The *chapelle ardente* on the first floor was replaced by a wall of names and the grass field in the courtyard was substituted with stone pavement. The office space on the North side of the building made way for a small museum exhibition on the first floor and a multifunctional room on the second floor, for group-instruction and other types of meetings.

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

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

An example of this complex interaction is the historic photograph placed on a large panel in the garden behind the courtyard, on the very spot the people in this picture were standing in 1942 (see figure 4.4). A girl depicted in black-and-white waves at you, smiling, standing in a disorganized courtyard. Her hand is blurry, her smile genuine. A boy in front of her has a somewhat defiant, but playful posture. A man in a suit with a white armband is drinking from a teacup and in the

**Figure 4.3.** Hollandsche Schouwburg current situation, Gelders, 1992

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

sun while others are talking to each other.

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

I could clearly see her from the upstairs window of the house where we lived. Then I took a few photos as a keepsake, for when she returned but for myself as well – so I had something to remember her by […]. Yet at a certain moment, the courtyard was empty. Greetje was gone.

Figure 4. 4. Photograph David Duindam
Underneath the excerpt the caption reads: ‘Lydia van Nobelen-Riezouw in an interview about her friend Gretha Velleman (Amsterdam 1924-Auschwitz 1942)’. The photographer is identified and the girl addressing the spectator with her wave now has an age, a place of death and a name. When you try to reconstruct from what angle and when the photograph was taken, it is hard to locate it precisely. It must have been during the deportation period at this spot from one of the neighboring houses, but where are all the buildings you can see in the picture? How could Lydia have been able to take this picture during the occupation? And why is Greetje waving and smiling rather than distressed and anxious? The casual, almost friendly atmosphere in the picture dispels conceptions of fear, chaos and hostility usually associated with a deportation center. It takes some extra context to understand that it was taken from the house on the left side, that the current garden previously held structures such as an annex for stage props that have long since been dismantled, and that the policy at the Hollandsche Schouwburg during the first months of the deportations was not as restrictive as it would be later on and allowed captives to take in some fresh air during the warm summer days.

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

![Figure 4. 6. Photograph David Duindam](image)

same object looks rather threatening and looming, somehow out of place.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Hollandsche Schouwburg is an *in situ* memorial museum: the events that unfolded in this building and beyond during the occupation of the Netherlands are both told and commemorated at this very site. According to museum specialist Paul Williams, there has been a world-wide rise of memorial museums in the last few decades.6 Eric Somers observes a similar trend in the Netherlands, where memorial museums have increasingly been established since the 1990s, especially at authentic historical sites, a process reflected in the overlapping topography of historic events and current museum sites.7 Somers demonstrates that on the one hand, memorial centers have been established at former camp sites and on the other hand, war museums, both at historic and non-historic locations, took on commemorative roles.8 He argues that several *ex novo* museums incorporated memorials to provide a moral framework because these museums lacked a site-specific historical significance.

An important issue is how the memorial function, which usually focuses on commemoration, and museum function, that emphasizes contextualization and education, interact with each other. Williams opposes these two views. According to him, memorials have the difficult task of being both specific and unique to the event commemorated, and at the same time universal enough to be appropriated by the general public. People do not visit memorials because they are beautiful, out of sheer curiosity or fascination, nor to learn more about a topic. ‘Instead, we come in respect, bringing with us a sense of history, often loaded with familial significance. […] World War memorials act more as staging points for mourning and reflection than as destinations that explain the significance of an event.’9 In opposition to the memorial, Williams situates museums that collect, exhibit and interpret objects on a critical basis. In spite of the observation that the line between

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

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

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

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

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

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

Der Hiat zwischen dem Ort der Opfer und dem der Besucher muß sinnfällig gemacht werden, wenn das affektive Potential, das der Erinnerungsort mobilisiert, nicht zu einer ‘Horizontverschmelzung’ und illusionären Identifikation führen soll.

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

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

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

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

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

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19 Assmann, Erinnerungsräume, 338.
visitor and past events without denying a real connection to the past. She emphasizes that semiotic objects are never exclusively indexical, but often carry iconic and symbolic elements in them as well.\textsuperscript{22} One such example of a mixed semiotic object at the Hollandsche Schouwburg is the courtyard walls: they are traces of the past that are transformed into an indexical sign that have an iconic resemblance of the former theater stage and a symbolic ruinous character. These walls are more evocative to present-day visitors than the pylon, a sign that has only a symbolic value that is no longer supported by a national discourse of victory over the Nazi cruelties.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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\(^{26}\) James Young argues: ‘In confusing these ruins for the events they now represent, we lose sight of the fact that they are framed for us by curators in particular times and places.’ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 128.

\(^{27}\) Van der Laarse, *De oorlog als beleving*, 24–25.
monuments to democracy that surround it – to Lincoln and Jefferson and Washington – will take on a new meaning. The Mall is a significant location that places the memory of the Shoah at the symbolic heart of the nation. Another key example is Yad Vashem’s intertwinement with Israel’s territory. Sociologist Erik Cohen argues that this site connects the history of the Shoah directly with modern Israeli society, making it a site in populo rather than in situ. He argues that ‘primary sites do not ensure authenticity and secondary sites do not preclude it.’ Both the USHMM and Yad Vashem are significant sites inscribed in the nation’s imaginary that both receive from and assign meaning to their symbolic locations. On the other hand, not all in situ sites are sufficiently marked and do therefore not automatically testify to the past. For example, the former death camps that have been destroyed such as Sobibor and Treblinka hold very little to no remaining original structures above ground. This has inspired researchers to dig for the past in search of authentic edifices and artifacts. Other in situ sites were reopened after the war, such as the Ernst Happel Stadion in Vienna where over a thousand Jews were held before they were deported. In 2003 a commemorative plaque was unveiled, but otherwise the dark past of this football stadium remains invisible.

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

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

28 Quoted in Young, The Texture of Memory, 347. For an account of this museum’s establishment, see Oren Baruch Stier, Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).
31 Holocaust archaeology has been developed over the last few years to examine underground physical traces. See Caroline Sturdy Colls, Holocaust Archaeology: Archaeological Approaches to Landscapes of Nazi Genocide and Persecution. (Dissertation. University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 2012). Iris van Ooijen is preparing her PhD dissertation on Dutch WWII memorial camps as contested space, in which the different functions of this new type of archaeology is critically addressed.
33 Violi, “Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory,” 39.
This imagination, though considered to be ambiguous by Assmann because of the danger of illusionary identification between visitor and victim, is not something to be prevented, but rather a powerful source for in situ memorial museums. At the Hollandsche Schouwburg, visitors are encouraged to actively inscribe their own biographies in the fragmented museum narrative, which is discussed in the third section of this chapter.

To conclude, it should be emphasized that the memorial and museum functions of in situ sites of memory supplement each other in the active mediation of the past. Secondly, in situ and ex novo sites are different not because in the former, the past is directly accessible and in the latter, location and the visitor’s experience are inconsequential. Rather, it is the latent and contingent indexicality of in situ sites that allows for the imaginative interpretation of material traces by the visitor. With this in mind, we can look at the various museum strategies that are employed at the Hollandsche Schouwburg to mediate the past and the active role of its visitors. Because Violi looks for ‘overall meaning effects’ in her case studies, she treats these sites as discrete, intentional and finalized texts separated from the actions of the visitor.34 This is based on her theoretical and methodological separation of enunciation, the museum, and interpretation by the visitor. It takes the museum as a static given, rather than an emergent configuration of media, techniques and historical textures with which visitors interact. It furthermore neglects the role of the visitor in the production of these signs. It is precisely the anticipation of the visitor to come in contact with a historic site that turns every trace into a possible sign. The expectant observer looks at the trees and walls and sees witnesses of the past. And it is that same visitor who wants to enter the garden and to be informed about its history. It is not the indexicality of signs, but rather the latent indexicality that may turn the smallest detail into a possible remnant of the past.

Visitors are not passive observers, but rather active performers.35 Their imagined and actual practices have been accommodated by architects and curators. When we look at the Hollandsche Schouwburg from this perspective, we can understand how the current presentation is the result of a long interaction between site, designer and user. Considering this, we should not try to determine all possible indexical signs, but rather recognize the fact that the latent and contingent indexicality evokes awareness on the part of the visitor that may turn the smallest detail into an imagined or actual trace of the past. Visitors constantly look for clues.

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

2. **Conflicting Scripts, Routing and Self-Exhibition**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Upon entering the main exhibition room, the visitor needs to make a sharp right turn. Because there are no clear indications, many visitors walk straight ahead and miss the chronological setup. The first part of the exhibition addresses the persecution of the Jews and is set against a backdrop of dark tones. The historical narrative is divided into four periods: ‘towards isolation, May 1940-June 1941’, ‘isolation completed, February 1941-June 1942’ and ‘beginning of the end – the yellow star, 1 May 1942’ and ‘via Westerbork towards Auschwitz, July 1942-September 1944’. The second part, in lighter blue tones, addresses people in hiding and acts of resistance in and around the Crèche. These two parts are divided by a low wall with holes through which the visitor can peek and a life-sized photo-cutout of a woman carrying a baby over the wall from the dark side to the lighter side (see figure 3.13). Former director of the Jewish Historical Museum Judith Belinfante had the final responsibility for the design. ‘The exhibition is a visual composition with a question. [...] This is what can happen, and if this happens, will you be standing on the other side [to accept the baby] or not?’47 This question however is posed too soon: it is positioned at the end of the first part, across from the map of the concentration camps, before the visitor has seen the part on resistance and hiding. Because most of this exhibition addresses the historical narrative rather than the responsibility of the visitor in the present, the fact that nobody is there to accept the baby might be misconstrued as a negative message – nobody was there to take the baby – rather than a question that addresses the visitor. Furthermore, the question seems to involve the visitor, but leaves little room for reflection or real agency.

47 Interview Belinfante.
Enlarged photographs, authentic objects and reconstructions are juxtaposed without prioritizing authentic artifacts.48 The aforementioned wall with a photo-cutout, a scale model of the city of Amsterdam, videos, facsimiles of newspapers and other documents are placed next to an original rucksack with its contents used by Erna Katan who survived Bergen-Belsen and the baby clothes of Jaap Wertheim who survived the war as a young child in hiding (see figures 3.10-3.12). The suitcase and baby clothes act as indexical signs through which the visitor can imagine a meaningful relationship with the past. However, the exhibition is not mainly based on the authenticity of these particular objects. I interviewed designer Victor Levie, who was involved in the plan for the exhibition and the wall of names. He relayed that the team of designers was not particularly concerned with this issue. ‘We did not think that original objects were better. If an artifact will be displayed for twenty years under these circumstances, it is impossible to use originals.’49 According to museum staff member Peter Buijs, who carried out research for the exhibition, several original documents were replaced with

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

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

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

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

3. Performing the Site: Walking and Self-Inscription

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

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 4. 12. Photograph David Duindam
and 4.14–4.16). Although every message is unique, you can recognize the educational tools they were given – such as messages of tolerance and peace – with which they try to come to terms with the history of the Shoah. These messages are acts of commemoration and at the same time are exhibited for other visitors to see.

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

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

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

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

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

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Ibid.

Figure 4.14. Photograph David Duindam
people to have a name or a biography. This selection could be replaced by thousands of other possible collages, so it had to remain somewhat anonymous.\textsuperscript{59} Because the collage functions as a synecdoche, standing in for all Jews before, during and after the war, it remains abstract and provides little insight into the lives of these particular people.

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

\textbf{Figure 4. 15.} Photograph David Duindam

name such as De Vries, which is not a typical Jewish name, is listed. Children

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

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

![Figure 4. 16. Photograph David Duindam](image)

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

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

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

In 2010, the IkPod was presented, a small device based on an amended IPod that visitors can place against the wall. It recognizes its location and displays the family name it is held in front of. By clicking on the family name, you are linked to the Digital Monument and can find information about individual victims. Different from the computer terminals, the IkPod only functions in relation to the wall of names. It elaborates on the commemorative practice of touching the wall and uses this to turn the static wall into a dynamic and interactive memorial. Due to technical issues, the device does not always run smoothly, which interferes with the commemorative function of the space. In theory however, the IkPod offers the opportunity to create a personal narrative. Arthur argues, ‘Digital history is more about creating pathways through information and interpretation than about achieving a whole picture or a final product.’

Storyteller and memory academic Anna Reading emphasizes that the choices people make using digital databases usually follow patterns that are gendered, socialized and connected to personal biographies. ‘This suggests that the extent to which visitors will actually extend or have challenged their knowledge and socially inherited memory of the Holocaust [...] may be limited.’ The names that visitors will look up are inescapably related to preexisting knowledge and their personal lives. The IkPod is not meant to

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

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

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