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

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Epilogue

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

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

Gringold continues her story. The gymnasium dates from 1953 and during the occupation it was a garden through which dozens of Jewish children were smuggled out into hiding. She points out that this route was the opposite direction of the path that we took going into the room. The children were taken outside through the main entrance of the Kweekschool. The passing of the tram was used as a diversion for the guards who stood in front of the Hollandsche Schouwburg. Further down the street, another member of the resistance pulled the children into a portico. Another tactic was to take a group of children out for a walk, have some of them taken away and upon returning, grabbing some children who had not been outside to make sure that the headcount was correct. Once they were no longer incarcerated, the resistance placed these children in the care of host families across the country. After the war, Huize Frank was torn down and incorporated into the Kweekschool. The former Crèche was used by a cleaning company and demolished in the 1970s. Of these three neighboring buildings, only the Kweekschool remains somewhat the same, however with several alterations such as an entirely new floor on top of the old building and the gymnasium in the backyard.

After the talk, the audience asks questions and goes outside onto the patio of the former school. People try to locate the classroom Gringold referred to and look for other traces of the past. They do not pay attention to the new buildings where once the former Crèche and Huize Frank were located, but focus on the Kweekschool in spite of the fact that this building has been thoroughly renovated and played a smaller role during the occupation in the rescue operations of children. These visitors only need a few clues in order to arouse their curiosity. One of the participants tells me she likes the fact that this patio is still cluttered as it takes away the feeling of being constructed as a memorial.

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

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

The aftermath and memory of the persecution of the Jews were difficult to reconcile with the postwar discourse of national unity that aimed for the reconstruction of a nation where Jews would be treated like any other citizen, both in the present and in the narratives of the past. The policy regarding the Dutch memorial landscape was strongly shaped by this particular discourse. The suffering of the Jews could not be presented as different from the suffering of the Dutch nation as a whole. Memorials dedicated to the persecution of the Jews highlighted Dutch resistance against Nazi rule. Two of the earliest and most prominent memorials nationwide that refer to the persecution of the Jews date from the 1950s and were established in Amsterdam, the city where the largest part of Dutch Jewry lived before and after the war. The Dokwerker statue and the Monument of

Gratitude both celebrate the Dutch resistance and the protection offered by the citizens of Amsterdam to the Jewish population. They fail to mention both active and passive forms of collaboration, that the Nazi ideology specifically targeted Jews, and that around three-quarters of the Dutch Jewish population was eventually murdered during the occupation; an exceptionally high percentage compared to other European countries. A request in 1947 by the Jewish orthodox community in Amsterdam to establish a memorial on the very spot where the Dokwerker was to be erected was never granted, and instead this memorial was realized on the Jewish cemetery in Muiderberg.

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

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

Of all the sites in Amsterdam related to the persecution of the Jews, it was this particular building that caused controversy soon after the occupation ended. The new owners reopened the theater and offered light entertainment. This led to

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

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

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

The establishment of this memorial complex can be seen in light of a broader international development in that same period. Israel's remembrance authority Yad Vashem established its Hall of Remembrance in 1961. In Paris, the

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

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

The balance between a specific yet open design allowed for the active appropriation of this memorial complex by an important part of the Jewish

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

In the 1990s, the abstract idiom of the memorials of Hollandsche Schouwburg no longer appealed to most of the younger generations, whereas the Shoah had gradually become a more pronounced part of the hegemonic memory of World War II, both in the Netherlands and abroad. In the United States, the Shoah had become an essential part of American culture and between 1988 and 1993 the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) was constructed in the center of the nation's capital. The museum focused on educating a broad and inclusive public and made use of all kinds of technological innovations to tell its story. The establishment of this museum marked a general shift towards a more informative and educational representation of the Shoah that aimed at a broad public of both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors. In the Netherlands, the Jewish Historical Museum had already addressed the Shoah for several decades with the utmost reluctance and consideration for older generations. When it took over the management of the Hollandsche Schouwburg it began renovations, it tried to find a balance between addressing a new generation without offending visitors who had survived the persecution themselves. It explicitly did not want to follow in the footsteps of the USHMM. According to Ted Musaph, the then chair of the Jewish Historical Museum board, the bluntness of the American museum lacked any respect for the feelings of survivors.¹ The result of this restraint was an educational exhibition that showed the gradual persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands, but did not explicitly exhibit the horrors of the concentration camps. In order to ensure that older generations were not disturbed by younger visitors, the exhibition was separated from the memorial in the courtyard. Another important addition was the

¹ NIW, 29 January, 1993.

wall of names that listed approximately 6,700 family names that represented more than a hundred-thousand individual victims. This strategy also struck a balance between indirect and concrete references to individual victims.

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

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

stations and the IkkPods that provide information about individual victims; and the practice of stone-laying has been integrated into the educational program.

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

There is another consequence of this latent indexicality, namely the spatial proliferation of memory. The history of the deportation site is strongly embedded in its direct environment: the Crèche across the street; Huize Frank and the Kweekschool; the residences around the courtyard through which some of the deportees would go outside for a short amount of time and from which the series of illegal photographs were taken; the café next to the Hollandsche Schouwburg that was connected to the former theater and where during the deportations an infirmary was installed; and the tram rail that was used to transport Jews to and from the Hollandsche Schouwburg (even though most transportation was accomplished by truck or by foot), and also used as a diversion by the resistance to smuggle out children. Most of these elements are already involved in the current presentation: the photographs in the garden connect the Hollandsche Schouwburg with the surrounding residences and the exhibition frames both the former Crèche

and the busy street life as part of its story about the rescue of children and the continuation of life after the war. These connections can be cause for conflict with neighbors, as we have seen with the photograph that faced the neighbor to re-enact the original position of the photographer. The neighbor complained that he did not want to be confronted on a daily basis with this history, and therefore the photograph was rotated. However, the proliferation of memory also carries the potential to expand the story told by this memorial complex, and to address a broader public. The light-art projection *Last Words* used the façade of the Hollandsche Schouwburg to facilitate the letters to break out of their museum frame and escape into the public realm. It addressed passersby that did not come to visit the memorial but were nevertheless confronted with its layered history. The façade can act as an important and interactive interface that connects the Hollandsche Schouwburg to its direct urban environment and thereby expand its potential public considerably.

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

² Over the last few years, the Hollandsche Schouwburg had between 40,000 and 45,000 annual visitors. According to the feasibility study of the consortium XPEX, Hypsos and Aronsohn, conducted in 2011 and 2012, the new NSM would need to attract 120,000 annual visitors to the Hollandsche Schouwburg and 80,000 to the Kweekschool. See XPEX Experience Experts, "Commemoration through Narration. Feasibility Study Summary" (Amsterdam: XPEX Experience Experts, 2012).

particular neighborhood to these potential tourists. It could also profit from the nearness of the Dutch Resistance Museum and the envisioned Holocaust Memorial of Names, which is currently planned for the nearby Wertheimpark and will hold all 102,000 individual names of Dutch victims of the Shoah, including other persecuted victim groups such as the Roma and Sinti.³ In addition to the institutional context of the Jewish Cultural Quarter, it is important to deliberate with these organizations in order to come to a fruitful cooperation or *modus vivendi* that clearly positions the various profiles and missions.

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

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

³ The city council of Amsterdam has announced a decision concerning the location of this new memorial in the course of 2016.

of the Shoah in the Dutch and European context. This exhibition would function ‘as context for the Hollandsche Schouwburg, and the Hollandsche Schouwburg would function as a concrete example and *lieu de mémoire*.’⁴ The consortium further suggested creating a new wall of names on a portion of the façade of the Kweekschool to visibly mark this site as memorial museum. The tram stop in between the two buildings could be used to visually connect these two buildings.

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

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

[The NSM] should have an important societal role aside from telling the story of the past. This public urgency is extremely important. The notion that storytelling is a form of remembrance dwells too much on the past and does not reflect on the present. Someone once said, to tell a story is to remember is to act.⁵

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

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

⁴ XPEX Experience Experts, “Herdenken door vertellen. Haalbaarheidsstudie Hollandsche Schouwburg als Nationaal Sjoa Museum en Centrum” (Amsterdam, 2012), 48.

⁵ Interview Gringold.

for whatever motivates them. There should also be space to talk about those issues that do not relate directly to the Shoah.⁶

For Gringold, this does not mean that the Shoah can be compared to every other form of discrimination or injustice: to compare the persecution of the Jews to school bullying would take the Shoah too far out of its historical context. According to her, every visitor has his or her own background and moral benchmark and the NSM has a social responsibility in the present, not merely in the past. An important issue will be how to address competing or conflicting memories and interests that might at first seem to diverge from or even counter the main narrative of the museum.

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

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

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interview with Joël Cahen, July 24, 2014.

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

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

If we look at the general development of the Hollandsche Schouwburg, one might argue that this site of memory was initially framed by a national memory discourse with a focus on first generation survivors and gradually moved towards broader international concerns with the education of younger generations in the 1990s and onwards. From this perspective, the advent of the NSM seems to completely place the Schouwburg within an international memory discourse, and

even perhaps transform a very specific site into a more generic memorial museum. However, this point of view obscures the importance of site-specific memory practices that are developed over time and in collaboration with local stakeholders. There will always remain a certain restraint concerning the representation of the Shoah because of its spatial proximity: there is no need for an all too revealing and literal representation, since this would overshadow the latent indexicality of this site. It is precisely the embeddedness in and interaction with the neighborhood that has been the strength of the Hollandsche Schouwburg and should remain the driving force in the development of the National Shoah Museum.