

Meta-Memory

About the Holocaust in New Israeli Video Art

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ABSTRACT

As the generation of Holocaust survivors dwindles, the questions of Holocaust representation are especially poignant today. What is appropriate? What are the limits of taste and irony? How to deal with the plethora of media-generated images of the past? These questions are particularly resonant in Israel, where Holocaust history and memory are the cornerstones of national culture and part and parcel of its “civil religion,” instrumentalized to serve the interests of the state. In this article I explore the work of young Israeli artists who may be termed “third generation” survivors, and the way their art engages with the memory of the Holocaust. Focusing on a representative video work, *Awake* by Tamar Latzman, I show that the art of the third generation is characterized by close attention to earlier representations of the Holocaust and their mediation. The artists’ attitude toward these representations is often playful, relying on parody, irony, and humor, and drawing paradoxical connections between past and present. They experiment with point of view, shifting from victims to perpetrators or deniers. I conclude that what emerges in Latzman’s (and others’) work is *meta-memory*—a memory of a memory (in the same way in which meta-cinema is film about film).

We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of preexistent works of the modernist texts,

the building blocks of older cultural and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage: metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts—such is the logic of postmodernism in general, which finds one of its strongest and most original, authentic forms in the new art of experimental video.

—Fredric Jameson, “Video”

In 2002, the exhibition “Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art” opened at the Jewish Museum in New York City. The show included major Israeli, American, and European contemporary artists, mainly of the younger generations that had not experienced World War II and the Holocaust. Their art challenged the audience and critics to grapple with representations that went against all expectations of what the appropriate commemoration of the Holocaust should look like (realistic, solemn, respectful, etc.).¹ The show stirred considerable controversy and started a renewed conversation about how to represent the Holocaust for the new generation. As James Young wrote in the accompanying catalog, the art included in the exhibition posed many questions: What is appropriate in Holocaust representation today? What are the limits of taste and irony? How to deal today with the plethora of media-generated images of the past?²

These questions are particularly resonant in Israel, where Holocaust history and memory are the cornerstones of national culture and part and parcel of its “civil religion.”³ The memory of the Holocaust and anti-Semitic persecution are instrumentalized to serve the interests of the state and to justify its creation, existence, and policies.⁴ As such, the Holocaust plays a central part in the public memory and national commemorations in Israel, including national holidays, school curricula, memorials, and museums. Paradoxically, the Holocaust has been marginalized in the Israeli arts, occupying a strange place between taboo and sentimental kitsch.⁵ Only in the early 1980s did artists such as Moshe Gershuni, Yocheved Weinfeld, Haim Manor, Simcha Shirman, and Honi Ha’Meagel—some of them second-generation survivors—break taboos and start confronting the Holocaust in their work in unprecedented ways.⁶ The work of Israeli artists included in the 2002 exhibition (Roece Rosen, Boaz Arad, Ram Katzir) who followed in the footsteps of the earlier artists was even more radical.⁷ They dared to cross many lines: some works forced the audience to identify with the perpetrator; others were playful, humorous, ironic, or even erotic.

Their work was definitive for a new crop of Israeli artists and the way their

art engages with the memory of the Holocaust. These artists—including Tamy Ben-Tor, Omer Fast, Gil Yefman, Maya Zack, Amit Epstein, and Tamar Latzman, some of whom are the grandchildren of survivors—may be considered “third generation” survivors. Significantly, although these artists have come from different art backgrounds, they work predominantly in video, a medium that straddles the border between artistic production and mass communication. This new medium is a part of the emergent cultural-technological regime of digital media, whose outlines, according to Steven Shaviro, aren’t entirely clear to us yet.⁸ Still, writes Israeli curator Chen Tamir, some characteristics of video art make it “an excellent instrument for processing their social reality.”⁹ Beyond accessibility of the means of production, video art may be distributed through channels (such as Vimeo and YouTube) where, at least theoretically, it can get a wider exposure than that offered in a traditional museum setting. (Although in reality such works may be password-protected or behind a paywall.)

Video art was a late arrival on the Israeli art scene, with the first experimental videos appearing only in 1970s. By the 1990s it had gained popularity, and today it is flourishing.¹⁰ Like other Israeli video art of the 2000s and 2010s, the “third generation” art that engages with the Holocaust is characterized by humor, irony, and indirect ways of dealing with either national or personal traumas. The artists are highly aware of the context for their work, stemming from film and popular culture; they experiment with cinematic structures, probing the nature and construction of narratives.¹¹

This new generation of Israeli artists exists, to use Irit Rogoff’s phrase, in “the Diaspora’s diaspora.” They move between Israel, Europe, and the Americas, living, studying, or working abroad, thereby violating the Zionist dictum of the “negation of the diaspora.” They occupy “positions of clearly articulated ambivalence” between their belonging and not-belonging in Israel; they thematize in their work “those past European cultures from which [their] ancestors were expelled and to which [they] at some level gravitate and try and make [their] own.”¹² Their mobility also makes them aware of the ideas of home and exile, and of their shifting national, cultural, gender, and other identities.

Following in the footsteps of Rosen, Arad, and Katzir, they continue to play with the boundaries and expectations of Holocaust commemoration. Their work builds on the existing vocabulary of images and icons of the Holocaust, moving the conversation from the history of the Holocaust, and even from memory, to their own relationship with the mediated nature of that history and memory today.

In the words of film scholar Gerd Bayer, they assume that “the audience already knows films that belong to the first two generations and therefore approaches memory from a different perspective, one that is less geared towards the past.”¹³ The third generation filmmakers (and artists) are by necessity focused on the matter of the representation itself: They “implicitly comment on the difficulty of representation while simultaneously insisting on its necessity.”¹⁴ The challenge for them is “finding the right balance between presenting traumatic memories and connecting them to the reality of later generations without turning them into nostalgic commodities.”¹⁵

Video art is an ideal medium for dealing with the memory of the Holocaust because, since its early days, video has been used to document and create memory. “Since its invention, the camera has figured centrally in the desire to remember, to recall the past, to make the absent present. Photographic, cinematic, and video images are the raw materials used to construct personal histories: events remembered because they were photographed, moments forgotten because no images were preserved, and unphotographed memories that work in tension with camera memories,” writes media scholar Marita Sturken.¹⁶ But the use of the medium to preserve memory can paradoxically result also in a kind of forgetting, as happens in the production of so-called screen memories, which act as substitutes for traumatic memories. Images of historic events in the media (such as representations of the Holocaust in Israeli media) create such screen memories, which “both substitute themselves for the personal memories of survivors and supersede documentary images as signifying history.”¹⁷ However, this paradoxical nature of the medium works to the advantage of video art. In the works of contemporary video artists, we can glimpse an emergence of memory in the postmodern context. As Sturken notes, “This memory is not about retrieval as much as it is about retelling and reconstruction.”¹⁸ This development is important because the medium of video art allows the new generation of artists to critically engage with the narrative of Holocaust memory, and to reshape it in the process.

The question is: what kind of memory is communicated in their works? Here I want to focus on a representative video work that exemplifies these trends: *Awake* by Tamar Latzman. I want to suggest that what emerges in Latzman’s (and others’) work is *meta-memory*: the memory of a memory (to coin a term that pays tribute to what Fredric Jameson called metatexts).¹⁹

Latzman (b. 1978) studied art at Hamidrasha College and photography at Jerusalem’s Hadassah College. In 2010 she graduated with an MFA from the

School of Visual Arts in New York City, and she continues to live and work in both Israel and the United States. Her work has been shown at Eyebeam and UnionDocs (Brooklyn), Jüdisches Museum Hohenems (Austria), Artists House (Tel Aviv), Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art (Israel), Ashdod Museum of Art (Israel), Loop Festival (Barcelona), SVA Photo Gallery (New York City), and other venues.

Latzman was born and raised in Israel, but her family immigrated there in the early 1970s from Vilnius, Lithuania, then a part of the USSR. She grew up as a Hebrew-speaker in a family that spoke Russian at home, so when she moved to the United States to study, the experience of dislocation and exile, as well as the situation of multilinguality and accentedness, was familiar to her. She had grown up hearing conversations about her family's history, which she didn't like to listen to as a child; reminders of the diasporic past were not popular in Israel at the time. But she did learn about her family's fate during the World War II: her grandparents survived in evacuation, and her grandfather fought in the Red Army, but the members of her larger family were all murdered.²⁰ This was a common fate for Lithuanian Jews, about 90 percent of whom perished in the Holocaust.²¹ This background shaped Latzman's focus as an artist on the issues of memory, history, displacement, and distortion.

Awake

Awake premiered originally as a two-screen installation in 2010, although later it was also shown as a split-screen video. The thirteen-minute video consists of five chapters that present separate vignettes, loosely unified by the narrator's presence and broad themes of inclusion and exclusion, compliance and resistance, personal memory and national past. Each chapter is announced by a simple black-and-white intertitle that identifies the name of the chapter. In all of them a female narrator played by Tamar Latzman appears on one of the two screens, narrating what seems to be her dreams; images on the second screen vary from contemporary moving footage to still images or historic photographs. The images on the second screen offset the stories, at times anchoring them in another context and at other times reinforcing the main story. The second screen is also where the subtitles appear, and they both complement and compete with the stories told in the narrator's voice. Both stories and images are rich in intertextual references. The relationships between the two screens and the two narratives—one spoken,

another written—are full of ambiguity and tension. The overall narrative in the piece progresses from vague to more specific historical references.

The first chapter, “Memory of a Nose,” opens with still domestic tableaux on both screens: on the left, a white mug on a windowsill; on the right, a corner of a stylish living room, with a red sofa basking in the soft light coming from a window. Although both screens are still and empty of human presence, quiet domestic noises in the background give the impression that life is taking place somewhere in another part of the house. The right screen then jump-cuts to a medium shot of the narrator, a young, dark-haired woman (Latzman) in an elegant yellow wrap that contrasts beautifully with the red of the sofa and the blue of the wall behind her. Her face is blurred (pixilated, in the manner of a TV exposé). As she starts her testimony in colloquial Hebrew, barely audible in the background, a male voiceover translates her words into English, speaking over her, so that both her face and her voice are partially erased. The story is that she noticed how her nose started growing over time. At first she ignored it (“Suddenly, I sensed something weird with my nose,” adds the subtitle on the left screen). But over time she found that her nose “grew bigger and bigger.” She consults with a doctor, who advises against surgery, telling her “just to wait and let it go.” “So, I did,” she concludes. The subtitles on the left don’t finish the story in the same way; they remain “stuck” at the description of her nose as “bigger and bigger.”

The narrative is both a testimony and a dream that is fragmentary and not resolved. At the first level, the nightmarish scenario of a growing body part alludes to the genre of body-horror, where a character’s body is out of control, growing or shrinking as if under a spell. A growing nose is also a signifier of lies (bringing to mind the fate of Pinocchio), inviting interpretations of delusions or deceptions. But the story of a growing nose as told in Hebrew is also metonymically connected to anti-Semitic Nazi stereotypes, even in the absence of historical references. These associations coexist in an uneasy and ambiguous way, with neither one claiming primacy. Even the title is ambiguous: is it the narrator’s recollection of what happened to her nose? Or is it a memory of the nose itself, as if it developed its own separate identity, with its own mind and memories, as in Gogol’s grotesque novella *The Nose*?

The second chapter, “Baader-Meinhof,” the first to feature a proper name, opens with shots of landscapes on both screens. The camera in both cases is stationary, observing for a while the calm, impersonal life of a park—a sunset, runners passing by, cars driving in the distance—to a soundtrack of chirping birds

and the swish of the wind. After a few seconds the narrator's voice introduces the story, with the female narrator jump-cut onto the left screen seconds later. She is facing a camera, as if for an interview or testimony; behind her, life in the park continues. Unlike in the previous chapter, Latzman's character's face is not blotted out, but it is not fully visible either—half hidden behind a knit hat and large sunglasses. She opens by recalling becoming aware of a group in her youth, but the subtitles on the right screen, in the glow of a sunset, cut to the chase: "I wanted to join them." Speaking in an accented and imperfect but fluent English, the narrator details her attempt to join the group. "I was very excited. I started to read about them, and, you know, I decided—I am going to be part of them." She reconstructs the requisite selection process, including a physical examination, a language test, and the most important part, an interview. Puffing on a cigarette, she explains how she had to get in shape for the test ("I ran in circles," comments the subtitle) and learn the difficult language ("German," adds the subtitle). Finally, she arrives at the interview, which took place in a room at the end of a long hall, where a woman and a "tall and handsome" man are seated at a table. They ask her questions about her motivation and preparation, and she tells them: "It's so important for me to be part of them!" The interview, she thought, went very well. But the subtitles barge in on her story again, "They didn't accept me. Apparently I was too short." The subtitles foreshadow the narrator's last words, "I was sure that I passed, but I didn't." As the story is unfolding, the tensions amass between the spoken narrative and the images on screen. The cigarette in the narrator's hand contradicts her account of physical fitness. The narrator's story does not specify the language, but the text on the right screen indicates "German." There is even tension between the seamless voice narration and the moving footage, which in fact shows subtle traces of editing, with strollers and runners appearing and disappearing in the background as if by magic, reminding us of the mediated, constructed nature of the recorded testimony.

"Baader-Meinhof" is a reference to the West German terrorist group (also known as the Red Army Faction) active in 1970s.²² But the story of trying to join a militant group, with its emphasis on physical fitness, national belonging, and ideological motivation, is a metonymic bridge to any kind of militarized youth movement—from Hitler Youth to Zionist youth movements, the latter of which Latzman experienced growing up in Israel. As in the previous chapter, the word "Jew" is not mentioned, but the character's palpable desire to belong—to be strong, to speak a new language flawlessly—calls to mind stories of assimilation



FIGURE 1. “Cutting a Mustache,” still video from *Awake*. Courtesy of the artist.

and transformation, like the Zionist dream of turning diasporic Jews into farmers and warriors. The oblique reference to German evokes transformation of a different kind—the idea of Jewish passing, such as that of Solomon Perel, whose story was the inspiration for the film *Europa* (Agnieszka Holland, Germany, 1990.). However, unlike Perel, who successfully passed for an ethnic German, Latzman’s narrator fails. Hers is not a story of triumph. Antithetical to the heroic Zionist narrative, she remains a diasporic Jew—too short, too accented, too weak. She is clearly playing here with the themes of belonging and not belonging in Israel; like other members of “the Diaspora’s diaspora,” she is simultaneously on the inside and outside, ambivalent about her European and Israeli roots.

In the second chapter the theme of “dreams” begins to come into focus—but it is still only loosely defined as something related to Nazi persecution of Jews. As the piece continues we start to see this theme increasingly developed, from different angles, and connected associatively as in a jazz improvisation. Gradually, it is seemingly everywhere, like the Baader-Meinhof cognitive bias phenomenon (named after the terrorist group): once people encounter a new piece of information or idea, they begin to see it all the time. Now that the Holocaust theme is on our radar, we’ll start to see the subsequent references to it.

The third chapter, “Cutting a Mustache,” opens with a shot of a rectangular, white porcelain drain on the right screen and a panning shot of an island on the left. Although difficult to identify, this is a view of Ellis Island, the historic entry point of millions of immigrants to the United States. The image of the drain remains still throughout the chapter, but a shot on the left cuts to what appears to be the interior of a large public space with arched windows, reminiscent of an old train station. (It is, in fact, the interior of the Ellis Island immigration museum, although the video doesn’t identify the location.) The diegetic sound mixes the hum of conversation, the shuffling of feet, and announcements. A camera follows

the narrator's walk through the space, then cuts to her in seated close up, lit by the natural light coming from the grand arched windows and the sharp light of electric chandeliers. She is wearing a heavy coat, as if for travel, but her face and hair now are in full view. In her clipped, accented English, Latzman's character recalls standing in a similar hall, with scissors in her hands. Suddenly, she says, a man arrives. He is bald, but with a mustache, which he asks her to cut. She is puzzled but complies with his request. Then another man arrives, and another. She ends up cutting the mustaches of many men, one after the other, her initial surprise giving way to routine. Then a man comes in with a "really small" mustache (she gestures to show how small), and then, she says, "I cut it before he even asks anything"—she mimics the cutting of the mustache—"and that's it," she concludes. Then her gaze breaks from the camera, and she stares uncomfortably in the space, as if processing what happened or contemplating the effect of her actions. The subtitles on the right screen this time don't contradict or foreshadow her narrative but rather supplement it with seemingly meaningless details ("I saw his socks"), which don't clarify anything but rather add minutiae the narrator deemed unnecessary to mention.

As in the previous vignettes, no direct references are made to Jews or Nazis, yet the story and its *mise-en-scène* are metonymically connected to the broader semantic field of the Holocaust, exile, and refuge, making us realize how little is needed for radar to go off. The setting—a train station or a detention center—evokes deportations and transfers that feature prominently in Holocaust representations as well as Jewish immigration narratives. Such places, be they train stations, airports, or checkpoints, indicate displacement; they are spaces of liminality and transiency.²³ The depiction of cutting people's mustaches, one after another, in an automated fashion also invokes the Holocaust: specifically, the Jewish *Sonderkommandos* who were ordered to cut people's hair before gassing, as was recalled in the tragic account of Treblinka survivor Abraham Bomba in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (France, UK, 1985). The association with the gas chamber is reinforced by the image of a drain that remains on the screen for the entirety of the chapter. By the time the man with the tiny mustache is mentioned, we are sure to identify him as Hitler, the square mustache being his most iconic visual representation.²⁴ The actions of the narrator in this story are ambiguous, vacillating between compliance and resistance. Is she just a cog in a machine, like people who were forced to do despicable acts to others? She seems to have no agency and no choice in what she is doing. In her story she just finds



FIGURE 2. "Tempting Joseph," still video from *Awake*. Courtesy of the artist.

herself with scissors in hand, facing a procession of men whose mustaches she is obliged to cut. Or is she heroic for shaving Hitler's mustache, thus denying him his iconic status? Given the allusion to Ellis Island, is she a refugee, fresh off the boat and put through excruciating experiences, or is she an immigration official enforcing eugenic medical procedures?²⁵

The title of the fourth chapter, "Tempting Joseph," alludes to a specific name, although it is yet unclear to which of the historic Josephs the vignette refers. The right screen is fixed on an institutional bathroom, with vintage sinks lining the wall above the checkered tile floor. With snow covering trees in the window, the entire image is cold and impersonal, bringing to mind a hospital or prison. In contrast, the left screen presents a frontal shot of Latzman's character: she sits comfortably in an armchair, in a tastefully appointed living room, framed by a bouquet of irises on one side and a fireplace on another. A cat meanders through the frame, completing the picture of domesticity. Dressed stylishly but comfortably, the narrator tells of a night when three unfamiliar men ("wearing sunglasses," adds a subtitle on the right screen) knocked on her door, as she was ready to go to bed. They asked her to participate in a secret mission, explaining to her that "this is an important and rare opportunity" and "they know I can do it." They show her a picture of a man and ask her if she recognizes him—"Of course," she says, "who wouldn't?" The men ask her to play the role of "a water girl." She needs her red lipstick; they provide a sexy black dress and a small water bottle. Her mission is to seduce and drug "him." The narrator then recalls getting to the right place, where she had to identify herself as a "water girl" at the door. She is asked to wait. At that time, she says, she puts on her lipstick (she gestures to her lips, "I put a lot") and black dress and prepares herself: "I felt afraid, but at the same time, proud of myself." When she is finally let in, she recalls, "I see him. He sits behind the desk. I see his back." "I heard violins," adds the subtitle



FIGURE 3. “Cooking Dinner for Adolf,” still video from *Awake*. Courtesy of the artist.

on the right screen, making the scene romantic or dramatic. “I am a water girl,” she recalls saying. As “he” turns around, “I think to myself, he looks much nicer than I thought, and the mustache . . . It’s kind of cute, actually.” They are approaching each other, but at a crucial point, when she opens her purse, she sees it is empty. “I have no water,” are the last words of her testimony, as she nods to herself disappointedly.

The story of a secret mission to drug a powerful man, with Latzman’s character cast in the role of a temptress in a sexy black dress and red lipstick, draws on elements of war thrillers or film noir, a cloak-and-dagger story. The titular Joseph—although Latzman identifies him as Stalin²⁶—could be read as any historical dictator. All we know about him is that he has a mustache, works at night, and has a ubiquitous presence—enough for Latzman’s character to recognize his photo instantly. All these features are metonymically connected to a plot related to war and heroic resistance; although there is no direct reference to World War II or to anything Jewish, the identification of Latzman’s character from the previous vignettes seeps into this one. Once again this is a story of failure, paying tribute to failed uprisings and assassination attempts, but it also disrupts the heroic Zionist narratives of Jewish resistance, whether during the Holocaust or in the fight against British Mandate.

The title of the last chapter, “Cooking Dinner for Adolf,” leaves little doubt about to whom its title refers. The chapter opens with a shot of woods on the left screen, and a close-up of kitchen knives on the right, as the narrator’s voice starts the story. The camera then cuts to a close-up of Latzman’s character sitting in the kitchen, with a set of knives in the background. As the narrator recalls staying in a castle by a beautiful lake, black-and-white vintage photos of picturesque landscapes appear on the right screen, zooming in on a picture of a castle that resembles Hitler’s Berghof in the Bavarian Alps and then shifting back to the

narrator's face. She recalls hearing about a competition at the castle, with the main prize of cooking "him" a dinner. "Yes, weird," she comments, and then proceeds proudly, "I win the competition." "I was very happy," she explains, and then, wrinkling her nose, in a deliberately ungrammatical, accented English, "but very stressful." She recalls how she debated with herself over what to make, and decided to make him a chicken. But when she catches a chicken in the castle's yard, she is stopped by a manager at the place—"Actually, it's not exactly the manager, it's more of a commander," she clarifies. "He wears a uniform." "Are you out of your mind?" he screams. "You can't make him chicken, he is a vegetarian!" Panicked, the narrator recalls running back inside, and then noticing vegetables in the kitchen: "That moment it hit me—I am going make him an Arab salad," she says triumphantly. And then she describes chopping (the footage of chopped vegetables on a cutting board briefly flashes on a screen), putting a lot of effort into making "a very good, huge, tasty, great Arab salad." "And then it's ready," she concludes, still with a triumphant smile on her face. This entire time, the subtitles on the left screen, over the image of the forest, are foreshadowing the story—providing virtual talking points to the narrative so that the element of surprise in hearing it is gone.

Historical references are most direct in this vignette—the name Adolf, along with the depiction of his vegetarianism, the castle, and the uniformed man in charge, metonymically point to Hitler. But at the same time, the cooking contest draws on an entirely different semantic domain—perhaps that of reality TV or a cooking show. Moreover, her cooking choice—the Arab salad—makes the first transparent reference to the Middle East, and also evokes questions of translation and cultural appropriation. (In Israeli Hebrew, an "Arab salad" is a chopped salad of tomatoes, cucumbers, and herbs with lemon and olive oil. But the same salad is known as "Israeli salad" in the United States.) As to the narrator's position, there is no attempt at resistance or subterfuge, just eagerness to please, harking back to the same desire to fit in and belong depicted in the "Baader-Meinhof" chapter. The cooking show-like contest places Latzman's narrator in a supplicant position. Unlike the result in "Tempting Joseph," she succeeds with her mission, and yet her ingenuity doesn't quite make her a hero. The accomplishment is questionable.

Interpretation of Dreams

Awake is a polysemic work open to multiple interpretations. The vignettes represent both testimonies and accounts of dreams. The title itself points to dreaming, and also contradicts it. Tamar Latzman explains that her work speaks to both the dreaming and the awakening: “It’s a dream but you are awake. This dream represents the memory that you’ve been trapped in, but there is a call or need to be awakened, to be released out of it.”²⁷ But of course *Awake* is not an account of actual dreams; it is a work of art that builds on an idea of a dream. In fact, dream logic can be a guiding principle of art. As psychotherapist Alan Roland points out, the same primary process mechanisms underlie both dreams and art, resulting in symbolic expressions.²⁸

Theorizing connections between the structure of dreams and the structure of language (as well as any other symbolic process), linguist Roman Jakobson points out how the same organizing devices, metonymy and metaphor, are manifest in both.²⁹ Metaphor is based on a relationship of similarity, whereas metonymy is based on relationships of contiguity. Consequently Freud’s “displacement” and “condensation” processes, based on contiguity, are metonymic, whereas “identification” and “symbolism,” guided by the relations of similarity, are metaphoric.³⁰ In dreams, as well as in art, these mechanisms produce novel associations and new symbolic expressions—at times incongruous or comic, at other times profound and insightful. One can argue that both of these fundamental devices—metaphor and metonymy—underlie different works of art. (Although, as Jakobson notices, metaphor is more easily identified and better understood.)

Metonymy is a key trope in Latzman’s *Awake*. As mentioned earlier, metonymic relations exist between an idea of a growing nose and anti-Semitic stereotypes, as well as between the Baader-Meinhof group and Hitler Youth; similarly, the name “Adolf,” along with vegetarianism, is metonymically linked to Hitler. However Latzman’s work goes one step further, creating metonymic connections between metonyms in a trope known as “metalepsis.” There are multiple definitions of metalepsis, but the meaning I want to adopt here comes from narratology. Metalepsis—more specifically, interior metalepsis—occurs when the boundaries between different levels of stories within a text are violated;³¹ as a result two stories within the narrative “bleed” into each other, producing an unsettling effect in readers (or, in my application to the visual medium, the audience). The disappearance of narrative boundaries induces a kind of a vertigo—an anxiety, a

mind warp.³² Metalepsis draws attention to deeper and hidden meanings in the narrative, and creates complex allusions.

Drawing on Fredric Jameson's theorizing, I would argue that this trope, in fact, is uniquely possible in the medium of video. In a traditional text, at the intersection of two signs, a hierarchy of signs gets established whereby one sign becomes subordinate to the other. (As in a metaphor, when we understand one thing in terms of another.) But this model, according to Jameson, doesn't work for video: "no single sign ever retains priority as a topic of the operation."³³ Instead the signs exist in the process of mutual interpretations that he calls "renarrativizations."³⁴ In video the elements of different narratives coming together in metaleptic relations form new meanings, none of them definitive or closed.

In the case of *Awake*, Latzman first creates metonymic allusions to different discourses: in "Cooking Dinner for Adolf," the metonyms Adolf, vegetarianism, Alps castle, and a uniformed commander all belong to the discourse of Hitler and Nazism. But her frontal interview/testimony to the camera—the description of a contest, with the prize of cooking dinner for "him"—evokes the discourse of reality TV or a cooking show. The piece gets depth and satirical force when the boundaries between these two discourses blur, as if someone was switching between a reality show and a history channel program too fast. The interpenetration of these two discourses results in bitter satire: history is trivialized and commercialized, packaged for us as mass culture, not different from any other content.

But of course dreams and art are not the same: in dreams symbolic expressions are incomplete—they are deeply personal, unintentional, and unconscious. As Roland points out, "The creative process in art is present in dreams in only an incipient stage."³⁵ Usually an analyst is required to explicate the latent meaning, based on the particular context of the person's life. In art, metaphors or other tropes reach (often paradoxical) integration. They can be understood not only based on the individual context of the artist and her background but also with respect to broader social and cultural symbols.

Latzman's *Awake* plays with the concepts of dreams and art, with the work of art passing as the account of a dream. Paradoxically, these "dreams" are not personal and do not reflect the artist's individual or familial history. Latzman explains that her starting point for *Awake* was "thinking about dreams as something that represents collective memory."³⁶ She became aware of this during her first year living in New York, when a friend, also an Israeli, used to have recurring dreams about the Holocaust. "I realized that as Israelis, we have that very often."

She wrote her friend's dream down and started asking different people to adopt the dream: "to tell this dream as if the dream were their dream, from the first person."³⁷ *Awake* grew out of this exercise, although the dream accounts in the piece are fictional, and were composed by Latzman after collecting the accounts.

Importantly, instead of the artist's personal memory of her familial history (the Holocaust of Lithuanian Jews or the repression of Soviet Jews), the "dreams" are based on clichés and stereotypes derived from Israeli national education and media. Discovering the meaning of these "dreams" does not require an analyst but rather a school curriculum on Holocaust history and a schedule of Israeli TV programs on Holocaust Memorial Day.

Awake in Context

Latzman's approach to exploring the collective memory of the Holocaust resonates with other Israeli video artists of her generation, especially Tamy Ben-Tor, Omer Fast, and Gil Yefman. Theirs and Latzman's work, like other postmodern artistic practices, are characterized by scrutiny and reuse of representations from mass culture. They pay close attention to the mediation of these representations, including production and performance, accents and languages (which, according to Hamid Naficy, are preoccupations of exilic production³⁸). They take advantage of the unique attachment of the video art to "the performative and the corporeal,"³⁹ using the human body "as its central instrument."⁴⁰ Drawing on performance art, these artists turn the camera on themselves, conveying their embodied and reflexive experiences.

These artists' attitude toward mass-mediated representations of the Holocaust is often playful, relying on parody, irony, and humor, however dark their subject may be.⁴¹ The third-generation artists insist on "preserving a defying level of childishness and upturned values."⁴² Part of that playfulness is drawing paradoxical or oxymoronic connections between references past and present, combining signifiers of the Holocaust and their everyday reality or contemporary media. Unlike the perspectives of earlier works of art that identified with the victims, their points of view range across a spectrum, and may include that of perpetrators or deniers.

Along with that of her cohort, Latzman's work is defined by influences of the Israeli artists of the generation of her teachers, especially Roe Rosen and Boaz Arad. Latzman's *Awake* makes sense within the context of Rosen's *Live and Die as*

Eva Braun (1997), an installation inviting the audience to identify with Hitler's lover and to be excited about intimacy with the mass murderer. Similarly, Latzman's character in "Baader-Meinhof" is longing to be a part of something like Hitler Youth. In "Tempting Joseph" she is not only a temptress but also herself tempted by the powerful figure. In "Cooking Dinner for Adolf," she excels at cooking a healthy vegetarian dinner for Hitler. But she also appears to be something of a victim (in "Memory of a Nose"), a resistance fighter (in "Tempting Joseph"), and a bystander or cog-in-the-machine figure (in "Cutting a Mustache"). The effect of such impersonations or role reversals is profound. As Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi posits, for many years Nazis remained invisible in Israeli culture, either through effacement or demonization. The artists' engagement with different positions, including subversive identification, results in "self-indicting questions of collective agency and the discarded notions of the (diasporic) self."⁴³ It is as if Latzman is trying out different roles, asking herself, What would I have done? Where do I fit in the narrative? The answers are not pretty: the clear boundary between the good (us) and evil (them) is blurred. This is why "Baader-Meinhof" alludes equally to the Hitler Youth and Zionist youth movements.

Awake also needs to be read in the context of video art works by Boaz Arad, especially, *Safam* and *Marcel* (both 2000). In the former, the artist removes the mustache from Hitler's face in historical footage. In the latter, he does the opposite, animating the facial hair on Hitler's face so that it grows and transforms itself from comical wheelbarrow mustache to a Herzl-like bushy beard. By erasing (or manipulating) the mustache, Arad denies Hitler's iconic image its semiotic power. As both Ariella Azoulay and Gene Ray show, his video art comments on the mediated nature of Hitler's image: the tiny mustache had long achieved an iconic status, instantly recognized and endlessly reproduced.⁴⁴ Today this iconicity goes beyond countless images, and is echoed in the phenomena of "Hitler cats" and other "Hitler memes" online.⁴⁵ In "Cutting a Mustache," Latzman's narrator cuts off the mustaches of many men, but the moment a small, square mustache is invoked, it signals Hitler for us. This is the artist's treatment of the power of an image—but also of a stereotype—inducing in us a knee-jerk response.

According to Latzman, one of her influences is Tamy Ben-Tor (b. 1975), an Israeli artist living and working in New York. Both Latzman and Ben-Tor use impersonation and parody as major performative strategies. In her video art Ben-Tor creates a line of exaggerated, outrageous characters, including self-hating Jewish intellectuals (*Yid*, 2010; *Rut Katz*, 2013), a Borat-like murderous Cossack

in faux folk garb riding to slaughter Jews with a kitchen knife (*Smudi*, 2009), and a bloodthirsty Muslim cleric spewing anti-Semitic fables (*Memri TV*, 2010). In her impersonations Ben-Tor completely embodies her characters, using crude wigs and masks and adopting different languages and accents (both real and fabricated). Like Ben-Tor, Latzman also impersonates a number of characters, but her relationships with them are more ambiguous. Latzman barely uses costumes and makeup, and unlike Ben-Tor, she is clearly recognizable in her fictional characters. She doesn't embody them fully, always maintaining a part of herself. Her Israeli accent and fluent but grammatically flawed English remain the same. The effect overall is unsettling: is it really her? Is it really her dreams? Her character is partial or split. This combination of recreated scenes and fictional accounts, and the confusion between autobiography and fiction, allow the artists to "problematize cinematic authenticity, truthfulness, and autobiography."⁴⁶ This doubling, characteristic of split subjectivity and filmmakers' multiple identities, is a hallmark of exilic artistic production.⁴⁷

Latzman explains that she uses this blurring of the boundary between herself and her characters to create a collective portrait of her generation: "It is a character, but it is a character that relates to me. . . . I use myself, so usually I use the coat that I own, I'm not dressing to be anyone else. I make it match, to work for this particular character, but it could be me. In a way, it could be a self-portrait of an Israeli woman of the third generation, that's being trapped in those histories, but also with a desire to be released out of it."⁴⁸

Like Ben-Tor, Latzman also messes with point of view and identification, adopting the personae of characters who admire the perpetrators and want to join them, or who fail in their attempts to resist. Adopting these multiple partial personae is a "gesture of reflexive self-parody,"⁴⁹ exposing the artist's alter-ego and acting as self-inscription.⁵⁰ With the boundary between the character and the artist blurred, it is not clear which one is the butt of the joke. Latzman is obviously lampooning a certain narrative—a series of clichés and stereotypes familiar to us from media and mass culture. But because there is no clear demarcation between the character and the artist, she is implicated, and the narrative speaks through her; it is not externalized. She is both a subject and an object of her parody.

Video art by Omer Fast is also concerned with the mediated nature of memory and reality. Fast (b. 1972) is another exilic Israeli video artist who grew up between Israel and the United States; he is based now in Berlin. His works, crossing the boundaries between documentary and fiction, use split screens or multichannel

installations, like Latzman's *Awake. The Casting* (2007) interweaves testimony of a US soldier about the traumatic memories of military action in Iraq and of being stationed in Germany. The mediated nature of the testimony is emphasized through reenactment of the events in vivid tableaux vivants reconstructed on screens by actors. The filming of the testimony and of the tableaux also becomes part of the story, and it is depicted in the video. An earlier work by Fast, *Spielberg's List* (2003), uses split screens to document the testimonies of Polish extras who participated in the filming of *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, USA, 1993), blurring the boundary between the reality of the historical events of the Holocaust and the reality of film production on the subject.

Latzman's *Awake*, like Omer Fast's work, plays with the format of testimony; in her own words, her focus is on "the distortion of testimony, the testimonial format."⁵¹ Her use of this format echoes the contexts of witness accounts in news reportage, documentary film, and archives, including the testimonies of survivors stored at the Shoah Foundation and other such repositories. Our association is that of authenticity, of investigation that will uncover the real facts. And yet Latzman's testimonies are about dreams—what facts can they uncover? Omer Fast's testimony refers to real-life events (the filming of *Schindler's List*, service in Iraq), but they are either missing context or enacted by actors in stylized tableaux vivants. This use and deconstruction of the testimonial format connects to the broader critical conversation about the problematic nature of testimony and the limits of this medium, including for documenting the Holocaust.⁵² This exploration is particularly relevant today, when new technology allows for a complete disconnect between the historical witness and a recorded reenactment of the testimony—such as in creating interactive holograms based on the survivors' testimonies.⁵³

The mediated nature of testimony is also highlighted by Latzman's use of subtitles. Unlike close captions or subtitles in a foreign film, her subtitles neither spell out faithfully nor translate what is being said. Rather they open an additional channel of communication—providing sometimes competing and sometimes superfluous additions. Which story should we believe? Which version is more authentic? How can an experience be communicated, if at all? According to Naficy, these kind of out-of-sync voices and subtitles can be seen as "counterhegemonic sound practices," which serve critical and deconstructive functions.⁵⁴ Like split screens, they can communicate split subjectivity and multiple identities of the artist.⁵⁵

Latzman's subtitles function to draw our attention to the medium, to create an overload of signification, like the constant ticker running during TV newscasts or the sidebars of a Facebook feed. Split screens and different channels of communication (visual, oral, and written) compete for our attention and disrupt the norms of cinematic presentation: where should I look? Which story should I follow?

Omer Fast's work is explicitly metacinematic (showing, for instance, cameras and crews in *The Casting*), whereas Latzman's technique is more subtle, although it serves the same purpose. Choppy editing in "Baader-Meinhof" and deliberate discrepancies between images and texts on screens expose the filmmaking process and make the normally invisible visible. These techniques are self-reflexive because they "distance the audience from the film, undermining full identification with the diegesis and with its characters."⁵⁶ The result is a heightened sense of a mediated produced work, where the audience is constantly reminded of a constructed nature of the narrative.

A different kind of resonance exists between *Awake* and the works of another Israeli artist, Gil Yefman (b. 1979), especially *Decomposition* (2015). In this video animation, Yefman makes archival images of mass graves move in a kaleidoscopic, circular pattern to tango music. The images are fragmented, but some parts of emaciated bodies and bones are recognizable as visual evidence of Nazi violence. Although Yefman's video does not look anything like *Awake*, it is guided by the same principles of metonymy and metalepsis, drawing together elements of dramatically different domains—corpses of the victims (invoking the Holocaust), tango melody (popular music of 1930s–1940s, played in dance halls and in concentration camps), and the circular pattern of a kaleidoscope (a toy) or a mandala (a spiritual symbol of rotation and return). In Yefman's *Decomposition* there is a metonymic contiguity between the images of victims' corpses as well as the music to which they used to dance when they were alive, and to which they were marched to their death. Another metonymic relation emerges when the artist treats the images of bones and body parts as visual elements, an interplay of light and dark tones, and then allows these images to serve as a pattern in a kaleidoscope. Metaleptic relations between the semantic realm of the Holocaust and the playful realm of toys and geometric patterns create a jarring juxtaposition: the photographs of the human remains in this work are used for fun, with the most grotesque images treated mindlessly, as if they were no different from any other images or bursts of color. This can be read

as a bitter, satirical commentary on the exploitation of the Holocaust imagery in mass culture, exposing our own apparent desensitization to these images, and making us finally gasp in horror. The same principle of metalepsis underlies the influential installation *Within the Line* (1997) by Ram Katzir, which offers coloring books with Nazi imagery.

Meta-Memory of the Third Generation

All this brings me to the final point: if we read Latzman's "dreams" as collective memory, what do they tell us? As Latzman herself explains, *Awake* can be read as a collective portrait of her generation. She is generationally removed from the first-hand experience of the survivors. She is also removed from the second generation, whose experience has been theorized as postmemory, defined as deeply felt memories of powerful and traumatic experiences transmitted to children from parent survivors,⁵⁷ or prosthetic memory, which "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum."⁵⁸

What emerges in Latzman's (and others') works is meta-memory—it is the memory of a memory. In her work memory has moved on from postmemory and prosthetic memory. In both cases the memories are deeply felt, adopted as if personal. Latzman's memory, using Marita Sturken's phrase, is "memory that is often disguised as forgetting."⁵⁹ Her memory, conveniently presented as dreams (which we can't control), is a memory of stereotypes and media representations about World War II and the Holocaust, with no connection whatsoever to her familial history. Latzman herself talks about the mass-culture narrative of the Holocaust as haunting her imagination, resulting in her "dreams." Importantly, the survivors had actual nightmares caused by traumatic memories. The third generation's dreams are memories of memories, mediated by public memory and national commemorations in Israel, including national holidays, memorials, museums, films, literature, and the arts. This Holocaust curriculum creates a national narrative in which Latzman feels "trapped." *Awake* is about this entrapment, of being unable to move beyond the stereotypes and archetypes of the national narrative. And yet, there is a paradox in it—what makes Latzman's work impactful is the fact that she reproduces and deconstructs these stereotypes. By self-consciously reproducing stereotypes, she escapes the traps of the narrative.

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I would like to acknowledge the contribution to this article of my former student Susanna Sigler, who worked with me on an independent study, “Third Generation Artists Reflect on the Holocaust,” for which she conducted research on Tamar Latzman. I quote Sigler’s interview with the artist throughout this article. I also want to thank curators and scholars Tal Ben-Zvi and Maya Benton for orienting me in the world of Israeli video art. Thanks also to Aaron Ring for his swift and insightful editing.

Notes

1. Such maxims are formulated by Terrence Des Pres, in his “Holocaust Laughter,” in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 217–233.
2. James Young, “Foreword: Looking into the Mirrors of Evil,” in *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt (New York: Jewish Museum/New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), xv–xviii.
3. Charles S. Liebman and Eli’ezer Don-Yihya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 100–107.
4. For further background on the status of the Holocaust commemoration in Israel, see Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For discussion of characteristic debates about Holocaust memory in Israel, see Yosefa Loshitzky, *Identity Politics on the Israeli Screen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 15–32.
5. Dalia Manor, “From Rejection to Recognition: Israeli Art and the Holocaust,” *Israel Affairs* 4.3–4 (1998): 253–277.
6. Ibid.; Tami Katz-Freiman, “‘Don’t Touch My Holocaust’—Analyzing the Barometer

- of Responses: Israeli Artists Challenge the Holocaust Taboo,” in *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art After the Holocaust*, ed. Shelley Hornstein, Laura Levitt, and Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: NYU Press, 2003), 129–154.
7. For analysis and reception of Roece Rosen’s 1997 exhibition *Live and Die as Eva Braun* in Israel, see Ariella Azoulay, “The [Spectator’s] Place: Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun,” in her *Death’s Showcase: The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2001), 48–75. Ram Katzir’s 1997 exhibition in Israel is discussed in Katz-Freiman, “Don’t Touch My Holocaust,” 129, 135–136. Boaz Arad’s “Hitler videos” are discussed in Gene Ray, “Working Out and Playing Through: Boaz Arad’s Hitler’s Videos,” in his *Terror and Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2005), 121–133, as well as in Ariella Azoulay, “The Return of the Repressed,” in *Impossible Images*, ed. Hornstein, Levitt, and Silberstein, 85–118.
 8. Steven Shaviro, “Post-Cinematic Affect: On Grace Jones, *Boarding Gate* and *Southland Tales*,” *Film-Philosophy* 14.1 (2010): 1–102.
 9. Chen Tamir, “Staring Back at the Sun: How Video Art in Israel Evolved and Why It Matters,” in *Staring Back at the Sun: Video Art from Israeli, 1970–2012*, ed. Chen Tamir (Artis, 2016), <http://artiscontemporary.org/staring-back-at-the-sun/>, last accessed November 19, 2018.
 10. Ibid.
 11. Avi Feldman, and Yael Bartana, “State of Amnesia: 2005–2012,” in *Staring Back at the Sun*.
 12. Irit Rogoff, “Daughters of Sunshine: Diasporic Impulses and Gendered Identities,” in *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2000), 177.
 13. Gerd Bayer, “After Postmemory: Holocaust Cinema and the Third Generation,” *Shofar* 28.4 (Summer 2010): 118–119.
 14. Ibid., 120.
 15. Ibid., 130.
 16. Marita Sturken, “The Politics of Video Memory: Electronic Erasures and Inscriptions,” in *Resolutions: Contemporary Video Practices*, ed. Michael Renov and Erika Suderburg (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.
 17. Ibid., 7.
 18. Ibid., 12.
 19. Fredric Jameson, “Video: Surrealism without the Unconscious,” in his *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 96.

20. Tamar Latzman, interview by Olga Gershenson, June 23, 2016, transcript.
21. "Lithuania," in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005444>, last accessed November 19, 2018.
22. For background on Baader-Meinhof, see Stefan Aust, *Baader-Meinhof: The Inside Story of the R.A.F.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). The story was also fictionalized in a German film, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* (Uli Edel, 2008).
23. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 257.
24. Ariella Azoulay comments on the iconic status of Hitler's mustache: "Hitler is recognized primarily by his mustache . . . , and its dominant presence on the center of his face has become its hallmark" ("The Return of the Repressed," 97). Our recognition is automatic, transforming the face into a mask, icon, label or concept (98), to the point that any face with the black square can signal Hitler.
25. For the history of the medical examinations at Ellis Island, see Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).
26. Latzman, interview by Gershenson.
27. Tamar Latzman, Skype interview by Susanna Sigler, April 4, 2016, transcript.
28. Alan Roland, "Imagery and Symbolic Expression in Dreams and Art," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 53 (1972): 536.
29. Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances," in *On Language*, ed. Linda R. Waugh and Monique Monville-Burston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 132.
30. Ibid.
31. Dorrit Cohn and Lewis S. Gleich, "Metalepsis and Mise en Abyme," *Narrative* 20.1 (January 2012): 106.
32. Ibid., 111.
33. Jameson, "Video," 87.
34. Ibid., 88.
35. Roland, "Imagery and Symbolic Expression," 536.
36. Latzman, interview by Sigler.
37. Ibid.
38. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*.
39. Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 185.

40. Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (1976): 52.
41. On playfulness in Holocaust art, see Ernst van Alphen, "Playing the Holocaust," in *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. Kleeblatt, 67–69.
42. Tali Tamir, "The Shadow of Evil: To the Third and Fourth Generation," in *Wonderyears: Über die Rolle der Shoah und des Nationalsozialismus in der Heutigen Israelischen Gesellschaft/New Reflections on the Shoah and Nazism in Israel*, ed. Stéphane Bauer (Berlin: Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 2003), 79.
43. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, "Acts of Impersonation: Barbaric Spaces as Theater," in *Mirroring Evil*, ed. Kleeblatt, 27.
44. Azoulay, "The Return of the Repressed," and Ray, "Working Out."
45. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past Is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 305–338.
46. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 278.
47. *Ibid.*, 271.
48. Latzman, interview by Sigler.
49. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 273.
50. *Ibid.*, 277.
51. Latzman, interview by Sigler.
52. For a recent analysis of the Holocaust testimonies archives, see Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).
53. For critical analysis of creating holograms out of testimonies at the Shoah Foundation, see Rachel Baum, "Reframing Testimony: Holograms and the Future of Witnessing," paper presented at the Memory, Media, and Technology: Exploring the Trajectories of *Schindler's List* International Conference, University of Southern California, November 16–18, 2014.
54. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 122–123.
55. *Ibid.*, 272.
56. *Ibid.*, 276.
57. Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29.1 (Spring 2008): 103.
58. Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 2.
59. Sturken, "The Politics of Video Memory," 12.

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