

10 Nashua Street  
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Dear Jonathan:

I would like to suggest a topic that would ~~be~~ yield fruitful results if taken up by Lillit: The Holocaust and Us. Specifically now, with Yom Hashoah around the corner. There are several crucial issues that are crying to be exposed.

1. Why is it that the directorship of Yad Vashem has become a halfway post for unemployed Israeli diplomats? In June 1967, Katriel Katz was left without a job (the Israeli Consulate in Moscow having closed down) and soon afterwards he took over Yad Vashem which he then proceeded to run as if it were the extension of the Foreign Ministry. Now that a new diplomatic post has been offered him, Katz has quit. Who's to know if the new director, Arad will last longer than Katz?

2. ~~What's~~ ~~What's~~ going on at Yad Vashem, anyway? Why do they invest a fortune on a meaningless concrete pillar? Why did they plan a forest for the Hasidei Umot Ha'olam, only to discover that there weren't enough of them to warrant even a grove? Why is Arad so preoccupied with the political lessons (as if there were any lessons to be gleaned) of the Shoah? What, if anything, is being done in the field of education?

3. ~~What~~ does Yom Hashoah mean to the Sephardim?

4. Are new models for the commemoration of ~~the~~ Shoah possible? Who will initiate them?

5. Physical vs. passive resistance. This bitter dilemma was brought home to me by reading the memoirs of Michal Weichert (Nokhn Khurbn, Tel-Aviv 1970). Weichert, the director of an avant-garde Yiddish theatre in Warsaw before the war, found himself in a privileged position after the Nazis invaded. Apparently, the Nazi official in charge of his region was a former classmate of his. Weichert decided to accept a position supplying the Germans with medicine so that he could surreptitiously smuggle medicines into the ghetto. Soon he became instrumental in organizing an elaborate Jewish Self Help structure in all the major ghettos of his region. His rationale, like that of the Judenrate, was: collaboration is justified as long as you can thereby save Jewish lives. This position completely contradicted the aims of the resistance movement who ultimately declared a death sentence against Weichert. The sentence was never carried out, but Weichert was brought to trial as a collaborationist after the war and was finally cleared of guilt by the Polish court. Unfortunately for him, Weichert wished to be vindicated by a Jewish court as well. At which point all hell descended upon him from the former members of the Jewish resistance. Of course, postwar politics also played its role. The campaign against him was led by none other than Itshak Zukerman, now of Kibbutz Lohamei Hagettaot. Weichert finally made it to Israel a few years ago, but by then he was a completely broken man.

The question is: to what extent is Holocaust history dominated by those who have a special axe to grind, namely, those who ~~were~~ fought in the resistance? Is it a coincidence that all the leading figures at Yad Vashem are former

in the wake of Auschwitz, all of contemporary reality assumes demonic potentiality. The simplest things and actions can become the harbingers of mass murder. That is, to say, that the two "realities" being juxtaposed are so incredibly opposed as to be mutually exclusive. If the world of the cattle cars is the "real" world, then the NY subway is not. If the New Jersey suburb is real, then Auschwitz never happened. Do you see what I'm getting at? How can world and anti-world (A & B) coexist? How can the two be fused into one coherent world-view? I maintain that they cannot, if our thinking is limited to conventional categories. It is only when we go beyond the accepted rational notions of reality that we can make room for the dual vision. That is the nature of mythic thinking: the mediation of polarities (a-la Levi-Strauss). The mythic world is one of ~~inherent contradictions and irresolvable paradoxes~~ that we can appreciate the inherent contradictions and irresolvable paradoxes we live with -- after Auschwitz.

That is why a superimposition of Jewish portraits over a supermarket is a shallow image, unless the supermarket can somehow be made to seem ominous in and of itself. The statement cannot rest with the obvious contrast. Sure the supermarket scene is banal. But can it be made to seem threatening? Can a supermarket be transformed into an Umschlagplatz by adding a train station and a few armed guards?

I recall a technique we used some years ago during a Holocaust Commemoration of contrasting a text that dealt with a report on the war and slides of chess pieces on a board. I don't even recall the text. It may have been a description of a camp in bureaucratic language. But the chess pieces, a new piece flashing on each second, expressed the meticulousness and yet arbitrariness of the Final Solution as nothing else I have ever seen. Yes, we were pawns at the hands of the Nazis. But the moves might have been entirely different if not for the whim of this-or-that player. Maybe it was all a game? Maybe we were playing it too (the old Hanna Arendt hypothesis)? Whatever. But the visual symbol carries more than one possible meaning. These are the kinds of symbols we must find.

Anyway, whenever you come out East, we must be sure to set aside many hours and talk these things out. Tell me, how did the presentation of Night Words go at the Art Festival? Was it very different as a performed ritual than it seemed in written form?