

Zemel, Carol

Time Between Time: Early Visual Accounts/Narratives of the Shoah

1945 is a critical moment in Holocaust representation, for it is then that survivors of the Holocaust are free to tell their story. It is also, I suggest, a “time-between-time,” a period of no fixed or conventional measure in which something has presumably ended and something else scarcely begun. With community lost or in chaos, how does the surviving self re-start? And with memory both dulled and quickened by trauma and grief, how do survivors in this “right after” describe the recent past, re-frame the future, and begin to assemble a Holocaust history?

In the endless present of the *Lager*, artist-prisoners rarely developed narrative sequence in their images; time disappears in their pictures, with immediate events distilled and frozen as icons. When conventional time—and a viable future—returns for these subjects, so too does narrative possibility and the struggle to find meaning in their experience. My paper concerns the strategies of visual telling in these early Holocaust accounts. The telling of traumatic experience—an experience without logic or plot—is also paradoxically time-bound and presumably depends on an afterward or belatedness, *Nachtraglichkeit* in Freud’s formulation, to come to consciousness.

It is this resumption of narrative as well as the pictorial dimensions of trauma, that I want to explore in early visual accounts. The paper considers images by Alfred Kantor, David Olère and Thomas Geve, all made immediately—sometimes within days—after liberation. Guided by psychoanalytic constructs (Freud’s *Nachtraglichkeit* (afterwardness), as well as issues of time and narrative (Ricoeur), I examines the ways in which habits of visibility and visual representation shape traumatic memory and attempt to restore order in an unsettled time.

Carol Zemel is Professor of Art History and Visual Culture in the Department of Visual Arts at York University, Toronto, and in Fall 2013, Bildner Visiting Scholar at the Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life, Rutgers University, N.J. She has written three books on Vincent van Gogh, including *Van Gogh’s Progress; Utopia and Modernity in Late-Nineteenth Century Art* (University of California Press, 1997). Her work now focuses on Jewish and diasporic issues and on the ethics of visibility in modern and contemporary art. Her book, *Looking Jewish: Visual Culture in Modern Diaspora* is forthcoming from Indiana University Press. Current work includes a study of Jewish visual humour, and *Art in Extremis*, a study of images made by prisoners in ghettos and camps during the Holocaust.