Maybe That's What It Means

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MAYBE THAT’S WHAT IT MEANS

by

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DEDICATION AND THANKS

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PROLOGUE

The journey of my family from Romania to Israel, my journey from Israel to New York, the journey of the eucalyptus tree from Australia to Israel and the story of the translator Yerushalaim Segal provide the narrative of the text embedded in my video. All journeys describe both personal memories and collective memories. The personal story describes my grandparents’ journey with my father and his brother from Romania to Israel on a ship, yet can be related to a shared experience of many Jews that immigrated to Israel after WWII. The text recounts their rehabilitation process in Israel after enduring the Holocaust and losing their identity, and forming a new one without speaking about their past and their gaze set on the future.

They arrived in Israel in 1950, one year after my father was born, and two years after the founding of the State of Israel. Their first home was Moshav Ein Ayala where they were given a tent, a donkey and two mules. In the moshav, my grandparents could create new lives while completely suppressing the past. They died in that moshav, taking with them to the grave the details of our family history in Romania. My father left the moshav, but did not go far from it. He married an immigrant from Germany, a Christian woman who volunteered in Israel as a nurse. She was born into a family with a Nazi history and converted to Judaism for the sake of the marriage. They had three daughters and lived in an artist village called Ein Hod.

My identity has always been a matter of inner conflict for me, something that can’t be clearly defined. I am half Jewish Israeli and half German “Goy”, which is the Yiddish word for Gentile which can also be translated as alienated and foreign.
In Hebrew, there is a term meaning "foreign plant" (Neta Zar), which translates as a seed not suitable for the ground where it was scattered. In Israel, the term is used to describe a person who feels that he/she does not belong in society.

The third-generation of Holocaust survivors is the generation that walks away from the “Land of Israel” and Zionist values, the generation that rejects the concept of being assimilated into society and chooses to return to being the “wandering Jew”. Even though I am now in a foreign country, studying at an American university, speaking in a language that is not my own, I work with materials that identify me as being Israeli while unsuccessfully trying to get rid of my accent and to disconnect from my culture and heritage. Ironically, this mirrors the Nazi propaganda film produced in 1940: “The Eternal Jew” (Der Ewige Jude, 1940). The anti-semitic film presents a folklore character, "The Wandering Jew”, a character that represents the betrayer of Christ and the punishment of exile, a character that suffers the punishment of exile and must live as a Neta Zar, a foreign plant in his own society.

(Stableford, 1991)

The generation who came before us, people like my grandparents who themselves were “wanderers,” successfully established a home for my generation. Then, we who are the third generation, choose to again become “wanderers,” seeking a home where our destinies and identities can be fulfilled.
Growing up during the First Gulf War, a highly traumatic event, makes it possible to remember many things from early age. I recall it being the only time when my entire family congregated together in the same space. Throughout the war, we spent days and often weeks huddled together in the basement or another safe space, and I remember the sense of collective anxiety shared by all of us as we rushed to the shelter when the bomb alarms went off, signaling that a missile was headed towards us. After a while, to avoid having to run there in the middle of the night, my mom put all of our mattresses in the basement of our house and that was where we slept. The basement was sealed with black gaffer tape against potential chemical attack and it was constantly dark and damp. However, what was most memorable to me was the television. Watching the news was a big part of my wartime experience. Children’s television shows were determined by the government and used as an effective way to calm the children with phrases such as “We will get through it” or “Everything will be alright”.

Television was almost all we had, and it made a huge impact on my generation’s nostalgic memories of the past.
The video *Maybe That's What It Means* consists of three parts, each recounting a story of immigration to or from Israel.

The first part of the video tells the story of my grandparents who immigrated from Romania to Israel in 1950, coupled with the journey of my recent immigration from Israel to New-York.

The second part tells the story of Yerushalaim Segal, a professional translator who translated foreign films that were brought to Israel cinemas.

The third and last part of the video tells the story of the Eucalyptus tree—how it was imported from Australia and eventually became an integral part of the Israeli landscape.

The stories present different types of immigration and processes of importing and exporting to and from Israel. They are soundless montages with subtitles and consist of footage from over the years of television in Israel: news, Arab movies, Zionist documentaries, commercials for Israeli products, sing-a-long evenings, and more.

According to Maurice Halbwachs, there are two basic mechanisms in relation to memory: the personal memory, which a person carries from an event that he/she has directly experienced, and a collective memory, which includes past events that were not experienced directly by an individual, but were told by other individuals from older generations through stories, books, the media, etc. Collective memory is in need of mediation that will shape it. Halbwachs referred to the dimension of time and argued that collective memory, as opposed to personal memory, has a generational dimension. After the passing of the generation, the memory becomes history, and the details are preserved; collective memory can thus be altered and shaped by society, government, and organizations (Halbwachs, 1992).
My video is sourced from different contents from Israeli television and was converted to black and white. Using the commonplace B&W format I narrate the stories through subtitles, subtitles that have no connection to the image.

At the end of the 1970s, color televisions came to Israel. The government instructed the Israeli Broadcasting Authority to reduce color broadcasts and the sale of color televisions so as not to highlight the gap between rich and poor, and to discourage imports.
INTERMISSION

Intermission is a recess between parts of a performance or production, as in a theatrical plays, opera, concerts, or film screenings. Psychologically, intermissions cause audiences to return to reality, and are a period during which they can engage critical faculties that they have suspended during the performance itself. In short, intermission gives the audience “a breather” (Pavis and Shantz, 1998).

The video *Maybe That’s What It Means* was created while researching the history of subtitles in the Israeli film industry. The translator, Yerushalaim Segal, translated films from English and French to Hebrew and Arabic. Since he had experience in doing translations, he agreed to translate a film in Burmese to Hebrew even though he did not speak any Burmese. The entire translation was based on guesswork and his own interpretation (Segal, 1993).

Every Friday night, my family, like every other family in Israel, gathered in the living room to watch the traditional Arabic movie which was shown each week. I did not understand the language and I also couldn’t read the Hebrew translation at the bottom of the screen. Like Segal, I needed to guess what I was seeing, interpreting freely according to my imagination. I learned English mostly from television, as did my classmates and so many of our generation.
Unlike in Europe, where films are usually dubbed, in Israel films are screened in the original language and are subtitled. Only films for children are dubbed into Hebrew.

In the video installation, the text appears as subtitles that jump from one screen to the other so the viewer cannot concentrate and loses the thread of the story. The images are unrelated to the text; they are a collage of television experiences of my generation and can be watched in any order. The video does not have a plot and the screen is only a viewer’s experience. The video is a compound and is built from three parts.
The last part of my video tells the story of the import of the Eucalyptus tree from an alien landscape to the landscape I was born into, the nostalgic landscape of my childhood. Eucalyptus seeds arrived first from Australia to Israel, at that time called Palestine, in the late 19th century, and it was thought that they could help control the spread of malaria. The disease, which was prevalent in swampy areas where mosquitoes bred, threatened the lives of the pioneers who were settling in those areas. The origin of the name malaria was “bad air” in Italian as it was believed that there was a link between the air around the swamps and malaria. The Eucalyptus tree was imported to dry out the swamps and purify the air.

At this time, a committee appointed to deal with the malaria fever problem. The committee, headed by Dr. Hillel Yaffe urged the population to hang nets around the beds and in the open windows and simultaneously to begin draining all sources of standing waters. Dr. Hillel Yaffe also convinced Baron Rothschild to send professionals to Israel to help in the annihilation of the mosquitoes. All the swamps were sprayed with petroleum to prevent spreading of mosquitoes by gestation, contaminating the air.
The first large planting of Eucalyptus trees started in 1888 and continued until 1921, the year it was understood that the tree did not fulfill its expected purpose. From then on it was considered an invasive species and regulations and laws against their planting came into effect (Haim, 1985).

The Eucalyptus tree represents a new beginning and stability, but also mortality and temporality. It brings out questions about humankind, origins, roots and localization in contrast to migration and universalism, the situation of the Israeli artist, the Israeli reality, and the idea of mobility, so inherent in the Jewish history and also today in the contemporary Israeli reality.

I am interested in the Eucalyptus tree as a symbol of failure, a solution that did not work as planned, and even more so, as a tree which became an invasive alien whose planting needs to be regulated by laws. Despite its controversial history, the Eucalyptus tree has become an important part of the Israeli landscape, and is a symbol of early Zionism as it is a reminder of the first Jewish settlements and pioneers in Israel (Haim, 1985).
THE MONOBLOC CHAIR

The Monobloc chair is a lightweight stackable polypropylene chair, often described as the world's most common plastic chair. It was designed by the Canadian designer D.C. Simpson in 1946. Variants of the one-piece plastic chair went into production in the seventies and in Israel, it became tremendously popular and it is still widely used in many official government and army events, schools, and ceremonies. Several chairs are usually tied together with a zip tie, so they can’t be pulled apart or moved in a different order.

My installation consists of five chairs, symbolizing the number of persons in the typical Israeli nuclear family, including my own (Zuckerman, 2011).
In my past works, mostly all of them in the video medium, I have dealt with my identity, my memories and my family’s memories and stories of their past.

The installation *Kirschallee* was created after discovering a house that my German family owned in the town of Lobau, Germany before WWII. I travelled to the house, named “Haus Schminke” in order to learn more about my family who I knew almost nothing about and had very little contact with. “Haus Schminke” was built by the architect Hans Scharoun, who also was a close friend of my great grandfather Fritz Schminke. The house was built in a modern style, predating the Bauhaus architecture. I learned that the house was tailor-made to specifications by my great grandfather Fritz and his wife, Charlotte. Scharoun would live with the people who ordered a design from him so that he could learn about their desires and needs in their home.
Since I’ve never had any contact with my German family, I began to learn about them through their usage of space, design of furniture and Scharoun’s way of presenting my family’s personality through objects. This gave me a way of creating a relationship with them. With the help of materials and forms and the house itself acting as mediators between me and my family, I thought that I could find more about my past and my family by understanding how Scharoun interpreted my great grandparents’ needs and characteristics. My approach was to find the apparent objects in the house, analyzing the living space, how the family moved inside the house.

Through this process of deconstructing the house and re-imagining its past life, I was hoping to confront my family’s history and further understand how I feel about it now, uncovering another layer in my quest for understanding my origins. I feel that in order to understand my background, I need to understand the architectural culture, and specifically, the German culture. I believe one can understand any culture through architecture, as they acted as homes. In order to understand my family background, I want to study and explore much more than just their habitual space, but also the cultural world in which they lived.

When visiting the house, I came across an archive of 16mm films of unknown family footage. These films helped me gain information about myself and my family history.
(Untitled from Kirschallee, 2016, single channel video (video still).)
My mother used to tell me about a memory she had of herself as a young girl in Germany and how her mother used to fill the bathtub for all the children to take turns and wash themselves. This would happen about once a week, and my mother was always the last of her four siblings to take a bath. She tells this story with great sensory details including the time, the smell, and the image, that terrifies her of this black oily water. When I hear this story, I feel as if I had experienced it as I know so many of its details. This video was created after reading Marianne Hirsch’s *The Generation of Postmemory*, which explains how memories of past generation integrate into the new generation, with its accompanying pain and trauma (Hirsch, 2012). Hirsch argues that we can remember other people’s memories. The memories of traumatic events live on to mark the lives of those who were not there to experience them. Children of survivors and their contemporaries inherit catastrophic histories not through direct recollection but through haunting post memories with mediated images, objects, stories, behaviors, and affects passed down through the family or within a culture at large (Hirsch, 2012).
CONCLUSION

Hannah Arendt argues that storytelling transforms private meaning into public meaning (Arendt, 1973). Telling the stories in my video through text, transforms a private experience into a public one. I am sharing those memories so they will be engraved in one’s memory and maybe this memory will continue to exist apart from me. It will be remembered and not forgotten.

Many holocaust survivors came to our school throughout the years, from when I was very young until high school. They read to us from books they wrote and told us stories of their own experiences of the Holocaust. Through the use of storytelling, the traumatic events that we were told became so engraved in our memory that they felt like they were our own.

Growing up as part of the third generation of Holocaust survivors, we constantly heard the phrase “Remember and never forget”.

Israelis are so anxious of losing their history and have become obsessed with transferring the stories of the horrors they suffered to younger generations. Our generation, the third generation of Holocaust survivors, will be the last generation to hear these stories from the survivors themselves.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew). Directed by Fritz Hippler. 1940; Germany: Terra, 1940. film.
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