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Trauma, Creativity, And Bearing Witness Through Art: Marian Kołodziej's Labyrinth

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Graduate Program in Media Studies

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts

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Abstract

The mid-2000s brought rise to significant shifts in the field of trauma studies, most notably the suggestion that a survivor's trauma can have meaning when it is shared with others through creative representation and storytelling. Despite these critical changes in the field, there is a dearth of research outside of clinical art therapy that examines the role of creativity in the processes of working through past traumas for survivors, and in the processes of bearing witness to the trauma of others.

In an effort to address these issues, I use a framework of relational psychoanalysis and feminist philosophy to explore a visual art exhibition in Harmęże, Poland entitled *The Labyrinth*, which was created by Nazi concentration camp survivor Marian Kołodziej. This thesis reveals how the creative process can help genocide survivors “mend” by rendering their traumatic pasts visible to themselves and others through visual art. I conclude that acting out when filtered through the creative process can lead to mending and working through for the survivor.

This thesis also unpacks the witness function of survivor art—that is, the power of visual art in the process of bearing witness to traumatic events that are so often described as unrepresentable and incomprehensible. I conclude that survivor art is a medium with the unique ability to awaken witnesses to their insomniatic responsibility to bear witness “beyond recognition”—a process Kelly Oliver asserts is essential for the restoration of subjectivity for the survivor.

Keywords:

Marian Kołodziej, *The Labyrinth*, trauma, creativity, bearing witness, the Holocaust, Auschwitz-Birkenau, visual art, psychoanalysis, genocide, Poland, World War II

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated in memory of Auschwitz survivor and artist, Marian Kołodziej. May your work and those who suffered and died at the hands of the Nazis never be forgotten.

Acknowledgments

I have been inspired and encouraged by many people during the process of writing this thesis. I would like to thank these people now:

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Beneath the shiny marble floor of a church in Harmęże, Poland, an exhibition portrays the traumatic memories of Auschwitz survivor,¹ Marian Kołodziej.² Marian Kołodziej's exhibition, *Negative of a Memory: Labyrinth (The Labyrinth)*, is a sensually-assaulting reminder of the horrors experienced by those imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps. As a Polish political prisoner who arrived at Auschwitz on one of the first transports, Kołodziej witnessed countless atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis against European Jews and other targeted groups. Kołodziej's artwork, initially functioning as a way to heal from the physical injury of a stroke, became a catharsis for his own psychological injury, and a testament to art's unique ability to help survivors "work through" their traumatic pasts by rendering their trauma visible to the public.³ By giving form to Kołodziej's unspeakable thoughts and traumatic memories, *The Labyrinth* also functions as a testament to the horrors of the Holocaust, a memorial to the victims of the Nazis, and a public reminder of the evils we are capable of perpetrating against one another. This thesis explores the "mending"⁴ potential of the creative process for individual survivors of trauma in the context of genocide, as well as the witness function of survivor art when it is shared with the public to experience.

In May 2016, I participated in a two-week study abroad program in Poland as part of an undergraduate course, "Representing the Holocaust: Memorials, Museums, and National Memory in Poland," under the supervision of Dr. Amanda Grzyb. During the trip, ten students and I engaged in study visits of all six death camps, concentration camps, former ghettos, as well as many other sites of Holocaust memory. On the third day of our trip, we

¹ I refer to Kołodziej as a survivor of the Nazi camps, but not as a survivor of the Holocaust. I reserve the term "Holocaust survivor" for Jewish victims alone. Any reference to Kołodziej as a "survivor" in this thesis is intended to refer specifically to the artist as a survivor of the Nazi camps.

² The church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception is part of the St. Maximilian Centre in Harmęże. The centre also consists of two other buildings: The Franciscan Monastery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the St. Maximilian Retreat and Educational House run by the Father Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata (<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>).

³ The concept of "working through" was originally used by Freud in his paper "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" (1914).

⁴ In her text *Mended by the Muse* (2014) Sophia Richman discusses how it is more accurate to refer to "mending" as opposed to "healing" when discussing the "working through" of survivor trauma.

toured the Maximilian Kolbe Centre and spent nearly two hours exploring Kołodziej's art installation, *The Labyrinth*. It is difficult to describe my experience of the exhibition in words... it was unlike anything I had ever experienced before and most likely ever will. In the days following our visit to *The Labyrinth*, we visited Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka, Majdanek, Sobibór, Belżec, and Chełmno. Millions of people suffered and died on the grounds we trekked across; yet, the entire time I was touring the death camps, I felt completely numb. I could not shake *The Labyrinth* from my mind. I thought about it as I walked through the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Majdanek, I thought about it on my flight home to Toronto, and I have continued to think about it every day since. What is it about *The Labyrinth* that was so profoundly upsetting? What is it about *The Labyrinth* that continues to haunt and intrigue me? I undertook this thesis project in order to unpack such questions related to my time within *The Labyrinth*.

1.1 Research Questions

This thesis seeks to explore the mending potential of the creative process for survivors of trauma in the context of genocide, as well as the witness function of survivor art when later shared with the public. As such, I will address these two over-arching themes in separate chapters. Following a biographical and historical discussion of Marian Kołodziej and his *Labyrinth* in Chapter One, Chapter Two explores Kołodziej's personal healing through the creation of his art. Chapter Two is guided by the following questions:

- How can the creative process undertaken by survivors of trauma in the context of the Holocaust help them to personally work through their traumatic pasts? Can it help survivors “mend”? How does one conceptualize the relationship between psychic expression and creative expression? More specifically, how might have the creation of *The Labyrinth* helped Marian Kołodziej work through not only the immediate physical trauma caused by his stroke, but also his psychic trauma as a result of being a concentration camp survivor?

Chapter Three focuses on the witness function of survivor art when it is shared with the public, exploring the implications of such art in facilitating remembrance of the Holocaust and the Nazi camps. As such, this chapter is guided by the following questions:

- What is the witness function of survivor art in the context of genocide? What does it mean when such artistic works are shared with others? Could such witnessing influence possible “mending” and collective remembrance of past genocidal traumas?
 - How might Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth* situate visitors into the process of witnessing the Holocaust and the Nazi camps?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Although this thesis discusses similar issues to those taken up in the field of art therapies, it is rooted in psychoanalytic theory and philosophy as opposed to practices of clinical art therapy (Naumberg, 1950; Gilroy, et al., 2012; Edwards 2014). Cathy Caruth contends that both psychoanalysis and trauma centre on the grounds of “impossible saying”; that is, both the discipline of psychoanalysis and the experience of trauma are motivated by a “not fully assimilated confrontation of death.”⁵ Psychoanalysis itself can be a form of witnessing and, in this way, using psychoanalytic theory to discuss trauma and its subsequent representations resonates strongly.⁶

In making my argument, I rely extensively on Sophia Richman’s relational psychoanalytic theory of creativity and Kelly Oliver’s feminist theory of witnessing. Chapter Two employs Richman’s relational psychoanalytic theories of creativity as discussed in her book *Mended by the Muse* (2014) in order to unpack the mending potentials of Kołodziej’s personal creative process. Supplemented by other relational theories of creativity (Levine 2009; Broderick and Traverso 2011; Charles 2011; Bisschoff and van de Peer 2013; Adnams Jones 2018), this chapter focuses on Kołodziej’s individual process of “working through” past trauma.⁷ Chapter Three uses Oliver’s theory of witnessing as articulated in her book

⁵ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 10.

⁶ Caruth contends that Freud’s psychoanalytic writings, especially *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), tell us not only about the traumas of others, but also about his “own unsettling departure from Vienna in 1938” (Caruth, 1995, 11, endnote 6). Harold Bloom also characterizes Freud as a witness who speaks and writes from his own traumas, stating that Freud’s “peculiar strength was to say what could not be said, or at least attempt to say it, thus refusing to be silent in the face of the unsayable” (Bloom, Harold. *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Psychoanalysis itself can be a form of witnessing.

⁷ The concept of “working through” was originally used by Freud in his paper “Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through” (1914).

Witnessing: Beyond Recognition (2001) to examine the ways in which survivor art can bear witness to events so often deemed incomprehensible and unrepresentable. I also make use of Oliver's notions of response-ability and vigilance to explore the witness function of *The Labyrinth*; that is, how the exhibition calls visitors awake to their responsibility to remember the trauma of the Holocaust and the Nazi camps.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis employs a multi-method approach, coupling theoretical analysis with compositional interpretations of various drawings from *The Labyrinth*. For information on the exhibition itself, I rely upon diverse sources of information on *The Labyrinth*, including the exhibition's printed catalogue, entitled "Marian Kołodziej—*The Labyrinths: Passing Two*"; a documentary film entitled *The Labyrinth: The Testimony of Marian Kołodziej* (2011); the exhibition's website (<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>) and the photos and field notes I took during my visit to *The Labyrinth* in May 2016. I received permission from the Maximilian Kolbe Centre, the sole owners of Kołodziej's art, to reproduce images from the exhibition's catalogue and website, as well as my own photos of the exhibition, in this thesis.

In addition to theoretical analysis of the site, I draw on various compositional interpretations throughout this thesis. Compositional interpretation is a qualitative and visual methodology rooted in the art history discipline. It is used to analyze art (typically paintings and drawings), and explores the key components of the still image, encompassing content, colour, spatial organization, light and expressive content.⁸ In her book, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (2001), Gillian Rose states that compositional interpretation "offers a detailed vocabulary for expressing the appearance of an image."⁹ Compositional interpretation demands careful attention to individual images and analyzes the visual impact of the image. I conduct interpretations of various images to complement my theoretical analysis. Because of compositional interpretation's strength in analyzing individual images to understand their significance and meaning, it is a beneficial research method to use in this study.

⁸ Rose, Gillian. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*. London: Sage, 2001, 70.

⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

1.4 Review of Literature

1.4.1 Trauma and Memory Studies

According to Broderick and Traverso, Trauma studies arose among humanities scholars in the twentieth century as a response to the “morbid spectacle of war.”¹⁰ In *Understanding Psychoanalysis* (2008), Matthew Sharpe states that “since the last century as a whole was arguably a century of traumas... [a] sense of trauma, unsurprisingly, pervades much of twentieth century European thought.”¹¹ Broderick and Traverso note that initially, scholars became interested in the research of traumatic memory “within the confines of psychology and psychiatry.”¹² Many concepts that arose from mental health sciences were translated into the studies of history, society, and culture. The interdisciplinary and constantly evolving field of trauma studies arose from these interests and intersections. As such, it is hard to determine a clear distinction between the notion of trauma as used in its original “psychological denotation” and its use in the “socio-cultural realm,” and discussing the representations of trauma in media (as this thesis does) further blurs these distinctions.¹³

Additionally, the concept of trauma exerted great influence on the rise of Holocaust studies in the 1990s. Other new sub-fields, such as comparative genocide studies, arose during this upswing in Holocaust scholarship.¹⁴ However, E. Ann Kaplan asserts that trauma studies actually “originated in the context of research about the Holocaust.”¹⁵ The lack of clarity about which field (trauma studies or Holocaust studies) was established first suggests a symbiotic relationship between the two fields, in which both fields influence one another. The popularity of trauma studies grew even more when scholars such as Cathy Caruth

¹⁰ Broderick, Mick and Antonio Traverso. *Interrogating Trauma: Collective Suffering in Global Arts and Media*. London: Routledge, 2011, 6.

¹¹ Sharpe, Matthew and Joanne Faulkner. *Understanding Psychoanalysis*. Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008, 1.

¹² Broderick, Mick and Antonio Traverso. *Interrogating Trauma: Collective Suffering in Global Arts and Media*. London: Routledge, 2011, 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 6.

¹⁵ Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005, 1.

“began to apply trauma-related debates—initially elaborated in unique reference to the Holocaust—to other catastrophic historical experiences.”¹⁶

Trauma studies has developed in close partnership with memory studies, a field which has also grown significantly over the past few decades. Scholars of memory studies traverse traditional disciplinary boundaries, seeing memory as a “phenomena at once neuronal, psychological, cultural and socio-political.”¹⁷ Almost all recent publications on memory converge in their explorations of how “personal and cultural worlds seem to be constituted through memory.”¹⁸ Additionally, trauma appears to be a “recurrent sub-topic” in memory studies, and publications focusing on trauma almost always include memory as a sub-topic. As such, it is difficult to draw a clear line between the two fields. Broderick and Traverso attribute the common terrain of these fields to an “inherent affinity” between them: “although not all memory is traumatic, trauma generally is described as a kind of memory.”¹⁹ Following this line of thought, trauma studies could be viewed as a sub-field of memory studies.

When discussing trauma, it is important to reference the seminal works of the first psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1924), Freud reconsidered his hypothesis of the pleasure principle²⁰ after noticing the repetition of traumatic events in the dreams of World War One survivors.²¹ This repetition of trauma occurred against the survivor’s will, and challenged Freud’s notion that humans are always striving towards pleasure both consciously and unconsciously. In order to better explain this repetition of trauma, Freud hypothesized that “the psyche instinctively strives towards mastery of the crisis and does this through repetition-compulsion.”²² In this way, the psyche will return to the traumatic experience as an attempt to gain mastery over the trauma through the presence

¹⁶ Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

²⁰ In his early works, Freud describes the pleasure principle as the primary driving force of the Id. Freud contends that people instinctively pursue pleasure and avoid pain to satisfy their needs. Freud later revised this theory in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1924).

²¹ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 10.

²² Freud, Sigmund and C. J. M. Hubback. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1924, 20.

of anxiety. Freud builds on this explanation of trauma in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), describing a period of latency “situated between the actual traumatic event and the subsequent recurrence of the trauma in the form of inexplicable symbols”—in the case of the WWI survivors, these inexplicable symbols appeared in their dreams.²³ In short, the traumatic event is repressed and then, after a period of latency, reappears through associative chains.

The 1980s marked a significant shift in studies of trauma in the fields of psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and sociology. In 1980, the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged “Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder” (PTSD)²⁴ which “included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes.”²⁵ The term came to use unofficially during the 1970s in large part due to the diagnoses of U.S. military veterans of the Vietnam War.²⁶ Following the official recognition of PTSD, public and academic discourse surrounding trauma began to expand as there was now an umbrella term from which to speak of the phenomena.

During the 1990s, other significant contributions were made in the field of trauma studies. American scholar Cathy Caruth rekindled Freud’s theory of trauma, most notably situating the period of latency “within the traumatic event itself, while it occurs.”²⁷ Caruth pointed out that although there is “injury in the accident... it is not registered fully” by the victim at the time of the accident.²⁸ In this way, trauma became redefined: the “pathology of

²³ Freud, Sigmund and Katherine Jones. *Moses and Monotheism*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1939.

²⁴ Cathy Caruth contends that while definitions of PTSD are often contested, “most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which take the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (Caruth, 1995, 9).

²⁵ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 3.

²⁶ For more on trauma and the veterans of the Vietnam War, see Laufer, Robert S., M. S. Gallops, and Ellen Frey-Wouters. “War Stress and Trauma: The Vietnam Veteran Experience.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 25, no. 1 (1984): 65-85.

²⁷ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 11.

²⁸ Ibid.

traumatic experience should [no longer] be defined by the event itself or the distortion of that event, but by the structure of the experience itself” because, Caruth writes, “trauma is a temporal delay that carries individuals beyond the shock of the first moment.”²⁹ Caruth contends that “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time.”³⁰ In terms of the ability to represent trauma, Caruth insists that such experiences are left unspeakable and unrepresentable, a theme which will be discussed more below.

Caruth’s theory of trauma predominated as the dominant discourse in trauma studies until the mid-2000s, when E. Ann Kaplan developed a new approach to trauma which partially departed from Caruth’s influential theories. In her book, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (2005), Kaplan points out that “most theorists since Caruth have chosen the disassociation route for trauma analysis.”³¹ During a period when postmodernism and deconstruction were highly popular among the arts and humanities, many scholars of trauma argued that “trauma has affect but no meaning.”³² On the contrary, Kaplan argues that trauma can have meaning *when it is shared*, as survivors can “choose a meaningful discourse to share the experience of the traumatic event.”³³ Kaplan’s discussion of trauma as meaningful is two-fold: “the telling of the story of trauma may achieve a working through for the victim, however limited or weak” and “the telling of trauma permits an empathetic sharing that moves both teller (traumatized) and receiver (vicariously traumatized) forward.”³⁴ In this way, Kaplan calls for the “representing of trauma in a way that leads to reconciliation.”³⁵

²⁹ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 11.

³⁰ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 5.

³¹ Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2005, 11.

³² Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2005, 11.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁵ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 11.

By tracing a brief history of trauma studies, we can see how the field has shifted from a mostly Eurocentric and patriarchal tradition to one more inclusive of feminist issues and other approaches as well.³⁶ While scholars since the early 2000s have been interested in the relationship between creativity and trauma, (Young 2000; Lang 2002; Sutton 2002; Bennett 2005; Levine 2009, Rothberg 2009; Broderick and Traverso 2011; Charles 2011; Adnams Jones 2018) Kaplan acknowledges that further research is still needed in trauma studies to broaden our understandings of the relationship between trauma and its subsequent representations.

1.4.2 Representing Trauma

Theodor Adorno famously stated that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (1962); however, it is not widely known that Adorno later revised this well-known quotation, stating:

I have no wish to soften the saying that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric... Yet this suffering, what Hegel called consciousness of adversity, also *demand the continued existence of art while it prohibits it*; it is now virtually art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.³⁷

In other words, it is impossible yet necessary to represent traumatic experiences; for Adorno, art is the closest we can get. This issue of the seemingly “unrepresentable and unimaginable nature of personal and collective trauma has permeated trauma studies since its inception.”³⁸ Caruth also speaks of this paradoxical notion inherent in traumatic experiences, stating that “it is the fundamental dislocation implied by all traumatic experience that is both testimony to the event and to the impossibility of direct access.”³⁹ Here, Caruth also points to how the memory of traumatic experiences is both a testimony to the event that must be told, but, at the same time, can never be directly accessed because of the “split within immediate

³⁶ Ibid, 9.

³⁷ Adorno, Theodor W. and Rolf Tiedemann. *Can One Live After Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003, 313, emphasis added.

³⁸ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 4.

³⁹ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 6.

experience that characterizes the traumatic occurrence itself.”⁴⁰ I will further explore this paradox of representation in Chapter 3, through instances of survivor art in the context of the Holocaust, as well through the work of Sophia Richman.

As stated by Lizelle Bisschoff and Stefanie Van de Peer, “there seems to be a general consensus in trauma studies that remembering and representation are important steps in working through traumatic experiences, and that these could even serve as preventative tools for the future.”⁴¹ E. Ann Kaplan also advocates for the necessity of representation, stating that if we stop at deeming trauma as unrepresentable, we risk pushing trauma “into the mystified circle of the occult, something untouchable and unreachable.”⁴² Kaplan states that the representation of trauma is necessary as it could “transform the viewer into the position of being a witness, opening up a space for empathetic identification... an identification which allows the spectator to enter into the victim’s experience through a work’s narration.”⁴³ Additionally, Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (2007) resist the notion that visual works cannot represent historical trauma; instead, they contend that there are many visual works that can actually enable agency in the representation and comprehension of traumatic experiences in history.⁴⁴ However, Guerin and Hallas describe how, following the release of the photographs of the liberated Nazi camps taken by the Allied troops, there was a wide mistrust of the ability of images to represent the trauma of victims. As such, there was a shift away from visual depictions of suffering in the 1950s and 1960s, and scholars, filmmakers⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Ibid, 9.

⁴¹ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013.

⁴² Kaplan, Ann E. and Ban Wang. *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008, 8.

⁴³ Ibid, 10.

⁴⁴ Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, 3.

⁴⁵ Sidney Lumet’s *The Pawnbroker* (1964) and Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos’ *The Shop on Mainstreet* (1965) are examples of films in the 1960s that avoid visual depictions of the mass suffering of the Holocaust. Instead, these films deal with the trauma of the Holocaust following the event, or through more indirect or subtle means. *The Pawnbroker* emphasizes a single survivor’s difficulty to continue his life after witnessing his family’s death at the hands of the Nazis, while *The Shop on Mainstreet* follows a Slovak carpenter who takes over an Jewish woman’s shop during the Aryanization of their town. Both films emphasize the intimate stories of individuals impacted by the Holocaust without directly visualizing the atrocities of the Nazis. Likewise, Andrzej Wajda’s *Samson* (1961) avoided explicit representations of the Holocaust, and instead opted for expressionist cinematography to

and writers avoided attempts to represent the mass atrocities of the Holocaust. The Eichmann trial in 1961 also facilitated a significant shift in focus back to individual testimony as opposed to representations of mass suffering during this time. In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars turned again to the issue of representation, and the role of “language, art and literature in the memorialization of the Holocaust.”⁴⁶ During this time, the oral and written testimony of survivors became considered the most authentic form of representation, especially since most victims did not have access to materials to create visual representations of their experiences during the event. Images of the Holocaust were most commonly created by perpetrators, liberators and bystanders—and as such, were deemed inadequate in comparison to the oral and written testimonies of actual camp survivors.⁴⁷

Guerin and Hallas contend that “scholars have paid more attention to the written and spoken word as the most appropriate communicative forms for bearing witness to and remembering the suffering of the traumatized subject.”⁴⁸ They attribute this privilege of the written word over the visual image to the “iconoclasm” that pervades the history of Western philosophy as well as most literature on trauma, memory and representation—that is, one should be suspicious of the “veracity of the image.”⁴⁹ Guerin and Hallas trace this suspicion of the image’s ability to represent trauma to the photos taken by Allied forces of the liberated Nazi camps. Many agree—as do I—that these images “transgressed the integrity of the human subject” and did not bear witness to the trauma people experienced within the camps.⁵⁰ The liberation photos seem to have begun the widespread mistrust in the images ability to “capture ethically the magnitude of the suffering of trauma victims.”⁵¹ In his book *Fantasies of Witnessing* (2004), Gary Weissman contends that the continuing interest in learning about the Holocaust stems from a desire to feel closer to its horror—this is the desire that Weissman calls the “fantasy of witnessing.”⁵² Despite such attempts, Weissman asserts

evoke an atmosphere of trauma and suffering. See Annette Insdorf’s *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust* (1989) for more on filmic representations of the Holocaust.

⁴⁶ Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 4.

⁵¹ Ibid, 6.

⁵² Weissman, Gary. *Fantasies of Witnessing: Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust*. Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2004.

that only those who experienced the camps firsthand can ever really know what it was like. Primo Levi takes this assertion even further, saying that only those who went up in smoke through the crematorium chimneys are the true witnesses of the Nazi camps—they were the only prisoners who “saw the gorgon.”⁵³

Philosopher Julia Kristeva posits that “binding affect to words in a public space” is essential in order to work-through trauma and the suffering associated with being “othered” and dehumanized. More specifically, she argues that “it is through imaginative interpretation that we can bind words and affects and heal wounds.”⁵⁴ However, Van Alphen points out that “as soon as Holocaust art or literature introduces narrative elements that relate to historical reality, post-Holocaust culture has its guard up.”⁵⁵ In other words, representations of the Holocaust are typically held up to suspicion if they include an imaginative element (such as Kołodziej’s drawings).⁵⁶ Van Alphen combats this concern about the collision between the imaginative and historical in Holocaust art by describing the works of German artist Anselm Kiefer. Kiefer’s work purposely blurs any distinction between the imaginative and historical in his depictions of the Holocaust. Van Alphen describes how “the historical aspects of [Kiefer’s] work are infused with mythical elements, a combination that makes it extremely difficult, perhaps even senseless, to distinguish the historical from the imaginative.”⁵⁷ According to Van Alphen and Andreas Huyssen, however, this blurring of realms is a critical reflection on “how mythic images function in history, how myth can never escape history, and how history in turn has to rely on mythic images.”⁵⁸ Van Alphen asserts that: “one could argue that Nazi Germany’s contamination of history and mythic imagination legitimizes, even contaminates, the maintenance of the clear-cut division between historical and

⁵³ Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. 1st Vintage International ed. New York, NY: Vintage International, 1989.

⁵⁴ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 110.

⁵⁵ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 4.

⁵⁶ For example, critics often debate the genre of Art Spiegelman’s two-volume graphic novel *Maus* (1980), and whether or not it should be considered a work of fiction or non-fiction due to its artistic representations of Vladek Spiegelman’s testimony. Rosemary V. Hathaway asserts *Maus* can most accurately be referred to as “postmodern ethnography” (Hathaway 2011).

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

⁵⁸ Huyssen 1989, pg. 27 in Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 5.

imaginative discourse that currently informs Holocaust studies.”⁵⁹ Essentially, Van Alphen and Huyssen believe that the inclusion of mythical or imaginative imagery in artistic works depicting the Holocaust actual makes more sense than purely literal or historical representations. Literal representations may not even be possible, as we cannot speak of the historical without simultaneously speaking of the imaginative. As a result, what we see in many artistic renditions of experiences of the Holocaust and the Nazi camps are “fragments from a memory that itself lies in ruins.”⁶⁰

Other scholars address the limitations and potential dangers of representing trauma creatively (Friedlander 1992; Caruth 1995; Sontag 2003; Ubaldo and Möller 2013). Saul Friedlander’s seminal book, *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992), includes several essays by various scholars that explore the limits of representing the Holocaust through different mediums. Most notably, the book explores the ways in which contemporary culture reshapes the image of the past. In her book, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag also explores such limitations specifically through photography of traumatic experiences, and asks if representations actually promote empathy amongst viewers, or if they merely create a voyeuristic spectacle of another’s trauma.⁶¹ However, Ernst Van Alphen reminds us that “we are not speaking of memory when we speak of the Holocaust, because memory is of something” and offers trauma work as a “model for understanding how the Holocaust is represented.”⁶² Van Alphen writes that “a traumatic event cannot be fully experienced at the moment it happens; as a consequence, it cannot be remembered... in the case of trauma, reality and representation are inseparable. There is no distinction: the representation is the event.”⁶³

This thesis follows from the assertion that although the Holocaust resists representation, it is still necessary to attempt such representations. To deem the Holocaust as unrepresentable and incomprehensible is to doom it to a mythic status, to make it impossible to speak about the atrocity, and to condemn it to be forgotten. In his book *Postcards from*

⁵⁹ Huyssen 1989, pg. 27 in Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 5.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York, NY: Picador, 2003.

⁶² Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 36.

⁶³ Ibid.

Auschwitz (2018), Daniel P. Reynolds contends that to insist that the Holocaust is incomprehensible or unrepresentable *entirely* because of its horror, is to “invite resignation in the face of atrocity.”⁶⁴ Likewise, survivor Elie Wiesel asserts that “the Holocaust can never fully be comprehended by those who did not experience it” and that it must “forever remain a mystery to those who were not there”; yet, Wiesel does not view this inability to comprehend as a barrier to remembering the Holocaust, but as the motivation for continuing to *attempt* to represent and comprehend the genocide in the hopes of never forgetting it.⁶⁵

1.4.3 Creativity and Trauma

The existing theoretical landscape dealing with the therapeutic potential of creativity and art can be divided into three camps: Freudian drive theory models, existential and humanistic models, and contemporary relational psychoanalytic perspectives.⁶⁶ Drive theory models follow from Freud’s notion that the artistic creation process is similar to the dream-work process in that artists create sublimations of unconscious wishes through their art (Freud 1935, 1952). Psychoanalysts who ascribe to the drive theory model (Kris, 1952; Kubie 1958; Ehrenzweig 1967; Noy 1979; Hanley 1986; Loewald 1988) all operate under a Freudian framework, but have differing views on “what agencies or levels of mind operate when the artist is engaged in creation.”⁶⁷

Existential and humanistic models of creativity, originally conceptualized by Carl Jung (1966), mark a significant shift away from Freudian notions. Proponents of these models (Maslow 1962; May 1994; Schantel 1984; Winnicott 1971; Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Miller 1990) believe that creativity and becoming a self-actualized “healthy” human are synonymous, and that the role of the unconscious in creativity is paramount.⁶⁸ Otto Rank—a “forerunner of existential psychoanalysis” and a former student of Freud who turned his back on drive theory models—believed that the “innate” human impulse to create manifests in art,

⁶⁴ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 22.

⁶⁵ Wiesel, Elie and Marion Wiesel. *Night*. 1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.

⁶⁶ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

⁶⁷ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 33.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

and thought that artists represented the ultimate example of “striving for self-expression and growth.”⁶⁹ Likewise, Donald Winnicott saw creativity as an “essential force intrinsic to human nature” and believed art functions as an intermediary area between inner and outer experience for the artist: a “transitional realm” or a “third concept.”⁷⁰

Contemporary relational psychoanalytic perspectives developed in the last 25 years (Rose 1996; Stern 1997; Charles 2001; Hagman 2010; Adnam Jones 2018) mark another change in psychoanalysis and theories of creativity, maintaining that “the primacy of configurations of self and others, whether real or fantasized, is the motivating factor in human behaviour.”⁷¹ These perspectives view the unconscious as “unformulated experience” as opposed to a “repository of repressed drives.”⁷² Donnell Stern (1997) asserts that “what eludes us is not repressed but unformulated” and the creative process provides a vehicle through which we can “give form to unformulated content, to create something new out of confusion and chaos.”⁷³ Gilbert Rose posits that the imagination and rationality are inseparable, and that the creation of art facilitates emotional responsiveness from both the creator and the witness.⁷⁴ Through this process of externalizing or giving form to inner feelings, “the artist’s mind now exists in the dynamic psychological space in which both inner and outer are contained, interact and affect each other”⁷⁵ and the “creative act becomes a link to the other in so far as it allows for communication in a form that it can be received and mutually recognized.”⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 41.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Winnicott, D. W. *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1971, 105-106.

⁷¹ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 48.

⁷² Ibid, 48.

⁷³ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 49.

⁷⁴ Rose, Gilbert J. *Necessary Illusion: Art as Witness*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press, 1996, 113.

⁷⁵ Hagman, George. *The Artist's Mind: A Psychoanalytic Perspective on Creativity, Modern Art and Modern Artists*. Abingdon, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2010, 18.

⁷⁶ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 52.

In *Mended by the Muse* (2014), Sophia Richman (a Holocaust survivor herself) develops a relational psychoanalytic theory of the creative process based on such relational theories. Richman unpacks the “widespread belief that there is a relationship between creativity and psychopathology,” despite the previous lack of evidence to support this claim.⁷⁷ Richman posits a direct relation between inspiration and insanity “based on the common factor of dissociation that they both share”; she proposes this commonality of dissociation is the “integral part of the creative process” that has been missing from the previous literature on creativity.⁷⁸ She argues that dissociation defers logical thinking, allowing “contents of the mind” and “vivid imagery” to be readily accessible.⁷⁹ Dissociation allows the artist to access “multiple self-states” through progression or regression—all of which act in the service of healthy development.⁸⁰ Richman uses a neuropsychologist’s study on “transient hypofrontality” to confirm the importance of dissociation in the creative process.⁸¹ Ultimately, dissociation is a paradox: the same symptom of traumatic experiences that can prevent us from working through trauma can help us heal when used during the creative process.

Richman acknowledges that many who work with survivors or who study survivor testimony “maintain that the major consequence of Holocaust trauma is the destruction of empathy” leading to a “erasure of the primary empathic bond and the destruction of the internal representation of the relationship between the self and other.”⁸² Richman takes issue with this dominant discourse within trauma studies, and believes that such assertions do not take into account the “complexity and diversity of individual responses to trauma” that can vary incredibly.⁸³ Previous discussions regarding survivors of trauma point to a “generic” survivor experience in relation to the Holocaust. Such sentiments can be found in the works of Laub and Auerhahn (1989):

⁷⁷ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 5.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 54.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 72.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*.

⁸¹ Dietrich, Arne. "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Creativity." *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review* 11, no. 6 (2004): 1011-1026.

⁸² Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 103.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

We do however, postulate a generic survivor experience, common to all those who are directly affected by the Nazi persecution, whether in hiding, ghettos, labor camps, or extermination camps. The essence of Holocaust trauma is the breakdown of the communicative dyad in the internal representational world of the victim... With the trauma-induced loss of the empathic communicative dyad, both self and object are thus subject to annihilation.⁸⁴

In short, Laub and Auerhahn state that there is an entire shutdown of the “processes of association, symbolization, integration, and narrative formation” within *all* survivors.”⁸⁵ Following this line of thought, there is a widespread sentiment in trauma literature that survivors have lost their ability to have an inner dialogue and to self-reflect. While Richman does believe that empathic failure can certainly be part of the trauma experience, she does not find it appropriate or accurate to state that the primary empathic bond is entirely erased, or that the “internal representation of the relationship between self and other” is permanently destroyed.”⁸⁶ In his book *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering* (2009), Stephen K. Levine also warns us that by ascribing an identical experience to all victims of trauma, we rob them of their agency yet again.⁸⁷ To hold such a view is to minimize the self-healing potentials of survivors and to ignore the possibility of resilience in times of adversity.

Along with her emphasis on dissociation as the link between “inspiration and insanity,” Richman discusses the witness function of art. Drawing on Winnicott’s theory of “the muse” and “transitional realms,” Richman describes how art bears witness to the experiences of trauma survivors through the externalization of the internal. The products of the creative process create memorials for what is lost, and can impart meaning, control, and mastery over the internal chaos of a survivor’s mind—all of which can be viewed and experienced by other witnesses/viewers. Richman believes this illusion of witnessing is an aesthetic experience containing a “powerful interactive component” that creates bonds

⁸⁴ Laub, Dori and Nanette C. Auerhahn. "Failed Empathy--a Central Theme in the Survivor's Holocaust Experience." *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 6, no. 4 (1989): 380.

⁸⁵ Richman describes her difficulty to reconcile her respect for Laub’s significant contributions in the study of Holocaust testimony with his “dogmatic theories about survivors” (Richman 105). She feels as though Laub’s theoretical framework limits his perspective, as he attempts to “fit every survivor into this procrustean bed of theory” (105).

⁸⁶ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 104.

⁸⁷ Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 41.

between survivors and others.⁸⁸ Just as the “analyst’s witnessing of the patient’s self-inquiry is an essential aspect of the analytic process” a witness, whether real or imaginary, is essential to the therapeutic action of the creative process.⁸⁹

1.4.4 Witnessing Trauma in the Context of the Holocaust

The New Oxford American Dictionary defines witnessing as the act of seeing an event take place, and/or the act of giving testimony to an event personally observed. In this way, witnessing is often divided in usage to refer to juridical or historical connotations, as the process of bearing witness to or representing something that cannot be seen, or a mixture of both such elements. In her book, *The Era of the Witness* (2006), Annette Wieviorka outlines a “history of the witness” and how the act of giving testimony to the Holocaust, and the role of the witness have changed over time. Wieviorka defines three distinct phases in the evolution of role of testimony and the social figure of the witness. The first phase consists of testimony left behind by those who did not survive the Holocaust, but were still about to record their experiences. During the time of the Nuremberg trials (1945-1946), these testimonies provided key information about the events of the Holocaust that would otherwise be left unknown. Survivor testimony was also a main source for establishing historical facts during this time in order to create a widely accepted chronology of the actual events of the Holocaust. However, Wieviorka describes how during this first phase, testimonies slowly came to no longer be seen as reliable sources in the eyes of many historians and scholars. For example, notable Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg did not use survivor testimony at all when researching and writing his chronology of the Holocaust.⁹⁰ Hilberg took an empirical approach and strictly sought to uncover the “machinery of destruction set up under Nazism.”⁹¹ Up until the Eichmann trial in May 1960, survivor testimony was pushed aside to make space for empirical truths. Wieviorka describes a second phase which centers on the period of time surrounding the Eichmann trial (1961-1962). For Wieviorka, the trial is a

⁸⁸ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 64.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 97.

⁹⁰ For more on Hilberg’s view of survivor testimony, see: Hilberg, Raul. *The Destruction of the European Jews*. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985.

⁹¹ Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963.

moment when a general “deafness to survivor’s stories was replaced by the image of the witness as the ‘bearer of history’.”⁹² She maintains that the role the trial played in “legitimizing testimony as a form of ‘truth telling’ about the past has gone unrecognized.”⁹³ The trial’s juridical setting “lent [testimony] all the weight of the state’s legitimacy and institutions and symbolic power.”⁹⁴ Additionally, the witness was now socially recognized as a “survivor,” giving rise to a “new function: to be the bearer of history.”⁹⁵ Wieviorka defines the third and current phase as “the era of the witness” in which testimonies have come to obtain varying “pedagogical and political uses” for solidifying the place of the Holocaust in collective memory.⁹⁶ In the 1990s for example, projects such as the Yale Video Archive and the Shoah Visual History Foundation were created to record and archive survivor testimony not only to preserve survivor memory but as a “tool for global education about the Holocaust and to teach racial, ethnic, and cultural tolerance.”⁹⁷

Wieviorka’s text is exceptionally beneficial for understanding how the role of witnesses and the act of bearing witness to the Holocaust has changed over time; however, scholars often debate *who* can actually bear witness to the Holocaust. Scholars such as Jean-François Lyotard contend that “no one can pretend to be a witness [of the Holocaust] and that no form of representation can bear witness to such atrocities.”⁹⁸ Elie Wiesel complements such arguments in his classic testimony *Night* (1960), contending that those who did not experience the Holocaust will never be able to understand its horror. Primo Levi also puts forward this notion in his testimony *Survival in Auschwitz* (1996). Other scholars are not as pessimistic about the ability to bear witness to or represent the Holocaust. Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer posits that because the Holocaust is of “such tremendous

⁹² Wieviorka, Annette. *The Era of the Witness*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, 56.

⁹³ Kennedy, Roseanne. "The Era of the Witness (review)." *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 26, no. 4 (2008): 218-221.

⁹⁴ Wieviorka, Annette. *The Era of the Witness*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006, 84.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 88.

⁹⁶ (Shoah Visual History Foundation. <http://www.vhf.org>).

⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

⁹⁸ Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. vol. 46, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

magnitude... an ordinary person's mind is incapable of absorbing it."⁹⁹ Because of the Holocaust's tremendous magnitude, "there will be a natural tendency to run away from it, deny it, and, mainly, try to reduce it to shapes and sizes we can cope with."¹⁰⁰ Bauer sees reducing traumatic experiences to "shapes and sizes we can cope with" as a necessary process in order to discuss them, and he does not entirely dismiss the idea of attempting to represent or bear witness to the Holocaust through such means.¹⁰¹

Despite debates about *who* can bear witness, scholars continue to unpack the pedagogical uses of testimony during the "era of the witness" as defined by Wieviorka. Dori Laub and Shoshanna Felman published a highly regarded text in 1992 entitled *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. The text explores the pedagogical potentials of testimonies, as well as the "hazards" and benefits of listening to human suffering and traumatic narratives.¹⁰² Laub and Felman consider listening to testimonies that bear witness to atrocity essential to "psychological survival"; it is "the very ability to sustain and to continue life after catastrophes."¹⁰³ Ultimately, Laub and Felman develop a crucial "theory of testimony" in which the Holocaust is said to be an "event without witnesses."¹⁰⁴ This "crisis of witnessing" is further explored by the authors, who state that literature becomes the only real "witness" to the Holocaust, and as such, testimonies become the only witnesses to a history that is "unspeakable and unarticulatable."¹⁰⁵ Laub and Felman note that "what ultimately matters in all processes of witnessing... is not simply the information, the establishment of the facts, but the experience of living through testimony, of giving testimony."¹⁰⁶

If witnessing is the act of seeing an event take place and/or the act of giving testimony to an event personally observed, then it is important to hold both of these notions in mind when discussing processes of witnessing. American philosopher Kelly Oliver reminds us that

⁹⁹ Bauer, Yehuda. *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978, 30.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 30.

¹⁰² Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York NY: Routledge, 1992, xvii.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, xvii.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 85.

witnessing “has both the juridical connotations of seeing with one’s own eyes and the religious connotations of testifying to that which cannot be seen, in other words, bearing witness.”¹⁰⁷ Laub contends that the traumatic experience carries with it the “collapse of witnessing,” suggesting that it is impossible to ever really *know* the original trauma.¹⁰⁸ It is precisely the fact that the traumatic experience carries this “impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself” from which trauma “opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, of *impossibility*.”¹⁰⁹ Following this line of thought, Oliver asserts that “we are obligated to respond to what is beyond our comprehension, beyond recognition, because ethics is possible only beyond recognition.”¹¹⁰ Oliver’s book *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001) examines the need to move beyond dead historical facts bound to the finite task of comprehending past events, traumas and atrocities, towards the infinite task of encountering them and bearing witness to what is beyond recognition. According to Oliver, the process of witnessing allows the survivor to reinsert agency into a situation designed to destroy it. Bearing witness to one’s own oppression reconstitutes the inner witness, begins to repair address-ability and response-ability that was damaged through oppression, and allows for the working through of trauma by re-instilling subjectivity.¹¹¹ Ultimately, Oliver believes that subjectivity and agency are produced through witnessing and bearing witness to what is beyond recognition, and social or individual change becomes possible through such transformative processes of recognition.

Much like Oliver, Giorgio Agamben also discusses the importance of bearing witness to what is beyond our comprehension or recognition. Agamben describes this as the “aporia of Auschwitz”; the notion that what happened in the camps is unforgettable to those who survived, yet unimaginable for those who did not experience it.¹¹² This aporia is a reminder of the importance of survivor testimony’s role in the process of bearing witness to an

¹⁰⁷ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 10.

¹⁰⁸ Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1992, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 10, original emphasis.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, 106.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 105.

¹¹² Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999, 12.

experience that is “impossible to bear witness to.”¹¹³ I use Oliver’s understanding of witnessing—that “we are obligated to witness beyond recognition”¹¹⁴— to interrogate Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth* in Chapter 4.

Before I provide a comprehensive analysis of *The Labyrinth*—referencing many of theoretical foundations I’ve outlined here—I will first provide a biography of Marian Kołodziej, a history of the exhibition, and explore the creative process of constructing *The Labyrinth*.

¹¹³ Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999, 13.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 90.

CHAPTER 2: MARIAN KOŁODZIEJ AND *THE LABYRINTH*

Who is Marian Kołodziej, and why was he compelled to construct an exhibition of over two-hundred and fifty drawings? Before analyzing *The Labyrinth*, it is essential to understand who Kołodziej was, what traumas he experienced in the Nazi camps, and why he did not speak of them for nearly fifty years. As such, this chapter provides a detailed biography of the life of Marian Kołodziej as well as an in-depth exploration of the construction of his *Labyrinth*. It also provides an overview of the Maximilian Kolbe Centre where the exhibit is permanently located. Despite Kołodziej's captivating story and unique exhibition, there are few historical accounts of the life of Marian Kołodziej, and there is no comprehensive English-language biography of his life before, during, and after his time in the camps.¹¹⁵ As such, this chapter draws from fragmented English texts and exhibition guides to provide the first comprehensive history of the artist in English.

2.1 Marian Kołodziej: A Biography

Marian Kołodziej was born on December 6, 1921 in Raszków, Poland during the final months of the Polish-Soviet war.¹¹⁶ Kołodziej grew up outside of Ostrów, an area of strong resistance during the partition periods of both the First and Second World Wars.¹¹⁷ At seventeen, Kołodziej became involved in resistance activities against Nazi partisans in Poland. When the Second World War broke out a year later, a Polish priest encouraged Kołodziej to join the Polish resistance movement. The resistance was formally established as The Secret Polish Army in 1939 and consisted of approximately 8,000 members by 1940.¹¹⁸ The group was soon incorporated into the Union for Armed Struggle, also known as the Home Army. Members of the resistance group worked to gather intelligence on the Nazi concentration camps and to sabotage German operations in occupied Poland. It is important

¹¹⁵ There exists one Polish language biographical text on the life of Marian Kołodziej, written by Sebastian Swiadek. This text was not available in Canada. Thank you to Piotr Cuber from Centrum św. Maksymiliana for this information. (Piotr Cuber, Centrum św. Maksymiliana, email message to Alyssa Logie, March 12 2019).

¹¹⁶ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

¹¹⁷ Chaffin, Cheryl. "Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej's Return to The Labyrinth". *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 75.

¹¹⁸ Biegański, Witold and Stanisław Okęcki. *Polish Resistance Movement in Poland and Abroad, 1939-1945*. Warszawa: PWN--Polish Scientific Publishers, 1987.

to note that the resistance movement in Poland was comprised of various—and often conflicting—groups, despite so often being portrayed in English history as a united movement representing all sections of society.¹¹⁹ Not all groups within the Polish resistance held the same views about appropriate resistance activities, and there were conflicting opinions among Catholic Poles about whether or not Polish Jews could or should be aided and protected from the Nazis. While some Poles most definitely sheltered their Jewish neighbours, this was not always the case.¹²⁰

After multiple attempts to cross the border to join the Home Army troops in West Poland, Kołodziej was arrested by the German Gestapo on May 14 1940 in Krakow.¹²¹ He was imprisoned in Montelupich and then transported to a prison in Tarnów. On June 14, 1940, Kołodziej was placed on the first transport to Auschwitz I alongside 727 Poles, of whom twenty were Jews. Most of the transported prisoners were Catholic, as the mass deportation of Jews associated with the “Final Solution” and the Jewish genocide had not yet begun. These prisoners received their tattooed numbers upon arrival at Auschwitz and Kołodziej was assigned number 432.¹²² Kołodziej was then forced to help build Auschwitz II-Birkenau alongside Soviet prisoners of war in the fall of 1941.

For the next five years, Kołodziej was transferred to various camps where he continued to participate in resistance activities even while imprisoned. All told, he spent time in Groß-Rosen, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Mauthausen-Gusen. He served as a forced labourer in KL Auschwitz-Harmęże, a service sub-camp that operated in Harmęże until 1945. At the sub-camp, prisoners worked at fish ponds and poultry farms and also scattered the human ashes accumulated from Auschwitz I and II. Kołodziej worked at the ponds in Harmęże from 1941-1942.

¹¹⁹ Anita Prażmowska asserts that many English historians have “perpetuated the myth of national unity in the face of German atrocities.” For more on the political disunity in the Polish resistance movement, see: Prażmowska, Anita. "The Polish Underground Resistance during the Second World War: A Study in Political Disunity during Occupation." *European History Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2013): 464-488.

¹²⁰ See Jan T. Gross’s *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (2001) and Bartoszewski, Władysław and Lewinówna’s *Righteous among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939-1945* (1969) for more.

¹²¹ *Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej*.
<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

¹²² Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

During his time at the sub-camp Blechhammer in Świętochłowice, Kołodziej was caught copying blueprints of the munition industry factories to send to the Polish resistance and soon after, he was sentenced to death.¹²³ Kołodziej was then transported once again to Auschwitz I and placed in Block 11.¹²⁴ Kołodziej was saved from cruel torture and certain death in Block 11 when a man who he had once befriended and given soup to helped him exchange his identity for that of another prisoner who was executed in front of Kołodziej—the prisoner’s name was also Marian Kołodziej.¹²⁵ Kołodziej traded his own ID with the other Kołodziej’s in order to confuse the Nazis and to avoid his own death sentence. It has been falsely reported in multiple sources, including Richman’s *Mended by the Muse* (2014), that “Marian Kołodziej” was not the Pole’s real birth name, and that he kept the name of the other prisoner following his change of identity in the camp. This is untrue. Kołodziej switched identities with a prisoner who had the exact same name.¹²⁶ Kołodziej was able to survive the camp until 1944, when he was transferred to Gross-Rosen, followed by Buchenwald.¹²⁷ He spent the last five months of the war in Mauthausen, where he was deported during a death march near the end of the war. On May 6 1945, he was liberated by General Patton’s Third Army.¹²⁸ Following his liberation, Kołodziej did not speak publicly of his experiences in the concentration camps for fifty years.

It is important to remember that as a non-Jewish Polish political prisoner, Kołodziej would have received certain privileges during his time in the camps. Political prisoners were

¹²³ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

¹²⁴ “Prisoners underwent punishment in block 11, in regular cells, dark cells, or standing cells. Punishment here was usually connected with suspected sabotage, contact with civilians, escape attempts or aid to escapees, or apprehension while escaping” (<http://auschwitz.org/en/history/punishments-and-executions/block-11>). Kołodziej was sent to Block 11 in 1942-1943—the exact date is unclear.

¹²⁵ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 112.

¹²⁶ Piotr Cuber from the Maximillian Kolbe Centre provided me with this information. Cuber asserts Marian Kołodziej is the artist’s name on his birth certificate, as confirmed by his family. Cuber reported a journalist once falsely printed that Kołodziej was not Marian’s real last name, resulting in the confusion in other published articles. Cuber also reported that the family of the second Kołodziej have visited *The Labyrinth*. They even entered the memorial book. (Piotr Cuber, Centrum św. Maksymiliana, email message to Alyssa Logie, March 12 2019).

¹²⁷ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

¹²⁸ Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej. <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

not subjected to the same horrendous treatment as the Jews and other lower-status groups. These privileges are a major part of the reason why a prisoner who spent so much time in concentration camps might have survived.

After the war, Kołodziej attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow at the Faculty of Painting, where he specialized in scenography and stage design under the supervision of Prof. K. Frycz.¹²⁹ Kołodziej went on to work as a set designer for forty years at the avant-garde Wybrzeże Playhouse in Gdańsk, designing sets for nearly two-hundred performances. There he collaborated with such Polish theatre notables as Zygmunt Hübner, Jan Kreczmar, and Krzysztof Babicki.¹³⁰ The artist also designed sets for many other theaters as well as two films: *Cross of Valor* (1959) directed by Kazimierz Kutz and *Westerplatte* (1967) directed by Stanisław Różewicz.¹³¹ He is cited in Polish theatre history as a leading set designer between 1955 and 1985, a period in which scenography was considered to be particularly distinctive in Poland and played a “decisive” role in theatre production.¹³² He was well-known in Poland for his “avant-garde, innovative set designs.”¹³³

Notably, Kołodziej designed the papal altar for Pope John Paul II’s historic visit to Poland in 1987.¹³⁴ The altar was used during the Pope’s public mass in Gdańsk port city, and was fashioned into the shape of a large ship (Image 1). Kołodziej also designed the papal altar for Pope John Paul II’s visit to Sopot, Poland in 1999. In 1997, Kołodziej became an honorary citizen of Gdańsk.¹³⁵ In 2006, during the ceremony at the headquarters of the Baltic Sea Cultural Centre in Gdansk, Kołodziej received the Gold Medal “Merited to Culture

¹²⁹ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 76.

¹³⁰ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Braun, Kazimierz. *A History of Polish Theater, 1939-1989: Spheres of Captivity and Freedom*. Vol. no. 64. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996, 68.

¹³³ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 77.

¹³⁴ Braun, Kazimierz. *Theater Directing: Art, Ethics, Creativity*. Vol. 10. Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2000, 20.

¹³⁵ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

Gloria Artist” from Jaroslav Sellin, the Secretary of State in the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.¹³⁶



Image 1: *The papal altar in Gdansk, 1987. Designed by Marian Kołodziej. From the archives of M. Kołodziej. As seen in Hejmej, Krzysztof. "Sacrum under the blue sky". In Architectus, Vol. 1, 31. 2012.*

Although Kołodziej never returned to the camps while working in stage design, he held that his camp experiences never really left him:

I have been to Auschwitz. I built Auschwitz, because I got there in the first transport. It is also true that I had not spoken about Auschwitz for almost fifty years. And yet Auschwitz was always present in what I was doing. Not literally. My theatrical works can be treated as a protest against what I experienced there... So Auschwitz has always been present—but as its denial.¹³⁷

In 1992, Kołodziej suffered a major stroke, and his hands and arms became partially paralyzed.¹³⁸ Kołodziej decided to use drawing as a method of bodily rehabilitation; however, his art soon became a means of emotional and psychic rehabilitation as well. His drawings were consumed by the images of Auschwitz as it had been solidified in his memory. Kołodziej claims “the drawings resulted from my illness” and that drawing “became a survival struggle, a way to escape the illness at least a little.”¹³⁹ He became obsessed with the task of recording all of his memories of the concentration camps, eventually completing more than two-hundred and fifty drawings before he died in 2009 at the age of 88.¹⁴⁰ In an interview with Pawel Sawicki a few months before his death,

¹³⁶ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

¹³⁷ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 15.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 15.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 15.

¹⁴⁰ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

Kołodziej stated: “I just brought the last four works. Nothing more will be added here. To be truthful, I have had my fill of this subject, because I live it and think about it the whole time.”¹⁴¹ The artist’s remains are entombed in the basement of the Our Lady Immaculate Church in Harmęże at the end of his exhibition (Image 2).



Image 2: Kołodziej’s tomb in the basement of the Our Lady Immaculate Church in Harmęże, Poland. Photograph by Alyssa Logie, 2016.

2.2 “Negative of a Memory. Labyrinth”

“What we see are fragments from a memory that itself lies in ruins.”

—Andreas Huyssen in “Kiefer in Berlin” (1992).¹⁴²

Kołodziej’s post-stroke, pencil-drawn works are filled with ghastly imagery of the concentration camp: skeletal bodies neither dead nor alive, barbed wire, large and ravenous insects and thousands of horrified eyes peering out. Kołodziej describes his post-stroke drawing style as such:

Each artist struggles for his own line. While I was still at the Art Academy, I decided that I would not get into this subject; it was supposed to be, for me, like a book I had already read, like a movie I had already seen. I thought that this does not pertain to me. However, I had a stroke. Because of it, I never developed my own line. The whole exhibition is the result of the rehabilitation that I had to go through. It is not my

¹⁴¹ Sourced from the Auschwitz Memorial-Museum’s Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/auschwitz-memorial-muzeum-auschwitz/i-was-rescuing-my-own-humanity-interview-with-marian-kołodziej/156449270447/>

¹⁴² Huyssen, Andreas. “Kiefer in Berlin.” October 62, (1992): 92.

own dreamed-of line. When my right hand finally became appropriately fit, there were already so many drawings that the next ones had to be continued with the same line—the rehabilitation line.¹⁴³

Here, Kołodziej explains how his pre-stroke artistic endeavours did not attempt to deal with his memories of the camps. He also suggests that *The Labyrinth* was not a pre-meditated project and his will to create the drawings about Auschwitz arose spontaneously following the trauma inflicted by his stroke. Once his body was restored back to health, he decided to continue drawing in the same style. The project then became an obligation for him; a duty he must fulfil. Kołodziej does not, however, refer to his drawings as “art”:

First of all, I believe, that I do not do art. Art always goes in the direction of aestheticism, and all of this is quite brutal and quite cruel. That is why I thought about how to present it, especially since there was no photographer during these events and I have the obligation of memory. All of us that were in the camp have such an obligation. You cannot call this art. I thought about how to begin this; and started with my own growing up and rescuing my own humanity. Sometime in the future, someone may consider, the way we think about cave paintings today, what people in the 20th century had the audacity to perpetrate; that the human body was turned into an industrial commodity; nothing could be wasted; fat, hair, bones, everything was utilized. This is atrocious. A death factory. Not only metaphorically. I am, in general, a pessimist when it comes to the future of our world.¹⁴⁴

This quote suggests that the creative endeavour became more than just creating art for Kołodziej. The project was part of his duty to record what he had witnessed in the camps, to tell others about the horrors human beings had perpetrated against other human beings.

Kołodziej’s work was first displayed publically in April 1995 at the Holy Trinity Church in Gdańsk and for a second time in 1996 in Essen, Germany.¹⁴⁵ In January 1998, Kołodziej began curating a permanent exhibition of his work in the basement of the Our Lady Immaculate Church in Harmęże, a village situated a few kilometres from Auschwitz-Birkenau. The church and the exhibition are part of the St. Maximillian Kolbe Centre.

¹⁴³ Huyssen, Andreas. "Kiefer in Berlin." October 62, (1992): 92.

¹⁴⁴ Sourced from the Auschwitz Memorial-Museum’s Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/auschwitz-memorial-muzeum-auschwitz/i-was-rescuing-my-own-humanity-interview-with-marian-kołodziej/156449270447/>

¹⁴⁵ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 77.

Kołodziej “systematically” added new works to the exhibition until his death in 2009.¹⁴⁶ *The Labyrinth* is available to the public through appointment only. Visitors must book a tour of the exhibition with a guide from the Maximilian Kolbe Centre. This appointment-based viewing model was put in place to ensure the security of Kołodziej’s art.¹⁴⁷

I will now attempt to describe the exhibition in words. A cracked window at the entrance sets the tone for the exhibition and is the “answer given by the author to the question: ‘What is the personality of a man who was sent to the camp, after nearly sixty years since the liberation?’ It is broken and cracked.”¹⁴⁸ Visitors must then walk through a dark cattle wagon that was used to transport prisoners to the camp, “in order to enter into the atmosphere of 1940-1945 and understand this dark time in human history.”¹⁴⁹ The church basement is cold, silent, dark, and reeks of a moist, moldy odor. Kołodziej’s chilling works cover the walls, the ceiling and even the floor—it is claustrophobic and assaulting. Visitors must walk through a dark maze of grotesque drawings; every direction one turns, they are confronted with the twisted representations of skeletal bodies, their eyes hollow and haunting. The drawings are arranged to loosely follow Kołodziej’s testimony of his time at Auschwitz: he depicts his arrival, and the horrors he witnesses perpetrated there. Kołodziej made use of his skills in theater set design, and built facsimiles of camp bunks where prisoners would sleep along the walls to render the space more reminiscent of the camps. Rocks are sprawled across the floor and rest upon various wooden structures inside the exhibition, reminiscent of both Jewish memorials and the excruciating labour of the camps. The exhibition attacks the visitor’s senses and seems to be a never-ending maze of death and despair.

Kołodziej’s drawings are a depiction of what he remembers of life inside the confines of Auschwitz. *The Labyrinth* is a long gaze into the tormented mind and dreams of Marian Kołodziej. On a meta level, we can see how *The Labyrinth* physically and symbolically represents a survivor’s mind: the actual layout and structure of the exhibit mimics the structure of the brain and the imagery that fills the walls of the brain depicts the trauma

¹⁴⁶ Centrum Św. Maksymiliana. <http://harmeze.franciszkanie.pl>.

¹⁴⁷ Logie, Alyssa. Field notes from study abroad in Poland, May 2016.

¹⁴⁸ Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej.
<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

within the mind of a survivor (Image 3). Cheryl Chaffin describes *The Labyrinth* as representative of a “brain with its cerebral cortex and various neural passageways and inner chambers.”¹⁵⁰

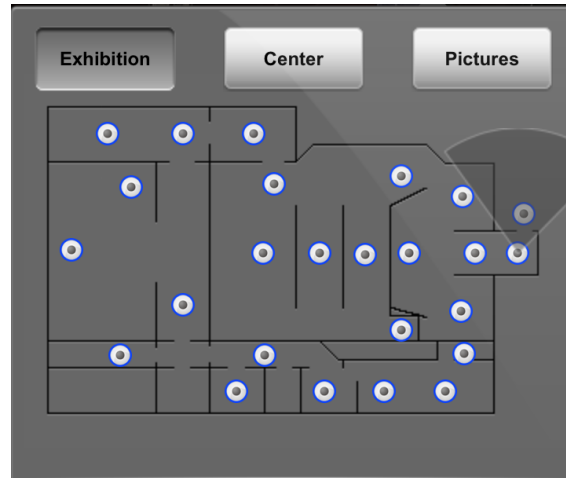


Image 3: A bird's-eye view of *The Labyrinth*. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>

In his afterword of *The Labyrinth's* exhibition catalogue, Polish art critic and poet, Kazimierz Nowosielski refers to *The Labyrinth* as the “Auschwitz Polyptych of Marian Kołodziej.”¹⁵¹ Nowosielski’s reference to *The Labyrinth* as a polyptych is intriguing to me; a polyptych is a painting or alter piece made up of three or more leaves or panels joined by hinges or folds. A polyptych is typically centred around one main panel, with several smaller panels attached; the various panels can be opened and closed to portray different stories and scenes. *The Labyrinth* is similar to a polyptych in that it is comprised of various panels of different images relating to the same story. Depending on how a visitor walks through and views the panels, they will have a different experience of the space and its story.

Additionally, polyptych have their roots in Catholic churches—*The Labyrinth* is the testimony of a Catholic Pole, and as such, portrays a Catholic prisoner’s experience. Guerin and Hallas note that the “social and political role of the image as icon dates back to early Christian times when the image was bestowed with metaphysical power as not simply in the likeness of God and the Saints.”¹⁵² Images of God were seen and treated as God themselves,

¹⁵⁰ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 77.

¹⁵¹ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 229.

¹⁵² Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London;New York;: Wallflower Press, 2007, 8.

and many early Catholic polyptych would have served this exact function. Perhaps there is a connection between the traditional use of the image of God as an icon and Kołodziej's depiction of his traumatic past. Guerin and Hallas note that "like the absent God who is given human form in the figuration of medieval icons, images of cataclysmic historical events have come to imply the appearance and presence of the event itself."¹⁵³ I will discuss the implications of this particular Catholic interpretation of Nazi violence and the Jewish Holocaust further now.

2.3 The Maximilian Kolbe Centre and Catholic Narratives in the Context of the Holocaust

Marian Kołodziej's *Labyrinth* is installed in the basement of the Our Lady Immaculate Church, which is part of the Maximilian Kolbe Centre in Harmęże, Poland, a small town close to Oswiecim and the former Auschwitz II - Birkenau camp. Harmęże was cleared of its Polish residents by German invaders in 1941 in order to make room for the construction of the Birkenau camp.¹⁵⁴

In the late 1980s, the Conventual Franciscans of the Krakow Province of St. Anthony and Bl. Jakub Strzemię arrived in Harmęże.¹⁵⁵ The Auschwitz region soon became a site of martyrdom in light of Father Maximilian Kolbe, a prisoner who was elevated to sainthood by the Catholic church as he had given up his life to save another prisoner in Auschwitz. Most specifically, Kolbe's standing cell in Block 11 at Auschwitz I has become a most sacred site of his martyrdom, as it is recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as such. Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt (1996) describe how the Catholic narrative of martyrdom and heroism for this standing cell in Block 11 is controversial.¹⁵⁶ Dwork and van Pelt suggest that anonymous martyrs of the camps are often overshadowed by the emphasis placed on Catholic martyrs such as Kolbe.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London;New York;: Wallflower Press, 2007, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej.
<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Pelt, R. J. van and Deborah Dwork. *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996, 365.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

The Franciscan monks who arrived in Harmęże established the St. Maximilian Kolbe Centre to honor the Catholic martyr in 1989.¹⁵⁸ The Maximilian Kolbe Centre consists of three buildings: “the church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception (in which *The Labyrinth* resides in the basement), the Franciscan Monastery of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the St. Maximilian Retreat and Educational House run by the Father Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata.”¹⁵⁹

The significance placed on Kolbe’s martyrdom in the camps raises questions about what it means when Catholic imagery and narratives intersect with the Holocaust: do atrocities experienced by Catholics undermine Jewish suffering in the Holocaust? To what do they actually bear witness?¹⁶⁰ Additionally, some allege that Fr. Kolbe himself may have been an antisemite. When Pope John Paul II began the process of canonizing Kolbe as a martyr and saint in 1982, allegations of Kolbe’s suspected antisemitism emerged. A 1982 article in the *New York Times* noted that Kolbe shared the same thinking as others in the Polish clergy, notably the desire to convert sinners, heretics, Jews and freemasons.¹⁶¹ While it is evident that prior to WWII, Kolbe was interested in the conversion of Jews to Catholicism, it is unclear if Kolbe himself actually held and/or spread antisemitic views. In fact, in 1934 Kolbe actually wrote to the editors of a local paper that had published an antisemitic article. He wrote “I would pay great attention not to stimulate hatred against Jews or to deepen it among readers, who are already hostile to them. Our highest goal must always be the conversion and sanctification of souls.”¹⁶² So while it is evident Kolbe did believe in the conversion of Jews, he did not necessarily spread hate towards them. Additionally, Kolbe actually sheltered many Catholic resisters *and* Jews from the Nazi camps. Kolbe was said to have sheltered nearly 1500 Jewish refugees in his friary where he shared his own home and food with them.¹⁶³ In her testimony, Rosalia Kolbe, who lived near the friary where Kolbe

¹⁵⁸ Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej.
<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ For more on controversies surrounding the presence of Catholic narratives at Auschwitz, see: Dwork, Deborah and Robert Jan Van Pelt. "Crosses at Auschwitz." *Jewish Exponent*, Jan 14, 1999.

¹⁶¹ Kamm, Henry. “Saint Charged with Bigotry: Clerics Say No.” [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/19/world/saint-charged-with-bigotry-clerics-say-no.html).
<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/19/world/saint-charged-with-bigotry-clerics-say-no.html>

¹⁶² From: <https://www.ewtn.com/library/answers/kolanti.htm> Taken from the May/June, 1996 issue of “Immaculata Magazine.”

¹⁶³ Ibid.

worked before his arrest, wrote the following: “When Jews came to me asking for a piece of bread, I asked Father Maximilian if I could give it to them in good conscience, and he answered me, ‘Yes, it is necessary to do this because all men are our brothers’.”¹⁶⁴ However, it is important to note that these assertions in defense of Kolbe were published in a magazine created by the Conventual Franciscan Friars of Marytown, Illinois.

One can speculate endlessly about whether Kolbe was an antisemite, but a definitive answer is impossible at this time. It is important, however, to recognize this possibility since Kołodziej chose to build his *Labyrinth* within the Maximilian Kolbe Centre to honour Kolbe’s memory. Kołodziej often represents Kolbe in *The Labyrinth*, referencing Kolbe’s sacrifice to save another prisoner in Auschwitz. Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth* resides in a Catholic space, dedicated to a Catholic martyr, and is filled with Catholic imagery throughout. Although one cannot overlook the fact that Kołodziej deploys Catholic imagery in an exhibition that is directly dealing with the Jewish Holocaust, it is important to remember that this is Kołodziej’s personal testimony—it is the testimony of a Catholic Pole who became a political prisoner of the Nazis due to his involvement in resistance activities against Nazism. It makes sense that Kołodziej would represent instances when he turned to his own Catholic faith as a source of courage and resilience in the face of the evil of the camps. I do not believe the use of Catholic imagery in the exhibit detracts from the inherently Jewish suffering of the Holocaust. Kołodziej bears witness to Jewish suffering *from a Catholic-Polish perspective*, from his own subject position, and it is absolutely horrendous and beyond words. Kołodziej does not *speak for* Jewish suffering in his art, he speaks alongside Jewish suffering, bearing witness to what he saw in the camps. His testimony is authentically *his* perspective. As such, Kołodziej’s works should not be dismissed in what they tell us about bearing witness to the Holocaust and the evils perpetrated against the Jews. It is another testimonial perspective from a prisoner who was given enough privilege to be able to hold on to his ability to self-reflect and perhaps comprehend and remember the evils he witnessed. Without his position of privilege as a Catholic, Kołodziej may not have been able to take in, repress and then release the horrors he witnessed. As discussed in the next chapter, Kołodziej held onto his soul and did not become incapable of representing the trauma of Auschwitz.

¹⁶⁴ From: <https://www.ewtn.com/library/answers/kolanti.htm>. Taken from the May/June, 1996 issue of “Immaculata Magazine.”

CHAPTER 3: KOŁODZIEJ, MENDED BY THE MUSE: ON THE MENDING POTENTIAL OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Guided by Sophia Richman’s relational psychoanalytic theory of creativity and notion of survivors being “mended by the muse,” this chapter explores Marian Kołodziej’s personal “mending” of past traumas through his creative process of constructing *The Labyrinth*. I make use of Richman’s notion of survivor’s being “mended” by the muse as opposed to the typical psychoanalytic notion of being “healed.” Richman writes:

We all have scars from wounds that are *forever in the process of healing*. These scars, which may fade with time and sometimes may be invisible to others, are permanent reminders of what we have lived through, but they don’t necessarily prevent us from living meaningful lives.¹⁶⁵

The term “mended” follows this line of thought, as it implies that although the survivor has worked through their traumatic past, this past still informs and impacts their daily lives; it remains a permanent scar. On the contrary, the term “healed” implies that the survivor has entirely rid themselves of their trauma.

Additionally, Richman calls for the need to move past dichotomous thinking and sweeping generalizations about survivors in the context of genocide. Richman believes generalized and one-sided views of survivors as “irreparably damaged [have] been perpetuated by theories that seem to have totalized the psychoanalytic field of trauma studies.”¹⁶⁶ She contends that previous psychoanalytic discussions regarding trauma survivors “tend to gloss over vast individual differences in the capacity of human beings to cope with traumatic circumstances.”¹⁶⁷ By taking an in-depth look at Kołodziej’s own creative process, this chapter aims to help challenge this dominant discourse within trauma studies.¹⁶⁸ Not only are trauma survivors able to maintain their ability to self-reflect and symbolize their experiences, they can actually use this creative process to help work through their past traumas.

¹⁶⁵ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 105, emphasis added.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 102.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 102.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 102.

This chapter also explores how creative acts constitute a restorative form of acting out as opposed to acting out in a Freudian sense, whereby the survivor becomes further traumatized through the involuntary repetition of the traumatic event. I argue that acting out when filtered through a deliberate creative process, can actually be a restorative, as opposed to a debilitating act for the survivor. Ultimately, the creative process allows for the reconstitution of the inner witness, and the survivor can come to understand themselves as a whole subject as opposed to a fragmented object.

3.1 Kołodziej's Stroke and Resurfaced Trauma

As described in Chapter Two, Kołodziej's stroke in 1992 at the age of 72 suddenly ended his career as a set designer because his hands and limbs were partially paralyzed. Kołodziej decided to use drawing as a form of physical rehabilitation in order to improve the function of his hands and general motor skills. It soon became evident that drawing was much more than just physical rehabilitation for Kołodziej; it also became a form of mental rehabilitation. In his words:

If I had not fallen ill, would I ever come back to the camp? It came quite unexpectedly. I left hospital and started to exercise my paralyzed hands, fingers, legs. Drawing turned out to be the best exercise. I began to draw to survive. Like I did in the camp, when I copied for the resistance movement the plans of the camp... I had a goal—a struggle. The same now—during my illness. I could not afford an aesthetically sophisticated line that everybody is fighting for. With my disability, with no body balance, I would not be able to draw lines freely. One hand kept going down disorderly. At the beginning, I used to draw lying on a table... My drawings stem from my illness. During my rehabilitation I asked to be given a pencil and I started to draw. Drawing became a battle for life; I wanted to get away from the illness; there was no great plan, just an attempt to save myself... Afterwards a sense of duty came into play. It was a chance to do what I promised my friends in the camp, my friends who died and who... obliged me to tell people what happened there.¹⁶⁹

Kołodziej's drawings became consumed with the imagery of Auschwitz as it had been solidified within his memory. While drawing helped Kołodziej recover from the bodily ailments caused by his stroke, it is clear he was also speaking about the illness of post-traumatic stress disorder related to his five years of internment. The combination of the

¹⁶⁹ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 15.

neurological trauma from his stroke and the psychological trauma of his time in the camps resulted in an incredible outpouring of artistic expression.¹⁷⁰

Kołodziej explains:

I had only a technical drawing pad of the size of 32.5 x 23 centimetres. So I drew on small sheets, and I thought it would remain like that. But I kept drawing more and more. There were just a few at the beginning, and then their number continued to grow, I myself do not know why. Maybe my power and energy came from a mixture of feelings: a struggle for myself and a sense of duty awoken many years after. So at first it was my illness, then a reminder of duty, and then God knows what. Because I did not control it anymore, because of what happened later... I sent myself to the camp voluntarily, this time for a year.... I do not think I would have gone back to Auschwitz if it hadn't been for my stroke.¹⁷¹

As if obsessed with the task of recording all of his memories of the concentration camps, Kołodziej frantically completed more than two-hundred and fifty drawings which he would eventually assemble into *The Labyrinth*.¹⁷²

3.2 Victim/Survivor Ability to Imagine, Symbolize and Create

“A non-writing writer is a monster courting insanity.”

— Franz Kafka, Letter to Max Brod, July 5, 1922

While Richman acknowledges that it is possible that at the time of the traumatic event there “might be a temporary disruption in the ability to reflect on or to integrate one’s experience,” it is untrue to suggest that survivors remain incapable of symbolizing or forming a narrative of their experiences following the event.¹⁷³ On the contrary, Richman argues that the very processes of self-reflection, symbolization, and narrative formation allowed many survivors to “hold onto their sanity and to begin the long road toward recovery in the aftermath of the Holocaust.”¹⁷⁴ She asserts that “those looking through the lens of pathology will see disturbance, while those more inclined to view behaviour in the context of adaptation

¹⁷⁰ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 109.

¹⁷¹ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 15.

¹⁷² Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej. (<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>).

¹⁷³ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 104.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

will see resilience.”¹⁷⁵ Richman contends that there is evidence of creative self-expression within the camps *and* in the aftermath, both of which attest to the “survival of self-reflection, the ability to represent traumatic experience, and the capacity to create a coherent narrative.”¹⁷⁶ One only needs to think of the many examples of victims creating art both within the camps and afterwards to validate Richman’s statement.¹⁷⁷ For example, the children’s art exhibition at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum entitled “Traces of Life”: The World of the Children,” devised by artist Michal Rovner, consists of tracings of various drawings created by children imprisoned in Nazi camps (Image 4).¹⁷⁸ Rovner wrote the following about the exhibition:

Only very few were able to document the essential thing they were able to hold on to: their viewpoint. That is what is expressed in their drawings. Within a situation in which they had no choices, in front of a piece of paper they had a certain freedom to express themselves and the way they saw reality. One can almost feel the urgency of the situation in many of the drawings. They are reflections and details of the life they were forced to leave behind, and the new reality they encountered. These drawings are their legacy – and our inheritance... These drawings and voices, these 'traces of life' are like hovering souls. They express a powerful testimony in just a few strokes of a pencil.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 105.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 105.

¹⁷⁷ Many examples can be found in collections such as—but not limited to—The Auschwitz Memorial Museum’s art collection, Celeste Raspanti and Hana Volavková’s *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* (1959), Lawrence Langer’s *Art from the Ashes: A Holocaust Anthology* (1995), and Vojtěch Blodig’s *Art Against Death: Permanent Exhibitions of the Terezín Memorial in the Former Magdeburg Barracks* (2002).

¹⁷⁸ Yad Vashem commissioned artist Michal Rovner to design an exhibition for a permanent display in Block 27 at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum which would be dedicated to the 1.5 million children murdered during the Holocaust. Rovner decided to reproduce children’s drawings from the camps. In response, Yad Vashem compiled a “special collection for her from its own archives as well as others around the world – most notably, the Visual Arts Collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague.” From “Traces of Life”: The World of the Children/ https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/pavilion_auschwitz/children.asp

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

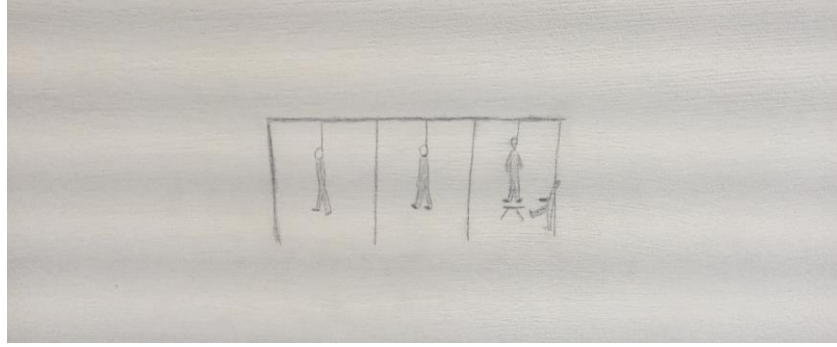


Image 4: A child's drawing from within Terezin. From the "Traces of Life": The World of the Children" exhibition at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum. Photograph by: A. Logie, May 2016.

Rovner describes how drawing was more than just an act of creativity for these children of the camps. It was an opportunity to resist the dehumanization imposed on them by the Nazis, to maintain a sense of self and to hold on to their humanity.

We must remember that individuals respond to and represent traumatic events in vastly different ways, and it is wrong to make sweeping generalizations about the ability or inability of victims/survivors to represent their trauma to themselves and/or to others. Richman notes, "we are complex individuals who are not affected the same way by our diverse experiences. What we have in common is that we all have scars from wounds that are forever in the process of healing."¹⁸⁰ Additionally, Oscar Lugo states that "things are unconscious because a person has come to feel at some point in their development that it is unbearable to know about them."¹⁸¹ This may explain why Kołodziej suppressed his memories of Auschwitz for fifty years—it was simply too unbearable to bring such memories to conscious thought. Lugo also describes how artists have a better ability to "access unconscious layers of the mind in order to get to some, but not all, of the meanings of a dream."¹⁸² Lugo makes reference to Ernst Kris's concept of "regression in service of the ego": the capacity for artists to "dip into layers and depths in their mind that in other people are sources of psychological difficulties—the artist can do so in a kind of controlled way that sub serves and enriches the creative process."¹⁸³ In other words, through their creative processes, artists are more capable of reaching beyond their ego and access unconscious

¹⁸⁰ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 105.

¹⁸¹ Lugo, Oscar. *Dream Work: The Influence of Dreams and the Subconscious in Art Throughout History*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2010, 85.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*.

thoughts. Kris' psychoanalytic theories of art support Richman's assertion that survivors of trauma are able to self-reflect and, ultimately, create profound representations of their past trauma.

It is also important to highlight that there are some extreme cases in which victims of trauma are damaged beyond repair. A well cited example from the concentration camps is the "Muselmann," what Primo Levi refers to as "the drowned."¹⁸⁴ The term "Muselmann" was coined in the camps to describe prisoners who were at the ultimate point of starvation and exhaustion.¹⁸⁵ These prisoners no longer possessed a will to survive; they were severely emaciated, apathetic towards their faith, and ultimately doomed to the crematoria. Richman believes that the Muselmann had entirely lost their ability to symbolize and self-reflect. However, the existence of the Muselmann did not prevent other victims from maintaining their ability to self-reflect. Stephen Levine describes how there were not only those who became Muselmann in the camps, but also those who were capable of creativity and resistance, and able to deny the "Nazi attempt to destroy the souls of inmates."¹⁸⁶

For example, in his classic memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), Victor Frankl describes how he would use imaginative processes to transport himself from the horrors of existence within Auschwitz. He writes:

I forced my thoughts to turn to another subject. Suddenly I saw myself standing on the platform of a well-lit, warm and pleasant lecture room. In front of me sat an attentive audience on comfortable upholstered seats. I was giving a lecture on the psychology of the concentration camp! All that oppressed me at that moment became objective, seen and described from the remote viewpoint of science. By this method I succeeded somehow in rising above the situation, above the sufferings of the moment, and I observed them as if they were already of the past.¹⁸⁷

This passage describes how Frankl was able to imagine himself in a different situation, one where he was able to recount his experiences to a room full of witnesses. Frankl's ability to

¹⁸⁴ Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and the Saved*. 1st Vintage International ed. New York, NY: Vintage International, 1989.

¹⁸⁵ Ryn, Zdzislaw and Stanslaw Klodzinski. *An der Grenze zwischen Leben und Tod. Eine Studie über die Erscheinung des "Muselmanns" im Konzentrationslager, Auschwitz-Hefte. Weinheim and Basel, Beltz, 1987.*

¹⁸⁶ Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 41.

¹⁸⁷ Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. 60th anniversary ed. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1984, 95.

envision a future for himself beyond the camps enabled him to remove himself from his dismal present. There are countless examples of concentration camp victims/survivors using imaginative and creative processes to either remove themselves from the horror the camps, or to make sense of their traumatic experiences following the event. It is as though dissociation from the current conditions becomes the only means of survival in the camps. Dissociation played a key role in not only the development of trauma, but also, paradoxically, the process of mending.¹⁸⁸

Richman posits a direct relation between inspiration and insanity “based on the common factor of *dissociation* that they both share”; she proposes this commonality of dissociation as the integral part of the creative process that has been missing from the previous literature on creativity.¹⁸⁹ In this way, Richman unpacks the “widespread belief that there is a relationship between creativity and psychopathology” despite the previous lack of evidence to support this claim.¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, dissociation is a paradox: the same symptom of traumatic experiences that can prevent us from working through trauma can help us heal when used during the creative process. Stephen Levine discusses a very similar conception referring to how we surrender ourselves in powerful artistic experiences. Like Richman, Levine contends that “in some ways, this mimics the effect of the trauma that overwhelmed us in the past; however, in this case the dissolution of the ego produces joy and not terror.”¹⁹¹

Not only did Marian Kołodziej make use of the creative process to give form to his traumatic past after his stroke, a certain section of his *Labyrinth* actually points to how he made use of such creative and dissociative processes in order to escape the dreadful reality of Auschwitz. A certain portion of *The Labyrinth* is sectioned off into a smaller alcove. There, drawings line the walls and ceiling, with three long benches resting in the center (Image 5).

¹⁸⁸ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 54.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, added emphasis.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁹¹ Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 51.

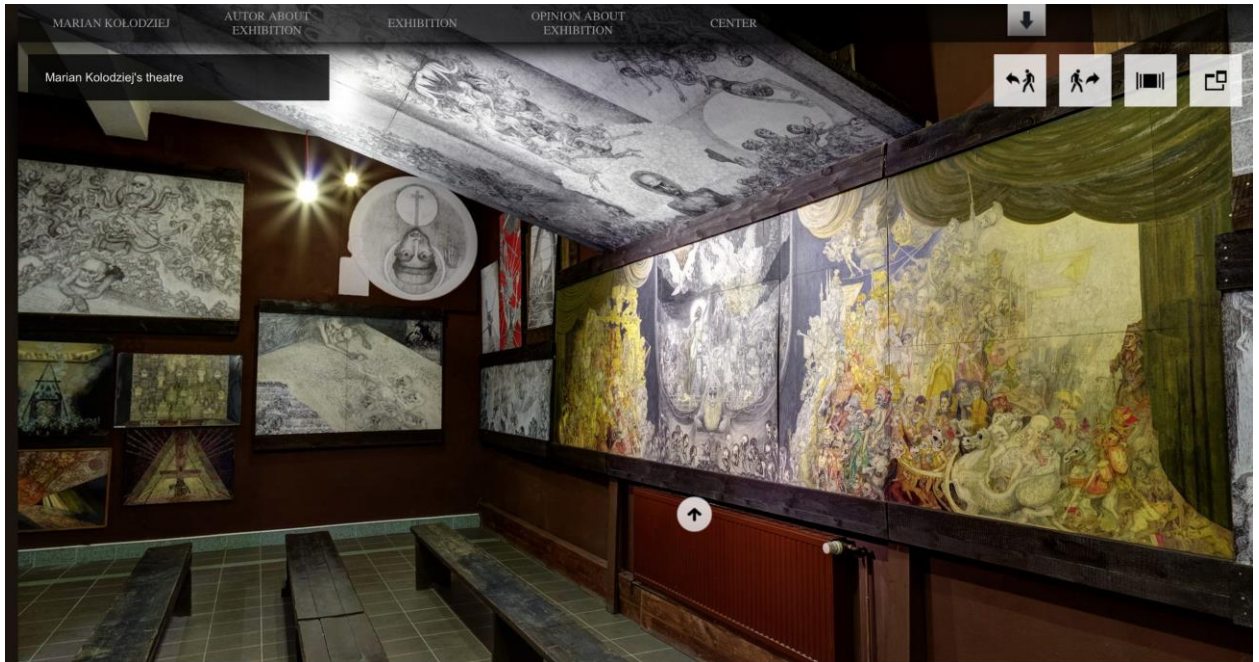


Image 5: Marian Kołodziej, *Kołodziej's Theatre*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

This alcove is labelled as “Marian Kołodziej’s theatre” on the exhibition’s virtual tour.¹⁹² A long mural lines the back wall of the alcove; this drawing stands out from the usual black, white and gray tones of the other pieces as it includes vibrant colours and faces that are not skeletal and emaciated. Instead, both sides of the mural are crowded with healthy and smiling faces. The figures are garbed in extravagant, theatrical costumes. Providing a stark contrast to this vibrant imagery, the centre of the mural depicts gray, skeletal figures with their heads hung low. During my tour, the guide told us that this space was meant to represent a small theatre constructed by prisoners who were artists, some of whom were notable Polish actors before their imprisonment. It signifies a space where some of the prisoners would secretly gather to recite poetry, act out small segments of plays from memory, and to ponder art in general. Kołodziej assisted the artists with their endeavours; he describes his role in the secret group, stating that it “came down to putting blankets on the windows, to making the space safer and quieter.”¹⁹³ Kołodziej attributes his time spent with this secret group to his decision to become a stage designer after his liberation. A caption in the exhibition’s catalogue refers to the transcendent meetings:

¹⁹² Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej. <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

¹⁹³ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 19.

The prisoners listened to [the poetry] deeply touched, in extreme conditions—in *anus mundi*—rectum of the world—the perfectly spoken Polish words were a refreshing bath, cleansing from the disgusting dirt of the camp. The performances of the great artists of our theatre and Kołodziej’s assistance in organizing them showed him his future profession. It was the artists that infected him with the posterity for such an effort.¹⁹⁴

Kołodziej further discusses the experience:

In everyday humiliation, in a desperate desire to salvage the moral standards, small miracles happened quite unexpectedly. The meetings with actors: Stefan Jaracz, Tadeusz Koński, Zbyszko Sawan, theatre director Leon Schiller, were secret meetings. The actors recited the poetry of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, Norwid, Wyspiański “to keep up our hearts”. We listened, very moved. In the degenerate life of the camp, we were beaten not only with whips, but also with brutal, horrible, vulgar words, most cruel curses and swear words. Two Sunday hours of most pure and elevated feelings and experience, finally in Poland so beautifully conjured in the inspired brilliant interpretation of Jaracz.¹⁹⁵

In this passage, Kołodziej describes how these secret two-hour meetings with other artistic prisoners allowed an imaginative escape from their disturbing reality. The vibrant colours of the mural allude to the solace and freedom the prisoners derived from their secret artistic endeavours. The colours contrast greatly with the dismal colours of the other drawings, signifying how these meetings allowed the men to dissociate from their traumatic realities. The healthy faces seem to depict an imagined audience watching the prisoners’ theatrical performance. The mural depicts how the prisoners used their imaginations to dissociate from their realities, and to imagine an audience witnessing their performances. It is as if the act of imagining others watching and listening to their performances allowed the men to transcend their feelings of helplessness and isolation. Those two hours of freedom on Sundays allowed the artists to imagine not only that they were free men, but also that others would be willing to listen to what they had to say if they ever survived and were liberated.

Additionally, this alcove of the exhibition acts as a place of solace for visitors of *The Labyrinth*: I remember several of my colleagues resting on the wooden benches and losing themselves in the colourful mural, as if to escape or dissociate from the horrendous

¹⁹⁴ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 158.

¹⁹⁵ Stefan Jaracz (24 December 1883 – 11 August 1945) was a Polish theater actor and producer. Jaracz was sent to Auschwitz as a reprisal to the Home Army’s killing of Nazi collaborator Igo Sym on 7 March 1941.

atmosphere of *The Labyrinth*... if only for a few minutes.¹⁹⁶ The benches invite visitors into the imagined theatre, encouraging them to, like the prisoners, imagine a world of free creativity and engaged audiences willing to listen intently.

Another mural in *The Labyrinth* is similar to the colourful mural within Kołodziej's theatre. Surrounded by multiple black and white drawings of emaciated prisoners, a large mural depicts a colourful Christmas scene. Like the drawing previously described, this mural features black and white representations of suffering prisoners huddled together in the centre of the frame. On the outer left and right sides, imaginative and colourful images stand in stark contrast to the gray realities of the camp. The colourful segments depict playful Christmas imagery: Santa Claus, a Christmas tree, a snow man, angels, and healthy and happy people of all ages gathering together for a meal. The people are sitting at a table facing the viewer directly; the imagery calls to mind da Vinci's Last Supper. Again, the vibrant colours of the mural enthrall visitors, who are invited to sit on a small wooden bench positioned directly in front of the drawing. A caption in the exhibit's catalogue briefly describes the mural:

Christmas Eve—the first one in the camp, in 1940. Christmas Eve—a holy day when we go back to the world of our childhood—the world of kindness, tenderness of parents, the world of Christmas carols and Christmas performances. There are 12 prisoners sitting bent over the “Christmas Eve” table, as if at the Last Supper. Out of the twelve—only Kołodziej survived.¹⁹⁷

Much like the previous one, this mural symbolizes a time when prisoners came together to imagine a world outside the confines of the camp. This scene suggests that the act of coming together as a group of fellow Catholics allowed the men to escape the hellish reality of the camp. The processes of individual and collective imagination allowed the prisoners to dissociate and escape temporarily. Kołodziej depicts this Christmas Eve scene in his *Labyrinth* as a testament to the power of imagination in allowing people to transcend their agony and struggles, as a means to “keep up [their] hearts” and to not allow the Nazis to obliterate their souls.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Logie, Alyssa. Field notes from study abroad in Poland, May 2016.

¹⁹⁷ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 112.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 19.



Image 6: Marian Kołodziej, "Christmas Eve 1940". Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

It is also notable that Kołodziej used drawing specifically as a form of resistance within the camps. As previously mentioned, Kołodziej had been sentenced to Block 11 and certain death after he was caught copying the blueprints for Nazi munitions factories to send to the Polish resistance. In this instance, Kołodziej used his artistic abilities to resist the Nazi efforts while in the camps. This example also points to the fact that Kołodziej was not rendered a Muselmann, and still was able to self-reflect, to create, and ultimately, to resist.

3.3 Giving Form to Traumatic Memory Through Art, and on “Acting Out” and “Working Through”

“One cannot directly verbalize the subsymbolic components of the affective core; their nature like the art of the sculptor or dancer is such that they cannot be expressed in words. To describe a feeling in verbal form, one describes an image or tells a story.”

–Sophia Richman in *Mended by the Muse* (2014)¹⁹⁹

Michelangelo once stated that the sculpture he intended to create already exists within the block of marble... he merely needed to “chisel away the superfluous material” to reveal its form.²⁰⁰ We can read Michelangelo’s assertion in a therapeutic context: a therapist can help their patient’s truth to emerge, a truth that can give meaning and purpose to a patient’s life. The truth was always there, the patient just needed to externalize their past experiences in order to make sense of them and to derive meaning from them. Feminist psychologist Laura Brown claims that the “radical potential of psychoanalysis” is to “retell the lost truths of pain among us.”²⁰¹ We can also take Michelangelo’s quote as a metaphor for the ways in which trauma survivors can give form to their traumatic memories through the creative process: the traumatic memories are already there, the survivor just needs the appropriate materials and means to fashion them into existence. Levine defines this process as “poiesis”, described as bringing one’s truth into the world through a creative work and the externalization of internal memories. Poiesis, Levine contends, does not imitate or represent “what already exists” in the world, but, rather, brings into existence “what has never been but what stands revealed as the truth of that which is.”²⁰² What does Levine mean by this? He is referring to how the process of telling our internal stories through the creation of a work, allows us to externalize the truth of our pasts; we are then able to “see for the first time who we [really] are.”²⁰³ Levine describes poiesis as “world-making”:

¹⁹⁹ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 51.

²⁰⁰ Levine on Michelangelo in *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 33.

²⁰¹ Caruth on Brown in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 12.

²⁰² Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 31.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 31.

Poiesis brings the truth into appearance in the world through ‘instituting’ it in a work; art is, Heidegger (1975) says, the setting-itself-into-a-work of truth. In this way, the work ‘sets up’ a world. The world is the totality of what shows itself and gives meaning to all the pathways of our lives. By setting up a world, the work helps us to see for the first time who we are, and we are changed by this revelation. *The work is a gathering of our lives into a pattern, a Gestalt or structure that we can recognize...* Suddenly we see ourselves at this moment in time and we are forced to re-vision our conception of who we thought we were.²⁰⁴

For Levine, poiesis is a process by which we are able to tell the stories of our lives to ourselves and the world. These stories reveal to us the meaning and purpose of our lives; they help us explain our traumatic pasts to ourselves—to “find meaning in our struggles,” as Victor Frankl would say.²⁰⁵ E. Ann Kaplan also speaks of a sort of revealing of “truth,” and explains how representing the trauma of the atrocity “expresses a subjective truth in the traumatized person’s grasp of his/her past, not in terms of an all-redemptive talking cure but as a frame that makes the telling possible.”²⁰⁶ Kaplan is describing how poiesis provides survivors with a framework from which to begin understanding their traumatic experiences. According to Sally Adnams Jones, art “moves us into deeper articulations of our realities.”²⁰⁷ This transformative process is the “healing narrative,” the process of “telling our biography through images, using recognizable objects in art that represent the artists and their history, their context, their identity, their challenge, or their future context and their future identify.”²⁰⁸ Rendering our traumatic memories into a visible work gives us something to hold on to; it gives form to the chaos of our minds. During a 2013 educational session at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum, Kołodziej’s wife, Halina Słojewska-Kołodziej, described how during his rehabilitation, Kołodziej became incredibly motivated by a quote from the poet Zbigniew Herbert: “You did not survive only to live. You have little time, you need to

²⁰⁴ Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 31-32. Added emphasis.

²⁰⁵ Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. 60th anniversary ed. New York: Pocket Books, 1984.

²⁰⁶ Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

²⁰⁷ Jones, Sally Adnams. *Art-Making with Refugees and Survivors: Creative and Transformative Responses to Trauma After Natural Disasters, War and Other Crises*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018, 41.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 42.

provide a testimony.”²⁰⁹ Finally, Kołodziej returned to Auschwitz on his own terms through his art—through poiesis—and the construction of *The Labyrinth* began.

Psychoanalysts such as Judith Alpert²¹⁰ and David Newman²¹¹ have noted that neurological trauma—such as Kołodziej’s stroke—can actually enhance one’s memory recall and ability for artistic expression. According to psychiatrist and neuroscientist Eric Kandel, many artists following a brain injury have actually shown “progressive interest in fine details, recalling images from earlier years, and have become intensely preoccupied with their art.”²¹² This is evidently the case for Kołodziej following his stroke. Additionally, the findings of multiple scientific studies are “in alignment with the psychoanalytic notion that the artist can transform psychic pain into works of art and thereby achieve some mastery over the effect of trauma.”²¹³ Studies in psychology have proven a link between adversity and subsequent creativity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2013; Forgeard, 2013).²¹⁴ For example, Forgeard’s 2013 study involving 373 research participants confirmed the hypothesis of a “link between self-reported distress and creative outcomes.”²¹⁵

The concept of poiesis calls to mind Freud’s concept of “dream-work”: the process by which dream-thoughts or latent content of the unconscious is transformed into the actual dream or manifest content.²¹⁶ In this way, dreams give form to thoughts and anxieties, and can lead us to the most painful parts of human experience, including trauma and unconscious thoughts that cannot be articulated in words. Richman, expanding upon and altering Freud’s dream-work, asserts that art-making can perform a similar function to dreams: form is given

²⁰⁹ “432. Marian Kołodziej. Magister vitae — educational session.” Auschwitz.org. <http://auschwitz.org/en/museum/news/432-marian-kołodziej-magister-vitae-educational-session,1047.html>

²¹⁰ Alpert, Judith. “Loss of humanness: the ultimate trauma”. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 72, pg. 118-138.

²¹¹ Newman, David. *Talking with Doctors*. New Jersey: Analytic Press. 2006.

²¹² Richman summarizes Kandel’s theory from his text *The Age of Insight: The Quest to Understand the Unconscious in Art, Mind, and Brain, from Vienna 1900 to the Present* (2012).

²¹³ Richman on Ballas (2011) in *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 91.

²¹⁴ More on studies in psychology dealing with the relationship between adversity and creativity can be found in: Calhoun, Lawrence G. and Richard G. Tedeschi. *Posttraumatic Growth in Clinical Practice*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

²¹⁵ Richman on Forgeard in *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 91.

²¹⁶ Freud, Sigmund. *On Dreams*. New York, NY: Rebman, 1914, 641.

to what has been repressed. Kołodziej described his *Labyrinth* thus: “These are not pictures. These are words locked in drawings.”²¹⁷ In this way, we can view Kołodziej’s drawings as ‘containers’ for his previously unspeakable words and memories; his drawings can speak of his trauma in ways he could not for nearly 50 years. For Kołodziej, his drawings portray memories, thoughts, and trauma-induced dreams that simply could not be translated into words. *The Labyrinth* is Kołodziej’s poiesis; it gives form to the unspeakable—and perhaps, unthinkable—trauma of a survivor. On a meta level, we can see how *The Labyrinth* physically and symbolically represents a survivor’s mind: the actual layout and structure of the exhibit mimics the structure of the brain and the imagery that fills the walls of the brain depicts the trauma within the mind of a survivor. Again, Cheryl Chaffin describes *The Labyrinth* as representative of a brain.²¹⁸

Using art for rehabilitative purposes provided Kołodziej with the perfect avenue to express the trauma that he had not been able to speak of for half a century. He could symbolize his past through his artwork, rendering his trauma visible to others. A website dedicated to *The Labyrinth* discusses the significance of Kołodziej’s art:

Through the blending of his testimony and the graphic drawings, viewers explore the memories and nightmares of a man, who like so many others buried experiences deep within. Why would a confrontation with death late in life, trigger the need to record his long-suppressed memories? And why in this graphic, metaphorical way?²¹⁹

With Richman’s connection of art-making to Freud’s dream-work in mind, it becomes more understandable why Kołodziej utilized art as a medium to share his testimony in a graphic and metaphorical way. Freud emphasizes how by giving form to thought through the process of dream-work, the dreamer is able to work through psychological trauma within their dreams. Perhaps this is the motivation behind Kołodziej’s frantic and insistent drawing after his stroke—the desire to work through his own psychological trauma in order to share it in a symbolic and visual form with the public before he died. Richman would agree that Kołodziej’s dedication to his creative process stemmed from the desire to give “previously

²¹⁷ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 16.

²¹⁸ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 77.

²¹⁹ “The Labyrinth Documentary”. thelabyrinthdocumentary.com.

unarticulated thoughts and feelings” a form.²²⁰ Daniel P. Reynolds notes how the creation of creative representations of trauma place less importance on “historical accuracy” and/or “logical progression”—what is important for the survivor is their intense need to tell others what they experienced.²²¹ This intense need to tell others regardless of historical accuracy or logical progression alludes to the “experience of Auschwitz itself” which “resists any logically ordered or complete representation.”²²² Kołodziej’s drawings did not seek to provide logical representation of historically accurate events—they were the result of a “violent impulse” to bear witness.²²³

In his book, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra describes acting out as related to repetition, and even the repetition compulsion.²²⁴ For him, victims of trauma exist presently as if they were still entirely in the past, completely unable to distance themselves from it. The past appears in the victims’ present existence in various ways such as nightmares and flashbacks.²²⁵ LaCapra contrasts acting out with working through; he sees working through as an attempt to gain critical distance from the past. He writes:

To put the point in drastically oversimplified terms: for the victim this means the ability to say to oneself: “Yes, that happened to be back then. It was distressing, overwhelming... but I’m existing here and now, and this is different from back then”... it’s via the working through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical and political agent.²²⁶

Such discussions about repetition most certainly raise the question, is Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth* an example of acting out in the Freudian sense, is it an example of working through, or is it something else entirely? In an attempt to answer this question, I will turn to Richman’s relational psychoanalytic theory of creativity.

Richman’s relational psychoanalytic theory of creativity gives agency back to victims of trauma: their art-making is not passive like the experience of dreams and survivors can

²²⁰ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 95.

²²¹ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 57.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 57.

²²⁴ LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001, 142.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid, 143-144.

deliberately use art to reveal and render visible their unconscious feelings and traumatic experiences. Richman asserts that although trauma may “elude linguistic, symbolic forms of articulation and meaning making,”²²⁷ the creative process can be deliberately used by the survivor to “articulate what has been endured, to organize it, and to make some sense of it.”²²⁸ In this way, through its “mimetic capacities,” art can “address representational difficulties that are inexpressible in words.”²²⁹ Psychoanalyst and poet Marilyn Charles describes a similar process, stating that “non-verbal meanings that may not be consciously known can be worked through and communicated implicitly in creative products.”²³⁰ Charles explains how trauma is “elusive and by its nature fragmented; traumatic moments are stored not only as images, but also in the body and speak their truths in patterned forms.”²³¹ In this way, art can depict the fragmented nature of traumatic memories, and can externalize that which has been internalized. More specifically, art can allow survivors to not only speak their truths, but allow such truths to become even more apparent through patterned forms of representation.

Richman and Charles are not referring to repetition in a Freudian sense, whereby repetition of the traumatic experience leads a survivor to act-out their trauma as opposed to working-through it. In contrast to the Freudian notion of repetition compulsion and acting-out past traumas, Charles asserts that creative actions which lead to the “repetitive engagement” with “troubling or soothing” themes is actually a form of self-soothing, working through, and communication. Psychologist Heinz Kohut refers to such creative projects as self-objects. Richman describes self-objects as consisting of curative psychological functions as “they are used to support cohesion, vitality and harmony of the self”.²³² In this way, Richman and Charles’ notions of repetition in the creative process do

²²⁷ Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

²²⁸ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 94.

²²⁹ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 13.

²³⁰ Charles, Marilyn. “Remembering, repeating and working through: Piecing together the fragments of traumatic memory” in *Perspectives on creativity*, Vol. 3, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011, 9.

²³¹ Richman on Marilyn Charles in *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 52.

²³² *Ibid*, 88-89.

not constitute a mode of acting out as described by Freud. For them, repetitive engagement with trauma *through the creative process* can be constructive for the survivor as opposed to debilitating.

The Labyrinth stands as an example in which the lines between acting out and working through become significantly blurred. Following Richman and Charles' line of thought, the construction of *The Labyrinth* seems to be more in line with a form of working through; however, one cannot overlook the obsessiveness from which Kołodziej worked. Kołodziej's creative endeavour was a violent outpouring of repetitive images from the camp. Such obsessive repetition seems to be more in lines with acting out. Perhaps *The Labyrinth* is an example of both acting out *and* working through simultaneously?

I would like to suggest that "acting out," when filtered through a deliberate creative process, can actually be a restorative as opposed to a debilitating act for the survivor. If we recall Richman's paradox of dissociation, this assertion makes much more sense. Through the creative process, dissociation becomes a positive force that allows the survivor to safely regress into their ego to access traumatic memories; these memories can then be articulated through a creative work. In this way, the acting out or repetition of trauma is played out in a safe, and meaningful way. The survivor is not entering into a repetition compulsion leading to further traumatization, they are repeating their trauma in a restorative way through their art. This safe form of acting out can allow the survivor to render their trauma visual and manageable to themselves, facilitating a process of mending and working through.

If we follow Charles' claim about finding meaning in repetition, and the idea that acting out can be restorative when filtered through the creative process, the repetition in *The Labyrinth* becomes more understandable. We can most definitely see a patterned form of representation in Marian Kołodziej's *Labyrinth*, as he continually returned to specific themes, and seemed to obsess over certain imagery within his art. For example, Kołodziej's drawings continually represent skeletal faces with haunting and distinctive eyes (Image 7). Although the skeletal faces of his fellow prisoners appear to be exactly the same, Kołodziej made a special attempt to give each prisoner a unique pair of eyes. In this way, Kołodziej represents the millions of prisoners who were forced to become automatons without identities. However, through the inclusion of unique eyes, he reminds us that these skeletons were all unique individuals, each with their own lives and experiences before the camp. Perhaps Kołodziej's obsessive return to drawing these figures over and over shows us that he

was forever traumatized by the fact that individuals were stripped of their identity, and became an anonymous mass in the camps. The eyes seem to have haunted him following his liberation. To me, Kołodziej's drawings evoke a sense of anxiety: an anxiety that his fellow prisoners would die and not be remembered as individuals. Image 8 shows a mass of faces turning into tombstones engraved with their prisoner numbers, dying as anonymous mass. Such anonymity was the ultimate goal of the Nazis. I believe Kołodziej combatted this goal through his art by giving each individual a unique pair of eyes. Some say the eyes are the gateway to the soul—in this way Kołodziej denied the Nazis the ability to destroy the souls of these victims permanently; they remain alive in *The Labyrinth*. Kołodziej's purposeful repetition of the eyes that had been scarred into his mind allowed him to gain mastery and control over the trauma, which furthered Kołodziej's ability to mend.



Image 7: Marian Kołodziej, *Haunting eyes*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>

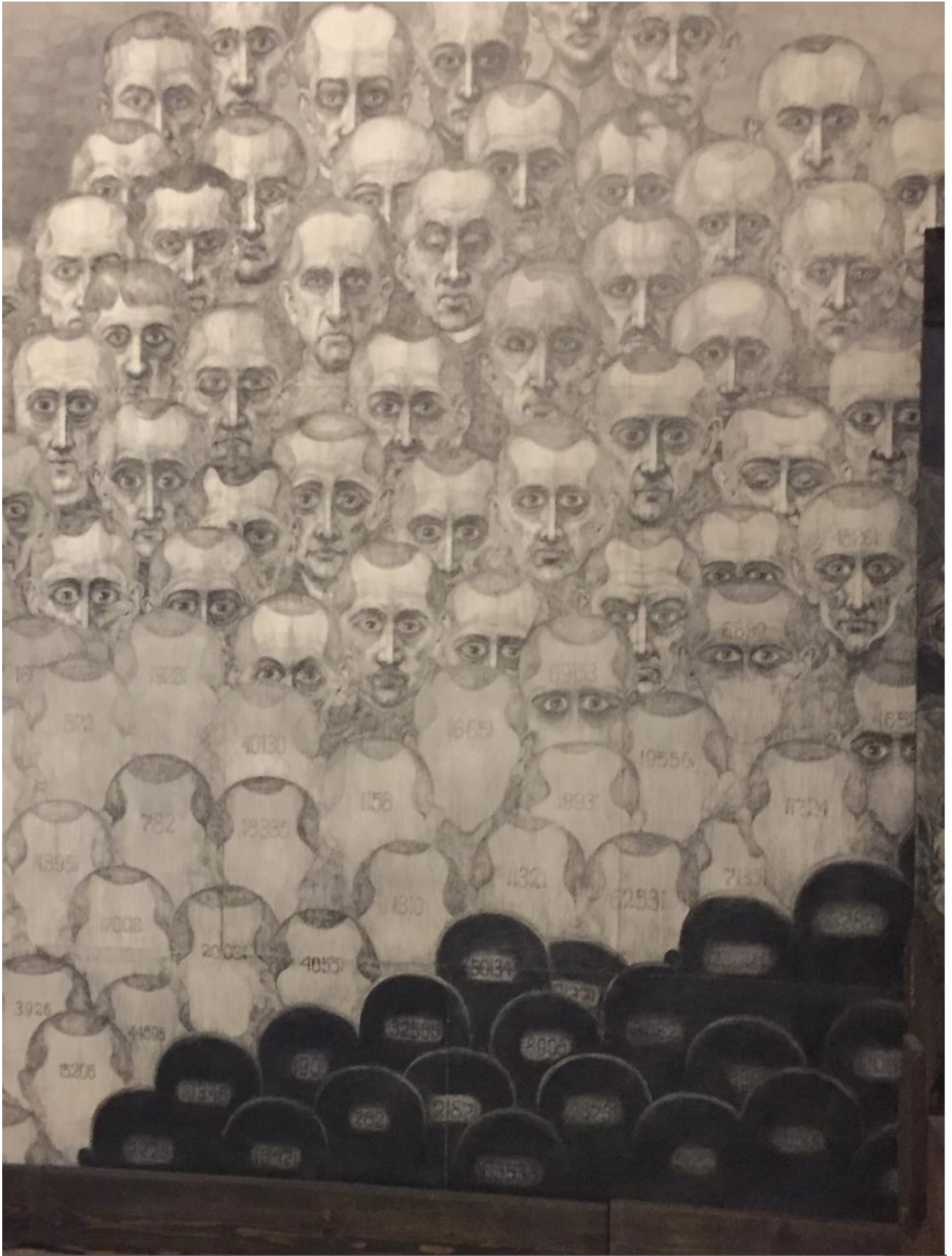


Image 8: Marian Kolodziej, *Faces fade to tombstones*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. Photograph by Alyssa Logie, 2016.

Another repeated image throughout *The Labyrinth* is Kołodziej's depiction of his "multiple selves": Kołodziej simultaneously and repeatedly depicts himself as a young boy, as a prisoner, and as he was when he created the drawings (Images 9, 10, and 11). Richman notes that the creative process "facilitates the integration of disparate self-states into a coherent and continuous sense of self."²³³ Supplementing this notion, psychoanalyst Phillip Bromberg contends that "normal multiplicity is a loose configuration of multiple self-states that are experienced as a unitary self" and believes the creativity process can facilitate the ability for one to "feel whole while recognizing that one is made up of many selves."²³⁴ As Richman argues:

Trauma breaks up the continuity of life, leaving the self in a sense of fragmentation and dissociation; making art is an attempt to restore continuity and facilitate integration of dissociated self-states and splits in experience by reuniting affect cognition, and perception torn asunder by traumatic experience.²³⁵

Trauma can cause a fragmentation of the self, making it difficult for victims to conceive of themselves as a whole subject. This idea is reminiscent of Lacan's notion of the entry into language as the moment when one becomes aware of one's self as a distinct and whole entity. If we consider how trauma is difficult to put into words—recall that Kołodziej did not speak of his trauma publicly for fifty years—then we may understand it as a phenomenon that removes the victims from language; thus, the victim can no longer see themselves as a whole. However, through the creative process, fragmented or *multiple selves* can be presented before the survivor simultaneously in a coherent representation—the survivor can once again see themselves as whole. This is precisely what Kołodziej does multiple times in his *Labyrinth*, and the chaos and fragmentary nature of trauma is acknowledged and embodied through his art. Similarly, Adnams Jones claims that:

By making "metaphors" about reality through creative acts, we can "art-iculate" experiences, before we even have the words. Images are powerful ways to communicate directly from the subconscious, making conscious the unconscious

²³³ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 14.

²³⁴ Richman on Bromberg (1998) in *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 14 and 67.

²³⁵ Richman, Sophia. *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 94.

material held in our implicit memory, which forms our patterns of thinking and response.²³⁶

In this way, the creative process can allow the artist to present themselves to themselves.

Kołodziej's repetitive impulse to draw images of himself was essential to his mending process. For example, Image 9 depicts Kołodziej at multiple stages in his life, and the figures are all embracing, as if they are consoling and supporting one another. To me, this image represents an acceptance of Kołodziej's past, an understanding that all of these versions of himself must be embraced to understand who he is. Perhaps this image portrays Kołodziej's acceptance of his past and his ability to embrace these multiple versions of himself. As Levine suggests, "the work is a gathering of our lives into a pattern, a *Gestalt* or structure that we can recognize... Suddenly we see ourselves at this moment in time and we are forced to re-vision our conception of who we thought we were."²³⁷ Following this theory, Image 9 can be viewed as a *Gestalt* image of Kołodziej enabled through the creative process. Levine would describe this process as poiesis. Kołodziej was able to tell the story of his own life to himself in order to come to terms with his traumatic past, and he was able to derive meaning from his struggles through his *Labyrinth*. Image 10 portrays similar imagery; however, the versions of Kołodziej's self are physically and symbolically bound together by barbed wire, an iconic image of the camps. This drawing alludes to how a survivor is comprised of multiple selves simultaneously and can also be referred to as a "self-object," a creative endeavour that allows the artist to heal from the "threat of fragmentation" while also restoring a "firm sense of self-cohesion."²³⁸

Image 11 depicts Kołodziej as a survivor holding up a mask representing his prisoner self with the number 432 sprawled across the forehead. Kołodziej referred to this drawing as his "double self-portrait" and describes it thus:

One of my drawings features myself from 50 years ago and myself now. Double self-portrait. The face of the man from the camp, however, is a mask. Today's face is the

²³⁶ Jones, Sally Adnams. *Art-Making with Refugees and Survivors: Creative and Transformative Responses to Trauma After Natural Disasters, War and Other Crises*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018, 41.

²³⁷ Levine, Stephen K. *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009, 31-32.

²³⁸ Richman on Marilyn Charles in *Mended by the Muse: Creative Transformations of Trauma*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014, 52.

true one. In the camp, life meant pretending, hiding behind something. In the picture, I uncover myself. I put what is the most tragic for me there.²³⁹

This image represents how Kołodziej's experiences of being a prisoner of the Nazis and the man he became within the camps always remains with him. The image also acknowledges that Kołodziej is neither a prisoner or a survivor exclusively. He embodies both of these identities, and these fragmented selves are all part of who he is as a man. This visual portrayal may have allowed Kołodziej to come to terms with his split sense of identity, as a victim and a survivor, as a prisoner and a liberated man.



Image 9: Marian Kołodziej, *Multiple selves*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>

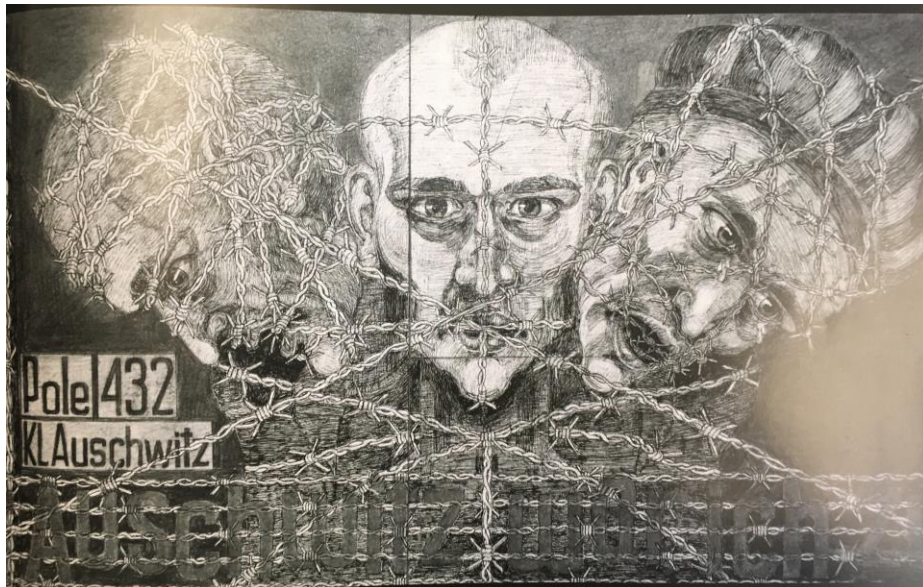


Image 10: Marian Kołodziej, *Multiple selves*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. As seen in as seen in Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 41.

²³⁹ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 17.

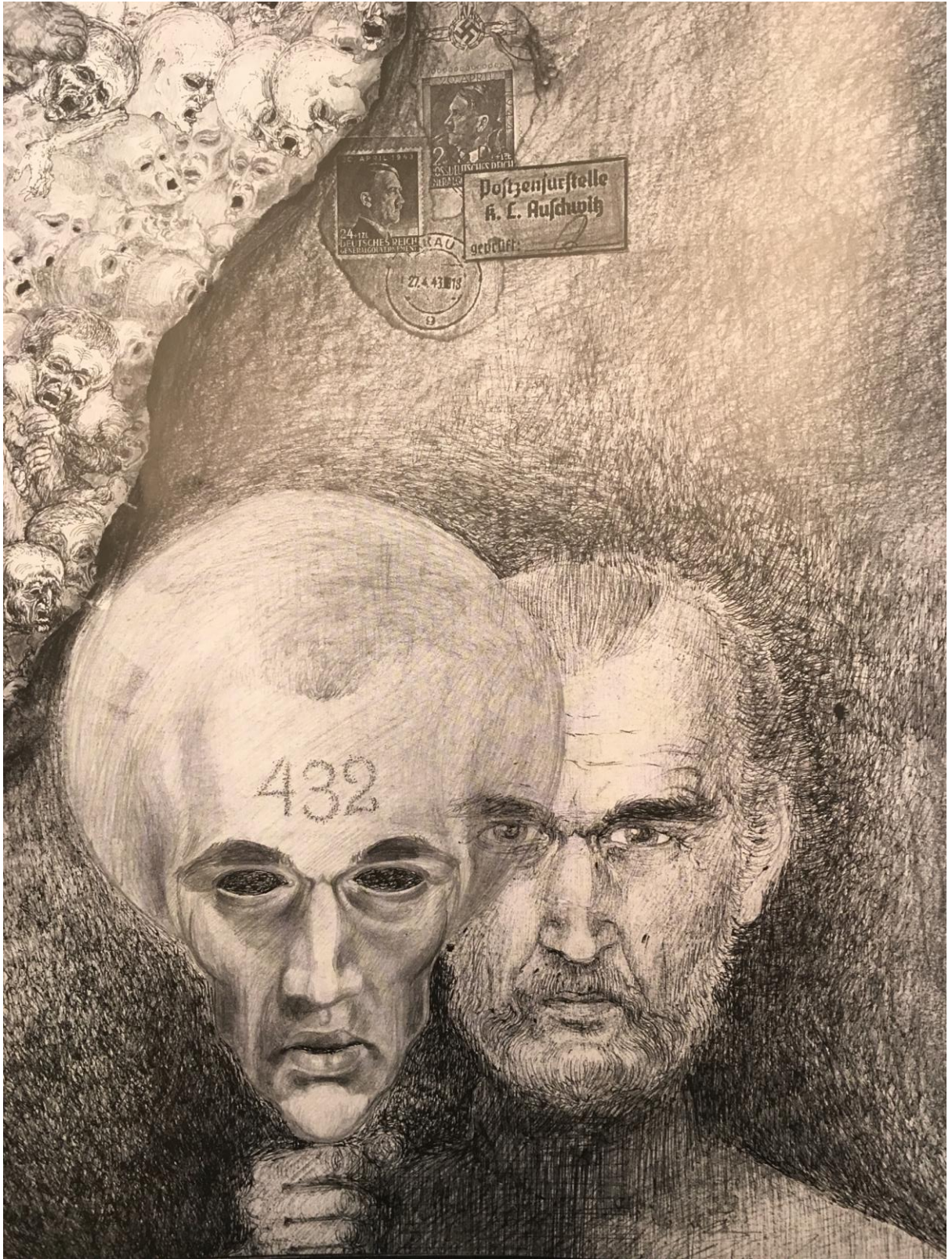


Image 11: Marian Kolodziej, "Double self-portrait". Drawing: pen and ink on paper. As seen in as seen in Kolodziej, Marian. Marian Kolodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2. Gdansk, 2009, 44.

Bisschoff and Van de Peer remind us that one of art's responsibilities is to "address the unspeakable."²⁴⁰ The creation of this drawing gave Kołodziej a platform from which to begin speaking about this traumatic fragmentation of his self. Art allows him to tell his story to himself, and orders the traumatized mind through a visual medium, which is something that words alone are incapable of achieving.²⁴¹ Kołodziej writes:

In my drawings I do not at all want to be wiser than I was. I am trying to come back to my naivety of a boy. Now, as an older man, I am writing a letter to myself as a young boy that I was years ago and I am trying to put in order and preserve in my drawings only the things that survived together with me, what I managed to save and what is in me now.²⁴²

Here, we are reminded of Richman's claim that dissociation in the creative process allows for "regression in service of the ego." This refers to the capacity for artists to "dip into layers and depths in their mind that, in other people, are sources of psychological difficulties—the artist can do so in a kind of controlled way that sub-serves and enriches the creative process."²⁴³ Kołodziej dissociated during the creative process, and his drawing enabled him to regress to his time as a young man in the camps, to put his experiences in order. Kołodziej's drawings are an "external manifestation of the internal—the physical manifestation of physical processes."²⁴⁴ The unconscious becomes conscious, visible, manageable, and understandable. "Art-iculation" helps the survivor to mend.²⁴⁵

In addition, Kelly Oliver (2001) describes the reconstitution of the inner witness as a necessary condition for a survivor to repair their trauma. For her, an inner witness enables the empowering of one's subject position and also enables a sense of self and agency that is required for subjectivity. In other words, bearing witness to one's own oppression reconstitutes the inner witness, begins to repair address-ability and response-ability that was

²⁴⁰ Bisschoff, Lizelle and Stefanie van de Peer. *Art and Trauma in Africa: Representations of Reconciliation in Music, Visual Arts, Literature and Film*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 13.

²⁴¹ Jones, Sally Adnams. *Art-Making with Refugees and Survivors: Creative and Transformative Responses to Trauma After Natural Disasters, War and Other Crises*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018, 40.

²⁴² Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 16-17.

²⁴³ Kris, Ernst. *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*. New York, NY: International Universities Press, 1965.

²⁴⁴ Adnams Jones on Arnheim (1966) in *Art-Making with Refugees and Survivors: Creative and Transformative Responses to Trauma After Natural Disasters, War and Other Crises*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018, 40.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 41.

damaged through oppression, and allows for the working-through of trauma by re-instilling subjectivity.²⁴⁶ The inner witness can be constituted when the survivor renders their internal trauma external through the creative process. Kołodziej's creative process allowed him to render his own self visible to himself. Likewise, Primo Levi suggest that survivors *need* to tell their stories for their own internal survival—this process of telling one's self to one's self constitutes a therapeutic liberation of the self.²⁴⁷

Kołodziej's double self-portrait is reminiscent of another piece of survivor art I encountered during a workshop I participated in at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum entitled "Art and its Meaning in KL Auschwitz" (Image 12). Our educator Agnieszka Sieradzka showed us a drawing depicting two men: one garbed in the iconic striped uniform of the camp prisoners, and the other in a white doctor's coat. The "Arbeit macht frei" entrance sign of Auschwitz looms behind the two figures. Sieradzka asked us who we thought the two men were—we figured one was a prisoner, and one was a doctor in the camp... perhaps Dr. Mengele. To our surprise, we were told that the two figures in the drawing were the same man: the doctor was the man before he became a prisoner of the Nazis. The drawing was created by Peter Edel, a German-Jew who had been sent to Auschwitz in November 1943.²⁴⁸ Edel was a painter and graphic artist, and continued his drawings despite his imprisonment. His drawings depicted camp realities, his fellow prisoners, and in the case of the aforementioned drawing, himself. The Auschwitz Memorial Museum posted a description of the drawing on their Facebook page in July 2017. It states:

His face has changed so much that it's hard to tell whether it's the same person. Especially as he can't recognise himself. Emaciated and debilitated by work and hunger, Peter Edel, the maker of this drawing, points a finger at himself. In the bottom left-hand corner there is a question which the artist put to himself after he had passed through the gate with 'Arbeit macht frei' on top of it, which you can see behind his back: 'Who's this?' 'You!' 'Me? Yes!'.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 105.

²⁴⁷ Daniel P. Reynolds on Primo Levi in *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 57.

²⁴⁸ From: The Auschwitz Memorial-Museum Facebook page. Posted on: July 11 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial/photos/10154513972536097>

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

Much like Kołodziej's double self-portrait, Edel's drawing provides a *Gestalt* image of himself made from his former self, and who he was within the camps. This process re-inscribes the inner witness, allowing the survivor to make sense of themselves and their past trauma. The image may have allowed Edel to remember that he was not always a prisoner. He was an individual before the camp, and although he has visibly been altered by the camp experience, he is still the same man he was before. Perhaps creating such an image allowed Edel to hold onto his humanity and his subjectivity, helping him to resist the Nazis and ultimately survive the camp. In this sense, the creative process can allow the survivor to act out their trauma in a constructive way. Adnams Jones reminds us that the facilitation of finding a voice through art is key, and "art-making becomes resistance, a critical, mediated performance of waking up."²⁵⁰ Acting out through art becomes necessary for working through.

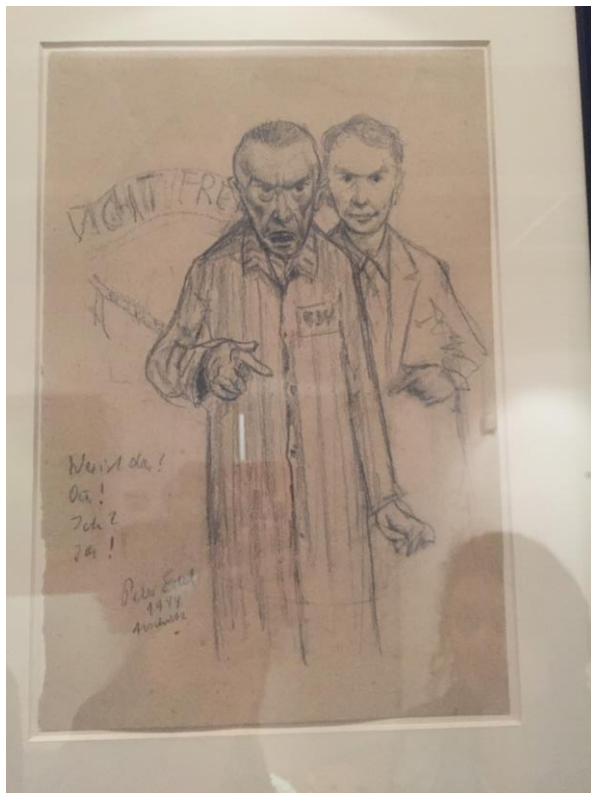


Image 12: Peter Edel, "Double portrait". Pencil on paper. From the collection of the Auschwitz Memorial Museum. Photograph by: A. Logie, May 2016.

²⁵⁰ Jones, Sally Adnams. *Art-Making with Refugees and Survivors: Creative and Transformative Responses to Trauma After Natural Disasters, War and Other Crises*. London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018, 55.



Image 13: Multiple selves, drawing by Kolodziej. From: Marian. Marian Kolodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2. Gdansk, 2009, 164.

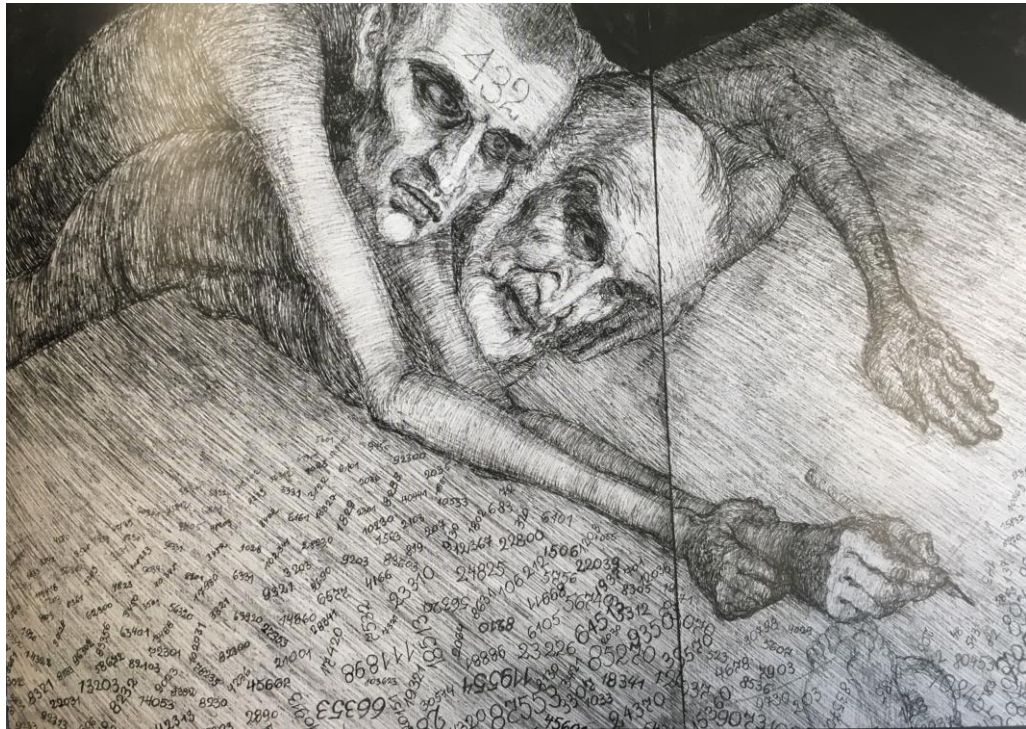


Image 14: Multiple selves, drawing by Kolodziej. From: Marian. Marian Kolodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2. Gdansk, 2009, 165.

This chapter explored how the creative process can enable survivors to mend through the externalization of their internal traumas. This externalization provides a stepping-stone from which survivors can begin to speak about the trauma that was previously unspeakable or unrecognizable to themselves. Although survivors can never be entirely healed from their past—their trauma will always be a part of them as a permanent scar that informs, but does not necessarily constrain their everyday life—the creative process provides an outlet for them to participate in the mending process. In turn, I concluded how such creative acts constitute a restorative form of acting-out; the trauma is repeated through the creative process in a *productive* manner, as opposed to in a harmful manner characteristic of the Freudian notion of the repetition compulsion. The creative process allows for the re-constitution of the inner witness, and the survivor can come to understand themselves as a whole subject, as opposed to a fragmented object.

Survivor art does not only externalize trauma to those who experienced it; it can also render such trauma visible to others. While I have already discussed the restorative functions of the creative process for the survivor, what does it mean when such art is shared with others? When we view art created by survivors, are we called to carry the burden of trauma alongside those who endured it themselves?

CHAPTER 4: *THE LABYRINTH* AND THE WITNESS FUNCTION OF ART

Survivor art is a medium with the unique ability to effectively awaken witnesses to their responsibility to “bear witness beyond recognition,” a process Kelly Oliver asserts is essential for the restoration of subjectivity for the survivor. While Chapter 3 focused on how Kołodziej’s creative process helped him personally mend from his trauma, this chapter introduces another salient question: what does it mean when survivor art is shared with the public? What does it mean for survivors to obtain an external witness to their trauma? Additionally, this chapter explores questions such as: How might the medium of survivor art contribute to the collective remembrance of the Holocaust and the process of bearing witness to trauma that is so often described as unrepresentable and incomprehensible?

In this chapter, I suggest that the restoration of subjectivity for survivors of trauma not only stems from the creative process, but also through the transformative and social act brought to life through the process of bearing witness beyond recognition. This form of witnessing also effectively “permits the survivor to speak to a public, whether to condemn the perpetrator, to memorialize the suffering or to teach as a warning against repetition.”²⁵¹ Ultimately, survivor art not only renders trauma visible to the survivor, re-constituting the internal witness, but it also allows for the creation of external witnesses—a process which furthers the mending process and re-inscription of subjectivity for the survivor. I argue that the process of witnessing beyond recognition transpires within *The Labyrinth* through the exhibition’s inherently performative and theatrical nature. I also engage with Daniel P. Reynolds’s work *Postcards from Auschwitz* (2018), in which he explores the role tourism plays in the efforts to understand and remember the Holocaust. Reynolds describes the Holocaust as “an event that continues to challenge ideals about humanity and our capacity to learn from the past,”²⁵² which allows me to consider how the tourist’s experience of survivor testimony is essential in bearing witness to what Oliver would describe as “beyond recognition.”

²⁵¹ Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, 8.

²⁵² Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 1.

4.1 Bearing Witness “Beyond Recognition” Through Art

Kelly Oliver outlines the necessity for—and the complications associated with—the processes of witnessing. She states that the performance of testimony by someone who experienced or lived through the event is crucial because it allows for the dramatization or performance of the impossibility of ever witnessing the event. For Oliver, it is necessary to bear witness to *the impossibility of witnessing*, in order for those who bear witness to encounter the experience of the incomprehensible. Oliver suggests witnesses of the past need to move beyond dead historical facts bound to the finite task of comprehending past events, traumas and atrocities, towards the infinite task of *encountering* them—that is, bearing witness to what is beyond recognition. Essentially, the empirical facts of the Holocaust found within historical texts are “dead to the process of witnessing.”²⁵³ By ignoring what survivor testimony may bear witness to, and only looking at historical truths of the Holocaust, one disallows the possibility of hearing something new, something “beyond comprehension.”²⁵⁴ Oliver states:

The double meaning of witnessing—eyewitness testimony based on firsthand knowledge, on the one hand, and bearing witness to something beyond recognition that can’t be seen, on the other—is the heart of subjectivity. The tension between eyewitness testimony and bearing witness, between historical facts and psychoanalytic truth, between subject position and subjectivity, between the performative and the constative, is the dynamic operator that moves us beyond the melancholic choice between dead historical facts or traumatic repetition of violence.²⁵⁵

Survivor art allows for this balance between historical facts and psychoanalytic truth to take place, as art is not merely historical. Art allows for “something more radical and crucial” to be borne witness to.

²⁵³ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 1.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.* Oliver cites an interview Dori Laub conducted for the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University. In the interview, a woman survivor reported that four chimneys were exploded during the Auschwitz uprising. Despite the fact that historians have deemed the woman’s testimony as unreliable because only one chimney was actually destroyed, psychoanalysts defend the testimony. Psychoanalysts describe how the woman was not “testifying to the number of chimneys blown up but to something more ‘radical’ and ‘crucial’—namely, the seemingly unimaginable occurrence of Jewish resistance at Auschwitz.”

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

Survivor art can be a means to create an “external witness” to traumatic experiences, which is essential in an intersubjective process of witnessing. The visual nature of survivor art allows it to be seen and experienced by others; artists know their art can render their internal worlds external and visible to others. While undertaking the creative process, the artist knows that the work can and will be viewed and experienced by others. The external witness is required to develop and sustain the internal witness necessary to interpret/represent one’s own experience, which is necessary for individual and social transformation. In other words, visitors of Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth*, act as the external witnesses necessary for the continued development of the survivor’s internal witness. Oliver reminds us that subjectivity requires a witness because “without an addressee... ‘I’ cannot exist.”²⁵⁶ In the exhibition’s catalogue, Kołodziej describes how he wanted *The Labyrinth* to be a “conversation” with its visitors. He wanted to talk to visitors through the visual language of art.²⁵⁷ Kołodziej envisioned an imaginary external witness to his work which would have facilitated the development of his own internal witness.

If Kołodziej wished for his exhibition to talk to its visitors, how might visitors engage in the conversation? Daniel P. Reynolds discusses how tourism at sites of Holocaust memory can enable a kind of witnessing if it amounts to “more than a simple act of viewing the displays that have been curated by museum staff.”²⁵⁸ For Reynolds, the act of witnessing is not passive; it is a “communicative act that translates a moment of experience into an utterance that, in turn, is heard by another.”²⁵⁹ Although Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth* does not include a *verbal* testimony, Kołodziej refers to his art as “words locked in drawings.”²⁶⁰ Kołodziej’s drawings speak to their viewers and are heard by those who gaze upon them. Reynolds asserts that testimonial accounts “engage their readers on both a visceral and a metaphysical level, involving them emotionally and intellectually in profoundly troubling considerations about humanity and violence,” a process which most definitely occurs within

²⁵⁶ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 15.

²⁵⁷ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 16.

²⁵⁸ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 55.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 16.

The Labyrinth.²⁶¹ The testimony must be heard for the process of witnessing to take place. As noted by Guerin and Hallas, the testimony is a social act that “permits the survivor to speak to a public, whether to condemn the perpetrator, to memorialize the suffering or to teach as a warning against repetition.”²⁶²

Many scholars, however, are critical of the volume of images of suffering the public is confronted with on a regular basis. How might the experience of *The Labyrinth* conform to or combat this critique? Susan Sontag warns that “image-glut keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content”; in other words, we are so often bombarded with images of suffering that we have become complacent towards them.²⁶³ While Sontag’s concerns are aimed towards photographic images, I would like to argue that they can be extended to artistic representations of suffering as well. However, I suggest that the theatrical form of *The Labyrinth* helps to combat such complacency, as the visitor is invited to interact with the images they are confronted with in the exhibition. Once the visitor has walked down the stairs to the basement of the Our Lady Immaculate Church and through the cattle car, they are fully immersed in the images of Kołodziej’s trauma. As the drawings inside of *The Labyrinth* surround the viewer entirely, no matter in which direction one turns, they are confronted with a testimony of brutality and trauma. As such, the viewer *must* be fully engaged with Kołodziej’s art—it is inescapable. Besides closing one’s eyes, the viewer has no choice but to look at and engage with Kołodziej’s drawings; *The Labyrinth* does not offer solace or retreat from representations of the horrors of Auschwitz. In this way, viewers cannot turn away from what they are witnessing: they are forced to enter into an intersubjective relationship with the art—the process Reynolds contends is attributed to a true form of witnessing. The viewer gazes at the art, and the art gazes back... thousands of faces with unique eyes address the viewer directly (Image 14). The suffering prisoners call out to the viewer, forcing them into an intersubjective process of witnessing the horrors repressed within Kołodziej’s mind. Unlike the inanimate objects piled inside the Auschwitz Memorial Museum, in *The Labyrinth* we must look into a representation of the eyes of the deceased and

²⁶¹ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 56.

²⁶² Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London;New York;: Wallflower Press, 2007, 8.

²⁶³ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York, NY: Picador, 2003, 106.

we must recognize and bear witness to their humanity... we must remember them. Inanimate objects cannot speak or be heard. Kołodziej's art can.

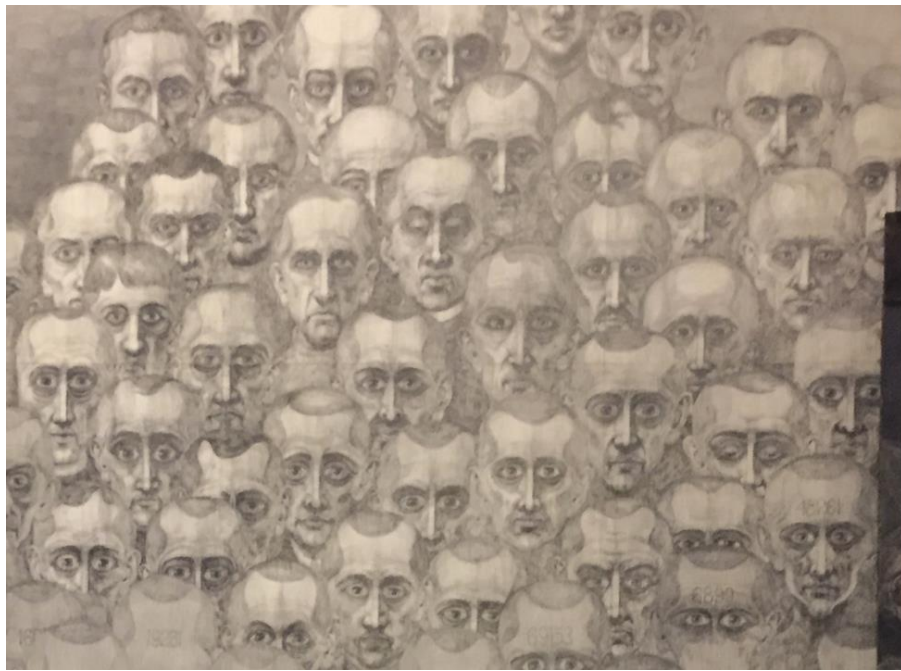


Image 15: Marian Kołodziej, *Victim eyes gaze back at the viewer*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. Photograph by Alyssa Logie, 2016.

4.2 “The Holocaust Effect”: The Power of Art in the Process of Witnessing

What actually happens when an external witness is created through the performance of the testimonial narrative or the witnessing of survivor art? Is survivor art more effective in the process of bearing witness than oral or written testimonies? Does the external witness actually experience the past trauma of the survivor through the sharing of survivor art? I contend that a transformative process takes place when we engage with survivor art. In the case of Kołodziej's installation, visitors can bear witness to a fragment of a trauma that is usually deemed incomprehensible. Visual art allows for a link between the traumatic past and the present witness, providing access to what is often inaccessible to both the survivor and the witness. In this sense, a viewer can experience what Ernst Van Alphen refers to as a “Holocaust effect,” a term he coined to describe instances in which “we are not confronted with a representation of the Holocaust,” but rather “experience directly a certain aspect of the Holocaust or of Nazism, of that which lead to the Holocaust.”²⁶⁴ Van Alphen posits that “in

²⁶⁴ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 10.

such moments the Holocaust is not re-presented, but rather presented or re-enacted.”²⁶⁵ Much like Oliver and Guerin and Hallas, he asserts that:

The Holocaust is not made present by means of a constative speech act—that is, as a mediated account, as the truthful or untruthful content of the speech act; rather it is made present as performative effect. Those performative acts ‘do’ the Holocaust, or rather, they ‘do’ a specific aspect of it. We are there; history is present—but not quite.²⁶⁶

Following this notion of the Holocaust being made present through a performative effect, I suggest that a Holocaust effect is successfully produced through the theatrical experience of Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth*. Perhaps this is why *The Labyrinth* entirely shook me to my core, why it haunts me today more so than any other site of memory I visited in Poland. While visitors of *The Labyrinth* do not experience Kołodziej’s trauma directly—which is impossible—they do experience a sort of “Holocaust effect” through *visual* performance of the survivor’s narrative.

I think it is appropriate to describe the experience of viewing Kołodziej’s work as a Holocaust effect in which visitors experience the suffering and evil of the concentration camp through Kołodziej’s art. As Van Alphen states: “When I call something a Holocaust effect, I mean to say that we are not confronted with a [mere] representation of the Holocaust, but that we, as viewers or readers, directly experience a certain aspect of the Holocaust or Nazism, of that which led to the Holocaust.”²⁶⁷ Kołodziej’s art is a portal to the past, allowing visitors to catch a glimpse of the horrors of Auschwitz as they were.

Through looking at various examples of visitor testimonies, it is apparent that a Holocaust effect takes place within *The Labyrinth*. A journal entry that I recorded upon exiting *The Labyrinth* during my visit on May 6th 2016 describes my experience of the exhibition:

I am completely at a loss for words after having seen Marian’s art. I was entirely speechless and in horror. It was hell on earth. I am thankful we visited this site before Auschwitz—perhaps it is a fragment of what Auschwitz really was... the hell it really

²⁶⁵ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 10.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 10-11.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

was. The eyes of the people in the drawings stunned me. These were humans, fellow living beings who suffered and died.²⁶⁸

My own reflections approximate the reflections of Reverend Josef Tischner who, after visiting *The Labyrinth*, wrote:

First of all, it seems that every transformation of these images into words is a kind of damage to them. Images are so meaningful that any attempt to supplement them with verbal comment is futile... I have been to Auschwitz several times, I have walked in Birkenau. But I have never seen there what I saw at this exhibition. My reaction is: Auschwitz is here. This, in fact, is all I can say: the real Auschwitz is here.²⁶⁹

Likewise, after visiting the exhibition, Reverend Zdzisław Wójcik wrote the following:

“Photographs are supposed to render the truth about people and facts best. However, having seen the exhibition... I can feel that there is still another truth about man, the truth that is the most personal, scarred, well-thought-put and well-expressed... Kołodziej takes us into the labyrinth of memories that he experiences by means of his words-pictures.”²⁷⁰ Cheryl Chaffin describes her experience of *The Labyrinth*: “I experienced shock. I have dealt in words, in texts. But here is acute visual detail, largely metaphorical but simultaneously intensely physical, exact in its anatomical depiction of emotion, pain, and terror. It is almost too much to absorb.”²⁷¹

These visitor descriptions, as well as the descriptions within my own field notes, allude to how *The Labyrinth* seems to capture history, allowing the visitor to attain a Holocaust effect. These testimonials, as well as my own notes, describe an “internal processual experience” in which the visitors seemed to have “re-enacted” and sense of the trauma and suffering of Auschwitz through the images.²⁷² The testimonials point to how Kołodziej’s art exemplifies historical truths *and* psychoanalytic truths. *The Labyrinth* is a testament to the horrors of the Nazi camps; it is a space where one can bear witness to the

²⁶⁸ Logie, Alyssa. Field notes from study abroad in Poland, May 7 2016.

²⁶⁹ Negatives of Memory: Labyrinths of Marian Kołodziej.
<http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 77.

²⁷² Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Continuum, 2002, 8.

atrocities of Auschwitz. Avishai Margalit posits that to be a moral witness one “...should witness—indeed, they should experience—suffering inflicted by an unmitigated evil regime.”²⁷³ This experience of suffering is animated into existence within *The Labyrinth*.

The theatrical structure of the exhibition encourages the visitor to engage with the imagery, and, likewise, the *narrative* structure of the images also pushes the visitor into an intersubjective relationship with Kołodziej’s testimony. For Sontag, “a narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obligated to look, to feel.”²⁷⁴ Likewise, Reynolds describes how testimonial accounts “engage their readers on both a visceral and a metaphysical level, involving them emotionally and intellectually in profoundly troubling considerations about humanity and violence” despite their historical accuracy.²⁷⁵ In this way, the visitors to *The Labyrinth* become the “audience” the exhibition needs for Kołodziej’s testimony to be received, “thus fulfilling the task of bearing witness.”²⁷⁶ While experiencing *The Labyrinth*, the visitor does not passively receive Kołodziej’s words locked in drawings, but experiences the trauma in a mediated form through the narrative flow of the drawings.

The Labyrinth is not a single image, or various separate images; it is a *polyptych* of images that tells a loose story. Van Alphen contends that narrativity in the context of representing the Holocaust is “met with suspicion because the coherence and meaningfulness [narrativity] creates was alien to the lived experience of the Holocaust.”²⁷⁷ The art of *The Labyrinth* provides a loose narrative, one that is not directly provided for the viewer. Piotr Cuber of the Maximillian Kolbe Centre reported to me that “Kołodziej himself wanted the visitors to leave space for personal sightseeing and personal interpretation. He did not want [the guides] to talk about the exhibition.”²⁷⁸ As such, Kołodziej wanted visitors to interpret the narrative of the exhibition through their own eyes. Despite Kołodziej’s initial wishes for

²⁷³ Margalit, Avishai. *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, 148.

²⁷⁴ Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York, NY: Picador, 2003, 122.

²⁷⁵ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 56.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 13.

²⁷⁸ (Piotr Cuber, Centrum św. Maksymiliana, email message to Alyssa Logie, March 21 2019).

complete interpretive freedom for visitors, Kołodziej's wife, Halina Słojewska-Kołodziej created a handbook alongside her husband for interpreting the exhibition.²⁷⁹ Presently, visitors of *The Labyrinth* tour the exhibition by appointment alongside a trained guide who follows the handbook created by Słojewska-Kołodziej.²⁸⁰ Additionally, most of the guides currently working at the exhibition knew Kołodziej personally themselves, and spent time listening to the artist share his own testimony within the exhibition. Such stories extend far beyond the contents of Słojewska-Kołodziej's handbook, and the guides often incorporate these extra details into their tours.²⁸¹ This information is passed on to any new guides who come to work or volunteer at the exhibition. As such, the narratives shared with visitors are heavily shaped by the words of Kołodziej himself.

Although visitors to *The Labyrinth* are escorted by a guide who provides an interpretation of the exhibition, the guide also encourages visitors to experience *The Labyrinth* however they choose. Visitors are encouraged to walk and reflect on the drawings on their own if they so wish.²⁸² Cheryl Chaffin reminds us that *The Labyrinth* "re-enacts memories accumulated and buried in an underground space, a circuitous structure, the subconscious mind."²⁸³ Such subconscious memories are fragmented and not fully known to their holder,²⁸⁴ meaning "there is no map, only memory for the artist and the result of that memory in the artworks for his viewers."²⁸⁵ During my visit to the exhibition, my colleagues and I meandered individually around *The Labyrinth*, tracing our own paths, and building our own narratives from the polyptych images before us; it is, after all, a labyrinth.²⁸⁶ Our eyes were transfixed to the various ghastly images, while the guide's voice faded softly into the background. For me, the visit felt intimate and personal. The exhibition's narrative is fragmented through its various panels and its story is confusing and overwhelming to the senses. It is *almost* incomprehensible, much like the event of the Holocaust itself. While

²⁷⁹ (Piotr Cuber, Centrum św. Maksymiliana, email message to Alyssa Logie, March 21 2019).

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ Chaffin, Cheryl. "Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej's Return to The Labyrinth". *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 86.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Logie, Alyssa. Field notes from study abroad in Poland, May 2016.

exploring *The Labyrinth* visitors are not necessarily confronted with the event itself, but they are confronted with glimpses into its horror.²⁸⁷

Kelly Oliver suggests that such “performative testimonies” allow survivors to access an external witness, which is necessary for the development of an internal witness that ultimately restores subjectivity to the survivor from the inside. In this regard, agency or subjectivity is repaired following a situation or experience that was designed to destroy it. Ultimately, the survivor regains a sense of self and agency that had been previously obliterated by the traumatic experience. Oliver asserts that because of this process, performative testimony can enable social and/or individual change to become possible. In this way, Oliver views performative occurrences of survivor testimony—such as *The Labyrinth*—as “transformative processes.” She asserts that the performance of witnessing, or the telling of a survivor’s own narrative, is in tension with constative description of becoming an object, a paradox of bearing witness to one’s own oppression. The constative speech act itself tells the tale of a victim’s dehumanization and/or objectification, while the performance of the narrative simultaneously engages the victim into a dialogic relation with another.²⁸⁸ Likewise, Ernst Van Alphen describes how giving testimony is not a mere telling; it is an intersubjective and “transactive” process:

Testimony not only provides a product, historical information; it is itself a process, a transactive process between a listener and a testifier that reintegrates the Holocaust witness in the present. Thus the testifier is no longer isolated within a past event. The voice and subjectivity of that individual are re-established by the process of offering testimony and in the dialogical relationship with a listener.²⁸⁹

In short, the content of the testimony of the oppressed re-inscribes the survivor as a victim or object, but the *act* or *performance* of the narrative itself restores subjectivity into the experience of objectification. In other words, every time a survivor performs their testimony, they negate the Nazi’s goal of obliterating them and their memory.

²⁸⁷ For more on the “comprehensibility” of the Holocaust, see Saul Friedlander’s *Probing the Limits of Representation* (1992), Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman’s *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), Elie Wiesel’s *Night* (2006), and Daniel P. Reynolds’ *Postcards from Auschwitz* (2018).

²⁸⁸ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 98.

²⁸⁹ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 13.

While Van Alphen's notion of the "transactive process" of testimony and Oliver's notion of performance can be applied to both oral and written survivor testimony, I want to suggest that Kołodziej's unique *visual* testimonial narrative offers the possibility for an *even more* transformative process. Through its visual quality, survivor art is capable of accelerating the process of witnessing to allow us to bear witness to what is beyond recognition in an even more intimate way. The paradox of the constative and performative qualities of the testimony are amplified when displayed in a visual form created by the survivor themselves. Guerin and Hallas contend that "despite the ambivalence shown toward the image in the public sphere and scholarly discourse, photographic, filmic, electronic and digital images play an increasingly important role in the formation of contemporary cultural imaginaries."²⁹⁰ They believe that the image's unique agency is "grounded in the performative (rather than the constative) function of the act of bearing witness."²⁹¹ Material images "do not merely depict the historical world, they participate in its transformation" as well.²⁹² Due to its ability to transform the historical world, the image can actually "facilitate specific possibilities to bear witness to historical trauma rather than foreclose or compromise them."²⁹³

4.3 "The Language People Know": On Symbolic Representations of Trauma and Art After Auschwitz

"Art is true insofar as what speaks out of it—indeed, it itself—is conflicting and irreconciled, but this truth only becomes art's own when it synthesizes the dirempted and thus makes it determinate in its irreconcilability. Its paradoxical task is to attest to the irreconciled while at the same time tending toward reconciliation; this is only possible because of its non-discursive language".

—Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* (1984)²⁹⁴

Kołodziej tells us that his drawings do not literally depict Auschwitz, saying "the story of the camp cannot be told literally."²⁹⁵ With Kołodziej's assertion in mind, how might the

²⁹⁰ Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, 5.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann, and Robert Hullot-Kentor. *Aesthetic Theory*. London: Continuum, 2002, 168.

²⁹⁵ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 15.

artistic and symbolic form of *The Labyrinth* be more effective in facilitating witnesses to respond to a survivor's trauma than typical oral and written testimonies? Elie Wiesel asserts that language is the largest barrier to the witnessing process or providing a full account of a traumatic past. For Wiesel, it becomes necessary to "invent a new language" that can speak to those who are willing to listen. I want to suggest this new language is manifest in Kołodziej's drawings through the symbolization of his traumatic experiences.²⁹⁶ It is necessary for survivors to use their own language and their own symbols to depict their trauma in order for themselves and those who engage with their creations to bear witness to the past. John Durham Peters has noted that since the end of WWII, "the survivor-witness has been encouraged to take an active role in the narration of [their] own story."²⁹⁷ Guerin and Hallas believe this active narration of one's own trauma can lead to the creation of images that are capable of "giving voice" to the survivor-witness, ultimately leading to an image that calls for "active saying" as opposed to passivity. If a survivor-witness creates their *own* image of their trauma, they can restore their voice and subjectivity. Images of survivor-witnesses not taken from their own subject position (such as the liberation photos) can re-objectify the victim and lead to the creation of an image that lends itself to passive consumption of an objectified thing.

Following this line of thought, we can see Kołodziej's *Labyrinth* has an example of imagery that does not objectify the survivor-victim. It is Kołodziej's *visual* testimony, from his own subject-position, that utilizes the visual form to actually accelerate the representation of his trauma, and ultimately, the process of bearing witness. Guerin and Hallas contend that the visual image holds much more power over people than the written word; they assert that "far more so than words, images are still perceived to have a power and an agency to bring to life—to bring into a particular kind of presence."²⁹⁸ Testimony in its visual form may more affectively impact viewers than those who just read a literary testimony, as "the image offers the experience of a personal encounter... this experience is understood to be its most authentic moment."²⁹⁹ Hans Belting refers to this phenomena as "iconic presence" and describes it as a process in which:

²⁹⁶ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 57.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 10.

images do not actually return to the event, but can “replace absence with a different kind of presence: *Iconic presence* still maintains a body’s absence and turns it into what must be called *visible absence*. Images live from the paradox that they perform *the presence of an absence* or vice versa.³⁰⁰

In short, the image can provide a viewer with a sort of access to the original trauma. We must remember, however, that one can never *truly* experience an event they did not witness or live through themselves.

For Kołodziej, simply completing his multitude of drawings was not enough; he worked ambitiously so that his testimony could be viewed and experienced by others. He sought to assemble them in a public space to render his trauma publically visible—it would no longer be trapped within the private confines of his mind.³⁰¹ American scholar Eric Santner posits that “in order to bind affects and words, this witnessing requires social space and symbols”³⁰² and without such social spaces and symbols, “the homeopathic operation becomes a sort of elegiac loop that must repeat itself endlessly.”³⁰³ The trauma is acted-out and not worked-through. Kelly Oliver cites both of these notions, and ultimately states that “affect can be deadly without a socially sanctioned space in which, and symbols available from which, to express it.”³⁰⁴ In order for people to work-through their trauma, they must be able to represent their testimonies in ways that make sense to themselves in spaces where their testimonies can be witnessed by others. For Kołodziej, indexical language was necessary to represent his memories of the camps. Indexical language describes signs that point to or index objects in the context in which they occur.³⁰⁵ Kołodziej alludes to this process of publicly binding affect to words through indexical language in his *Labyrinth* when he states:

³⁰⁰ Guerin, Frances and Roger Hallas. *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*. London; New York: Wallflower Press, 2007, 9-10.

³⁰¹ Speaking in Freudian terms, what was trapped within the private confines of Kołodziej’s mind could be both conscious and unconscious thoughts and memories.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ Santner, Eric. *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990, 25.

³⁰⁴ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 111.

³⁰⁵ The concept of indexical language was first introduced by linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein in his paper “Shifters, Linguistic Categories and Cultural Description” (1976).

I would like to tell the viewer: be patient, wait patiently for everything that is written in these drawings. They are my ‘drawn words’ that I am sending you... There came a moment when I decided that my drawings should be a word, that I could confine my entire experience in a line. *I chose to speak the language that people know, that they are familiar with...* I began to look for a sign that would be not only man but also an animal and insect... It seemed improper to me to give only a sketch of a person, just to outline his or her appearance. My respect to the memory of my co-prisoners told me to reconstruct the faces I remember in possibly the most faithful way. Like a photographer.³⁰⁶

In this passage, Kołodziej describes how his art attempts to represent concentration camp life as honestly as possible through indexical language. To do this, Kołodziej knew he would have to create drawings of humans that likened them to animals and insects because this is how prisoners felt at the time and how they were treated by the perpetrators. As such, Kołodziej utilized symbolization in his drawings in order to portray concentration camp life more accurately than the literal visual depictions are capable. This symbolization gave form to memories of concentration camp life that Kołodziej could not express through mere words or literal representations; animalesque and insect-like figures came to stand in place of humans. These indexical signs are necessary to depict Kołodziej’s memories in the context of the “L’Univers concentrationnaire.”³⁰⁷ In Kołodziej’s drawings, the imagery of beasts, horses, snakes and reptiles became symbols for the perpetrators prisoners experienced in “a world apart” from the reality outside of the camps (Image 16). These beasts are seen throughout Kołodziej’s artwork, symbolizing the Nazi officers and Kapos within the camp.

Much like the process of symbolization apparent in Kołodziej’s renditions of his camp experiences, Van Alphen describes how the work of Dutch artist Armando makes use of indexical language, using “symbols, objects, creatures, and situations that were not actually present” in order to more accurately depict his memories of his experiences.³⁰⁸ Van Alphen notes how Armando “never describes the event itself: that would be impossible. But

³⁰⁶ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 17, emphasis added.

³⁰⁷ The term “L’Univers concentrationnaire” was made popular by David Rousset’s 1945 memoir of the same name. It used to describe the German camp system as a “world apart,” segregated from the world outside of and before the existence of the camps.

³⁰⁸ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 13.

he gets close to it” by using indexical language in his works.³⁰⁹ Similarly, Kołodziej writes, “And today I dream the same and in the same way. Again I can see beasts, disgusting, brutal, predatory, cruel—people.”³¹⁰ The imagery of Kołodziej’s dreams he had while he was a prisoner had become intertwined with his memories of everyday camp life. As such, his memory of imprisonment became a tangled nightmare, infused with the horrors of reality and dark imagery of the night. From Kołodziej’s art, it is hard to tell where reality ends and his nightmares begin—perhaps they are one and the same.



Image 16: Marian Kołodziej, *A Kapo as a pig*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. Photograph by Alyssa Logie, 2016.

Kołodziej depicts the evil of humanity in his artwork through the aesthetics of ugliness: deformed, animalistic and aesthetically displeasing representations. The aesthetics of ugliness can give form to what Karl Rosenkranz refers to as “intellectually ugly”; that which is entirely evil, those who treat others as if they are not human.³¹¹ Kołodziej frequently uses aesthetics of ugliness to portray the intellectually ugly, in this case, the Kapos and guards of the camp. For example, he depicts “Lagerastester Kapo #1, Bruno,” a Kapo who tortured prisoners for his own pleasure (Image 17). The Kapo’s body is monstrous and deformed, and he dominates the space of the image. In another drawing, Kołodziej depicts a

³⁰⁹ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 13.

³¹⁰ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 18.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 42.

Nazi officer as a skinless, monstrous demon riding a three-headed beast, with bodies of prisoners trampled to their death below him (Image 18). Another image depicts a Kapo deciding who will live and who will be sent to the gas chambers (Image 19). His body is also deformed and grotesque.



Image 17: Marian Kołodziej, "Confession of Jaracz," Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>



Image 18: Marian Kołodziej, Monstrous Kapo. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>



Image 19: Marian Kolodziej, *Monstrous Kapo*. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. Photograph by Alyssa Logie, 2016.

These monstrous depictions utilize the aesthetics of ugliness to more genuinely depict the intellectually ugly within the camps. The drawings are not beautiful and are not aesthetically pleasing. As Adorno states:

Art [should] oppose the hopelessly antiquated principle of l’art pour l’art... by renouncing the illusion of a pure realm of beauty that quickly reveals itself as kitsch. By determinate negation artworks absorb the membra disjecta of the empirical world and through their transformation organize them into a reality that is counterreality, a monstrosity.³¹²

The Labyrinth is not just art for art’s sake. Kolodziej’s choice to represent the evil Nazis and Kapos as deformed, grotesque and animalistic more accurately depicts the reality of Auschwitz—a counterreality, a monstrosity. Adorno posits that aesthetics of ugliness more readily gives form to the “cruel,” and this “radical formal experiment, which makes visible the cruel, repeats the moment of cruelty.”³¹³ This leads us to how the aesthetics of ugliness is intertwined with the historical relations of *The Labyrinth*. The formation of cruelty apparent

³¹² Adorno, Theodor W., Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann. *Aesthetic Theory*. London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1984, 320-321.

³¹³ Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013, 93.

in Kołodziej's work "repeats the moment of cruelty," thereby acting as a witness to human suffering under such cruelty.³¹⁴

While monstrous aesthetics apparent in Kołodziej's art speak to the evils of the Holocaust, Pickford asserts that the traumatic effect these images instill in the viewer would not alone constitute the work as Holocaust artwork. He believes that not only must a work contain aesthetic relations, the work must also contain historic relations. Without this historical relation, "any work that achieves a traumatic effect [through aesthetics], regardless of its relation to historical facts, would in principle merit consideration as Holocaust [artwork]."³¹⁵ This is not the case with *The Labyrinth*.

For Adorno and Henry Pickford, genuine art must not only be both aesthetic and historical, but these two relations must be in constant tension with one another. As suggested by Albrecht Wellmer, "the modern work of art must, in a single pass, both produce and negate aesthetic meaning... balancing so to speak on the razor's edge between affirmative semblance and an anti-art that is bereft of semblance."³¹⁶ Wellmer's analogy of the work of art balancing on a razor's edge is helpful in thinking about how a genuine work's aesthetic and historical relations are two separate desiderata, but work in conjunction, seamlessly with one another in a single pass.³¹⁷ This balancing act is what Adorno refers to as *Schein*—the genuine work of art that is both the appearance and semblance of history through aesthetics, or the aesthetic-historical dialectic.³¹⁸

The Labyrinth does not only exemplify both aesthetic and historical relations, both of these apparent desiderata are "in tension" with one another; they each exist because of the existence of the other.³¹⁹ In other words, the aesthetic relations of *The Labyrinth* contribute to the historical relations of the space, while the historical relations contribute to the aesthetic

³¹⁴ Hohendahl, Peter Uwe. *The Fleeting Promise of Art: Adorno's Aesthetic Theory Revisited*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013, 93.

³¹⁵ Pickford, Henry W. *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013, 3.

³¹⁶ Wellmer, Albrecht. *The Persistence of Modernity: Essays on Aesthetics, Ethics, and Postmodernism*. 1st MIT Press ed. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991, 10.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Pickford, Henry W. *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013, 5.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

relations of the space—the historical and aesthetic are intimately intertwined. The aesthetics utilized Kołodziej in his works are dark, ugly, repulsive and obscene; such aesthetics are influenced by history, as they reflect Kołodziej’s experience as an Auschwitz prisoner. Holocaust scholar Lawrence L. Langer notes, “there are two forces at work in... the literature of atrocity: historical fact and imaginative truth... History provides the details—then abruptly stops. Literature seeks ways of exploring the implications and making them imaginatively available.”³²⁰ Langer suggests that when history stops, aesthetics begins... and vice versa. Langer also goes on to eloquently describes how this dialectic is at play works about the Holocaust:

The significance of the literature of atrocity is its ability to evoke the atmosphere of monstrous fantasy that strikes any student of the Holocaust, and simultaneously to suggest the exact details of the experience in a way that forces the reader to fuse and reassess the importance of both. The result is exempted from the claims of literal truth but creates an imaginative reality possessing an autonomous dignity and form that paradoxically immerses us in perceptions about the literal truth which the mind ordinarily ignores or would like to avoid.³²¹

Langer describes how Holocaust artworks, like *The Labyrinth*, evoke fantastical and imaginative atmospheres, but in a way that does not falsify or make abstract the atrocities of the past. History is portrayed in a far more genuine way through the inclusion of aesthetic and imaginative qualities. Through this, viewers are called to bear witness to the atrocities of the past.

The actual location of *The Labyrinth* is also important to consider. Pickford posits that neither aesthetic or historical relations should be prioritized, for as Adorno states “each subordination shifts the criterion of adequacy, ultimately even to a nonhistorical, nonaesthetic sphere: profit or popularity.”³²² *The Labyrinth* is in an obscure, remote location. It is not a popular tourist destination, and design differs drastically from other heavily visited sites of Holocaust memory. It is not a site constructed under the discretion of museum curators, such as the exhibitions found at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum; it was entirely

³²⁰ Langer, Lawrence L. *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975, 8-9.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 30.

³²² Pickford, Henry W. *The Sense of Semblance: Philosophical Analyses of Holocaust Art*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013, 8.

constructed by a survivor of Auschwitz himself. This location of relative neutrality contributes to the space's aesthetic-historical dialectic according to Adorno.

In his book *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), Agamben notes that testimony's authority:

...depends not on a factual truth, a conformity between something said and a fact or between memory and what happened, but rather on the immemorial relation between the unsayable and the sayable, *between the outside and inside of language*.³²³

Like Oliver, Agamben asserts that testimonies are not meant to be sources of factual evidence, but rather bear witness to the unimaginable, to that which is beyond recognition. As an artist, Kołodziej was able to express his traumatic memories—the entangled nightmares and reality of camp life—visually through his drawings. The sudden burst of creative energy allowed Kołodziej to deal with his fifty years of repressed trauma, and allowed him to give voice to the Muselmanner who could no longer speak. Agamben notes that “the atrocious news that the survivors carry from the camp to the land of human beings is precisely that it is possible to lose dignity and decency beyond imagination.”³²⁴ In this way, Kołodziej's representations of his traumatic experiences of the camp can be presented to external witnesses.

Ernst Van Alphen suggests that it is art and imaginative literature that can be “successful in simultaneously presenting, analyzing and working through this apocalyptic moment in human history,” rather than merely “historical accounts” of the event.³²⁵ He finds art and imaginative conceptions to be the most successful mediums in providing a Holocaust effect because:

A confrontation with Nazism or with the Holocaust by means of re-enactment here takes place within the representational realm of art. Our access to the past is no longer mediated by the account of a witness or a narrator, or by the eye of a photographer. We will not respond to a re-presentation of the historical event, but to a presentation of performance of it. Our response, therefore, will be direct or firsthand in a different way.³²⁶

³²³ Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999, 158, emphasis added.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, 67.

³²⁵ Van Alphen, Ernst. *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997, 11.

³²⁶ *Ibid*.

For Van Alphen, survivor art and imaginative conceptions of trauma are the most adequate way to facilitate *responses* from those who bear witness to a survivor testimony. Likewise, Daniel P. Reynolds describes how “horror can motivate comprehension” as affective moments can move beyond rational thought, becoming productive for the witness. Essentially, horror and affect can lead us to become reflective on the most difficult of topics.³²⁷ We cannot turn a blind eye to such horrors, and ultimately we are compelled to *respond*.

4.4 Insomniatic Response-ability

“*Forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination itself.*”

—Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994).³²⁸

Soon after my field study in Poland, I had an intense and vivid dream. A man, who was a survivor of Auschwitz was walking alongside me as we headed towards a venue where he was to publicly narrate his testimony. After walking for some time, the man became weak and could no longer walk. He asked me to carry him, and although he was much heavier than myself, I picked him up in my arms and carried him onwards. For me, this dream speaks to the responsibility of each and every one of us to remember the Holocaust and the evils perpetrated by the Nazis. As the number of living Holocaust and Nazi camp survivors rapidly diminishes, anxieties to preserve the memory of the Shoah rise significantly. When there are no longer survivors to speak of their experiences of the Holocaust, who or what will be left to bear witness to these atrocities? Perhaps this was the motivation behind Kołodziej’s intense and obsessive drawing. Through the creation of *The Labyrinth*, Kołodziej rendered his internal trauma external, allowing his art to function as a permanent reminder of the nightmare of the Holocaust and the Nazi camps. Ioana Cosman describes the impact of nightmares in general:

The term nightmare is used to describe a vivid and terrifying nocturnal episode during which the dreamer is awakened from sleep brutally. Nightmare is characterized by a subjective feeling of terror in which the dreamer feels a paralysis of the body

³²⁷ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018.

³²⁸ Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, 49.

movements. In most of the cases the person who just wakened from a nightmare will have a long and vivid memory of the dream.³²⁹

Cosman's description of a nightmare eerily resembles my experience of visiting *The Labyrinth*. As I walked through the exhibit, I felt brutally awakened by a subjective feeling of terror induced by the horrendous atmosphere. I physically felt as though I could not move or speak. After my visit, I continue to think of Kołodziej's art, and cannot seem to erase the memory of *The Labyrinth* from my mind. Would it be fair to refer to Kołodziej's *Labyrinth* as a public nightmare, a place people can be submerged within a horrific vision of the past? The nightmare of *The Labyrinth* awakens visitors, as the evil of humanity is rendered visible to all—this is what humans have done to each other in the past, and are capable of doing again. The evil that is hidden behind the banality of everyday life is displayed jarringly right before our eyes in the seemingly inescapable public nightmare of *The Labyrinth*, which reminds us of the horrors of the Holocaust in the hopes that we may be awakened to evil potentials of humanity.

Kołodziej believes he survived the Holocaust so that he could share his experience with the world, in the hopes of preventing future genocides and crimes against humanity. He writes:

Today, after so many years, I am absolutely sure that it is the experience of the camps, all the hells that I survived that made me what I am like now. I learned and taught myself how to live—in loneliness and in a community, and for the community, to live honestly and with dignity, to have conscience. Maybe it was worth going through? Looking at this 20th century of ours at the end of my life, I can see that nothing has changed in this earth after Auschwitz—and it was to have changed—but it is worse. The laws of the camp still rule the world. The death factory—modernized, computerized. The monster Apocalypse from my drawings continues to exist.³³⁰

What are these “laws of the camp” that Kołodziej speaks of? In *Remnants of Auschwitz* (1999), Agamben discusses how biopower will eventually reduce the inferior groups of people in our world until they themselves become the Muselmanner. He writes, “Thus the non-Aryan passes into the Jew, the Jew into the deportee... the deportee into the prisoner, until the biopolitical caesuras reach their final limit in the camp. This limit is the

³²⁹ Cosman, Ioana. “Remembering the Holocaust: Dreams During and After a Long Traumatic Experience.” *Philobiblon*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2013, pp. 116.

³³⁰ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009, 20.

Muselmann.”³³¹ For Agamben, biopower continually reduces and others the inferior to the point of absolute destruction. He writes, “beyond the Muselmann lies only the gas chamber”—total elimination. For Kołodziej, this process is always already occurring in our world, and the monster Apocalypse continues. Biopower will eventually reduce the inferior groups of people until they too become the Muselmanner.³³² How do we end this othering process of biopower? Kelly Oliver would argue that our conception and recognition of the other and otherness must be altered. There can never be “never again” until this violent biopower—the process of seeing others through a hostile gaze—is replaced with viewing others through a loving eye. We must turn towards notions of subjectivity based in love and not hate. We must never again create the Muselmanner.

My dream also reminds me of the final drawing of Kołodziej’s *Labyrinth*: the drawing depicts Kołodziej offering an image of himself as prisoner 432 to the viewer (Image 20). Before visitors exit *The Labyrinth*, this image is the final image they see. This haunting drawing seems to represent Kołodziej passing on the story of survivors to those who come to witness *The Labyrinth*. If survivors are no longer alive to speak for the Muselmanner, someone will need to speak for the survivors in order to keep the voices of the true witnesses of the Holocaust alive. The image also speaks to Oliver’s notion of vigilance—how working through trauma is a continual, never-ending process and so, vigilance becomes necessary—vigilance to elaborate, analyze and interpret—the “process through which we become who we are” and others become “othered.”³³³ Oliver posits that “subjectivity is a responsiveness to otherness and vigilance is a movement beyond ourselves towards otherness. Oliver urges us to acknowledge that “not everything that is real is recognizable to us” and that we must respond in ways that affirm response-ability.³³⁴ We are “obligated to respond to what is beyond our comprehension, beyond recognition, because ethics is possible only beyond recognition.”³³⁵ Chaffin reminds us that “action becomes a sort of ethical response to the

³³¹ Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. New York, NY: Zone Books, 1999, 85.

³³² For more on biopower, see: Foucault, Michel. “From the Repressive Hypothesis to Bio-Power (Ch. 6).” *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Harvester Press, 1982.

³³³ Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 133.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

world and the suffering we unavoidably encounter in it. Action not only defines humanness; it constitutes humanness.”³³⁶ She posits that it is art specifically that calls us to act and respond to the injustices and evil, as “the ethical call to art causes us to feel the disintegration of our humanness even as we strive to shore up and strengthen that humanness.”³³⁷ Ultimately, Kołodziej’s narrative is a “an ethical one that urges the viewer to remember within the context of a shared humanity, even while they witness its destruction.”³³⁸ Kołodziej would refer to this as the “obligation of memory” held within his drawings.³³⁹ I have chosen to refer to this obligation to remember the atrocities of the past held within survivors and witnesses to survivor testimony as “insomniatic responsibility.”

Justice is a process that never ends because it is the need for infinite response-ability, and we must remain in a state of insomnia in which otherness keeps us awake. We must never rest upon finite historical facts. We must remain vigilant in listening to and responding to the trauma of others if we are to enable wounds to mend and ensure no further wounds are inflicted. It is time we experience Marian’s nightmare in order to recognize the monster Apocalypse of biopower and hostility occurring in our lives today.

³³⁶ Chaffin, Cheryl. “Photographic Plates of Memory: Marian Kołodziej’s Return to The Labyrinth”. *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature, Culture and Media*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 89.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Kołodziej, Marian. *Marian Kołodziej—The Labyrinths: Passing 2*. Gdansk, 2009.

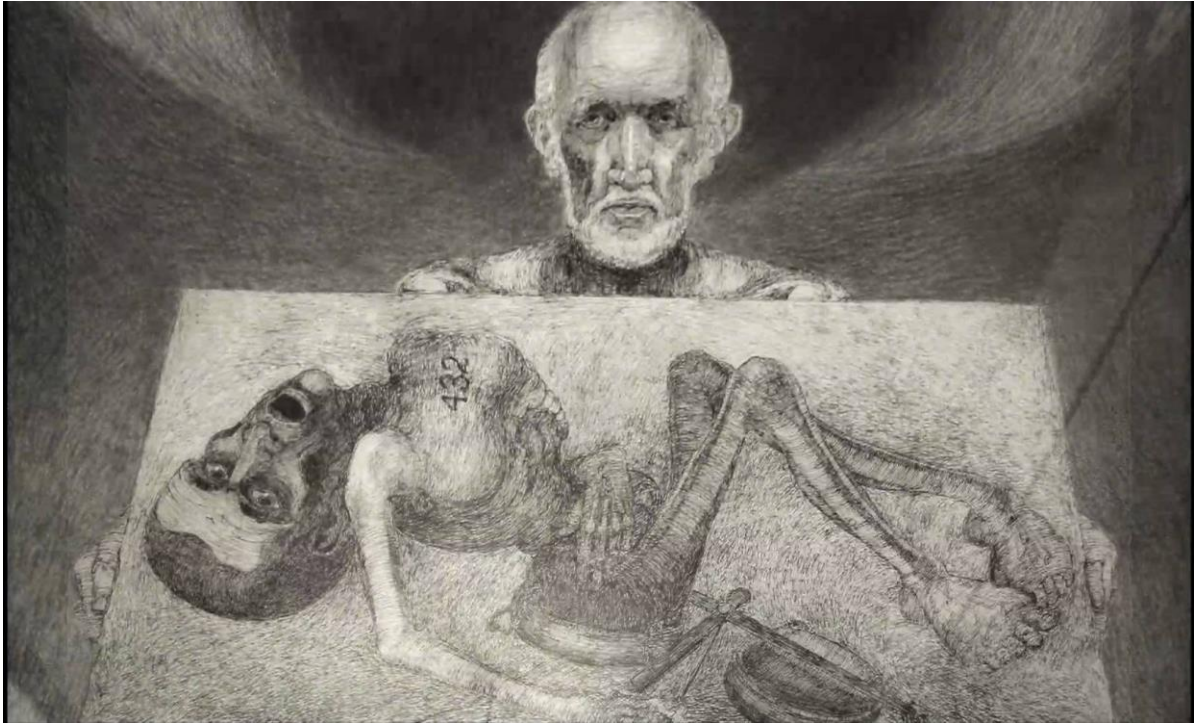


Image 20: Marian Kołodziej, Handing over the responsibility of sharing testimony. Drawing: pen and ink on paper. From: <http://wystawa.powiat.oswiecim.pl>

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I explored the mending potentials of the creative process for survivors of trauma in the context of genocide. As a distinct case study, I suggested how Marian Kołodziej was able to mend from his trauma of the Nazi camps by turning to art as a way to give form to his unarticulated memories. Ultimately, creating *The Labyrinth* allowed Kołodziej to revive his internal witness, and allowed for the construction of external witnesses to his trauma. Daniel P. Reynolds reminds us that receiving testimony does not require a direct transfer of experience, and that the “absence of a direct transfer of experience is not a failure to communicate.”³⁴⁰ While Reynolds contends that while “no degree of power or monumentality can transform one’s lived memories to another’s,” we can still achieve collective remembrance of an atrocity by bearing witness to a survivor’s art.

As an exhibition of survivor art, *The Labyrinth* gives access to what Van Alphen refers to as a Holocaust effect, allowing visitors to access a portal to Kołodziej’s traumatic past. This proximity to trauma that has for so long been deemed unrepresentable and incomprehensible by many Holocaust scholars calls visitors awake to their responsibility to remember the trauma of the Holocaust, to treat others with love, and to ensure that such an event never occurs again. I concluded that survivor art is a medium with the unique ability to effectively awaken witnesses to their responsibility to “bear witness beyond recognition”—a process Kelly Oliver asserts is essential for the restoration of subjectivity for the survivor. I coined the term “insomniatic responsibility” to refer to this process. The restoration of subjectivity ultimately stems from the transformative and social act brought to life through the process of bearing witness beyond recognition.

The Labyrinth reminds us that the trauma of the Holocaust and the wounds of the Nazi camps can never fully be healed. While survivors and those who bear witness to the stories of survivor can begin to mend this trauma, it is always present; it is a scar that will never fade. Caruth reminds us, however, that “speaking and listening from the site of trauma” can help us to begin to make sense of what we do not know about our traumatic pasts.³⁴¹ She tells us that it is trauma itself that may “provide the very link between cultures: not as a

³⁴⁰ Reynolds, Daniel P. *Postcards from Auschwitz: Holocaust Tourism and the Meaning of Remembrance*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2018, 60.

³⁴¹ Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 11.

simple understanding of the pasts of others, but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves.”³⁴²

This thesis provided an in-depth case study of one exhibition, and, as such, it will be beneficial for future research about other instances of survivor art. It is necessary to examine examples of survivor art from other genocides, and not only in the context of the Holocaust and the Nazi camps. Additionally, as the aim of this master’s thesis was to provide a starting point from which to consider the power of art in bearing witness to trauma, future and more in-depth research should be conducted on how witnesses actually receive and respond to survivor art. Such explorations will allow for a much deeper understanding of whether or not visual art is a uniquely effective medium in the process of bearing witness to what is beyond recognition.

There is also more research to be conducted on *The Labyrinth* itself. What is the future of this exhibition? Given the rise of white nationalism in Poland, along with the recent passing of “anti-defamation laws” in Poland,³⁴³ is *The Labyrinth* at risk of being commandeered by white nationalistic projects given that Kołodziej himself was a Catholic and not a Jew? Moving forward, it is critical that sites of memory such as *The Labyrinth* remain accessible to visitors to remind us of the evils of our past. James E. Young, a pioneering scholar in the study of Holocaust memorialization, asserts that it is not enough to simply ask how memorials remember the past; we also need to ask, “to what ends we have remembered”—that is, how is “response to the current moment facilitated in light of the remembered past”?³⁴⁴ Young reminds us that commenting on the contours of memorials is not enough; “this is to recognize that the shape of memory cannot be divorced from the actions taken on its behalf.”³⁴⁵ It is necessary to be vigilant and ensure *The Labyrinth* remains a site of bearing witness to what is beyond recognition. This process of witnessing allows survivors to mend, and calls those who bear witness to survivor testimony awake to the atrocities of the past in the hopes that they will never be forgotten.

³⁴² Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, 11.

³⁴³ On February 1 2018, “Polish President Andrzej Duda signed into law an anti-defamation bill that makes it illegal to attribute responsibility for or complicity during the Holocaust to the Polish nation or state” (<http://time.com/5128341/poland-holocaust-law/>).

³⁴⁴ Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993, 15.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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