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This book was set in Janson Text by Graphic Composition, Inc.  
Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Azoulay, Ariella.

Death's showcase / Ariella Azoulay; translated by Ruvik Danieli.

p. cm.

Collection of works previously published chiefly in Hebrew. With new works and introduction.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-262-01182-4 (hc.: alk. paper)

1. Death in art. 2. Photography, Artistic. 3. Artists and museums. 4. Arts, Israeli—20th century. 5. Death—Psychological aspects. 6. Postmodernism. I. Title.

NX650.D4 .A99 2001

306.9'09'04—dc21

00-064600

# DEATH'S SHOWCASE



## ADOLF HITLER AND EVA BRAUN

Dear customer: As soon as you put on the state-of-the-art headgear, body suit, and electronic sensors, you find yourself in the bunker's livingroom. Late April 1945. The subterranean quarters are comfortable and opulent, if somewhat morose. The noise of exploding bombs is dimmed by soundproof walls, but you sense the blasts by the shudders sent through rooms and up your body. Your lover is about to arrive. You head to the bathroom to tidy yourself up. You look into the mirror, leaning forward, and your own image is revealed to you for the first time. You are blond, your face is still young, your complexion pinkish-pure, your bosom ample. You seem truly good-natured. Anyone would be thrilled to be you, but for you it should merely be a given—you are Eva Braun. . . . Excitement jolts through your body when you hear the steps outside. When he opens the door, you gasp at the sight of his small mustache. Because you are not only Eva, it seems menacing, almost monstrous. But everything around the moustache is so congenial. He comes toward you with such warmth, his smile tired, his arms open to embrace you. Remember—you are Eva. When Hitler closes his arms around you, the view darkens, and you are surrounded by his presence. You are almost overwhelmed with titillation when you feel the whiskers of that famous little facial tuft tickle your ear and the back of your neck. . . . You realize, with some pride that you are the sanctuary of this special man, your lover.

—ROSEN, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*

#### RESISTANCE TO MEMORY

Who is the “dear customer” who appears in this appeal, which was posted at the entrance to Roe Rosen’s 1997 exhibition? The Hebrew text addresses the customer first in the masculine—“but you [m.] sense the blasts by the shudders sent through the rooms and your body”—and then in the feminine—“Anyone would be happy to be you [f.]” The customer turns into someone else, who is no longer he himself but who is not yet who he is to become. Ostensibly there is a tension here between the generalized identity of a “customer” (a sort of neutral position that, in principle, anyone is invited to occupy) and the specific identity of “Eva Braun” (Adolf Hitler’s beloved). However, the tension between masculine and feminine as well as generalized and specific obscures a more complex set of identities—a system in which the specific, fixed identity loses its rigid boundaries and can be described only in terms of becoming, of transforming, of changing.<sup>1</sup> The Eva Braun identity that is offered to the customer in the exhibition is already, as can be gleaned from this short text, part of the customer’s identity. The text doesn’t leave the customer the option of not

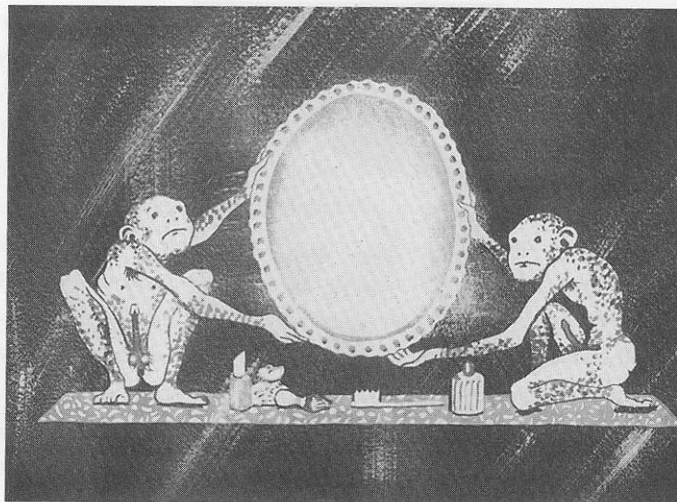
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1. On the concept of becoming (*devenir*), see Deleuze and Guattari (1980).



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, details, 1997

always being Eva Braun. The text doesn't refer to two separate and distinct characters that, by some process of transformation (disguise, identification, makeup, simulation), turn one into the other but refers instead to a sequence of becoming. The mirror, the distinctive place of the self-portrait, appears in this short text as the place in which one watches oneself becoming someone else: "You look in the mirror, leaning forward, and your own image is revealed to you for the first time. You are blond." Is Eva Braun always and already part of the customer's identity? Is the customer's yearning toward Eva Braun also—necessarily—a yearning toward the object of her desire, Adolf Hitler? Is the yearning—toward someone, to be someone, to see how he appears in his intimacy, to see out of his intimacy, to yearn from inside of him—necessarily a betrayal of (personal) identity, (societal) belonging, (museum) function, and (civilian—the work of memory and remembrance) destiny? Is it clear that the customer's personal identity distinguishes between himself and the set of identities offered to him at the exhibition? What is this identity that is supposed to function like a suit of armor in the face of the temptations offered to him? Does the exhibition even ask the customer whether he wants to be Eva Braun?



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, details, 1997

Rosen's exhibition places the museum spectator in the intimacy of the bedroom—and not just any bedroom but the bedroom of the Berlin bunker that belonged to Eva Braun and Adolf Hitler. A small two- or three-year-old boy looks down from the bunker's wall. A dotted barber's apron lies across the boy's shoulders; two pairs of gigantic scissors fence above his hair. The child's black eyes are open wide and blazingly intense, his lips are rounded like a button, and Hitler's mustache—a relatively small black rectangle, an abstract and ostensibly meaningless form, but nonetheless one that cannot be mistaken—adorns his face. The face is that of Roe Rosen as a child; its reflection that of Adolf Hitler. The boy has seemingly succeeded in his Oedipal mission. He has murdered the father and penetrated into the mother's bedroom in the guise of the father. But he doesn't suffice with that. He wants to produce more and more of the mother figure, of Eva Braun—an abundance, a proliferation, and a flowering of Eva Braun.

You, dear customer, are invited to be Eva Braun: the surplus value, the interest, the profit. "I" (Roe Rosen) am Adolf Hitler. Come hither, look in the mirror. Two monkeys with their weapons drawn will hold up the mirror for you. You need to look into it until your image appears, is revealed out of its own splendor, coalesces with the instruments, images, and symbols that have already passed through this image-

producing mirror. These things, images, and symbols have passed through the mirror and yet remain forever, impossible to be erased completely. It remains impossible to create a portrait out of nothing or one that doesn't bear the traces of other portraits. Look into the mirror that is being held up to you for another moment. That little mustache may insinuate itself between your own nose and upper lip. Or desire may lead you to contemplate the skin of your beloved, who is managing Europe's destiny from your bedroom.

Sacrilege? What is sacrilege in your eyes, dear spectator—the reenactment of the Oedipus story, the fact that Hitler plays the father's role? Or maybe it's the image of Roe Rosen, a three-year-old boy festively wearing Hitler's mustache. Is it the boy's presence in your bedroom, or maybe your presence in Hitler's and Eva Braun's bedroom, with you taking the place of the latter? Indeed, are these all the possibilities? Maybe the sacrilege lies in the mutual presence of you and Roe Rosen on "this" side of memory (and why should we immediately divide memory into sides; is it not everyone's duty to remember the same thing?). Maybe it's your surprise at discovering that this exercise doesn't concern remembrance at all or any connection between an experienced event and its recall in memory but that it does concern a game of fantasies and desires, the fabrication of pictures and scenes, roleplaying, the staging of situations, the realization of anxieties. However, the fabrication of images and memories (and this you must have felt as soon as you stepped inside the exhibition) is not part of the familiar and reassuring game of Holocaust remembrance. But who said anything here about the Holocaust or the work of commemoration, which is a framework that provides each person with a predefined role and makes clear-cut distinctions—of profession, generation, ethnic, and class—between the various functionaries?

Dear customer, if this exhibition is a sacrilege in your eyes, do not expect this text to rehabilitate the sanctity. The above questions are not in the nature of open questions to which this text is meant as a reply. They appear sequentially, in a series, to outline the range of discussion. These questions seek to strengthen the oppressiveness, annoyance, uncertainty, discontent, and discomfiture elicited by Rosen's exhibition—from its appeal to the museum spectator as a customer, through its intimate treatment of the "Nazi" body, and until its conclusion as an allegory for the state of painting. The exhibition—and this is the only merchandise that this text attempts to serve to its customers in a wrapping—seeks to arouse a scandal and to profane, not as a purposeful action in its own right but only to reemphasize that "the real sacrilege, if at all, is Hiroshima itself." The sacrilege doesn't lie in a sentence that

interjects “Hiroshima” into a discussion that is supposed to concern “the Holocaust.”<sup>2</sup> The sacrilege doesn’t lie in the discussion of the horror in a bedroom or the link this text posits between two events, over the separation of which an army of gatekeepers is appointed (despite the connection between them derived from the event that encompasses them both and is known as “World War II”), but the real sacrilege is “Hiroshima,” “extermination of the gypsies,” “extermination of the Jews,” “extermination of the ill,” or in the words of Marguerite Duras (1961, 9) in the introduction to her screenplay for the movie *Hiroshima Mon Amour*:

This beginning, this official parade of already well-known horrors from Hiroshima, recalled a hotel bed, this *sacrilegious* recollection, is voluntary. One can talk about Hiroshima anywhere, even in a hotel bed, during a chance, and adulterous, love affair. The bodies of both protagonists, who are really in love with each other, will remind us of this. What is really sacrilegious, if anything is, is Hiroshima itself. There’s no point of being hypocritical and avoiding that issue.

The bite of the name in the living flesh of events—like the boundary between “World War II” and “Hiroshima”—plays a central role in director Alain Renais’s movie *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. The movie begins with a close-up of two naked bodies intertwined. The bodies appear limbless, and for several seconds they are separated from one another by layers of sweat, dust, dew, ointment, rash, burn. If not for these layers, which alternately replace one another, the bodies would merge into each other completely and become a single undifferentiated pile of body. From out of this wounded, unifying, rehabilitating, caressing, incisive, doting intimacy, from

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2. Quite a few works, books, and films made since *Hiroshima Mon Amour* propose new possibilities of speech deviating beyond the boundaries posed by private names (such as “Hiroshima,” “Auschwitz,” or “Rwanda”) or by the names of the events that are part of them (“Holocaust,” “World War I,” “World War II,” or “ethnic cleansing”). By deviating beyond the boundaries posed by the name itself, these works seek a way out of the economy that turns the name into a resource—of which more and more can be produced, indeed, but only within permitted boundaries that are determined not according to the essence of the resource itself but according to the cultural context of its exploitation. Events close together in time and place (such as the “Holocaust,” “Hiroshima,” and “World War II”) remain closed loops that refuse to open up and become linked together in certain parallel stories for fear of losing their unique identity. Thus, we find some who would posit World War II as the primary event, place the Holocaust as just a marginal addendum to it, and maintain this hierarchical relation between the two events. Others would present World War II from the perspective of the Holocaust and posit the latter as the reason for, and essence of, the former. Some would prefer to remove Hiroshima from the arena in order to preserve World War II as a European event and continue associating the concept of extermination solely with the Jewish Holocaust, while others would present the annihilation of Hiroshima as the end of the war or as the beginning of a new era after the war and thus obliterate its significance.



out of this complete loss of boundaries and identities, one of them emerges, relocates outside, attempts to testify to his identity and express it. Considering the matter, he states in reproof: "You didn't see anything in Hiroshima." "I saw everything in Hiroshima," replies the woman. "Everything." "You didn't see anything in Hiroshima," he insists. As opposed to his "nothing," she sticks to her "everything." After a few more such lines, she concedes and retreats. It only then becomes clear to the spectators that the man is Japanese, the woman French. He can be identified by gaze, she by voice. When their national identities are disclosed onscreen and the geographical distance between them with all its attendant historical ramifications becomes clear, she begins to withdraw from her adamant position and to detail exactly what she did see: museum, hospital, news reports. "Four times in the museum," she tells him repeatedly. At this point the equilibrium that obtained between the declarations of the two, between his "nothing" and her "everything," is disrupted. As soon as the equilibrium is disrupted, the dialogue between them becomes focused on the specificity of each one's point of view—Japanese versus French. You, a French woman who celebrated the victory at the end of World War II, "didn't see anything in Hiroshima." How could you have seen anything? All you could see in France was victory, he seems to be saying to her.

At this point in the movie, the woman contrives a change in the dialogue between them. At the start of the dialogue, she had posed her gaze as equal to his. Afterward, when he negated her point of view and berated her pretension to have seen something in Hiroshima, she was pushed into the position of justifying herself as if she had something to prove: I saw the horror, I understand, I know, I remember, I consecrate. He refuses to be persuaded. And then—and this is the turning point of the movie—she gives up any pretension to prove or demonstrate or even any pretension to see. She addresses his words at their face value, ignoring the context of remonstrance, negation, and exclusion—you, as a French woman, didn't see anything—and simply tries to correct his mistake. France celebrated the victory, I didn't celebrate any victory.<sup>3</sup> I didn't celebrate the victory because I identified with the victims of Hiroshima, who had been wiped from the face of the earth. Simply, France isn't me. Unlike the Japanese man, who would like to consecrate the memory of Hiroshima and place it on the level of the sublime, the French woman is trying to do the exact opposite—to desubliminate the memory. From here on, throughout the entire movie, she tells the story of her love for a German soldier who was shot on the

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3. "Victory" here refers to the end of World War II rather than the liberation of France.

day of France's liberation. The enemy that France exterminated was her lover. On the day that France exterminated her enemy—the woman's lover—she herself became an outcast, became the enemy of France.

In effect, as soon as the Japanese man attempts to proscribe her from a certain community of gaze, as soon as he tries to deprive her point of view of its legitimacy, she returns or is returned to the trauma of being ostracized by her family and townsfolk. She returns to the day on which France was liberated, her lover was shot to death and she was exposed as the German officer's beloved. She returns to the day on which her head was shaved and she was incarcerated in a cellar. And she is trying to get him back to the first shot of the movie, to the moment in which their bodies are melded together and memory doesn't function as an instrument of exclusion. Unlike the regime of gaze that he would like to impose (the nationalist gaze that constitutes its subjects and draws the boundaries of their field of vision), she is trying to rehabilitate contact, both her lost contact with the German officer's body and the contact that just now she and her Japanese lover had been a part of and that has been erased beneath the crush of the gaze. When she recalls in his ears her meeting with her dying lover, she doesn't merely pose the Japanese man as an eyewitness to her story as an addressee; she poses him as her dying German lover and demands that he impersonate him with his body. She appeals to him as if she were there right now, on the railroad platform, and he, the Japanese man, was lying and dying on the platform like the German. She makes it impossible for him to be outside the story that she is now enacting, in the act of remembrance, and thus she manages to resist memory as a fixed picture, a museum image on a wall, which he or she can look at, process, and interpret.

In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Renais resists the traditional roles of gaze, testimony, and proof in the economy of memory, while trying to remove memory out of the territory of gaze and nationality into the territory of physical contact and the personal. But he also proposes new boundaries for the narrative of the horror: Hiroshima without "Hiroshima." The movie proposes a secularization of memory and its intertwinement in the individual's—any individual's—daily work of mourning, without examining the extent of his proximity to the "Trauma" with a capital T. The price (in other words, forgetfulness) is clear, and in the 1950s Renais already found it a worthwhile price to pay. In the early fifties, a few years before he shot *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, Renais had shot a short documentary film, *Night and Fog*, about the Nazi extermination apparatus, in which he used footage from period newsreels (Caruth, 1994, 128):

If one doesn't forget, one can neither live nor act. The problem was posed for me when I made *Night and Fog*. It wasn't a matter of making another monument to destruction but to think of the present and the future. Forgetting must become constructive. It is necessary, on the individual plane just as on the collective plane. What is always necessary is to act. Despair is inaction, the withdrawal into the self. The danger is to stop moving forward.

After *Night and Fog*, Renais was commissioned to direct a documentary film about "Hiroshima." A long time after working on the archives relating to the destruction of Hiroshima, he decided to devote a feature film to the catastrophe, fearing that if he did make a documentary film about Hiroshima, it would look too much like the movie he'd made about the Holocaust. Renais in effect came out against the pretension and injunction to document, remember, and propagate and posed forgetfulness as the condition, the basis, for exchange relations with the present and future. In a certain sense, Renais's response resembles that of Claude Lantzman, the director of the 1985 movie *Holocaust*. Where Renais insists on making manifest forgetfulness, Lantzman tries to make manifest incomprehension. Forgetfulness, like incomprehension, is presented as a condition for the work of memory (Lantzman, quoted in Rothman, 1997):

It is enough to formulate the question in the simplest terms, to ask, "Why were the Jews killed?" The question immediately reveals its obscenity in the project of understanding. Not to understand was my iron law during all the years of the elaboration and production of *Shoa*. I had clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only operative, attitude. This blindness was for me the vital condition for creation.

Both Renais and Lantzman are opposed to memory as a purposeful activity whose role is to understand the past or to transmit its lessons to the future. Both of them come out against economies of memory centered on the practice of gaze—the investigative gaze or the incisive gaze—whose aim is to present to the spectator a meaningful story, which features causal development and a teleological structure, a readable story based on conventions amenable to decipherment, a story that ostensibly evokes an identification with it, a tangible story that provides visual evidence. Serge Daney (1997, 615), the French cinema critic, spoke in this context of a visual story that demands "optical confirmation" of the spectator, confirmation that what is seen does indeed exist, a "reception perfect" signal like the technical confirmation provided by a fax machine after the transmission of information has been successfully concluded.

At the beginning of *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, when confronted with the Japanese man's remonstrance, the French woman is obliged to provide such optical confirmation. But quickly she draws herself together and challenges the very rules of the memory game. Confirmation of the seen in the framework of such an optical procedure in effect erases the field of vision and its spectrum of contingent possibilities, demarcating it in the framework of a closed exchange economy that produces and manages subjects, data, and merchandise. Within this closed economy, memory is presented as a separate activity, isolated from mundane routine and from economic, political, and personal life, which is managed as an activity with independent patterns of looking at, solemnizing, and sanctifying the "exhibits" of memory.<sup>4</sup> This activity makes possible both the transformation of memory into an exhibit worthy of interpretation and the constitution of the spectator as an interpreting subject who is called on to look at the horror, confirm it, take part in the nationalist story in which it is intertwined, and become a subject of the transmitted lesson. The game of mutual recognition between memory (as an exhibit meant for interpretation) and subjects (who are invited to interpret it) is conducted within institutional boundaries that seek to preserve the memory, preserve the modes of its preservation, and thus impose restrictions on the intertextual network inside which an exhibit may be interpreted. For example, restrictions arise that stem from the constitution of the Holocaust as a unique and incomparable event.

Renis and Lantzman would like to deviate from the economies of memory described above. They propose an open and diffusive economy whose products cannot be determined in advance and may be determined anew at any time, just as the economy can move from one area of meaning to another. This is an economy based on recognizing the limitation of profit ("the legacy of the Holocaust") or loss ("Hiroshima forgotten"), which can be prognosticated, managed and controlled. It seeks to leave an opening for gaze, contact, and speech, which are not predicated on purpose and intentions. Lantzman, Renais, and Duras are actually speaking about an economy predicated on resistance to memory as sanctifier, a productive resistance that leaves its traces out of and around which more and more resistance activity can be strung together. This resistance engenders—by happenstance, without benefit of guidance or management—contingent traces of memory. They do not propose eliminating memory but eliminating the management of memory. They propose re-

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4. A distinctive example of such patterns are the remembrance rooms in Holocaust museums, which adopt modernist architecture and art (a bare white space and monochromatic abstract painting) to create a shrine to the view as the locus of memory (see the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.).

sistance to memory as guide, memory with purpose, and memory managed by agents who claim a monopoly because of their greater proximity to the truth of the event or because they are worthier representatives of the event and its victims. Resistance to memory as sanctifier means resistance to memory that presents itself as worthy. Memory, then, is an act of resistance—fragmentary in nature, eluding agreement, incomplete, qualified, unclosed, indeterminate.

#### THE MUSEUM MERCHANDISE

In the context of the museum space, resistance to memory takes on additional dimensions manifested by the museum object and its relationship to the spectator. Two recent projects challenge these dimensions from cultural, historical, and economic aspects. French artist Marie Ange Guilleminot dealt with Hiroshima and the trauma of obliteration—of the city, of life, of memory. Roe Rosen dealt with the memory of Hitler and the trauma of this memory. In relation to the official remembrance activity of the Holocaust or Hiroshima, both these projects (to paraphrase Duras) are concerned with the intentional profanation of memory. Both projects would like to be subsumed within established modes and patterns of consumption (such as buying and selling) and to come out against the introspective silence of commemoration, against the role of gaze and contemplation, against the vacuum of what cannot be represented, and to divert exchange relations with the spectator to other areas. Guilleminot's project begins with an item for sale in the museum gift shop; Rosen's begins with an appeal to the museum spectator as a customer and with the display of Rosen's art as merchandise offered to satisfy the customer's needs. Both projects take as their point of departure the immediate language and practice of consumption, without benefit of disguise or camouflage. Both refuse to adopt capitalistic exchange relations as is but seek to emphasize and to problematize the exchange relations between the producer of memory and the consumer of memory. Both projects are searching for a specific and unique exchange economy that doesn't abide by the rules of the game of capitalist economics or by the rules of the game of the museum economy, which sanctify the visible and manufacture the conditions for its sanctified appearance.

What is the museal economy? The museum, whether of history or art, exhibits and preserves the different, the deviant, the unique, the rare. This has been the museum's historic purpose ever since it was established in the late eighteenth century. Actually, the museum was established as a shrine of negation: what's collected inside is distinguished by the negation of everything that came before it and constitutes an incomparable uniqueness. The museum must find objects in their purest state and

preserve them. This is the social and cultural logic underlying the museum as an institution that provides preservation services to society through a team of experts. However, the museum isn't just an agent of preservation. Its portrayal from this viewpoint obscures another aspect of museum activity that is anchored in the economic logic of capitalist society, of which the museum is a part. The museum owns capital and merchandise, and it participates in a complex network of cultural, political, social, and economic exchange relations.

The object exhibited in the museum is also merchandise. It has use value and exchange value in each of the aforementioned spheres—cultural, economic, and political. The unique structure of museum merchandise expresses itself in both its use value and its exchange value. First, this merchandise is a sign. Consumption of the sign (use of it) is manifested by the act of interpretation. The consumption of museum merchandise—its interpretation—is embedded in the framework of a story. Out of this use emerges a unique exchange system that supports the economic system but is not identical to it. In the framework of this exchange system, something of the exhibit is exchanged but the work remains in the possession of its owner. The institution, the owner or representative by proxy of the exhibit, is always offering the use of the work to the next spectator in line. Spectators purchase tickets that entitle them to view the exhibit, to add to their accumulated experiential capital the fact that they “have seen it,” and to be among those who recognize both the exhibit and its value. In the framework of the exchange relations that the museum makes possible between the spectator and the work, between the spectator and the interpreter or critic, and between one spectator and the next, the merchandise is exchanged, and recognition and interpretation are accumulated as virtual property.

The use value and exchange value of museum merchandise pull in different directions. The use value, which is determined in the act of interpretation, points to the particularity and uniqueness of the exhibit; otherwise the exhibit would be unworthy of consumption (interpretation). The use value of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, for instance, is supposed to be derived from the particularity of its form and content as an object; otherwise, there would be no point to collecting it inside the museum. The exchange value points in the other direction, toward the exchangeability of the exhibit; otherwise, it would not be found worthy of traveling through the museal exchange networks. The exchange value of the same *Fountain* is to be derived from its difference and distinctiveness from all prior works; otherwise, there would be no point to collecting it inside the museum. The exhibit's use value obscures the fact that the meaning that must be interpreted from within the exhibit is not contained within it at all but actually stems from a place in the exchange network

of other merchandise. Its exchange value obscures its particularity, which imposes restrictions on virtual exchange relations in a way that prevents its simple exchange by any other merchandise. The museum exhibit is the point of contact between these two values: use value, (from which we may infer that the source of the capital lies in the exhibit itself and its specific weight) and exchange value (from which we may infer that capital is produced, increased, and accumulated in the very act of exchange). Use value suggests an attempt to preserve the exhibit as it is—entangled in its original exchange networks, accumulating layers of age and authenticity. On the other hand, exchange value suggests an attempt to mobilize the exhibit as much as possible—to transport it from one exchange network to another (for example, to exhibit it at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and at the Museum of Contemporary Art in California) so that it will circulate inside them and accumulate layers of capital simply by virtue of its movement in the framework of these networks and among them.

The museum exhibit—whether belonging to the museum of art, science, history, or the Holocaust—is subject, to varying degrees, to the twofold logic of merchandise (use value and exchange value) I have described above. Nevertheless, the exhibit usually, though not always, benefits from an image that is preserved because of its rarity, uniqueness, and worthiness of being preserved. Against the background of this contention concerning the twofold nature of the museum exhibit, I would like to examine the encounter between the rules of museum discourse and those of discourse concerning the Holocaust.

At the center of discourse concerning the Holocaust stands a deviant, unique, rare, and extraordinary event comparable to none other. On examination, the encounter between museum discourse and discourse concerning the Holocaust would seem to be the ultimate encounter between two discourses, at the basis of which stands the category of uniqueness, regulating their logic of action. However, the unique has a different standing in each of these discourses. The purpose of the discourse concerning the Holocaust is to preserve the unique in its uniqueness and to protect it from any other unique event—to expurgate any event that threatens to challenge this uniqueness and share the position of unique horror that the Holocaust occupies.<sup>5</sup> In the discourse concerning the Holocaust, the unique is derived from the

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5. One of the more hair-raising cases of an encounter between the Holocaust and the logic of the museum occurred in real time in Prague during World War II, while the Holocaust was still an ongoing process of extermination. Nazis and Jews began a museum to commemorate the vanishing Jewish race, which demonstrated the Nazis' use of the museum institution and discourse as well as a manifestation of the

“use value” of the signifier “Holocaust”—the restrictions imposed on interpretations of the object called the Holocaust or of the Holocaust as object. The uniqueness of the Holocaust will not be allowed to concede ground before the uniqueness of any other event. In museum discourse, on the other hand, uniqueness is derived from the “exchange value” of the exhibit—from the fact that each exhibit is distinguished anew from all the other exhibits being transmuted at the same time in the exchange network. In other words, the purpose of museum discourse is to exhibit and preserve the unique but also to replace one instance of the unique with another each time and to always preserve a place for the new instance of the unique that is bound to follow. In this sense, a museum of contemporary art is based on the existence of a space intended for the unique—an empty space that functions on the principle of alternately being filled and emptied.

#### THE EXHIBITION

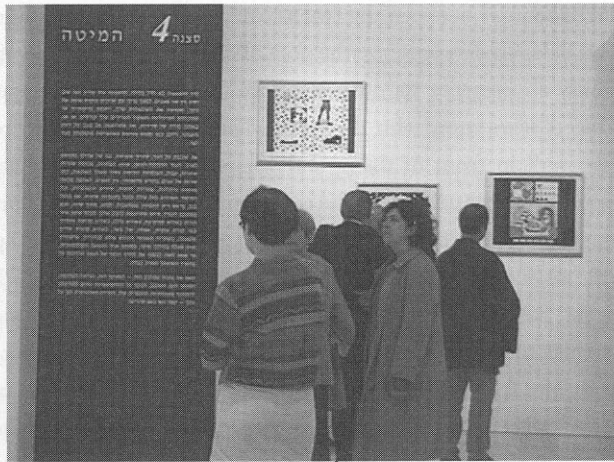
The contrary proclivity of the rules of these two discourse systems of the museum and the Holocaust (which I pointed to above) can be of assistance in analyzing the patterns of viewing, reception, and distribution of Roe Rosen’s exhibition. The appeal to the spectator that Rosen’s exhibition proposes shatters the network of relations that has been customary in the museum ever since its establishment: a silent, dumb object faced by an interpreting subject who knows how to make the visible speak out.<sup>6</sup> Instead of this network of relations, Rosen’s exhibition posits the spectator as an attentive, speechless, nonsovereign subject, a recidivous consumer who is exposed to new possibilities and temptations, enchanted by the wonders of virtual reality, and embroiled from the start of the exhibition in a mimetic vortex inviting him or her to become anyone or anything that is met along the way. The exhibition is built as a walkway to be negotiated at reading or viewing pace, consisting of ten

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possibility contained in the institution itself. Nazis and Jews joined together in common purpose to preserve the unique and the authentic, which would soon become rare and immediately thereafter turn into a memory of something that had been annihilated. The Nazis made use of museum logic to establish a museum that would participate in the extermination of the Jewish race and also in the purification and preservation of authentic Jewishness. The only thing left after the war would be the rarest and most unique memory that could be extracted from it: the Jew whose actuality had become abstract. Extermination as the condition for the preservation of the unique and authentic was a concept that underlay the extermination of everything that didn’t suit the authentically German. With the establishment of the museum for the vanishing Jewish race, a link was extended between the nation-state and the museum that had formerly been hidden from view.

6. It should be noted that at this stage the interpreting subject knows how to make the visible speak out but he is requested to do so outside the museum space. In other words, in the exhibition space he’s invited to be just as mute as the object. The only voices heard in the exhibition space are those that are authorized by the museum in the guise of its exhibition guides.





Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, general view of the exhibition, 1997

stations (ten chapters laid out along ten placards of text) and sixty black-and-white paintings of various size but all relatively small (see photo above). The viewing course is elucidated by the placards. The text appeals to the spectator and describes—as in a running voice-over commentary—how the customer becomes Eva Braun as she awaits Adolf Hitler’s arrival, gets into bed with him, sheds a tear, commits suicide, and turns into a wax statue or a two-dimensional figure in hell. In this exhibition, speech emanates not from the interpreting subject but from the wall. This speech is precedent to the subject. It interprets the subject, describes the subject’s actions, offers him or her a way—but also remains attentive to the conflict in which the subject is embroiled. For instance, in the concluding statement of the first station’s placard: “Who would have believed it! In fact, you read German even if you don’t understand a word. After all, it’s your mother tongue—since you are Eva Braun.” The exhibition preserves the pole of muteness, but, contrary to the usual structure (the mute object), it’s on the spectator’s side.

This is a radical inversion proposed by Rosen’s exhibition because it strikes at the ostensible sovereignty of the spectator-citizen in the museum. The latter has internalized the rules of the discourse and knows what behavior is expected of a spectator who comes to a museum. This radical inversion clearly deviates from the rules of museum discourse, from the rules of discourse concerning the Holocaust, and

from the usual encounter between the two as well. The machinery of museum discourse has been delegated to preserve the pole of muteness on the side of the object and consequently to preserve its own standing and that of the spectators as interpreting subjects who know who they are, where they are coming from, what's hanging on the wall in front of them, and where they are going. Ever since its establishment over two centuries ago, the museum has been one of the primary arenas for the interpreting subject who knows how to make the mute object speak out—how to place the object in the framework of a story—“art,” “Holocaust,” “Israeli art,” or “art concerned with the Holocaust.” Both the producer and the consumer of art are educated to become subjects of art who know how to make it speak out.<sup>7</sup> The museum is the main site for acquiring the technique of making an object speak out. It resembles a huge concert hall where people gather to listen—through and beyond the works of art—to the transcendent law of art. Everyone who takes an active part in the field of art agrees that a worthy object is a mute object, an object that mustn't appear arbitrary (so as to justify the interpretative effort) but that mustn't appear too bespoken or too outspoken either (also to justify the interpretative effort).<sup>8</sup> This intermediate situation—neither arbitrary nor able to speak for itself—is essential not to the object but to the exchange relations subsisting among the different agents looking at, speaking about, and exhibiting it. Spectators, critics and interpreters are all dedicated to preserving and rehabilitating—if need should arise—the exhibit's space of meanings and intertwinement in the traditional exchange system each time. In the case of Rosen's exhibition, the overturning of the traditional relation between exhibit and spectator precipitated a surfeit of activity, the purpose of which was the rehabilitation of the exhibit's space of meanings and its incorporation into the familiar pattern. This activity actually required turning a blind eye to the visible and the bespoken from the walls, so that the exhibition could be embedded in a sort of security zone in which rages an ostensibly furious controversy on the lines of “Israeli art and the Holocaust.” The polemics, vigorous and vociferous as they may be, actually function as an apparatus that reaffirms the customary distinctions, the traditional relations, and the consensual divisions of labor by successfully jump-starting the museal engine—the engine of differentiation.

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7. For more on the way in which the museum takes part in constituting interpreting subjects who acknowledge the transcendent value of art, see the last chapter.

8. In my book *TRaining for ART: A Critique of the Museal Economy* (Azoulay, 1999a), I described the patterns of behavior and exchange relations displayed in the home of artist Rafi Lavi and how the individuals who trained and visited this place of knowledge (the Lavi home) learned how to see art, speak about art, speak like artists, and behave like artists (Azoulay, 1999a).

## THE POLEMICS

The controversy surrounding Rosen's Eva Braun and Adolf Hitler exhibition was characterized by a polarization of opinion between those who castigated it, believing that it did not belong inside a museum, and those who crowned it as one of the important exhibitions ever seen in Israel. Detractors and enthusiasts alike used identical categories, pointing to the exhibition as a turning point, a boundary marker, the crossing of a border: "his excellent, stimulating, undermining exhibition"; "there's a limit to everything and the limit is pornographic exploitation of the Holocaust"; "an important document in the annals of sensationalism"; "one of the most moving exhibitions ever seen in Israel"; "a profane transgression."<sup>9</sup>

Spectators at Rosen's exhibition, then, can be divided into those who were for it and thought it was *deviant, unusual, and disturbing* and those who were against it and thought it was *deviant, unusual, and disturbing*. Detractors thought that these characteristics were exactly the reason that the exhibit should be removed from the museum walls, while supporters thought that for the same reason the exhibition's run should be extended so that more people could see it. Both positions served a polemical function for each other and also a confirmatory function as well. The fact that detractors sought to silence the exhibition was grasped by supporters as proof that the exhibition was indeed disturbing and worthy of being exhibited, while the fact that supporters considered the exhibition to be a stimulating and disturbing event convinced detractors that the supporters' only interest was in sensationalism—in "getting attention at any cost."

This mirror-image response stems from the connection between museum discourse and discourse concerning the Holocaust. Besides the relation to the unique that I discussed earlier, a dimension of universality characterizes them both. Anyone is entitled—and even obliged—to partake in the memory of the Holocaust because it bears a universal message. Anyone is entitled to take part in the act of viewing what's inside the museum because what's exhibited there is presumed to have universal value. Both discourses are custodial and preservative, and the speaker-spectators in them have proved their ability to listen to (and, of course, interpret) the objects that need to be preserved. Both involve an unbiased subject (spectator or speaker) who is capable of clearing the museal arena pending the appearance of nonmediated knowledge (museum knowledge or knowledge concerning the Holocaust). The speakers in the framework of these discourses are supposed to serve

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9. See Breitberg-Semel (1997), Gladman (1997), Green (1997), Gurevich (1997), Riegler and Trebelisi-Chadad (1997), Rosen and Yahav (1997), Samet (1997), Sheffy (1997), Shragay (1997), Tsippor (1997), Yosifon (1997).

knowledge, worship it, and be subject to it. The “anyone” who is invited to be a spectator at the exhibits of these two discourses is supposed to constitute himself in the image of the “expert”—a universal, unbiased subject of knowledge. In principle, anyone is entitled to adopt this persona, but in practice, the only ones who are entitled are those who are already part of the formal or symbolic community that apports entitlement and takes part in the transformation of “anyone” into an entitled person. The rejection of Arafat’s request to visit the Holocaust Museum in Washington a few years ago exposed the inner workings of the entitlement machinery. That machine cranks out entry permits only to those subjects who have already been acknowledged as entitled and as capable of listening to the museum exhibit of the Holocaust and extrapolating from it the universal lesson of the memory of the Holocaust. In prevalent Jewish and Israeli discourse, that lesson is nothing other than the uniqueness of the Jewish victims, the uniqueness of the event, the Jewish and Israeli monopoly over the representation of the event, and the acceptance of these conclusions as universal principles that everyone is supposed to acknowledge and agree to (see Elkana, 1988; Zuckerman, 1993; Ophir, 1987). This entitlement apparatus is managed by a team of experts who have been delegated to interpret the exhibits and make them speak out. They are its ideal consumers, according to the logic of merchandise described above. In practice, their role is to preserve the exchange value of the exhibit—to guard the boundaries of the exchange relations and the restrictions attached to them so that the consumption of the object will be conducted by all who enter into the exchange relations in exactly the same manner.<sup>10</sup>

#### SEEING HOLOCAUST

Immediately after Rosen’s exhibition *Live and Die as Eva Braun* opened, it was labeled as dealing with the “Holocaust.” The argument that accompanied the exhibition’s reception revolved naturally—so thought curators and art critics—around the relationship between art and the Holocaust because Rosen’s exhibition deals with the Holocaust. The artist is the son of Holocaust survivors. The museum—the authoritative voice in this debate—presented the exhibition to its spectators as one that deals with the Holocaust: “In his works, the Holocaust is made visible from a tem-

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10. In 1998, the administration of Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority) reneged on its decision to award a prize to controversial leftist Israeli sculptor Yigal Tumarkin. This expressed Yad Vashem’s commitment to its delegated mandate—the safeguarding of knowledge of the Holocaust and its memory from the “nationalistic,” which paradoxically means the elevation of “nationalism” into the organizing pattern to which everything, including interpretation of the Holocaust, is subservient and the purpose of which everything is supposed to serve.

poral and spatial distance, and is thus transformed from a fresh, vivid traumatic experience into a traumatic memory” (Perry-Lehman, 1997).<sup>11</sup> It was presented as part of the “museum’s continuing commitment to allow younger artists in Israel to grapple with the difficult subject of the Holocaust—particularly as their contemporary experience becomes increasingly remote from the actual experience of the Holocaust itself” (Perry-Lehman, 1997). The museum’s declared commitment expresses the demarcation of the “Holocaust” square on the chessboard of Israeli art, an examination of its status, whether occupied or vacant, as well as an examination of various Holocaust-related exhibitions to determine whether they are qualified to occupy this square. Several articles published in recent years have examined this square and have almost unanimously determined that it is on the whole vacant.<sup>12</sup>

Articles written about Rosen’s exhibition, however, have determined that it occupies the vacant square. Many of these articles have dealt with the question of why the trauma of the Holocaust is unseen in Israeli art. Prevalent explanations have pointed to the inadequacy of the Muses in the face of the trauma and the systematic instrumentalization of the Holocaust by the Zionist state. These explanations may be largely satisfactory with regard to the specific question—the attitude of Israeli art toward the Holocaust—but they obscure the limitations of the question. Where is the discussion of the connections between artistic and museal practices and the practices of memory and commemoration of the Holocaust? Why is there such disregard for the factors that enable the instrumentalization, reification, and fetishization of the Holocaust, the aim of which is to determine the Holocaust’s standing once and for all as a singular and unique object that must be preserved outside the exchange economies of the discourse concerning the horrors of the twentieth century.<sup>13</sup> In other words, what’s involved here is the dogmatic acceptance of an axiom on the lines of “one can’t compare the slaughter of the Armenians to the Holocaust.” It is not surprising that the Holocaust has been disregarded by artists and has remained unrepresented, for this is possible only if the Holocaust turns into a fixed object outside the exchange economies of the horrors of the twentieth century. Thus any treatment of World War II is enfolded into the framework of “art and war,” while any

11. From the foreword to the exhibition catalogue, which was written by the acting head curator of the museum.

12. These articles were written by various people in the Israeli art world, including Roeë Rosen himself, who wrote about other artists (see Rosen, 1996).

13. Such a discourse merely strengthens the Holocaust’s fixed standing as an “object” and in effect foretells the undermining action of an exhibition such as Rosen’s, which claims to be acting in several additional fields of discourse.

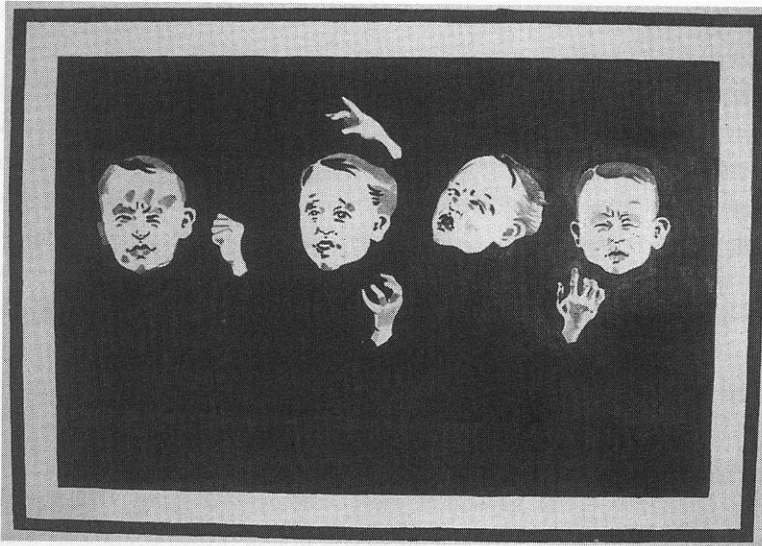


Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, details, 1997

discussion of Hiroshima falls into the category of treatment of the Other, and all this safeguards the differentiation of the object called the “Holocaust.” Such action to preserve and safeguard the differentiation of the discourse is carried out in various fields of activity, of which the museum is but the tip of the iceberg.<sup>14</sup>

For a long time I too subscribed to the diagnosis that Rosen’s exhibition deals with the “Holocaust.” That’s how the museum presented it: “Combined with his own

14. The educational system is the primary watchdog institution for this fetishization, and a small personal anecdote may serve to demonstrate. When my daughter was in the second grade, she was requested to bring something connected with the Holocaust to class. I suggested that she take a photograph of my father from the period when he served in the French army during World War II. My daughter refused my offer, saying: “Mom, the teacher asked us for something connected with the Holocaust, not with World War II.”



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, details, 1997

personal iconography, the images, symbols and other elements in his works deal directly with the Holocaust” (Perry-Lehman, 1997). But after devoting several weeks of thought to the exhibition, I realized that my view had also been blinded as a result of this assumption, which seemed self-evident. Renewed examination of the exhibition and its works showed me that not one of its images or symbols could be viewed as customary Holocaust iconography. The public discourse concerning the “Holocaust” deals with the Jewish victims and the Nazi regime almost solely through the prism of the genocide of the Jews. Rosen’s exhibition doesn’t deal with Jews, genocide, or the “Jewish” motif in the Nazi regime. The “Holocaust,” then, has no presence in Rosen’s exhibition.<sup>15</sup> The exhibition throws spectators into a maze of intricate systems of noncausal, nonrational, and unmanaged relations of representation. They encounter different possibilities of being the subject (of a museum, of

15. Rosen also shattered the narrative space (space of fantasy) of the Holocaust by dragging into it the one person who’s not supposed to be there—Adolf Hitler. Hitler’s presence inside the space of fantasy, rather than as its condition of possibility, in effect topples the possibility of a fantasy world called the Holocaust existing in isolation from the holocaust of gypsies, homosexuals, mentally ill people, and abnormal people in general. But it doesn’t negate or deny—only challenges the manner of its dissection and delineation as an object of knowledge and memory.

control, of representation, of evil, of sexuality, of passion, of rejection, of will, of resistance, and of loss) but also of being an object (shoe, sexual organ, arm, tree, puddle, monster, flag). It is an unbounded mishmash of becoming something or someone else—Rosen, who turns into Hitler, who turns into Eva Braun, who turns into moonlight, which turns into a puddle, which turns into a stain, which turns into a tongue, which turns into a mountain. Confronted by this outflow, the spectator can only simulate his sovereignty as interpreter. He can only disregard the swirling morass and try to isolate and establish certain segments of it as exhibits for his sovereign interpretation. He then becomes a part of the machinery of discourse that would like to traffic in the object called the “Holocaust” and at the same time to maintain sole control of the rules of exchange governing this object.

#### THE IMPERATIVE

But there’s another option beyond the simulation of sovereignty. Viewers can acknowledge the imperative “live and die as Eva Braun,” which completely shatters the exchange systems that the spectator usually takes part in within the framework of the museum, and see where it leads to. Let’s begin with a question: what exactly am I being enjoined to do by the wall, by the picture, by the imperative “live and die as Eva Braun”? I am being enjoined to renounce my universal identity, my being “anyone” just like anyone else—the position that the principle of universal citizenship, of which the museum is a distinct representative, has prepared for me, the position of “anyone” regardless of their name, social status, religion, gender, or race. Suddenly I am being enjoined to become someone else with a name, status, religion, gender, and race who is called Eva Braun. I can refuse, of course. But this refusal cannot obliterate the other renunciation that preceded it and that the present imperative made manifest—my renunciation of my own name, status, religion, gender, and race to occupy the vacant position of the universal spectator, the “anyone” of the museum who is also the universal subject of democracy. This imperative makes manifest the previous imperative, which enjoined me to put myself into brackets and postpone my actuality to be entitled to become the unbiased subject of an object that has universal value. This renunciation has actually created a situation in which spectators are completely exposed: their only armor is that of one who has renounced most of the elements of personal identity to claim the vacant place of “anyone.” When this vacant place is filled by someone concrete—Eva Braun—its vulnerability is exposed. It is capable of becoming anyone, of resembling any proposed model, of losing control, of whirling out of control among the proposed models.



## THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED [BODY]

At the end of the exhibition's course I found myself accompanying Hitler to his death and taking part—with, through, by means of, and following Rosen—in the formulation of another version of Hitler's death.

Hitler's death. On May 1, 1945, at 9:45 A.M., German radio interrupted its broadcasts to announce that in several minutes there would be an important and bitter announcement. After a short while the voice of Grand-Admiral Karl Dönitz, who presented himself as the successor to the Reich, informed the nation of Hitler's death while "fighting at the head of his troops" (Petrova and Watson, 1996). This announcement signaled the start of the war of versions concerning Hitler's death—a plethora of contradictory, complementary, scientific, fantastic, substantiated, and farfetched versions. For many years versions were propagated that cast doubt on Hitler's death and claimed that he was hiding in a cave in Germany, living inside a bunker in England, or roving free in Argentina.<sup>16</sup> The version of Hitler's death by suicide was made public only a few months after the end of the war by Hugh Trevor-Roper.<sup>17</sup> Each version sought to rewrite the death, and to conclude the story differently—in a more proper, precise, scientific, justified, and poetic manner.<sup>18</sup> In 1995, when the Russian archives were opened, a new scientific version was published laying claim to be the definitive one: *The Death of Hitler: The Full Story with New Evidence from Secret Russian Archives* (Petrova and Watson, 1996).

But these versions didn't begin after his death. How Hitler would die, what would cause his death, what the setting would be, who would take part in the spectacle, what remains would be left: these and other details concerning his death preoccupied Hitler himself throughout the last several months of his life, which he spent in the Berlin bunker (January to late April 1945). At the end of January, reported his associates, he had declared that he "has no intention of falling into the hands of the enemy" and that he "doesn't want a Jew or Communist to march his body in a procession."<sup>19</sup> He wanted to manage his own death no less than he'd managed the death of others. From the moment he concluded that Germany was

16. The sources of these versions were different people, variously aligned with or against the Nazi regime. Some versions prompted intelligence agents to conduct lengthy searches; others were instantly refuted.

17. Trevor-Roper's version came out in 1947 in dozens of editions. Other versions appeared in various ways—rumor, information forwarded to the relevant government agencies, newspaper reports, books, articles, and films.

18. Especially interesting, in this context, is the version written by George Steiner, which is interspersed with doubts as to how to end Hitler's life, one proposal being to send him to Israel to mingle among the people, who all know who he is but are prohibited from killing him (Steiner, 1981).

19. Hitler's own remarks, as cited in *The Death of Hitler* (Petrova and Watson, 1996, 25).

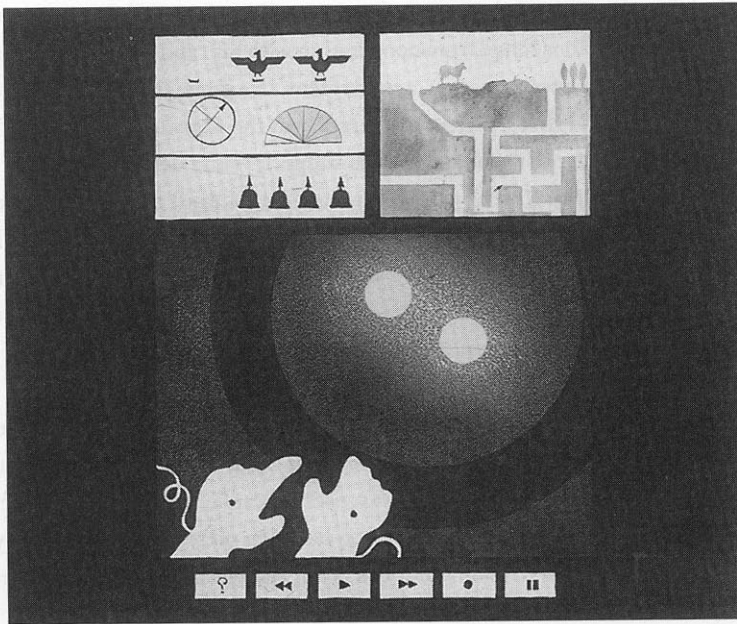


Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, details, 1997

approaching defeat, he began staging his death with careful attention to the details of the production.<sup>20</sup> A few days before his death he legally married Eva Braun, wrote his political will and testament, and gave away the paintings that were dear to him. Then he poisoned Eva Braun, who'd become Frau Hitler, and shot himself in the mouth, but not before ensuring that their bodies would be burnt.<sup>21</sup>

20. Eva was poisoned first, and after her death Hitler shot himself using a Walther 7.65 caliber pistol. Both bodies were incinerated, and a part of Hitler's skull was preserved. The Russians, who were first to enter the bunker, found isolated remains of Hitler's burnt body and gathered them into their archives, completely suppressing any knowledge of them until 1995.

21. Hitler's management of his death included his marriage to Eva Braun, the bequest of his possessions to the nation and the party, the writing of a will and its removal outside the bunker, and the order to publish the will



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, details, 1997

To this staging of his death Hitler had covert partners who joined forces unwittingly, each in his own behalf, to achieve a goal that was similar to Hitler's own—the disappearance of his body. They eliminated any possibility of his body being interred in a place that might become identified with his absent presence or his present absence. Hitler's commemorative passion reached its peak with his complete disappearance and transformation into a ghost, a repressed figure who would in the future preoccupy many and return again and again.<sup>22</sup> In the way he managed his death,

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when Hitler should command it or immediately after the confirmation of his death. The contents of the will were an attempt to have the last word, with Hitler reclaiming responsibility for the extermination of the Jews: if the Jews should fail to be exterminated so that the extermination can't testify to itself, or if the Jews should try to appear as testimony to its noncompletion, at least Hitler's testimony would confront the extermination and as the last word would summarize what has come before. The will and order to publish it fell into Russian hands.

22. Hitler's passion for the management of commemoration expressed itself in the final hours of his life in the bunker, which were devoted to conversations about art, commemoration, and museums. His conversation with his pilot Baur concerned the portrait of Friedrich the Great, which Hitler wanted to give him. Baur agreed to accept it only if he could donate it to a gallery or museum. Hitler explained that it was a personal gift to Baur of prominent historical value, which he was interested in passing on to the future.

Hitler in effect determined the range of options of his continued existence among the living. Those options range from cooperating with him and his wishes so that his body won't appear (in a wax museum, a monument, or a grave site) to refusing to cooperate with him (and thus in effect cooperating in the transformation of his body into a fetish, an object of pilgrimage to both supporters and detractors).

I contend that Roe Rosen's exhibition marks out a third option: attentiveness to Hitler's requests—"I just hope they don't put me in a wax museum" or "I just hope not to fall into the hands of a Jew"—and a literal manifestation of this anxiety in the museum's exhibition space by means of a consummate *mise-en-scène*, which puts it up for display inside the museum, and which in effect invites the spectator not only to become Eva Braun but to intimately confront and deal with Hitler's body.

The journey through Rosen's exhibition at the Israel Museum at Jerusalem begins with a picture in which spectators are offered a pair of hands—the gloves that they (the Jewish spectators, of course) can use to handle Hitler's body marching backward toward its death. The "play" button has been pressed, and the journey begins. The "Jew" is invited to handle Hitler's death and cheat Hitler of his control of his death.

As for the question "Why do the dead return?" we might have recourse to Lacan's reply: "because they haven't been buried properly" (Zizek, 1992, 23).