

Makayla Mckinney

GERM 350/JDST 350

12/6/2021

On Thin Ice: The Line between Holocaust Remembrance and Marketing

In the 2nd edition of his book *Holocaust Representations in History: An Introduction*, Dr. Daniel Magilow defines three implicit testaments of Shoah Representation:

- 1.) Holocaust shall be represented, in its totality, as a unique event, as a special case and kingdom of its own, above or below or apart from history.
- 2.) Representations of the Holocaust shall be as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason -- artistic reasons included.
- 3.) The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even sacred event, with a seriousness admitting to no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead.

Arguably, if a piece does not adhere to the three testaments, it is not truly a piece of remembrance but rather commercial exploitation of Shoah. Shoah has been represented across endless mediums: including high-profile ice skating. Russian Olympic level skaters Tatianna Navka and Yulia Lipnitskaya both drew on Holocaust themes for performance within two years of one another: Navka for the tv show *Ice Age*, Lipnitskaya for the Sochi 2014 Olympics.

Although Navka's choreographer is Jewish, her Holocaust performance was widely regarded -- especially in the western world (exemplified in Alec Luhn's article for the *Guardian*) and Israel - - as insensitive. Lipnitskaya's performance called the ethics of dancing to music associated with the Holocaust to the media's surface but did not receive as much condemnation as Navka's. The ethics of dancing to the Holocaust are debatable; However, the intentions behind Lipnitskaya's

performance versus behind Navka's performance exemplify the commercialization of the Holocaust. Neither performance displays understanding of the Holocaust deeper than surface level, however, the amount the performance adheres to the testaments directly correlates to how the audience receives the performance. Lipnitskaya's performance, although perhaps distasteful, appeared remembrance-motivated; Navka's broke two of the three testaments and appeared commercial-based.

The sexualization of Navka's costume and the joyous nature of the routine was not "accurate" nor "faithful" to the events of the Holocaust. By performing in a striped dress -- juxtaposed to her male partner's striped pants -- Navka accentuates her femininity; However, the Holocaust dehumanized men and women equally. The camps lacked the privilege of femininity: As discussed in Claude Lanzmann's 1985 *Shoah*, women in camps -- such as Treblinka -- were stripped of their clothing and hair before their murder. As opposed to Navka, Lipnitskaya skates in a red coat which is a reference to the girl in the red coat from Stephen Spielberg's 1993 *Schindler's List*. She and her partner pantomime the plot of Roberto Benigni's 1997 *Life is Beautiful (La vita è Bella)* -- a movie that breaks the second testament as well. Navka depicts life in the Holocaust as a game -- for the sake of an unseen child -- which trivializes the experiences of actual victims for the sake of elevating fictional experiences. Navka and Lipnitskaya both reference the Holocaust with pop culture -- Navka to *Life is Beautiful*, Lipnitskaya to *Schindler's List* -- but Lipnitskaya avoids depicting the specifics of the Holocaust, thus protecting herself from the second testament. Navka displays events to entertain the audience; Lipnitskaya depicts solemnity to encourage the audience to reflect for a moment. Navka's memorial to the Holocaust is her dance; Lipnitskaya, the feelings her dance cultivates. Lipnitskaya uses her Olympic

platform to honor the victims whereas Navka appears to use the victims to garner attention and grow her own platform.

Because Navka's artistic changes stem from humor, Navka also disregarded the third representation testament. Throughout her performance, Navka expresses excitement and playfulness and injects moments that attempt humor; For example, the audience hears dogs barking as the skaters "run away" via skipping. At one point, she and her partner mime shooting one another while laughing. Lipnitskaya, however, maintains stoicism: She skates with powerful gracefulness and her movements emphasize the severity. Navka's movements are cartoonish and lack context: Although she theoretically depicts adults protecting a child's innocence, she instead trivializes and infantilizes the struggles of the Holocaust. Both skaters are Olympic champions: Navka's movements are artistically intentional. Navka capitalizes on the implicit morality of the Holocaust and the marketability of resilience stories: in essence, Navka performs to "see the world through rose-colored glasses," and uses the Holocaust as a great moral equivalency to show that no matter how impossible it may seem, anyone can be optimistic, which commercializes the Holocaust. Lipnitskaya, however, honors the actual Holocaust victims through solitude rather than playing dress-up with Jewish suffering.

Breaking the three testaments of Shoah remembrance significantly alters the public's perception of an Artist's intentions behind a specific performance. The more commercial a piece is, such as Navka's ice-skating piece, the less it adheres to the three testaments. Properly representing the Holocaust is nearly impossible; however, understanding the factors that influence "proper" representations versus "representations" for commercial gain can help not only the artist display respect but also help the audience to consume media that is inoffensive to Shoah victims. Rampant commercialization silences Jewish rage and trivializes Jewish suffering

while also not condemning the actions of the perpetrators. Commercialized Holocaust pieces alter history: for example, Navka's piece implies not only that the Holocaust wasn't as horrendous -- a child could be gaslighted into thinking the camp was a game, it couldn't have been that bad -- but also neglects the suffering of the millions of families who were separated and murdered throughout the course of Shoah. Lipnitskaya's performance does not display any understanding of the events of the Shoah but also did not trivialize the suffering that victims experienced; Lipnitskaya's performance was universal, but an attempt at remembrance. Navka's performance was blatantly disrespectful. Lipnitskaya's performance was inspired by voicing feelings for those who no longer are able to voice the feelings for themselves; Navka's used martyrdom -- as her partner miming handing her their child before being murdered depicts -- as well as post-Shoah Jewish saintdom to entertain a large audience and capitalize from their moral obligation to sympathize with a heart-warming tale of an optimistic Holocaust victim. . The performance revokes the Jewish people's right to anger and trauma rather than be angelic survivors.

Works Cited

D. Magilow & L. Silverman, Holocaust Representations in History: An Introduction, 2nd edition (Bloomsbury, 2019, ISBN: 78-1350091801)

“Holocaust on Ice' Dance by Wife of Putin Official Causes Uproar.” *The Guardian*, Guardian

News and Media, 28 Nov. 2016,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/27/wife-of-putin-official-performs-in-concentration-camp-ice-dance>.

Lanzmann, Claude. Shoah. New Yorker Films, 1985

Olympics. “Yulia Lipnitskaya's Phenomenal Free Program - Team Figure Skating | Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics” *Youtube*. 27 Feb 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ke0iusvydl8>

Ледниковый Период. “Татьяна Навка и Андрей Бурковский — «Beautiful That Way». Ледниковый период (26.11.2016)”. *Youtube*. 26 Nov 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3FsrbASNY>