

**Binding Autobiographies: Torah Binders  
Revisited**

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**Declaration:**

I undertake that all the material presented for examination in this thesis titled "Binding Autobiographies: Torah Binders Revisited" is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Ekaterina Oicherman

14/6/2014

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized capital letter 'E' followed by a smaller, cursive letter 'O' and a long, sweeping tail that curves downwards and to the left.



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## Abstract

The thesis investigates contemporary textile practice and its links to traditional forms of textile art. It focuses on the 19<sup>th</sup> century German circumcision binders ("Jewishing cloths"), ceremonial Torah scroll wrappings, which documented male births. The case study examines images on the seams of a 1836 binder, showing that the seams acted as a transitional territory, where the embroiderer consciously played around with traditional images, transposing the concern with birth and fertility into a concern with a cultural identity formation during the Jewish emancipation in Germany.

The contemporary museal staging of the binder is criticised as a nostalgic vision of Judaism, refusing to recognize the binder's contemporaneous position, ignoring its singularity as a contradictory repository of modern Jewish identity hi/stories. On this critique the practical part of the thesis is based, developing as an appropriation or a "re-actualisation" of a traditional textile format in the contemporary textile practice. Such "re-actualisation" is positioned in the relevant textile art context and reflected through my textile practice and an "autobiographical" account of it. Through its practice-based and written components the thesis reflects upon and makes way for creation of works, where my autobiographical female stories of Jewishness in Israel are staged as a fictional binder. The shifting position of cloth in between the historical and the contemporary accounts, in between autobiography, practice and research, is addressed through the concept of *subjectile* by J. Derrida.

The practice investigated "hands on" the particularities of the 1836 binder, exploring its letters, images, materials and techniques, appropriating and reshaping them. This practical exploration modified the research, shifting its emphasis towards the embodied and performative reading of the binder and related rituals. The thesis proposes a general design for a research-based practice. Alongside its contribution to the history of Jewish textiles and contemporary textile practice, it unfolds interrelated "biographies" of research and textile practice.

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*for Sarah Maximovsky*

## Prologue

I begin in two places: a cloth and a text. Two places, two stories. The relationship between them is tangible, as is the cloth's structure; it is mutable, as is the flow of meanings in a text. Tangible and mutable, the stories, the cloths, the texts – they interchange, they come one in place of the other. And thus they create the question of a place, the question of identity.

Let me introduce the two. They run in parallel, to prevent the problem of primogeniture, which is truly irrelevant here:

*To sew:* (1) "I could . . . sew," and for that I have to pierce with a needle or a pointed lead, perforate, penetrate, make holes in the skin of the figure, but I can sew, (2) and even suture and scar, in order to close the wound that I open in sewing...

*To unsew:* (1) "I could . . . unsew," unmake, do the preceding operation in reverse, but it was already the reverse of itself. The link itself, like the link between these two operations that consist precisely in a certain treatment of linking and unlinking, the obligation of this ligature is a double bind, a double conjuncture.

In 2002, I was a recent graduate from textile design and hardly knew of Jacques Derrida or any theory or philosophy related to art

An embroidered linen band measuring 3.17m in length x 0.18m in width. It bears embroidered images and a Hebrew inscription.

The band consists of four parts accurately sewn together. The joining seams are meticulously hidden underneath an elongated embroidery of a stick, supporting a plant in a conical pot. One of the seams is concealed behind an embroidered tree with a snake twisting around it. The snake turns its head to the right, backwards in relation to the text, towards a Classicist vase with a symmetrical three-branched beige flower with six petals. The circularly applied dense satin stitch at the petals and the inner stamen field created a tiny hole in the fabric, just at the spot where the needle was repeatedly inserted.

One of several thousands of similar objects dispersed among the Jewish and Textile Museums in the

or other creative practices. I was therefore increasingly surprised to discover in those passages – nameless for me at the time of their discovery and not fully clear in their entirety – a description of the principles on which my textile practice, already deviating from the boundaries of industry-oriented textile design, had been operating ever since I fell for textiles in 1997, deciding to turn an interest into a profession. I still keep the first print-out of this excerpt, which has accompanied me in every studio since. I have also chosen it for the starting point of this extended biography of my practice. Derrida's text neither explained the practice, nor provided it with motivation or subject of any kind: it just conditioned and enacted in itself the operation, the work in it. Unobtrusively and literally it set the scene.

world, this cloth caught my attention in 2005. This kind of Jewish ritual textile is usually referred to as a "Torah binder" or *wimpel*. According to German custom, *wimpels* were made from the swaddling cloth used during the circumcision and embroidered with the name and date of birth of a circumcised boy. For that reason they were also called in Yiddish "Jewishing cloths". This cloth is exhibited behind the thick glass of a showcase with other ritual textiles on the second floor of the Museum of German-Speaking Jewry in Tefen Industrial Park, in the northern region of Galilee in Israel.

Struck by the striking wholeness of cloth, text, ritual and identity, an immigrant among immigrants, I was trying to apprehend the binder's contemporary status: a thing among things in a museum dedicated to the uneasy German Jewish minority narrative in the Israeli "melting pot". What is it to me? What if I had one?

## Introduction

The thesis offers an account and an historical and theoretical positioning of my textile practice. It is a critical creative autobiography woven between the three main trajectories: the story of an artefact, the story of my practice, based on the artefact and a critical journey through theories that contextualise both stories and bind them together. As a result a synthetic way of thought is developed that simultaneously produces the conceptual framework of the thesis and is its primary and innovative outcome. This is my method and it has evolved as I have made this rather complex journey. In other words, the thesis is about *how to think* contemporary textile practice and how to position it in relation to the multiple creative domains relevant to its existence and function: art, craft, design; their relevant institutions: museum and academy; and relevant domains of knowledge: history of textiles, histories of art, craft and design, anthropology, critical theory, epistemology. In other words (again): the thesis is about staging a contemporary politics of identity of a textile practice, entangled with my own practice.

The need for this approach in the thesis stems from my experience of the breadth and multiplicity of the contemporary creative scene in textiles. This multiplicity has already been addressed and announced as early as 1991 by Sarat Maharaj in "Arachne's genre", the post-modern Derridean "genre débordé", one that "cites established genres and their edges even as it cuts across and beyond them."<sup>1</sup> By then, following the expansion of creative fields in the 1970s and 1980s, the disciplinary boundaries of "textiles" were dissipating: Arachne's principle has been enacted through fibre art (an American term), feminist art practices, conceptual textiles, fashion, hybrid design projects. "Craft" as a practice, a concept and a process, received a lot of attention in both the creative<sup>2</sup> and academic scenes.<sup>3</sup> In 2007 Glenn Adamson suggested that "craft only exists in motion. It is a

<sup>1</sup> Maharaj, Sarat. (1991). "Arachne's Genre: Towards Inter-Cultural Studies in Textiles", *Journal of Design History*, vol. 4, no.2. The Design History Society. p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Recent examples: *Lost in Lace*, an exhibition curated by Lesley Millar at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, October 2011 - February 2012; Grayson Perry, *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* an exhibition at the British Museum, October 2011 - February 2012; *Power of Making*, an exhibition curated by Daniel Charny at the Victoria and Albert Museum, September 2011 - January 2012; *Bizarre Perfections*, an exhibition curated by Suzanne Landau at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, December 2008 - June 2009; *Radical Lace and Subversive Knitting*, an exhibition curated by David Revere McFadden in the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, January - June 2007; *BoysCraft*, an exhibition curated by Tami Katz-Freiman at the Haifa Museum of Art, Israel; *Boys Who Sew*, an exhibition curated by Janis Jefferies at the Crafts Council Gallery, London, February - April 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See: *The Journal of Modern Craft* (editors: Glenn Adamson, Tanya Harrod and Edward S. Cooke Jr., Bloomsbury Publishers) launched in 2008: "covers all aspects of craft as it exists within the condition of modernity" see: <<http://journalofmoderncraft.com/about-2>>. Also see: Adamson, Glenn ed. (2010). *The Craft Reader*. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers; Sennett, Richard. (2008). *The Craftsman*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; Adamson, Glenn. (2007). *Thinking Through Craft*. Oxford, New York: Berg Publishers; Alföldy, Sandra ed. (2007) *NeoCraft: Modernity and the Crafts*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design; Magliaro, Joseph, & Hung, Shu. (2007). *By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; Risatti, Howard Anthony. (2007). *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press; Greenhalgh, Paul ed. (2003). *The*



way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institutions and people".<sup>4</sup> He argued for craft to be thought of as "a conceptual limit active throughout modern artistic practice".<sup>5</sup> Craft, a concept and a practice, similarly to Arachne, signifies a transfer from the clear-cut modernist divisions of genres, materials and privileged cultural domains. It also stresses, on different levels, the "craftedness" of the contemporary digitised culture.<sup>6</sup>

Things have changed since 1991. The "glocal"<sup>7</sup> situation has developed in the tension between the expansiveness of the world economies and means of communication and the corresponding nostalgias, seeking to restore various imaginary pasts. As Svetlana Boym notes:

Since the late 1980s, there has been a widespread belief among promoters of globalization that the economy and technology determine politics, and culture is nothing more than a consumer item and the icing on the cake. The economic and political developments in post-Communist countries as well as in Asia and Latin America in the 1990s revealed that the opposite might be true: cultural mentality and political institutions could affect the economy both locally and globally.<sup>8</sup>

This turn to the local often suggest reinvention of histories related to it. Cultural myths, their histories, futurologies and nostalgias, old and new, are then at play. In

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*Persistence of Craft*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press; Rowley, Sue ed. (1997). *Craft and Contemporary Theory*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin; Dormer, Peter ed. (1997). *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Houston, John ed. (1988). *Craft Classics Since the 1940s*. London: Crafts Council. The list is hardly exhaustive of the breadth of contemporary multidisciplinary scholarly interest in crafts and the art/craft relationship.

<sup>4</sup> Adamson, G. (2007). p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Jonsson, Love. "Rethinking Dichotomies: Crafts and the Digital" in: Alfoldy, S. ed. (2007) pp. 240-248; Press, Mike "Handmade Futures: the Emerging Role of Craft Knowledge in our Digital Culture" in: Alfoldy, S. ed. (2007) pp. 249-266; Gershenfeld, Neil A. (2005) *Fab: The Coming Revolution on Your Desktop - From Personal Computers to Personal Fabrication*. New York: Basic Books; Plant, Sadie. (1998). *Zeros and Ones*. London: Fourth Estate; Dormer, Peter. "Craft and the Turing Test for Practical Thinking" in: Dormer, P. ed. (1997). pp. 137-157; Myerson, Jeremy. "Tornadoes, T-squares and Technology: Can Computing Be a Craft?" in: Dormer, P. ed. (1997). pp. 176-185.

<sup>7</sup> "Glocalisation" as a way to address "how the process of (economic) globalisation is subject to the countervailing tendencies of (cultural) localisation" see: entry "glocalisation" in Southerton, Dale, ed. (2011). *Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*. Vol. 2. London and New York: Sage. p. 678. On the origin of the term see there and: Khondker, Habibul Haque. (2004). "Glocalization as Globalization: Evolution of a Sociological Concept". *Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology*, 1(2), July, 2004, available from: <[http://mukto-mona.net/Articles/habibul\\_haque/Globalization.pdf](http://mukto-mona.net/Articles/habibul_haque/Globalization.pdf)>. For a critique of "glocalisation" see: Bauman, Zygmunt. (August 1998). "On Glocalization: or Globalization For Some, Localization For Some Others". *Thesis Eleven*. 54(1). pp. 37-49. In the art context, "glocal" was used by Hou Hanru in 1999 in the exhibition "Cities on the Move" in the Hayward Gallery. There "glocal" was addressed as a "possibility of producing art in a dynamic tension between global and local tastes, traditions, narratives and imperatives." See: Schirato, Tony, & Webb, Jen. (2003). *Understanding Globalization*. London and New York: Sage. p. 156; Hou, Hanru, & Obrist, Hans Ulrich. (1999). *Cities on the Move: Urban Chaos and Global Change - East Asian Art, Architecture and Film Now*. London: Hayward Gallery.

<sup>8</sup> Boym, Svetlana. (2001). *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books. p. 349.

this set-up, the ability of a practitioner to “cite and cut”, to navigate and relate, is an imperative.

Recently the position of the creative practitioner in all of the three intermingling fields (art, craft, design), has been questioned and often reviewed through a certain activist prism (in itself related to the “glocal situation”): socially-engaged art,<sup>9</sup> craftivism,<sup>10</sup> ecologically and socially sustainable design.<sup>11</sup> Referring to the subject of sustainable design, my initial Ph.D. proposal included a “conceptual recycling” as a description of my approach to artefacts, a formulation which became less relevant as the project developed. An isolated and disconnected creative position in any discipline is no longer possible, but in fact it never was fully possible. Thus the task at hand in this thesis has been not so much to critique the modernist ideas of a self-referential work of art or a universal design paradigm, but to develop a particular and concrete tactics of creative action within a world which is not cleared of all kinds of myths. Particularity is a key concept here, since it engenders a personal responsibility, which is truly indispensable in the world in which I live. I will return to the professional and personal background of this approach later on in this introduction.

The relationships between art-craft and museums has also become more fluid, something which is noticeable in a great number of creative residencies or creative projects within different international museum and heritage contexts. Examples are the creative residencies and special projects at the Victoria and Albert Museum,<sup>12</sup> The Freud Museum in London,<sup>13</sup> and the 2011-2012 Grayson Perry show

<sup>9</sup> Finkelppearl, Tom ed. (2001). *Dialogues in Public Art*. Cambridge, USA: MIT Press; Kaprow, Allan; Kelley J. (2003). *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press; Lacy, Suzanne ed. (1995). *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle, Washington: Bay Press; Kester, Grant H. (2004). *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>10</sup> Black, Anthea, & Burisch, Nicole. “Craft Hard, Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies For Craftivism in Unruly Contexts” in: Adamson, G. ed. (2010) pp. 609-619; Brian-Wilson, Julia; Collins, Liz; Gschwandtner, Sabrina; Mazza, Cat; Smith, Allison; “The Politics of Craft: a Roundtable” in: Adamson, G. ed. (2010), pp. 621-628; Greer, Betsy. (2008). *Knitting for Good!*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications; Levine, Faythe, & Heimerl, Cortney. (2008). *Handmade Nation: The Rise of DIY, Art, Craft, and Design*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press; Spencer, Amy. (2007). *The Crafter Culture Handbook*. London: Marion Boyars Publishers.

<sup>11</sup> The literature on the subject is vast. I mention here only a few key books and those dealing directly with textiles. Sustainable design: Papanek, Victor J. (1984). *Design for the Real World*. London: Thames & Hudson; Chapman, Jonathan, & Grant, Nick eds. (2007) *Designers, Visionaries and Other Stories: A Collection of Sustainable Design Essays*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press; McDonough, William & Braungart, Michael (2010). *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Social responsibility in textile industry: Webster, Ken, Fairbrass, Stephen. (2007). *The Real Price of Cotton*. Norfolk Education & Action for Development; Snyder, Rachel Louise. (2009). *Fugitive Denim: A Moving Story of People and Pants in the Borderless World of Global Trade*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company; Dickson, Marsha A., Loker, Suzanne, & Eckman, Molly. (2009). *Social Responsibility in the Global Apparel Industry*. London: Bloomsbury. Sustainable textiles and fashion: Blackburn, Richard S. ed. (2009). *Sustainable Textiles: Life Cycle and Environmental Impact*. Cambridge: Woodhead Publishing. Gwilt, Alison, & Timo, Rissanen eds. (2012). *Shaping Sustainable Fashion: Changing the Way We Make and Use Clothes*. Oxford and New York: Routledge; Mohsen, Miraftab, & Horrocks, Richard A. eds. (2007). *Ecotextiles: The Way Forward for Sustainable Development in Textiles*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press; Fletcher, Kate. (2012). *Sustainable Fashion and Textiles: Design Journeys*. Oxford and New York: Routledge.

<sup>12</sup> see: <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/m/museum-residency-programme/>>

<sup>13</sup> For example: the 2011 show *Sigmund's Rug - To Sleep To Dream No More* by Anne Deguelle, curated

*The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsmen* at the British Museum.<sup>14</sup> Such sites are bound to contain unique scenes of cultural memories and mythologies. In this respect the particularity of the practitioner's approach is crucial. The particularity here is attached to the relationships between the practitioner, the artefact and the museal setting.

There are other aspects to working in/with/against the museum, but it is the material trajectory of the artefact and its scene on which I focus throughout this thesis and my practice. Reasons for this focus run through my intersecting professional and personal journeys. Since my teenage years I have been a frequent visitor to the storage spaces of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where my mother worked, so that I perceived the world of the artefacts and their stories (from contemporary art to Judaica and neolithic archeology) outside their showcase, in close bodily contact, as an interlocutor highly coherent in its silent presence. This continuous close encounter with material culture from "before me" led me later to reflect upon the nature of the relationship between practitioner and artefact in a museum, the same particularity of approach I discussed earlier in this introduction. For me it was about learning to know the artefact and learning to know the setting within which it is displayed, in order to occupy an ethical and responsible position in relation to them.

In that sense Rozsika Parker's *Subversive Stitch*<sup>15</sup> was a foundational read, which inspired in its historical rigour and scope, as well as in its responsible vision of the social histories it explored. Through Parker's feminist insight embroidery was not just freed from a constraining position of a technical medium, but powerfully re-inscribed into contemporary politics of art and gender and their social contexts. Thus *The Subversive Stitch* provided a model of relation with artefacts, which I was later able to articulate in different terms, more appropriate to a practitioner's perspective as I understood it.

Textiles as practice, be it art, fibre art, craft or design, operate within a highly saturated historical field. The majority of textiles produced now are using, in different degrees, structural and aesthetic principles developed long ago; thus the study of textile artefacts is a necessary tool in the inventory of any practitioner. During my own graduate studies I felt the lack of this tool in the college curriculum. In many ways this lack was what drove me into postgraduate studies and eventually to this research. The experience of my later position as a lecturer and

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by Yvan Poulain, which was based on the Freud's collection of oriental rugs; Solveigh Goett and Judith Alder's show *Touch & Tell*, also 2011, "attached" to the textile narratives inside Freud's house; the 2003 show of Stuart Brisley *The Collection of Ordure*, compiled in reference to Freud's collection of antiquities; the 1994 Susan Hiller work *After the Freud Museum* (Hiller, Susan. (2000). *After the Freud Museum*. London: Book Works.) – as well as many others.

<sup>14</sup> Perry, Grayson. (2011). *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*. London: British Museum Press.

<sup>15</sup> Parker, Rozsika; (1984); *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*; London: The Women's Press.

recently as a Head of Department of Textile Design in the same college where I was once a student only reinforces the urgency of the task.

My first encounter with German Torah binders took place in 2004, during my MA studies in Modern Jewish Culture in the University of Leeds. My supervisor in Leeds, Dr Eva Frojmovic, then showed me several of those long bands which belonged to the University collections and which had made their way to Leeds from Prague, part of a large bequest of Torah scrolls collected by the Nazis from the Jewish communities of the former Czechoslovakia.<sup>16</sup> Bright embroidery threads on the background of stained yellowish linen, childishly rendered Judaic religious symbols and signs of Zodiac (the somewhat gruesome but funny lion struck me the most) and multi-coloured Hebrew letters joining into words with the unrolling of the long band, gave a strange effect of a comic strip endowed with an almost frightening sense of corporeality carried by the fabric. This encounter was unforgettable and when I learnt more about the binders I realised that it was a "case-encounter" for my research.

The question of how to occupy a responsible position towards the artefact is ambiguous in relation to creative practice, since this is not judged by the same set of criteria as academic research. This is not just about the objectivity or subjectivity of an approach, even though subjectivity plays a role here, but about the desired outcomes and the specific ways "to get there". As such a way, the thesis investigates contemporary textile practice and its links to the traditional formats of textile art. The question of methodology here is twofold: as a textile practice-based researcher I took textile practice as my main methodology, yet, as far as an artefact was concerned and explored, the approach to it needed to be articulated and implemented. The relationship between those two main trajectories of research, textile practice and exploration of a textile artefact, also needed to be articulated. Because of this initial complexity of the research, I provided an outline of a methodological approach at the beginning of the relevant chapters, which deal with Torah binders and with my practice.

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<sup>16</sup> Most of this bequest is now concentrated in the Czech Scroll Centre in London, with more than 400 Torah binders which came with the scrolls.

## Chapter 1

### ***Subjectile: setting the scene for a biography of a certain art-practice***

*Mise-en-scène: subjectile; Mapping out; Crafting the "Unsense"; Crafting cloth (out) of subjectile (with nouns and verbs); S(he)bjectile; Crafting a name: textile mythologies, poetics, autobiography*

#### ***Mise-en-scène: subjectile***

On 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1932 Antonin Artaud wrote, in French, a letter to Andre Rolland de Renéville, where he said: "Herewith a bad drawing in which what is called the subjectile betrayed me".<sup>17</sup> "To Unsense the Subjectile" was published in 1986 by Jacques Derrida, in a volume entitled *The Secret Art of Antonin Artaud* dedicated to the drawings of Artaud. Derrida wrote in French, knowing that the volume would be published in German. I read an excerpt of the text in 2003 and the full text in English translation in 2009.

In the essay Derrida writes of Artaud's "pictograms" - works on paper which are a mixture of drawing and writing. *Subjectile* is a key figure in this interrogation; it appears to be a rare and obsolete Latin designation for the actual substratum on an artwork - paper, canvas, cardboard, wall - or its material substance, for example marble.<sup>18</sup> Derrida traces the word in Artaud's letters, unfolding in his text ways in which it, the *subjectile*, a plain piece of paper, not the text or image on it, but the paper itself, can take on an existence and activity of its own. It becomes "a traitor", which operates, acts on, forces Artaud, just as Artaud acts on, caresses, abuses, forces and rebels against it, the surface and the intestines of a sheet of paper. For Derrida *subjectile* acts as a conceptual "work

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Derrida, Jacques; "To Unsense the Subjectile" in Derrida, Jacques and Thévenin, Paul (1998); *The Secret art of Antonin Artaud*; Cambridge, USA: MIT Press; p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> Derrida cites the following sources: "Italian" source, letters of Pontormo to Varchi: "Sculpture is such a dignified and eternal thing, but this eternity has more to do with the marble quarries of Carrara than with the value of the Artist, because it is a better subject for that, and this subject, which is to say, relief." Lebensztein notes here that "subject, *soggetto*, designates the material substance of art, its substratum, *subjectum*, *hypokeimenon*". Cited from the letters of Pontormo to Varchi, edited by Jean-Claud Lebensztein, *Avant-guerre*, no. 2 (1985).

Georges Didi-Huberman, (1985), *La Peinture Incarné*, Paris: Editions de Minuit, p. 38. He mentions the theoretical reestablishment of "the old notion of the subjectile" by Jean Clay.

An article that Artaud seems to have read: Tristan Klingsor, article on Pierre Bonnard, *L'Amour de l'art* 2, no. 8, (August 1921): "The use of a subjectile so rarely used before, that is, cardboard, facilitates his work. The way the cardboard absorbs so readily lets him get rid of the oil colours... In addition, Pierre Bonnard, with a seeming negligence, lets this subjectile show through here and there. Since it is rather warm in nuance, generally golden, it contrasts with the cold tones laid down by the painter and gives them the most exquisite finesse. Even better, it guarantees a general harmony to the work... Once the nuances of cardboard have been discovered, the artist will use them in his canvas, he keeps his orchestration in changing the subjectile." in J. Derrida, (1998), p.64

table”,<sup>19</sup> an opportunity to construct hypotheses<sup>20</sup> starting from which some apprehension of Artaud's art practice and theoretical endeavour can be developed, and a tribute to his person can be paid.

The following chapter reflects on the possibilities opened by *subjectile* for writing on textile practice, past and present, including my own. In particular, it suggests an articulation of the relationship between my textile practice and the Torah binder, keeping in mind the “biographies” involved. The idea of biography, though not of an actual biographical text, comes up in several aspects of the research: the chosen Torah binder has a certain “biographical” appeal, as it bears the personal data of the newborn; there is the “biography” of the binder itself, its journey from its “place of birth” in Fürth to its current location in the Tefen museum. Once practice is concerned, biography turns into autobiography: the embroidery created on the basis of the Fürth binder uses my own personal data; cloths in it, my own old swaddling, have a “biography” of their own.

Gender encoded media, which in Western art discourse have historically provoked controversies,<sup>21</sup> in the present textiles are still fuelled with ambiguity in terms of their relation to the categories of “art” and “craft”, as well as their possible affiliations with some particular art genre. It is not by accident that the list of *subjectiles* derived from Renaissance and modernist texts is already exclusive: it mentions traditional European art-materials, among which textile is set aside with its only “proper” appearance: a canvas, the basis for painting. In 1991 Sarat Maharaj called avant-garde textiles (for him inclusive of art textiles and fashion) “Arachne's genre”, on which he reflected in the Derridean mode of “genre débordé”, one that “cites established genres and their edges even as it cuts across and beyond them”.<sup>22</sup> Invocation of the mythical figure of the rebellious female weaver is bound to the reading of her tapestry as a transgression of the borders of the established aesthetic order, founded in its turn on the patriarchal social order, “'proper' genre and gender”. In the article, and with reference to Ruskin, the image of borders is found in the ornaments framing the tapestries of Arachne and of Athena: creeper-like, sharply-edged ivy leaves opposed to the balanced and orderly olive branches. It is suggested that the erratic, cutting, zigzag-like shape of ivy leaves, a border simultaneously transgressed and reasserted, undoes the static

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<sup>19</sup> “We won't be describing any paintings. The paradigm of the subjectile: the table itself!” in: Derrida, J. (1998), p. 71 and “...on one hand a hypothesis is also a subjectile, and the subjectile a working hypothesis, as one might say a work table” *ibid*, p. 121

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>21</sup> On the hierarchy of arts and crafts in the Western art history and the position of embroidery and quilt-making in it from the Renaissance to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century see: Pollock, Griselda and Parker, Rozsika. (1981). *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. New York: Pantheon Books. pp. 50-81; as well as R. Parker's *The Subversive Stitch*.

<sup>22</sup> Maharaj, Sarat. (1991). “Arachne's Genre: Towards Inter-Cultural Studies in Textiles”. *Journal of Design History*, 4(2), (75-96), p. 93.

architecture of genre, so that the current inscription of textiles as "Arachne's genre" does not aim to re-establish them in the modernist hierarchy of other arts, but to undo this hierarchy and its structure altogether, opening "the scene of post-modern art practices".<sup>23</sup>

As a reflection on this opening I use the terms "practice"- "practitioner", rather than "art"- "artist" and "craft"- "craftsman" (the very need to specify gender in the last term is worth noticing). As a practitioner operating in the "boundaried boundarilessness"<sup>24</sup> of Arachne and as a self-appointed historian of my practice, I am interested in devising a way of "applied" writing, in the sense of a personalised tactic<sup>25</sup> of negotiation of boundaries between "art", "craft", "history" and personal experience. The question of tactics of writing (about) textiles has been brought up most recently by Jessica Hemmings in her introduction to *The Textile Reader*, which is as:

... concerned with how we write about textiles as it is interested in what we write about textiles.<sup>26</sup>

Hemmings points to the diversity of texts chosen for the *The Reader* as an identifying mark of the emerging discipline of textile scholarship.<sup>27</sup> By "tactics" I refer to a certain extent to Michel de Certeau's "calculus which cannot count on the 'proper'". The designation of 'tactics' is useful for imagining Arachne's series of transgressions and "citations" (she "cuts and cites"). "The other's place" in the case of Arachne is the place of the genre, into which she "insinuates herself fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance".<sup>28</sup> Even though in the alternative post-modern discourse of art and craft, Arachne stands for the Other, genre is the Other of that post-modern discourse.

I refer to "post-modern" in the spirit of Stuart Hall, not as the end of the modern, but as a series of turns from and ruptures with it and its historicisation.<sup>29</sup> Arachne acts on modern genres differently, depending on her particular personification in that or another practice. When she insinuates, she is also insinuated; her inter-relationship with history through genres is active and activating. She is the other of "art" as long as she keeps her ties to craft, and she is

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 94

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Tactic: "a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance." in de Certeau, Michel. (1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press. p. xix

<sup>26</sup> Hemmings, Jessica ed. (2012). *The Textile Reader*. Oxford: Berg Publishers. p. xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> de Certeau, M. (1988). p. xix.

<sup>29</sup> Hall, Stuart. (2001). "Museums of Modern Art and the End of History". *Annotations* 6 (8-23) InIVA. pp.9-11.

the other of "craft", insofar as art has a voice in her actions. She lives in transition, and in order not to appropriate her, not to have a hold of her in any way, it is important for me not to address her as the Other. In that profusion of figures (Arachne, art, other etc.) I need to keep the memory of myself: as a practitioner I am simply *another*<sup>30</sup> *one*, thus the tactic: we need to negotiate how we relate, how we insinuate and are insinuated. It is in this regard that I wish to reflect on Derrida's *subjectile*, assembling *the tactical craft of positioning*. This "craft" has several aspects to it: the content of position, and its formulation, the particular language used to put it together, as well as the relationship between the content and its language.

To specify the problematics of the above: in its epistemological foundations this research is concerned with boundaries and inter-relations of academic disciplines (history of textiles, philosophy, anthropology) and of practices (art, craft), as well as with the acts of translation which become necessary once a series of transitions between theory (word-based knowledge) and practice (action-based knowledge) are made. It is also concerned with ways of accommodating and inscribing practice within text-based disciplines (history, philosophy) and reflecting that inscription back in the practice. Accommodating, inscribing and reflecting, i.e. translations between theory and practice, are all performed by means of a particular language and specific lexicon, each of which assume certain systems of value expressed in separate categories of words. The content of each further translation, still bearing the traces of its former language, becomes infused with the value system of the language into which it is transposed, thus becoming ambivalent or polyvalent, resorting to Mieke Bal's thought on translation: dissipating,<sup>31</sup> "resisting containment within the 'duct'" of a single system.

"To Unsense" is stitched through with numerous trajectories: the relationship between life and language, person, name and signature, text and image, artist and material, mastery and awkwardness – these are merely the ones of interest to the present work. Central to me are the trajectories of material and craft, specifically textiles, cloth and its metaphors. In order to trace the usage of

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<sup>30</sup> The "capital letter" discourse of alterity is subjected to the feminist critique by Adriana Cavarero: "'The Other' or 'the other' ... often gets invoked by contemporary philosophers as a proof of their good intentions with respect of the individualistic spirit of the times. Whether it is the alterity that invades the self, rendering him nomadic and fragmented, or the alterity that lures the self more subtly with his embrace, these others never have the distinct and unrepeatable face of each human in so far as he is simply *another*." in Cavarero, Adriana. (2000). *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*. trans. P. A. Kottman. London and New York: Routledge. p. 90.

<sup>31</sup> Reflecting on Benjaminian ideas of translation as liberation and renewal Bal articulates the principle of dissipation: "The moment one undertakes to translate, the object translated resists containment within the "duct", the conduit. It attaches itself left and right, engages a single "destiny", and attempts the many encountered along the way. It also leaves elements behind, lost forever ... The translator endorses a loss of (linguistic) self in an activity that cannot but dissipate language." in Bal, Mieke. (2002). *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press. pp. 64-65.



textile-related metaphors in the text of "To Unsense", I have compiled a "glossary", bringing together all appearances of direct designations as well as clues pointing to textiles, actions and crafts that can be associated with them.

Returning to the concrete: "textiles" inscribed as "art" and as "craft" are not the same textiles; depending on their affiliation, their history will be written differently; relating to the specific history, further inscription of the categories of "textiles", "art", and "craft" will change. In that framework, I do not want to suggest that "textiles" are devoid of any inherent content nor that they are totally dependent on the inscriptions within the prevailing categories of the "creative" discourse: rather, I am interested in the phases of translation, when "textiles", once set to play within that discourse, question their own borders and conceptual "architecture".<sup>32</sup>

In view of the above, the quest for language here is the quest for mobility and (dis)continuity - I am looking to seize and articulate the motivations and processes within my textile practice, to articulate the discrepancy<sup>33</sup> of relations between contemporary practice and practices from the past. This articulation does not intend to finalize and imbue the practice with a single meaning, but *to set a scene for further action and thought*. In that sense translation from practice to verbal articulation and back again has to constantly traverse gaps between these points, hence the "(dis)continuity" and the shift of emphasis from "object" and "subject" of translation to the work of translation, from noun to verb.<sup>34</sup> In the wider sense, that experience of articulation can help a practitioner who might be in a similar position to set *a scene of action* of her/his own.

### **Subjectile: Mapping Out**

This section is a selective review of "To Unsense the Subjectile", which aims to substantiate the concept of textile practice through the text of Derrida, elaborating on the relation of "textiles" and "practice" to "subjectile", mediated by the words "craft" and "name".

In order to substantiate the discussion of textile practice as

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<sup>32</sup> In a similar manner the unevenly shaped fragments of tapestries forming part of the walls of a cell in the work *Spider* by Louise Bourgeois, another personification of Arachne, "contradict the square, structural, rigid character of architecture as it is imagined in culturally predominant fictions such as Renaissance linear perspective." in Bal, Mieke. (2001). *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> Bal elaborates Jonathan Culler's reflection on the nature of history: "the name of the discrepancy between intention and occurrence". "Discrepancy ... a word to indicate the gap between past and present, as well as to suggest the two - or more - sides of that gap, without prejudging the kinds of cuts, joints and erasures needed to make that discrepancy something we can look at or learn from." Ibid p. 60. She quotes: Culler, Jonathan. (1988). *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions*. Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press. p. xv.

<sup>34</sup> "'Dissipation' plus 'gap' equals infinite process, without origin or end. ... a process through a dissipated field, crossing out gaps and hauling along history's remnants, a verb "translating" - not a noun, is needed here." Bal, M. (2001). p.65.

transgression and citation of the conventional boundaries within art discourse, I want to reflect on the idea of medium (which in many ways parallels "genre") and begin with two relatively outward remarks: 1. The focus of "To Unsense" is on the practice of an artist who draws and writes on his drawings, either in them directly, so that writing is part of the composition, or outside of them in his letters. In this form of practice, the activities of writing and drawing become inseparable: physically - as they often share the same sheet of paper - and in their content. 2. The same artist, Antonin Artaud, as theatre director, actor and theorist postulated that in the theatre the *mise-en-scène* is more significant than the text of the play.<sup>35</sup> In his text Derrida approaches the experience of a draftsman who constantly tried to assess and supplement his own drawings with writing, and a theatre practitioner deeply preoccupied with the tension between the written word of the play and a lived-out materiality of the acting moment on stage.

The "original" configuration of the practice, which became the conceptual polygon for Derrida, is founded in transgression and cross-breeding of art disciplines, genres and media. Artaud's practice necessarily cuts through theatre (direction and acting), drawing and writing, relating to their different characteristics and means as media, but never appropriating them or succumbing to externally imposed boundaries. In Artaud's articulation this spirit reaches the limits of perception itself, when he speaks of painting and music production and perception as synaesthetic. At the same time Artaud, and after him Derrida, are deeply involved in the discussion of craft and the material specificity of a medium. Transgression of a medium (from painting to music, from text to performance) necessarily happens by the citation of its limits (material characteristics) and boundaries (established conventions of use of those limits), in a skilful crafting of a work. The focus of articulation shifts from definition and characterisation of a medium to the process of transference, translation from one medium to another and back. Generally speaking the whole of the text works by uncovering and specifying the tension between the fields of sense, not by way of a simple dialectic, but by enactment of the operative dimension of a particular field and those adjacent to it. Thus the animation of the genre and medium discourses through translation (moving, transference) is not so much an attribute of those discourses, but a holistic condition of the generation of the text, or a condition of *practice* as such.

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<sup>35</sup> "This very difficult and complex poetry assumes many guises, and first among these are all the means of expression that can be utilised on stage, such as music, dance, plastic art, pantomime, mimicry, gesture, intonation, architecture, lighting and sets."

"... this language begins with the stage, draws its power from its spontaneous creation on stage and struggles directly with the stage without resorting to words ... it is *mise-en-scène* that is theatre, much more than the written and spoken play."

In: Artaud, Antonin. Sontag, Susan, ed. (1976). "Mise-en-scène and Metaphysics" in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*; trans. Helen Weaver. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. pp. 232, 234.

In this vein "To Unsense" is not written as an explanation of Artaud's work, but as an experiment, which follows the latter's thought and meditates on his texts, testing the possibilities of the word and the idea of *subjectile*. The resulting text is thus not so much a story, but a record of a conceptual and textual adventure, whose multiple narratives are written down as they appear, evolve and influence each other. Notwithstanding this chronicle-making, the record has a certain preordained chronological plot, which relates to the appearances of the word "subjectile" in Artaud's letters. Three appearances, in three letters from 1932, 1946 and 1947, are addressed generally one after the other (with one exception when the last letter is mentioned briefly at the beginning of the text), creating a kind of fragmentary biography of the *subjectile*. The text establishes the historical meaning of the word *subjectile* as a starting point of the experiment and clarifies the method of "unsensing" or working with words and texts that are enacted. The last few pages are devoted to a review and questioning of the narrative that has been recorded.

To summarise the aspects of the text relevant to the present work, *subjectile* is a conceptual-metaphorical device, an empty figure that successively or simultaneously personifies art-work, its material support, the instrument of its creation, art convention and the artist himself, body and soul. A locus of birth and erasure of human uniqueness and creative freedom, in the state when it is stretched as a screen, a canvas - a traditional support for painting, inert and neutral,<sup>36</sup> the *subjectile* is burdened, physically contaminated with empty conventions of representation.<sup>37</sup> Those demand to be exorcized by brutal and uncompromising creative acts, which can never be accomplished entirely, thus making the *subjectile* a place of failure and shame. Evil convention which inhabits the *subjectile* as succubi,<sup>38</sup> and dictates the subjects and procedures of drawing, fixes the creative source and its operations, defines it by thematising, gives it a name, as it were, deadens it.

In giving names to creative acts and their traces this evil force names itself, reveals itself as god. The act of naming becomes a curse of death to art practice and to Artaud himself, that person who was born on a particular date and named. Death comes from the enforcement of a social norm, of propriety in the glance of the proper name. For that reason the artist's name "Artaud" needs to be purified of god, this evil fixity in convention and norm, through incantational rites of semantic abuse and grammatical dismemberment,<sup>39</sup> through re-establishment of

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<sup>36</sup> Derrida J. (1998). p. 76

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p. 63, 64

<sup>39</sup> "For a reading of this *ra*, grammar of the future and clearing of the throat, a semantic ramification and a frenzied death rattle, we would have to bring together all the *ra*'s and all the rats of Artaud, starting with those to be heard in his own name: Ar-Tau ... Inserted in a drawing, the syllable *ra* is

his body as a total creative instrument<sup>40</sup> constantly forced into silence by the authority of the name.

Returning to the discussion of practice and translation, the act of naming and the fact of bearing a name are expressed in the tension of their ambivalence. Naming oscillates between the often equally aggressive acts of affirmation of uniqueness (of a person, of an art) and its erasure and "calibration", while name (a *subjectile* in itself) is staged as the locus, trace or memorial of those acts, a destiny and a liberation at the same time.

On paper's surface, in the drawing, deliverance from god or norm in its artistic or social sense is achieved through a series of operations, that constitute a special *cunning craft*, "a backward skill"<sup>41</sup>, the "right awkwardness".<sup>42</sup> It is a "bad", intentionally maladroit way of drawing, which, while necessarily founded in technical mastery and competence in the "themes of art",<sup>43</sup> nevertheless subverts them, forcing them to address their self-rejection on paper. In Artaud's own words:

You will realise  
from my maladroit drawings,  
but so crafty,  
and so adroit,  
that say SHIT to this world.<sup>44</sup>

In Derrida's interpretation:

The crafty person who comes to correct some wrong, is a sort of copula between the right of the adroit and the right of the awkward. The drawings are awkward because they are crafty, skilful, sly, adroit, indirect stratagems for plaguing this world with its norms and values, its expectations, its Art, its police, its

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also circled with a stroke, then multiplied in *rabut, tarrabut, rarfa, ratura, rarina, arera*, and so on. Such is the *art* of Antonin Artaud, always beyond Art or against the Fine Arts." original italics, *ibid* footnote 75, p. 154, also pp.92-93.

<sup>40</sup> "I mean that there is in my drawings a kind of moral music that I have made in living through my features not just with my hand, but with the gasp of the breath of my tracheal artery, and of the teeth of my chewing." To draw with his mouth, this isn't just giving it his voice, his breath, and his language *before any words*, it is rather attacking the support with these solid, incisive or grinding instruments that are the teeth, it is eating up, sometimes spitting out the subjectile, the "thing", if we can say it like that, as much as its glossomatic body or its phonogram; the word *subjectile* is thus drawn beyond its assigned, normative, reasonable sense. It is immediately *unsensed*, incarcerated." *Ibid.* p. 82, also related the motive of breath, see *ibid* pp. 119-121.

Artaud is quoted from "Mes dessins ne sont pas des dessins ..." in Artaud, Antonin. (1956). *Oeuvres complètes. vol. XXI.* Paris: Gallimard. p. 265.

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, J. (1998). p. 107

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid* p. 117

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* p. 107

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* p. 117

psychiatry: in a word its rights.<sup>45</sup>

In the third letter mentioning *subjectile* "the cunning craft" is manifested in verbs designating manipulations with textiles: sew-unsew, shred, cut, stitch, references to the crafts of tailors and embroiderers.<sup>46</sup> I will address this appearance of Arachne later in a separate section. Here I only want to attest for the presence of textiles in the crafty mutiny against the god of names and themes. It is through this eager and particular presence, between the acts of sewing and unsewing, characterised by the ambivalent affiliation to gender and genre, that the mutiny itself is enabled and embodied.

Breaking away from its conventional instance as canvas, a subservient support for painting, *subjectile* can gain a level of autonomy in an attempt to traverse and overcome the inertness of a screen. Then its surface becomes animated by the intense creative operation enacted upon it: it becomes a membrane,<sup>47</sup> porous, breathing and penetrable, a place of ceaseless birthing, a utero-phallic organ of a primordial demiurge,<sup>48</sup> resisting the strictly gendered male Latin god of names and representation. Ironically the measure of its resistance should be controlled. An over-resistant *subjectile* is a danger not just to the god of names, but to the artist himself. Such a *subjectile* should be "mistreated" and *thrown* back to its place, the underneath. *Subjectile* makes itself appear and disappear in the tension between the acts of control and submission. From this discontinuity of its appearances, and an inherent dis-ownership of its image, stems

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid

<sup>46</sup> "The figures on the inert page said nothing under my hand. They offered themselves to me like milestones which would not inspire the drawing, and which I could probe, cut, scrape, file, sew, unsew, shred, slash and stitch without the subjectile ever complaining through father or through mother." Ibid p. 66

<sup>47</sup> Ibid p.76

<sup>48</sup> "...*this arcane man who torments the matter in himself to have beings come forth instead of every idea*". Around this image from Artaud's drawing and text evolves the utero-phallic discourse of creation: "Arcane man holds his hand on his sex. If he "torments the matter in himself to have beings come forth," what he is hiding and showing thus, the place of torment, in other words, of work, is under the hand, a single hand, the phallic *and* uterine matter, the projectile *and* the orifice of birth-giving: the matricidal subjectile, the double organ of a phallic progenitor, father and mother at the same time. "For I am the father-mother, / neither father nor mother, / neither man nor woman..." Ibid pp. 126-7

"*On one side*, the subjectile is a male, *he* is the subject: *he* makes the law from his supposed transcendent neutrality. He is the father, he gives lessons, comes to teach ... *But on the other hand*, and also inseparably, this same *subject-he* [*sujet-il*] makes all the signs traditionally interpreted as attributes of femininity, even of maternity. First, he is a substance, even the matter of a *hypokeimenon*, and not an attribute, precisely. A matter or a matrix stretching out beneath, and whose beneathness receives the advances and the moves forward, the projectiles and the ejaculations; it easily becomes the *object* of ambiguous aggressions, it exposes itself passively, one might say, to the marks and the seizures of instruments or convex organs ... Then the subjectile, this woman, is also a mother: place of travail and of birthing, lying down and lying in at the same time..." "The innate child that this father-mother secretes away in its crucible in itself. The subjectile would not only be the androgynous father-mother, incubus succubus that it represents even in itself ... it is also the child, the progeny, the "beings" projected, procreated, and thrown which must "come forth" from there. The subjectile-he and the subjectile-she steal them in identifying itself also with them. In the genealogy of this textile, we can count *tous les fils* [all the threads or sons] *et filles* [and daughters] of Artaud. The subject as a subjectile, it's *me*, the me that adds itself or subtracts itself, to support them, to or from all the figures in the uterophallic scene." Ibid pp. 132-3

*subjectile's* ability to resist the convention of art: "The neither/nor of the *subjectile* (neither subservient/nor dominating) situates the place of the double constraint: this way it becomes unrepresentable".<sup>49</sup>

"To Unsense", then, suggests the *subjectile* as a construct, or even a super-construct, that allows to address not the idea of something *as it is*, for example "control", but the operative field of this idea, its workings, which naturally includes its opposite: the *subjectile* is simultaneously the aggressor and the victim, the authority and the subjected, a mute material substance and the artist's very body and person.

Pictogram, in itself a fully materialised *subjectile*, because it is realised through drawing and writing at the same time, is understood as an impassioned document attesting to a struggle, extension and contraction of operative fields, expressed through some nominal figures (the "father" and "mother" of the third letter)<sup>50</sup> within a personalised mythology of creation. All of those figures can be played through the construct of the *subjectile*, which acts as the founding matrix in this mythology. In that way the *subjectile* substitutes and animates the conventional constructs of "theme", "genre", "medium" and "form" in the discourse of artwork, its production and meaning. This substitution forces the discourse to shift, to critique its own clichés and re-establish the link to artwork through the membrane of language-at-work, which "unsenses", mobilises, entangles and disentangles fixed meanings that form an obstacle between artwork and writing on it. Articulation - verbal discourse - ceases to be an external patron of art practice: it is itself re-established as an active practice intimately related to the art it addresses.

### **Crafting the "Unsense"**

The story of the *subjectile* is the story of a support, some material substratum, and "crafty" operations that it endures by various instruments. Some of the parallel instances of the *subjectilian* practice include: the projectile operates on the *subjectile*, pencil on paper, brush on canvas, needle on cloth: writing manipulates language, translation interprets text, naming defines body, convention directs art, etc. The dramatic tension of those *subjectilian stories* develops through the varying degrees of acceptance or resistance to the operations to which the substratum is subjected. As a result, the dramatic narrative that evolves as a result never assumes a single meaning, but oscillates between possibilities of resolution,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid p. 77

<sup>50</sup> A letter from February 1947: "The figures on the inert page said nothing under my hand. They offered themselves to me like millstones which would not inspire the drawing, and which I could probe, cut, scrape, file, sew, unsew, shred, slash, and stitch without the *subjectile* ever complaining through father or through mother." Quoted *ibid* pp. 136-7.

constantly taking on new meanings, changing along with the conceptual scenery. I will review the operation of "unsensing" and language as its *subjectile* and then move on to operations and *subjectiles* related to textiles and their crafts.

The idea of the essay being a scene, where *mise-en-scène* and dramaturgy of the *subjectile* is developed and tested, in association with Artaud's proposition of the necessarily predominance of *mise-en-scène* over a written play on stage, is stated from the very beginning: "I would call this a scene, 'the scene of the subjectile'".<sup>51</sup> The dynamics of acceptance or resistance, which imbue the substratum with a degree of independence and ability to act on its own behalf, is presented shortly after: "Subjectile, the thing or the word, can take the place of the subject or of the object – being neither one nor the other".<sup>52</sup>

Being preoccupied with the problem of subjectivity and objectivity to a lesser extent, the figure of the *subjectile* instead generates possibilities to reassess the discourse of art production based on the interchangeability of the "subject" and "object". In this it avoids the conventional narrative of projection, wherein the artist projects himself onto the sheet of paper/canvas. Here another narrative exists, where the sheet of paper has the option of independent reaction, even of direction of the creative act. The aim of attributing such abilities to a sheet of paper is not to inaugurate some fetishised mythology of material, which in fact would only reflect the fetishisation of the artist figure, but to open up a more subtle and mobile discourse on the process of art making and its articulation in words. At the basis of this alternative ethics of writing-art lies the (dis)continuity between *subjectile* the word and *subjectile* the thing, the phenomenology of a thing and its name in language. A careless or obvious<sup>53</sup> move from one to another subjects this subtle phenomenology to the threat of clichés, of overstated meaning, of naming as curse. Such a curse, namely a common convention of speech, obliterates, empties the phenomenon of relation thing-language of its living dynamism.

The operation of "un-sensing" is the main tool of this ethics, activated for the sake of keeping the *subjectile*-language permeable and mobile. "Unsensing" sets to work the linguistic and phonetic potentials of a given word in order to activate new possibilities of generating meaning. It is a kind of linguistic "synaesthesia", layering of the phonetic associations of a word over its grammatical history. In this vein the French word *forcené* (rabid, mad), translated into English as "unsensed", is explored: "*Forcené* the word I wanted to decompose surreptitiously, subjectively, in *for*, *fort*, *force*, *fors*, and *né*, letting all the words in

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid p. 61

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> "To write according to the new phrasing, but discretely, for resistance to translation when it is deliberate, noisy, spectacular, we already know it has been repatriated." Ibid p. 65.

or, hors, sort incubate in it."<sup>54</sup> "Unsensing" links to madness (another edition of the essay is titled "Maddening the Subjectile"),<sup>55</sup> as a mad person is someone without sense (French *hors sens* which resounds in *for* and *sen*), or someone "without what is sense for others".<sup>56</sup> What is significant in "unsensing" is not the sign of mental illness, but the possibility of generating a different text, attuned to sensibilities unavailable in a conventional art-historical writing, thus remaining "outside of its sense". A *forcené* text permits the use of writing and drawing as co-productive instances or phases of the same creative enquiry, and enables connections to be traced between them on multiple, coexisting levels of meaning.

In the last pages of the essay, the *subjectile* is addressed finally with a direct question: "what is it?". In the ironic "short history" of his own poetics Derrida offers no answer, instead playing out the futility of a definition attempt:

But then what?

What is the subjectile exactly? No matter what, everything and no matter what? The father, the mother, the son and myself? Just for good measure, because we could say the subjectile, it's also my daughter, matter and the holy Spirit, matter and the form of forms, the support and the surface, the representation and the unrepresentable, the figure of the unfigurable, the impact of the projectile, its target and its destination, the object, the subject, the project, the subjacent of all these spurts, the bed of the succubus and the incubus, etc., the et cetera even as the place of universal incubation, the absolute preoccupation, what bears everything in gestation, manages everything and gives birth to everything, being capable of everything.

In short, everything and no matter what, so that there is no more sense, rather some maddening-of-sense to asking: "who is it?" Can one even ask, or wonder, "what is it?" "It's what?" No, it's nothing, nothing at all, no determined being, from the moment that it can take on the determined look of anything at all.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid p. 69

<sup>55</sup> Derrida, Jacques and Caws M. Ann. (December 1994). "Maddening the Subjectile". *Yale French Studies*. 84 (154-171).

<sup>56</sup> Citation from Heidegger's note on the history of the German word *Wahnsinnige* – madman, in Derrida, J. (1998) p.70

<sup>57</sup> Ibid p. 134



This list of the possible senses of the *subjectile* embodies, in its exhaustive enumeration, the “maddening-of-sense”. *Subjectile* manifests the gap between artwork in its material and performative existence and its possible appropriation or “namings” by various text-based domains (philosophy, history of art, psychology). In this irreducibility to a textual definition, an artwork is close to the person of an artist, or any *person*. *Subjectile* appears as the problem of uniqueness and generalization. The “who” question is not entirely irrelevant, as even if there is no conventional sense in the “who”, in the unsensed figure which is *subjectile*, the “who” of an artwork can seize an opportunity of existence.

On the one hand “To Unsense” inaugurates a writing code which obliges the writer not to define, not to generalise art(work), not to follow the obvious route of a “theme”<sup>58</sup> (genre, medium, form, representation etc.). On the other, a rejection of definition brings about a crisis of meaning. An attempt to “unsense” the *subjectile*, which doesn't have a sense in the first place (*subjectile* is “everything and no matter what”), turns into conferring it forcefully with a sense, and confining it to that sense.<sup>59</sup> Again *subjectile* (dis)appears in the tension between definition and vagueness.

### **Crafting cloth (out of) subjectile**

“To Unsense” references textiles through the interposing figures of “canvas”-“sheet” and “bandage”-“diaper”. They are concretised imaginary points of departure of interpretative moves, “states”, metaphorical instances of the *subjectile*, linked through craft or labour-referencing verbs. Tension between canvas and linen sheet invokes the struggle to get a drawing done. On the one hand the stretched canvas is a metaphor for art convention, the rule of representation, it is “impenetrable” to an artist's effort and as such it can even dictate to the artist what and how to draw. On the other, it is on the canvas's surface that the work is born, thus the sheet (bed) is the other face of the canvas, it is the place of conception, incubation and birth, the soft surface that bears birth signs.

The bandage-diaper pair echoes the canvas-sheet pair – canvas is the place of struggle, wounds from which are to be bandaged; both wound and healing up leave traces, signs on the cloth. Thus the work, drawing-writing, oscillates between wounding and healing, destruction and repair of the *subjectile*. The acts and tools that inflict the wounds (needles, knives, feathers etc.) correspond to the tools that leave signs on the paper sheet (pencils, pens, brushes). Sheet and diaper

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<sup>58</sup> “... a theme, the meaning of an object or a subject, such as it could be posed there. A theme is always posed or supposed. ... The property of a theme is what an expropriation has deprived us of, and it is as if we had been deprived of our own memory, distanced from our own birth.” Ibid p. 74

<sup>59</sup> The problem of “a double constraint” of unsensing the *subjectile* is addressed through the concept of *khora*. I do not address this concept in any detail because it moves away from the immediate material associations of the *subjectile*. The discussion of *subjectile* as *khora* is ibid on pages 134-136.

are signs of birth: the one who has been conceived between the sheets is born on them and then is wrapped in the diaper. Conception, birth and defecation – sperm, blood and excrement – are “inks”, liquids and substances that leave stains, traces, signs and signatures on the cloth, on the *subjectile*. The “work” on the *subjectile* is both that of leaving signatures – stains – and deciphering them, searching for the name that is lurking in them.<sup>60</sup> The work is also the new-born him- or herself. In that sense, apart from the obvious metaphor, the “who” question of the artwork gains legitimacy.

The most direct cloth-related operations referred to in “To Unsense” are those of sewing and stitching, references to the textile crafts of tailoring and embroidery. They appear in the aftermath of the crisis of meaning resulting from the direct attempts to define the *subjectile*. That crisis is worked through in a paragraph from the last letter, where *subjectile* is mentioned and which invokes stitching and sewing. Here is the passage from Artaud's letter of 1947:

The figures on the inert page said nothing under my hand. They offered themselves to me like milestones which would not inspire the drawing, and which I could probe, cut, scrape, file, sew, unsew, shred, slash and stitch without the *subjectile* ever complaining through father or through mother.<sup>61</sup>

To be able to continue writing in the aftermath of the definition and naming crash, Derrida turns from nouns and names to verbs. Once the bankruptcy of sense and ethical un-sustainability of definition has been shown, the un-nameable *subjectile* is not asked about her/his/its nature, but of the acts and actions that sustain her, that constantly make and re-make her. It is here that the links between textile act and its metaphor are fully actualised as paradigms of a living and evolving art practice, transgressing the boundaries of genre, art convention and discipline. The verbs sew-unsew-shred-stitch are mobilised as operative fields, between which a critical language that *metaphorises*, articulating a practice by materialising the dynamism of its meanings, identifies itself.

The metaphorising is performed in a series of numbered moves. Their disposition fits their order in the letter and their instrumental logic of doing and undoing. To perform a stitch, needle and thread are the two basic tools needed. With a needle, a perforation or an entry into the cloth is made; the thread passing through is the aftermath, the trace of perforation – through the thread the journey

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<sup>60</sup> “But this *phenomenon*, what you see here, the colour, the dark light of the stroke, the traces of burning, the enthusiasm of the plumb line, all *constitute* the *subjectile* which otherwise would be nothing, especially not the support of a signature, the tortured body of a name.” Ibid p. 147

<sup>61</sup> Ibid p. 66

of the needle is traceable. In perforation there is a peculiar beginning, setting in motion a relationship of needle-cloth-thread. The hi/story of this relationship is the thread. Probe-perforate-pierce is the first set of verbs that Derrida addresses:

*To probe:* (1) The probing instrument works by penetration, it plumbs the depths, perforating the surface and passing through to the other side. "I could probe . . ." means then: I could make the most intimate of moves, by transgressing a limit, under the skin, once the epidermis was pierced. The element through which an underwater probe delves is liquid like the sea - the "mother waters" - offering little resistance to the probing tool. It can sink down like a *mine*, ready to incise a stroke with a pencil lead [*mine*] or to explode. ... (2) I could probe to try to find out, to discover the truth under the subjectile, behind the veil or the screen. I could with the point of a lead instrument try to learn, to decipher the sign or the symptom of a truth.<sup>62</sup>

Probing is mobilised in two meanings: transgression and learning. The first is an intimate physical transgression of body limits, referencing amniocentesis: the probe delves through "mother-waters".<sup>63</sup> Conception and birth are invoked when an underwater probe resonates with images of a pencil lead and a mine – an incision, a stroke, ready to explode within the abdomen, impregnating it, but possibly also disrupting the pregnancy, causing a miscarriage. The second meaning of the probe is discovery and learning, when the surface of the *subjectile* can conceal or display the truth. Thus the probing pencil acts through it and on it, once as a needle, once as a deciphering tool. In its journey through the *subjectile*, from one surface to another, the verb "to probe" mutates into the noun "the probe", which changes its visual image several times, before becoming a verb again. The operative field of "to probe" is performed "live" in the text.

The needle operates on layers of cloth prepared through the acts of cutting, which, as with probing, oscillate between aggressive attacks on the *subjectile* ("to notch and gash them, slice and incise them, cut them up, hack them to pieces")<sup>64</sup> and its regeneration through removal of withered parts ("to strengthen by lopping off everything restraining the growth, to prune, thin, cut back,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid p. 139.

<sup>63</sup> Even though in 1986 amniocentesis was not a common medical test, the reference to the amniotic fluid is clear.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid p. 140.

rejuvenate, render strength to a tree or a member"). Once the cloths have been prepared and the purposes of the needle established, sewing can begin:

*To sew:* (1) "I could . . . sew," and for that I have to pierce with a needle or a pointed lead, perforate, penetrate, make holes in the skin of the figure, but I can sew, (2) and even suture and scar, in order to close the wound that I open in sewing. I pass the thread through to repair, gather, have the fabrics hold together; I adjust the piece of clothing which, covering the surface of the body, weds it in its natural form, reveals it by covering it. The truth again.

*To unsew:* (1) "I could . . . unsew," unmake, do the preceding operation in reverse, but it was already the reverse of itself. The link itself, like the link between these two operations that consist precisely in a certain treatment of linking and unlinking, the obligation of this ligature is a *double bind*, a double conjuncture. For, (2) to unsew is also to undress, again to lay bare the body under the surface or the surface of the skin under the clothing, or the flesh under the skin. Under the act of war (surreptitiously recalled by the act of *unsewing*), to unsew can again serve or save the truth, the truth of the body proper."<sup>65</sup>

The metaphor of sewing-unsewing expressively performs the creative dynamism of Artaud's practice turning to the physical instrumentality of the images of textile crafts. Sewing simultaneously performs acts of damage and repair, making holes with the needle and pulling the edges of the fabric together with the thread, suturing the wound and crafting a garment, an image of the body. Probing deals with *subjectile* by penetration, while tailoring shapes and adjusts its different layers so that they manifest one another through acts of overlaying and concealment. In the conventional binary logic of form and content this might be understood as paradoxical, but in terms of practice there is no contradiction between a garment relating to and thus revealing the shape of the body it is meant to cover. Here, the evocation of textile crafts helps to evade the trap of the logical paradox, allowing the practice to remain possible, embodied and relational without losing its saturation and intensity.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid p. 141

*To shred*: (1) "I can . . . shred," during the same test of force and desire, that is, cut into pieces, into tatters or shreds, slash, hack, wound, mutilate the body with a cutting instrument. It's sometimes the maladroit gesture of a surgeon. *Shredded* linen also names the old cloth (textile is always, along with paper, the best paradigm of the *subjectile*) from which threads are taken to make bandages, generally in wars. The act of war would be perhaps purely aggressive and devoid of any repairing counterpart without this virtual allusion to the act of bandaging...

*To stitch* shares in fact its ambivalence with *to sew* (to pierce through but also to have the tissues hold together, whether skin, fabric, or flesh) but adds its own... Having recourse to the infinitive, a possibility mentioned in the Littré dictionary, Artaud invents or discovers a rare usage in order to stress an activity, a labor, an eagerness. To occupy oneself with stitching is never to cease *covering with scars*. For such is the sense of this verb that only relates sewing and stitching to the flesh. To have the body stitched is to be able to show it covered with traces, the scars of blows and wounds. But "to cover with scars" may mean at the same time to multiply the blows and wounds *and* the gestures of reparation, sutures, and bandages which belong to the moment of scarring. Surgery does both, successively or simultaneously.<sup>66</sup>

'Shred' and 'stitch' reinforce and particularise the principle of sew-unsew. Shred adds an "historical" layer to the *subjectile*, reframing the surgical references to war sutures. Stitch stresses the activity and endurance, and the surface topography in the aftermath of stitching acts. In English the operative field of "to stitch" incorporates the craft of embroidery, which resonates here in the "eagerness" of the act and the topographical change of the *subjectile's* surface. Reference to textile crafts designates the polyvalent principle of art practice discourse and concretises it in its physical and historically resonant images, so developing an actual and metaphorising "poetics of cloth".<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid p. 142.

<sup>67</sup> Barnett, Pennina. "Folds, Fragments, Surfaces: Towards a Poetics of Cloth" in Binns, Polly, Barnett,

## S(he)jectile

*Subjectile*, word and thing, is the main object of "unsensing". Through its intense application *subjectile* is constantly questioned as to its nature, essence and identity. Decomposed by "unsensing", it resonates with many possible resolutions of its meaning: *subjective*, *subtle*, *sublime*, *projectile*. Without succumbing to any one of them it draws bi-directional trajectories from subject to object, from surface to instrument, from male to female, from birth to death. A multitude of those trajectories manifests the performative body of the interpretative text, which is concerned with performance of meanings and not with their final establishment. Announced as a material substratum of drawing/writing, *subjectile* manifests its different instances as matter, surface, support, skin, membrane, screen, veil, canvas, paper.<sup>68</sup> As a support, as something which is constantly underneath, providing a location, a place for the creative act it gathers a much more extended material mythology:

At once a place of combat, the meadow for a duel, a ground, a bed, a bedding down, even a tomb: you give birth there, you abort there, or you die there. ... It isn't enough to say that a subjectile is stretched or lie *beneath*. War takes place between several *underneath*s.<sup>69</sup>

It is an anatomy of layers and surfaces, of the peculiar "between" situations when surface is not the final limit of tactility and thought, but is opened up into a thickness of material.<sup>70</sup> Those co-relations of material and surface and of underlying surfaces (what lays between the both sides of a fabric?) negotiate the metaphorical-material interval, exactly the moment, where the link of material-word-meaning is being established and re-established.

Gender of the *subjectiles* is negotiated through the materiality of textile. "Textile" signs for both male and female evoke a whole array of "gendered" domains, actions and concepts: the canvas/bandage sign for art, war, instrument,

Pennina. (1999). *Textures of Memory: The Poetics of Cloth*. ex. cat. Angel Row Gallery, Nottingham. pp. 25-34.

<sup>68</sup> For example: "The notion belongs to the code of painting and designates what is in some way lying below (*subjectum*) as a substance, a subject, or a succubus. Between the beneath and the above, it is at once a support and a surface, sometimes also the matter of a painting or a sculpture, everything distinct from from, as well as from meaning and representation, not representable. Its presumed depth or thickness can only be seen as a surface, that of the wall or of wood, but already also that of paper, of textiles, and of the panel. A sort of skin with pores." in Derrida, J. (1998) p. 64. "...about the traversal of the subjectilian division, canvas, veil, paper, wall... The screen must be traversed by an expression that attacks the subjectile.... upon all the history ... introjecting and interjecting itself between the two epidermal surfaces of a membrane..." Ibid p. 103

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p. 112

<sup>70</sup> "...we have to give the ink of so many words depositing themselves slowly in the thickness of the body time to get absorbed: exactly the thickness of the subjectile whose nature we still do not understand." Ibid p. 140

spurt (ejaculation, blood, paint), father, being born; sheets/diapers for home, reparation, surface (receptacle), hymen, incubation, mother, giving birth. The ending of the word "subjectile" may be interpreted phonetically as both female and male (French *il* and *ile*),<sup>71</sup> playfully mingling the associations brought about via textile signs.

"Throwing" is an instance of a "whole", un-deconstructed (in the basic physical sense) textile surface which can be linked to the image of the sheet. *Throwing* in its many variations (to throw and throw at, being-thrown, throwing oneself, thrown on, be thrown upon, throws itself, throw down, thus becoming crumpled on the ground, heaped together) is one of the central acts or *motives* of the *subjectilian* poetics. It is there to describe and characterise, to give an image of the drawing act. Briefly, *throwing* (*jeter, jacere*) enacts the two situations of the *subjectile*: being thrown (becoming a screen, stretched out) and throw something (at, down, below). It oscillates between active and passive forms, between throwing as ejaculating, spurting blood, casting a line etc. - the "male" state of the projectile, and the "female" state of being thrown - becoming a sheet, a subject, a support, a sick body, a newborn - the state of the *subjectile*.<sup>72</sup> As *subjectile*, something/one that has been thrown becomes a foundation. From the state of passivity and helplessness, by the act of throwing down, beneath, it acquires the ability to serve as foundation. It is able to sustain a construction, which will be capable to withstand and/or receive further throws (blows, spurts, lines, seed, etc.).<sup>73</sup>

The female/male dynamic does not rest on the complementary evolution from one instance to another, it moves further:

The subjectile-he and the subjectile-she steal them [the children] in identifying itself also with them. In the genealogy of this textile we can count *tous les fils* [all

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<sup>71</sup> "In vain does the word *subjectile* have an *il* inscribed in it, its phonic form retains resonances conventionally associated with the feminine, precisely in its *il*, in the sound *ile*: fragile, gracile, docile, the slight weakness of what is more gracious than powerful, the aerial, the ethereal, the subtle or the volatile, even the futile." Ibid p. 133

<sup>72</sup> On the double conjecture of "throw/being thrown" see:  
 p. 77: "But the drama of its own becoming always oscillates *between* the intransitivity of *jacere* and the transitivity of *jacere*, in what I will call the *conjecture* of both..."  
 p. 84: "throwing, throwing oneself..."  
 p. 117: " To *throw* something right in someone's face, like an insult frank and straight..."  
 p. 118: "You can cast or spurt in all directions..."  
 p. 147: "It was necessary to perforate, to throw, to throw oneself against the subjectile with all one's strength, to become a projectile and see oneself on the side of the target, already on the other side, and from the other side of the wall that I also am. I traverse the membrane, and my own skin. I am cast before even being able to cast, into birth."

<sup>73</sup> "At the same time, and because I have thrown something, I can have lifted it or founded it. *Jacio* can also have this sense: I lay down foundations, I institute by throwing out something. The subjectile does not throw anything, but it has been laid down, even founded. A foundation in its turn, it can thus found, sustain a construction, serve as a support." Ibid p.77

the threads or sons] *et filles* [and daughters] of Artaud.<sup>74</sup>

In a series of substitutions, partitions and fusions of grammatical genders and categories of animated beings and inanimate things, *subjectile* becomes simultaneously father, mother, child and the sheet on which copulation and birth take place. In terms of writing, such fusion allows us to shift from object to subject when addressing textile and through it addressing artwork. By this shift textile-*subjectile* becomes a person, someone possessing his/her own genealogy. The artist (Artaud) and his work (*subjectile*) are tied by a shared genealogy which is performed again through a cloth-related homonym: *filles* (French for "sons" or "threads") and *filles* ("daughters") of Artaud are counted in the structure (genealogy) of this textile (*subjectile*). Thread counting is an act inherently related to the make-up of a woven textile, by which basic characteristics of the woven cloth are defined – density of the cloth and its width, if threads are counted in relation to a certain measure of width - and its structure, i.e. the order of raising the warp and inserting the weft. This indirect discourse of weaving suggests that production of art-work and its interpretation can be measured, structured acts - counted and thus accounted for. Genealogy imposes order upon interlaced blood-relations, metaphorically speaking: genealogical order permits the flowing stain of blood to be absorbed into the thickness of the cloth, become part of its structure, and thus susceptible to acts of counting and accounting and acts of articulation. Conversely, the amorphous flow of the stain marks a special area in the plain disciplined grid of the weave, subtly subverting the rule of its binary order. *Subjectile* appears as a self-producing cloth of art practice: inside its structure it bears the history of its past production and the trace of its production in the future.

Notwithstanding the impulse of mingling and mutating genders and inverted genealogies of the *subjectile*-cloth, a certain trajectory of gender specificity remains at work. Acts and features of *subjectile-she* and *subjectile-he* are outlined with too much graphic detail, which does not permit the reader to "let gender go" and peacefully linger in androgynous creativity. It is not just the demand of the dramaturgy of the text, although the dramatic tension of the *subjectile* is to a great extent achieved through the tension between its male and female instances. "To Unsense" is in some way a kind of interpretative exercise, a meditative development of a certain "body of thought", a certain imagination, selected texts and passages. As such it is distanced, even solitary, conditioned by the universe it outlines for its own action. Yet it is also a tribute, not just to the thought, but to the body, a person named Antonin Artaud, and inexorably to a man.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid p. 133



These are "the figures . . ." that "I could . . .".

That I could have what?

Let's be satisfied, finally, with this remark. What I could, myself, always has the double value, double and nondialectic, of an operation. A surgical operation, we have seen, a work of the hand and of *man's hand*.

The account that began with the scene of the *subjectile* comes to a close with the work of a man's hand. This is not a generalised address to the "human hand", it is the hand of *that* man, Antonin Artaud. Capital letters are reserved for the proper name only; Artaud's manhood remains uncapitalised, ungeneralised, specific. The dynamism of gender in Artaud's practice, as understood by Derrida, is there to maintain the specificity of "that man's hand" and the only way to do this without embracing the obvious heroics of masculine phallogocentric discourse is by activating, i.e. giving an active part to, the *subjectile*, the support, the sheet and the diaper, the myth of the female succubus of art material.

The only reality, or the actual virtuality of the text, is that of the two men, Artaud and Derrida. Their texts exist between them in their solitude, in the gap of time that separates them, and between them in their speech of one to another. Between them is the discourse of Art, tropes of genre, theme and representation. The *subjectile* is brought to de-capitalise it, to personify its figure and to personalise it for them, so that the discourse will come *in person*. Remember? The figures of the subjectile "offered themselves to me". S(he)subjectile is present so that the object-her can be abused - as mother-tongue or a sheet of paper, knowing that the subject-her - as text or artwork, will recuperate herself and its object, will be able to reinstate their internal speech. She is just a figure, in that she is the weakest and the most powerful thing in the text, she can make everything possible, and withdraw. Her scene is always - already - empty and thus set for them to investigate the traces of her absence.

### **Crafting a name: textile mythologies, poetics, autobiography**

In art practice action and articulation are not opposites, neither they are complementary - they work in conjunction, they are inseparable elements of the same process, no matter in what form or to what extent articulation proceeds. Action and articulation produce the journey from the practitioner's "position" to its material manifestation and back again, because "the position" is not a location of origin, it is a mutable and fluid constellation of material manifestations and their feedbacks. "Position" is never singular, it is always plural, as one person occupies

many "positions" at once. Mutable and plural, more than anything "position" is a scene, a place of play, of performance and experience of a personal identity of a practitioner through the material outcomes of his/her actions in the world. Personal identity and the material world, verbal expression and material things in that scene are hardly divided. "Textiles" here can act as signs and as the actual matter<sup>75</sup> of each of those pairs. As a metaphor textiles can be mobilised to play out identity-world-word-thing relations in all their specific materiality. Literalizing the act of transference in metaphor, textiles "metaphorise"<sup>76</sup> or conceptually embody those relations without illustrating, or succumbing to, any anterior<sup>77</sup> narrative. It is the task of language in this research to keep that permeable relationship of open inside and pervasive outside, and for that purpose I turned to *subjectile*.

In terms of methodology of writing, of setting in motion the task of language just discussed, I am interested in experimental writing and its ethics as developed in "To Unsense". On the basis of this ethics I construct my own way of writing, when *subjectile* offers the means to address "textiles" as practice: inter-related material, act and metaphor, a scene, a playground of meanings generated within a culture. It is by no means my goal to strip textiles (with no quotation marks) of their concrete materiality and specific history. This writing does not reject materiality, but aims to negotiate the position of materiality within language and to locate language within materiality. To achieve this working with metaphors enables the mapping out of the cultural associations of textiles, so that the specific historicity of a piece of fabric and its making unfold and reconnect with an extended constellation of meanings, thus constructing a holistic identity of a textile practice in multiple layers.

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<sup>75</sup> "... this same *subject-he* [*sujet-il*] makes all the signs traditionally interpreted as attributes of femininity, even of maternity. First, he is a substance, even the matter of a *hypokeimenon*, and not an attribute, precisely. A matter or a matrix stretching out beneath..." in Derrida, J. (1998) p.133

<sup>76</sup> "No longer an escape from literal, material reality metaphors a la Louise literalize their own name. *Meta-phorein* means transference, as in "translation"... The literal sense of a metaphor is to transfer onto the viewer what the object is, says and does. In case of the fragments of tapestry that characterise *Spider* ... [they] are not conceptual as opposite to material, but conceptual in their materiality. With their frayed edges, bearing witness to their ancient history and the pastness this history carries with it, metaphorizing, into the present, they conceptualise metaphor in a hyperbolic materiality." in Bal, M. (2001) pp. 84-85

<sup>77</sup> Anterior story: a (usually) iconographic narrative mode when "a visual work is considered an illustration of the narrative that precedes it and to which it is subordinated, its success being measured in terms of the degree to which it matches the story." Ibid p. 32.

To summarise, *subjectile* sets the scene for textiles in this thesis in the following ways:

1. ***Subjectile* as the expression of ambivalence of textiles in relation to art genres**

Textiles are *subjectiles* of art: they are to this day the material supports of painting, and thus involuntary carriers of traditions of this medium and histories of its conventions of representation. As "textile art", the genre of Arachne, they are subversive trespassers of those conventions and crafty reiterators of those histories. Arachne's *subjectiles* evoke other histories or stories of others, where "succubi" of craft, gender and social existence of art proliferate and challenge the propriety of convention. In that double-binding or double constraint the mythologies and histories of textiles inter-penetrate.

2. ***Subjectile* as a conditional mode of operation for textile practice**

*Subjectile*, an extended and cumulative figure of artwork, makes its (dis)appearances in the tension between operations. Its double-bound operational logic is "a certain treatment of linking and unlinking": sew-unsew, stitch-unstitch, shred and bind. *Subjectile* performs the immediate and the secondary, metaphorical, operations of embroidery, with which my current practice is mostly concerned, simultaneously. *Subjectile* is the instrumental poetics of textiles.

3. ***Subjectile* as a performative register of language**

*Subjectile* permits a performative record of the relationship between the textile histories in art and in craft and the personalised instance of their instrumental poetics (practice). *Subjectile* facilitates a record of a holistic and (dis)continuous practice, avoiding the clichés of thematisation. It enables the negotiation of an extended personified relation between practitioner,

artwork and practice, the possibility of “the who” question in relation to *subjectile* and thus to textiles.

In the framework of the three ways of the *subjectile* I intend to craft the name of my practice and to chart its biography. In the light of the *subjectile* those two quests, as well as the operation of crafting them, are ambivalent and dissipating. Naming (dis)appears between the inscription of a creative convention or social norm and the uniqueness of a singular practice. Autobiography similarly (un)links histories of textiles in art and craft and my personal textile practice. Both are there to negotiate the place of an autobiographical narration and the tactics of its (dis)appearance within my specific practice and the relation of this practice to the wider history of art and craft.

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*As a subjectile, halfway between rightful object and raw material, cloth oscillates in its function and in the way it works. In this oscillation cloth vacates its “intrinsic” position, forming a stage for identities other than its own; identities which, nevertheless, remain hooked into, encoded into the cloth's structure. A seemingly vacant stage, a figure of presupposed absence, allows singular, shifting and changeable, protean presences to surface and dissolve on both sides of the cloth.*

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## Chapter 2

### Politics of Articulation:

#### *The Space Between Stitches and the Surface of the Weave*

*Writing practice; Languages between cloth and textile;  
Textiling autobiography; History intervenes; Spacing textiles*

#### **Writing practice**

Torah binders are textiles that carry text. Furthermore, they function as actual documents, embroidered certificates of birth. In the light of this, the relationship between text and textile is central to this research. In this chapter I address this relationship in the context of textile culture and in the context of my practice linking an historical artefact and an autobiography. This chapter lays conceptual foundations for the methodology of this research.

The question of methodology here is twofold: as a textile practice-based researcher I use textile practice as my main methodology, yet, as far as an artefact is concerned and explored, the approach to it needs to be articulated and implemented. The relationship between those two main trajectories of research - textile practice and exploration of a textile artefact - needs to be articulated as well. Because of the initial complexity of the research, I give an outline of a methodological approach at the beginning of the specific chapters that deal with Torah binders and my practice. The current chapter aims to articulate the relational character of this research. On the one hand, it aims to provide the research with wide philosophical foundations in the theories of uniqueness and biographical identity of Adriana Cavarero and the relational or political identity of Hannah Arendt. On the other it will articulate a particularised or applied philosophy of text and textile, a relationship of materiality, text and writing. For this I turn to Victoria Mitchell's idea of "textility" and complement it with Doreen Massey's relational conception of space.

Since from the outset the research developed along two trajectories, which I simplistically call *historical* and *autobiographical*, some of the writing itself evolved in an academic format and some in a freer, poetic language. In the course of time I understood that this is a necessary trait of the text produced here, because it manifests the (at least) duality of voices and perspectives at work. In order to make a clear distinction between the shifts of voices, I separated the "other", poetical voice with a *different italicised font*. This chapter also aims to mark and contextualise the space of this *subjectilian* poetics, *the space between the stitch and the surface of the weave*.

Whilst constructing the foundations I have just outlined, texts to which I referred became tokens of articulation in a reflective process which accompanied the practical work. Considering the combined, relational nature of this work, they answer the call of “material thinking” or “creative research” as formulated by Paul Carter.

[It is] a research which is likely to be occasional, generically disrespectful and promiscuous, and localised.<sup>78</sup>

I turn to this rather radical call, since it makes place and space, dubious and fragile as they are, for thinking practice, i.e. sustaining conceptual and cultural links which mobilise and perpetuate practice outside the “proper sense” of a subject to be analysed within a particular disciplinary logic.

On some levels this chapter reflects on the *subjectilian* narrative unfolded before, aiming to position this narrative, which basically deals with art, in the study of history of textiles on the one hand and biographical identity on the other. The reason for bringing together those disparate domains lies in the knot tied within my practice, which binds together, in text and thread, the historical and the biographical narratives related to cloth. The aim is to present and negotiate the dual positioning of a practitioner-researcher, the “throwing” between present and past, between text and material, between theory and practice, between writing and embroidery.

### **Languages between cloth and textile**

The material and metaphorical place and function of textiles in the contemporary cultural memory, especially in the contexts of identity politics and (im)migration, has been addressed by Janis Jefferies in a 1999 volume dedicated to the emergence of textiles in contemporary art and interdisciplinary academic discourse:

How the past is seen, grasped as history, told and narrated, grasped as memory and bodily shifted, recognizes the primacy of textile in the construction of knowledge and cultural production.<sup>79</sup>

Jefferies establishes a dynamics of hi/story and narration, hapticity and embodied performativity as identifying trajectories of the contemporary

<sup>78</sup> Carter, Paul. (2005). *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research*. Carlton, Australia: Melbourne University Publishing. pp. 8-9.

<sup>79</sup> Jefferies, Janis. “Introduction: Textile Transitions” in Jefferies, Janis ed. (1999). *Reinventing Textiles: Gender and Identity*. vol. 2. Telos Art Publishing. p. 5. A similar attitude can be seen in the aims and scope of *Textile The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, which Jefferies edits: “...although textiles are part of our everyday lives, their very familiarity and accessibility belie a complex set of histories, and invite a set of speculations about their personal, social and cultural meanings”.

comprehension of textile culture. The textile historian Mary Schoeser, in her discussion of the historical study of textiles, almost inexorably turns to the relationship, direct or metaphorical, of textiles to language and text:

With or without inscriptions, textiles convey all kinds of 'texts': allegiances are expressed, promises are made ... memories are preserved, new ideas are proposed. ... The 'plot' is provided by the socially meaningful elements; the 'syntax' is the construction... Textiles can be prose or poetry, instructive or the most demanding of texts.<sup>80</sup>

Textile dictionaries suggest that the terms "textile" and "cloth" are synonyms. Yet "textile" or "textiles" more often act as general designations for the field of production and commerce, while "cloth" or "cloths" refer to a specific commodity, which appears in conjunction with a particular place, material, method of production or other specific affiliation, such as "terry cloth", "cloth of gold", "cloth of Cologne" etc.<sup>81</sup> Occasionally the term "textile" is specifically related to a woven fabric.

In the growing contemporary inter-disciplinary literature on the various aspects of "textile culture",<sup>82</sup> the word "textile" is often addressed as the epitome of materialised and embodied *texts*, commonly relating to the Latin word *texere*: weave, a root shared by both "text" and "textile".<sup>83</sup> "Textiles" generally denotes materials and technologies used in art and design,<sup>84</sup> while "cloth" or "fabric" stand for the poetic conceptualisation of softness, the illusive haptic sensuality and its non-linear, fold-like experiential narratives.<sup>85</sup> "Cloth" also appears as the container

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<sup>80</sup> Schoeser, Mary. (2003). *World Textiles: a Concise History*. London: Thames & Hudson. pp.7-8

<sup>81</sup> See: entries "textile" and "cloth" in Wingate, Isabel B. (1979). *Fairchild's Dictionary of Textiles*. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Fairchild Publications; Linton, George E. (1963) *The Modern Textile Dictionary*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce; Beech S.R. et al eds. (1988). *Textile Terms and Definitions*. Manchester: The Textile Institute.

<sup>82</sup> For a general discussion of textiles as culture in the anthropological and art contexts see: "Textile Culture and the Ethnographic Museum" in Colchester, Chloe. (2009). *Textiles Today: A Global Survey of Trends and Traditions*. London and New York: Thames & Hudson. pp. 169-175.

<sup>83</sup> See: The Concise Oxford Dictionary. (1971). Entry <Text>. p. 1268. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. For examples of usage see: Kruger, K. S. (2001). *Weaving the Word: the Metaphorics of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press; Klindienst Joplin, Patricia. (1984). "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours". *Stanford Literature Review*, 1(1) (25-53). Victoria Mitchell provides an extensive etymological outline of the link between text, textile and techne in her 1997 paper. See: Mitchell, Victoria. (1997). "Textiles, Text and Techne" in Hemmings, Jessica, ed. (2012). *The Textile Reader*. London and New York: Berg Publishers. pp. 5-13.

<sup>84</sup> *Selvedge Magazine: The Fabric of Your Life: Textiles in Fine Art, Fashion, Interiors, Travel and Shopping*; such series as: Telos Art Publishing *Art Textiles of the World* and 3 volumes of *Reinventing Textiles*; Monem, Nadin, ed. (2008). *Contemporary Textiles: The Fabric of Fine Art*. London: Black Dog Publishing; Colchester, Chloe. (2009). *Textiles Today: A Global Survey of Trends and Traditions*. London and New York: Thames & Hudson; Quinn, Bradley. (2010). *Textile Futures: Fashion, Design and Technology*. London and New York: Berg Publishers.

<sup>85</sup> Barnett, P. (1999); Hartzell, Freyja. (2009). "The Velvet Touch: Fashion, Furniture, and the Fabric of the Interior". *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture*. 13(1) (51-82).

of the social meanings and conflicts that arrive through the histories and processes of its production and use.<sup>86</sup>

In this way the pair textile/cloth creates a subtle and a profoundly *subjectilian* dialectics, which enables us to develop a more sensitive discourse on the phenomenon of textile culture. The *subjectilian* link is all the more pertinent considering the known Artaudean contempt towards the "Latin",<sup>87</sup> i.e. text-based culture, which he strove to remove from the European theatrical stage, occupied by the plots of written plays. In the conundrum of Artaud's thought, Latin, written, stagnant and fixing word is opposed to *mise-en-scène*, a holistic multi-sensual experiential complex of means of expression on stage. In the same context Derrida notes the desire that Artaud shares with "the Germans", Fichte or Heidegger, of trying "to take back their language from Rome".<sup>88</sup> Leaving aside the nationalistic overtones, "Latin" and "French" crossroads of Artaud, a dichotomy into which he is hopelessly bound, resound in the *subjectilian* pair of "Latin" textile and "English" cloth.

In the two other languages related to this research, Hebrew and Russian, the duality of the external, general, "foreign", term and the internal, particular, "local" word is also felt. Russian "ткань", cloth, points to the production process of weaving; its link to text can be seen in the rather common literary expression "ткань повествования", the cloth of narration. In Hebrew בד [*bad*], cloth, is linked to processes of fabrication, or production of something. Here a link exists not so much to text, as to stories, fabricated fables: בדוי [*b'daya, baduy*], fabrication, fiction, fictive.<sup>89</sup> A literary expression סיפור בדים [*sipur badim*] – a false, invented story – manifests this connection.<sup>90</sup> Another instance, the book of Isaiah 44:24-25:

... אנכי יהוה עשה כל ... מפר אתות בדים וקסמים יהוול משיב חכמים  
אחור ודעתם ישכל

...I am the Lord that maketh all things ... That  
frustrateth the **tokens of the liars**, and maketh

<sup>86</sup> Weiner, Annette. B., & Schneider, Jane, eds. (1991) *Cloth and Human Experience*. Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press; Livingstone, Joan and Ploof, John, eds. (2007). *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth and Cultural Production*. Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago Press.

<sup>87</sup> "In opposition to this point of view which strikes me as all together Western or rather *Latin*, that is, obstinate I maintain that insofar as this language is born on the stage, draws its power and its spontaneous creation from the stage, and struggles directly with the stage without resorting to words . . . it is *mise-en-scène* that is theatre, much more than the written and spoken play. No doubt I shall be asked to state what is Latin about this point of view opposed to my own. What is Latin is the need to use words in order to express ideas that are clear. Because for me clear ideas, in the theatre as in everything else, are ideas that are dead and finished." Artaud, A. (1976) p. 234.

<sup>88</sup> Derrida, J. (1998) p. 68

<sup>89</sup> *The New Even Shoshan Dictionary of Hebrew*. (1968). Entry < בד >. vol. 1. p. 182. Kiriat Sefer: Jerusalem. Also see entries: בדוא, בדוה, בדוהא

<sup>90</sup> Ibid



diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish.<sup>91</sup>

*Tokens of the liars*: אותות בדים [otot badim], the same root בד [b.d] here appears as a designation of lie and deceit.

Discussing the E. B. White children story *Charlotte's Web*, Victoria Mitchell points out that in the story the words produced by the spider as part of her web acquire a status of a miracle, causing "the message to be divorced from the skill that produced it".<sup>92</sup> Unpicking the etymology of *text*, *textile* and *techne*, she continues to argue for

... a phylogenetic and ontogenetic *conjunction* between language and textile [producing] a formative relationship between words and textiles ... the *textility* of both thought and matter.<sup>93</sup>

Mitchell concentrates on the role of making and tactility, a kind of thinking which disrupts the culturally specific borders of thought and action, language and making, body and mind, text and textile. She notes that recently (meaning 1997) the profoundly embodied, sensory nature of textile production and perception as well as textile metaphors "assumed the agency of a sensory idea, a material of thought, so that it becomes possible to speak of textile thought and tactile literacy".<sup>94</sup> In the light of this observation, a semiotic abstract notion of text appears as a fiction, a dream of a disembodied, dematerialised and all-inclusive, and thus all-powerful paradigm, "purified at every point of reference related to the senses."<sup>95</sup>

Mitchell's observations are still valid today in relation to textile practices and their articulation, for my own part I would like to add to the sensorial "textility of thought and matter" a relational political dimension, or in the words of Daniel Miller: "taking on board the intrinsic materiality of what is otherwise regarded as social relations".<sup>96</sup> Historically textiles have been produced as carriers of narratives of public and private nature or at a certain point of their "biography"<sup>97</sup> began to be such. Those narratives were often expressed through text in the literal sense (i.e.

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<sup>91</sup> King James version of the Bible, available from:  
<<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+44%3A24-25&version=KJV>>

<sup>92</sup> Mitchell, V. (1997/2012) p. 6.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, original italics

<sup>94</sup> Ibid p. 10

<sup>95</sup> Ginzburg, Carlo; Tedeschi, John and Tedeschi, Anne C. (1992). *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. pp. 102-108.

<sup>96</sup> Kuchler, Susanne & Miller, Daniel eds. (2005). *Clothing as Material Culture*. London and New York: Berg Publishers. p.2.

<sup>97</sup> Biography as a socio-anthropological approach to objects is discussed in: Kopytoff, Igor. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as a Process" in: Appadurai, Arjun, ed. (1986). *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 64-91.

using letters) and through imagery, which is commonly interpreted as an extended text, a visual element produced through the use of a certain codification (“a visual language”) whose meaning can be verbalised. *Text*, a convention of writing and the meaning of the inscription, and *cloth*, the aspects of its production or making and its sensorial embodied materiality, linked through a common goal of expressing a narrative, compose a complex story. Each of the elements brings into play its particular history, so that eventually none can be extracted in a “pure” form without reducing their interrelated unity and uniqueness, the symbiosis which is textile.

### **Textiling autobiography**

All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives  
tell one story in place of another story.<sup>98</sup>

Biography and autobiography are identity narratives, which are naturally positioned on the crossroads of 'life', 'body' and 'text'. As such, biographical and autobiographical narratives display (broadly speaking) a sense of the symbiotic uniqueness similar to textiles, becoming “impure”, *subjectilian* texts. The ambivalence that accompanies a female autobiography is personified and exhibited in the tension between the text's interchangeable “sides”, the subject and the author. Autobiographical writing imposes a shift in position, where in place of the writer, the “author”, another inward-looking face speaks about her, as if she was somebody else pretending to be her. In 1981 Gayatri Spivak addressed this situation in her discussion of the post-colonial female subject:

I see no way to avoid insisting that there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? But who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?<sup>99</sup>

*The inverted gaze, the other name and the one who writes behind it. As if in the state of a subjectile, her and my life, her and my name are presented or thrown in front of her as in front of me, a canvas, a cloth stretched on the embroidery frame, in place of her other life, my real life. A subjectile herself, she throws herself onto the betraying outline, beginning the embroidery. She operates in the state of “a double bind”: closure and distance activated simultaneously by the piercing act of the needle and the extending*

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<sup>98</sup> Cixous, Hélène. “Albums and Legends” in Cixous, Hélène and Calle-Gruber, Mireille. (1997). *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 177.

<sup>99</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. (1981). “French Feminism in an International Frame”. *Yale French Studies* 62 (154-184). Feminist Readings: French Texts/American Contexts.

*action of the thread.*

This mental state, materialising through writing, has also been addressed by Cixous in *Quelle Heure*, a reflection on a male writer<sup>100</sup> reflecting on his age. There, expressing a true “textility of thought”, Cixous talks of writing performed “between the skin and the trousers”, of the acute materialised and embodied sense of strangeness that goes “between me and me”<sup>101</sup> and is performed through the act of writing. The writing is done *in place*, “one story in place of another story”. What does one *do* in this place?

*I embroider I write.*

*I have for several years now reflected on the mundane encounter of a structured woven surface with a needle pulling a thread through it. This encounter fascinates me in the duplicity or ambivalence of its outcome, as well as in the anxious and provocative experience of its process.*

*An additional, “sleight of hand” surface aggravated upon the pre-existing “true” and self-efficient one; the minuscule holes, traces of the needle’s journey, who never manage to “hurt” the weave, because it is already made of holes; the interval, the almost non-existent, but all so potent, space, between the upper coverage of stitches and the surface of the weave.*

*Space to write of, space of a private historicity of work, slowly amassing, stitch by stitch, the before- and after- of the embroidery. Not to mention the other side, the left side, all sins laid bare, all tricks and mischief uncovered, all knots bound and exposed.*

*And the ever present danger to prick a finger... Nevertheless – it is also the space where history intervenes: the small brown stain – is it the blood of the newborn or of the embroiderer?*

Addressing Barthesian theorisation of autobiographies as “strategies of the rhetorical construction of the self”, Adriana Cavarero remarks:

In Barthes' view, writing does not put into words the essence of *who* someone effectively is or was, but rather produces that identity textually and artificially.

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<sup>100</sup> Marie-Henri Beyle or Stendhal.

<sup>101</sup> “Quelle Heure” in Cixous H., Calle-Gruber M. (1997) p. 130

As a result, taking writing as a paradigm – making every language into a text – also turns every 'real' existent into something definable as 'extra-textual' or 'extra-discursive'...

...by swallowing life, the text also risks swallowing the unrepeatable uniqueness of the existent. Omnivorous texts, hungry for life and ready to offer themselves as the more dignified replacements of an all-too-human corporeality...<sup>102</sup>

A replacement of 'life' with 'text' leads to an alienation of the material and embodied singularity of a particular life, and in so doing re-establishes the separation of mind (spirit) and body, with the first as the dominating part of the binary. The essence of *who someone is* remains under question, as long as this essence corresponds to the idea of 'the real', and biography is understood as a naturally loyal account of this real. Still, fully recognizing the discontinuous and fragmentary, i.e. naturally editing-prone character of biographical and auto-biographical accounts,<sup>103</sup> the "biographical situation", stems from the existent's desire for a narratable unity of *this* and not another life-story. No matter how unreliable and illusory, it will be based on the everyday unique and embodied experience which begins with birth, ends with death and cannot be exchanged for another. The sense of uniqueness is not a matter of individuality or exceptionality,<sup>104</sup> but of relationship: "a unique being is such only in the relation, and the context, of a plurality of others, which likewise unique themselves, are distinguished reciprocally – the *one from the other*".<sup>105</sup>

The reciprocal desire for a narratable life-story based on the uniqueness of each life, for Cavarero, is a basic human trait, which in itself is beyond textuality. In other words, text proper its genres, strategies, qualities and technicalities, even though often employed in the tales of life-stories and thus able to modify or at least interpret their content, is in itself inessential for this desire.<sup>106</sup> In its uniqueness a story is always a result of actions in the world, it is "a series of events, not a text". Thus there can never be a tale without a story, but there can be stories without tales.<sup>107</sup> The very idea of identity in that respect is related to a performance or appearance of the human existents (Arendtian term) in the world and before one

<sup>102</sup> Cavarero, A. (2000) p. 42, original italics. See also p. 62 on Barthes, pp. 68-71 on post-structuralism and feminist critique of (auto)biography.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid pp. 43, 63

<sup>104</sup> Ibid p. 70

<sup>105</sup> Ibid p. 43, original italics. Cavarero derives her conception of the unique and relational self from Hannah Arendt, see also pp. 20-23

<sup>106</sup> Ibid pp. 62, 71

<sup>107</sup> Ibid p. 28

another, so that the essence of the question of *who* someone is, is never given to the existent him/herself, but always lies in the hands of others before whom he/she performs.<sup>108</sup> Others are necessary for the existence of the uniqueness of the self, while the answer to the *who* question cannot be given through a definition (*what* someone is), but only through an (auto)biographical story, one that starts with birth, and is delivered while motivated by the desire to 1. narrate this story of yourself to another, 2. to hear this story of yourself *from* another repeated to you.

Stressing the idea of performance, I shall abandon for now the problematics of uniqueness and text, and shift the discourse in the "technical" or textual direction. As Cavarero suggests, this is inessential for the biographical desire, but it is important when considering the relation of materiality and text: stories, biographical and autobiographical, have to be performed somehow, be it via oral narration or in some kind of writing. Any kind of performance is materialised or embodied in some way.

In this light I want to readdress the encounter of "text" and "textile", this time as embodied practices of inscription and construction. Text and textile, fabric and fabrication are words connected etymologically, but the connection itself unfolds far beyond its formal linguistic aspects. The most commonly mentioned Latin link of the verb *texere* (to weave) with its derivative noun "text", which has already been discussed, can be complemented with Eastern terms which testify to an embedded and embodied relationship of writing and textile patterning: Persian "*kalam*", pen, resonates in the Indian "*kalamkari*" painted cloth; Islamic "*tiraz*", originally an embroidered cloth, denotes all cloths carrying inscriptions.<sup>109</sup> Schoeser suggest that the origin of writing and origin of textile patterning in some cultures is inseparable, while Mitchell argues for the "*textility* of both thought and matter", both writers in their different ways pointing to the embodied and thus performative nature of the link between text and textile.

In this light of a 'technicality' of text and textile I shall turn to the seminal 1996 text of Rosalind Krauss "Welcome to the cultural revolution", where she reviews the growing importance of images<sup>110</sup> in cultural studies and reflects in that context on the place of text. Her fascinating critique of the juxtaposition of text and image as cultural paradigms in academic scholarship touches upon the Barthesian notion of "myth". This is understood as an impoverishment of the linguistic sign, a specifically post-modern situation where meaning and history abandon the sign, leaving it as an "empty, parasitical form", one that Barthes calls a "mythical signifier".<sup>111</sup> It is mythical because instead of ontologically reliable, referentially

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid pp. 20-24

<sup>109</sup> Schoeser M. (2003). pp. 7-8

<sup>110</sup> Krauss, Rosalind. (Summer 1996). "Welcome to the Cultural Revolution". *October* 77 (83-96).

<sup>111</sup> Krauss references the Barthes's *Mythologies*. (Barthes, Roland. (1972). *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette

related concepts and images (sign), the subjects in post-modern culture are left with a phantasmal, mirage-like *image* which in itself signifies nothing, but is perceived, in its overpowering ahistorical emptiness, as an example of "the natural state of things."

Taking up Frederic Jameson's post-Marxist view on the relationship of production and culture,<sup>112</sup> Krauss suggests that this state of affairs results from the prevailing alienation of subjects from production (not least due to the expansion of digital technologies), which brings an ongoing removal of referentiality between subjects and material objects around them. This kind of material ignorance forces subjects to identify easily with mythical (superficial, empty) images of those objects.

Contrary to the possible opposition of text and materiality glimpsed in Cavarero's critique (insofar as materiality and embodiment are necessary for uniqueness), a kind of topsy-turvy reading of Krauss and Barthes suggests that a performance of the pre-mythical linguistic sign, i.e. text 'proper', can in fact allow for sustaining the materiality and thus uniqueness of identity stories. Krauss suggests that mythologisation is "the elision of the material support for the sign, written or pictured": thus a "pre-mythical" written sign is necessarily materially moored. I shall suggest that this mooring is not only indexical (which is commonly viewed as opposed to digital), but it can also be extended over to the existent's performance in the world, the "biographical situation" responsible for the generative mechanism of life-stories.

In this mechanism the inexorably performative application of linguistic signs, i.e. writing in its diverse forms, constitutes an inseparable element, which partakes in the uniqueness of the life-story and in the 'embodiedness' of this uniqueness, since no performance can be disembodied. The answer to the *who* she is question, which is the biographical story, will include "a chapter" on the writing of an autobiography: she was born on such and such a date, her name was such and such... and she wrote her autobiography. In other words, books, diaries or other materialisations of (auto)biographical stories are inseparable parts of the embodied human relational performance in the world. They are unique in the relational specificity of their materialisation: in the ways they came to be the way they are. Conceptually - negotiating the reference to relevant modes of personal narratives. Technically - the technology that was used in their production and the ways in which this technology, in itself historically circumscribed by other performances

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Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang), I used the recent Russian translation of this text: Барт, Ролан. (2000). *Мифологии*. Перевод: Сергей Зенкин. Москва: Издательство имени Сабашниковых.

<sup>112</sup> Krauss references Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (Jameson, Frederic. (1981). *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.) and "Reading and the Division of Labour" (in: Jameson, Fredric; (1991); *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durnham N.C.: Duke University Press)

where it was used before, influenced the performance/writing of the story. Stylistically – in terms of a unity that the combination of conceptualisation and technology brought about upon the performance of the story, contributing to its relational uniqueness.

To summarise: the technicality of text, though irrelevant to the biographical desire, is not necessarily irrelevant to uniqueness, once an existent chooses to materialise the tale of his/her life-story. It is not irrelevant exactly because text is not an abstract category, but a performative and embodied practice, whose procedures and value can only, and temporarily, be established in relationship with other practices. Since no practice stands isolated, nor can it be detached from the performing human existent behind it, no such evaluation can be performed in purely textual or technical terms.

### **History intervenes**

Considering the centrality of the post-modern idiom in the description of a reproduced identity discussed above, it can be rather strange to apply this idea to a textile culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet the very notion of reproduction is not that foreign here, keeping in mind that modernity - among its other constituent traits - was the time of a dissolution of communities and reconstruction of craft traditions. In respect of the Jewish textile tradition (just as with other craft traditions), the act of reproduction had been central for centuries as a basic operative principle and as a method of knowledge transfer.<sup>113</sup> Cultural change infiltrated into preexisting models, gradually modifying them, creating stylistic situations in which some elements disappeared, while others lingered on, almost intact. But it was probably the 19<sup>th</sup> century when an accurate or modified reproduction of a traditional Jewish textile started to take on an overtly political significance, possibly unknown beforehand.

Stuart Hall refers to the “moment of modernity” as the dissolution of wholeness, the moment when

we could no longer think in terms of cultures that are integral, organic, whole, which are well bounded spatially, which support us and which write the scripts of our lives from start to finish.<sup>114</sup>

An act of reproduction in such a situation is ambivalent. It can be motivated by the desire to affirm certain pre-modern affinities and “truths”, as much as to stress the difference of those affinities in the new context into which they are inscribed. This

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<sup>113</sup> Sennett, R. (2008).

<sup>114</sup> Hall, S. (2001) p. 18

difference in such situation is not exchangeable with the pre-modern state of 'normal' and obvious differentiation of religious communities. It becomes a complex difference-in-question of a subject in the face of the homogenizing universality of the "modern project".<sup>115</sup>

In the context of that project the very presence of a specific and particularised tradition signals difference, thus an attempt can be made to construct a version of a normalised and dignified history "like all others have", one that includes a well developed craft tradition as a prerequisite for modernization. A reproduction of a traditional textile can be seen as representing a willingness to be included in that "normal" history, an adherence to a view of future which is tinted by a dignified reactionary nostalgia. It is a necessary trait of a new cultural propriety, a feeling of a historiated rootedness even more necessary for a self-sense of a "rootless" community on the way to become "rooted", like others, in the economic stability and social prestige of the middle class. In this context, circumscribed by the interrelated social change and change in the modes of production, textiles become a scene of identity negotiation, wherein the space between the externally "constructed subject" and the actively "performing existent" is constantly inscribed and re-inscribed or - translating again - embroidered, unpicked and embroidered again.

### **Spacing textiles**

It is such intermediate scenes that this work aims to elaborate, extending the perspective of the disembodied and metaphorical 'text', but also questioning the necessity of strictly textual interpretations of material culture. Doreen Massey warns against an unthoughtful use of the word and ideas of 'space' in diverse academic discourses, pointing out that often such precipitative implementation of the terms, based on unconscious prejudices regarding 'the spatial', does little justice to space as it is "connotationally depriving space of its most challenging characteristics".<sup>116</sup> Massey points out, at the outset of her discussion of philosophical imaginations of space, that the choice of her subjects is not necessarily related to thinkers who explicitly conceptualised space. She is critiquing those who were influential enough in their implicit and impoverishing imaginations of space, or its mere exclusion, to clandestinely influence and eventually impoverish subjects central to their discussion, for which the factor of space was indispensable. The effect of such impoverishment was a loss of effective thought, that ultimately "debilitated our conceptions of politics and the political."<sup>117</sup> Recognizing that this

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<sup>115</sup> Bauman, Zygmunt. (1998). *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge: Polity Press. pp. 15-16, 18-52.

<sup>116</sup> Massey, Doreen B. (2005). *For Space*. London: Thousand Oaks. New Delhi: Sage. p. 17

<sup>117</sup> Ibid p.19



work is not about space, I shall nevertheless address the relevance of Massey's reflections on it in relation to the problematics of identity, the politics of text and textile, the place and space of thinking practice.

The basis of Massey's critique addresses firstly the all-too-common counterposition of space and time, which ignores that their conceptualisations are interdependent and consequential to real-life political decisions.<sup>118</sup> Secondly she addresses the double usage of 'space' in philosophical discourse, where it is used simultaneously as designating some geographical imagination and as an indirect naming of another category (often representation or ideological closure).<sup>119</sup> Thirdly, but in close connection to the two previous points, Massey addresses an almost habitual attribution to space of conceptually disabling traits: as the opposite of time it is static, immobile, fixed, a residue of the temporal activity; as surface it is passive and ahistorical, waiting to be acted upon, conquered by time, so that geography turns into history. The simultaneous heterogeneous presence of people in space is measured only according to their position in this linear history; as the opposite of 'place' it is abstract and meaningless.<sup>120</sup>

As an alternative to this disabling polarisation Massey puts forward the unity of spatio-temporal experience and the political significance embedded in this unity:

... the very possibility of any serious recognition of multiplicity and heterogeneity itself depends on a recognition of spatiality. The political corollary is that a genuine, through spatialisation of social theory and political thinking can force into the imagination a fuller recognition of the simultaneous coexistence of others with their own trajectories and their own stories to tell.<sup>121</sup>

Instead of opposing 'space' to 'time' she suggests viewing space as

**a simultaneity of stories so far**<sup>122</sup>

Such conceptualization offers a view of space as a product of relationships, constituted through interactions between its local and global instances. Necessary for such a view is a recognition of space as "a sphere of coexisting heterogeneity", which insofar as it is a product of interrelations, "must be predicated upon the existence of plurality". Consequently, such space

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid pp. 5, 11, 18.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid p. 18

<sup>120</sup> Ibid pp. 4, 6-7, 18-19

<sup>121</sup> Ibid p. 11

<sup>122</sup> Ibid pp. 9, 12

is always under construction ... a product of relations between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out; it is always in the process of being made.<sup>123</sup>

Conditioned and constituted through an interrelated multiplicity and contemporaneous plurality of materialised practices, this radically open space bears close resemblance to the Arendt-inspired embodied reciprocal and relational uniqueness of life-stories of the performing existents in the "biographical situation" described by Cavarero. Both situations are profoundly political in the existential necessity of simultaneous plurality and interrelation, and their politics is unmistakably embodied, while performative materialisation-in-process inexorably affirms a uniqueness of each simultaneous trajectory or life-story. Both situations are products of performative practices, rather than essential givens.

In this vein the very notion of materiality is responsibly liberated, since materialisations of reciprocal human performances set the ground for further performances, constantly becoming part of the "space-under-construction". There is a possibility of linking the discourse of a fully historical, i.e. relational, performative and constantly materialising identity of an existent, with his/her "products", the materialised opuses of his/her reciprocal performances, texts and textiles included. Cavarero's work aims to claim life back from text, from literature. My intention is not to reverse this, but to consider text in the aftermath of the Cavarerian "biographical situation", to explore textile as the tension in a materialised, embodied, relational and performative practice balancing on the verge of the textual, but never collapsing into it.

Put another way, textile acts simultaneously as a mediator and a scene for exploration of "the limits dividing the self from one's surrounding, a choreography of a self",<sup>124</sup> using the words of Michaelangelo Pistoletto on his 1968 exhibition in Rome, a helpful reference bearing in mind the latter's installations with second-hand textiles and clothes. In the notorious garments heap *Venus of Rags* of 1967, as in the modest wrapping and stitching of 1968 *Monumentino*, textiles acted as material and metaphoric mediators between high art and everyday life, between the sediment of pompous public commemoration and the intimacy of a concrete, if anonymous, personal life-story. In each case the textile act, heaping of clothes or wrapping bricks in cloth and stitching them in, carries a symbolic meaning, which is empowered by the seemingly trivial elemental functionality of the act.

Space and textiles in everyday life are ubiquitous and mundane to the

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid p. 9

<sup>124</sup> Quoted in the chapter "Language, Identity, Play" in: Lumley, Robert. (2004). *Arte Povera*. London: Tate Publishing. p. 65.

point of absence and obliteration. Massey's discussion of the exclusion of the factor of space in philosophical debate can be related to this absence. Being among the most familiar and common physical presences in human life, space and textiles are hardly noticed, subsumed and managed by additional categories, streets and cities, sheets and clothes. A textile is made constantly in between the overwhelming global generality and invisibility of raw materials<sup>125</sup> and the embodied and intimate concreteness of a towel. It is this politics of textile, the possible space between, the interval, which accommodates a multiplicity of unique stories. Text lingers there each time a story asks to be told or written, in between the stitch and surface of the weave.

Referring to deconstruction, Massey notices the importance attributed by Derrida to space/spacing, space as interval. Stressing the affirmative and generative position of *différance* towards space she suggests that "the very concept of *différance* holds within it an imagination of both the temporal and the spatial (deferral *and* differentiation)."<sup>126</sup> The work of spacing effectively deconstructs any interiorised notion of a linear history, to which *différance* comes as the "only fully historical" alternative. Derrida suggested that the very act of spacing, even in the lack of an actual discourse, necessarily implies textualisation.<sup>127</sup> In this way 'text', notwithstanding its habitually two-dimensional and "residually horizontal"<sup>128</sup> materialisation and indirect or metaphorical understanding of reality, is extended to act as an enfolding conceptualisation of physical space. Again we see the threat of the "text swallowing life", as in Cavarero's critique of Barthes.

Discussing this "claim for increasing generalisability" of deconstruction, Massey points to the emphasis that deconstruction, when enacted towards not-texts, has eventually put on a motive of horizontality, a trait which is textual and which in the context of the socio-material world can only be a passing instance, an analytical fiction resulting from the preference for differentiation on deferral. This preference for the horizontal (the concepts of collage and superimposition) eventually fails to accommodate the contemporaneous multiplicity of trajectories in space-time. It is as if once deconstruction is taken as a conceptualising tool for space, in its residual, text-based horizontality, it flattens the socio-material space-time, depriving it of other dimensions. What is more, differentiation, when

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<sup>125</sup> Mitchell usefully quotes Peter Dormer's idea of raw materials and engineering being "below the line", invisible, taken for granted. Mitchell, V. (2012). pp. 6, 12. She quotes from: Dormer, Peter. (1970). *The Meanings of Modern Design: Towards the Twenty-First Century*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson. p. 15ff.

<sup>126</sup> Massey, D. B. (2005) p. 45

<sup>127</sup> Massey relates to the 1994 text "The Spatial Arts: an Interview with Jacques Derrida" in P. Brunette, D. Wills eds. (1994). *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 15.

<sup>128</sup> "There is a residual, but persistent 'horizontality' about the approach of deconstruction which makes it difficult for it to handle ... a spatiality which is fully integral with space-time." in Massey, D. B. (2005). p. 50.

understood as the only generative tool of identity, is necessarily negative. In the endless "setting aside", a work of spacing as differentiation between the same and the other, identity can only be constituted negatively (I am not...), while otherness becomes equally externalized and homogenized, making it impossible for any coeval multiplicity to exist. The resulting identities are fragmented and ruptured from the outset, while all the process of differentiation only maintains the fragmentation.

Cavarero addresses the text-based radical feminist identity politics exactly with this critique: such a preconditioned state of rupture disables the relational uniqueness of the performing existents, and incapacitates the "biographical situation". Taking on Derrida's suggestion of spacing as an always-implicit textuality, Massey suggests two possible, but radically different propositions: a textualisation of the world: "the world is like a text" and "enworldment" of the text: "texts are just like the rest of the world".<sup>129</sup> The last proposition carries within it a way to shift a negativity of spacing (spacing, which is nothing but a movement towards alterity, which is irreducible), to a notion of *position*,<sup>130</sup> so that not just the work of spacing is recognized, but the very "fact of spacing", in which alterity is marked by a certain set of spatio-temporal coordinates: in other words, alterity is positioned.

When thinking about textile and text, the proposition that "texts are just like the rest of the world" is an opportunity to activate the operational mode of the *subjectile*, to shift the familiar hierarchies and genres and to stir the material in the textual. Through "enworldment" the physicality of textile making occupies a political stance in relation to "text" and, as a result, produces unique and particularised identities, capable of holding and negotiating a relatively positive and responsible multiplicity of inter-related and shifting positions. In other words, through "enworldment", identity is "spaced" or "textiled". In this way Victoria Mitchell's "textility of thought and matter", mobilised by the reference to the sensorial and embodied nature of textile production, can be complemented by the political dimension of spatiality and position.

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It is time to summarise my promiscuous journey through texts:

Cavarero suggests that biography and autobiography are driven by the desire of a particular human being to recognize other beings or/and be recognized her/himself in a unique story of their lives. This desire is based on a common knowledge that each particular life is unique and un-substitutable and that it can be told, can be put in words and through those words the uniqueness of a particular

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid pp. 50, 54

<sup>130</sup> Ibid p.53

human existence can be recognized and appreciated.<sup>131</sup>

The idea of writing a biographical tale of my practice is motivated by exactly this desire. The aim is to chart the unique trajectory of action and articulation I call "practice", upon the specific constellation which creates my biographical identity, as it comes forth through the practice: and upon the specificity of encounters with material culture, the Torah binders, which mobilised the whole journey from the beginning. Since I act as the sole biographer of my own practice, the writing inexorably becomes an autobiography.

I suggest that such perspective is not narcissistic and is not devoid of public interest, first because both practice and writing have an external model and point of reference in the Torah binder, second because in the course of working and writing this autobiography I address other texts and works and reassess my trajectory in relation to them. If an (auto)biographical tale addresses specificity and uniqueness of a particular human life based on the shared understanding of uniqueness as a common human trait, then through relational writing it is possible to develop a *personalized relational responsibility towards material culture*, understood as a constellation, an interchange of materialised trajectories of others' life-stories.

Unpicking "text" and "textile" as a disciplinary and conceptual pair allows me to outline a theoretical framework, or a "space", which permits the engagement of text in the materiality, technicality and historicity of a particular textile - performed through a textile practice. Such performance in itself creates a relational identity with a biography of its own. The terms on which the writing of such identity is discussed are linked to textiles through metaphors, outlining the "supple, subtle and cunningly playful"<sup>132</sup> identity politics, which characterise the operational space of doing and articulating.

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<sup>131</sup> "We are dealing with a desire for unity which asks for a narration of another above all to be *recognized as desire*. This is what autobiography responds to... whatever the text its narration inevitably produces. ...even the text that puts into words a biography of discontinuous and fragmentary characters (even in the most radical 'postmodern' sense) still end up unable to flee from the unity, which, *listening to* the tale with the ear of its desire, is conferred upon it by narratable self." Cavarero, A. (2000). p. 42.

<sup>132</sup> Victoria Mitchell related to this kind of politics when addressing the etymological linking of text, textile and *techne* "reflecting an intimacy and a complexity for thought in its association with making". Mitchell, V. (1997). p. 6.

## Chapter 3

### **A Jewishing Cloth: Binding Names and Rituals**

*Jewish culture, text and textile; The rite: circumcision and naming; The binder; Binding, wrapping, swaddling; Die Schultragen: presentation; Of stains: negotiating distance and closeness; Negotiating the haptic and the symbolical; Binding names and rituals*

Chapter Three outlines a general context of Jewish studies, concentrating on the plurality of Jewish cultures and the “corporeal turn” - scholarship that stresses the materialised, historically and socially specific, embodied, performative quality of texts in Judaism. An introduction to the German circumcision binders or “Jewishing cloths” follows. I examine the ritual context of the binders and their relationship to the construction of a male Jewish identity.

The connection of circumcision and naming is explored, followed by the discussion of an embodied and performative link between the circumcised boy and the Torah as it comes forth in the binder in the ceremony of its presentation in the synagogue. The prohibition of the bodily contact to the Torah scroll is examined in the context of customs related to binders. I suggest that the binder acts as a haptic and symbolic mediator between the everyday and the sacred domains and between private (female) and public (male) spheres.

The binders are presented in this chapter through anthropological lenses as part of a larger ritual context. Understanding of this context is instrumental to any meaningful and responsible discourse about the binders, yet such context permits to only see them as part of a certain system of objects, mobilised by a specific social and cultural order. This general outline provides the background for Chapter Four, which develops a far more particular insight into a specific artefact, the 1836 binder from Fürth.

#### **Jewish culture, text and textile**

In Jewish studies, the relationship between embodied culture and text, 'text' and 'textile' (if I can briefly substitute “textile” for material culture generally), are historically juxtaposed, if not opposed. The classical, “old school”, scope of this initially hybrid field<sup>1</sup> included the study of Judaic religious texts, while explorations of the Jewish material culture were deemed important only in the light of those

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<sup>1</sup> Officially Jewish studies were admitted to the American universities in the 1970s.

texts: it was seen as lacking an inherent cultural value of its own. Such a relationship to the study of material culture stems from a conviction that the “spiritual”, i.e. textual, achievements of the Jewish people worldwide are far more significant than their embodied and materialised expressions,<sup>2</sup> and it is the greatness of this “achievement” that Jewish research should stress. This search for achievement is complicated by the fact that Jewish culture changes not just over time, but over place, absorbing visual models and everyday practices of cultures, which surround it, for its own needs. As David Biale observes:

... it was precisely in their profound engagement with the cultures of their environment that the Jews constructed their distinctive identities. But this engagement involved two seeming paradoxes. On the one hand, the tendency to acculturate into the non-Jewish culture typically produced a distinctive Jewish subculture. On the other hand, the effort to maintain a separate identity was often achieved by borrowing and even subverting motifs from the surrounding culture.<sup>3</sup>

This plurality (“culture would appear to be the domain of the plural”,<sup>4</sup> to reference Biale again) or *spatiality* – referring to the discussion in the previous chapter, makes it difficult to produce a single and normative version of *the* Jewish culture. During the last century, this task drove the politics behind the field, especially in the USA and in Israel (though with different intents), enforcing again the turn to the trustworthy “text” rather than material culture or “textile”. The last three decades have seen “the corporeal turn”,<sup>5</sup> in a way co-sounding with the “textility of thought and matter”, an arrival of alternative approaches, originating in the further hybridization of Jewish studies, through encounters with anthropology and history of everyday life, study of literature and visual arts and, not least, feminism and gender studies. Those approaches did not abandon text, which notwithstanding the plurality of Jewish cultures has acted and still acts as a continuous and formative presence in them,<sup>6</sup> but rather shifted and multiplied the perspectives from which it

<sup>2</sup> “Judaism’s mind has been more interesting and more influential than Judaism’s body” is an “old school” paradigm addressed by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in her overview of the new tendencies in Jewish Studies. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. (2005). “The Corporeal Turn.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95 (3) (447-461). A conservative critique of the “new Jewish scholarship” is outlined in Halkin, Hillel. (February 1998). “Feminizing Jewish Studies.” *Commentary* 105 (39-45).

<sup>3</sup> Biale, David ed. (2002). *Cultures of the Jews*. New York: Schocken Books. p. xxi. Ivan Marcus refers to the same “twofold process of negotiation and transmission” as “inward acculturation.” See: Marcus, Ivan G. (2004). *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage from Biblical to Modern Times*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. pp. 4-5, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Biale, D. (2002). p.xxiv

<sup>5</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2005). See also: Heller, Scott. (1999). “The New Jewish Studies: Defying Tradition and Easy Categorization.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (45.21): A21–22.

<sup>6</sup> “The multiplicity of Jewish cultures always rested on the Bible and [with some exceptions] on the

can be examined, stressing Judaic texts as historically and socially specific, embodied, performative practices.<sup>7</sup>

In a similar spirit my study of the German Torah binders draws on several sources with different approaches to their subject. Ethnographical-historical accounts provide a great deal of information about binders and the ritual contexts within which they were implicated – circumcision, presentation etc. Yet in order to understand the specificity of identities to which the binders testified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Germany, it was important to attain a more detailed view of the rites themselves. For that reason I provide an anthropological account of circumcision in Judaism, as well as a limited socio-historical perspective on it. Both show the way in which the rite came to be the way it was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and signify what it signified then, stress its changing political and social role, and in so doing complement the predominantly ethnographic descriptive nature of “traditional” academic literature dealing with Judaica. This is invaluable as a source of information, but often lacks a rounded view of the rite within temporally and geographically specific cultural formations. These are “the political performances of a culture”, or, referring to Massey again, a cultural space, the multiplicity of stories so far.

Those perspectives allow a deeper and more polemical understanding of identities to which the embroidered binder testified in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period which Jewish ethnography has often had difficulties with, since it is the period when its object of enquiry was created, institutionalised and destroyed. The destruction of an ethnographic object by/in modernity is an uneasy issue which to a certain extent reverberates today in different ways. Mieke Bal reflects in this respect on the ambivalence of realism in a museal display and the aesthetics of the picturesque, which collides with “...ethnography, as a discipline that ... is predicated upon the destruction of the cultures it studies”.<sup>8</sup> Yet it is not the destruction which is of concern here, but rather the trouble with the ethnographic view in itself, a certain sacralisation of “real” and “original” customs, rites and artefacts, a sacralisation which in itself bears specific political and ideological agendas, especially those of modern nationalism and the cultural-institutional foundations of the modern state, such as museums.<sup>9</sup> In the context of Jewish culture those “troubles” are of primary

Talmud and other Rabbinic literature.” See: Biale, D. (2002). p. xxiv

<sup>7</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2005) pp. 448-9, 457-8. Also see: Heliman, Samuel C. (2001). *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship and Religion*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers. and Biddick, Kathleen. (1996). “Paper Jews: Inscription/ethnicity/ethnography.” *The Art Bulletin* 78 (4) (594-599).

<sup>8</sup> Bal, Mieke. (1996). *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*. New York: Routledge. p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. “Objects of Ethnography” in: Karp, Ivan ed. (1991). *Exhibiting Cultures*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press. pp. 386-443; Bennett, Tony. (1995). *The Birth of the Museum*. New York: Routledge; Preziosi, Donald. “Brain of the Earth's Body: Museums and the Framing of Modernity” in: Carbonell, Bettina Messias ed. (2004). *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing. pp. 71-84; Coombes, Annie E. “Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities” in: Carbonell, B. M. ed. (2004). pp. 231-246.



importance till this very day: furthermore, they are ubiquitous in the background to my work, which has began with an artefact in a museum.

In relation to circumcision and its performance it is important to address briefly the concept of "rite".

Ronald Grimes discusses the relation of *ritual* and *rite* in the following way:

"The term 'rite' (from the noun *ritus*) denotes specific enactments located in concrete times and places... 'Ritual' (from the Latin adjective *ritualis*) refers here to the general idea of which a rite is a specific instance... Ritual is an idea scholars formulate... Ritual is what one defines in formal definitions and characterizations; rites are what people enact."<sup>10</sup>

The gap between rite and ritual is similar to the one between the actual Torah binder and the laws that dictate how a scroll should and should not be handled. It is the same gap that opens the gates of variety of a custom and the one that imbues rites, such as circumcision, and their accompanying artefacts with urgent contemporaneous concerns, which relate to "the idea" but also modify it. This modification is a matter of interplay between official, religiously institutionalised meanings of the rite, and its public, unofficial, but widely recognized meanings, which become present as presupposed undercurrents in its every performance.<sup>11</sup> In his study of circumcision and gender in Rabbinical literature Lawrence Hoffman suggests that rites are "artistic constructs of behaviour not unlike a literary plot line".<sup>12</sup> This perspective allows an elaboration of the texts, various written orders of circumcision that carry the particular official meaning of the ritual and its specific performance, the rite itself. Similarly, once transposed onto artefacts, it allows the elaboration and negotiation of the aforementioned "gap" between a binder and an official idea of it.

In its variety the custom of circumcision binders maintained the link between swaddling a circumcised newborn and swaddling the Torah on different levels: through making, through terms designating the textile, and through the actual, binding, act with cloth. The reality of this binding act is symbolic, as much as it is political. Its meaning is produced on the background of the basic and principal connection of circumcision, blood and naming. This connection has never

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<sup>10</sup> Grimes, Ronald L. (1990). *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies on Its Practice, Essays on Its Theory*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press. pp. 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Hoffman, Lawrence A. (1996). *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 18-22

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p.18, see also pp. 41-42, 69

been permanent,<sup>13</sup> and it is still prone to change and acute debate. The purpose of the following description in the light of the above is to bind the artefact - a Torah binder - and the rite - circumcision.

### **The rite: circumcision and naming<sup>14</sup>**

A newborn boy traditionally remains nameless prior to circumcision, which is performed according to the book of *Genesis*, when Abraham is commanded by God: "at the age of eight days every male among you shall be circumcised, throughout your generations..."<sup>15</sup> The context of this command is a covenant of blood by which Abraham receives God as his and his people's only deity: in return he is promised the land of Canaan and great nationhood in the future.<sup>16</sup>

The Hebrew term for it is *Berit-Milah*<sup>17</sup> (ברית מילה), which simultaneously means "a covenant of word" and "a covenant of circumcision". The operation and its trace act as a performed and embodied mark or sign<sup>18</sup> of this covenant, together with the duties of putting on the phylacteries<sup>19</sup> and keeping the Sabbath.<sup>20</sup> Whilst the operation was known and popular among Jews (as well as other peoples) long ago, its status as a mandatory and legally obligatory covenantal sign was probably accepted in the official religious discourse and practice and integrated into the Pentateuch text after the Babylonian exile in the 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>21</sup> According to the text a refusal to adhere to the *Milah* covenant is punished with "cutting off" from one's kind,<sup>22</sup> an extremely severe social exclusion. The Hebrew term for "uncircumcised", *Arel* (ערל), relates to *Orlah*, "foreskin" and has to do with bodily and moral malfunction,<sup>23</sup> obstruction<sup>24</sup> and taboo.

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<sup>13</sup> An analysis of the changing cultural and political significance of circumcision rite in the Pentateuch, achieved through the text's editing in the context of political power shifts from monarchy to priesthood, can be found in Hoffman's *Covenant of Blood*. The book explores later ways in which those meanings have been altered to establish the political and cultural authority of rabbis at the period of the Mishnah compilation. Hoffman, L. A. (1996). pp. 27-48, 51-52.

<sup>14</sup> A short order of the circumcision ceremony is given in Appendix 1.

<sup>15</sup> "This is my covenant which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin and that shall be the sign of the covenant between you and Me. At the age of eight days every male among you shall be circumcised, throughout your generations..." Genesis 17:10-12. Here and onwards I used the 1993 Stone English edition of the Pentateuch: *The Chumash: The Torah: Haftaros and Five Megillos*. English trans. Nosson Scherman. New York: Mesorah Publications.

<sup>16</sup> "You shall be a father of a multitude of nations; your name shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations; I will make you most exceedingly fruitful, and make nations of you ... and I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourns – the whole of the land of Canaan – as an everlasting possession; and I shall be a God to them". Ibid 2-9.

<sup>17</sup> English transcription according to the entry "Circumcision", *Encyclopedia Judaica (EJ)*. vol. 5. the Macmillan Company, Jerusalem: Keter. (1971). pp. 567-575.

<sup>18</sup> Hoffman, L. (1996) pp. 34-35

<sup>19</sup> *Exodus* 13:9, 16

<sup>20</sup> *Exodus* 31:12-17

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 29-31

<sup>22</sup> *Genesis* 21:4

<sup>23</sup> Rubin, Nissan. (1995). *The Beginning of Life: Rites of Birth, Circumcision and Redemption of the First-Born in the Talmud and Midrash*. (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibutz Ha-Meuchad. p. 84

רובין, ניסן. (1995). ראשית החיים: טקסי לידה, מילה ופדיית-הבן במקורות חז"ל. תל אביב: הקיבוץ המאוחד.

<sup>24</sup> Rashi commentary to *Leviticus* quoted at the entry "Circumcision", *EJ*. Vol. 5. pp. 567-575. It is also

The Talmud considers the *Milah* to be a commandment of utter importance: "Great is circumcision, for it counterbalances all the [other] precepts of the Torah."<sup>25</sup> "Great is circumcision for if it were not for that, the Holy One Blessed be He, would not have created the world."<sup>26</sup> The operation is regarded neither as a subtraction from the male body, nor as its mutilation, but as a means of perfecting and completing it.<sup>27</sup> This deed is related to an acquisition of a new name: once circumcised Abram is called Abraham.<sup>28</sup> The letter "hey" (ה), standing for the divine name, joins into, thus changing the sum of the numerical values<sup>29</sup> of the letters in the patriarch's name from 243 to 248.<sup>30</sup> *The Tractate of Vows* tells of an acquisition through this addition of 5 (ה) new body parts, "two eyes, two ears, and the membrum".<sup>31</sup>

The exegesis suggests that this acquisition refers to gaining a higher measure of mental control over sinful temptations that might come through the senses of sight and hearing, as well as through the sexual organ.<sup>32</sup> Thus in the religious sense *Milah* imbues the male Jew with moral perfection,<sup>33</sup> gained through a physical interference with his body.

According to the Pentateuch the *Milah* was the duty of the father,<sup>34</sup> even though the newborn himself was not exempt from this responsibility, if he were to remain uncircumcised once grown up. During the Mishnah period, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE, new rules were formulated which, without negating the previous custom, included the operation's execution by a specially trained person, the *Mohel*.<sup>35</sup> The general order of the ceremony, as well as a set of prayers and

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a derogatory name for non-Jews. See: *Nedarim* 3:11. Epstein, I. ed. (1936). *The Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 15. English trans. H. Freedman. London: Soncino Press.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid 3:32a. Original brackets.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 3:11.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, discussed in Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 35-36

<sup>28</sup> *Genesis* 17:10-12.

<sup>29</sup> Each Hebrew letter has a particular numerical value. Thus any Hebrew word and name can be expressed as a sum of letters-numbers that comprise it. The use of letters instead of numbers is still practiced in in the Jewish calendar. See: entry "Алфавит" [Alphabet] in: *Краткая Еврейская Энциклопедия на Русском Языке* [The Concise Jewish Encyclopedia in Russian] (CJER). vol. 1. Hebrew University, Jerusalem. p. 95

<sup>30</sup> The numerical value of ה is 5. 243 (אברם) changes to 248 (אברהם).

<sup>31</sup> "... at first God gave him [Abraham] mastery over 243 limbs, and later over 248, the additional ones being the two eyes, two ears, and the membrum." *Nedarim* 3:32b, my brackets.

<sup>32</sup> See the Hebrew text of the Schottenstein edition of the Babylonian Talmud, footnotes 4, 7.

<sup>33</sup> The idea of moral perfection is discussed in the same passage of *Nedarim* in relation to Abraham's story from the book of *Genesis*: "If one perfects himself, good fortune will be his, as it is written, *Walk before me and be thou perfect*, and it is further written, *And thou shalt be a father of many nations*." Also see: Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 168-170.

<sup>34</sup> Rubin, N. (1995). pp. 88-89

The Bible records cases where the mother performed the operation, such as Tziporah, the wife of Moses (Exodus 4:24-26), yet those are generally exceptions. Rabbi Maharam (Meir Ben Baruch von Rothenburg, 1215-1293) aggravated this condition, explicitly stating that a male and not a female was commanded to perform the rite. See: Maharam B"R Baruch from Rottenberg; *Sefer Menhagim* (Book of Customs); The Rabbinical Beith Midrash of America Publication; p. 80; available from: <[http://www.beureihatefila.com/files/Minhagei\\_Ha\\_Maharam\\_M\\_Rottenberg.pdf](http://www.beureihatefila.com/files/Minhagei_Ha_Maharam_M_Rottenberg.pdf)>

מהר"ם ב"ר ברוך מרוטנברג. (תפ"ח). ספר מנהגים. הוצאת בית מדרש הרבנים באמריקא.

<sup>35</sup> Rubin, N. (1995) pp. 89-90; Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 62-63

benedictions, was agreed upon then. Since Biblical times till the beginning of Talmud compilation in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, the ceremony was performed at the newborn's home. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE it was transported into the synagogue,<sup>36</sup> signalling the growing importance of communal life at the outset of the Middle Ages. By the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE "... the circumcision of a boy was ... a communal event, inserted into a prayer service that preceded and followed it".<sup>37</sup> The synagogue by then had lost its earlier significance as a civic house of gathering<sup>38</sup> and was appropriated and acknowledged by the rabbinic authorities as a prayer house, which in some functions replaced the Temple.

Notwithstanding the idea of the *Milah* being a paternal obligation, the newborn's mother took part in the ceremony by bringing him to the synagogue and holding him on her lap during the rite.<sup>39</sup> The presence of a woman, beautifully clad for the occasion, among men who performed and witnessed the ceremony in the synagogue, started to be seen as immodest by the leading rabbinic authorities in Germany in the 13<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>40</sup> with the result that in the 14<sup>th</sup> the mother was resolutely banned from attendance. The final decree on the matter was issued by the Maharil, or Rabbi Jacob Molin of Mainz in Rhineland (1360-1427), in his time a central rabbinical authority in the *Ashkenaz*.<sup>41</sup>

The Maharil did not merely confirm that the mother is not to participate in the rite on the grounds of impropriety, but ruled that she is not even to bring the child to the synagogue.<sup>42</sup> This change in the rite brought about the rising importance in the roles of the god-parents, in Hebrew male *Ba'al Brit* (בעל ברית) and female *Ba'alat Brit* (בעלת ברית), meaning "ally" or literary "master of the covenant", or *Sandek*,<sup>43</sup> a shortened and transformed Greek word for godfather: *anadakomenos*. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the most common order in the *Ashkenaz* was that the mother remained at home, while the *Ba'alat Brit* took the

<sup>36</sup> On the transfer of *Berit-Milah* from home to synagogue see: Schauss, Hayyim. (1950). *The Lifetime of a Jew Throughout the Ages of Jewish History*. NY: Union of American Hebrew Congregations. pp. 33-39; also Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 193-195.

<sup>37</sup> Hoffman, L. (1996); pp. 195-196.

<sup>38</sup> Levine, Lee I. (1987). *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity*. Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research.

<sup>39</sup> The evidence for the mother's role is found in the text of Rabbi Samson ben Tzadok or the Tashbetz (d. 1285, Germany), who condemns it. See Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 196-199.

<sup>40</sup> In this the Tashbetz is relying on his teacher, the Maharam. Ibid. Also see Sperber, Daniel. (2008). *The Jewish Life Cycle: Custom, Lore and Iconography*. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, Oxford University Press. pp. 90-93

<sup>41</sup> *Ashkenaz*, אשכנז - in the Bible (Genesis 10:3) a land between Armenia and the Upper Euphrates River. In the Jewish literature since the Middle Ages the term is used to designate the lands of North-Western Europe. Rashi (rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1140-1105) in his commentaries already uses an expression לשון אשכנז, the language of *Ashkenaz*, in respect to the communities of Mainz and Worms, where he lived, and ארץ אשכנז, the Land of *Ashkenaz* as Germany. See: entry "Ашкеназ" [*Ashkenaz*] in CJER. Vol. 1. p. 263

<sup>42</sup> ספר מהרי"ל; (תשל"ח). ירושלים חובב"א. הלכות מילה כב; עמי תפז-תפח

*Sefer Maharil* (Book of Maharil). (1977). Jerusalem: Ryzman Edition. Available from:

<<http://www.hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=8918&pgnum=1>>

<sup>43</sup> On the role of the *Sandek* see Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 199-205.

child from her and brought him to the doors of the synagogue, not entering herself to prevent the possibility of an improper situation. *Ba'al Brit* took the child from her at the doors and brought him/her to the laps of the *Sandek*, where the rite was performed. The *Sandek* and *Ba'al Brit* may have been the same person - a distinguished member of the community (a rabbi) or the child's father. The role of the *Sandek*, the one who holds the newborn on his lap, has been imbued by the Maharil with additional theological meaning. His lap was compared to a sacrificial altar, while he himself was likened to a priest.<sup>44</sup>

Another aspect of the female exclusion from synagogal rites was related to a stricter observance of purity rules in medieval Europe. According to *Leviticus* the mother is considered impure, *Niddah*<sup>45</sup> (נידה) during the first week after the birth of a boy (two weeks after the birth of a girl), during which any sexual intercourse or intimacy is forbidden.<sup>46</sup> She has to wait for another 33 days until she is considered "pure" (*Tehorah*, טהורה).<sup>47</sup> During the whole of this period she cannot touch "anything sacred" or enter a sanctuary. *Baraita de-Niddah*, a text written possibly by the end of the Gaonic period, exerted significant influence in medieval Europe including Germany. It increased severely the limitations on the impure woman, including prohibiting her from entering the synagogue,<sup>48</sup> while previously the interdiction was related only to the Temple itself. As a result of all those changes the *Milah* in the Ashkenaz has become an exclusively male rite.

Among the earliest texts mentioning the obligation to name the newborn after the *Milah* is *The Record of The Covenant* (זכרון הברית), a 13<sup>th</sup> century book by the German rabbi Yakov Ha-Gozer, a *Mohel* himself, where he extrapolates this obligation from the story of Abraham's name and its extended interpretation in the Talmud.<sup>49</sup> He states that the change of name is necessary because through the *Milah* a newborn is purged of his pre-circumcision, impure and shameful "name of foreskins", *Shem Orloth* (שם ערלות) and must be given a "pure name" (שם טהור),

<sup>44</sup> "...the commandment of being a *ba'al brit* is greater than the commandment performed by the *mohel*, since his knees are likened to an altar as if he were offering incense to heaven." Translation from Hoffman, *ibid* p. 206.

ספר מהרי"ל. הלכות מילה א', עמ' תעו'

<sup>45</sup> Literally "menstruous woman". It is the seventh tractate in the order *Tehorot* in the Mishnah and the Babylonian Talmud. The numerous and complicated laws of *Niddah* "comprise some of the most fundamental principles of the halakhik system", see: entry "Niddah". EJ. Vol. 12. pp. 1141-1149. Also see: Rubin, N. (1995) pp. 19-21, 67-72.

<sup>46</sup> *Leviticus* 12:1-2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* 4-5. Also see: Rubin, N. (1995). pp. 17-21, 67-76. On the variations of the specific customs of post-natal impurity and rabbinical discussions on the issue as well as a context in other Middle-Eastern cultures see: Sperber, D. (2008). pp. 37-46, esp. footnote 6.

<sup>48</sup> See: entry "Niddah". (EJ). Vol. 12. pp. 1141-1149. Hamburger refers to similar limitations in his discussion of Ashkenazi post-natal customs. See: Hamburger, Benjamin Shlomo. (1995). *Roots of Ashkenazi Custom*. (in Hebrew). Bney-Braq: Machon Moreshet Ashkenaz. p. 387

המבורגר, בנימין שלמה. (1995). שורשי מנהג אשכנז. בני ברק: מכון מורשת אשכנז.

<sup>49</sup> יעקוב הגוזר. (תרג"ב). *זכרון הברית לראשונים*, חיבר גלסברג, יעקב בן מרדכי, סג"ל. ברלין, ע"מ 96-94

Yakov Ha-Gozer. (1892). *Zichron Brit le-Rishonim*. (*The Record of The Covenant*). edited by Glasberg, Yakov Ben-Mordechay. Berlin. Available from: <<http://www.hebrewbooks.org/8725>>

which is to celebrate and glorify the “new” body, completed by the removal. Founded on its immediate meaning of “foreskin”, as something unnecessary to be removed in order to make a body or a thing acceptable and consumable, *Orlah* (ערלה) as a concept extends in the field of agriculture: it can also refer to a negative category of taboo fruits and states of growth,<sup>50</sup> which are considered to be ritually impure due to their prematurity and incompleteness. By the end of the *Milah* rite, the pronounced “pure” Hebrew name and the mark on the newborn's flesh correspond in modifying physically and symbolically completing his body, creating the first and fundamental signs of an identity, which was publicly imparted to him by other “complete” men of his community.

From an anthropological perspective “completion by removal” constitutes a basic rule in the “sorting” culture, which Judaism is.<sup>51</sup> Constantly seeking to separate the surrounding world and its inhabitants into strict binary categories (interior-exterior, digestible-refused, sacred-everyday, pure-impure, male-female, Jewish-gentile), the Jewish law upon its historical variations has been devised as a system of rules that allows a supervised transfer from one state or sphere to another and, as far as possible, avoids dangerous in-between states.<sup>52</sup> In the spirit of Lévi-Strauss those binary spheres can be attributed to the poles of culture and nature, the cooked and the raw,<sup>53</sup> bearing in mind that both poles are in themselves cultural constructions in terms of the culture in question and research into it.<sup>54</sup> In agriculture and food the acts of completion, e.g. making something exterior and premature into interior, mature, *kosher* and thus edible for a Jew, are performed via diverse kinds of removal.<sup>55</sup> *Orlah* is one such example; these are the fruits of a newly planted tree, which are considered refuse, inedible for the first three years. On the fourth year the fruits should be given to the temple. Through those respective acts of removal, on the fifth year since the planting, the fruits cross the border of refuse and become edible.

The lifecycle of a Jewish man is similarly marked with completing irreversible removals in the three rites of passage: circumcision at birth, a broken

<sup>50</sup> *Orlah* is the tenth tractate in the order *Zera'im* (Seeds) in the *Mishnah* and the *Jerusalem Talmud*. It deals with a multitude of aspects relating to the prohibition to consume the fruit of a tree for three years after it has been planted. Leviticus 19:23: “When you shall come to the land and you shall plant any food tree, you shall treat its fruit as forbidden [*areltem arelto*]; for three years they shall be forbidden [*arelim*] for you...”.

<sup>51</sup> Rubin, N. (1995). p. 15. As Hoffman puts it: “...the entire rabbinic system is based on a cosmology of order in which it is men's role to impose order in human affairs, paralleling a male God's primeval act of ordering the cosmos.” Hoffman, L. (1996). p. 156

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>53</sup> Lévi-Strauss, Claude. (1992). *The Raw and the Cooked*. Penguin.

<sup>54</sup> See the critique of Lévi-Strauss's opposition of culture/nature: MacCormack, Carol. “Nature, Culture and Gender: a Critique” in: MacCormack, Carol and Strathern, Maryline eds. (1980). *Nature, Culture and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-24; Bloch, Maurice and Bloch, Jean H. “Women and the Dialectic of Nature in Eighteenth Century French Thought” in: MacCormack, C. and Strathern, M. (1980) pp. 25-41

<sup>55</sup> Rubin, N. (1995). pp. 16-17

glass under the *Huppah*, a torn garment at the funeral.<sup>56</sup> An irreversible<sup>57</sup> completion by circumcision is an act which markedly differentiates male and female statuses in the eyes of the Jewish law, constructing man as imbued with a male-controlled sign of positive permanence and identity, contrasted by the impermanence of the uncontrollable female alternating states<sup>58</sup> of ritual purity and impurity, ovulation and menstruation.<sup>59</sup>

Circumcision irreversibly and permanently positions the newborn boy in the mature, edible and controllable sphere of "culture", maintained by the male members of a patrilineal chain of descent in the "male-oriented"<sup>60</sup> society.<sup>61</sup> Talmudic thought has emphasised the nature of the covenant as related to male procreative ability, suggesting that circumcision is a way of "cultivating" the male body akin to cultivating plants and trees in order to increase and refine their crops.<sup>62</sup> This way of thinking was reflected in the naming of boys. A Hebrew name given at the rite of *Milah* was related to as "sacred name", *Shem Kodesh* (שם קודש). It had to be selected from the Bible or from names of Hebrew origins in the Talmud. In the Ashkenaz, following the rabbinical tradition emphasising the male lineage, it was common to name newborns after deceased paternal relatives.

Meanings that are attributed to the rite of circumcision by Judaism itself and contemporary research upon this are manifold, yet its significance as an irreversible physical sign of a specifically male identity remains undeniable.<sup>63</sup> It is a sign which is reflected in the naming of boys, and it has many implications as to their progression in the spheres wherein this identity receives its particular content: religion, education, Jewish and non-Jewish society, family, nation etc.

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> The state of surgical irreversibility of *Milah* was important, especially when during the Hellenic period many Jews attempted a restoration of the foreskin. Ibid p. 100-102.

<sup>58</sup> Hoffman notices in relation of the Talmudic exemption of women from time-bound commandments: "Women [as opposed to minors, retarded and deaf] ... were believed to have the sense to understand the system, but to lack something else: the self-control to practise it." Hoffman, L. (1996). p. 165.

<sup>59</sup> On the principle of control: [The Hebrew terms used in the Talmud] "differentiate clearly between one who is a master of his action, and one whose body fluids flow without his consent.' Menstrual blood ... is completely uncontrollable; it thus shares with non-seminal emissions the status of pollutant. Urine on the other hand, assumed to be controllable by any socialised adult, is not classified as a pollutant; and 'tears, saliva, mucus, milk and ear wax ... are similar to urine in that a person can exercise a similar amount of control over them.'" Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard. (1990). *The Savage in Judaism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 187, quoted in Hoffman, L. (1996) pp. 152-3. The principle of control in relation to circumcision blood is discussed also in Rubin, N. (1995). pp. 16-17.

<sup>60</sup> To avoid historical simplification Hoffman uses the term "male-oriented" rather than "patriarchal" in order to describe the "official Rabbinic Judaism". Hoffman, L. (1996). p. 24.

<sup>61</sup> Rubin, N. (1995). pp. 16-17

<sup>62</sup> Ibid pp. 78-79; Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 38-39. Hofmann suggests that the connection male fertility-circumcision is developed in the Pentateuch itself, again in the post-exile context, as a means of defeating a matrilineal system of measuring descent and replacing it with a patrilineal one. Also see:

בראשית רבא יא ו', מדרש בראשית רבא (תשכ"ה). ירושלים: ספרי ואהרמן  
Breishit Rabbah 11:6. Midrash Breshit Rabbah. (1964). Jerusalem: Waherman Books.  
תוספתא שבת טו (טז), תוספתא שבת. (תרמ"ב) קרלסרוה.

Toseftah Shabat 15:9. Toseftah Shabat. (1882). Carlsruhe.

<sup>63</sup> Rubin, N. (1995). p. 85

question of Judaism's adequacy for the conditions of the new life order had been raised within Jewish communities, as well as outside of them. From the point of view of the official policy makers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Germanies, the elaborate ritual side of the Jewish liturgy, based upon a multiplicity of customs augmented over hundreds of years, was traditionally viewed with suspicion. This was based on fundamental ignorance and a lack of desire to acquire any real understanding of Judaism as a discrete and independent cultural entity, "a social organism" in its own right.<sup>64</sup> The official effort of modernization and benevolent "improvement" of culturally and morally inferior people, as Jews were normally seen, driven by the ideas of the Enlightenment, was shot through with truly medieval prejudices and preconceptions.<sup>65</sup> The results of this extremely uneven and ambiguous project, which had rather contradictory and obscure intentions even for the official modernisers themselves,<sup>66</sup> were similarly uneven and controversial for the modernised Jews, split and bewildered by the mutually negating strives of bureaucratic ambitions on which they had no influence whatsoever.<sup>67</sup> The age-old self-sustaining communal governance of the Jews, physically circumscribed by the walls of the ghettos, and almost totally segregated from the gentile juridical and civil system, was disintegrating, as the modern nation state rose to power, aiming to exert full social control over its subjects or citizens. Dismissal of the ghetto, coupled with the political earthquakes of the Napoleonic era with its numerous advances and withdrawals of Jewish emancipation and the real change in modes of everyday life and consumption brought about by industrialisation, have made observing the full range of Jewish ritual and liturgy increasingly problematic.

The resulting uncertainty of the modern Jewish identity, historically founded on religious *practice* not less than on theology and on a self-sustaining communal governance, has found its expression in the rise of the Orthodox and the Reform movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Germanies. Jewish communities attempted to resolve this uncertainty, upon which the "response to modernity" on both sides of the religious split was founded, by fixation and aggravated observance to "the ways of the fathers" or, at first almost clandestinely and later openly, by continuous reinvention and sometimes rejection of those ways in the aesthetic spirit of the "cultured" Christian Europe.<sup>68</sup> In fact both movements sought integration into German society, trying in their respected ways to present Judaism as a cultured and

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<sup>64</sup> Vital, David. (1999). *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789-1939*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press. p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> "... awkward compromise... between ancient, but still powerful, often implacably hostile sentiments and judgements on the Jews and the new tendency to look at them in a clinical light and to therapeutic purpose." Ibid pp. 34-35.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid p. 29

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p. 31

<sup>68</sup> Schwartzman, Sylvan D. (1959). *Reform Judaism in the Making*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: The Union of American Hebrew Congregations. pp. 39, 69



enlightened religion and way of life, one that possesses tradition and history not inferior to that of the Christian Germanies.

For the Orthodox tradition, honour and distinction were to be carried on proudly, echoing the reactionary moods of the gentile Germany. "Tradition" in that sense was indeed "reinvented" (echoing Eric Hobsbawm<sup>69</sup>), since once the ghettos were opened, being "traditional" started to acquire new political significance. The Orthodox movement was in fact neo-Orthodox, since the whole content of the movement was derived from their particular stand towards modernity: i.e., "Orthodox" appeared only once "modern" was becoming the established reality. For the Reformers, who emphasised the general moral and ethical aspects of Judaism, "tradition" was an inadequate, non-aesthetic and often shameful "burden of the past", which signified backwardness and slowed emancipation. Yet as time moved on, for both "tradition" and its material expressions started to evolve into a picture of nostalgia, imbued with meanings each party desired to be "true".

Circumcision stood firmly in the midst of this religious split. Many of the reforms were extremely far-reaching in the extent of their modification and even rejection of practices and concepts which were considered the backbone of Judaism, such as the observance of the Sabbath, the use of Hebrew, anticipation of Messiah, the absence of women in the liturgy. Circumcision was questioned by the reformers, but in secret. The very few occasions where the question of the necessity of circumcision in the modern Jewish ritual was raised publicly have brought a raging univocal response from both Orthodox rabbis and reformers of various degrees that confirmed beyond all doubts the widely agreed centrality of the rite as a primary sign of Jewishness, a dismissal of which was simply unthinkable.<sup>70</sup> The affair of the Frankfurt "Friends of Reform Society" in 1842 was a notorious example. The society's lay members refused to recognize the authority of the Talmud and rejected circumcision as "pre-Mosaic, perhaps physically dangerous, and always intrinsically particularising ritual."<sup>71</sup> The rite itself has hardly changed<sup>72</sup> apart from its location, which due to the lesser access to synagogues after the removal of the ghettos, often shifted back to the private sphere of the home, partially in the mood of the modern view of religion as a private affair.

Supplemental naming of a different, practically oriented kind complicated the symbolical facet that linked Milah and the given Hebrew name, Shem Kodesh. Already in the Biblical period it became rather common to provide

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<sup>69</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Terence. (2006). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>70</sup> See: Meyer, Michael A. (1988). *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 122-123; Hoffman, L. (1996). pp. 2-9.

<sup>71</sup> Meyer, M. A. (1988) p. 123.

<sup>72</sup> Schauss, H. (1950). pp. 50-52; Freehof, Solomon B. (1944). *Reform Jewish Practice and Its Rabbinic Background*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press. pp. 111-114.

the newborns (male and female) with an additional "foreign" or non-Hebrew name (*Shem Luazi*, שם לוּעִזִי). This custom developed during the Babylonian exile, when Jews were adopting local names in addition to their native Hebrew ones.<sup>73</sup> This tendency was not extinguished upon the return to the Land of Israel, but continued throughout the Hellenic era,<sup>74</sup> until its firm establishment during the Middle Ages in Europe and other places. The need to clarify the identity of a person for juridical purposes (especially in relation to marriage and divorce), expressed through the tendency to add a second name, was evident already in the Mishnah<sup>75</sup>, even though sometimes it was the doubling of names that created a confusion.<sup>76</sup> In the Middle Ages and onwards the second name, related to as *Shem Khol* (שם חול, secular name) or *Shem Arisah* (שם עריסה, cradle name) was intended for use in everyday life and in communication with the gentile world.<sup>77</sup> *Shem Kodesh*, the sacred name, was to be used only in the synagogue and for official signatures, especially marriage contracts and divorce charters. The secular name was often a translation of the Hebrew name into the local dialect or its Germanized pronunciation. Girls often received only one name, either sacred or secular, which could also be a diminutive form of the sacred name.<sup>78</sup> Here the sacred name was not always considered a necessity, since women were not actively participating in the liturgy.

The sacred name was given publicly at the synagogue, while the secular name was announced at the newborn's home. A special custom of secular naming, *Hollekreisch*,<sup>79</sup> had already evolved in the Ashkenaz by the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The meaning of *Hollekreisch* can be inferred from Hebrew חול (*khol*) – "secular", "everyday" and German *kreischen* (scream) or *schreien* (cry, shout).<sup>80</sup> The purpose of the custom was to set and announce the name of the child that will be used constantly in everyday life. According to the decision of the parents the sacred name given at the *Milah* could be announced as secular.<sup>81</sup> The custom was performed on the thirtieth day after the birth or the first Sabbath<sup>82</sup> after the

<sup>73</sup> See entry "Имена" [names] in CEJR vol. 3. pp. 724-729.

<sup>74</sup> Schauss, H. (1950). pp. 28-29.

<sup>75</sup> *Mishnah*, order *Gittin* 4:2, available from: <<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/b/h/h36.htm>> Later this tendency was enforced by the local gentile authorities in the early modern attempts to assign family names to the wider population, including Jews. It was often achieved by addition of a second name that designated a geographical location related to a person, a profession or a personal trait. Obligatory assignment of family names: Austro-Hungary – 1787, France – 1808, Prussia – 1812, Russia – 1804. See entry "Имена" [names]. SEJR. vol. 3.

<sup>76</sup> See examples in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 1. p. 445-448.

<sup>77</sup> See examples *ibid*

<sup>78</sup> According to rabbi Moshe Halevi from Mainz, the Maharam, see Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 1. p. 441; see other interpretations in Raphael, Freddy. "The Hollekreisch in Alsace" in: Friedlander E. et al. (1997). *Mappot ... Blessed be, Who Comes: the Band of Jewish Tradition*. ex. cat. the Hidden Legacy Foundation and Prähistorische Staatssammlung München. pp. 80-81; Schauss, H. (1950). pp. 31-32; Rubin, N. (1995). pp. 57-59.

<sup>79</sup> The description is given according to: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 1. pp. 415-455; Raphael, F. (1997). pp. 80-81

<sup>80</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 1. p. 441

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid* p. 416

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid* p. 406

thirtieth day,<sup>83</sup> when the impurity<sup>84</sup> days were over and the mother could visit the synagogue.<sup>85</sup> The parents invited boys from the street, or those of the relatives, who had not yet reached puberty to enter and gather around the cradle. In the cradle the newborn boy was dressed for the *Milah*, covered with a prayer shawl, and a small Torah scroll could be positioned by his head or laid on his belly. The earliest description of the custom in the 12<sup>th</sup> century mentions an inkstand and a quill placed in the cradle as well.<sup>86</sup> The boys read several passages from the Pentateuch and then shouted: "*Hollekreisch! What shall we call this baby?*" raising the cradle in the air three times. The mother declared the newborn's secular name and the children repeated it loudly three times. The secular name was therefore given at the cradle, giving rise to the term "cradle name". At the conclusion of the rite the boys were given fruits and sweets.

The naming of girls was performed in a similar way and at the same time. Instead of boys, girls were invited to raise the cradle. Several garments of the bridal outfit, instead of scrolls or *Talith*, were used in the cradle. Passages from the Pentateuch were not necessarily read, at least there was hardly any prescribed selection that was considered obligatory. *Hollekreisch* performed at home was the only special rite for naming girls.

With the onset of the modern period the politics of Jewish naming began to change. Jews were adopting Christian names, to the great discontent of the neo-Orthodox rabbinic institutions and some gentile authorities, while sacred names began to go out of use more and more. Orthodox rabbis clearly distinguished between secular names, which could be of a foreign origin, but were given at the *Hollekreisch*, and foreign names adopted much later as means to blur the Jewishness, a phenomenon viewed with contempt.<sup>87</sup> Rabbi Solomon Carlebach (1845-1919) explained the persistence of name adoption by the hostility to which the Jews were exposed from the surrounding German population after the ghettos were opened and limitations on Jewish settlement withdrawn.<sup>88</sup> From the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards many states demanded obligatory participation by Jews at the general birth registers. This often resulted in addition of another foreign name, as some German authorities recognized only German names.<sup>89</sup> Some communities chose not to give those foreign names at the *Hollekreisch*, while others accepted

<sup>83</sup> Ibid pp. 406-407

<sup>84</sup> Towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century the period of impurity was often shortened and was related more to the individual physical state of the woman. The rabbinical discussion also shifted from the accent on impurity to the issue of health. Nevertheless the 4 week period of total segregation, if justified by impurity or by a condition of illness, was stringently observed in the Ashkenaz up the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Ibid pp. 406-411

<sup>85</sup> Another version of the custom is performed a few days after the circumcision on a Sabbath.

<sup>86</sup> The Vitry Machzor. See Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 1. p. 417

<sup>87</sup> See the Hungarian rabbi Moshe Shik (1807-1879) and his famous teacher rabbi Moshe Sofer, Chatam Sofer, (1762-1839) quoted *ibid* pp. 448-449.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid p. 451

<sup>89</sup> Ibid p. 450

and pronounced them at the rite. Language was becoming significant, as German had become widely accepted among Jews, strengthening the use of German names in written correspondence. This direction was reinforced by the changing status of Hebrew as the sole language of the liturgy. Since the translation of the Pentateuch into the vernacular German by Moses Mendelssohn in 1783, the reformists were continuously questioning the necessity of a purely Hebrew liturgy, striving to replace parts of it with prayers in the vernacular language.

To summarise: in Judaism naming and circumcision were sorting tools, clearly dividing between sacred and everyday, public and private, male and female, Jewish and gentile. They created a complex entry into an identity which, as a result of cultural sorting, from the very start was to be gendered and partitioned, a trait that during the ascent of modernity became further exaggerated and complicated in its bureaucratic aspects and in everyday practice. With the advent of emancipation in the Germanies the choice and prevalence of secular and Christian names signalled on the one hand the extension of the split between *Khol* and *Kodesh*, and on the other the blurring of boundaries between categories that in previous times were understood as a relatively simple matter of fact. In contradistinction, circumcision remained an unchanged and irreversible sign of a particularised identity, stubbornly refusing to succumb to the universalising and homogenizing effort of the official modernizers. The creators of binders had to find their way in this complicated situation, mending and tearing names, texts and cloths.

### **The binder**

Torah binder is a Jewish ceremonial textile, which in different variants is present throughout the world. Commonly it is a long and narrow cloth band used to wrap and fasten the Torah scroll when it rests in the arc (Fig. 1). In the Ashkenaz its typical proportions approach 20 centimetres width by 300 centimetres length.<sup>90</sup> Traditionally the Ashkenazi binder is wrapped around the whole length of the scroll five or six times, so that no parchment remains uncovered.<sup>91</sup> The wrapping (כריכה) can be performed from bottom to top (more common) or the opposite, each option bearing its religious meanings.<sup>92</sup> The end is thrust upwards in between the edges of the cloth and no knot or additional fastening device is needed.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> The actual numbers may vary, but the ratio remains similar. Yaniv, Bracha. (2008). A Work of Embroidery. (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Machon Ben Tzvi. p. 82

יניב ברכה. (2008) מעשה רוקם. ירושלים: מכון בן צבי.

<sup>91</sup> On ways of binding the scroll see *ibid* pp. 17, 23-24,82. For a detailed Orthodox account see: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 551-571.

<sup>92</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995), vol. 2. pp. 551-554.

<sup>93</sup> Belt-like types of binders (Yiddish: *gartl*) fastened in the middle of the scroll with a buckle existed in Bohemia and Moravia. See: Veselska, Dana. "Bohemian and Moravian Torah Binders and Covers from Circumcision Swaddling as a Source for Social and Art History" in Cermanová, Iveta, Putík, Alexandr eds. (2009). *May God Let Him Grow: a Child's Birth in the Culture and Customs of Bohemian and Moravian Jews*. Jewish Museum in Prague. pp. 28-31.

Contemporary binders are often narrow and short, which necessitates complementary fastening with

These artefacts can be traced back to ancient Judea, where between the era of the Second Temple<sup>94</sup> and the 5th century CE, the written text of the Torah acquired its contemporary shape, that is: a single scroll, wound onto a wooden beam at each of its edges,<sup>95</sup> containing all the books of the Pentateuch. Initially each of the five books was written on a separate parchment rolled into an individual scroll that was wound onto a removable wooden beam.<sup>96</sup> This type of scroll was shared by ancient Greece and Rome, while the Aramaic name of the beam, "tabur" (טבור), corresponded to its Latin and Greek equivalents: *umbilicus* and *ομφαλος*, meaning "navel".<sup>97</sup> The scrolls were laid horizontally inside the holy arc, wrapped in cloths. Archaeological findings from the Judean desert include fragments of linen and woollen cloths, sometimes with fixing straps, or possibly sewn together at their edges to form a pouch (Fig. 2). These were used to wrap and contain the texts, protecting their parchment from dirt and moisture.<sup>98</sup>

The merger of the five scrolls into a single one, familiar today, took place at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. As a result, the scroll became long and heavy, while its reading necessitated two beams, one on each edge, to facilitate an easier rolling back and forth.<sup>99</sup> The beams received the name of "pillars"<sup>100</sup> (עמודים) or "trees of life" (עצי חיים), referencing the passage from Proverbs: "Torah is a tree of life to them that lay hold of it".<sup>101</sup> Those transformations brought about the contemporary liturgy based on the three weekly readings from the Pentateuch. The winding of the scroll onto two beams demanded a fastening implement to hold its parts together.<sup>102</sup> Such fastenings were named *Mappah* (מפה), or *Mitpakhat* (מטפת), generic terms, which in the Talmud and the medieval Jewish European sources designate cloths that fasten and cover the scroll.<sup>103</sup>

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buttons, straps etc., solutions which are problematic on Sabbaths. See: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 562-571. On fastening and coiling the binder in the USA see: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "The Cut that Binds: the Western Ashkenazic Torah Binder as Nexus between Circumcision and Torah" in: Turner, Victor ed. (1982). *Celebration Studies in Festivity and Ritual*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. p.138

<sup>94</sup> The Second Temple in Jerusalem was erected in 516 BC and destroyed in 70 CE.

<sup>95</sup> See Feuchtwanger-Sarig, Naomi. (1999). *Torah Binders from Denmark*. PhD thesis. (in Hebrew). The Hebrew University, Jerusalem. pp. 19-20

<sup>96</sup> Landsberger, Frantz. "The Origin of European Torah Decorations" in: Gutmann, Joseph ed. (1970). *Beauty in Holiness: Studies in Jewish Customs and Ceremonial Art*. New York: Ktav. p. 87.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 88, see also Sukenik, Eleazar L. (1934). *Ancient Synagogues in Palestine and Greece: Schweich Lectures*. London: H. Milford. p. 53.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid pp. 52-57; Yadin, Yigael. (1963). *Judean Desert Studies: The Finds from the Bar-Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*. (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Bar-Kokhba Fund. pp. 248-253; Yadin, Yigael. (1971). *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome*. (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and The Maariv Book Guild. pp. 159-165, 222-228, 236, 238, 248; Sperber, Daniel. (2005). *Material Culture in the Land of Israel in Talmudic Times*. (in Hebrew). vol. 2. Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University. pp. 81-84. Also see the discussion in Yaniv, B. (2008). pp. 16-18.

<sup>99</sup> Landsberger, F. (1970). pp. 87-89.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid p. 88

<sup>101</sup> Proverbs 3:18

<sup>102</sup> Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999). p. 21

<sup>103</sup> On the identity of the two terms see: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. p. 324; on the cloths' uses and historical development see: Landsberger, F. (1970). pp. 90-92.; Yaniv, B. (2008) p. 22;

Wrapping and fastening parchment scrolls with textiles was widely practised in Rome and Greece, making the Jewish custom non-exceptional in functional terms.<sup>104</sup> The real difference lay in the Jewish conception of the Pentateuch scroll, which perceived the material embodiment of the sacred text as exceptional in high religious terms and imbued with magical powers in the popular view.<sup>105</sup> Both of those factors, which influenced profoundly the design and understanding of the cloths' protecting function, came to be expressed in different historical periods through series of written directives addressing the handling, keeping and embellishment of the scroll. *The Tractate of Scribes* dictates: "It is obligatory ... to write a beautiful scroll of the Torah with choice ink, with fine reed-pen [written] by an expert penman on a well finished parchments, on deer skins, and to wrap it in precious silks".<sup>106</sup> Echoing this are the words of Moses Maimonides: "It is praiseworthy to set aside a special place for a Torah scroll, to respect that place, and make it very beautiful".<sup>107</sup>

Towards the Middle Ages in Europe the Jewish liturgy and its accompanying objects altered; the positioning of scrolls in the arc changed from horizontal to vertical, thus affecting wrapping textiles, which had not just to cover, but also to reinforce, the standing scroll.<sup>108</sup> As a result, *Mappah* cloth evolved into three particular items: *Yeriah* (יריעה) – a sheet which was rolled up with the scroll, providing a soft inner layer, protecting the letters,<sup>109</sup>; *Avnet*<sup>110</sup> (אבנט) – a binder or a sash wound around the scroll to keep it safe and reinforce it, and *Meil* (מעיל) – a mantle, an outer tailored garment (Fig. 3).<sup>111</sup> The first visual reference to the existence of Torah binders in Europe appears in a prayer book illustration from Southern Germany circa 1320, showing a scroll wound in a long and narrow cloth (Fig. 4).<sup>112</sup>

The cloth's ritual function is to create a physical "partition of honour

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Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 22.

<sup>104</sup> Landsberger, F. (1970) p. 91.

<sup>105</sup> On the extraordinary materiality of the Torah scroll and its magical power in Jewish culture see: Sabar, Shalom. (Autumn 2000). "Torah and Magic: the Book of Torah and its Implements as Magical Objects in the Culture of Israel in Europe and the Islamic Lands". *Paamim: Quarterly for the Research of Communities of Israel in the Orient*. (in Hebrew). 85 (149-178). Jerusalem: Ben Tzvi Institute.

<sup>106</sup> "Masseket Soferim" 3:13, in: *Minor Tractates of the Talmud. Massektoth Ketanonth*. trans. A. Cohen. Vol. 1. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: The Soncino Press. (1971). 36b p. 225, original brackets.

<sup>107</sup> 10:10 in: "Tefillin, Mezuzah, Torah Scroll" in Maimonides, Moses. (2004). *The Book of Love, The Code of Maimonides*. trans. Menachem Kellner. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. p. 109.

<sup>108</sup> Yaniv, B. (2008). p. 22

<sup>109</sup> *Yeriah* was present exclusively in the Italian and Sephardic communities, while binders and mantles were common in all European communities.

<sup>110</sup> The term *avnet* is not a traditional designation of the object, but a modern scholarly addition which aims to clarify the use of the term *Mappah* in relation to different ceremonial textiles. Yaniv, B. (2008). p. 81

<sup>111</sup> Ibid pp. 22-26. Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 23

<sup>112</sup> The binder is visible on the opening illustration to the "Song of Songs" in Machzor Meshulash, "a triple cycle" - a compilation of prayers for the three pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot. Yaniv, B. (2008) p.24

between the scroll and its users"<sup>113</sup> in various situations, including preventing the direct touching of the scroll by human body<sup>114</sup> and unnecessary disclosure of the sacred text.<sup>115</sup> The interdiction of any direct physical contact was stridently formulated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE by Rabbi Yochanan Bar Nafkha: "Anyone who grasps a Torah scroll with his bare hands will be buried bare".<sup>116</sup> Following this interdiction and for the safekeeping of the scroll, almost<sup>117</sup> any physical haptic interaction with the parchment is thus mediated by cloth.

The closeness to the scroll imbued binders themselves with a high degree of sacredness.<sup>118</sup> This condition, the rule of "elevation to sacredness", is discussed in the Babylonian Talmud. It elevates the degree of sacredness that can be associated with material objects, based on their vicinity to the sacred text.<sup>119</sup> Once an object has been elevated, transferred from the domain of the everyday to that of sacredness,<sup>120</sup> it cannot be degraded and returned to its previous state.<sup>121</sup> For that reason old binders could not be simply discarded, but either had to be committed into a keeping chamber for derelict scrolls, a *Genizah*,<sup>122</sup> or used as additions to burial shrouds.<sup>123</sup> By "recycling" the binder a supplementary good

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid p. 16.

<sup>114</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud addresses the issue of physical contact with the scroll in everyday situations in different ways, including a discussion around the possibility of placing a scroll under the bed or in the bedroom (The Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 3:5, VI A-C), sitting by a scroll on a bench (ibid VI G-L), engage in a sexual intercourse in the vicinity of a scroll – in the last case the scroll should be covered with a *Mappah* or even with an additional textile curtain or some sort of screen (ibid VI D-F). "Berakhot" in: Neusner, Jacob ed. (1989). *The Talmud of the Land of Israel, A Preliminary Translation and Explanation*. Trans. Tzvee Zahavy. vol.1. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. pp. 141-142. I use this English translation here and onwards. The Hebrew text I referred to is the 2008 Schottenstein edition of the Jerusalem Talmud, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Mesorah Publications. The Tractate of Scribes addresses a somewhat similar situation: "... nor may one sit on a bed on which a [Torah] scroll [happens] to rest. It is related that R. Eleazar once sat [unwittingly] on a bed on which lay a [Torah] scroll and [when he realised it] he jumped up as if a snake had bitten him." Masseket Soferim 3:13, in *Minor Tractates of the Talmud*. 36b. p. 225, original brackets.

<sup>115</sup> The Jerusalem Talmud, Megilah, 1:9, XII GG.

<sup>116</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Megilah, 32a<sup>3</sup>. Discussed in Landsberger, F. (1970). p. 89; Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 22; Yaniv, B. (2008) p. 16. For this quote and on I used the 1991 Schottenstein English edition of the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli), 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Mesorah Publications.

<sup>117</sup> During readings a special long metal pointer, often with a pointing finger tip, is used to help the reader to follow the lines of text.

<sup>118</sup> Yaniv, B. (2008) p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Megilah, 27a<sup>2</sup>. The text reflects upon the possibility of downgrading the sanctity of a Pentateuch scroll when wrapping it with the *Mappah* which belongs to another one as well as wrapping the other books of the Bible with a *Mappah* which belongs to the Pentateuch. The discussion is left with no answer: "from this one cannot infer anything." Expanded in Yaniv, B. (2008) p. 16

<sup>120</sup> "The rabbinic system establishes a basic dichotomy with regard to the things that constitute the cosmos as system; they are either *kodesh* or *chol*, sacred or profane (everyday). But the system is more complex still, since the times, places, people, and things that are holy are not equally so. Rather holiness occurs in various degrees. ... Every where the rabbinic system provides not for a simple dichotomy so much as a graded scale, going from the very holy to the barely holy and only then to the realm of the nonholy, the everyday." See: Hoffman, L. A. (1996). pp. 160-161

<sup>121</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Megilah, 26 b<sup>4</sup>

<sup>122</sup> On keeping and burring worn scrolls see the Babylonian Talmud, *Megilah*, 26 b<sup>4</sup> and Tractate of Scribes 5:14-15 and Tractate of the Book of Torah 5:14. See "Massekhet Soferim", *Minor Tractates of the Talmud*. Vol. 1. 37b p. 235-6 and "Massekhet Sefer Torah", ibid, vol. 2. 62b. p. 645. On physical contact with the scroll as a measure of the object's sanctity see Babylonian Talmud, Megilah 26 b<sup>2</sup>-b<sup>4</sup>. On different early modern and modern views regarding the use of worn binders see: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 580-583.

<sup>123</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Megilah 26 b<sup>4</sup>

deed<sup>124</sup> was performed, further increasing the piety in the primary act of elevation of an everyday cloth to a "utensil of sacredness" (*Tashmish Kedoshah* תשמיש קדושה).

Eventually the ritual elevation influenced an approach to aesthetics: binders were commonly embellished with painting and embroidery, or produced from luxurious textiles (Fig. 5).<sup>125</sup> The intimate closeness to the scroll turned those creative acts upon themselves: the medieval ruling to wrap the scroll with the embellished side of the binder turned inwards, to the text.<sup>126</sup> If several binders were used to wrap a single scroll, the innermost binder had to be the most beautiful and face the scroll; the middle one could be less attractive, while the last one, facing the crowd, had to be beautiful. This creation of a ceremonial gradation and material transference from the eye of the public to the body of the scroll is mentioned first in the *Sefer Hasidim* of late 12<sup>th</sup> or early 13<sup>th</sup> century by rabbi Yehuda Ha-Hasid.<sup>127</sup> This ruling was variously backed via interpretations of instructions how to arrange the altar in the tabernacle in the book of Exodus.<sup>128</sup> In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the issue was re-confirmed in *The Ways of Moses* by Rabbi Moses Isserles, the Rema (1520-1572), a central figure in Jewish Poland. The Rema states that 'facing the scroll' is the right way to wrap, even though some do not act accordingly, e.g. many are wrapping the binder 'facing the crowd'. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Yuspa Shammash (b. 1648), from Worms in Rhineland, confirmed the practice of gradation of beauty when several binders were used in his *Customs of the Holy Community of Worms*.<sup>129</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Vilna Gaon ruled the opposite<sup>130</sup> of the official idea of wrapping 'facing the scroll', reinforcing his contemporaneous public practice of wrapping 'facing the crowd'. A similar stand was taken in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Lithuanian rabbi Yechiel Epstein, who ruled: "The greatest part of the Torah's honour is in front of the eyes of those who watch",<sup>131</sup> relating to the very few moments when the binder is actually seen: during the wrapping itself.

The three ceremonial textiles of the scroll and terms by which they are called clearly show a connection to the layers of human clothing. Through the history of the Judaic material culture, the Torah scroll was not just the central

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<sup>124</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 353-355; Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot*, 39:2

<sup>125</sup> See Veselska, D. (2009) p. 29-31; Yaniv, B. (2008) pp. 83-87.

<sup>126</sup> Quoted and discussed in Yaniv, B. (2008) pp. 24-25; Veselska, D. (2009) p. 22; Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 556.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid

<sup>128</sup> *Exodus* 25:11, 26:29. See: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. pp. 557-561.

<sup>129</sup> The Rema and Yuspa Shammash quoted in: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 558-9.

<sup>130</sup> Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman Kremer, the Vilna Gaon or Gra (1720-1797), a major Ashenazi authority of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In *Elaborations of Gra* on the subject of wrapping he suggests to wrap with the embellished side facing the eyes of the crowd. He interprets differently the Biblical references used by his predecessors to justify the wrapping with the embellished side inwards. See: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 560-1.

<sup>131</sup> Yechiel Michael Epstein, (1829-1908), or the *Aruch ha-Shulchan* (after the title of his major work), a significant Lithuanian authority. Quoted in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. p. 561.



sacred text, the most authoritative source of the people's "official religion"<sup>132</sup> that had to be zealously studied. In the popular view it was regarded as a kind of sacred material body,<sup>133</sup> imbued with magical power, but also vulnerable and in need of care, protection and glorification. In words of Shalom Sabar: "In the eyes of a common believer, the very body of the scroll is an embodiment of sacredness and a possible mediator between him and God".<sup>134</sup> Thus "like a human, the scroll is 'dressed' in its finery... Like a queen, the scroll wears a regale mantle...".<sup>135</sup> Those needs were provided for by the different wrapping cloths, disclosing the rich and complex haptic aspects of the liturgy, a politics of touch directed to manage the intercourse of the human body with the body of the sacred text.

### **Binding, wrapping, swaddling**

Hebrew verbs used in the *Tosefta* (Talmud additions), as well as in later sources up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in relation to *Mappah* cloths are: "wound around", "wrapped", "rolled up" (ללל, כרר, עטף).<sup>136</sup> They suggest a circular way of packing or swaddling<sup>137</sup> the scroll. In that sense *Yeriah* and *Avnet* are especially interesting in terms of the somewhat ambivalent simplicity of their inter-related function, one that surreptitiously brings to mind a baby-swaddling band and underwear. In the medieval European context the link to baby swaddling is relatively direct, since newborns were commonly wrapped in long and narrow bands of linen along the length of their body<sup>138</sup> to prevent movement (Fig. 6). This custom was preserved up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. In Germany it persisted till the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century in cities and lingered on longer in rural areas.<sup>139</sup> German Jews acted as gentiles; the changing of the practices of tight swaddling in the Jewish communities was initiated by the Jewish enlightenment movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the effort to modernise childcare routines generally. Those efforts were still enacted by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

[the baby's] first clothes are fetters – these are the

<sup>132</sup> Sabar, Sh. (2000) p. 149.

<sup>133</sup> "A fit Torah scroll is to be treated with extreme sanctity and great respect. It is forbidden to sell a Torah scroll, even if one has nothing to eat..." - see "Tefillin, Mezuzah, Torah Scroll" 10:2 in *The Code of Maimonides*, p. 108.

<sup>134</sup> Sabar, Sh. (2000) p. 151.

<sup>135</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1982) p.136. On the development of Torah vestments and decorations see: Landsberger, F. (1970) pp. 87-121, on the notion of royalty in relation to the scroll: Sabar, Sh. (2000) p. 150.

<sup>136</sup> "Wound around", "wrapped", "rolled up" (ללל, כרר, עטף). See *The Tractate of Scribes* 3:13: "It is obligatory ... to wrap it in precious silks". "Masseket Soferim", in *Minor Tractates of the Talmud*; vol. 1. 36b p. 225. Discussed in Yaniv, B. (2008). p. 17. For medieval German (Maharam, Maharil) to modern Polish, Galician and Hungarian sources using the same verbs see: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 323-27. Hamburger himself uses the verb "to wrap".

<sup>137</sup> Jews of Spanish descent used similar verbs. Rabbi Joseph Trani or Maharit (1538-1639) of Greece used the verb "to swaddle" in his responsa. Quoted *ibid* p. 323.

<sup>138</sup> On swaddling in Europe see: Stahl, Avraham. (1983). "Swaddling: Its Disappearance as an Illustration of the Process of Cultural Change". *Koroth*. vol. 8 (7-8) (285-298). See p. 287-8

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid* p. 288.

swaddling bands ... His hands and feet are bound by bands of linen so that he cannot turn this or the other way, and is unable to move any of his members...<sup>140</sup>

Avraham Stahl, in his article on swaddling, among other examples of Jewish swaddling practice, brings recollections of his own elderly family members of Eastern European descent, born about the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They describe a swaddling with a special pillow upon which the baby is laid and "round about this 'package' a long band of linen was wound around and around many times, 'like you tie a Torah scroll'".<sup>141</sup> In light of the ages-old swaddling practice, the idea of swaddling the scroll acquires a utilitarian basis imbued with possible anthropomorphic and even motherly symbolism, which comes through the link between the swaddled body of an infant and the swaddled "body" of the scroll.

The binder-swaddling connection just described received an explicit expression in the material culture of German-speaking European communities.<sup>142</sup> Torah binders there were made from swaddling cloths or bands that covered or lay underneath the male child during the circumcision ceremony.<sup>143</sup> Dedication and donation of a ceremonial textile to a festive event was practised in other contexts and other lands as well, such as the bridegroom's donation of Torah binders or mantles<sup>144</sup> or donations of textiles as a form of thanksgiving or commemoration.<sup>145</sup> In time such textiles were prepared from the festive clothes of the donors, man and woman, following the rule of "elevation to sacredness". Such "recycling" was not always approved of by the rabbis, who discussed the issue in different periods and often tended to see a danger of sacrilege in the closeness of a profane object to a sacred one.<sup>146</sup>

This applied especially to female clothes, it was believed that their appearance in the publicly observed ceremonial textile, such as the arc curtain or the mantle, might cause impure thoughts during prayer.<sup>147</sup> A certain consensus was

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<sup>140</sup> Quote from an article in the German Hebrew journal *Ha-Measef*, from 1811, *ibid* p. 289. Stahl brings several other quotes from Hebrew and Yiddish periodicals relating the same issue in Germany, Galicia and Palestine between 1870s and 1920s.

<sup>141</sup> Stahl, A. (1983). p. 290

<sup>142</sup> The geographical provenance of the binders included the communities of Germany, Alsace, Switzerland, Denmark, Holland, Bohemia, Moravia and neighbouring areas. See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1982) p.137; Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 23

<sup>143</sup> A concise modern description of the custom is found in the work of a prominent neo-Orthodox rabbi A.E. Kaplan (1890-1924), *Divrey Talmud*.

רא"א קפלן, דברי תלמוד, ח"א, ירושלים תשי"ח, הוצעת מוסד הרב קוק, עמ' צא.

<sup>144</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 347-48.

<sup>145</sup> Yaniv, B. (2008) pp. 49-51, 205-209.

<sup>146</sup> Diverse positive and negative rulings on the subject are quoted in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 338-342. All interpret the Babylonian Talmud, *Menahot* 22a, where clothes and other utensils used by laymen, e.g. those who are not Cohanim (priests) are prohibited for use in the Temple. Also see Sperber, D. (2008) p. 145, footnote 5.

<sup>147</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 342-44. Hamburger brings a mixed bag of stories verging from complete interdiction to honourable and emotional confirmation of the custom by the medieval and modern Orthodox rabbis.

reached, allowing the use of a female dress as long as it was modified irreversibly in its new role. Nonetheless the suspicion has grown, manifesting itself in a suggestion that the mere appearance of a female name in the dedicatory inscription can be dangerous.<sup>148</sup> Unlike these “dubious” donations, the circumcision binder, which from the very start was meant to be an “object of commandment” (תפצא של מצווה), first of the circumcision, second of wrapping and embellishing the Torah,<sup>149</sup> was perceived in the Ashkenazi official discourse as a donation truly “pure and exalted”,<sup>150</sup> a pious expression of gratitude after the successful entrance of a son into a new stage in life.

A major written source, where a swaddling band and a Torah binder are juxtaposed in the context of circumcision, is the “Book of Maharil”, a 14<sup>th</sup> century compendium of stories and directives, compiled by the Maharil's pupil, Rabbi Zalman of St Goar. Binders are mentioned there in the context of an occasion when the Maharil is invited to be the godfather (*Sandek*, סנדק) in a circumcision ceremony (Fig. 7).<sup>151</sup> Once there, he discovers that there is no swaddling band (*Mappah*) to bind the legs of the child after the circumcision, as the circumciser (*Mohel*, מוהל) usually does to prevent the bandage on the wound from loosening. The Maharil orders a Torah binder (*Mappah*) to be brought to bind the child's legs, justifying such an act with the threat of a mortal danger (*Sakanat Nefashot* סכנת נפשות). He rules that in such a case the sacredness of the binder is not violated, though the binder should be cleaned of blood before being returned to the scroll and a small contribution should be made to the charity box of the synagogue. Hamburger refutes the rather ubiquitous opinion that this story testifies to the origin of the custom in the rulings of the Maharil, suggesting instead that it confirms the existence of circumcision binders already in the Maharil's times.<sup>152</sup> The earliest circumcision binder known today is dated to 1569.<sup>153</sup>

The local term for binders was *Wimpel*, an old German for cloth or band to tie woman's hair, a word related to the Middle High German verb *bewimpfen*, meaning “to cover, to conceal”.<sup>154</sup> A similar term *Fasche* has evolved from a Latin

<sup>148</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. pp. 344-47.

<sup>149</sup> On the “recycling” of religious ceremonial objects, or doubling of a good deed see: Sperber, D. (2008) p. 143.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid* p. 347

<sup>151</sup> ספר מהרי"ל מנהגים של רבינו יעקב מולין זצ"ל, הלכות פורים יא', עמ' תכז; הלכות מילה א', עמ' תפח-תפט', שלמה יי שפיצר (עו'), מפעל תורת חכמי אשכנז, מכון ירושלים, תשמ"ט

Shpitzer, Shlomo, I. ed. (1989). *The Book of Maharil, Customs of Our Teacher Yakov Molin*. (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Mif'al Torat Hochmei Ashkenaz, Machon Yerushalaim. pp. 427, 488-489.

<sup>152</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2 pp. 350-51.

<sup>153</sup> A binder from Hégenheim, Southern Alsace, in the collection of Musée d'art et d'histoire du Judaïsme in Paris (num. 90.1.22). See Yaniv, B. (2008). p. 88.

<sup>154</sup> Eis, Ruth. (1979). *Torah Binders of the J.L. Magnes Museum*. ex.cat. Berkeley, CA: J.L. Magnes Museum. p.11; Yaniv B. (2008) p. 81. The first mention of the term in a Hebrew text is in the *Book of Maharil*.

root *fascia*,<sup>155</sup> bringing about words such as *Fádschen* or *Fätschen*, mostly applied to the infant's swaddling bands.<sup>156</sup> This link is made in the book on Jewish customs published in 1748 by the Christian scholar Johan Christoff Bodenschatz,<sup>157</sup> where in relation to Torah binders he used the term *wickelbinde*, "a winding band", which is normally used to refer to a swaddling band.<sup>158</sup> There exist other local terms, which are mostly based on verbs designating the acts of winding around, rolling, wrapping.<sup>159</sup>

A band or a cloth? The custom of the circumcision binder has developed differently in different communities, thus both options were present. In the first scenario, the binder arrived at the circumcision ceremony already made to shape, if unembellished. As I have already mentioned, a swaddling band of linen was a common item in the mother's inventory and it had just the right shape for swaddling the scroll.<sup>160</sup> Once the presence of godparents at the circumcision rite was firmly established in the Middle Ages, swaddling bands became a common and often the only permitted present<sup>161</sup> of the godparents to the newborn, a custom that may, like the godparents themselves, have been borrowed from a similar Christian practice at baptism. The newborn's attire prepared for the ceremony included two bands, and both could be given by the godparents:<sup>162</sup> an outer band in which the newborn was brought to the synagogue and an inner plain linen band. This inner band was used to swaddle the newborn during the rite itself, as the Maharil's story describes. Yet other accounts speak of using the outer band.<sup>163</sup> The aforementioned writer Yuspa Shammash of Worms mentions the swaddling band (*ווידל*, *windel*), which after the circumcision ceremony is made into a Torah binder (*ווימפל*, *wimpel*).<sup>164</sup> Among modern accounts the prominent Orthodox rabbi Avrohom Kaplan mentions circumcision binders.<sup>165</sup>

The second scenario is that of a rectangular cloth, which could be variously positioned in the vicinity of the newborn during the rite. Later on it was turned into a binder by being torn into four strips, then sewn together to form a band of necessary length. Evolving geographically and temporally, the custom of

<sup>155</sup> Italian Jews used the same word for Torah binders. See Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 40.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid p. 43

<sup>157</sup> Bodenschatz, J. Ch. (1748-1749). *Kirchliche Verfassung der heutigen Juden sonderlich deren in Deutschland...* 2 vols. Frankfurt and Leipzig, quoted in Yaniv B. (2008) p. 81.

<sup>158</sup> For both terms see *ibid* p. 81, footnotes 42, 44

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>160</sup> For an extended discussion of the relation between swaddling cloths and Torah binders see: Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) pp. 47-58.

<sup>161</sup> Godparents often added small presents, such as coins, hidden in the folds of the band, a custom that was prohibited in times of hardship. Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 357.

<sup>162</sup> An account from Hessen quoted *ibid*.

<sup>163</sup> A report on the custom in Frankfurt-on-Main quoted *ibid* p. 356.

<sup>164</sup> יוזפה שמש, מנהגים דק"ק וורמיישא, מהדורת ב"ש המבורגר ו' זמיר, א-ב, ירושלים תשמ"ח-תשנ"ב. Shammash, Yuspa. (1987-1991). *Customs of the Holy Community of Worms*. B. Sh. Hamburger and I. Zamir edition. (In Hebrew). Jerusalem: Alef-Beth.

<sup>165</sup> Avrohom Eliyahu (Elya) Kaplan (1890-1924), a prominent Orthodox rabbi, head of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin. Quoted in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. p. 356.

using a rectangular cloth, included (rare) cases when an actual diaper, or a specially prepared cloth<sup>166</sup> on which the newborn urinated has been used,<sup>167</sup> to cases where the cloth was to cover<sup>168</sup> him during the circumcision, or was just laid next to him. It could cover the actual location where the baby was laid down during the rite - the knees of the godfather<sup>169</sup> - or be hidden in a cushion<sup>170</sup> placed on them.

Once ready in this or another way, the binder was embroidered or painted with the names of the child and his father, the date and sometimes the place of birth, in practice acting as a form of a birth certificate in cloth.<sup>171</sup> The mother's name was mentioned very rarely.<sup>172</sup> The inscription ended with a blessing taken with slight variations from the concluding lines of the circumcision liturgy: "may God bring [the child] to Huppah [marriage], Torah [sacred learning] and good deeds, Amen Selah". Decorative elements traditionally added to the text included signs of Zodiac, the wedding canopy (*Huppah*, חופה) and the bridal couple, Torah scrolls, blessing hands, flower garlands and other images mostly positioned on the cloth in correspondence to the inscribed words. Usually the text was written by the local scribe or rabbi, and then embroidered by the child's mother or a skilful female relative. Wealthy families could order binders in professional workshops, specialising in painting or embroidery.<sup>173</sup> I will return to the text, images and stylisation of the German binders later on in much detail.

### ***Die Schultragen: presentation***

The binding act was performed in a special rite called in Yiddish *Die Mappe Schultragen*<sup>174</sup> or (literally) bringing the binder (*Mapah*) to the synagogue. Its kernel was the donation of the binder by the child to the synagogue on his first visit there, usually between six months and three years of age. The donation was understood as one of the first pious acts of the child, imbued with much educational significance (Fig. 8).

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<sup>166</sup> As in other places in Europe the binders were cut from a big sheet of linen before the birth, with the rest of the baby's attire and care items, including diapers and swaddling bands.

<sup>167</sup> An account from Bad Vilbel, Hessen, quoted in: Davidovitch, David. (1978). *Torah Binders: A Jewish Folk Art*. ex.cat. Tel Aviv: Eretz Israel Museum. Hebrew text, p. 17, footnote 13

<sup>168</sup> Rectangular circumcision covers embroidered similarly to circumcision binders were made in Bohemia and Moravia. The exact position or function of those covers is not yet established. Veselska, Dana. (2009). pp. 26-28, 232-234.

<sup>169</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1982). p.137

<sup>170</sup> M. L. Bamberger. (1923). 'Aus meiner Minhagimsammelmappe' in: M. Grunwald ed. *Jahrbuch für jüdische Volkskunde*, Berlin and Vienna, pp. 320-332, quoted in Yaniv B. (2008) p. 88

<sup>171</sup> In Alsace in the time of the French revolution the age of men liable for military service was verified by the circumcision registers and the binders. See Raphaël, Freddy. (1997). "Am Schawess bréngt mein Jénigle die Mappe in d'Schüle" in Friedlander E. et al. (1997) p. 73.

<sup>172</sup> This is correct for the German binders. In Bohemia and Moravia and in Denmark, it was common to mention both parents' names.

<sup>173</sup> This was a frequent case in Denmark, while the majority of binders produced in Germany were home-made.

<sup>174</sup> Gutman, Joseph. (1997). "Bringing the Torah Binder to the Synagogue: a Special German-Jewish Custom". *Rimonim* 5. (in Hebrew). pp. 56-57. Feuchtwanger-Sarig discusses the different descriptions of the donation ritual by Jewish and Christian authors in Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) pp. 25-30.

The age of the child that donated the binder varied, yet it was not accidental. The earliest occasion, at the age of one month, was a custom in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Worms, where the donation took place on a Sabbath with the mother's first visit to the synagogue, after the four post-natal weeks of impurity were over. Other communities considered the age of one, the first birthday, as a time well fitted to thank God for the normal growth of the child.<sup>175</sup> The age of two was generally accepted as the right time to wean the child, and a good occasion to celebrate this with a binder donation.<sup>176</sup> The age of three, on which I will expand, was widely accepted for *Schultragen* across Germany. Donations at the age of five or even later were also practised for certain reasons, which are of lesser importance here.<sup>177</sup>

The age of three was a significant departure point in the life of a Jewish boy, thus in many German communities, including Fürth,<sup>178</sup> the *Schultragen* was performed at this age. This was for several reasons related to the physical and intellectual development of the child: he was (mostly) weaned, he would not need a diaper in the daytime, he could talk and could walk by himself, and he was able to apprehend and memorise the event at least partially.<sup>179</sup> In some communities from this age on he could attend the services and sit with other children at the children's places.<sup>180</sup> In his third year the boy was introduced to the Hebrew alphabet, meaning that his initiation into the study of the Torah had begun. This made this year a highly significant period of transition from "the private Jewish space of the home to the public Jewish space of the school or the synagogue."<sup>181</sup> Binder donation at three years was often justified by reference to the agricultural rule of *Orlah* already mentioned<sup>182</sup> – just as the fruits of a newly planted tree are forbidden for three years and on the fourth are set aside for jubilation, i.e. the Temple, so the binder is donated on the third year, when the boy becomes "ripe", i.e. can speak, and is "set aside", i.e. initiated into the sacred learning.<sup>183</sup>

The description of the *Schultragen* that I bring here is based on the investigations of Hamburger, Guttman and Sperber; it gives the general order, which in practice could vary in details. This general order<sup>184</sup> is integrated into the

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<sup>175</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. pp. 516-518

<sup>176</sup> Ibid pp. 518-519

<sup>177</sup> Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) pp. 25-30. In Denmark the donation could be made even later. See *ibid* p. 101; also see Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. pp. 524-525

<sup>178</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2 p. 520. Some contemporary Orthodox communities donate the binder at the age of three, *ibid*.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid* pp. 521-522

<sup>180</sup> An account from Württemberg area, quoted *ibid*. p. 524.

<sup>181</sup> Marcus, Ivan G. (1996). *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe*. New Heaven and London: Yale University Press. p. 76.

<sup>182</sup> See page 55 of the thesis

<sup>183</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995). vol. 2. p. 522; Sperber, D. (2008) p. 46.

<sup>184</sup> Among early sources describing the rite: Johann Buxtorf (1564-1629), a Swiss Christian hebraist, describes this ritual in his work *Synagoga Judaica: Das ist, Juden-Schul* published in 1603. Johann Georg Christoph Bodenschatz (1717-1797), another Christian scholar, describes it in his book *Jüdisches Ceremoniel*, published in Erlangen, Bavaria, in 1748 and later on in 1749, an extended edition of it, titled *Aufrichtig Teütsch Redender Hebräer* (The Truth about German-Speaking Jews).

final stages of a morning liturgy, when the reading of the Torah is completed and the scroll needs to be stored away. The *Schultragen* itself can be divided into four parts.

### 1. Bringing the binder, waiting

*Schultragen* can correspond to presenting the child with his first *Talith Katan*<sup>185</sup> or his first trousers,<sup>186</sup> in which cases he might wear the new garments at the rite. The father brings the child to the synagogue for the morning prayers, with the binder in the child's hands. The binder is rolled from its end to the beginning, where the name of the child is embroidered. The child stays in the women's section of the synagogue, or is waiting with the mother at some intermediate space, such as a corridor, or is brought by her to the doors of the synagogue.<sup>187</sup> The very presence of the child at the synagogue is a sign that a *Schultragen* is to be performed. Some reports state that if the child is old enough, he walks around the synagogue before the prayer starts and shows his binder to those who are interested.<sup>188</sup>

### 2. Presenting the binder

The father and other (male) family members may be invited to read the Torah and perform the "mini" rites of storing the scroll away.<sup>189</sup> Once the reading is complete, the scroll is lifted up in the air and witnessed by the congregation, an act related to as *Hagba'ah* (lifting, הגבהה). The father takes the child from the mother, without her entering the men's section, and carries him in his hands, or takes him by the hand to the readers stand (*Bimah*, בימה). The boy gives the binder to the person who is performing the rolling and dressing of the scroll, acts related to as *Gelilah* (rolling, גלילה). The scroll is wrapped with the binder usually from bottom to top, referencing the rule of elevation to sanctity, with the child's name pressed closely to the parchment.<sup>190</sup> In the normal liturgy handing the binder to the person who is rolling and dressing the scroll was a separate special duty, though lesser in importance.<sup>191</sup>

### 3. Touching "the trees of life"

Once the scroll is wrapped, the boy is gently directed by his father to touch "the trees of life", the wooden staves of the scroll referencing the Proverbs line quoted

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They both provide descriptions of biographical details of the child and images embroidered on the binders. Lion Wolff describes the *Schultragen* ceremony in his 1891 *Handbuch für den Gebrauch in Synagoge, Schule und Haus* (Manual for Use in Synagogue, School and Home). Quoted in Gutman J. (1997) pp. 56-57.

<sup>185</sup> *Talith Katan*, תלית קטן or small talith – a rectangular garment made of wool or cotton with an opening for the neck, bearing the ritual fringes (*tzitzit*) on its corners, worn by the Orthodox Jewish man underneath the clothes. Entry "Талит Катан" [Talith Katan] in the glossary in CJER vol. 8. p. 1339

<sup>186</sup> *Talith Katan* in Alsace, trousers in Baden, see: Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 509

<sup>187</sup> Ibid pp. 508-509

<sup>188</sup> Ibid pp. 509-510

<sup>189</sup> Ibid pp. 508-510

<sup>190</sup> Ibid p. 554, on the rule of elevation see ibid. p. 552.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid pp. 596-598

earlier: "Torah is a tree of life to them that lay hold of it".<sup>192</sup> Holding "the trees of life" is in its basis a functional act, which in some communities was considered a separate deed as rolling and dressing.<sup>193</sup> In a normal situation it aims to help the person who is rolling the scroll. For the *Schultragen* Lion Wolff in his *Manual* of 1891 notes a special prayer recited by the father as the child is holding the staves:

I praise the Lord with all my heart in the assembled congregation of the upright. "It was this boy I prayed for; and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him". [Psalms 111:1] "But I, through Your abundant love, enter Your house" [Psalms 5:8]. The child with whom You have favoured your servant has been weaned from milk, removed from the breast – may he be supported, blessed and held by the Tree of Life. May his pure heart be blessed twofold with the spirit of compassion. Draw him near to your Torah, teach him Your commandments, guide him in Your way, train him to love and fear Your Name. Train the lad in your way: he will not swerve from it even in old age. The living, only the living can give thanks to You as I do this day. Father, relate to children Your acts of grace. [Isaiah 38:19] Blessed is the One who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.<sup>194</sup>

#### 4. Blessing

The *Schultragen* is concluded when the father takes the child to the rabbi who is blessing him.<sup>195</sup> After the conclusion, sweets are given to the children outside the synagogue or at the child's home. *Schultragen* is an occasion for a modest family celebration and congratulatory visits.<sup>196</sup>

According to the Orthodox view of Shlomo Hamburger, the religious educational idea behind the *Schultragen* rite aims:

1. to emphasise the continuity of tradition bequeathed

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<sup>192</sup> Proverbs 3:18. This final stage of the ceremony was pictured in the 1869 nostalgic grisaille of Moritz Daniel Oppenheim *Das Schultragen*, (*The Presentation at the Synagogue*, oil on canvas, 71.5 x 57 cm, in the collection of The Jewish Museum, New York). It is discussed in Gutman J. (1997) p. 56.

M. D. Oppenheim (1800-1882), a German-Jewish painter, one of the first Jews who gained national and international acclaim for his work in modern Europe. *Das Schultragen* was part in a series of grisaille paintings dedicated to Jewish life scenes. They were published in an album titled *Bilder aus dem altjuedischen Familienleben* in 1865 in Germany, which appeared in the United States as *Family Scenes from Jewish Life of Former Days* in 1866. The album was immensely popular both in Germany and the USA.

<sup>193</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. pp. 598-603.

<sup>194</sup> Quoted in Sperber, D. (2008) p. 149

<sup>195</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2, pp. 511-513

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid* p. 511



from fathers to sons named after fathers, names that are commemorated on the binder itself.

2. to celebrate an important and joyful birthday by means of holiness.
3. to bind the boy to the Torah so that he and his seed will remain loyal to its commandments.<sup>197</sup>

The boy hands the binder and “so expresses the hope that through his life he will be granted to study the word of Torah... to observe and to enforce it.”<sup>198</sup> The donation of the swaddling cloth creates a link between the boy and the Torah from his birth, focusing on the boy as “a symbol of the continuity of tradition.” The symbolism appears to be embodied and sensual, as follows from the words of rabbi Shimon Schwab: “[through *Schultragen*] the boy feels as if he himself is wrapped around the Torah scroll.”<sup>199</sup>

The wrapping or the binding act with cloth at the *Schultragen* was part of a larger initiative ritual context. At the age of five or six the boy was admitted to the Jewish school, the *Cheder*, a transition which was similarly marked by a rite of carrying the boy from home to the school. The rite also involved a protecting and mediating cloth: the boy was wrapped in a *Talith*, a prayer shawl (תלית). Teaching the boy was a second paternal covenantal obligation after circumcision, mentioned in the circumcision liturgy three times and inscribed on the binder: “may he grow to the Torah ...”. A connection between the two bodies, that of the child and that of the scroll, is further emphasised in the rites of the *Schultragen* and carrying to the school.<sup>200</sup> Both bodies were seen as pure and had to be protected from harm and pollution,<sup>201</sup> and - through the rites - were linked in a relation of dedication and consecration, the body of the boy symbolically dedicated, donated to the body of the scroll by means of the embroidered cloth.

### **Of stains: negotiating distance and closeness**

The strict prohibition on direct physical contact with the scroll in the Talmud and loyal observance of this prohibition imbues the juxtaposition swaddling/binding with additional interest. This applies particularly to the series of specified instructions regarding materials and substances that can and cannot come into contact with the scroll to prevent sacrilege. The incongruity in juxtaposing a swaddling band and a

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid p. 505

<sup>198</sup> Rabbi Solomon Carlebach quoted *ibid.* p. 506

<sup>199</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* p. 506.

Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) was a prominent Orthodox rabbi in Germany (the rabbi of Ichenhausen in Bavaria) and USA.

<sup>200</sup> Marcus, I. G. (1996) pp. 76-77.

<sup>201</sup> On the danger of religious pollution on the street during the rite of carrying to the school see *ibid.* p. 76. The need to wrap the child in the *Talith* partially stems from the threat of pollution that the gentile street could carry during the passage from the home to the school.

Torah binder lies in the rather common-sense understanding that, through the swaddling cloth or band, bodily waste of the newborn can come into contact with the scroll, either directly or at least by association. The interdiction of “bare” touch does not deal with bodily waste at all, but conceptually it is not far off. If closeness to the body is problematic and needs to be mediated by a cloth, then closeness to the discarded waste of the body or its traces in the cloth should at least raise questions.

The problem of closeness to excreta (including child excreta) and urine during prayer, as well as how to deal with semen discharge when praying, is discussed in detail in the Jerusalem Talmud.<sup>202</sup> Even though there is no direct mention of the contact of excreta and semen with the scroll, it is still clear that such closeness to bodily liquids and waste is problematic and needs to be addressed with some act - moving away a certain distance, diluting the urine or spitting on the excrement.<sup>203</sup> Maimonides similarly rules: “One may not enter a bathhouse, a privy, or a cemetery while holding a Torah scroll in his arms, even if it is in a kerchief (*Mitpakhat*) and in its case.”<sup>204</sup> Those issues are discussed in the same chapter that deals with the interdiction of sexual acts in the room where a Torah scroll is present and the requirement to conceal the scroll in such a situation with a textile screen or a wrapper.<sup>205</sup> Similarly the discussion of a possibility of sacrilege arose around the custom to bring the Torah scroll, as a magical means of protection and support, into the room where a woman is giving birth.<sup>206</sup> Additional issues of ritual cleanliness of the wrapping materials are discussed in the Minor Tractates of the Babylonian Talmud: the wool to wind the parchment has to come from a ritually clean cow or wild animal.<sup>207</sup> Both Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud are dealing with the problem of *sheatnez* (שטטנעז), hybrid fabrics in which wool and linen are combined together. In relation to Torah wrapping textiles (*Mitpakhot*) such a combination is usually seen as impure.<sup>208</sup>

Yet it is important to stress that generally the rabbinic rulings were not just about interdictions,<sup>209</sup> rather they were about sorting<sup>210</sup> everyday situations

<sup>202</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakhot* 3:5

<sup>203</sup> Ibid

<sup>204</sup> “Tefillin, Mezuzah, Torah Scroll” 10:10 in *The Code of Maimonides*, p. 109.

<sup>205</sup> See footnote 59 and the clarifications of Maimonides ibid 10:7.

<sup>206</sup> Sabar, Sh. (2000). p. 157, also see the discussion of *Niddah* (menstruating woman) below on page 22.

<sup>207</sup> *The Tractate of the Book of Torah* 1:1, “Massekhet Sefer Torah” in *Minor Tractates of the Talmud*. Vol. 2. 62a, p. 631.

<sup>208</sup> *Leviticus* 19:19: “... and a garment that is a mixture of combined fibres [*kilaim sheatnez*] shall not come upon you”. *Jerusalem Talmud*, order *Kilaim* 9:3; *Tosefta, Kilaim*, 5:10; *Mishna, Kilaim*, 9:3, see “*Kilaim*” in *The Mishna*. (1958). Trans. Herbert Danby. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. p. 38.

<sup>209</sup> “An extremely fine, and quite vague, line separates a practice sanctioned by the Jewish law from one that is not. On the one hand the *poskim* [adjudicators] felt duty-bound to justify practices that we would regard as transgressions... On the other ... they took a vigorous stance against customs that they viewed as invalid and erroneous.” see Sperber, D. (2008) p. 36.

<sup>210</sup> Rubin, N. (1995). p. 15.

from the sacred and providing different ways of dealing with the results of that sorting in practice. When everyday issues are closely intertwined with sacred ones, the laws are there to manage the encounter, to avoid mixture as much as possible, or at least to devise a means to control their relationship.<sup>211</sup> What is often presented to the seeker is not a simple yes/no claim, but a discussion of a situation, which could be problematic in various respects, and which is not always resolved unanimously. Maimonides's strict interdiction on selling a Torah scroll<sup>212</sup> is followed by two exceptions: if one has nothing else to sell it is permissible to sell a scroll intending to study Torah with the money or "to wed a woman with it".<sup>213</sup> The Talmudic interdiction of a "bare" touch punished by the naked burial is followed by a discussion on what "bare" means: does it actually suggest that the deceased will be buried without clothes or that he will be deprived of his good deeds, the *Mitzvot*?<sup>214</sup> Motivated by the seeming disproportion between the misdeed and its sentence, the discussion results in a much softer ruling. Behind is the everyday reality of a liturgy, where unintentionally a scroll could be touched with a bare hand. The rulings regarding bodily waste and sexual relations in the vicinity of a scroll similarly provide ways of dealing with the problem, rather than simply imposing a taboo on it.

Rulings regarding ceremonial textiles are similarly produced. In different times and places they oscillate between the rule of elevation to sacredness and the prevention of sacrilege by contact with the profane. In some cases the official resolution aims to uproot a public practice, which is seen as incorrect or at least dubious, such as with the case of "recycling" dresses for ceremonial textiles. In others it is the public practice, which is reinforced by the official ruling, often on the grounds of questioning the interpretation of the biblical source by the preceding rabbis, such as with the question of wrapping "facing the scroll".

The association with swaddling, including its function of absorbing the newborn's bodily liquids and waste, played a certain role in the custom: at least it seems that it was not rejected, as it could reasonably have been on the grounds of ritual impurity of bodily waste. Bringing a very small child into the space of the synagogue at the *Schultragen* rite evoked in some communities doubts as to the child's purity. Thus, it was preferable to bring him as early as possible prior to his first birthday, before he starts eating food other than milk. In that case his excrements were not considered polluting, and did not demand an act of distancing

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<sup>211</sup> "True to [Mary] Douglas's model whereby purity is order, and true also to Israel's essence of being a holy People charged with not profaning (that is, polluting) the holy with the everyday, rabbinic Jews take great care not to mix categories. [Ritual] time, space, actors and activity must be of equal holiness." See: Hoffman, L. A. (1996) p. 162

<sup>212</sup> See footnote 76 above

<sup>213</sup> "Tefillin, Mezuzah, Torah Scroll" 10:2 in *The Code of Maimonides*, p. 108

<sup>214</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Megilah*, 32a3

during prayer.<sup>215</sup> Similarly donating the binder between two to three years of age corresponded with the time when the child was not using diapers during the day, and thus was able to control his bowels.<sup>216</sup>

The Talmud saw excrements and urine as impure, yet the degree of their impurity was relatively mild and easy to deal with.<sup>217</sup> Together with semen discharge, such bodily emissions were seen as controlled by the human agent and thus significantly less dangerous. The idea of control in that sense was of a social rather than of a biological nature. I have already referred to the issue of menstrual blood being regarded as truly out-of-control and thus dangerously polluting, to the extent that a female agent, "naturally" uncontrollable by herself, could not be trusted with social authority and power. "Normal" blood, such as a blood flowing from a wound, has never been regarded as polluting, because it could be managed – just as a wound can be inflicted, opening the flow, it can be bandaged and healed, thus externally and consciously interrupting it. Such "normal" blood had a degree of sacredness by itself, it was believed to contain the soul, and thus following "completion by removal", it needed to be drained from meat before it could become consumable.

The blood of circumcision has come to be seen as the epitome of (male) control: a flow of "normal" male blood of the newborn consciously opened, managed and stopped by the male *Mohe*l. The binder came into contact with the newborn by being wrapped around him, constraining his movements during the rite and keeping him warm. It came "into contact" with his blood, and thus was consecrated. In that context it is reasonable to suggest that the significance of circumcision blood on the binder overcame the possible problem of the scroll's closeness to bodily waste, a reminder of which the swaddling cloth could evoke.

Nevertheless, a bloodstain on the binder, mighty symbol as it was, was not unanimously accepted. Here again the custom varied depending on the local interpretation of rabbinical sources and the accepted public ways. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Jewish Worms the binders were never washed of blood, as Yuspa Shammash reported.<sup>218</sup> In early 20<sup>th</sup> century Kassel only small stains were left, those that did not spoil the binder's appearance.<sup>219</sup> In Alsatian painted binders the stains were used as a part of the design.<sup>220</sup> Many binders found in southern Germany after the Second World War bear stains that could be bloodstains, yet no chemical analysis has ever been conducted to confirm or refute this possibility. On

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<sup>215</sup> A 20<sup>th</sup> century account from London, quoted in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 516

<sup>216</sup> Ibid p. 520

<sup>217</sup> Hoffman, L. (1996) pp. 152-3; Rubin, N. (1995) pp. 16-17.

<sup>218</sup> Gutman, J. (1997), pp.56-57 and Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) pp. 29-30

<sup>219</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 576

<sup>220</sup> Raphaël, Freddy. "On Saturday My Grandson Will Bring the Mappah to the Synagogue" in: Friedlander E. et al. (1997) p. 73.

the other end, in accordance with the late 18<sup>th</sup> century regulation of rabbi Aaron Worms of Metz,<sup>221</sup> who was inclined to think that the main part of circumcision is the removing of the foreskin and not the shedding of blood,<sup>222</sup> some communities tended to wash the blood of the cloth before turning it into a *wimpel*, in the spirit of Maharil's story.

### **Negotiating the haptic and the symbolic: the politics of binding and swaddling**

Circumcision binders offer a very special picture of the oscillation between the sacred and the profane. This picture can be called "haptic", insofar the factors that make it up are associated with the complex relationship of functional and symbolic touches:

1. The mother touches the cloth and the newborn in order to swaddle him at home before the *Milah*;
2. The newborn, swaddled in the cloth, is handed by his mother at home to the godmother;
3. The newborn, swaddled in the cloth, is handed by the godmother to the *Mohel* or the godfather on the doorstep of the synagogue;
4. The father and *Mohel* touch the cloth in order to handle the swaddled newborn at the *Milah* rite;
5. The swaddled newborn lays on the knees of the Sandek (possibly covered by a cloth) at the *Milah* rite;
6. The mother or other woman touches the cloth in order to tear it apart and sew it together;
7. The cloth is touched by a scribe or another man in order to write the inscription on it;
8. The mother or other woman touches the cloth to embroider it;
9. The embroidered cloth is handed by the mother to the father at the *Schultragen*;
10. The newborn's name is embroidered upon the scroll at the *Schultragen*;
11. Men touch the embroidered cloth in order to handle the scroll during service at the synagogue;
12. The embroidered cloth touches the scroll in the arc.

The hapticity of the cloth presented here is indeed complex. Currently I have limited the list to the two rites of circumcision and presentation, excluding its pre-rite state of production and its post-rite history, whereby it continues "changing hands" and often arrives at the modern museum, with a whole array of rules. The

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<sup>221</sup> Aaron Worms of Metz (1754-1836), a prominent French Orthodox rabbi with modernizing tendencies.

<sup>222</sup> Quoted in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 576

fundamental one of these is the management of - and mostly an interdiction of - touch. The haptic system at both rites is an issue that deserves separate research, which cannot be part of the current project. I will only suggest that in both rites the swaddling cloth continues to act as a haptic mediator on different levels between the everyday and the sacred domains, as well as between the private (female) and public (male) spheres, between the physical spaces of home and synagogue.

### **A Jewishing cloth: binding names and rituals**

Yuspa Shammash called the swaddling band used during the *Milah* a "Jewishing cloth" (יידיש ווינדעל), combining the German *windel* with the archaic Judeo-German װינדשען, to circumcise, to make Jewish.<sup>223</sup> Functionally Torah binders were wrapping cloths, intended to protect the scroll and to manage the intercourse of the human bodies with the body of the sacred text. Because of their special features German binders performed as certificates-in-cloth of male Jewishness, an identity that was visible and publicly acknowledged. The validity of binders as "certificates" of male Jewishness came from their embeddness in the context of birth and the post-natal primary rite of male identity imposition in Judaism: circumcision. The binders forged a material and symbolic bond between circumcision and Torah,<sup>224</sup> between male physicality and access to the duties and privileges of Jewish law and spirituality.

Reflecting on this embodied symbolism Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes: "The binders do what they are about".<sup>225</sup> They bind the boy to the Torah symbolically as ritual objects and actually keep the scroll tightly rolled. They frequently contain a visual exegesis of the words traditionally inscribed on them; as such they perform a "concretization of the often metaphorical readings of the unadorned [Biblical] text."<sup>226</sup> Finally their shape, the extended length and the contracted width, manifest an embodied

spatial metaphor for temporal passage, [when] the lifetime of an individual is *extended, displayed* and *secured* by words and images *proceeding the length* of the binder.<sup>227</sup>

Thus the experience of reading the binder as it is being wound onto the scroll or removed from it, as it is being rolled up to be put away or unrolled to be used once

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<sup>223</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2 p. 548.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid and p. 145. Also Susser, Bernard. (1997). "The Covenant of Circumcision" in Friedlander E. et al (1997) p. 45.

<sup>225</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett B. (1982) p. 140

<sup>226</sup> Ibid

<sup>227</sup> Ibid p.139, my italics.

more, activates physically the extended and “expandable text”<sup>228</sup> embroidered on its surface. Reading and embroidery here are inextricably bound, the unhurried pace of the needle making way for the instantaneous movement of the eyes.

In its variety the custom of circumcision binders maintained the link between swaddling a circumcised newborn and swaddling the Torah on different levels: through making, through terms designating the textile and through the actual binding act with cloth. The reality of this binding act is symbolic as much as political. Its meaning is produced against the background of the basic and principal connection of circumcision, blood and naming.<sup>229</sup> The blood of circumcision has come to be seen as the epitome of (male) control: a flow of “normal” male blood of the newborn consciously opened, managed and stopped by the male *Mohel*. The binder came “in touch” with the newborn’s blood, and thus was consecrated, even though the bloodstain was not univocally accepted on the binder.

In Judaism naming and circumcision acted as sorting tools, clearly dividing between sacred and everyday, public and private, male and female, Jewish and gentile. Circumcision was a gender-specific bodily mark of difference and consecration, which demanded the doubling of the names of the marked body. The sacred name was the one given publicly by the male community, the keepers of the religious law, upon the entrance to the sacred covenant. The secular name was given for everyday life by the mother, who was absent from the circumcision ceremony, in the privacy of the home. The binders acted as haptic mediators on different levels between the everyday and the sacred domains, as well as between private (female) and public (male) spheres, between the physical spaces of home and synagogue. Circumcision and the act of binding the swaddling cloth on the scroll continually performed a ritual of remembrance, in linking the sacred given name of the newborn boy and the mark on his body to make him remember the covenant. The very term for “masculine” or “male” in Hebrew comes from the root z.h.r. (זכר), which has to do with memory, remembering, reminding.<sup>230</sup>

Circumcision and naming are linked in the Jewish liturgy and its ritual practice, one of their main functions being the maintenance of a continuous patrilineal chain of descent, which is kept alive and intact through the three paternal obligations to a son: induction into Torah learning, arranging a marriage, transmission of the paternal blood. Alongside patrilineal names and birth dates, all three obligations find their official, explicit and public implicit expressions in the binder, appearing as texts, images and stains. As such the binder also acted as a didactic cloth, with a message transmitted from father to son.

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid

<sup>229</sup> A certain parallel of bodily entrance into a religious covenant can be also found in the christening wraps and gowns. See the discussion in Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) pp. 42-46.

<sup>230</sup> Susser, B. (1997) p. 44

In the ritual contexts described above the cloth almost sustains the domains of the everyday and the sacred in preventing conflict between them. As a swaddling cloth it stands for the everyday, as an absorbent and a wrapper it embodies very literally *the bodies* of everyday, those who are generally removed from the sacred as incomplete: children and women. Once marked with the blood of circumcision, again as an absorbent, the cloth is consecrated. In that sense it certifies the entrance of the male child into the domain of male "culture" and his departure from the female "nature". Once the cloth is embroidered with names, date and blessing, the newborn's covenant is documented and certified, while the cloth's consecration is officially confirmed. Once the cloth is wrapped around the scroll, its elevation is complete, while the newborn's official status as an observant Jew at the beginning of his life journey is "activated". In the course of the Jew's life journey constant and repetitive transitions between domains are made. They create a need to negotiate his identity anew, to sort and mark identities with names proper for each domain. The cloth testifies to and confirms those negotiations and even changes its own "name" too, as it passes from the everyday to the sacred.

What is next?

*Throughout this journey the cloth continues, "to do what it knows", knows "naturally": it swaddles, absorbs, is being embroidered, and swaddles again. In between the stages it is also being torn and sewn, rolled and un-rolled many times. All those acts are reasonable, everyday and functional, even "natural" in the sense that they are using the physical and structural properties of the cloth, so basic that they become mundane, almost redundant. Let me change the key: the cloth is there when it is needed; there is no question about that. It is always there in relation to the need in it, it is never there for itself. Unlawful formulation. A something doesn't have a self. Let's change it. Who are you, Cloth?<sup>231</sup>*

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<sup>231</sup> The "who" question here echoes the question posed by Sarat Maharaj in his article "Textile Art – Who are You?". Maharaj, Sarat. "Textile Art - Who Are You?" in: Jefferies, Janis ed. (2001). *Reinventing Textiles: Gender and Identity*. Vol. 2. Winchester: Telos Art Publishing. pp. 7–10.



## Chapter 4

### Jewishing Cloth: Images-on-the-Seams

*The 1836 binder: introduction; General description; Materials and techniques; Script, images, iconography; Signature, authorship; Images on the seams; In the museum.*

#### **The 1836 binder: introduction**

Answering “the who question” posited at the end of the last chapter is an embroidered Torah binder from the Bavarian town of Fürth, carrying the name of Tzvi son of Yoel, born in 1836. The binder is currently exhibited in the Museum of the German-Speaking Jewry in Tefen Industrial Park, Israel. It is finely embroidered with silk thread on linen cloth, following closely the convention of similar German-Jewish artefacts in terms of inscription, images and techniques (Figs. 9-10).

A certain diversion from convention is present in the images that adorn the joining seams. I explore them, suggesting that they offer a material and pictorial identity narrative staged on the seams/margins of the textual one. This marginal or “diverted” narrative is conditioned by the specific social and cultural setting of Jewish emancipation in Bavaria. I begin with a description of the binder and then contextualise it with reference to the aesthetics and production of German binders, embedded in the changes of the Jewish social and religious fabric in Fürth in the 1830s. To achieve this I compare the binder with other binders as well as with other relevant ceremonial artefacts.<sup>232</sup> Then “images-on-the-seams” are examined in this context. The concluding discussion addresses the status of the binder as a museal artefact and examines the strategy of its contemporary display in the light of the identity narrative present on the cloth.

#### **General description**

The binder is made of high quality unbleached linen,<sup>233</sup> embroidered with twisted coloured silk threads following preparatory drawings in ink. Its dimensions correspond to the common traditional proportion: 317 cm length by 18 cm width. The length is composed of four approximately equal panels and trimmed with a folded silk ribbon.<sup>234</sup> The panels' edges are tacked inside and tightly sewn together with hemming stitch. The embroidery techniques used in the texts and images are: chain stitch for the outlines made with finer threads; satin stitch for the fillings with thicker threads; and buttonhole stitch is used to elaborate a detail in the Huppah

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<sup>232</sup> The lists of the artefacts organized by type, collection and relevance are in Appendix 2.

<sup>233</sup> Density of the cloth: 26 picks x 32 ends per cm<sup>2</sup>

<sup>234</sup> Ribbon width: 24 mm

curtain. The binder is considerably well preserved, the most damaged part being the beginning of the first panel, where two holes subtract the upper parts the letters בִּי in the name Tzvi.<sup>235</sup>

The general colour palette is harmonised and reserved: the prevailing beige, mustard, brown, yellow and rare black of the embroidery fit in a balanced manner into the dark mustard frame of the trimming and the natural, by now darkened, background of the linen cloth. Nevertheless, the outward appeal is solemn and festive, because of the darker and contrasting motifs spread along the length in black and brown. The impression of clear and distinctive colour was possibly even greater at the time when the binder was created.

The Hebrew dedicatory inscription is embroidered in square print script:

צבי המכונה הירש בר יואל שליט נולד למ"ט ביום ב כו תמוז תקצו  
לפק השם יגדלהו לחופה לתורה ולמעשים טובים אמן סלה.

Translation: Tzvi called Hirsh son of Yoel [may he live long] born [under a good constellation] on Monday 26 Tamuz 5596 [by abbreviated era] may God bring him to Huppah, Torah and good deeds, amen, selah<sup>236</sup>

The Hebrew date corresponds to 11th July 1836. The dedicatory inscription and the blessing are formulated in the traditional way. *Hirsh*, the secular name of *Tzvi*, "deer" or "hind" in Hebrew, is written in a small print script underneath his holy name (Fig. 11). It is a translation of the Hebrew holy name into Yiddish.

At the lower left corner appears the partially survived signature of the maker (Fig. 12), embroidered according to a preparatory inscription in cursive Hebrew script:

נעשה ע"י (ב/ה"ג) (?-ל-?/מ-נ) (פינג) ער(שפי?) ג-ע(ל ק"ק פירטה

Transliteration: NAASA A"Y [AL-YADEY] (B/H)"G (?-L-?/M-N) FING(ER)SPI(?G/E)L K"K [KEHILA KDOSHA] FIRTE

Translation: MADE BY (B/H)"G (?-L-?/M-N) FING(ER)SPI(GE)L [HOLY COMMUNITY] FIRTE<sup>237</sup>

<sup>235</sup> See Appendix 3 for the detailed report of the preservation state.

<sup>236</sup> Square brackets are used to disambiguate Hebrew acronyms.

<sup>237</sup> Square brackets are used to disambiguate Hebrew acronyms. Round brackets single out unclear or fragmented words or syllables. Question mark stands for unclear letters, for example: ?-L-?/M= unclear letter followed by L, followed by unclear letter, possibly M.

## Materials and techniques

The use of materials and stitches in our binder closely follows the common Ashkenazi convention of similar textiles. Embroidery was the earliest technique of binder decoration; tempera painting appeared towards the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and became the most common decoration technique in the 19<sup>th</sup>. The earliest German binders were embroidered on silk; since the 14<sup>th</sup> century linen has been the most common material, being both cheaper and more suitable for domestic embroidery.<sup>238</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the majority of German embroidered binders were executed with silk floss or thread on bleached or natural linen, as is the case with the binder from Fürth.

The proportions of the binder are within the common ratio of 246 to 388 cm in length by 15 to 20 cm in width, derived from the original fabric width of 70 to 98 cm.<sup>239</sup> Trimming of hems with a ribbon, as in our case, is an unusual solution. The hems of most binders are folded inside and finished with buttonhole stitch.<sup>240</sup> Joseph Gutmann (born in 1923) in his article on the *Schuletragen* suggests that silk trimming was seldom used and mentions the green silk strip on the borders of his own *wimpel* in the synagogue of Gemünden-am-Main in Bavaria.<sup>241</sup> In the collections of the Israel Museum is an 1845 painted binder<sup>242</sup> trimmed by a narrow band of cloth, though not a ribbon (Fig. 13).

The joining of panels in earlier binders was performed with great creativity often using faggoting (Fig. 14), turning the joining into an important part of the design. Faggoting was a common method of joining selvedge-to-selvedge panels to make swaddling bands, thus sometimes the joining considerably preceded the embroidery and was made by a different, often professional maker.<sup>243</sup> Very rarely, woven ribbons appeared as a method of joining seams.<sup>244</sup> By the 16<sup>th</sup> century tight joining seams, made with a blanket stitch or invisible stitches, replaced faggoting.<sup>245</sup> The Fürth binder is partially different: joining seams are made discreet

<sup>238</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 87-88; Davidovitch, D. (1978) p. 4, p. 15, footnote 6.

<sup>239</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) p. 89. The measurements are based on examination of nearly 300 binders from several collections in Israel and USA.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid p. 90

<sup>241</sup> Gutmann, Joseph. (1983). "Die Mappes Schuletragen" in: Friedlander E. et al. (1997). pp. 65-69, p. 67.

<sup>242</sup> Num. 150/087, JRSO (Jewish Restitution Successor Organization), Wiesbaden collection. Several ribbon-trimmed binders are in the Yeshiva University Museum, all of them dated 1920s-30s (for example: nums 1977.147, 1977. 144, 1977. 148 and others).

<sup>243</sup> Goldstein, Gabriel. M. (1998). "Moses, Little Red Riding Hood and the Furniture Store: Wimples (Torah Binders) in the Yeshiva University Museum Collection" in: *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*. 1/1/1998. p. 352

Available from: <<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1168&context=tsaconf>>

<sup>244</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 90, 290. Yaniv mentions two binders from 1606 (at the Portuguese Synagogue, Amsterdam, num. PIG 0055) and 1678. I found three such binders in the Magnes Museum, two from Bavaria of 1685 (num. 67.1.21.9) and 1697 (num. 67.1.21.10) and one of general German provenance, of 1649 (num. 86.8.5). Another binder (num. Td 26/94, 10-11) from Ichenhausen (Swabia, Bavaria) with ornamental woven ribbon at the joining lines is mentioned in Friedlander E. et al. (1997) pp. 128, 132-133.

<sup>245</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009). pp. 88-91

with hemming stitch, then simultaneously emphasised and concealed by means of embroidered images (Fig. 15).

Stem and chain stitches appeared profusely through the history of German binders as a means of drawing outlines of letters and motives; different filling stitches appeared only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>246</sup> Our binder fits within this traditional logic: the outline is done with chain stitch and filling with satin stitch. The good overall correspondence of embroidery colours and the deep olive trimming ribbon is characteristic of the post-eighteenth century shift in colour use, from accidental selection to carefully arranged naturalistic schemes, a belated Renaissance heritage, as a result of which letters, imagery, joining seams and hems' finishing corresponded.<sup>247</sup> This general naturalistic tendency in the rendering of images in the binder has a particular contemporaneous context in the prevailing spirit of European domestic embroidery for interior and clothes, infused with influences from the detailed botanical drawings and Neoclassicist painting.<sup>248</sup> The technique of needle painting, elaborate renderings of painterly effects with dense and precise satin stitching, was popular in the production of embroidered pictures and ornamentation of dress.<sup>249</sup>

An example of such work is present in the 1814 binder of Munich-born Menachem Lilienthal<sup>250</sup> (the future famous American rabbi Max Lilienthal), a masterful piece with detailed naturalistic execution of traditional human, animal and vegetal motifs, signed by the professional embroiderer Koppel Heller (Fig. 16). Our binder does not present such fashionable, exquisite and expensive mastery and remains within the mature and skilful traditional convention of letter and image reproduction, but the spirit of the rendering of Huppah and Torah illustrations is similar to, if simpler than, Heller's creation.

A developed domestic craft with naturalistic renderings of images can be noticed on later semi-ceremonial textiles (Figs. 17-19).<sup>251</sup> The Fürth binder stands at a stylistic mid-point between those rather elaborated and "refined" domestic creations, acculturated to the general spirit of the bourgeois aesthetics of the

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<sup>246</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 50, 91. There are at least 33 binders with chain stitch outlines between 1649 and 1854 among the 72 binders I have looked at on the Magnes Museum online collections.

<sup>247</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) p. 88. This tendency notwithstanding, a great number of binders was produced in the spirit of the medieval multiple colours scheme up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Numerous examples of various skill-levels are in the Magnes Museum, among others.

<sup>248</sup> Stewart, Imogen. "Embroidery and Dress" in Synge, Lanto ed. (1986). *The Royal School of Needlework Book of Needlework and Embroidery*. London: Collins. p. 154.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, also see pp. 121-124 in Parker, R. (1984) - on the connection of botanical drawing, embroidery and femininity.

<sup>250</sup> In the Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, num. 80.83. See the report by Ruth Eis from 1985, available from <[http://www.magnesalm.org/multimedia/docs/pdf/80-83\\_lilienthal-report\\_eis.pdf](http://www.magnesalm.org/multimedia/docs/pdf/80-83_lilienthal-report_eis.pdf)>, accessed on 2/10/12.

<sup>251</sup> See: a 1897 German Matzah cover embroidered with colourful flowery garlands in satin stitch, signed with the initials of its maker (Num. 85.23.1, MM); an Alsatian Passover cushion cover with exquisite botanical embroidery (Num. JM 5-75a, JMNY); Matza cover richly embroidered with bright wool and beads, bearing depictions of grapes, wheat and blessing cup (Num. 158/001, IMJ)

period, the traditional "folk" character of earlier *wimpels* and late Baroque metallic embroideries in monumental synagogal textiles, such as the arc curtains and valances (Fig. 20).<sup>252</sup> This kind of stylistic mixture supports the assumption of a professional maker, as it testifies to a relative visual literacy.

### **Script, images, iconography**

As with the material characteristics of the binder, it is possible to say that to a great extent its script and iconography remain within a convention. The images on the binder include traditional illustrations adjacent to names and words in the blessing, and vegetal decorative elements spread alongside the upper edge of the entire inscription and onto the vertical joining seams of the panels.

The bold script is executed with distinct thin outlines in chain stitch, with floral or geometrical elements in satin stitch, positioned inside the thick upper and lower horizontal strokes, with parts of the inner surface left uncovered. Shorter vertical strokes are done with satin stitch, creating fully covered elevated elements. The date of birth is emphasized in the same way. The script, with thick rectangular horizontal strokes and pointed vertical strokes joined with a circular element, is typical of German post-medieval Torah binders.<sup>253</sup> Indirectly it derives its character from the Hebrew medieval manuscripts influenced by Gothic scripts,<sup>254</sup> including figurative and geometrical decoration inside letters and the tendency towards zoomorphic or vegetal elements in the strokes.<sup>255</sup> The script was transmitted either by copying from older binders or from other written matter, such as hand-written Torah scrolls, prayer books and inscriptions on synagogue walls, which were closer to the monumental medieval script than to the printed square script.<sup>256</sup>

In this medievalist spirit the upper strokes in the letters *Lamed* (ל) on the binder are designed as extending vegetal garlands, spreading either to the left or to the right. Most plants are recognizable: garden flowers such as tulips, jasmine, carnations, possibly *Callistephus* (China aster) or marigold, branches with the leaves and fruits of cultivated forest trees, such as oak and hazel (Fig. 22). The profusion of vegetal ornaments generally and especially in the words "good deeds" can be linked to the book of Ezekiel: "It [the vine] was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it

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<sup>252</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 57-59.

<sup>253</sup> Two Bavarian binders of 1742 provide good and clear examples of a similar script with outlines in chain stitch and partial satin stitch filling with flowery motives (Magnes Museum, nums. 67.1.21.17 and 67.1.21.16). A 1767 binder from Gernsheim show a very elegant and clear rendering of the central circular elements, creating a horizontal line through the entire length, as well as floral motifs and birds (MM, num. 67.1.21.25). Later binders from 1809 and 1821 show a similar script, less well executed. (MM, nums. 67.1.21.54, 67.1.21.55, 67.1.21.63).

<sup>254</sup> Schrijver, Emile. "Ashkenazic Tradition and the History of its Script: Where do Torah Binders fit in?" in Friedlander E. et al. (1997) pp. 51-53; Yaniv, B. (2009) p. 91.

<sup>255</sup> Schrijver, E. (1997) pp. 51-53.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid

might be a goodly vine".<sup>257</sup> Two images of birds appear among the leaves of the garlands in the *Lamed* of the acronym לפ"ק (by abbreviated era) and on the word יגדלוהו (bring him). Two other birds, doves possibly, nest inside the horizontal strokes of the letter *Beth* (ב) in the word "son" (בר) (Fig. 21). A dove symbolises the assembly of Israel and relates to religious faithfulness and good deeds, hope and innocence.<sup>258</sup>

Three joining seams are concealed with elongated images of (1) two thin stems of carnations with buds and leaves, grown in a pot or a basket, tied to a supporting stick, which actually cover the seam; (2) a thin conical tree with white round fruits among rare foliage and a curling serpent, adjacent to a vase with a triple white lily; (3) an indoor plant (possibly a pothos) with white buds grown in a pot, also supported by a stick. All three are done with dense satin stitch with finer lines in chain stitch (Fig. 23). I will return to those images later at length.

The majority of the figurative non-vegetal images on the binder serve as a visual exegesis of the written text,<sup>259</sup> alongside their "purely" decorative task. Examples are the images of a deer and a bull (Fig. 24) by a fir-tree, each standing on a miniature stitched "island" under the names of Tzvi and Yoel. The deer illustrates the boy's name and stands for piety, alluding to the passage: "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to do the will of your father in heaven".<sup>260</sup> Its appearance on binders is common in conjunction with names such as Tzvi and Hirsh.<sup>261</sup> The bull has more negative connotations, bringing to mind the Golden Calf;<sup>262</sup> it is difficult to establish the symbolic reason for its appearance on the binder. It may allude to the professional occupation of Yoel, as many Jews in Bavaria of that period were involved in the cattle trade.<sup>263</sup>

The major symbolic load and masterful embroidery effort are found in the images interpreting the fatherly obligations in the blessing: the Torah (Fig. 25) and the Huppah (Fig. 26). Both subjects, like the other figurative images on the binder, are treated as staged scenes, rather than just images of objects. In this sense they correspond to the post-Renaissance representational convention adopted in German binders since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when concern with a certain naturalism of depiction, attention to scale, volume, perspective and movement

<sup>257</sup> Ezekiel 17:8, discussed in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2 p. 479

<sup>258</sup> Frankel, Ellen and Platkin-Teutsch, Betsy. (1992). *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*. London: Jason Aronson Inc. Entry 60 <Dove – יונה> pp. 41-42.

<sup>259</sup> On the principle of a visual exegesis in binders see: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett B. (1982) pp. 140-143

<sup>260</sup> Pirkey Avot, V:20

<sup>261</sup> See Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 133; Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2 pp. 448-449; Yaniv, B. (2009) p. 93.

<sup>262</sup> Exodus 32:3-4: "And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

<sup>263</sup> Harris, James F. (1994). *The People Speak!: Anti-Semitism and Emancipation in Nineteenth Century Bavaria*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. pp. 17-18.

were adopted by the makers, replacing the medieval “conceptual” or schematic image-sign.<sup>264</sup> A definitive trait of that adoption is a greater attention to colour and a massive, drawing-like use of satin stitch as surface coverage, inside which details of the image are delivered through the changing direction of the stitches. Those methods, together with a growing number of figures in the central scenes and the entry of secular subject matter in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>265</sup> increased the binders’ dramatic appeal.

The Torah is presented as an image of a crowned scroll, placed after the word תורה (Torah). The slightly cambered inscription כתר תורה (crown of Torah) in small square script levitates upon a five-dented crown, underneath which an unrolled scroll is positioned, embellished with coloured lozenges. A strikingly dark, ink-like inscription framed by its two parts states:

וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל על פי ה ביד משה

Translation: And this is the Torah that Moses put before  
the sons of Israel by the Lord in the hands of Moses

An elemental levitation narrative is presented vertically – the hovering lines of text framed by the scroll hanging in the air, crowned by the floating crown and the descending letters of כתר תורה. The impression of a floating movement is heightened by the slightly crooked, shifting shapes and lines, results of an imperfect drawing or of the cloth moving and shifting during the work. The image of the crown is a reference to one of the three symbolic crowns of Judaism, the crown of the Law.<sup>266</sup> The image of a levitating scroll and crown are rather common on binders, as well as on other liturgical objects, especially in metalwork, such as Torah breastplates and Hanukkah lamps (Fig. 27).<sup>267</sup>

The embroidery is very fine, artfully using the same simple combination of chain stitch in outlines and satin stitch in shape and letter fillings. The use of colour is similarly simple, but effective: the lighter off-white and beige frame of the scroll and the crown provide the right contrasting backdrop for the dramatic entrance of the greenish, dark, almost black text. Two tips of the crown with triple

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<sup>264</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 96-97.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid pp. 95-96. Secular subjects, such as hunting or the circus, not necessarily related to the text on binders appeared in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>266</sup> Pirkey Avot, 4:17. The other two are the crowns of priesthood and the crown of kingship. On the crown as a Jewish symbol see: Frankel, E. and Platkin-Teutsch, B. (1992) Entry 52 <Crown – כתר, > עטרה > pp. 37-38. On the crown motif in binders and other textiles see: Abbink van der Zwan, P. J. (1978) “Ornamentation on Eighteenth Century Torah Binders”. *Israel Museum News* 14 (64-73). p. 71; Kybalova, Ludmila ed. (2003). *Textiles from Bohemian and Moravian Synagogues*. The Jewish Museum in Prague. p. 335.

<sup>267</sup> See for example, an 1814 silver Hanukkah lamp (num. 12243) and a 19<sup>th</sup> cent. Torah breastplate (num. 12328) from the Cluny Museum of Medieval Art in Paris, both in: Klagsbald, Victor A. (1982). *Jewish Treasures from Paris: From the Collections of the Cluny Museum and the Consistoire*. Jerusalem: The Israel Museum. pp. 24-25, 54-55.

leaves in mustard green impart the necessary touch of brighter livelier colour. The shiny and soft silk thread, densely applied in precisely adjusted stitches, finalises the rich and sensuous appeal of the scene.

The wedding scene, the most elaborate embroidery piece in the binder, is executed in the same way, but more lavishly. It is positioned after the word חופה (Huppah) in the blessing and presents a monumental wedding canopy resting on two thick columns with heavy drapes. The drapes are embroidered in a painterly fashion, with considerable attention to volume, light and shade effects. Their edges are attended to with a thin white thread in buttonhole stitch, possibly alluding to a lace trimming. This is the only time when a more complex and rather time-consuming stitch is used. Beside the columns, the bride stands on the left, the groom on the right, with their hands reaching towards each other. They are rather modestly proportioned, hardly reaching half of the height of the mighty construction. An eight-pointed Huppah stone<sup>268</sup> is positioned under the canopy with a "good luck" wish underneath.

The sensuality of the drapes and the imposing canopy, reminiscent of a classical shrine, is maximised through the carefully chosen direction of the shining dense stitches. A relatively modest use of colour (again beige, white and off-white) brings more attention to the texture of stitched surfaces, investing the visuality of images with strong tactile appeal. This appeal is also present in the single-colour attire of the bride and the groom, where the clothes fit and bodily movement is rendered solely through the stitches' direction. The colours of their attire reproduce and enhance the palette of the Torah scroll scene: the black of the letters returns in the black coat and cylinder of the groom; the mustard green in the crown tip, in the dress of the bride.

Generally both scenes give the impression of professional or at least of highly accomplished amateur workmanship, since minimal expressive and technical means are used with accuracy and balance to the greatest advantage of the entire piece.

### **Signature, authorship**

The appearance of a signature of the maker on a German binder is unusual. The embroidery of binders in Germany was rather well-documented in the rabbinical responsa and Christian Hebraist texts, where it appears as a female religious

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<sup>268</sup> *Huppahstein*, a stone incorporated into the northern wall in some German synagogues, upon which a bridegroom used to break the glass in the wedding. See Sabar, Shalom. "May He Grow up to the Huppah: Representations of Weddings on Ashkenazi Torah Binders" in: Cohen Grossman, Grace ed. (2002). *Romance and Ritual: Celebrating the Jewish Wedding*. Los Angeles: Skirball Cultural Centre. p. 41.



privilege,<sup>269</sup> an act of piety and dedication.<sup>270</sup> The absolute majority of embroidered binders in Germany are unsigned. It is important to mention, though, that most of the written sources deal with medieval and early-modern periods, providing very little insight on the state of things in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>271</sup> During the modern period other semi-ceremonial textiles, such as Passover towels, cushions of the Elijah chair, *Khalah* (Sabbath bread) and *Matza* covers etc., were part of the same female religious production, in which the domestic and the sacred coexisted. They also varied in terms of the skill and creativity exhibited, and were only occasionally signed and/or dated by their creators.<sup>272</sup> For example, in Southern Germany between the mid-18<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the embroiderers of the domestic festive towels for Sabbath and Passover occasionally disclose their names, and often note the year of production (Fig. 28).<sup>273</sup> The stitches and image renderings on those often white and red towels are similar to binders.

Torah binders were only occasionally embroidered by professional male makers, as Lilienthal's binder shows. Painted binders were often more or less sophisticated creations of scribes and artists.<sup>274</sup> Jewish professional embroidery workshops and masters existed in Germany, notwithstanding the often small communities. They specialised in various kinds of metallic embroidery, pearl-work and spun gold, occupations which were reflected in the family names.<sup>275</sup> The embroiderers, mainly men, supplied the needs of their own communities, and always sought work elsewhere, creating lavish Torah mantles, curtains and valances for the holy arcs, devising and improving strategies of marketing, ordering and communication with clients. Occasionally Jewish embroiderers also worked for the rich gentile population, aristocrats, and even the church. The need to familiarize potential clients with the maker was expressed in the common practice of signing those elaborate works (Fig. 29).

<sup>269</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) p. 83; Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. pp. 361-368; Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) p. 201.

<sup>270</sup> When a daughter was born the father, the father would bless her: "May it be thy will, Eternal God, that I rear my daughter to sew, spin, knit, and perform pious deeds." in Holzer, Isaak. (1935). *Zeitschrift fur die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*. v. 5, N. S. p. 176, quoted in: Pollack, Herman. (1971). *Jewish Folkways in Germanic Lands (1648-1806)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: MIT Press. p. 220 note 99.

<sup>271</sup> Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999). p. 202.

<sup>272</sup> Such as the already mentioned 1897 German Matzah cover signed with initials י.מ. (I.M.) (num. 85.23.1, Magnes Museum) and Passover pillow case dated to 1774 (num. 158/27 IM FCJ [Feuchtwanger Collection of Judaica]).

<sup>273</sup> Examples are the Passover towel that bears a date of 1804 and signature of Raihel (רייכל) (Num 158/29, IM FCJ.), a 1814 towel signed by Pairly (פעיירלי) (Num. 161/18 IM), a c.1800 towel which possibly bears the initials B P Sh (בפּש) (Num 158/30, IM FCJ), an 18th century Purim towel bearing the initials (possibly) sh r (שר) (Num. 161/55, IM FCJ). Also see num. 00997, JHM: dated 1755(6); num. 81.49 MM: dated 1752; num. 1984-54 JMNY: dated 1842(3); num. 1986-163 JMNY dated 1903(4).

<sup>274</sup> "The existence of numerous binders made and signed by male artists, specialising in copying and illumination of manuscripts, is parallel time-wise to the peak period in the creation of illuminated Hebrew manuscripts in the years after the invention of printing, especially in the Northern Europe." Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999). p. 75.

<sup>275</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 52-62.

The Bavarian Jews were asked to register with a family name in 1808.<sup>276</sup> In our case the family name, FING(ER)SPI(GE)L, does not disclose a connection of the maker to an embroidery profession.<sup>277</sup> Separately both *Finger*<sup>278</sup> and *Spiel*<sup>279</sup> or *Spiegel*<sup>280</sup> appear among German Jewish family names. *Spiel* suggested a musician, while *Spiegel* (mirror) could relate to the involvement of the family in the production of mirrors, an industry which existed in Fürth from the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in which Jews participated.

The domestic maker was not rewarded financially for her work, thus the idea of promoting the name to encourage orders was irrelevant. The issue of signature and single authorship is further complicated by the possibility that some binders served as familial teaching implements, akin to embroidered samplers.<sup>281</sup> Rare signatures of female creators start to appear on binders from Denmark<sup>282</sup> and Alsace only at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that in Germany the domestic and didactic character of the making, and the religious doubts regarding the propriety of a female name appearing on a publicly observed, holy vestment resulted in the rare occurrences of female signatures on binders.<sup>283</sup> In that context the signature on our binder is unusual and can either be interpreted as the mark of a male professional embroiderer, or testify to a certain change in the way in which a domestic female maker viewed her work.

The formulation of signatures on domestic textiles and on professional work was different. Ashkenazi professional formulations often included clear declarations of an authored production in Hebrew: "נעשה ע"י" "made by ..." or [נו"י]

<sup>276</sup> Harris, J. F. (1994) p. 15.

<sup>277</sup> See examples of textile-related family names in Yaniv B. (2008) pp. 52-54, 61-62, 66. Also see: Yaniv, Bracha. "Jewish Surnames Reflecting the Embroidery and Ornamentation Crafts in Central and Eastern Europe" in: Demsky, Aaron ed. (1997). *These Are the Names: Studies in Jewish Onomastics*. vol. 5. Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press. pp. 179-192.

<sup>278</sup> Etymology: "Finger" [German] "finger", as German surname from "vingerer", maker of finger-rings, an artificial surname, stems from the Middle High German. See: Menk, Lars. (2005). *A Dictionary of German-Jewish Surnames*. New Haven: Avotaynu.

<sup>279</sup> Etymology: "Spiel" [German] "play; game" or "spiel!" [German] "play!"; an artificial surname based on occupation (music). Ibid.

<sup>280</sup> Etymology: "Spiegel" [German] "mirror, looking glass", an artificial surname based on occupation. Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Goldstein, G. M. (1998) pp. 353-354; Safrai, Chana. "Embroidered Torah Binders from Weyer in Hessen" in Friedlander E. et al (1997) pp. 104-108. A 1750 Bavarian binder demonstrates a variety of embroidery stitches together with uneven skill and great effort, as well as a binder from Gernsheim of 1800 (MM nums. 67.1.21.19, 67.1.21.50, see curator notes online). An 1814 Gernsheim binder shows uneven workmanship on its four panels, possibly done by different people, suggesting the family project scenario (MM num. 67.1.21.59). On samplers: Browne, Clare. Wearden, Jennifer. (2010). *Samplers from the Victoria and Albert Museum*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: V&A Publishing; Sebba, Anne. "Samplers" in: Syngge, Lanto ed. (1986) pp. 169-194; Parker, R. (1984) pp. 110-146.

<sup>282</sup> Else Goldschmidt of Copenhagen signed painted binders in 1913, 1916 and 1926, Emma Kaufmann in 1916 – both mentioned in Feuchtwanger-Sarig, N. (1999) pp. 192-193.

<sup>283</sup> Italian binders and those coming from Bohemia and Moravia are often signed with female names. Italian binders were also dedicated to girls as well as to boys. The traditional set-up of binder production and their place within a professional occupation of textiles in Italy was entirely different.

“made and finished by ...”.<sup>284</sup> Domestic makers included, if anything, just first names or initials, only rarely using the word “made”. The signature on our binder, which clearly presents the words “made by”, fits the professional formula, which usually suggests a male, rather than a female maker. The Lilienthal binder presents a similar formulation. Fürth is known to have a professional Jewish embroidery history. An embroidery workshop, which produced Torah curtains, existed in Fürth in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>285</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Fürth was the hometown of a famous metal thread embroiderer Elkana Schatz Naumberg.<sup>286</sup> His work was signed with a formulation: “מעשה ידי”, “the work of the hands of ...” (Fig. 29).<sup>287</sup> In the binder the fine fabric, the dense embroidery, the amount of time-consuming labour, and the abundant amount of silk suggest an order from a wealthy family, which, just as in case with the Lilienthal binder, wished to demonstrate their achievement through the lavish textile. A precise knowledge as to the identity of the maker can be obtained only through archival research in Fürth, which is not part of the current project. Based on the existing material, the signature formulation, the general level of craftsmanship and mature visual stylisation in the binder, it seems reasonable to accept the hypothesis of a professional production by a male embroiderer.

### Images on the seams

The joining seams of the binder are concealed under embroidered images of plants, a solution which is exceptional in German binders. I wish to devote separate attention to those images and to show how they construct a non-textual narrative, which develops “on the margins” or literally on the seams of the embroidered inscription.

The following questions are on the agenda:

4. How was the concealment performed, what means were chosen and why?
5. What can be learned from the historical setting of the concealment?
6. Why were the seams concealed?
7. How does the concealment influence the contemporary reading of the binder?

<sup>284</sup> Some painted binders are signed in this way. Other painted objects often exhibit a similar formulation, such as in an Austrian glass painting of 1825: “made and finished by Issar Basqavitz.”

<sup>285</sup> Offir, Baruch Tzvi et al. (1972). *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot: The Encyclopedia of Jewish Settlements From Their Foundation Till the Holocaust of the Second World War. Germany, Bavaria.* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Yad Va-Shem. Entry <Fürth> p. 344.

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<sup>286</sup> A magnificent Torah curtain of 1723-3, signed by Elkana Schatz is in the collection of the Israel Museum. See: Benjamin, Chaya. “Sacred Beauty: Treasures of Judaica and Jewish Ethnography” in: (2006). *Beauty and Sanctity: the Israel Museum at 40.* ex. cat. Jerusalem: Israel Museum. unpaginated.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid

Together the answers will provide the elements of the identity which unfolds alongside the data given on the cloth.

Here is the description of the seams again:

5. **Seam 1:** two thin stems of carnations with buds and leaves, grown in a pot or a basket. They are tied to a supporting stick, which actually covers the seam.
6. **Seam 2:** a thin conical tree with white round fruits among rare foliage and a curling serpent, adjacent to a vase with a triple white lily.
7. **Seam 3:** an indoor plant (possibly a pothos) with white buds grown in a pot, also supported by a stick. All three are done with dense satin stitch with finer lines in chain stitch.

### **The function of images in binders**

Before addressing the images on the seams it is useful to outline the general function of images in German Torah binders. The remarks that follow spring from the seemingly obvious thought: images and letters on the binder are embroidered, i.e. possess certain material characteristics that cannot be ignored when their operation and meaning are discussed. Images in binders, whether appearing between words or running in parallel on the margins, direct and modify the ways in which the text is read on various levels, contributing to and opening symbolic planes in the words<sup>288</sup> and managing the rhythm of reading, the levels of smoothness or disruption in the flow of letters, and the words and meanings brought up by them. The link of binder illustration to illuminated manuscripts is significant, even though binders were not meant to be read in the same way and frequency that manuscripts were.

A performative and secretive experience of reading is created, related to but also different from the experience of reading a manuscript. The difference is enhanced by the elongated format of the cloth, worked through in the haptic and colourful materiality of embroidered texts and images. This reading is performative firstly because its scarce occurrence involves a high level of bodily interaction with "the text". The binder is "read" when it is sketched and embroidered, then when it is wrapped around the scroll; possibly it is read also in between those situations when shown to the child; finally it is read now, becoming an object of study, a situation to which I will return later. All those situations demand the rolling and unrolling of the cloth, as with the Torah scroll itself, but with one significant difference. In the ritual context the touch is welcomed and is understood as more

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<sup>288</sup> The idea of images as a "visual exegesis" of text on binders in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (1982) p. 140.

then the immediate function of wrapping, but as a symbolic embodied act: the body of the child is wrapped around the body of the scroll. Secondly, the reading becomes performative in the sense that it is aware of itself, by means of disruptions created by imagery inseparable from the materiality of cloth and embroidery, which inevitably involves the sense of touch besides vision. Through this involvement the reader becomes aware of the feel of surfaces in letters and images, the slight differences in height which builds up the shapes, as much as the "reliefs" of meaning.

The visual effect of both scenes of Huppah and Torah in the 1836 binder is achieved exactly by means of a light relief of satin stitch work, an appeal which is a mild invocation of the monumental convexities in the liturgical metallic embroideries of the arc curtains and scroll mantles. Convexity and relief in images were subject to rabbinical debate.<sup>289</sup> Suspicion towards the possibility of inculcation of "a graven image"<sup>290</sup> into the synagogue was often extended from sculpture to convex, as it amounted to protruding detail in the otherwise flat artwork. The discussion of "a graven image" was not limited to a figure, even though questions as to the extent of figuration, the appropriate degrees of human and animal appearance in liturgical objects and decorations, prayer books and everyday life utilities were central. Volume and three-dimensionality were important factors to consider, imbuing the relief with a questionable intermediate status. The relief balanced on the border between prohibition and acceptance: it was not fully a sculpture, but nevertheless it provided some of its plastic expressive capabilities, which could be distributed over or absorbed into the flat, "safe", parts of curtains and other textiles. The effect of alternating convexity and flatness of embroidery and cloth in the images contributes to the disruption of the textual, "flat", flow of meaning when reading the binder.

### **Seams: historical background**

The history of the seams, joining the four panels of the German Torah binder, is of a somewhat controversial nature. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century rabbi Maharil of Mainz, deprecating the disappearance of silk from the making of *Mappot*, also urged the woman of his congregation to sew the panels together tightly, since parchment could be revealed through the holes of the elaborate seams.<sup>291</sup> This kind of address shows that already in his time open faggoting was used to join the panels.

Goldstein assumes that it could be the work of the swaddling cloth maker, done prior to embroidery and by a different person, which is suggested by

<sup>289</sup> See the discussion in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. pp. 488-500.

<sup>290</sup> Exodus 20:4: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

<sup>291</sup> ספר מהרי"ל, הלכות קריאת ספר תורה, סימן ד', עמ' תנב-תנג  
*The Book of Maharil*, Discussed in Yaniv, B. (2009) p. 88.

the disparate degrees of skill in the joining and the embroidery in some binders.<sup>292</sup> Bracha Yaniv relates to the issue of joining differently and points to many examples where the threads on the seams and hems and those of embroidery are identical, as well as examples where the embroidery evidently preceded the joining of panels, in which case the joining of panels and the embroidery were done by the same person.<sup>293</sup> Either scenario is possible and, in any case, it seems that the safekeeping of the scroll and sacrilege prevention, which concerned Maharil, were significant enough to change swaddling cloth production, though other factors could be at play too.

### **Vertical division as an element of design in later binders and scrolls**

Later seams were resolved in the spirit of Maharil's ruling: from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on, the majority of binders were sewn together tightly, using tacking and variations of double buttonhole stitch, a solution which - like open faggoting - created a very clear division between panels.<sup>294</sup> Whether or not they were made by another maker prior to being embroidered,<sup>295</sup> those division lines formed a sufficiently visible element of the binder design. Yaniv's examination suggests that the majority of embroideries were designed with the lengths of individual panels in mind, taking care not to divide single words between panels, and using abbreviations or smaller script where whole words could not fit.<sup>296</sup>

Towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century painted binders were becoming more popular, and therefore the joining of panels was made discreet through the use of tacking and hemming stitch. The division line began to lose its status as an element of design and became a purely functional issue, often simply ignored when applying embroidery or painting. The division of text and images in relation to panels did not seem to have a particular meaning or logic, apart from a more or less successful distribution over the length of the entire cloth. It is possible to say with some certainty (since many variations exist) that first and second panels dealt with names and dates, while third and fourth contained the blessing. Nevertheless, slippages between those two parts of the inscription occurred often.

Occasions where the joining line is somehow stressed beyond the appearance of the seam itself are extremely rare even in older binders. A 1706 binder<sup>297</sup> from the village of Ichenhausen in Swabia shows small colourful flowers on short stems positioned horizontally on each side of the joining seams (Fig. 30).

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<sup>292</sup> Goldstein, G. M. (1998) pp. 353-354

<sup>293</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 89-91

<sup>294</sup> Ibid p. 88

<sup>295</sup> Yaniv points to examples where the joining was evidently executed after the embroidery was accomplished. See pp. 90-91.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid p. 90

<sup>297</sup> Ichenhausen synagogue, no inventory number, mentioned in Friedlander E. et al. (1997) pp. 126, 130-1

Similar flowers (and a similar overall style) are present on another binder of 1715.<sup>298</sup> They could be a mark of the embroiderer, possibly a professional.<sup>299</sup> The use of ribbons as a way to join the panels was mentioned above. This rare form of attachment definitely stressed the joining line and could force the designer to pay further attention to the distribution of text and images.

Apart from the actual seams, some binders show a use of auxiliary vertical graphic elements, not necessarily of narrative character, which mark certain points in the text. These may take the form of flowers, which mark the beginning or the ending of inscription, or ones that appear to mark inner parts of it. The first case can be seen in the binders from 1717<sup>300</sup> (Fig. 31), 1720<sup>301</sup> (Fig. 32) and 1693<sup>302</sup> (Fig. 33), the second in another binder from 1693<sup>303</sup> (Fig. 34). It would be difficult to suggest some kind of stylistic pattern, since expressive examples are very scarce, while the appearances of such elements can be explained in the narrative symbolic spirit of the other images' position inside the inscription. Those floral elements work as reading aids with symbolic content, directing the eye, stressing strategic points of entrance and exit, and dividing the inscription into portions.

Vertical floral insertions with a similar function can be found in a particular form of Jewish texts, the Esther scrolls (Fig. 35). The book of Esther, read on the Purim festival, was produced as a small illustrated scroll for domestic use, encapsulated in a decorative case of ivory or silver. The proportions of the scroll were not dissimilar to binders. Upon the narrow and long parchment the text was positioned in clearly defined columns, frequently framed and divided by figures and ornaments of a floral and architectural character. Similar elements are often seen on other Judaica items, notably on the arc curtains,<sup>304</sup> stylistically related to classical imagery, but also carrying a sense of local folk art. Vases containing flowers or blooming trees were common elements in such divisions (Fig. 36). The reading of the story, with the narrow parchment unrolled, was orchestrated, segmented and rebound by the architecture of the division lines.

### **The Tree of Life/Tree of Knowledge: the symbol in Judaism**

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<sup>298</sup> Num. 10/135 in the Bayerisches Nationalmuseum München, mentioned *ibid* p. 126.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>300</sup> 1717 binder from Ichenhausen, Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 25/94, 10-11. Mentioned *ibid* pp. 127, 132.

<sup>301</sup> 1720 binder from Ichenhausen, Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 26/94, 10-11. Mentioned *ibid* pp. 128, 132.

<sup>302</sup> 1693 binder from Ichenhausen, Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 12/94 10-11. Mentioned *ibid* p. 125.

<sup>303</sup> 1693 binder from Mackenheim, private property: inv. no. 2. Mentioned *ibid* pp. 137, 149.

<sup>304</sup> Architectural columns with vegetal elements referred to Jakhin and Boaz (1 Kings 7:15-22) the two bronze columns which flanked the entrance of the Temple's Great Hall. They were topped by double capitals engraved with lilies and pomegranates. Their function was symbolic rather than constructive; freestanding, they alluded to a Tree of Life or represented the cosmic pillars of the world. Frankel, E. and Platkin-Teutsch, B. (1992) Entry 122 <Jakhin and Boaz – יָכִין וְבוֹאֵז>. pp. 80-81.

All three seams of the 1836 binder are concealed behind embroideries of potted flowers and a tree. Flowers and trees, springing from earth or placed in vases, baskets or pots were associated with a Tree of Life, עץ חיים (*Etz Hayyim*). In its various inter-related instances it appears endlessly on Judaica objects, from monumental Torah arc curtains and ceremonial metalwork to *Mizrah*<sup>305</sup> cut-out paper plates and domestic textiles. In Judaism "a tree of life" refers to Torah, its wisdom and learning, and the actual scroll as its physical epitome. "She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is everyone that retains her."<sup>306</sup> This line, together with images of trees, plants and flowers, is frequently shown in the immediate vicinity of the word לתורה (to Torah) on binders and other liturgical objects, occasionally even replacing the word itself with a depiction of an open scroll filled with the words: עץ חיים היא (a tree of life she is).

Visually variegated images of the Tree of Life in other cultures are anthropomorphic. They stand for "a substance of life";<sup>307</sup> often immortality itself is hidden inside the tree trunk springing upwards. The Tree of Life is affiliated with the Tree of the World, *Arbor Mundi*, an image which frequently embodied "the successive interconnection of human generations, the genealogy of kin as a whole",<sup>308</sup> and served as a basic model for the articulation of differentiated world structures. Particularly this idea of differentiating between the essences of the world is expressed in the Tree of Knowledge, a image conceptually linked of the Tree of Life and Tree of the World.<sup>309</sup> Its structure becomes a model for the search and revelation of truth through differentiation. Revelation is associated with birth, creating an integrated picture of biological and cultural processes.

In Jewish mystical thought this way of thinking is expressed in the Tree of God. An anthropomorphic "mystical organism",<sup>310</sup> the Tree of God represents and maps out the ten divine emanations ספירות (*Sefirot*), ten qualities of god, ten names, which comprise the One holy name. It is "the carcass of the universe, [which] germinates through the entire creation and spreads its branches over all of its domains."<sup>311</sup> This tree creates a complex picture of interrelated material, temporal and intellectual aspects of the Jewish mystical worldview, acting as a multifaceted symbolical matrix, dynamically responding to the needs of the seeker for the description and explanation of the divine work. "Tree of Life" was the title of

<sup>305</sup> A paper wall plaque intended to indicate the direction of prayer, מזרח [mizrah] – East. See examples in the collection of the Jewish Museum, NY. Available from: <<http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/>>

<sup>306</sup> Proverbs 3:18

<sup>307</sup> Tokarev, S. A. ed. (1997). *Encyclopaedia: Myths of the World Peoples*. (in Russian). Moscow: Olimp. Entry <Tree of Life> p. 396.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, entry <Tree of the World> p. 400.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid, entry <Tree of the Knowledge> pp. 406-407.

<sup>310</sup> Scholem, Gershom G. (2004). *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. (in Russian). Moscow, Jerusalem: Gesharim. p. 272

<sup>311</sup> Ibid p. 273



a major mystical tract of rabbi Hayyim Vital.<sup>312</sup> Together with the strong parallels between the image of a tree and sacred learning, Judaism in its folk expressions was not blind to the aforementioned understanding of it as a symbol of longevity,<sup>313</sup> vitality, birth<sup>314</sup> and generational connection.<sup>315</sup> The mystical aspect here probably supported and enhanced this understanding, since ideas of the Kabbalah were disseminated beyond learned Jewish circles and found their way into everyday life routines and customs.<sup>316</sup>

This folk interpretation of the Tree of Life is found expressly in embroidered towels for Sabbath, Purim and Passover, which have been discussed with regard to signatures. Often embroidered in red or pink over plain linen, those towels presented vivid images of plants and flowers sprawling from stomachy vases and baskets sometimes flanked with animals (birds, stags), in which piety coexisted with female celebratory expressions. Similar images appeared on other domestic semi-ceremonial textiles such as Matzah covers and festive tablecloths. To summarise: trees and flowers in Judaica connected the concepts of life (birth, longevity, kinship) and concepts of sacred knowledge (Torah, differentiation), embodying the organism of a religion living through the generations of its followers.

### **The Tree, the Flower and the Serpent: the seams between symbols**

Two painted Passover towels<sup>317</sup> (Fig. 37) from Alsace, made circa 1830, present a whole paradisaical scene, with the Tree, the Serpent, Adam and Eve, and various animals and birds. One of them shows both the Tree in the paradise and an exuberant bush of roses growing in a fashionable basket, surrounded by a Paschal inscription.

A similar scenario can be found on our binder: following the acronym *לפ"ק*, which finalises the date of birth, is a Classicist vase with a triple white lily (Fig. 38). It is succeeded by the second joining seam, which forms a fruit-bearing tree with a serpent crawling around it, facing the vase. The position of both images, as well as of the seam itself, is strategic: they mark the division between the two parts of the inscription, concluding the informative part and opening the benedictory one. If both the tree and the vase are "trees of life", then a doubling of symbols has occurred. This could be explained simply in terms of surface distribution, yet it is very clear that distinct space was left for the vase, as a concluding element of the informative section. The appearance of the tree with a

<sup>312</sup> Hayyim ben Joseph Vital (1542-1620), one of the most significant disciples of the famous kabbalist Isaak Luria Ashkenazi, called Ha'Ari (1534-1572) from Zefat.

<sup>313</sup> Abbink van der Zwan, P. J. (1978) p. 72

<sup>314</sup> A custom existed of planting a tree to mark the birth of a child. See: Frankel, E. and Platkin-Teutsch, B. (1992) Entry 245 <Tree – *γν*> pp. 181-182.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Scholem, G. G. (2004) pp. 323, 345, 352-355. See also: Pollack, Herman. (1971).

<sup>317</sup> A towel of 1828/9, JMNY num. F 5004; a similar towel made ca. 1830, YUM num. 2006.231.

serpent was planned, together with other two images on the seams; it was inserted very precisely between the letters after the rest of the embroidery was finished.

The vase concludes the announcement of the birth. In this it resembles celebratory appearances of flowers with or without vases close to the word "born" or the name of the child. Lily is traditionally related to שושנה, (*Shoshanah*) of the Song of Songs,<sup>318</sup> even though it is difficult to establish which flower was actually meant in the text. On binders it is occasionally accompanied with the words from Hosea: <sup>319</sup>"יִפְרֹחַ כְּשׁוֹשָׁנָה" (may he blossom like a lily). Budding and blossoming flower stands for potential, flower in full bloom – for maturity and perfection.<sup>320</sup> In this spirit we can interpret the carnation plant with buds, in the first joining seam between the first panel, which ends with "born under a good constellation" and the second, stating the date of birth. The child's date of birth is positioned between the confirmation of the potential of the new life and the maturity and perfection which awaits it in the future, once the potential is realised through the study of the Torah, the Tree of Life.

The appearance of serpents in binders,<sup>321</sup> especially close to the word "born", usually relates to Lilith,<sup>322</sup> the demonic first wife of Adam. A wicked infant strangler, she is a mortal threat to children and mothers during the first post-natal week, before circumcision and naming. Serpents frequented binders as decorative extensions of long-stroke letters, such as ל or ן (Figs. 39, 33). Even though it is impossible to extract a precise meaning of them, it is useful to remember that their origins are in the vast, centuries-old world of Jewish symbolic imagery and folk tales based on the Biblical stories known to all, closely related to everyday life and ritual, and thus present in different ways in all objects of German-Jewish material culture.

In our binder the tree with a serpent opens the benedictory wish השם יגדלוהו לתורה (may God bring him to Torah), a strategic location, which corresponds less with Lilith. The "original", Biblical Serpent<sup>323</sup> acted as a seducer of Eve in her disobedient deed. In its major role in the book of Genesis, the Serpent stands for the negative powers of temptation, rebellion and deceit. It occupies a similar position in the Talmud: serpents spring forth from human backbones, which did not bow in prayer.<sup>324</sup> Simultaneously the Serpent also relates to resurrection, healing

<sup>318</sup> Song of Songs 2:1-2.

<sup>319</sup> Hosea 14:6. See Abbink van der Zwan, P. J. (1978) p. 72.

<sup>320</sup> Frankel, E. and Platkin-Teutsch, B. (1992) Entry 84 <Flowers – פרחים> pp. 56-57.

<sup>321</sup> For example: 1693 binder from Ichenhausen, Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 12/94 10-11. Mentioned in: Friedlander E. et al (1997) p. 125.

<sup>322</sup> The legend of Lilith in the Jewish folklore is based on the double description of the creation of man in the Bible. The first description mentions the simultaneous creation of man and woman, while the second tells that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Lilith is this "first" female, cursed for claiming equality to man and leaving Eden. Frankel, E. and Platkin-Teutsch, B. (1992) Entry 145 <Lilith> p. 98

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, entry 211 "Serpent" pp. 148-149.

<sup>324</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, Shabbat 1, 5b.

and idolatry. In the book of Numbers, God punishes the Jews for blasphemy sending fiery serpents, after which the cure comes from looking upon a copper serpent crafted by Moses.<sup>325</sup> The same serpent becomes an object of worship in the Temple, until it is destroyed by King Hezekiah.<sup>326</sup> A Kabbalah influenced belief linked the Serpent to circumcision, to the custom of burring the removed foreskin in the earth after the Brit.<sup>327</sup> The book of Proverbs orders the believer to feed a hungry enemy.<sup>328</sup> The Serpent, perceived as "an enemy", feeds on dust, thus the removed foreskin should be buried "in the dust" to appease him.<sup>329</sup>

What does the Serpent do on the middle of the binder from Fürth? I have already noticed the intentional "doubling" of symbols relating to the Tree of Life, which produces a certain ambivalence of meaning. The Serpent plays a significant part in the staging of this ambivalence, which unfolds in the images positioned through the length of the entire cloth and on the seams between panels.

In the first two panels the child "was born" and named. Then his name was accompanied by the image of a pious and diligent deer ("Be ... swift as a deer ... to do the will of your father in heaven"). His life potential was confirmed by the budding carnation on the seam joining the first and the second panel, and sanctified at the end of the third panel by the Tree of Life, the sign of the Torah, the covenant. The transfer from the second panel to the third one is highly significant and dramatic, marked by the "doubled" symbols of the flower and the tree. Once born, the boy enters the covenant through circumcision. The third and fourth panels are a written confirmation of this; they bear the words which are recited three times during the circumcision rite. At the same time those words are an idealised and didactic suggestion of how his future life should proceed - through sacred learning, marriage and good deeds. The second joining seam, illustrated with the Tree and the Serpent, holds together two conceptual parts of the binder, the pious certification of birth (name, date) and the confirmation of circumcision. It holds together the very heart of the Jewishing cloth, as both parts are necessary in order to make Tzvi Jewish. The Tree with a Serpent appears exactly on this seam, on the threshold of the newborn's entrance into the covenant. I suggest that this transitional turning-point in the narrative unfolding on the binder is marked by the kin of the Tree of Life, the properly Jewish Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the tree of differentiation and of difference. Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge. What was to be differentiated from what, what kind of difference was created?

To answer those questions it is necessary to examine more closely the

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<sup>325</sup> Numbers 21:6-10.

<sup>326</sup> 2 Kings 18:4

<sup>327</sup> Midrash Rabbah, II, 810

<sup>328</sup> Proverbs 25:21: "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink."

<sup>329</sup> Pollack, H. (1971) pp. 24-25.

immediate historical *mise-en-scène* of the creation of the binder. The date on the binder, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1836, points to the day when the boy Tzvi was born. The artefact itself could have been completed later, as in Fürth the *Schultragen* was commonly celebrated on the third birthday,<sup>330</sup> meaning that the maker might have accomplished the work at any time up to July 1839. Before turning to the events in the Jewish Fürth between 1836 and 1839, a general remark on the iconography of the images-on-the-seams is in order. The first and the third joining seams show domestic plants in baskets or pots, supported by sticks. Their appearance points to a tendency which had already become noticeable in binders by the 18<sup>th</sup> century: depiction of non-religious, everyday subjects and situations and/or “updated” interpretation of traditional religious subjects, sometimes in almost secularised fashion.<sup>331</sup> Stylistically this shift in subjects corresponded to and was supported by the shift towards the naturalistic use of embroidery discussed earlier. Subjects included recreational activities, such as fishing and hunting, depictions of everyday objects such as flower pots and clocks,<sup>332</sup> and scenes of marriage and Torah reading containing details, accessories and dress reflecting the fashions of the period.

Indoor plants were just entering the interior of common homes at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, becoming markers of middle-class domesticity.<sup>333</sup> So the solemn symbol of the Tree of Life has found a “tamed”, domesticated expression on the seams of the binder, alluding to the aspirations of the maker or of the ordering family to enter the middle class social milieu, aspirations typical of the Jewish emancipation then in process.<sup>334</sup> How did the “taming” proceed, or how could the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge meet on the seam of a swaddling cloth? What was the historical *mise-en-scène* of emancipation in Fürth between 1836 and 1839?

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<sup>330</sup> Loewenstein, L. (1974) *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Fuerth*. Hildesheim-New York. II. p.72, mentioned in Hamburger, B. Sh. (1995) vol. 2. p. 520.

<sup>331</sup> Yaniv, B. (2009) pp. 93-95.

<sup>332</sup> Eis, R. (1979) p. 15.

<sup>333</sup> Martin, Tovah. (1988). *Once Upon a Windowsill: a History of Indoor Plants*. Portland, OR: Timber Press. pp. 22-72.

<sup>334</sup> Vital, D. (1999) pp. 248-278.

### **General Mise-en-Scène: Bavaria**

In 1840 there were 59,288 Jews in Bavaria, 1.4% of the total population.<sup>335</sup> Emancipation legislation was slow, encountering opposition from both its Christian population and the ultra-conservative upper house of the Bavarian Parliament.<sup>336</sup> All legislation, either realised or postponed, even when enacted by the supporters of emancipation, was articulated in terms of the "improvement" of Jews, who were generally considered morally and culturally inferior to Christians.

The 1830s was a relatively stagnant period, when several attempts to advance emancipation were made in Bavaria by either Jewish individuals and communities or liberal representatives of the lower house of the Bavarian Parliament. Those attempts were debated only reluctantly and eventually ignored by the upper house and the king himself.<sup>337</sup> Full emancipation was achieved only in 1871, with the creation of the German Reich.

### **Front stage: Fürth**

The day drives away the dark night.

My dear Christians, be alert and bright!

So went the song of the night watchman in the streets of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Bavarian market town of Fürth. When passing the Jewish neighbourhood, the night watchman sang "my dear gentleman" instead of "my dear Christians", following the demand of the local Jewish community. Following the 1719 Jewish regulations in Fürth, the Jews participated fully in general municipal taxation, which included the night watchman's fees. These regulations, revoked in 1820, included the right to representation by two delegates at the city council, unlimited opening of synagogues and houses of study, self-supervision on the entrance of new Jews, autonomous internal jurisdiction.<sup>338</sup> The regulations also included a number of limitations and had to be renewed annually for a significant, though constant, fee in gold. Fürth had long been an exception to the historic waves of hostility demonstrated by authorities and common people towards the Bavarian Jews.<sup>339</sup> Its relative tolerance, commercial excellence and scholarly rigour had bought the city the title of a "Franconian Jerusalem".

The Jewish infrastructure in Fürth was already well developed by the 17<sup>th</sup> century. There were five synagogues (including the "old" *Altschule*<sup>340</sup> of 1617 and

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<sup>335</sup> *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot* (1972). Entry: <Bavaria> p. 7

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>337</sup> Harris, J. F. (1994) pp. 53-55, on the 1831, 1834 and 1845 attempts at legislation in favour of Jewish emancipation in Bavaria.

<sup>338</sup> *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot* (1972) Entry <Fürth> p. 344

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>340</sup> Old or main synagogue

"new" *Neuschule*<sup>341</sup> of 1697 with the women's ritual bath); a popular house of study, the High Yeshiva (est. 1697); a ritual slaughterhouse; a hospital for the needy built in 1653 at the Jewish cemetery (est. 1607). A second hospital was opened in 1846 and remained active till 1942.<sup>342</sup> An orphanage, the first in Germany and the only one in Bavaria, was established in 1763 and reorganized in 1838.<sup>343</sup> During the 17<sup>th</sup> century Fürth also became an important centre for Hebrew printing: the first publishing house was established in 1691, followed by five others, the last of which opened in 1840. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, scattered in various locations at the houses of the wealthiest families, numerous publicly accessible private synagogues with study rooms appeared. Most of them were still active in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>344</sup>

Trade in materials and groceries, property sales and banking services, were the main occupations and business spheres in which the Jewish residents of Fürth excelled. They became famous far beyond the borders of the city, challenging the financial authority of the close-by city of Nuremberg. German historian Christian von Dohm refers to Fürth in his publication of 1783 saying: "... the Jew succeeds gloriously in the pursuit of commerce when he is less oppressed."<sup>345</sup> By the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Jews were among the pioneers of local manufacturing, producing and distributing eyeglasses, mirrors, bronze, and pencils.

In 1818 the Jews were given the right to vote in community matters and were admitted to the municipal administration. The *קהל* (*Kahal*), an assembly of Jewish representatives, which had governed all inter-communal affairs since the Middle Ages, ceased to exist the same year. The 1719 regulations were abolished in 1820, while a number of communal issues (the right to marriage subject to a fee, communal management and jurisdiction, religion and learning) were passed into the hands of the community itself. In the same year the Jewish businesses in Fürth included eight manufacturers, six glassmakers, eleven jewellers, thirteen bankers, twelve brokers, three collectors, eight cooks, a doctor, a surgeon, two midwives and a dentist. In addition, there were close to two hundred merchant shops dealing with fabric, dress, paper, leather, ribbons and groceries (half of all),<sup>346</sup> eight restaurants and a Jewish-owned library.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> New synagogue

<sup>342</sup> Glaser, Willie. *The History of the Jewish Hospital in Fuerth Until 1942*. PDF file. <[http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/en\\_fu\\_index.html](http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/en_fu_index.html)> (accessed July 5, 2008)

<sup>343</sup> *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot*. (1972) Entry <Fürth> p. 345

<sup>344</sup> Berthold-Hilpert, Monika. "Die Ausstellung "Synagogen in Fürth" im Jüdischen Museum Franken in Fürth." *Altstadtbläddla*. 35 (2000-2001) <<http://www.altstadtverein-fuerth.de/blaeddla/35/syna00.htm>> (accessed July 1, 2008).

<sup>345</sup> Cited in Barbeck, Hugo. *History of the Jews in Nuremberg and Fürth*. PDF file. <[http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/en\\_fu\\_index.html](http://www.rijo.homepage.t-online.de/en_fu_index.html)> (accessed July 5, 2008) p. 43  
Christian Wilhelm von Dohm (1751-1820), a German historian and political writer. In 1781 Von Dohm published a two volume work on Jewish emancipation *Über die Bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*.

<sup>346</sup> Barbeck, H. p. 58

<sup>347</sup> *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot*. (1972) Entry <Fürth> p. 345

In 1836, the Jewish community in Fürth comprised nearly 2500 people, about 16% of the overall city population.<sup>348</sup> By then Jewish children attended public schools, while adults participated in the city's municipal elections, took part in the local charity projects, including the Fürth Theatre, established in 1818. The first railroad in Germany was opened in 1836 between Fürth and Nuremberg. The project was partially funded by the wealthiest members of the Jewish community.<sup>349</sup> Notwithstanding this rather favourable picture of emancipation, due to the *Judenmatrikel* policy, the number of Jews in the city between 1836 and 1900 grew very slowly, while their percentage in relation to the wider German population steadily declined.<sup>350</sup> Like the railroad, which very soon after its opening changed from locomotive to horse power due to high fuel expenses,<sup>351</sup> Jewish emancipation moved through a series of contradictory pullbacks and advances.

This contradictory picture of external affairs corresponded to the internal schism in the Jewish community itself. In the 1830s reformist Judaism was making significant ground in the religious scene of Fürth and its communal government, which became divided between the conservative "Orthodox" representatives, (*Haredim*, חרדים, the Pious) and "reformists" who demanded the modernization of Judaism and the Jewish lifestyle. Similar processes were developing in all German-Jewish communities, but, like other European Jewish centres of religious life, the rabbinical Franconian Jerusalem with its illustrious history of religious study in the High Yeshiva and its Hebrew publishing, appeared at the focus of especially incandescent debates and actions of the rival sides. Fundamental subjects of disagreement were education of youth and the very existence of the High Yeshiva, communal governance and places of worship.

*Haredim* rabbis saw in the modern call for the freedom of religion a chance to finally practise, without hindrance, a lifestyle and a worldview for which their forefathers were subjected to persecution for centuries.<sup>352</sup> Learning the Talmud was considered a crucial part of this life, not simply a professional preparation of religious leaders and teachers, but an ahistorical divine commandment to every male Jew, which by its very nature is not subject to change,<sup>353</sup> but should be kept and revered as an everlasting cultural value. The abolition of, or a significant infringement upon, this worldview was not a price that the rabbis of the High Yeshiva and their disciples were willing to pay for the emancipation of Jews.<sup>354</sup> For

<sup>348</sup> Harris, J. F. (1994) p.166; additional data in *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot* (1972) Entry <Fürth> p. 342.

<sup>349</sup> Hamburger, Benjamin Shlomo. (2010). *The High Yeshiva in Fürth: The South-German City of Torah and Its Scholars*. Vol. 3. (in Hebrew). Bney Braq: Machon Moreshet Ashkenaz. p. 440.

המבורגר, בנימין שלמה, (2010), *הישיבה הרמה בפיוורדא: עיר תורה בדרום דרמניה וגאוניה*, כרך ג', בני ברק: מכון מורשת אשכנז.

<sup>350</sup> 3017 Jews are in Fürth in 1900, 5.5% of the gentile population. *Pinkas Ha-Kehilot*. (1972) Entry <Fürth> p. 342

<sup>351</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) p. 440.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid* pp. 284-285

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid* pp. 270-274

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid* p. 286

the Reformists, modernity meant a chance to change this exact lifestyle and worldview "in the spirit of time". Access to civic rights and active participation in the life of the whole German nation was sought through the adjustment and remodelling of Judaism according to the standards of the secularised and academised Christianity, an approach mostly supported by the Bavarian government.<sup>355</sup> In terms of practice, this remodelling meant the conduct of liturgy and religious education in German instead of Yiddish or Hebrew, the shortening and ordering of the traditional liturgy and its aesthetisation through the convergence of an exterior appearance of synagogue and of a church, the introduction of organ music into prayer, mandatory secular education of children and many other issues of a religious and practical nature.

Conceptually, the deepest gap between the *Haredim* and Reformist parties occurred between the sense of the modern inevitability of answering the "call of time" and the idea of the divine unalterability of the Jewish law. Around this gap gathered a diverse range of controversies, from the question of the divine origins of the Talmud (the Oral Torah),<sup>356</sup> the belief in a personified Messiah and the resurrection of the dead, to the necessity for circumcision, dietary laws and the religious status of women.<sup>357</sup> The Reformists, with different degrees of radicalism, strove to free Judaism from "the heavy burden" of the everyday religious observances and customs accumulated through centuries, to accommodate religious practices into the routines and rhythms of industrialised, secularised and nationalised society, making a religion as "proper" as possible. The moral principles of Judaism were transmitted in general terms, claiming universal grounds, or at least those accepted as such by the contemporaneous Christian standards. In the eyes of the *Haredim* such initiatives were symptoms of apostasy, licentious misbelief, and often a simple religious ignorance, as the reformist rabbis often spent less time in traditional Jewish schooling and attended Christian universities.

The processes of secularization of Jewish life in Bavaria started with the entry of non-Jewish subjects into the curriculum of the Jewish public schools in the 1820s, and the introduction of the German language into the liturgy and religious education.<sup>358</sup> Moses Mendelsohn had translated the Pentateuch into German by 1783: by the 1820s his translation was widely known and used. Tzirendorf print-house in Fürth published Mendelsohn's translation in 1801 as part of its Pentateuch edition "דרך סלולה תקון סופרים". The Jewish Edict of 1813 demanded that all new

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<sup>355</sup> For example, during the 1819 debate in the Parliament dedicated to the restriction of Jewish peddling, all speakers arguing for or against the case criticised the Jews and mostly agreed that Jews should assimilate, "become 'Christian' in all but theology". Harris, J. F. (1994) p. 52.

<sup>356</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) pp. 286, 437.

<sup>357</sup> Meyer, M. A. (1990)

<sup>358</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) p. 245. In the 1820s younger *Haredim* rabbis preached in German when they considered this necessary for the religious cause. Ibid p. 280.



candidates for rabbinical posts, as well as serving rabbis, should be examined for their knowledge of German and required to have a general academic education. It only permitted students with a basic general education to attend the Yeshiva. The threat of the Christian academy was one of the more serious concerns of the *Haredim* rabbis in Fürth, who did not oppose practical education, but gravely feared classical languages and philosophy as the most likely roads to apostasy for Jewish youth.<sup>359</sup> In order to protect the students from the influence of German literary and philosophical thought, the rabbis of the High Yeshiva of Fürth in the 1820s prohibited the reading of books in German or Latin characters and continued teaching in Yiddish.<sup>360</sup> The Reform faction complained to the Bavarian authorities<sup>361</sup> in response.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1824 an order was issued by the Bavarian government to close the Yeshiva, as none of its teachers possessed evidence of a formal German education. During the next six years, till the final closure in 1830, the Yeshiva rabbis struggled in the public, personal and legal arenas, both locally and nationally, to postpone or annul the order, and kept teaching clandestinely. The final closure of the Yeshiva was enacted by the Bavarian police force and became one of the most traumatic events of the decade, which resonated in many Jewish communities far beyond Fürth itself. The period between the 1820s and 1850s witnessed a number of related controversies, which touched upon diverse aspects of the Jewish existence in the town. Those controversies were reinforced by the conservative shift in the agendas of Ludwig I and his government, with the latter constantly acting as the factions' arbiter.

Notwithstanding the centrality of the High Yeshiva to the life of Jewish Fürth, the Reform faction took over the communal governing committee.<sup>362</sup> Their radical decisions to change the old way of things in the community were met with the furious and unyielding resistance of the *Haredim* minority. The Fürth *Haredim* enjoyed significant prestige among the traditionalist Jewish circles in Germany, many of whose leaders had been students of the Yeshiva. The ability to exert political pressure inside the community and far beyond it, approaching senior Bavarian bureaucracy and ministers and even the king himself to resolve critical situations, slowing down or preventing altogether the unwanted reforms, made the Pious difficult rivals.

The first Reformist head of a significant community in Germany, Dr. Isaak Loewi (1801-1873) started his term of office as a district rabbi in Fürth in

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid pp. 239-257, 291

<sup>360</sup> Ibid pp. 269-270

<sup>361</sup> Ibid

<sup>362</sup> Between the 1820s and the 1850s first two, later three or four members among the overall five were Reformists.

March 1831; his appointment, which the *Haredim* tried unsuccessfully to annul during the next eight years,<sup>363</sup> became one of the most tenacious contentions between the fractions. Loewi, a twenty-nine year old ex-student of the High Yeshiva, was also educated in philosophy and psychology at the University of Munich. In his office proposal submitted to the local authorities Loewi suggested bringing together Jews and Germans by means of “*cleansing the tree of life of damaging insects* and releasing it of wild plants without harming its roots” in order “to create a synthesis between traditions and customs of the old and the new worlds, between Torah of the East and culture of the West.”<sup>364</sup> The Tzirendorf publishing house refused to print Loewi's inaugural sermon. Instead it was printed by a local German printer, with all quotations in Hebrew appearing in Latin characters, since the printer lacked Hebrew ones.<sup>365</sup>

During his tenure, which lasted till his death in 1873, Dr Loewi modified the order of prayer, including partial use of German;<sup>366</sup> completely changed the Altschule interior in the spirit of a Catholic church<sup>367</sup> (1831) and installed an organ there<sup>368</sup> (1872); unsuccessfully attempted to dispense with the traditional Jewish burial societies<sup>369</sup> (1838-39); and enacted many other innovations. The attempt to modify burial customs coincided with the rise of a new reactionary government which, unlike the previous one, generally eschewed religious reforms and supported the *Haredim* counter-action.<sup>370</sup> An 1838 decree, issued to all Bavarian Jewish communities, demanded that only academically trained rabbis should be appointed, and that they should (nevertheless) avoid “dangerous religious innovation”.<sup>371</sup> Furious reactions in the Jewish press reverberated several years after the decree was issued, proclaiming a return to Middle Ages policies and making accusations of a religious fanaticism, endangering the rapprochement of Jews and Christians, to the “backward” *Haredim*.<sup>372</sup>

Between 1838 and 1839 a series of legal attempts were made by the Pious to remove Dr Loewi from his office on the grounds of his extreme reformist

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<sup>363</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) p. 442.

<sup>364</sup> *Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner*, p. 630, quoted in: Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) p. 422. My italics.

<sup>365</sup> Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) p. 428.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid* pp. 430-431, 434-435.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid* pp. 430-433

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid* p. 480; as a result the *Haredim* stopped using the building altogether.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid* pp. 446-455

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid* p. 442

<sup>371</sup> M. Bierheim, “Geschichtliche Uebersicht der inneren israelitische Verhältnisse in Bayern”, *Israelitische Annalen – Ein Centralblatt für Geschichte, Literatur und Cultur der Israeliten aller Zeiten und Länder*, 15 Feb. 1839, p. 51 quoted in Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) p. 442

<sup>372</sup> Dr. Megas; “Historisch-statistischer Bericht über die Juden in Franken in bürgerlicher religiöser Beziehung” in *Der Orient*, 22 August 1840, p. 242 (a Reformist Jewish weekly magazine dedicated to Jewish history and literature, issued in Leipzig between 1840 and 1851); *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 28 January 1843, p. 48. (a weekly Jewish magazine issued between 1837 and 1922, in Leipzig and Berlin, started by the reformist scholar Ludwig Philippson (1811-1889). Both available from <<http://www.compactmemory.de/>> (accessed on 14/11/2012).

views and actions. As a result, on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1839 the ministry of interior affairs issued Loewi with a personal admonition to avoid preaching and reform that undermine Jewish traditions and values embodied in the Talmud and to lead his private life "as is proper to a rabbi".<sup>373</sup> Later, in 1844, the *Haredim* succeeded in achieving a relative measure of religious autonomy through the appointment of a rabbi of their own alongside Loewi.<sup>374</sup> The conflict continued nevertheless, since the autonomy was only partial and both factions had to communicate on many practical issues. The incandescence began to wither and firmer agreements between the Reformers and the Pious were achieved only after 1850, with the death at the age of eighty of rabbi Wolf L. Hamburger,<sup>375</sup> the zealous and uncompromising head of the disincorporated High Yeshiva, the main rival and the former teacher of Dr. Isaak Loewi.

### **The tree, the flowerpot and the serpent: identity on-the-seams**

The *mise-en-scène* described above provides a complex and uneasy background for the appearance of the "traditional" images of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge on the binder. The year of Tzvi's birth was the year of the opening of the first German railroad. The conflict surrounding the burial societies, when the antagonism between the *Haredim* and the Reformist fractions was at its highest, took place in the time span of the binder's creation. It would be contentious to claim that this conflict is directly reflected in the image of the Serpent, but it is also impossible to ignore the acute particularity of the historical-political circumstances within which this image found so expressive a location between the two parts of the Jewishing cloth.

The threat represented by the Serpent is cultural rather than physical. The Serpent alludes to the temptation of acculturation, to the choice to remain loyal to the covenant of circumcision or to diverge from it. The relationship between the Trees of Life and of Knowledge of Good and Evil, reflect identity dilemmas awaiting the boy to whom the binder was dedicated, but which were also relevant to the maker. The trees met on the seam between birth and circumcision, at the time and place when this exact identity was far from being a simple and univocal answer to a simple question. Who is a Jew, what does a Jew do? The text of the binder

<sup>373</sup> The decree was published in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums*, 21 May 1839, pp. 244-245, available from <<http://www.compactmemory.de/>>, (accessed on 14/11/2012). Shortened Hebrew translation in Hamburger, B. Sh.; (2010) pp. 458-459.

<sup>374</sup> The decision of the ministry of interior on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1843 was published in *Der Orient* on 21 May 1844, p. 164; available from <<http://www.compactmemory.de/>>, (accessed on 14/11/2012). Hebrew translation in Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) pp. 476-477, footnote 246.

<sup>375</sup> Rabbi Wolf L. Hamburger (1770-1850), *Shaar Ha-Zkenim*, head of the High Yeshiva in Fürth between 1820 and 1830, head of the rabbinical court of justice till 1831, a famous teacher of the Talmud and an unofficial leader of the Orthodox community; author of two collections of responsa, שמלת בנימין (Benjamin's Dress, *Simlat Binyamin*) and שער הזקנים (Gate of the Old; *Sha'ar Ha-Zkenim*). See: Hamburger, B. Sh. (2010) pp. 35-115.

answers: the Jew is one born of his father, who is a Jew and he learns Torah, marries and performs good deeds. The images on the seams disrupt the set textual narrative, complicating it by imbuing with inexorably contemporaneous socio-political context.

"The call of time" indicated formally in the date of birth (11 July 1836) is answered through the choice and position of images and their specific execution. Is this answer a "yes" or a "no"? Probably neither: it is more complex, a reflection, a matter of relationship, rather than a single word. The Serpent is admonishing: know the difference between bad and good knowledge, know the difference between yourself and others. What is left is to fill the binaries of what is differentiated from what: Son/Father, Pupil/Teacher, Latin/Hebrew, German/Yiddish, Christian/Jewish, Reformist/Haredi, Modern/Traditional, Gentile/Jew. Luckily, the Serpent is not alone, two other seams show domestic plants, blurring the excessively decisive disposition of forces with a sense of choices made everyday, on the window shelf. Will it be a carnation, a pothos? This concerns the little Tzvi and his family as much as it concerns the maker of the Jewishing cloth. On the seams, away from the central figurative schemes of the binder, the Torah and the Huppah, the signature and the images remain as signs of a residual identity. The maker definitely does not rebel against "tradition", but neither does he seem entirely to refuse the new social order revealed through emancipation. On the splices of the binder's length, he finds narrow spaces of reflection which, through the time of making and the length of the cloth, allow him to pause and ponder upon the changing community around him, to make a series of statements negotiating a possible, liveable and thus ambivalent position.

The seams on the Jewishing cloth are liminal locations in both the direct and the extended, anthropological, sense of the word. In the transitions from one panel edge to another, and especially, in the transition from certificate of birth in the first two panels to certificate of circumcision in the third and the fourth, the embroidery simultaneously divides and connects, hides and reveals the seams. Jewishing cloth accompanied and confirmed the circumcision, a liminal situation in itself, one of the most significant rites of passage in life of a male Jew. This "traditional" liminality extended further into a contemporaneous liminality of a political-historical nature: modernity, and the ambivalence of identity that characterised Jewish existence within it. The seams were hidden under the everyday normality of the potted flowers, under the didactic Tree of Knowledge, only to reveal the suture of the embroidered trunk, the stick supporting the flower. The supple convexity of the satin stitch columns covering the seams, felt with fingertips, as well as seen with eyes, remains and reminds - re-enacts - an effort to

sew the edges together, to bind them symbolically *under* the image of the Tree, in the name of life understood as the male covenant in the Torah of fathers. Whether the binding was successful is a different matter, the embroidered seams witness against themselves. Their presence as witnesses is what matters most.

### **Conclusion**

Returning to the questions asked at the beginning, it is possible to say that in the Fürth binder the seemingly functional and technical issue of joining the panels of a binder appeared to be the arena of decision making, which was beyond “the technical”. Joining seams were made discreet with hemming stitch, then simultaneously emphasised and concealed by means of embroidered images, reiterating and renewing the traditional visual appeal of clearly defined panels' borders; in doing so, they referenced other forms of Jewish texts, such as Esther scrolls. Yet, unlike paper-based flat Esther scrolls, the convex materiality on the embroidered binder facilitated a performative reading, orchestrated by means of the disruptions provided by the embroidered seams.

The seams were integrated into the imagery on the binder in ways that made sense of the total elongated format, consciously playing around with convention and allowing some insight into the maker's world. The historical setting at the time and place of production was full of internal conflicts in the Jewish community of Fürth, provoked by the changing social setting of emancipation and the rise of internal religious reforms. Considering this setting, the act of concealing the seams, which in fact stresses their presence, appears as ambivalent, troubled in its very preoccupation with the liminal area of the cloth's edges. The embroidery is there to deal with the question that troubles the maker: how to join together, to keep whole what seems to be torn apart? The embroidered “images-on-the-seams” of the binder provide a material narrative to cope with this question. They are an alternative to the textual narrative which, following the conventional formula, creates a clear and stable Jewish identity, covering up what embroidery strives to reveal.

### **In the museum**

Returning to the museum here is somewhat akin to returning to a crime scene, for the museum is the scene of the first encounter with the artefact, which triggered the investigation developed in this text. The museum is a scene also in a simple sense of staging, as the presence of the binder from Fürth in the showcase of the Museum of the German-Speaking Jewry (MGSJ) in Tefen is staged. The aim here is to characterise this specific staging, to outline the links between the binder showcase and the overall idea behind the MGSJ, in order to reflect upon the whole

complex from the vantage point of post-investigation, bringing the story of “images-on-the-seams” into the narratives already present inside the exposition. The desire that guides me here is to mark a certain contemporary moment for the binder beyond the “role” prescribed to it within the showcase, beyond and in defiance of the wholeness of a curated picture. In this, my post-investigation position corresponds with a sensation, which accompanied the first encounter: there is more here than what is presented to the eye, and it is just as much about “then” as it is about “now”.

The aim of MGSJ as stated on its website is “to tell the story of the magnificent past of the Jewry of Central Europe in Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic till the time of the Second World War. The museum also extensively presents the activity of the Jecke<sup>376</sup> Jews in Israel within different central domains and the influence of the people of German culture, who came to Israel, on imparting a Western character of the State of Israel.”<sup>377</sup> The problematic nature of this statement is rather clear: “the past” of the Central European Jewry is “magnificent”; German culture (and thus) the character of the State of Israel is “Western”. Those claims are presented as the obvious truth known to all. Their appearance in the contemporary museal space is strange enough to prompt one to play their game and ask: if this all is true and everybody knows it, why have a museum?

The history, space and material content of MGSJ are far more complex and openly ambivalent than the website statement. The museum was established in 1968 in Nahariah, on the seventh floor of the local council building. Nahariah<sup>378</sup> began as an agricultural settlement, established in 1934 by the people of the Fifth *Alyah*,<sup>379</sup> part of approximately 55000<sup>380</sup> Jewish refugees that came from Germany between 1929 and 1939, fleeing from the Nazis. As opposed to previous “waves” which were driven to a more significant extent by Zionist ideological motivations, the Fifth Wave were overt fugitives, who often moved to Palestine in search of a better alternative.<sup>381</sup> The social composition of the “wave” was different as well, with

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<sup>376</sup> Originally: a Jew from Germany.

<sup>377</sup> Hebrew statement by the chief curator Ruti Ofek in the website of the museum <<http://www.omuseums.org.il/museum/sitePage.aspx?pageID=570&Place=1>> (accessed on 28/11/2012); my translation (no English text is available). Also see:

אופק, רותי ע. (2011). *המוזיאון ליהדות דוברת גרמנית. מרכז מורשת היקים. המוזיאון הפתוח גן התעשייה תפן וארגון יוצאי מרכז אירופה.* Ofek, Ruti ed. (2011). *The Museum of the German-Speaking Jewry, The Centre of the Jekkes Legacy.* The Tefen Industrial Park Open Museum and The Association of Israelis of Central European Origin.

<sup>378</sup> Entry <Нахария> [Nahariah] in SEJR vol. 5, p. 639.

<sup>379</sup> עליה, literally “ascent”, Jewish immigration from the countries of diaspora to the land of Israel, a religious term for pilgrimage. Later, this was a major Zionist concept, currently a term of common usage in Hebrew, which relates both to the act of immigration and to the specific groups or “waves” of immigrants which can be distinguished by period and ideology. During the Fifth *Alyah* of 1929-39 more than 250,000 Jews arrived from Central Europe. Entry <Алия> [alyah] in SEJR vol. 1, pp. 84-85.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid

<sup>381</sup> Zukerman, Moshe; “Jekkes’ Realms of Memory” in in Zimmerman, Moshe and Chotam, Yotam eds. (2005). *Between Homelands: the Jekkes in their Realms.* (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar

a significant percentage of women, children (who often were sent alone, while parents remained in Germany) and elderly people.<sup>382</sup> Additionally, a higher number of qualified professionals were present, including liberal professions and businesspeople.<sup>383</sup>

The position of the Fifth Wave in Jewish Palestine was uneasy. Jeckes were often seen as the epitome of assimilation, a condition which was regarded, by both secular and religious Zionists in Palestine, as an obstacle to the creation of a new national identity.<sup>384</sup> The worldview and life experience of Jecke fugitives all to often did not correspond to the ideological construct of the New Jew, "purified from the ills" of Diaspora through agricultural labour and military service.<sup>385</sup> The controversies which accompanied the arrival and acclimatization of German Jews brought about inner cleavages in the community "banished from home to homeland".<sup>386</sup> Their departure from the land of Germany, its language, bourgeois culture and lifestyle, which the Jeckes sincerely considered native, was dwarfed by the question of loyalty and belonging to the emerging Hebrew culture, which, due to the unfolding of Nazi aggression, was often openly hostile to everything "German".<sup>387</sup>

The very term "Jecke", which originally denoted simply a Jew from geographical Germany, had already acquired a derogatory sense in the 1930s, pointing to the "second order qualities" associated with Germanness, such as punctuality, pedantry, reliability.<sup>388</sup> Those qualities were part of the social portrait of German Jews, drawn at the time of the processes of social rationalization and industrialization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the small Jewish community of Palestine, managed mainly through interpersonal relations, lacking industry or developed bureaucracy, those qualities seemed irrelevant and instead of social progress, started to denote an inflexible social awkwardness, "irresponsive to the needs of the hour".<sup>389</sup>

Again, the German Jews found themselves in the position of social and

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Centre for the History of Israel HUI. p. 93.

צוקרמן משה, "מחוזות זיכרון יקיים", ב-צימרמן משה, חותם יותם עוי, (תשס"ו), בין המולדות: היקים במחוזותיהם, ירושלים: מרכז זלמן שזר לתולדות ישראל, ע"מ 92-95.

<sup>382</sup> Entry <Беженцы> [refugees] in SEJR vol. 1, p. 312.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid

<sup>384</sup> Zimmerman, M. and Chotam, Y. "The History of German Jews Between Central Europe and Middle East" in Zimmerman, M. et al. (2005) p. 13.

צימרמן משה, חותם יותם, "ההיסטוריה של יהודים גרמניים בין מרכז אירופה והמזרח התיכון", ב-צימרמן משה (תשס"ו) ע"מ 13-16.

<sup>385</sup> Kaufmann, Chaim. "The New Jew and the Body Culture in the Land of Israel" in Zimmerman, M. et al. (2005), pp. 261-264.

קאופמן, חיים, "היהודי החדש ותרבות הגוף בארץ ישראל", ב-צימרמן משה (תשס"ו) ע"מ 260-264.

<sup>386</sup> Ada Brodsky quoted in Deck, Michal. "Constrainedly Israelis: On the Not-soft Landing in the Promised Land" in: Zimmerman et al. (2005) p. 123.

דק מיכאל, "ישראלים בעל כורכום: על הנחיתה הלא רכה בארץ המובטחת", ב-ב-צימרמן משה (תשס"ו) ע"מ 120-125.

<sup>387</sup> Diner, Dan. "Jeckes – the Metamorphoses of the Nickname" in Zimmerman et al. (2005), p. 91.

דינר, דן, "ייקים - גילגוליו של כינוי", ב-ב-צימרמן משה (תשס"ו) ע"מ 89-91.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid pp. 89-91.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid p. 90

cultural ambivalence: estranged as Jews in Germany, they became estranged as Germans in the Jewish Palestine and later in the Jewish state. Many of them kept longing openly for the life routines and sounds of language "left behind", worsening their relations with the proponents of radical secession from diasporic Jewishness. This strengthened the image of Jeckes as aloof aliens, incapable of or deliberately refusing integration into the impassioned realities of the Jewish state-on-the-way.<sup>390</sup> This image, which with time became widely disseminated in Israeli society, turned for Jeckes into a cause for "embarrassment, frustration and a tendency towards apologetics."<sup>391</sup> On the other hand, as refugees, who "came from Berlin, rather than from ideology", Jeckes strove to preserve the memories of their "previous" life and culture.<sup>392</sup>

This was the *mise-en-scène* of the MGSJ's establishment. The museum's founder was a school teacher Israel Shiloni, who immigrated from Germany in 1942. His museum was entirely hand-made with cardboard panels filled with texts and images cut from books, donated objects and archival material from Jecke families. Shiloni addressed it to Israeli and German youth groups, mainly in order to expose them to the pre-Holocaust German Jewish culture.

The museum in Nahariah was active till 1992, when following a disagreement with the mayor regarding the very need for the place (by that time Jeckes had been displaced from Nahariah by North African immigrants), it was transferred to Tefen Industrial Park, owned by the industrialist Stef Wertheimer, himself of German descent, who agreed to house the museum in one of the park's blocks. In 2003, joining with the Central European Jewry Organization, another move was made within the park. A new location had undergone a complete architectural renovation according to the needs and requirements of a museal space. Ruti Ofek, the curator of the Open Museum in Tefen Park, who took over the management back in 1992, worked in close collaboration with Shiloni to devise a new set-up of exhibits. By 2003 the concept of the old museum had been refocused and widened. Instead of the particular geography (Germany), the language became the defining factor of the community represented, including the Jews of Central Europe, who were German-speaking. The history and achievement of Jeckes in the State of Israel were given place, reflecting areas of industry and commerce, architecture, medicine, jurisprudence, settlement and theatre. Finally the events of the Holocaust were commemorated.

Currently the museum houses a permanent historical display, a temporary exhibition space, a library and an archive. The archive contains personal

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<sup>390</sup> Zimmerman, M. and Chotam, Y. (2005) p. 13.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid

<sup>392</sup> Zukerman, M. (2005) p.93. Zukerman goes as far as to claim an existence of "a Jecke diaspora in the Land of Israel".



correspondence and official documents coming from bequests from Jeckes. Those are catalogued by families, preserving the wholeness of a particular bequest and keeping the singular biographical picture, rather than dissecting them into external themes.<sup>393</sup> The cataloguing is instantly continued because of inflowing donations and untouched material remaining from the old museum. In the upper space, library and exposition are fused, so that books simultaneously become museal artefacts, testifying to the activity of Jeckes in literature and philosophy, and are functioning reference material. The displays include interactive digital presentations alongside printed information panels and showcases with documents, photographs, memorabilia and Judaica. The labels and panels are written in Hebrew and English: German is absent. Their content comes partially from Shiloni's old museum and archive. The exhibition floor presents the work and life story of the artist Herman Schtrok (1876-1944) and changing shows.<sup>394</sup>

The 1990s, the period of the museum's renovation, differed significantly from the time of its establishment. The desire of Shiloni to expose and rehabilitate the pre-immigration past of his community in the eyes of young people was superseded by a similar drive directed to the much closer Palestinian and Israeli past, summarised under "achievement". Turning to the logic of achievement was not surprising considering Stef Wertheimer's successful history of industrial enterprise<sup>395</sup> and the context of his industrial park, a unique setting, which houses hi-tech companies, craft studios<sup>396</sup> and museums of art and industry.<sup>397</sup> In the museum displays this industrial setting is transformed into a picture of the industriousness of Jeckes in literature, theatre, science, diplomacy, commerce etc, presented as an uninterrupted line from the German Middle Ages to the contemporary life of the Jewish state.

The designed and technology-invested halls testify to the already unshakable position of power which the Jeckes attained in the Israeli society. As generations have changed, the point of view of the museal narrator has shifted significantly. The current curator herself belongs to the younger generation of immigrants,<sup>398</sup> for whom the German past is further removed, while the Israeli life

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<sup>393</sup> Ruti Ofek points to the desire of the donors to keep the materials together.

<sup>394</sup> The story of the museum is summarised according to: Shiloni, Yisrael. (1998). *Das Mogliche und das Unmogliche, Erinnerungen*. German and Hebrew. The Open Museum, Tefen Industrial Park, Israel. pp. 163-178 and an interview with Nili Davidson, the archivist at the museum, that took place on 28/5/08.

<sup>395</sup> In 1952 Stef Wertheimer (b. 1926) established the ISCAR Metalworking Company, which was to become one of the world's largest manufacturers of carbide industrial-cutting tools used in the car industry. In 1969 ISCAR Blades was created, later a worldwide manufacturer of blades and vanes for jet engines and industrial gas turbines. Wertheimer became the exemplary Israeli industrialist, hitting the headlines in 2006, when 80% of ISCAR metalworking was bought by Warren Buffett for five billion dollars. See: <<http://www.iscar.co.il/>>, <<http://www.iscarmetals.com/>>.

<sup>396</sup> See the list of companies at: <<http://www.iparks.co.il/industry/list.aspx?Place=1>> (accessed on 11/12/12).

<sup>397</sup> See: <<http://www.iparks.co.il/museum/DefaultPlace.aspx?Place=1>> (accessed on 11/12/12).

<sup>398</sup> Ofek was born in Salzburg.

and actions of immigrants became the immediate and personal history. Furthermore, as time passes, the political climate changes and new immigrant communities enter the Israeli social scene, each with their unique experience of Jewishness or non-Jewishness, of transitions between "home" and "homeland". Reclaiming the past becomes accepted, as the academic, public and political discourses of Zionism open up to more critical debates. Alternative histories of the state's establishment and of diaspora/homeland relations are being conceived, evoking identities more complex and ambivalent in their understanding of Jewishness and in the meaning of immigration. At the same time Israel participates in the general turn to nostalgia, whilst globalization brings about a counter-move towards "local attachments" and collective memory.<sup>399</sup>

In the light of those developments, the museum acts less as an apologetic space, but rather as a familial, biographical space for Jeckes and their descendants. Kinship and memories that accompany it as texts, photographs and small personal objects can be deposited and beheld, discovered and rediscovered (Fig. 40). The "big" histories of modernity and narratives of Jeckes' "achievement" and "contribution" embedded in these objects, and delivered through texts and images on the panels, are brought closer to the visitor in the showcases via personal objects, documents, correspondence, diaries and calendars, photographs of "then" and "now". The history here is constantly becoming a story. Such stories of biographical and genealogical nature, act as mnemonic devices. Ofek says: "...if it is somebody with a name and an ID number it is easier to imagine the person, it touches and engraves itself in memory."<sup>400</sup>

In this vein, the value of an object, a material artefact in the text-invested expositions, is derived from the specific story of its owner, which can be reconnected into wider historical contexts. In that sense the collection of artefacts in the museum differs from the conventional idea of a Judaica collection – an aggregation of ritual artefacts assigned a value of "art". Ritual artefacts form only a small fraction of the collection, which, like the archive, is based mostly on private donations. As a result the overarching narratives of "achievement", reflected in the panels' texts, are fragmented, brought down into "biographised" details, which allow a way out of History. At the same time, "biographisation" of objects in the showcases is achieved through the addition of rather spacious labels with text, creating a confused view, where "the objectness" of the artefact and of the label begin to merge. In other words, escaping History, the personal object does not escape a "historicising" styling. The object exists in the showcase not as "itself", but rather as an image of itself, as a detail in a particular biography.

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<sup>399</sup> Boym, Svetlana. (2001). p. XIV.

<sup>400</sup> I interviewed Ruti Ofek on 30/7/2008.

The Fürth binder is among the few “proper” Judaica objects which have found their way into the display. The “biographising” rule is adhered to. The label notes the donors: “From the Goldberg family in memory of Erna and Kurt Blumental (Bental), donated by their children.” The binder was donated by Professor Efraim Bental at the inaugural ceremony of the museum in 1992. Blumental's story fits well into the Jecke narrative: Kurt and Erna were a secular, non-Zionist, well-educated couple, who came to Palestine in 1933, fleeing from the Nazi regime. Kurt Blumental, a psychiatrist by education, established a mental health hospital in Haifa, which is still active today. His son Efraim Bental followed in his father's footsteps and worked most of his life in the hospital, becoming one of its leading psychiatrists. Originally the binder belonged to the ancestors of Erna Blumental, the Goldberg family from Western Prussia. It was taken from Germany to the USA in the 1930s, by Erna's brother, Berth Goldberg (later Berg), who collected Judaica. Under the latter's will it was brought to Israel and donated to the museum in memory of the Blumental couple, who had passed away by then.<sup>401</sup>

The binder, set in numerous folds, occupies the lower part of a showcase, also presenting an embroidered prayer shawl with a bag, a Herman Shtrok's headgear and a Jewish new year greeting card – all from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 41). The next case displays Passover objects: printed *Haggadas*, an embroidered *Matzah* napkin, a ritual metal plate (Fig. 41). The ritual context is that of the Jewish lifecycle, presented through a sparse selection of ceremonial and festive objects. The lifecycle theme is contextualised within panels dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century “influence of emancipation upon the Jewish religious institutions”, the synagogal architecture of Germany and everyday life of German Jews presented through the reproductions of the Oppenheim's famous series of grisaille (Fig. 42).

On the one hand, the curatorial strategy in the showcase is consistent with the rest: the general theme of religious life of Jeckes is conveyed through objects of biographical value. On the other, the objects here are different. The mass-produced memorabilia in other showcases possess a biographical appeal, i.e. where they are known to belong to a particular person, it helps imagining a particularised portrait of him/her. Notwithstanding this appeal, a metal-thread knitted theatre pouch, a colourful printed scarf, a set of writing implements remain objects that many other people, including the person in question, were using at the

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<sup>401</sup> Goldberg was the marriage name of Erna Blumental's grandmother, Lotte Lewinsohn, who married a restaurant owner, Benjamin Goldberg, in the early 19th century. He died in 1866, leaving her with six children. One of them, Louis, became a doctor and lived in Frankfurt. His two sons, Berth and Felix, immigrated to the USA in 1929, where they have shortened their name to Berg. Efraim Bental, son of Kurt and Erna Blumental, received the binder from his American uncle Berth Berg and donated it to the museum. All information about the Blumental-Goldberg family comes from the family *mémoire* *The History of Blumental-Bental Family and Blumental Hospital in Haifa* written by Hava, Efraim and Beni Bental and their children, independently published in 2003. I am most thankful to Gil'ad Bental, Efraim's son, for allowing me to browse through and photocopy materials from this wonderful volume.

time. Even inasmuch as, for the family members, the scarf carries a unique image from a family history, of a woman wearing it at the time of her wedding, it positions this woman within thousands of her contemporaries wearing such scarves at the behest of fashion.

This “duplicity” of things is surely a matter of opinion, but this fact notwithstanding, the handmade binder remains a thing of significant difference in the displays. The binder is specifically dedicated to the birth of a son and to confirmation beyond any doubt of a Jewish identity of this newborn. The level of investment of its orderers and of its maker in imbuing this object with such characterising information is exceptional compared to other personal objects in the museum. Paradoxically, this “super-personal” textile is estranged, since it comes from a different convention of “identification”, a religious convention, according to which Jewishness is not a matter of a common, if individualised, hi/story of modernity, but a matter of custom and ritual. In the Judaica display a religious identity becomes a cultural one, or rather a particular picture of a “cultured” way of life.

The outward appearance of the display suggests an aesthetic convention: what is presented is what can be considered “beautiful”, or at least impressive.<sup>402</sup> The story of Judaism in Germany is thought of as a “cultured” one, a respectable story of fine aesthetics and good taste, like the Oppenheim’s grisaille. Two other binders in the collection of the museum, modestly painted at home by amateur artists, are not part of this solemn picture (Figs. 43-44). The contrast between the willingness of the curator to present biographical, rather than aesthetic, value in the displays relating to the history of Jeckes in Palestine and Israel, and the overt aesthetisation in the presentation of the religious life of Jewish Germany, is startling. As opposed to the fragmented, “biographised” histories of mass-produced personal objects, “the past of Judaica” remains wholly “magnificent”, untouchable, safely de-politicised. Judaica becomes an aesthetically invested idol, an object of a tepid melancholic adoration of the German-born, Israeli secularity, suffering from nostalgia. As happens with any nostalgia, it has difficulty with a precise definition of its object: its desire often shifts not even to the past, but “sideways”.<sup>403</sup> Thus the adoration of Judaica becomes ambivalent: “the alluring object of nostalgia is notoriously elusive”,<sup>404</sup> permeated with suspicion. What if the “idol” wakes up?

Once the binder is released from the status of “a beautiful thing”, and regains its biography, it tells the story not of an imagined magnificence “once upon

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<sup>402</sup> Ofek expressly stated in the interview that this was the selection criterion.

<sup>403</sup> “Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather sideways.” In Boym, S. (2001) p. XIV.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

a time”, but a deeply politicised and unsightly story of an inner struggle. The danger of reawakening the ghost of this struggle, lying dormant in the binder, unsettles the cultured picture of the “magnificent” German-Jewish past created in the Jecke's Museum. The whole complex of the industrial park is a triumph of a secular syncretic thought, which, as outreaching and creative as it is, hardly knows how to deal with this part of its own “bequest”, having difficulty recognizing a relevant narrative of identity within a religious ritual object. Nostalgic de-politicisation is safer, especially considering the acuteness of the secular/religious divide in the contemporary Israeli society. Seams and scars attract further attention, once an effort is made to conceal them, to make them “look nice”, proper – appropriating unwanted identities, re-naming their values and attributes.

For me the memory of my encounter with Tzvi's binder in the museum is accompanied by two contradictory emotions. One relates to the sheer wonder of a thing and its story; the other, to the immediate sense of loss and disappointment from the setting in which the encountered artefact is housed. Museums are sites of wonder, of wonders and wo(a)nderers, but when it comes to Judaica, more often than not, this wonder is clad in a strangling attire of commercialised nostalgia and raffinated remembrance. As a result a thing in a showcase is often cut off from its “native” ritual context and function - but this is only half the trouble. A thing is cut off from **now**, its historical-political content is ignored, frozen underneath generalising categories of objects. These can answer the question “what is this object?”, but they can hardly help identifying the uniqueness of a particular thing or answering “the who” question of Adrianna Cavarero.

The question of a uniqueness of a thing, de Certeau's “dream of countless combinations of existences”,<sup>405</sup> is a political question, a matter of relationship, engagement and re-enactment. The removal of Judaica from the particular politics of its time disables its possible links to a politics of the present, activates a form of a dangerous forgetfulness, an approach that suggests that the religious life of Jews in a specific time existed separately from their social life, picturing an idealised existence outside of history, once upon a time. The impossibility of seeing, or even a lack of desire to see, a fully historical, and thus political Judaica of a past, creates a motive for a similar blindness in the present, regarding not just objects, but communities with which objects are associated as falling outside of time, or as fixed within a particular, non-relevant past. Paraphrasing the discourse of “space” of Doreen Massey, the de-politicisation of Judaica refuses to recognize “the radical contemporaneity of space”, or, in this case, “the radical contemporaneity of material culture”. The task of an artist in a museum, as I understand it, is to re-politicise, re-enact artefacts in the now-time. This task will be discussed in the final chapter.

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<sup>405</sup> De Certeau, Michel. (1988) p. 21.

## Chapter 5

### The Biography of an Art Practice: Stories of a Torn Swaddling Cloth

All biographies like all  
autobiographies like all  
narratives tell one story in  
place of another story.

Hélène Cixous<sup>1</sup>

Enamoured of distance,  
not of the referent

Susan Stewart<sup>2</sup>

This chapter is dedicated to the task of an artist in a museum, which I have previously described as a re-politicisation or re-actualisation of the Torah binder from Fürth in the now-time. Until now the binder performed several "roles": as swaddling cloth / ritual object / document / museum artefact / artist's reference. The previous two chapters dealt with the first four appearances of the binder: it is the last appearance that I want to explore here. In my practice the binder became a conceptual and material mobiliser for works and texts.

As I have pointed out in the beginning of Chapter Two, my textile practice has been a methodology of creative research. Here I present an account of this research in which material operations with needle and thread evolved, productively cohabiting and interacting with other media such as video and drawing, as well as with the historical exploration of the binder. I also present the general working process, referencing relevant artworks, historical textiles and additional texts which entered in the different stages of the practice development and became part of the mobilising conceptual "workflow", which shaped decisions taken in the practice itself.

The character of this chapter is that of a multiple autobiography, since it weaves together the story of my practice "so far" and a fragmented autobiographical story of my own. In this "cloth" *the other, poetic and subjective voice* becomes significant on several levels, as it turns to be an actual part of the practical work, figuring in inscriptions and texts written as part of the practice. Moreover, the text of the chapter itself at times becomes the practice. The boundary between "research" and "practice" in this chapter is often blurred and transgressed as part of the material thinking, the "occasional, generically

<sup>1</sup> Cixous, H. (1997) p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Stewart, Susan. (2007). *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durnham, NC: Duke University Press. p. 145.

disrespectful and promiscuous, and localised" way of doing and articulating. *Spacing*, the principle of the "multiplicity of stories so far", is enacted and expressed.

In order to keep track of the story of my practice, I turned to three sources: recorded audio commentaries and a table-like diary of embroidery, which I kept while working;<sup>3</sup> detailed photo documentation of the embroidery as work-in-progress; and relevant research papers that I delivered at several seminars and conferences. Additionally, the chapter includes a limited, but autonomous theoretical and historical bibliography of its own, which complements the bibliography of chapters One and Two. The text of the chapter is often uneven, as I strove to preserve the qualities of the source texts. They allow the reader and me to experience the changing and shifting in the processes of articulation.

In its conceptual and geographical migrations the binder bears seemingly unchangeable signs of identity. Names, date, text, images and their design are there as cloth and threads. They are "simply" there, mute and stubborn, surfaces and screens for projection of desires for Jewishness, the desires of its creators and orderers, its donors and keepers, and finally its beholders. My practice explores the Jewishing cloth format as such "a surface of desire", a desire for a Jewish story of my own. The chapter charts the way in which the "crafty" cloth betrayed, gave shape to this desire. This shaping is, in a way, devoid of discrepancies, as many external have observers noted about my work: "You live in Israel, study in the UK, research a 19<sup>th</sup> century German-Jewish artefact and reflect upon your Russian-Jewish identity in your contemporary practice".<sup>4</sup> The intention here is to voice the connections and the discontinuities, which are bound together in the material body of the practical work. To account for them, to explain the practice and its consequences, it is necessary first to tell its "biography", which inexorably becomes my autobiography.

I begin with a juxtaposition of the two. Here they are:

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<sup>3</sup> The embroidery diary is in Appendix 5.

<sup>4</sup> This comment came up in several conversations which I had throughout the duration of writing. Naturally those issues were a frequent subject of discussion with both my supervisors, Prof. Janis Jefferies and Terry Rosenberg. At the very beginning of the work in 2007 exactly those issues came up in a discussion with my MA supervisor Dr Eva Frojmovic, the Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies from the University of Leeds, and then with Dr Esther Schuhazs, a specialist in Jewish material culture and textiles from the Haifa University. The particular formulation which I quoted came from a recent conversation with Prof. Yuli Tamir, the current president of Shenkar College of Engineering and Design.

An embroidered linen band measuring 3.17 m length x 0.18 m width. It bears embroidered images and a Hebrew inscription.

The band consists of four parts accurately sewn together. The joining seams are meticulously hidden underneath elongated embroidery of a stick, supporting a plant in a conical pot. One of the seams is concealed behind an embroidered tree with a snake twisting around it. The snake turns its head to the right, backwards in relation to the text direction, towards a Neoclassical vase with a symmetrical three-branched beige flower with six petals. The circularly applied dense satin stitch at the petals and the inner stamen field create a tiny hole in the fabric, just at the spot where the needle was repeatedly inserted.

One of several thousands of similar objects dispersed among the Jewish and Textile Museums in the world, this cloth caught my attention in 2005. This kind of Jewish ritual textile is usually referred to as "Torah binders" or *wimpels*. According to German

*I was born on 22 August 1977, in Pskov.<sup>5</sup> My mother, Elena Lavorko (b. 1949), is Jewish. She studied Russian language and literature in the Herzen State Pedagogical University in Leningrad in the 1960s, worked in the Pskov Theatre of Drama as an editor, later becoming a tourist guide. I knew her already in this capacity.*

*My father, Vasily Lavorko, whom I have never known, as they got divorced straight after I was born, is Russian. He is a landscape painter, lives and works in Briansk.<sup>6</sup>*

*Mother and me shared a flat with the grandparents, first in the older part of town, on the street named after the furiously moustached red hero Jan Fabricius;<sup>7</sup> from the beginning of 1980s - in the newly-built neighbourhood Zavelich'e, on the other side of the river Velikayah (the Great), in the outskirts, on a street concisely called: "Zapadnayah", Western.*

*My grandmother, Sonya Maximovsky, Sarah according to her passport, was born in 1919, in Nevel.<sup>8</sup> She was a surgeon, running the oncology department in the local hospital in Pskov. She studied in the First Medical Institute<sup>9</sup> in Leningrad before the war;*

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<sup>5</sup> A regional centre town on the border with Estonia, in the North-West of Russia.

<sup>6</sup> South-West region of Central Russia, on the border with Ukraine and Belarus.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Fabricius (1877-1929) was a Latvian red commander, who was active in the Pskov and Novgorod regions between 1918-1921, presiding over the Pskov Military Revolutionary Committee (BPK). In 1929 JF drowned trying to rescue a man trapped in an airplane, which crashed into a river. See: <[ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Фабрициус,\\_Ян\\_Фрицевич](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Фабрициус,_Ян_Фрицевич)> (accessed 16/3/2013).

<sup>8</sup> A small town about 250 km southeast of Pskov, a *steitele* which was located within the pre-revolutionary Jewish Pale of Settlement.

<sup>9</sup> Currently: The Pavlov State Medical Academy of Saint Petersburg (est. 1897), often called "the First Medical Institute" – relative to the Melnikov State Medical Academy, or the Second Medical Institute.



custom, *wimpels* were made of a swaddling cloth used during the circumcision and embroidered with the name and date of birth of a circumcised boy. For that reason they were also called in Yiddish "Jewish cloths".

This cloth is exhibited behind the thick glass of a showcase with other ritual textiles on the second floor of the Museum of German-Speaking Jewry in Tefen Industrial Park in the northern region of Galilee, in Israel.

Caught by the striking wholeness of cloth, text, ritual and identity, an immigrant among immigrants, I was trying to apprehend the binder's contemporary status: a thing among things in a museum dedicated to the uneasy Jewish minority narrative in the Israeli "melting pot". *What is it to me? What if I had one?*

In the summer of 2008 names and dates of birth were identified as crucial situations to relate to in the binder. Relevant autobiographical situations were articulated in a short text, reflecting on the link between my grandmother and myself. Once written, the text allowed to reformulate the ritual blessing on the binder, relating to the very act of inscribing a name and a date. During 2009 the new

*and remained there, working as a surgeon, during the whole time of the siege. She was still working when I was born. She retired in the mid-1980s, stayed at home, cooking, reading, sewing, smoking, playing cards, watching out for me.*

*My grandfather, Michail Maximovsky, Mendel according to the passport, was born in Nevel in 1921. He studied Russian language and literature in the Herzen State Pedagogical University in Leningrad. During the war he served as a commander of a mobile radio-locator unit, directing artillery fire from inside the enemy lines. He went all the way to Berlin, up to 1945. Once discharged, he became a teacher, later on - a school principal, running several schools during his lifetime, including, in the 1950s, a self-sufficient boarding school for orphans and socially disadvantaged children. My mother and her older sister, Ekaterina, were obliged by him to study there. Their memories from that post-war time can be summarised with a splinter of a mirror by the bed, torn sheets and grandfather's suit, which had to be ironed instantly. To much of the family's surprise, grandfather retired in the early 1980s. He then spent much of his time writing memoirs, pedagogical essays and poetry, travelling the USSR on trains, sporting, smoking, drinking with his ex-colleagues and wartime*

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The First Medical was the first high medical academy for women in Europe. See: <<http://www.spb-gmu.ru/universitet/istoriya>>, (accessed on 16/3/2013).

inscription was transposed onto my own swaddling cloths appropriating embroidery materials, techniques, scripts and colours of the 1836 binder, resulting in a 4.25 by 0.18 m hand embroidered cloth, consisting of 8 approximately equal panels.

The binder was completed and exhibited in the Jerusalem Artist House in May 2010. It was displayed on a transparent circular device hanging from the ceiling, so that the entire length of the cloth and the inscription were visible. The viewer was to experience the length and read the inscription by walking around. An elderly visitor told me: "What is more to a person than a name and a date?"

During the spring months of 2011 I made a film, which further reflected on the female family linkage and involved my mother. In the film the cloth was slowly unrolled between the hands of my mother and my grandmother, accompanied by my mother's voice singing in Russian, enacting the performative character of the cloth and its inscription. Binder and film were exhibited at the Kaunas Textile Biennale in September 2011. The display was similar to the one in Jerusalem. At the Biennale I have become

*friends. And - rearing me.*

*Mother aspired to leave the USSR already in the 1970s, without success, as grandfather refused to grant his permission, fearing that his privileges as a war veteran and his status as a local educator might be damaged.*

*My mother and I left Russia in 1989, (I was twelve), the first Jews in Pskov to leave for good. My father initially refused to grant his permission for my immigration on the grounds of a homeland lost. Mother threatened him with a court appeal, and he withdrew. Our extended family joined in 1990. All came to Jerusalem, where most of us still live.*

*In Israel my mother enrolled in the re-qualification course for immigrants with higher education in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. She has worked there since, currently as deputy curator of Islamic art.*

*My grandparents received a small, state-funded apartment, where they lived together till their deaths. Grandfather passed away in March 2006, two months after the birth of my son, Michael. On his deathbed my mother overheard him speaking Yiddish, saying that an angel will take him to a crossroads, where his father will be waiting.*

*When he died, grandmother, for the first time in her life, had a place all to herself. In Russia she lived in our drawing room, sleeping on a sofa, while*

acquainted with a group of Russian and Lithuanian female textile artists and discovered the possibility of talking about the work without explaining it.

By that time another short text had been written, which addressed my father and his work as a painter, or rather the interval between his name, his work and his person, which was always present in my life.

On 24 May 2012 I started a series of drawings in a thick sketchbook, which originated in the specific parts of the embroidery and the rhythmic experience of the film. The drawings involve a great deal of erasure; they often extend into collage and cutting, linking back to my past work. Working on rhythm, letter and image, they deal with names, my own and that of my father, the ambivalence of national belonging, addressing the relationship between the male name and circumcision. They are still in progress, the aftermath of the entire project, a reflection on its findings in the theoretical, historical and practical trajectories.

To summarise the material outcomes: an embroidered cloth, a film, a sketchbook, two short texts and two exhibitions.

*grandfather had a study room all for himself. In Jerusalem it was the same. Once alone, in defiance of growing deafness and deteriorating health, she lived autonomously, went to swim twice a week, loved the visits of her family, but mostly loved to be alone, reading, smoking, cooking, sewing. Around 2009 she diagnosed herself with stomach cancer and died in March 2012, aged 93.*

*A few weeks before her death, which above all came surprisingly, I visited her in the early morning to check her new washing machine, which wasn't working. She was still sleeping (she always slept late, after a prolonged night reading time) and I didn't want to wake her up, just to sit in the sunny silence of her drawing room, surrounded by the polished surfaces of our old Soviet furniture, peeping beyond the curtains' see-through stripes at the half-built view of the desert outside.*

*The machine was fine; she just didn't press the button. I heard her turning over in bed, on the way to wake up, and looked through the doorway. A delightful, small creature in an open motley nightshirt, unaware of my presence, enshrined in the sunlit silence of her aged body, turning around in her sheets.*

*The sound of her yawn is still my blessing. She was happy, god, she was happy.*

## **“Throwing, throwing”**

The practice developed through a series of successive moves, which were mobilised by the Fürth binder as an expressive and conceptual model. The initial idea was rather “simple”: in order to learn something about binders through practice, it is necessary to make a binder. This idea developed in the early stages of the research, partially driven by Channa Safrai’s<sup>10</sup> analyses of a binder from Weyer. This suggested that the way it is made clearly shows a progression of acquiring the embroidery skill, i.e. the binder was created by a young woman learning the craft.

My hypothesis was that remaking the artefact can clarify some technical aspects of its production, and through them, can give a glimpse on the decision-making behind the design, which in itself reflects the complex cultural and social factors that conditioned its particular appearance. In other words I was interested in deciphering the working process behind the finished embroidery in order to look at the appearance of the binder, its iconography and stylistic features as fully participating elements of the binder’s materiality. In this way the remaking was devised as a basic framework with which to start.

This basic framework became the scene for the decision-making, which had to reflect not just the “original” artefact, but also the position of myself as a contemporary maker (Fig. 45). Once the work started to acquire a differentiated shape, it became clearer that apart from being a “deciphering tool” serving the research of an artefact, the practice occupies its own unique space and position. The contemporary relationship of art and craft was at stake, becoming the in-between “space”, the genre of Arachne, where the new binder could find an accommodation.

Back then in 2008, I was convinced that a woman embroidered the Fürth binder, thus the signature and the stylistic choices were a kind of concealed female presence in the overwhelmingly male artefact and ritual context, which is the case with the majority of embroidered binders. The binder appeared as two identity narratives superimposed, with the possibility that the subsumed female narrative, linked to craft and making, acts as a subversion of, or at least an alternative to, the “official” religious narrative instituting male Jewish identity through circumcision.

In a sense, when deciding to remake the binder, I had already contrived a fictional narrative, which allowed me to “reoccupy” the position of this hidden female maker, throwing a line (a thread, rather than a stroke) from 1836 Fürth to 2009 Jerusalem. The characteristic female/male dichotomy in Judaism was at the

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<sup>10</sup> Safrai, Channa. “Embroidered Torah Binders from Weyer in Hessen” in: Friedlander, E. et al. (1997). pp. 104-108.

basis of my reaction to the binder, while “throwing”<sup>11</sup> allowed me to superimpose the cloth with autobiographical stories related to my own immigrant experience of ID acquisition and “Jewish check” at the Rabbinate, prior to marriage. At a very early stage I decided that first, in defiance of the original artefact, the “remade” binder will be dedicated to a female story; second, that this story will be that of myself and my female lineage.

This decision changed irreversibly the “original” relationship of form and content in the work and introduced into the play elements of a subjective nature, which were foreign to the initial subject: the 1836 binder from Fürth. Balancing on the verge between past and present, in the discrepancy<sup>12</sup> between historical and autobiographical narratives, the practice entered the realm of the nostalgic imaginary. The romantic discourse of making, ideological idealization of handicraft as a “memorative sign”<sup>13</sup> of an imagined lost past of a nation in need of restoration,<sup>14</sup> was not part of my motivation. To a certain extent the binder was an “exotic object”<sup>15</sup> for me, in as much as it appeared and appealed in the separation of its use value from its display value,<sup>16</sup> but it never appeared in the glance of a “primitive”<sup>17</sup> and thus more “pure and authentic” thing. The input of “the *handmade* in a plastic world”<sup>18</sup> was not part of the equation. Hand-making the work was important as a learning tool, and undoubtedly began to occupy a political position in the practice, but not so much as a gesture against “the plastic”, but as a processual reflection on the episodic constructedness or “craftiness” of identity. In other words the binder never fully became a souvenir, although my relationship to it can be thought in terms of a “conceptual tourism”.

The binder acted as a creative “home” for my practice, somewhat fictive, as the Jews of Russia did not produce circumcision binders. Upon the entirety of its ritual and social aspects reflected in the cloth, the binder became a distancing

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<sup>11</sup> Quoting the first chapter: “*throwing* enacts the two situations of the *subjectile*: being thrown (becoming a screen, stretched out) and throw something (at, down, below). It oscillates between active and passive forms, between throwing as ejaculating, spurting blood, casting a line etc. - the “male” state of the projectile, and the “female” state of being thrown - becoming a sheet, a subject, a support, a sick body, a new born - the state of the *subjectile*. As *subjectile*, something/one that has been thrown becomes a foundation, from the state of passivity and helplessness, by the act of throwing down, beneath, it acquires the ability to serve as foundation, to sustain a construction which will be capable to withstand and/or receive further throws (blows, spurts, lines, seed, etc.).”

<sup>12</sup> “History - the name of the discrepancy between intention and occurrence” - Jonathan Culler quoted in Bal, M. (2002) p. 60

<sup>13</sup> Boym, Svetlana. (2001) p. 12

<sup>14</sup> The “restorative nostalgia” in Boym: “restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps.” *ibid.* p. 41. Boym references Eric Hobsbawm's “invented tradition”: “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature which seeks to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition which automatically implies continuity with the past.” Hobsbawm, E. J. and Ranger, T. O. eds. (2006). *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 2

<sup>15</sup> Stewart, S. (2007) p. 146

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid* pp. 148-149.

<sup>17</sup> In the reflections on “the primitive” Stuart relates to Baudrillard's *The System of Objects*.

<sup>18</sup> Graburn, Nelson. (1979). *Ethnic and the Tourist Arts*. Berkley: University of California Press. p. 15, quoted in Stewart, S. (2007) p. 148, original italics.

device to view my own life-story. Acting less as a tool to decipher the historical past, the remaking set-up became a vehicle to address the present time through the framework of an imaginary past. Not revival of a "lost" tradition, but reflection on the current state of an immigrant identity, turning to the definition of Svetlana Boym, not "restorative", but "reflective nostalgia". Such nostalgia is "oriented toward an individual narrative that savours details and memorial signs, perpetually deferring homecoming itself";<sup>19</sup> its narrative is "ironic, inconclusive and fragmentary."<sup>20</sup>

The general idea of an auto/biographical desire of Adriana Cavarero received a particularisation through the desire of a "reflective nostalgic".<sup>21</sup> Such nostalgic not only wishes to see "the unique design of her own story" in all its unsubstitutability, but being aware of "the gap between identity and resemblance"<sup>22</sup> is motivated in her narration by defamiliarisation with 'the home' and a 'sense of distance' from it. The uniqueness of a particular story in this case is also the uniqueness of a particular relationship between past, present and future (to paraphrase Boym). Far from being teleological, this relationship opens the past up to a "multitude of potentialities" of historic development, so that the past might be "inserted" into the present: or, in Paul Carter's terms, "threaded into a different future".<sup>23</sup>

*Recognition* of a past and its translation or "transportation" into present came from the texts of Mieke Bal. *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* and *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: Architecture of Art-Writing*<sup>24</sup> were two books that in the early stages of the project constantly accompanied me, together with the catalogue "The Band of Jewish Tradition." The binder appeared in the tension between "historical object" and "theoretical object",<sup>25</sup> one that "can be brought to bear on" a theoretical discourse, just as the discourse can be brought to bear on the object, thereby creating "a fluctuating, mobile, and irreducible tension, between past and present and between history and theory". Such a Benjaminian, philosophical, rather than historical (and reflectively nostalgic) approach to objects is about "recognizing for the present, 'as one of its own concerns' - the objects of its inquiries, which flare up only for brief instants." I was seeing the binder exactly in this way, a flaring instant, a nostalgic image of an artistic persuasiveness and wholeness, rather than purely seeing its historical value. Following Bal's logic, such an object needed to be "translated" rather than researched, while translation was understood as "liberation,

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<sup>19</sup> Boym, S. (2001) p. 49

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibid p. 50

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Carter, Paul. (2004) p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> Bal, M. (2001)

<sup>25</sup> Bal, M. (2002) p. 61

transformation, renewal, and a supplementation that produces the original rather than being subservient to it". This was the approach which motivated my practice.

A material embodiment of this approach was found in the work of Louise Bourgeois, who often appropriated ready-made and historical textiles, creating metaphors related to gender, to the body and its absence. In fact, the idea of translating or transporting the past into the present, which I have addressed previously, first appealed to me through the analyses of Bourgeois' work by Mieke Bal. There, the word *metaphor* carried the connotation of 'vehicle' (from Greek *meta-phorein*, moving vans), a means of transportation from one meaning into another. The materiality of this move has been described as baroque, operating in intricate and passionate folding of visual and textual domains. Bal claimed that tapestry fragments in the work of Louise Bourgeois's *Spider* (Fig. 46) successfully avoid the opposition of materiality/concept: instead they literalize, embody metaphors, reclaiming materiality rather than escaping from it.<sup>26</sup> Bourgeois's artistic operation is thus a revision of the very concept of metaphor, activating a play where material artwork does not succumb to interpretation as the only method of reading/looking/experiencing. 'Real', be it autobiography, history or history of art, is re-staged in the overall design of *Spider*, an architectural sculpture, a real-metaphorical space experienced through the movement of the observer's body. Here 'real' refuses to freeze and become an illustration to a psychological narrative, it evolves between the multiple historical and autobiographical references and the now-time of observation. In other words – it becomes a scene, referring back to *subjectile*, to Derrida's performative conception of an artwork. Just like a Torah binder, the tapestry in Bourgeois work "does what it is about". Manifesting its own multiplicity, it becomes a *space* in the sense of Doreen Massey, "a multiplicity of stories so far".

The whole project, its practical and academic trajectories, is balanced between its subject, the binder of 1836, and the subjectivity in my address of it, my nostalgia for it, the longing for an artefact which was in front of me and was at the same time irredeemably distant, an imaginary binder I could have never had. In other words, the project developed as a *subjectile*, *thrown* from within itself, *throwing* itself between its own surfaces.

### **Embroidery: to stitch or not to stitch**

Embroidery was a challenge in itself, not just as a new technique to learn, but also in its associations with a particular kind of creativity. My initial training (1997-2001)

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<sup>26</sup> "[The fragments of tapestry in *Spider*] are not conceptual as opposed to material, but conceptual in their very materiality. With their frayed edges, bearing witness to their ancient history and the pastness this history carries with it, metaphorizing, into the present, they conceptualize metaphor in a hyperbolic materiality." Bal, M. (2001). pp.84-85

in the Department of Textile Design in Shenkar College did not include embroidery, because embroidery, in an unconsciously modernist fashion, was not considered a serious design discipline. The college grew up from an extended Bauhaus textile agenda, imported to Israel from Western Europe after the Second World War, and from the need to supply professional personnel for the textile industry, which was well developed in Israel in the 1970s.<sup>27</sup> In this setting embroidery mostly didn't count, was not considered "technological" enough: it was usually treated as a hobby craft to be learned in a community centre, not in a design school. The feminist art context of embroidery in the spirit of *The Subversive Stitch*<sup>28</sup> was virtually unknown. Gender issues generally were ignored, even though the absolute majority of students were female.

I was trained as a weaver. Weaving was understood, if not quoted word-for-word, by the canon of Anni Albers, as the essence, the ultimate functional-poetic basis of all textile production and creativity.<sup>29</sup> Embroidery for me began somewhere, where Albers' satin weave was positioned as a sign of luxury and "extravagant existence",<sup>30</sup> far removed from the "most serviceable construction"<sup>31</sup> of the simple weave. Embroidery could be an addition, a manipulation, a deceit – in any case not a substantial operation with material and construction. A craft maybe, but not Design.

I "discovered" embroidery only in England in 2003, while studying at Goldsmiths, together with an array of literary and critical texts that dealt with textiles, text and art. Thus within my biographical trajectory "text" and "textile" became inexorably tied with "weaving" and "embroidery", as haunting culturally-charged inter-dependent acts and approaches to practice. For this reason I felt the necessity to unpick "text" and "textile", as well as to undo and reactivate "weaving" and "embroidery" beyond, but at the same time from within, their technicality, which I have never perceived as "mute" or inessential. Since weaving formed a great part of my schooling, as well as my professional experience, and in many ways influenced my approach to creative practice, it appeared often as a conceptual counterpart of embroidery, as well as a non-realised trajectory of the practical work. After all, Torah binders were woven cloths before they were embroidered ones, just as my own embroidery was done on found woven cloths, my own swaddling.

The cultural significance and intricate beauty of embroidery and other textile crafts became evident for me only in England, through the works of Ann

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<sup>27</sup> On the history of the Israeli textile industry see: Shavit, Yaacov. (1991). *Textiles in Eretz Israel: 1854-1956*. Tel Aviv: The Israeli Textile Association.

<sup>28</sup> Parker, R. (1984).

<sup>29</sup> Albers, Anni. "On Weaving" in Adamson G. (2010) pp. 30-31

<sup>30</sup> Ibid p. 33

<sup>31</sup> Ibid



Wilson, Hew Locke, Tracy Emin and Grayson Perry. All the artists mentioned addressed cloth and its crafts as an inherently historicised and gendered domain, resorting to the relational terminology of Arendt – a domain of politics. In their works cloth, in its thoroughly material existence - in materials, techniques, appearance, locations and journeys - bore and embodied stories of colonialism and oppression, personal biographical narratives, stories of immigration, narratives of gender constructions. More so, the historicisation of cloth there did not end somewhere in the past: it returned back to the present moment, making histories, techniques and materials acutely contemporary. Those textiles definitely were “whole cloths” and from this perspective I wanted to explore my own pinkish flowery dowry.

Later on, the works of Geraldine Ondrizek and Elaine Raichek became more specific references. The embroidery of the two women, undoubtedly political in the above-mentioned sense, though differing from each other in terms of their subject matter, often departed from the starting-point of an existing historical textile format or technique.

Ondrizek used Torah binders’ format to juxtapose stitch with genetic imagery. In *Torah Binder, A Boy's Chromosomes* (Fig. 47), started in 1999, she borrowed the elongated format of the German binder, yet in her interpretation of the “birth certificate in cloth” she printed and embroidered on linen the chromosome test results imagery of her own son, underplaying the ritual side of the binder and stressing the problematics of blood, the certification of identity by the means of modern technology which provides readable transcription to the “text” in the blood stain. The work was included in a larger project *Family Photos, Linens and Alphabets* (Fig. 48) of 2002-3, which dealt with cloth, inscription and politics of cultural and biographical memory.<sup>32</sup> A juxtaposition of correlated and overlapping signs drawn from a written language, the visual representation of genetic code, the grain of silver-print photographs, and the stitches in embroidered cloth has grown into a reflection upon, and a materialised experience of, a contemporary self-sense of controversy with respect to Jewish identity as something solid and “verifiable”. Apparently “technical” transcripts of identity are inexorably embedded into the emotionally charged politics of personalised and inherently biographical histories.<sup>33</sup>

Raichek worked for years with the format of an embroidered sampler,

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<sup>32</sup> See: <<http://academic.reed.edu/art/faculty/ondrizek/>> The project was part of a residency in October 2002, at the Farhhochschule fur Kunst, Knustseminar, Schwabishhall, Germany.

<sup>33</sup> On Ondrizek's recent work see: Lafond, Clare. (2012, June). "Chromosome Painting: Discovering beauty in DNA". *UW Today*; available from: <<http://www.washington.edu/news/2012/06/28/chromosome-painting-discovering-beauty-in-dna/>>; ""Inner Space, Global Matters" exhibition held at UHCL | University of Houston-Clear Lake Newsroom". (2012); available from <<http://newsroom.uhcl.edu/news/inner-space-global-matters-exhibition-239813>>; "Panel Discussion for Geraldine Ondrizek exhibition at UHCL"; (2013); available from <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psbIUUwKryc>>.

critically examining echoes of 19<sup>th</sup> century femininity constructs in contemporary art<sup>34</sup> and addressing her own fractured sense of American Jewishness, reflected in family stories and proverbs in the installation *A Postcolonial Kinderhood*<sup>35</sup> (Figs. 49-50). The installation presented a recreation of her childhood bedroom in Brooklyn and included embroidered samplers, combining the “proper” imagery and alphabets from American Christian samplers together with proverbs and sayings which came from Reichek's family. These offered an ambivalent view on the substance of an American Jewish identity and the aspiration to assimilation into a “privileged” WASP culture.

I became an anthropologist of my own culture. I discovered in my own shifting dislocations within American Jewish life, as I know it and experience it, the same kind of shifting border territory between culture and social ethos that I had been exploring from a safe distance in nineteenth-century travel and science. The life of a middle-class Jewish girl from Brooklyn, I saw, encompassed the same sorts of ambiguities of belonging that the cultural theoretician Homi Bhabha has called “cultures ‘in-between’” – a crucial condition to understand at this particular moment of international social change.<sup>36</sup>

The strategy of appropriation of an historical format in order to explore Soviet myths and related post-Soviet personal identity narratives of the artist is present in the work of Grisha Bruskin. Of special interest to me was the project *Alefbet*,<sup>37</sup> where a series of Bruskin's drawings based on the Book of Tanya<sup>38</sup> were meticulously woven by him and a team of tapestry artists to compose a wall of five panels<sup>39</sup> (Fig. 51). In the tapestries, allegorical, medievalised images meet with

<sup>34</sup> *As She Likes It* from 2001; *MADAMI'MADAM* from 2000-02; *Ariadne's Thread* from 2008-2012

<sup>35</sup> *A Postcolonial Kinderhood*. 1994, installation at The Jewish Museum, New York. About the work see: Elaine Reichek; *Some Notes On A Postcolonial Kinderhood*; the Proceedings of the 2007 Conney Conference on Jewish Arts, available from:

<<http://conferences.library.wisc.edu/index.php/conney2007/issue/current>>;

Schwabsky, Barry. “Elaine Reichek: Jewish Museum”; *Artforum*, October 1994; p. 104. The installation was restaged in August 2013, as *Elaine Reichek: A Postcolonial Kinderhood Revisited*, see: <<http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/exhibitions/Elaine-Reichek#sthash.IqZxzvKb.dpuf>>.

On Reichek see: Reichek, Elaine & Frankel, David. (2000). *When this you see...* New York: George Braziller; Reichek, Elaine and Cooke, Lynne. (2000). *Elaine Reichek: At Home & In The World*. Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles.

<sup>36</sup> Reichek, E. (2007).

<sup>37</sup> *Alefbet*, 2001, tapestry, 288x210 cm, wool, linen, silk, in the collection of the Museum of Russian Avant-garde, Moscow.

<sup>38</sup> The works include extracts from *The Tanya* (תנין), a 1797 Hasidic text, by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1747-1812), the founder of Chabad Hasidism.

<sup>39</sup> On Alephbeth see: Bruskin, Grisha. (2008). *Grisha Bruskin: Alefbet Tapestry Project*. Saint Petersburg: Palace Editions; (2004). *Мой Народ Мир*. Музей Русского Авангарда. Магма. Also on Bruskin see: Sweet, Christopher in *Grisha Bruskin: General Instruction and Other Works*. ex. cat.,

handwritten text with blots and corrections. The works deal with mythology and at the same time, via the handwritten text, remain highly private<sup>40</sup> documentation of identification. Yet since both text and image are woven, this whole complex of identification is historiated, "imagined", shifted into the notational character that tapestry acquires in the contemporary world.<sup>41</sup> Thus the works become a continuous distancing from the subject matter, whereby the very notion of a personal (post-Soviet, Jewish) identity is viewed through the mythologised and mythologising surface of a weave. In 2011 at the Kaunas Textile Biennale I had a chance to befriend Liah Altman, a master weaver and a relative of Bruskin, who managed the whole *Alefbet* production. Altman's tapestries<sup>42</sup> combined family photographs from the 1940s with classical floral ornaments (Fig. 52), simultaneously creating mythologised and particularised reflections on her own identity as a Soviet Jewish woman and artist operating in the post-Soviet reality and its fragmented cultural space.<sup>43</sup>

In light of those "whole cloths" my own relation to embroidery and weaving changed, becoming more flexible and reflective. Embroidery became the other (not the Other) of weaving as weaving was conceptualised by Albers. The relationship between them, instead of antagonistic, became symbiotic, based on a "simple" understanding that embroidery attaches itself onto a woven cloth and covers it up, while the woven structure affects the shape and size of a stitch through its density. An embroidered cloth as a *subjectile* is produced in the tension between, or in the double bind of, the two operations that make it up, stretching between two sides of its own surface. Looking at the embroidered cloth in this way allowed me to work out the different trajectories<sup>44</sup> of the embroidery-weaving relationship in practical work.

Cultural burdens, narratives and associations of both techniques, instead of being established truths demanding ideological loyalty, became actors in a play staged and enacted with threads on cloth. Embroidery and weaving formed a distinctive dialectic of their own, a particularised case of "text" and "textile". I combined a free "glossary" of texts which appeared to be significant in the development of this dialectic. This "glossary" was instrumental in the working process, but was not included in the final edition of the thesis. Instead I decided to

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13/1-5/2/1994. Marlborough Gallery. New York; *Grisha Bruskin Painting and Sculpture*. ex. cat. 2-31/3/1990, Marlborough Gallery. New York.

<sup>40</sup> "It is like a facsimile of notes. In a certain sense the entire structure of the work has a similarly private character" in Bruskin, Grisha. "The Alephbeth Tapestry or the Continuation of Language" in Bruskin, Grisha. (2008). p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> See: Groys, Boris. "Allegorical Man" in Bruskin, Grisha. (2008). p. 26.

<sup>42</sup> *Memory and Forgetfulness*, 2009-2010, tapestry, 120x170 cm and 120x240 cm, wool, flax.

<sup>43</sup> See: Kaunas Biennial Textile '11: Rewind. (2011). ex.cat. pp. 77-76.

<sup>44</sup> It is possible to refer here also to Bal's suggestion of travelling as "a heuristically productive endeavour. Instead of definitions, a trajectory is proposed." Bal, M. (2002) p. 60

leave it as an appendix<sup>45</sup>, via which it is possible to follow the train of thought - which travels in between the textuality of weave and a frivolity of embroidery.

### **The *subjectile*: surfaces of shame, resistance and desire**

As I decided to remake the binder, I intended to remain loyal to the basic idea of reusing a swaddling cloth. At my disposal were my own swaddling cloths (Fig. 53). Turned into pillowcases, which had served our family through the last thirty five years, they travelled with us from Russia to Israel in 1989. When I discovered that the old pillowcases were in fact my swaddling cloths, they were nearly downgraded to dust cloths. I collected every piece of them from my mother and grandmother, together with our old Soviet bedlinen, which for me was closely linked to pillowcases. This was to be my material, like the binder of 1836, a firm starting point for the direction of the practice. It was a location which would not change, to which it is possible to return, but impossible to remove or ignore.

By that time (2007) the shameless confessional quilts of Tracey Emin appealed to me in their soft and colourful brutality<sup>46</sup> (Fig. 54), yet aesthetically my own previous work lingered in a very different realm. Cloth, as a bearer of memory, was of concern for me for a long time, but the swaddling cloths were spotted pink and printed with pink blooming roses with tiny emerald leaves. The bedlinen fabrics were pink, peach and thinly striped with white and vinous red. This was my "whole cloth": mundane, cute, girly, mass-produced woven textiles, some of them so ordinary and common in their design and presence that it would be difficult to classify them. Pennina Barnett noted on this mundanity of cloth when discussing the work of Maria Chevskva, Anne Wilson and Verdy Yahooda: "the cloth ... doesn't fuss, it just is."<sup>47</sup>

My previous practice, which already included the referencing and re-interpreting of historical artefacts, turned to sources of great visual complexity and sophistication: Turkish carpets and Persian manuscripts (Figs. 55-56). The swaddling cloths were different in every possible respect. As keepers of memory they were much less inspiring and much more challenging, not least because of their outrageous closeness to me.

The simplicity of design in my swaddling cloths offered a key to the universal conventions of surface distribution in textiles: a plain woven cloth, a

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<sup>45</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>46</sup> As Catherine Harper puts it: "It is somehow the very homeliness of Tracey Emin's blankets that I adore, more than their allusion to negotiations of the feminine in Western culture, more than their performance of the monstrous feminine, more than their impermanent textile challenge to the authority of the wall, and more than their obsessive repetition of texts and motifs. I love their radiant honesty, their frankly work - a day feel, I love that they seem to be as how - and - tell of how Emin felt on the day she made each one." in Harper, Catherine. (2004). "I Need Tracy Emin Like I Need God". *Selvedge*. (01) (22-25).

<sup>47</sup> Barnett, Pennina. "Stain". in Pajaczkowska, Claire, Ward, Ivan, eds. (2008). *Shame and Sexuality, Psychoanalysis and Visual Culture*. Oxford and New York: Routledge. p. 203.

simple stripe and a half-drop diamond repeat, which was present in the roses pattern. With such simple geometry and basic flower images, those textiles appeared almost archetypal in their look and in their function as body wrappers and comforters. At the same time, they were extremely particular and historicised, fabrics produced in a specific time and place, and those same fabrics became part of biographical narratives in our family.

Towards the end of the 1980s in Pskov, just as in many other places all over the USSR, those narratives inexorably and increasingly related to emigration, to the ado of preparations towards it. Bedlinen figured there, particularly as quantities of stuff to be packed and taken with. New bedlinen and towels were all brought over, printed cotton with simple flowery and dotted designs, produced in Russia, striped and checked coarse linen from Lithuania. Bedlinen, old and new, was sealed into black polyethylene, then packed into boxes, then deposited into wooden crates.

*In the mild asphyxiation of emigration dreams, I've spoken with my grandfather about books, how is it going to be once we unpack them in a new place, who will stand by who; with my mother – about bedlinen, how new and shiny patterns will take their place by the old, worn, soft and most favourite of sheets and pillowcases. Books and bedlinen were inseparable, because we all read in bed. It took time until the dreams began to come true, since the crates were shipped by sea and took more than six months to arrive to their port of destination. During that time, we have used bedlinen provided by the Jewish Agency, two sets that were delightfully modern and non-creasing. Newly arrived “Russian” women exchanged news during Hebrew lessons and in super-markets: “Do you know that they do not iron the sheets here?” It didn't stop most of them from ironing; some (including my mother) still haven't given up. Those cotton-polyester sheets and pillowcases (quadrangular, but not square, as in Russia) produced in India, brightly coloured with orange, purple, green and yellow shapeless patches, are now part of our family pantheon of bedlinen, laying in the stack with once-new Russian and Lithuanian sheets.*

Ironing was an inseparable part of the Soviet bodily discipline in clothing and home textiles, an attribute of the legitimate official good taste triad of

"neatness, tidiness and cleanliness".<sup>48</sup> In its initial, Soviet, social setting it can be viewed as a tool of social control, a disciplining measure which aims to establish the primacy of the collective over the individual body.<sup>49</sup> In a different social setting, in immigration, the ironing of sheets became an element of an unwritten code of resistance, which silently and mostly invisibly outlined the ironing women as different, those belonging to a distinctive group which wants to keep its distinctiveness in the everyday life. The question: "Do you iron sheets?" through the years became a kind of password, which, no matter what the answer was, shrouded some sort of a mutual clandestine understanding.

A feeling of clandestineness in relation to everyday aspects of dealing with and using cloth/clothes forms a part of the closeness, which I previously called "outrageous". This feeling originates in the discourse of modesty and shame, which in the Soviet social space extended into everyday life as such, and specifically into its bodily aspects and the cloths that accompanied it.<sup>50</sup> Lingerie was one such, publicly invisible, area of shame.<sup>51</sup> Bedlinen, in a sense, belonged to the same discourse and scene of intimacy, the other side of the monitored official glamour of news and ceremonies. Yet, as opposed to Soviet lingerie, which presented a very limited range of cuts and types, bedlinen was based on the enormous pull of printed cotton, which was present in the USSR even in the hardest times.

The manufacture of printed fabrics was highly developed in czarist Russia, and, in spite of breaks in production during the revolutionary times and Second World War, it survived and developed through the Soviet era. A distinctive language of elaborate floral and geometric patterns developed in Russia towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>52</sup> originating from the craft of icon decoration<sup>53</sup> and Russian native

<sup>48</sup> Тихомирова, Анна. (2007). Советское в постсоветском: размышления о гибридности современной российской культуры потребления одежды. *Неприкосновенный запас: Дебаты о политике и культуре*, 4 (54). Retrieved from <<http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2007/54/ti10.html>>, 9/2/2013

[Anna Tichomirova: "The Soviet in the Post-Soviet: Reflections on a Hybridity of the Contemporary Russian Culture of Clothing Consumption"]

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Деготь, Екатерина, Пепперштейн Павел. (2000). "Диалог о стыде" в: *Память тела. Нижнее белье советской эпохи*. Каталог выставки. Стр. 48-56

[Ekaterina Degot, Pavel Peperstein "A Dialogue about Shame" in *The Memory of Body: The Lingerie of the Soviet Era*, ex. cat.]

<sup>51</sup> Гурова, Ольга. (2008). *Советское нижнее бельё: между идеологией и повседневностью*. Новое Литературное Обозрение.

[Olga Gurova; *The Soviet Lingerie: Between Ideology and the Everyday*]

<sup>52</sup> Игнат'ева, Т. И. (2009). "Музей художественных тканей МГТУ им. А.Н.Косыгина. Личность как объект экспозиции: Эмиль Циндель." "Музей художественных тканей МГТУ им. А.Н.Косыгина. Личность как объект экспозиции: Демидовы, де Лассаль, Жаккард, Кондрашовы, Ворт". *Рынок легкой промышленности*. н. 66. Retrieved from <<http://rustm.net/catalog/article/1558.html>>, 9/2/2013

[Ignat'eva T. E. "The Museum of Textiles of the Kosygin Moscow State Textile Institute. Persona as an Object of Exposition: Emile Zindel", "The Museum of Textiles of the Kosygin Moscow State Textile Institute. Persona as an Object of Exposition: Demidov, de Lassal, Jacquard, Kondrashov, Vort".]

<sup>53</sup> Соболев, Н. Н. (1912) *Набойка в России: история и способ работы*. Москва: Сытин. стр. 16-17. [Sobolev N. N. Block Print in Russia: the History and Method of Work]

block print, as well as from European and naturalised Eastern designs.<sup>54</sup> Modified by the mechanization of production, pattern design passed through the extreme reductivist geometrization of revolutionary modernism of the 1920s, evolving into the narrative propaganda textiles, in which “the rose was replaced by the Red Army soldier”.<sup>55</sup> In the preface to the exhibition catalogue from 1928, featuring propaganda prints, the art critic Fedorov-Davidov referred to cloth as an “ideological commodity”, capable of “appealing straight to emotion, past the logical associations, being perceived purely reflexively and leaving its imprint on the very foundations of psychic life and public behaviour of man.”<sup>56</sup>

The ideological message was also encoded in cloth through the actual use of text and number, in monochrome designs based on the traditional use of engraving techniques, wherein slogans such as “proletarians of all countries, unite!” were inscribed in the delicate rendering of thin lines inside a familiar and seemingly “innocent” floral design.<sup>57</sup> Designs dedicated to the five year plan were issued, featuring a dense, often barely readable, entanglement of numbers 5 and 4 (five years in four) or 5 and 2.5 (five years in two and a half).<sup>58</sup> Those ideological commodities,<sup>59</sup> magically and “literally wrapping the body of the citizen and his everyday life into the Soviet ideology”,<sup>60</sup> were dismissed as irrelevant at the beginning of the 1930s,<sup>61</sup> together with the remainder of the constructivist project. At this point the new Soviet pattern design re-appropriated flowers and “safe” obedient geometry, evolving by the code of “neatness, tidiness and cleanliness” into a simplified, but highly diverse range of basic small-scale patterns with flowers, geometric shapes, dots, stripes, checks etc.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. pp. 26-86

<sup>55</sup> Каратеева, Т. (2011). “Красноармеец вместо розы: текстиль для советского человека”. *Теория моды: Одежда Тело Культура*. 21. Retrieved from <<http://www.nlobooks.ru/node/2695>>, 9/2/2013.

[Karateeva T. “A Red Army Soldier Instead of a Rose: Textiles for the Soviet Man”]

For stylistic and compositional analyses see: Yasinskaya, I. (1983). *Soviet Textile Design of the Revolutionary Period*. London: Thames & Hudson. pp. 12-23.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in: Карева, Галина.; “Третья пролетарская столица” in Остаркова, И. ред. (2010). *100% Иваново - Агитационный текстиль 1920х - 1930х из собрания Ивановского государственного историко-краеведческого музея им. Д. Г. Бурлыгина*. Москва: Первая публикация. стр. 59

[Galina Kareva “The Third Proletarian Capital” in Ostrakova I. ed.; *100% Ivanovo – Propaganda Textiles of 1920s-1930s from the Collection of the Ivanovo State Historical Museum in the name of D. G. Burilyn*.] This wonderful publication, which presents the fullest up-to-date collection of Russian propaganda textiles, can be viewed online at: <<http://1p.fondpotanin.ru/about/publish/item7.html>>

<sup>57</sup> Such as the designs by S. V. Loginov from 1925-6. See: Kareva, G. (2010). p. 49.

<sup>58</sup> Such as designs by E.E. Mityaev and D. N. Preobrazjenskaya made between 1929 and 1932.

See: Акинша, Константин. “Идеология как Орнамент”. в: Остаркова, И. ред. (2010) стр. 98.

[Konstantin Akinsha, “Ideology as Ornament” in Ostrakova I. (2010)]

<sup>59</sup> Introduction of propaganda textiles was preceded by a removal from the printing rolls all over the mills of the USSR of tens of thousands of classic floral patterns. See: Блюмин, Марина. “Феномен агитационного текстиля: опыт Ивановских мастеров” в: Остаркова, И. (2010) стр. 23-24

[Marina Blumin, “The Phenomena of Propaganda Textiles: The Experience of Ivanovo Masters” in Ostrakova, I. (2010)]

<sup>60</sup> Уиддис, Эмма. “Человек есть то что он носит: тематический текстильный рисунок и формирование советского человека” в: Остаркова, И. (2010) стр. 102

[Emma Widdis, “A Man is What He Wears: the Thematic Textile Drawing and the Formation of a Soviet Man” in Ostrakova I. (2010)]

<sup>61</sup> See: Kareva, G. (2010) p. 59

In fact, the production of basic geometric and floral patterns has never ceased since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although during the hardship of the post-revolutionary years, once textile mills of Moscow, Ivanovo, Serpuchovo and other towns returned to action, it was diminished significantly and mills<sup>62</sup> were only able to offer the simplest of old designs.<sup>63</sup> Minuscule basic patterns featuring a hammer and a sickle among spikelets were printed in the 1920s.<sup>64</sup> Small-scale geometric patterns with “newer” fill<sup>65</sup> were developed as well. I use brackets, because basic geometry is an ever-present element of textile design and innovation here is often dependent on a particular context, such as constructivism. The “new” here is ideological, which does not diminish at the slightest the cultural significance, volume and quality of the constructivist project.

The 1930s re-appropriation of the exuberant florality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century patterns, accompanied by a dismissive criticism of propaganda textiles, marked the rise of Stalinism, and a turn in the total official aesthetic agenda, labelled as “socialist realism”. The avant-garde art project of changing the reality was fully adopted by Stalin.<sup>66</sup> The appearance of the socialist symbols on cloth openly challenged the exclusive party hegemony over this project. Hammer and sickle was evacuated from the cloth, which once again was filled with tiny flowers, dots, circles and stripes. Even if the cloth gave away its power as an omnipresent “ideological commodity”, as the revolutionary drama and the events of the Second World War gave way to the strange normality of the Soviet everyday existence, this existence was nevertheless enveloped in its own cloth.

*As early as I can remember myself reading, this memory is wrapped in cloths that now figure in my work. Spotty swaddling cloths made into pillowcases, similar motley sheets and covers. Curled in bed with a book among the soft medley of cloths, this has always been my best embodiment of happiness. This custom has been engendered by my mother and grandmother; often scorched by my grandfather; not for the reading itself, but for the rosy entourage of meekness and careless self-indulgence, unbearable for his vigorous bodily discipline of a soldier and a pedagogue. The duty of reading then, as if forever appeared to me enveloped in a pinkish patterned cloth; black lines of text in*

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<sup>62</sup> In 1921 286 of 398 mills registered with the professional union in Russia were in operation. See: Yasinskaya, I. (1983) p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> See Semen Burylin designs for Ivanovo mills of 1924-25 featured in Yasinskaya, I. (1983) and in Kareva, G. (2010) p. 48

<sup>65</sup> See samples of simple geometric patterns in: Blumin, M. (2010) pp. 16-17

<sup>66</sup> Groys, Boris. (1992). *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*; trans. Charles Rougle. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. pp. 34-36.



*the double spread of a book coincided and laid upon the thin  
vinous stripes of a duvet cover. The rhythmic pleasure of the  
text, the flight of imagination, were conditioned and protected  
by the pervasive pattern and caressing texture of cloth.*

My ex-pillowcases and once-swaddling cloths were pieces of this cloth, produced in one of the Ivanovo mills. I have managed to find some very similar samples in a 1959 catalogue of Soviet textiles from various mills in the Ivanovo region: Trehgorka,<sup>67</sup> Vera Slutskaya Cotton Printing Mill, Kalininsky Mill,<sup>68</sup> Tejkovskaya Mill (Figs. 57-59). Trehgorka and Kalininsky are still active today. Some basic floral designs similar in spirit are still produced in Kohma Mill near Ivanovo (Fig. 60). Being notoriously anonymous and mundane in their appearance,

the unassuming material base of life that 'importance'  
commonly overlooks<sup>69</sup>

those textiles nevertheless were hopelessly bound to my intimate and unique autobiographical experience. They were:

the opposite of the unique... contingent, empty of  
meaning, tokens of endlessly repeatable production, of  
an infinite series.<sup>70</sup>

For me the presence of their patterns neutralised a possibility of a romanticised, survivalist fascination with the Cloth as an ancient or timeless, basic and pure superstructure. The cloths were "tainted" with stripes, flowers and dots, they were mass-produced and marked by a design, which was meant to serve and accommodate the taste of a collective, of the "masses". On the other hand they were commonly personal, mundanely autobiographical, in the "almost" spirit of materials in Emin's quilts:

Again the sewing is evident, the markings of hand-  
labouring, of care, of industry. Again, the almost-kitsch,  
almost-nostalgia of cut-out, sewn-on flowers. Again,  
that blankety, felty softness that comes of old fabrics,  
many times washed and dried, many times loved on,  
laughed over, stained and torn.<sup>71</sup>

As subjectiles, thus, they were particularly poignant, since in their appearance

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<sup>67</sup> [http://www.trehgorka.ru/tk\\_postel](http://www.trehgorka.ru/tk_postel)

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.ttm-textile.ru/proizv.html>

<sup>69</sup> Bryson, Norman. (1989). *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still-Life*, London: Reaktion Books. p. 61, quoted in Bal, M. (2001) p. 57.

<sup>70</sup> Bal, M. (2001) p. 57.

<sup>71</sup> Harper, C. (2004) pp. 22-25.

alone they undermined the comfortable possibility of an “original” work telling a solipsistic, unrelated story.

### **My stories and their design**

I dedicated the embroidery to my female genealogy, to the women who had most interaction with the cloths, reflecting on the link between my grandmother, mother and myself. Following the formulation on the binder I had to edit our life-stories, relating them to the most important elements in it, reconfigured as female: names, dates and marriage. Before proceeding to formulating the actual text to be embroidered I wrote about those elements in my grandmother’s and my own biographies:

*My grandmother, Sarah Maximovsky, known as Sonya, received her identification card upon arrival to Israel in 1990. Due to a mistake in the registers of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, the space for “nationality” was printed with the words “not registered”. Henceforth, Sarah, a surgeon who chose not to change her name during the “Killer Doctors” affair in the end of Stalin’s regime in Leningrad, has become an unidentifiable agent in terms of national belonging.*

*I received my ID in 1993, reaching the age of sixteen. Due to a mistake in the registers of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the year of my birth was printed as 00. Henceforth a doubt is imposed on my being in the world.*

*In 1997 I wanted to marry. The Rabbinate asked to verify my Jewish decent. I showed my ID, which stated in the space of nationality: Jewish. Not convinced, they demanded to speak with my grandmother. They called her and asked in Russian: “Is your name Sarah?” “Yes”, - she replied. “Have you always been Sarah or have you just become Sarah?” Sarah, who due to her age had hearing deficiency and was anxious for not answering adequately, replied: “What? Ahhh... Yes, I have always been Sarah.” They then asked her to speak Yiddish, and she spoke as well as she could remember. Thereupon it was decided that I am Jewish.*

The described events relate to the troubles of immigrants' identity re-

acquisition in Israel, when during the issue of passports and ID cards mistakes can instantly create new identities. Taking into account the special sensitivity of nationality, this process can be traumatic. The problematic creative power of a written word or number in the official document further generates anxieties when applied to dates, such as with the case of a mistake in my own ID. The power of the state converges with the power of its male-dominated official religious institutions, when dealing with the registration of birth, marriage and death.<sup>72</sup> Orthodox and mostly reactionary in their view of Judaism, those institutions exert their power over a population which does not necessarily share their worldview, but has to conform due to the lack of official alternative.

Tension arises when it comes to immigrants, especially the big waves of immigration from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. Both bride and groom have to pass the "Jewish check", to prove their Jewish descent in the religious council to obtain permission to marry, while the Israeli passport issued by the state upon arrival is not valid as a proof of descent. The procedure of descent verification is obtrusive and traumatising. The state allows entry, but refuses its new citizens their full civil rights, suggesting various degrees of acceptance into Israeli society. This problematic guided me when writing the short passage. I tried to address it in a way that would emulate the sparsity of the official parlance, avoiding emotions, as if just presenting an account of events.

The next step was to formulate the Hebrew inscription on the binder, increasing and exaggerating the reference to the style of the original formula and the passport. Here is the result in English translation:

*Sarah called Sonya, daughter of Shlomo Lioznov from Nevel  
born under a good constellation on Sabbath 1<sup>st</sup> Heshvan 5680  
by abbreviated era the name [god] is not written [stated]*

*Akaterina, whom they wanted to name Esther; daughter of  
Vasily Lavorko from Briansk, born under a good constellation  
on Monday 8 Elul zero zero the name [god] did not write  
[register]*

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<sup>72</sup> Those three issues have been in the hands of the Orthodox religious authorities in Israel since the establishment of the state in 1948, according to the status quo agreed between David Ben Gurion and the religious parties in 1947. The status quo was intended to unite the Jewish people in Israel and avoid a religious and social divide. As a matter of fact since its establishment, and especially in the recent years, the status quo has been one of the most acutely debated issues in the Israeli political scene. See:

אלוני, שולמית. (1970). *ההסדר: ממדינת חוק למדינת הלכה*. תל אביב: אותפז.

[Aloni, Shulamit *The Regulation: From the State of Law to the State of Halakha*]

Ben Rafael, Eliezer. (2002). *Jewish Identities: Fifty Intellectuals Answer Ben-Gurion*. Leyden and Boston: Brill.

Cohen, Asher and Susser, Bernard. (2000). *Israel and the Politics of Jewish Identity: The Secular-Religious Impasse*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press; Neuberger, Benjamin. (1997). *Religion and Democracy in Israel*. Jerusalem: The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies.

That inscription transgresses the dominating male narrative customarily told by the binders. To stress the interconnectedness of religion, authority, masculinity and the act of inscribing words and dates, the blessing formula has been changed. God in the original formula is designated as “the name”, a traditional substitution of Jehovah, which I used to point to the erasure of identity in my grandmother's passport: “the name is not written” (Fig. 61) and as a presence of an anonymous force preventing for the identity re-emergence in my own: “the name did not write” (Fig. 62). The whole formulation thus has been recharged in absurd mode, emphasizing the discrepancy between the vital actualities of birth and naming and the incongruence of their registration and authorisation. In Hebrew the institute of registration and the physical act of writing down are designated by the same verb רשם (RSHM), a feature that I used to further stress the negative creative power of the bureaucratic machinery. It is the same feature though that also became the path of subversion and criticality when the inscription had to be transposed onto fabric with needle and thread. (Figs. 63-63a).

### **Rhythms, letters and flowers**

The embroidery became a project of its own, giving rise to questions of both a practical and conceptual nature. Those questions reflected back into the work, changing its design in terms of appearance and production set-up. Since all of the fabrics I used were patterned or marked in different ways, in the working process I realised that I need to develop some sort of linkage between the script, colour and techniques appropriated from the Fürth binder and the specific character of the fabric surfaces. By changing the fabric surface or the scripts and their colours I actually transgressed the purity of the appropriation experiment, as both components lost their initial total difference and estrangement from each other. Yet the logic of work is different from the logic of ideas. Once an idea is worked on (literally), becomes material, then a series of acts through materials take the lead, modifying and specifying “the idea behind” them. The modification of fabric surfaces and of scripts through embroidery was such a work of specification, when the appropriation move was not clarified, but particularised.

This particularisation went through several significant moments of encounter between the appropriated scripts and the fabrics. The outline of a Hebrew letter ה embroidered with shiny olive silk goes over a pinkish printed rose with three emerald leaves (Fig. 64); the same outline separates a shape in a striped cloth (Fig. 65), etc. The more stylistically remote (especially in view of the Fürth model) were the elements that came together, the more significant and fascinating became their encounter, which in most cases for me was a trigger for

modification of the actors on the scene – embroidered letters and printed elements. The length of cloth was enough to experiment with a whole range of situations, from the initial “pure” juxtaposition of an appropriated letter and the ready-made cloth, to the entire modification of both. In that sense the binder became a real sampler, from which particular situations could later be extracted and explored in a separate work.

The modification of printed patterns was triggered by the textural richness of the embroidery; as a result the “original” cloth was reformulated in the spirit of the autobiography inscribed on it. The discrepancy between the juxtaposed colour palettes of the cloth (pink, white, wine red, emerald) and of the embroidery (beige, white, cream, olive) felt disturbing at first, to the extent that I decided to further aggravate it by way of some entirely foreign colours and materials. Shiny blue, orange and dark green viscose, very thin in comparison to the silks I had used, allowed a more detailed treatment of the roses and made the meeting points of the embroidered letter and the printed motive unmistakably visible (Fig. 66). Embroidering the flowers activated them; from just “being there” they began to influence and “grab” the letters.

The colours came from the textiles designed in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Russian avant-garde artists<sup>73</sup> and Ukrainian folk embroiderers<sup>74</sup> from the villages of Verbovka and Skopzi (Figs. 67-68). I encountered this episode in the history of embroidery in Russia through a catalogue of the 2009 show called *Handiwork (Рукоделие)* at the Proun Gallery in Moscow. Unique in its approach, the show presented embroideries and designs from the 1910s through to the most recent works with embroidery in the contemporary Russian art scene. The exhibition attempted to draw an outline, making a link between the avant-garde art and embroidery in revolutionary Russia and the role of embroidery in current Russian art.<sup>75</sup> The majority of the avant-garde embroideries that were exhibited possessed a fictional character, as they were contemporary recreations made according to paper-based designs from the 1920s and 1930s, which were never realised (Fig. 69).

Names, my own and that of my father, clearly signify the presence of a foreign, Russian, blood in the story, thus destabilising further the purity of the sense of a Jewish identity usually associated with Judaica items (Fig. 70). In both panels with the words “name not written/registered” the “NOT”, *нл*, is over-embroidered with the whole of the inscription repeating itself, in a minuscule

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<sup>73</sup> Alexandra Exter, Nina Genke-Miller, Nadezda Udaltzova, Evgenia Pribyl'skaya and others.

<sup>74</sup> Paraska Vlasenko, Gannah Sobachko-Shostak, Glikeria Tzibul'eva, Maria Primachenko and others.

<sup>75</sup> *Рукоделие*. (2009). каталог выставки. Галерея Проун, 5-7/2009, куратор Марина Лошак. Also see: Похвала Плахте. (2009). каталог выставки, Галерея Проун, 7-9/2009, куратор Марина Лошак; Myzelev, Alla. “Ukrainian Craft Revival: From Craft to Avant-Garde, From Folk to National” in Alfoldy, S. (2007) pp. 191-212.

colourful script, so that the rejection signified by the word remains ambiguous, activated and erased simultaneously (Fig. 71).

The idea of constructing the big letters out of small ones developed in the early stage of the project, back in summer 2008, when I did some initial experiments with putting the Hebrew letters on the piece of cloth with the roses (Fig. 72). Already then I was intrigued by the way in which the stitch and a particular width of the thread modify the shape of the letter. I was working at a very small scale, so that the stitch was held well on the cloth, without long floats. The signature of the Fürth binder maker fascinated me as an autograph. It was embroidered over a handwritten signature, so that the embroidery shape kept a feeling of a freely moving hand and the flow of ink. The embroidery itself was done in a very different manner, as a meticulous and methodical tracing that covered the "original" handwritten line. It was done with minuscule horizontal stitches; by covering the line they gradually built it up, "revealed" it.

At first I wanted not so much to copy this way of working, as to take the minuscule detail into the autographic mode not as a tracer, but as the actual container of the "original" handwriting. I began to embroider the name Sarah in small letters, using horizontal, vertical and diagonal strokes of thread to compose the letter, experimenting with additions of colour as a differentiator between words. The scale became so small that the letters were barely readable. In this stage, facing unreadability, I began to think of the small letters as the building blocks of the larger ones, those that will be approachable, generalised, readable and "clear". They will carry within them the potential of the highly particularised detail, almost unreadable and opaque, dissipating in the multitude of its minuscule traits.

I also had in mind the general concern with letters as building blocks of the world, as expressed in the Jewish mystical thought. According to Zohar<sup>76</sup> any Hebrew letter has seventy aspects or "faces"<sup>77</sup> which can be revealed in the process of tireless exegesis.<sup>78</sup> In many binders the traditional inscription is often reinterpreted by means of extending into the realm of image, when illustrations replace words, and free space inside the letters is used as an opportunity to insert a decoration, a note, or a clarification regarding the meaning of the whole word.<sup>79</sup> This interplay of text and image is formally staged as interplay of line and stitch, wherein the ink-bred graphicality of writing attains tangible materiality, thickness and texture of a thread. The writing supplemented speech - the words recited

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<sup>76</sup> One of the most influential Kabbalistic texts written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Spain.

<sup>77</sup> See: Scholem, Gershom. G. (1993). *Основные Течения в Еврейской Мистике*. Иерусалим: Библиотека Алия. p. 268.

[Scholem, Gershom. G. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*]

Scholem, Gershom. G. (1965). *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*. New York: Schocken Books. p. 62

<sup>78</sup> Ibid

<sup>79</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett B. (1982) pp. 140-143

during the ceremony - and then the embroidery supplemented the text written on the fabric. This supplementation, or *textography*, as in the signature, opened another layer<sup>80</sup> of interpretation; seeing the letters and editing the story that was to be told by their means.

Additional references were the works of Alighiero e Boetti and Soviet propaganda textiles with number codes of the five year plan. The work of Boetti, handily titled "the satirical caballist",<sup>81</sup> was of interest as a reflection on tautology inherent in names/codes, which results in an ambiguity of relationship between name, identity and person. I refer here to his early works with Arte Povera, the *Manifesto* poster of 1967 (Fig. 73), where the names of Arte Povera<sup>82</sup> artists were juxtaposed with graphical signs of unknown meaning,<sup>83</sup> and the changing of his own name in 1972 by adding "and" between proper and family name: Alighiero e Boetti.<sup>84</sup> The colourful embroideries with texts produced in Afghanistan were of interest in terms of reactivation in the art context and thus a politicisation of a specific craft culture, and the continuing experimentation with language and its visual codification by means of this craft.

An early step to this direction, is the 1971 work, *16 dicembre 2040 - 11 luglio 2023* (Fig. 74), where imaginary future date of Boetti's death and the hundred anniversary of his real birth were embroidered on two square canvases with coloured threads in the midst of flowers and leafs framed by a zigzag ornament. Something between a cushion and a memorial plate, the first work produced for Boetti by the Afghani embroiderers, it can be seen as an act of a reflective nostalgia, a transposition of private, if imagined, information into the material and political context of another culture. It is a codification of yet to happen events in a language transmitting a particular "pastness", which delivers the information, the dates, in a dispersed, fractured manner, so that they appear lost among the differently coloured shapes of the flowers.

The later embroideries produced in Afghanistan are nostalgic in the sense that they reach towards a magical, imaginary synthesis of language and image, arriving at the state of a constructed dispersion of the text and its message.

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<sup>80</sup> Scholem G.G. (1993) p. 268 "...revealing in the Torah all the more new layers of a concealed meaning..."

<sup>81</sup> Fox, Dan. (2000). "Alighiero e Boetti". *Frieze Magazine*, (50).

<[http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/alighiero\\_e\\_boetti/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/alighiero_e_boetti/)> (accessed on 31/3/2013).

On Boetti also see: Godfrey, Mark and Boetti, Alighiero. (2011). *Alighiero E Boetti*. London and New Haven: Yale University Press; Boetti, Alighiero et al. (2006). *Alighiero E Boetti*. Turin: U. Allemandi; Sauzeau Boetti, Anne-Marie. (2003). *Alighiero E Boetti: Shaman-Showman*. Köln: König.

<sup>82</sup> The poster appeared in December 1967 on the occasion of Boetti's solo exhibition in Genoa, at the outset of the group formation. The first Arte Povera show opened in October 1967 curated by Germano Celant; the manifesto "Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerilla War" written by Celant, appeared in November of the same year.

<sup>83</sup> "Boetti's Manifesto deliberately set out to frustrate expectations of transparency, explicitness and direct public communication in favour of opacity, ambiguity and the adoption of a highly private, indeed secret, code that only he could decipher." in: Lumley, R. (2004) p. 6.

<sup>84</sup> See: "I am I, He is He: Alighiero Boetti" in Lumley, R. (2004) pp. 68-69.

This dispersion, the changing "face" of the letter, is kept in the highly "designed", straight angle grid of the works, driven by the relations between the colours and proportions of the letter and the cell which houses it (Fig. 75).<sup>85</sup> Even though disparate historically and contextually, five year plan textiles are possessed by a similar, incantational, magical, synthetic formula, striving to embed "the message" by grinding it into an ideologically charged colourful farina.

In my embroidery a relationship developed between the conglomeration of the small letters-blocks and the outline of the full letters, which comprised the readable inscription. I wanted to juxtapose the "original" character of the letters, i.e. outlines in chain stitch, with decorative or flat satin stitch filling, and the newly developed style of small letters building the big one. To a certain extent it was a matter of the copying technology as I was transferring the letters outlines onto fabric using paper cut-outs (Fig. 76). The small letters then had to find a relationship with the outline in terms of order and proportion. Throughout the binder I tried different combinations, when the entire inscription in small script repeatedly filled the empty spaces inside the big letters.

Two main combinations can be discerned, those based on the plain or the all-over patterned fabric and those based on the striped one:

Plain or all-over pattern:

1. The small letters, divided into words by colours, followed the shapes of the decorative lozenges inside the thick horizontal bars (as in *שרה, שלמה, נולדה* in the first and second panels, Fig. 77).
2. The words composed of small letters were arranged inside the horizontal bars in a composition, that referenced Jewish magical amulets with text (the letter *ה* in the word *נולדה* "born" in the second panel, Fig. 78).
3. Minuscule inscription in single colour covering the entire empty space inside horizontal bars of the big letter in reference to the Torah scroll text, which is written without intervals between words (the family name *ליוזנוב* Lioznov in the second panel, letter *ב* "in" in the third panel, part of *ביום* "in the day", the names *אקטרינה* Akaterina and *וסילי* Vasily in the fifth panel, Fig. 79).

Striped pattern:

1. The inscription is ordered vertically in columns inside the stripes, filling the chain stitch outlines entirely. The letter's width is accommodated to the width of the stripe. Colour is used to differentiate between the columns. (The letter *ב* in the word *שבת* "Sabbath" in the third panel, Fig. 80).
2. The inscription is ordered vertically in columns inside the stripes. No outline

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<sup>85</sup> Works such as: *Ordine e disordine (Order and disorder, 1973)*; *ALIGHIERO BOETTI ALIGHIERO BOETTI ALIGHIERO BOETTI ALIGHIERO BOETTI (1989)*.



is present; the minuscule inscription forms the letter without the boundary line. The letter's width is accommodated to the width of the stripe. Colour is used to differentiate between the columns, including the use of opposing colours, red for white stripe, white for red stripe. (The letters א and נ in the date in the seventh panel, Fig. 81).

Working on the plain or all-over pattern provided solutions based on a line and a horizontal dispersion of colour. The outline was essential to keep the letter together at first; later on, as different possibilities were tried, the playful relation between the lines of smaller text and the shape of the big letter was developed in both words אל, "not". As already mentioned, in the fourth panel, the outline is present and erased at the same time, since the white outline of the letter ל is covered over with the lines of the small text divided into words by colour, while the outline of the letter א is embroidered on top of those lines (Fig. 71). The second occurrence of the "not" in the last panel uses a different approach. Both outlines are covered entirely by the small text in dark grey. The big letters are seen through because inside the outline the small text changes colour into orange (Fig. 71). Both "nots" were done towards the very end of the work, comprising the experiences gathered in all of the panels. For me they started to signify almost separate, poem-like pieces of work, completed within themselves, thus both were dated once finished.

Another equally important method of letter construction was based on the striped pattern. The stripes, which were vertically positioned in the panels, promulgated the idea of a column, a vertical arrangement of letters. They provided a highly visible reference of proportion and rhythm and a contrasting alteration of colour, white and red. The big letter could be constructed by filling the stripes with small letters, making the outline unnecessary and fully adhering to the principle of a building block (Fig. 81). Another approach was through selective filling in or covering the alternating stripes with horizontal stitches, technically returning to the way the signature on the binder was embroidered (Fig. 82). There were no pre-existing marks on the fabric, just the basic geometric arrangement of stripes, which potentially could provide the guidelines for any marks or signs. Thus both methods of filling the stripes can be described as "revelation through covering".

Such approach was inevitably constructivist in spirit, suggesting an elemental transcendent geometry at the basis of any embroidered visual message, and indeed, the work of El (Lazar) Lissitzky came to my mind during the embroidery. Lissitzky's oeuvre was in many ways linked to Judaism and Kaballah.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Abramsky, C. "El Lissitzky as Jewish Illustrator and Typographer" in *Studio International*. v.172 (82); Birnholz, A. C. (1973). "El Lissitzky and the Jewish Tradition" in *Studio International* v.186 (959); Glatzer Wechsler, J. "El Lissitzky's 'Interchange Stations': The Letter and the Spirit" in: Nochlin, L.

Between 1916 and 1919 he actively participated in the Russian Jewish renaissance, making sketches and taking notes of the synagogues in Mohilev for the Jewish Ethnographic Society. In the Jewish folklore he found sources for the development of a new revolutionary graphical style, not unlike other avant-garde Russian artists, who made connections with Russian folklore. His early work included illustrations of the traditional Passover stories and design for an embroidered Torah curtain, where stylised medievalist language, characteristic of the Russian modern style, was applied to the fantastical figures of fishes, a deer and an eagle, densely embroidered in tender pink, peach and black (Fig. 83).<sup>87</sup>

Beyond those direct references, the Kabbalistic tradition and of the Hebrew letter are important as well for the understanding of Lissitzky's constructivism, his concepts of typography, book design and art in general. The *Proun* is an acronym, which signifies "for the new art", exemplifying the newness of Lissitzky's art and his period. Acronyms were popular during the revolutionary period in Russia and played a crucial part in Jewish mysticism. The Kabbalists attached great value to the wisdom gained from abbreviations – the heavens revealed a 'celestial alphabet' waiting to be deciphered. The word *Proun* signified that in these compositions lay a glimpse into the nature of the universe, intelligible to those few able to interpret the abbreviations.<sup>88</sup>

In *Proun* the moment of coding or composition was related to rhythm and the position of basic elements on the page, to an unstable, musical, rather than narrative, act (Fig. 84). Embroidering on the striped fabric created a similar sense of a rhythmic disquiet, of inscription simultaneously brought together and falling apart. This feeling corresponded to the inscription itself, the already mentioned discrepancy<sup>89</sup> between birth and naming and their registration.

### **Involving other makers**

At the outset the decision was simply about speeding up the production, since the binder was submitted as a work-in-progress project for the competition of the Adi Foundation,<sup>90</sup> a context which was highly appropriate for it. The project was accepted and its deadlines had to be taken into consideration. Moving into machine production was outside the initial remaking framework: thus, as long as I wanted to have the full length of the cloth embroidered by hand, I had to involve more hands. This decision required me to find embroiderers and to determine what parts of the

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and Garb, T. eds. (1996) *The Jew in the Text*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson.

<sup>87</sup> The Torah curtain design is featured in: Иноземцева, Екатерина. "Вышивка в Искусстве XX века" в: *Рукоделие*. (2009). стр. 6-7. [Irina Inozemtzeva "Embroidery in the Art of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" in Handiwork ex. cat.]

<sup>88</sup> Birnholz, A. C. (1973) p. 132-133.

<sup>89</sup> See page 132 in the thesis.

<sup>90</sup> Adi Foundation for Jewish Expression in Art and Design.

work could be given away and what had to remain for my own execution. As to the last issue, the resolution was to give away parts that were more technical and predictable in character: the outlines of the letters, that were to be done in simple chain stitch and the edge trimming.

Being a lecturer at the Department of Textile Design, I didn't have much trouble finding an embroiderer. It was worth eliminating the possibilities which I could use, since the makers and their stories appeared to reflect a certain state of affairs in the contemporary Israeli textile scene: a group of Ethiopian female embroiderers who worked on Judaica designed by Hannah Krakauer, an Israeli textile designer of Western-European origin; several female pupils of Ruti Weiss, a veteran (of Polish origin) of the Israeli fashion embroidery, who worked with the by now legendary fashion and textile collective *Maskit; Desert Embroidery* cooperative of Bedouin women from the Southern town of Lakyah; Yasmin Cohen, a lesbian feminist artist and embroiderer, who, after studying at the Textile Design department, went on to gender studies and activism; another ex-graduate, Itamar Sagie, a gay embroiderer of German-Jewish religious background, producing a range of products from Judaica to therapeutic dolls. Whichever thread I grasped, the story of the embroiderer, the thread holder, had to do with entanglement of identities, with gender, belonging and immigration, issues with which my own work was concerned. Through the stories I was able to see a connectedness of the local textile trajectories weaving themselves in a *subjectilian* fashion, crafty in pulling together as much as in undoing the stitches.

After various considerations of practical character I decided to work with Yasmin and Itamar, who were both available and didn't raise an eyebrow at the request to embroider worn speckled cotton with fine silks, often mismatching in colour. They were attuned to the project and I was open to discussing its related conceptual and historical aspects, each from her/his perspective.

Another option, which I started to consider, was to embroider together with my mother. On the one hand it was a justified move, since some binders probably were akin to samplers and could be used as a training cloth, which was the case with my work anyway. I was learning from the binder itself, not from a human mentor. Once my mother was involved, the situation changed: I had to teach her how to embroider, using the experience I had managed to gather up to that point. In the process of working together, constantly observing and comparing details on the panels, noticing accurate or awkward stitches, new issues began to surface. First there was the very presence of my mother; she did not appear in the textual name/date of birth narrative of my grandmother and myself. My awareness of her always existed in a matter-of-fact manner in the generational gap between Sarah Maximovsky and Ekaterina Oicherman. In the work she remained an officially

nameless, but absolutely essential agent, whose major contribution was to develop the seams of the binder, in the images of plants, redone several times over until the cloth was not able to physically bear it (Fig. 85). Hers was the only blood to appear, as a tiny spot by the family name of her grandfather, the blood from the embroiderer's finger occasionally pricked by a needle. The stain, marked in a bright blue thread, is on the second panel by the letter 7 in Lioznov (Fig. 86).

### **Documentation become work**

In May 2010 the work was accomplished and exhibited at the Jerusalem Artist House (Fig. 87). As a possibility of exhibiting at the Kaunas Textile Biennale was on the horizon, I decided to document the length of the binder through video, in addition to still photography. This gave a good sense of the details, but not the actual experience of the 4.25m hand-embroidered texts and images. The documentation developed into a separate work, one that was dedicated not just to the artefact, but also to the experience of rolling it. Rolling up the binder, which was removed from the scroll, was often a female privilege in the German synagogue, one of the very few ritual acts related to the Torah scroll that a woman could expect to perform, and one that actually allowed the person involved to see the binder throughout its whole length and experience this length haptically.

Once I had seen the short pieces, that were filmed for the purpose of documentation, I realised the potential of a moving image in animating the binder, its text and patterns. The short pieces were filmed with the immobile camera directed down unto the binder, which was lying on a table on white background and was manually unwound panel after panel. The moment a hint of a rhythm was present, purely accidentally, the elongated image began to work within the frame. Initially, rolling and pulling the binder, I generated the movement so that my hands were part of the frame. I generally liked this situation, since even though the "mechanics" of movement were apparent, the moving image worked its rhythms. The task then was to generate a rhythm through the binder's movement across the frame, without concealing the device that enables movement. All these discoveries might seem basic, but they were very important for me, since I have never done any video work.

It is worth mentioning another reference, utterly unconnected in terms of its immediate content, but pertinent in terms of frame and movement. It is Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 "Apocalypse Now" with Vittorio Storaro's cinematography, which I accidentally happened to see for a second time when I was developing the video. There were several prolonged shots of the river. The water was filmed from a close distance, with pages of a secret dossier floating on its

surface. The shots were accompanied by voice narration. The entire situation worked very well as its auditory and visual components were superimposed rhythmically with a supreme precision, almost physically drawing the viewer into the duration of the shot.

After some deliberation and playing around with rolling and unrolling the binder, I realised that the shape of the cloth, once it is rolled inwards on its both ends, creates a situation similar to the Torah scroll which is rolled on two rods, leaving a portion of text in between for the reading. The double-end rolling then creates a reading frame with a particular format, conditioned by the proportions of the scroll. I decided to explore this situation and soon realised that I need two pairs of hands, one that unrolls and one that rolls up. The solution came instantly: my mother and my grandmother. Their hands came in contact with the swaddling cloths in so many everyday situations and it is between them that my work, which is also my life-story, unfolds<sup>91</sup>

Another issue that concerned me was sound. In the first documentary pieces the sounds of the street outside the window were at the background. Their sporadic audio presence made me aware of the importance of the audio element as such, not as ambience, but as a tool to generate rhythm. Once the image of two pairs of hands un/rolling the binder settled in my mind, the sound that seemed appropriate was a song, sung live, together with the rolling. When I was little, my mother and her close friend, who often came to look after me, used to lull me with a song called "Миленький ты мой" (literally: "darling you're my" or plainly: "my darling"). It was a lullaby-like, sad and repetitive narrative of an unhappy love affair and separation.

The music for the lyrics, which most sources attribute as anonymous or folk,<sup>92</sup> may have been written in the 1910s-1920s by a popular composer of romances, Lev Drizo (Leo Drisse, d. 1935).<sup>93</sup> In the last three decades it has been performed by many popular singers, notably the romance singer Zhannah Bichevskaya (1983), the Soviet folk diva Valentina Tolkunova (1986) and Russian rock veteran Boris Grebenshikov (*Чубчик* 1996). Very recently, numerous pop versions of the song have been released, ranging from shabby to delightfully ridiculous.

To my own surprise, I became familiar with those renderings only when making the video, whilst looking for the complete lyrics. Bichevskaya and Tolkunova

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<sup>91</sup> The video can be seen at: <<http://oicherman.net/katya/art/oh-my-dear-one/>>.

<sup>92</sup> Колесникова, А. (1996). *Уноси мое сердце в звенящую даль...: Русские романсы и песни с нотами*; М.: Воскресенье. [Kolesnikova A. *Take My Heart to the Ringing Distance: Russian Romances and Songs with Scores*]

Такун, Ф. И. (2005). *Славянский базар*. Москва: «Современная музыка». [Takun F. I. *The Slavic Bazar*]

<sup>93</sup> See: <<http://a-pesni.org/drugije/milenkij.htm>> (accessed 26/3/2013)

performed the song on TV broadcasted concerts, which were most likely watched in our house, which I nevertheless do not remember. I knew the song vaguely from childhood memories and even more, from family folklore, as mother and her friend were exchanging stories in which the song figured. In those stories the singer had to repeat the song at my demand over and over again, until she fell asleep, leaving me awake and wandering. The song as a lullaby was closely related to the ex-swaddling-pillowcases-cloths, which I embroidered, thus closing a certain circuit in my memories. Apart from this it was a simple, melodic and yet very evenly rhythmic tune, which made it appropriate for the task. And - there were lyrics, which set well in the overall narrative of immigration and female identity ambivalence. Here are the lyrics in a word-to-word translation:

Darling you're my, take me with you.  
There in the land faraway call me "wife".  
Darling you're my, I would have taken you with me.  
But there in the land faraway, I do have a wife.

Darling you're my, take me with you.  
There in the land faraway call me "sister".  
Darling you're my, I would have taken you with me.  
But there in the land faraway, I do have a sister.

Darling you're my, take me with you.  
There in the land faraway call me "stranger".  
Darling you're my, I would have taken you with me.  
But there in the land faraway, the stranger you I do not need.

A song started by a deserted and apparently deceived female lover, where homecoming and departure from home are fused together in a mutually exclusive impossibility. What is more, they face each other in the parade of fictive roles or calls, the legitimate ones of which, "wife" and "sister", are removed as pretenders to a place already taken, while the illegitimate, but potentially liberating "stranger" is simply denied. She can be there as long as she is legitimately useful. Mournful Circe, vindictive Odysseus, a desire for belonging repeatedly betrayed/made apparent in its refusal. The sadness of the song is on the verge of a comical effect, thus unsurprising is the appearance of an additional "self-made" couplet in the Russian song lyrics websites:

Darling you're my, then to hell with you.  
There in the land faraway I do have another (man).

As long as the song is performed in a duet of a man and a woman, this

particular reading remains central, but I was interested in a single female voice, in a woman singing to herself, or to, but not with, another woman. The song becomes a story, which is not so much mournful as reflective. She sings to herself about what has been, about what could have been, sings from the distance, even from the irony arising between the time of the event and the time of singing. Valentina Tolkunova sang from within this state of mind, cleverly passing from singing to reciting, in the 1986 concert in Moscow luckily called "A Monologue of a Woman". This performance itself was highly nostalgic for the Woman, the imaginary folk female singer; Tolkunova is dressed in a grey glittering gown stylistically stuck somewhere in between 1880 and 1986. Its Youtube file is tagged with a logo of Ностальгия ТВ,<sup>94</sup> the word ностальгия (nostalgia) in which the letter c is replaced with a red hammer and sickle. In this way the song, "folk", i.e. origin-less, participates in multiplying circuits of nostalgia and reflection, whilst every performance condenses some intensely particular and unique sense of history.

During their transition from swaddling cloths to ritual objects, binders were involved in a series of exchanges, passing from hands to hands, from female to male, from home to synagogue. The video work that I have done in fact predated this understanding. After I filmed the binder passing from the hands of my mother to my grandmother and slowly unfolding in the space between the two women, I realised the presence of the passage narrative in the original artefact and was able to articulate it in words.

The same can be said about the rhythmic experience of reading the binder. The convex performativity of its text was revealed and articulated for me first in the video work, and later transferred into a written passage, which reflected back upon the original artefact. This rhythmic experience originated in the striped "coded" panels.

### **Reactualisation: On the seams of text and textile**

The Fürth binder acted both as a written text and as an embodied material history – an embroidery. Its conception withdrawn from the initial context and appropriated within the framework of contemporary textile practice unleashed an exchange between those two states. This exchange allowed redoing of the auto/biographies, once word became text and text became thread ("a fanciful embroidery of the facts"). The juxtaposition of the colourful patterned fabric of the swaddling cloths with the solid solemnity of the square Hebrew script, with its contained colour palette, compromised the aura of sacredness and authenticity of the Fürth binder as a "respectable" museal object.

A juxtaposition of the original artefact (the Fürth binder) with the "forged"

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<sup>94</sup> See: <<http://www.nostalgiatv.ru/>> (accessed 26/3/2013)

contemporary version, made according to the traditional rules, provides a new marginal scene where voices previously unheard come into being. It is important to stress here that the swaddling cloth binders were not done in Russia, and my own family does not have German Jewish roots. My binder thus possesses in fact a fictional character, which aims to destabilise the existing frameworks of inscriptions of Jewishness in Israel, as much as to locate and provide a voice for a problematic and complex Russian-Jewish identity underrepresented in that scene. Art practice makes way for the manipulation and collaging of real remnants (I use my own swaddling cloths and re-write real life stories). Yet, those fictions, fixed in the woven surface of the *subjectile* and destabilised in the crafty act of embroidery, are not entirely fictitious. They are stubbornly material-stained swaddling cloths, which resist the institutionalization of identity stories enforced by the religious and the official state certifications and the museal set-up. Still, as artwork they also do not entirely allow the undoing of this setup, since it is within and against it their action actualises. The presence of fiction here is the materialising “design of the life-story”, using Adrianna Cavarero’s expression. It is the desire shared by biography and auto-biography - to see and touch a unique story of my own, interrelated with the stories of my mother and my grandmother: unique, but also ordinary, like my swaddling cloths.

The extended length of cloth of a traditional binder held within its text a promise for a future story, guiding the future life which started with the unique event of birth, motherless in most binders<sup>95</sup>, into the right and moral path of a Jewish man – religious learning, wedding, moral conduct. It contains a certain contradiction between the concreteness and uniqueness of the names and dates inscribed on it and the generalizing character of the blessing formulation. My own binder tells of a life lived till the moment of its transcription onto cloth. Its promise is that of remembrance; it claims as its own a sequence of time, from my birth until now. It is this and not another birth, even if its date has been written wrongly, for I know that I was born on a specific date, as do others around me, like my grandmother. The embroidered zeros do not in fact negate the fact of my birth; rather they signify the difficulty of the coexistence of diverging modes of inscription and management of uniqueness. That management becomes coercive once the concreteness of name and birth is superseded with universalising notions of national belonging, enacted by the problematic union of reactionary male-dominated religious Judaic institution and the supposedly neutral identification apparatus of the state. This difficulty calls for action, which shape I have glimpsed in the folds of the binder of Tzvi Stern, my own acquisition of speech, delivered

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<sup>95</sup> As I have mentioned in the third chapter, the German binders only seldom include the name of the newborn's mother.



once more with cloth, needle and thread.

Speaking in the tongue of the *subjectile*, the paper of ID cards (encapsulated in plastic as if to make it even less traversable<sup>96</sup>) embodies in fact the evil neutral form of material support, stretched as a canvas, fully controlled by the god of names, enforcing conventions of inscription, which deform names and dates and spread bad awkwardness. In that state body, name and date do not correspond entirely, become detached and dysfunctional. Disguised as a binder, a kind of envelope which is not yet a tailored garment, and thus to a certain extent prevails in namelessness, *subjectile* can become membrane, a woven cloth. Embroidery works with and from within the woven structure, re-activating the relationship between this structure and the image printed on it. Guided and guiding the needle passes through, evoking succubi of cloth, mothers and grandmothers, giving birth, tearing fabrics, and wrapping new-borns in pink flowery swaddling.

The binder, uniquely embodying in its production, ceremonial function and particular history, the transition between *subjectile* and object, becomes an embodied material location of biographical and auto-biographical story-telling, a position, speaking or rather embroidering from which facilitates the creation of material narratives of selfhood. Those narratives interact with and re-cast universal conventions of identity description (IDs) and subvert gender codifications of the traditional Judaica objects. Relating to the marginal tradition of Western "female crafts" and their contemporary resonance in art-practices, the co-operation of woven cloth and embroidery needle becomes a way to reflect critically on the place and function of a materialized auto-biographical narrative in a text-dominated world, listening to "the voice of the shuttle" once more<sup>97</sup> - without losing the subtlety and in-substitutability of the sensed uniqueness of a singular human existence, of a particular life-story. The materiality of the written word and its bearer, the cloth, becomes a paradigm for reflection upon the discrepancy between the lived actuality of identity and its disembodied inscriptions in official practices of identification.

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<sup>96</sup> Derrida. J. (1998). pp 64-65, 76

<sup>97</sup> Klindienst, Patricia. (1984). pp. 25-33.

## Drawing

### *Red Tractor*

*My mother decided to immigrate to Israel in 1988. According to the Soviet law, in order to take me with her she needed permission from my father, who has not seen me even once since I was born. "How come she will not have a homeland?" - he reproached my mother. "Do you want to take it to court?" - she replied.*

*My father, Vasily Lavorko, is a painter. He paints in oil Russian landscapes. Mother once said that he knows how to put a red tractor on a muddy field, to make your heart convulse.*

On 24 May 2012 I started a series of drawings in a thick sketchbook, which originated in the specific parts of the embroidery and the rhythmic experience of the film (Figs. 88-92). The drawings involve a great deal of erasure; they often extend into collage and cutting, linking back to my past work. Working on rhythm, letter and image, they deal with names, my own and that of my father, the ambivalence of national belonging, addressing the relationship between male name and circumcision. They are still in progress, in the aftermath of the entire project, a reflection on its findings in the theoretical, historical and practical trajectories. The work here comes full circle in a way that it explores a book as a format, reconnecting to the intimate experience of "reading-in-cloths" addressed earlier.

Coming late into the story, drawings serve as a testing ground and as a means to document ideas and images. In other words, they are sketchbook. But not quite, since I only allow finished pages in there. Finishing a work (when is it finished?) is a heavy subject in any practice, including this thesis, thus I do not intend to unfold it here, I will just say that it is not straightforward and some pages in the book are being repeatedly revisited. Drawing opens and remains open to a motive that was lurking throughout my work: the masculine line and name, my father Vasily, Vasya and the array of stories which did not enter into the selective fragmentation of the autobiography written here. It is the book and what it has inside its filled and its empty pages.

*I can probe, cut, scrape, file, sew, unsew, shred, slash and stitch without it ever complaining through father. Meanwhile it didn't complain.*

*I'll see what happens next.*

## Conclusions

This thesis has been concerned with a development of interrelated historical and practical perspectives on a textile artefact. Those perspectives have evolved by using a range of theoretical sources, which allowed to elaborate a critical hi/story of my textile practice and tell from a first person. The very possibility of a first person speech in the context of a practice based PhD was of fundamental importance for me, and I attempted to construct the whole framework of the thesis in a way that mobilised this possibility, as well as provided a grounded justification for it. The process of creating this unique framework is reflected in the uneven styles of the thesis chapters. Each chapter forms an autonomous story told with a language that suits it best. Together, the chapters are bound by the subject matter and textile metaphors presented in the prologue. This relative and relational autonomy of each chapter is necessary as it reflects the nature of the research that I have undertaken.

**The Prologue** introduced the two starting points of the research, an excerpt from Jacques Derrida's "To Unsense the Subjectile" and the description of a Torah binder from Fürth. Both texts were presented as parallel columns, to literalise the initial double setup of the research. Two columns, two voices: that of text and that of cloth, two sides of the same research.

**Chapter One** outlined this untraditional double epistemology of the textile practice-based research and suggested an appropriate language for it. To do this it offered an analysis of the textile-related metaphors in the text "To Unsense the Subjectile" by Jacques Derrida. The analysis allowed me to grasp and express the constantly shifting and intertwining position of cloth in between the historical and the contemporary accounts, in between autobiography, practice and research. The chapter was in search of the language, which was able to negotiate, translate, and move between the side of cloth and the side of text: in other words the language that I could use as a practitioner who writes about textiles.

Beginning with the invitation of the Arachne genre, "one that cites established genres and their edges even as it cuts across and beyond them", the chapter addressed the poetical method of "unsensing" that Derrida uses, in order to understand how the particular dialectics of cloth is crafted in his text through gender ambivalent and transgressing metaphors of textile crafts. Just as Arachne does, the figure of the *subjectile* cited and cut across the "edges" of artwork and artist, art mediums and genres, languages and their grammar, biography and fiction.

As such the Derridean *subjectile* appeared as a necessarily shaky, if possible, epistemological platform for textile practice. It was capable of expressing

the inherent ambivalence of textiles in relation to art genres. It characterised the immediate and the secondary metaphorical operations of textiles, i.e. outlined the instrumental poetics of cloth. It operated in the performative register of language, allowing a record of a holistic and (dis)continuous practice, negotiating an extended personified relation between practitioner, artwork and practice. In other words, the *subjectile* appeared as a trajectory that simultaneously enables and guides the writing.

Finishing with the veil is finishing with self.<sup>98</sup>

"To Unsense the Subjectile" is not the only text written by Derrida in which textile metaphors are involved or issues of autobiography are dealt with. It is necessary to mention in this regard "A Silkworm of One's Own, Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil", written in dialogue with H el ene Cixous's "Savoir". Both texts appeared in a book tellingly titled *Voiles*, "veils", in 1998. Another text by Derrida, which I did not address, and which is dealing with autobiography, Jewishness and circumcision is his autobiographical "Circumfession".<sup>99</sup> Eventually my emphasis was not on the marking of a (male) body, but on the craftiness of the female subversive act of embroidery.

To a certain extent related are two other texts: Ewa Kuryluk's *Veronica and Her Cloth*<sup>100</sup> and Georges Didi-Huberman's "The Index of the Absent Wound"<sup>101</sup>. I have read them in the earlier stages of the research, and more than anything, they were important in terms of outlining the perspective that I was not interested to develop, i.e. the dialectics of stains and figuration, which could be read into the (blood) stains appearing on the binder.

Derrida's "Silkworm", as well as those other texts, deal with a certain visuality of a textile, veiling and unveiling, with acts of seeing and appearing on/through the surface of a cloth. Unlike this discourse of visuality, the focus of my work was on the reflecting and reflexive, crafty acts of embroidery, "the subversive stitch". It was the figure of the subjectile, the "stuff of art", a performing cloth (a person-cloth, a process-cloth, a gender-changing cloth, a Jewishing cloth, a social cloth) that provided the right conceptual setting. Reading and rereading "To Unsense" helped me to articulate my intuitive visions of what a binder might be. Through this text I understood much about the social life of cloth and the way I can

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<sup>98</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "A Silkworm of One's Own, Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil" in: Cixous, Helene and Derrida, Jacques. (2001). *Veils*. trans. G. Bennington. Stanford, California: Stanford Claifornia Press. (pp. 17-107). p. 28.

<sup>99</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Circumfession" in Bennington, Geoffrey and Derrida, Jacques. (1999). *Jaques Derrida*. Trans. G. Bennington. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>100</sup> Kuryluk, Ewa. (1991). *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism, and Structure of a "True" Image*. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell.

<sup>101</sup> Didi-Huberman, Georges. (1984). "The Index of the Absent Wound (Monograph on a Stain)". *October*. 29 (63-81).

articulate a creative relationship with it.

"To Unsense" is highly saturated with intense interrogations of creative process and its materialisation. Addressed to another artist, Artaud, "to Unsense" is not a text "about" a work, but a text that *does the work*. In that it is an extremely *crafty* text. In this hard-core craftiness it manages to bypass the trivial symbolism of its subject(iles) and as such for me it was a very useful point of entrance. Since I had to write through my practice, dividing my own "creative self", "To Unsense" was a way to see how to address a work of another through my own and even more importantly, how to address my own practice through the work of some one else. The *subjectile* became a conceptual "cutting edge", using Glen Adamson's notion in an off-set manner, the site "where the tool meets work" and where "all concerns of the making converge, from the aesthetic to the ethical".<sup>102</sup> Similarly to the decision of concentrating on a single artefact, such narrow focus allowed depth and has literally set me into the journey of writing. The chapter on the *subjectile* was the first significant body of text that I produced and it opened the way for the rest of the thesis.

**Chapter Two** introduced textile practice as the main methodology of the research, positioning it in the framework of Carter's "material thinking", "occasional, generically disrespectful and promiscuous, and localised".<sup>103</sup> It articulated the political relational character of this methodology, expanding the *subjectilean* trajectory into the discourses of textile culture and theories of biographical identity.

Since from the outset the research developed via two trajectories, which I simplistically call *historical* and *autobiographical*, the writing itself evolved at times in an academic and at times in a freer, poetic language. In the course of time I understood that this is a necessary trait of the text produced here, because it manifests the (at least) duality of voices and perspectives at work. In order to make a clear distinction between the shifts in voice, I separated the "other", poetical voice with a *different italicised font*.

Chapter Two marked and contextualised the space of this *subjectilean* poetics, *the space between the stitch and the surface of the weave*. As in the Prologue, I have written in two directions. They did not appear in a straightforward divided format as in the Prologue: instead, I tried to interweave them. One direction is text and textile; the other is autobiography and "life". In the first I turned to Mitchell's sensorial "textility of thought and matter"; in the second, to the relational politics of Arendt and Cavarero's feminist theory of a unique biographical identity (based on Arendt).

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<sup>102</sup> Adamson, Glen. (2013). *The Invention of Craft*. London, New York: Bloomsbury. p. 32.

<sup>103</sup> Carter, P. (2005) pp. 8-9.

The two directions met in the *space* of Doreen Massey, “the simultaneity of stories so far”,<sup>104</sup> a seemingly unrelated theory, but one that allowed the binding together of materiality and textuality in the unity of an autobiographical identity. I expanded the discourse of this unique unity unto material culture, particularly textiles, suggesting the approach of a personalised relational responsibility towards material culture. The sensorial and embodied “textility of thought and matter” is “spaced” and thereby politicised, mobilised by the inter-related temporal and material unity or *historicity* of a particular textile.

**Chapter Three** outlined the general context of Jewish studies, concentrating on the plurality of Jewish cultures and the “corporeal turn” - stressing the materialised, historically and socially specific, embodied, performative quality of texts in Judaism. This was followed by an introduction to the German circumcision binders or “Jewishing cloths”. I examined the ritual context of the binders and their relationship to the construction of a male Jewish identity.

The connection between circumcision and naming was explored, followed by the discussion of an embodied and performative link between the circumcised boy and the Torah as it comes forth in the binder and the ceremony of its presentation in the synagogue. The problem of the bodily contact and of the closeness of bodily waste to the Torah scroll was examined in the context of customs related to binders. I suggested that the binder acts as a haptic and symbolic mediator between the everyday and the sacred domains and between private (female) and public (male) spheres.

In short, the binders are presented through anthropological lenses as part of a larger ritual context. Understanding this context was instrumental to any meaningful and responsible discourse about the binders, but it only examined them as part of a certain system of objects, mobilised by a specific social and cultural order. To gain a far more particularised insight into a specific artefact, one that allows the development of a “personalised relational responsibility towards material culture” I turned to a single binder, the 1836 binder from Fürth, which had already figured in the Prologue.

**Chapter Four** opened with a detailed description of the binder. It explored its materials and techniques, as well as its scripts and iconography, contextualising them within the material and visual conventions of similar artefacts. Then the issue of signature and authorship was examined, suggesting a professional production, possibly by a male embroiderer. The actual case study of the chapter questioned the meaning and appearance of the images positioned on the seams of the binder. I showed that, beyond their technical aspect, the seams acted as a marginal and transitional territory less burdened with the traditional

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<sup>104</sup> Massey, D. B. (2005) pp. 9, 12.

figurative schemes common in binders. Those embroideries consciously played around with a common image of a tree of life, transposing the concern with life, birth and fertility into a concern with cultural and political identity in the midst of Jewish emancipation in Germany.

Considering this setting, the act of concealing the seams, which in fact stresses their presence, appears as ambivalent, troubled in its very preoccupation with the liminal area of the cloth's edges. The embroidery is there to deal with the question that troubles the maker: how to join together, to keep whole what seems to be torn apart? The embroidered "images-on-the-seams" of the binder provide a material narrative to cope with this question. They are an alternative to the textual narrative, which follows the conventional formula and creates a clear and stable Jewish identity, covering up what embroidery strives to reveal. The *subjectilean* trajectory is restored here - the cloth betrays; embroidery covers in order to reveal; while the gender-ambivalent embroiderer, disguised behind the signature, discloses something of (possibly) himself at the edges of the cloth through which he "cuts" and "cites", as "traditional" images - simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar - join and divide the literally long story of the binder.

The chapter is concluded with a reflection and a critique of the contemporary museal staging of the 1836 binder. I suggested that the display presents a restorative nostalgic vision of Judaism, which refuses to recognize the binder's contemporaneous position. Ignoring its singularity as a contradictory and non-univocal repository of modern Jewish identity hi/stories, it depoliticises the artefact. Referencing Massey, in a depoliticised Judaica it is impossible to recognize "the radical contemporaneity of space", or rather "the radical contemporaneity of material culture".

In **Chapter Five** "the initial double setup of the research" from the prologue is recreated in presenting the "biography" of my practice, including the description of the binder, and my own selective autobiography, in two parallel columns. The chapter is meant to sew together those two surfaces of the same cloth. As such, the text of the chapter is a post-production text, just like the preceding section on the binder in a museum was a post-investigation one. It addresses works and text which have already been completed. Nevertheless, just as the previous chapter leaves an opening at the end suggesting a re-actualization of the binder, the chapter on practice concludes with a section on drawing, which in the multiplicity of stories of my practice so far, is an open-ended work-in-process.

In order to keep track of the practice story I turned to three sources: recorded audio commentaries and a table-like diary of embroidery, which I kept while working; detailed photo documentation of the embroidery work-in-progress; and relevant research papers that I delivered on several occasions. All these can be

found in the appropriate appendices to this chapter. Besides this, the chapter includes a limited, but autonomous, theoretical and historical bibliography of its own, which complements the bibliography of the first and second chapters. The text of the chapter is often uneven, as I strove to preserve the qualities of the source texts, as they permit the experience of the changing and shifting in the processes of articulation.

In the chapter I discuss the act of re-making of a binder in the context of Boym's reflective nostalgia and Bal's translation, "a supplementation that produces the original, rather than being subservient to it". Then I address embroidery as a medium in art and outline a brief professional autobiography, via which I position embroidery and weaving in a dialectic of their own, complementing and particularising the "textility of thought and matter" in my practice. A free "vocabulary" of texts that were instrumental in the formation of this dialectics forms one of the appendices. I also refer to the practices of contemporary artists, which were important for my development.

Reconnecting to the *subjectile*, I addressed the cloths on which I embroidered, as "surfaces of shame, resistance and desire". In the text the unfolding of hi/stories related to the cloths is interspersed with autobiographical fragments, while histories themselves in fact form a kind of personalised and subjective textile history. This addresses episodes of the Soviet textile past that I found irresistibly captivating in the course of my practice, and in the light of my autobiographical experience of printed cloths. I addressed ways in which the link between the binder and my autobiography was made, through re-writing and appropriation of the binder format. The story of embroidering the inscription indicates the critical encounters of the "imported" and the "native" languages in the work. I outlined changes in the work that were brought about by involving other makers, notably my mother; a decision which eventually brought about a shift to other mediums, video and sound. When discussing the video work, again in a post-production mode, I attempted to reconstruct the memory of a song which I would have heard as a child in the Soviet mass media. As with the excursus into the Soviet textile industry, this is a personalised and subjective diversion into Soviet pop music, which was necessitated by the development of the practice.

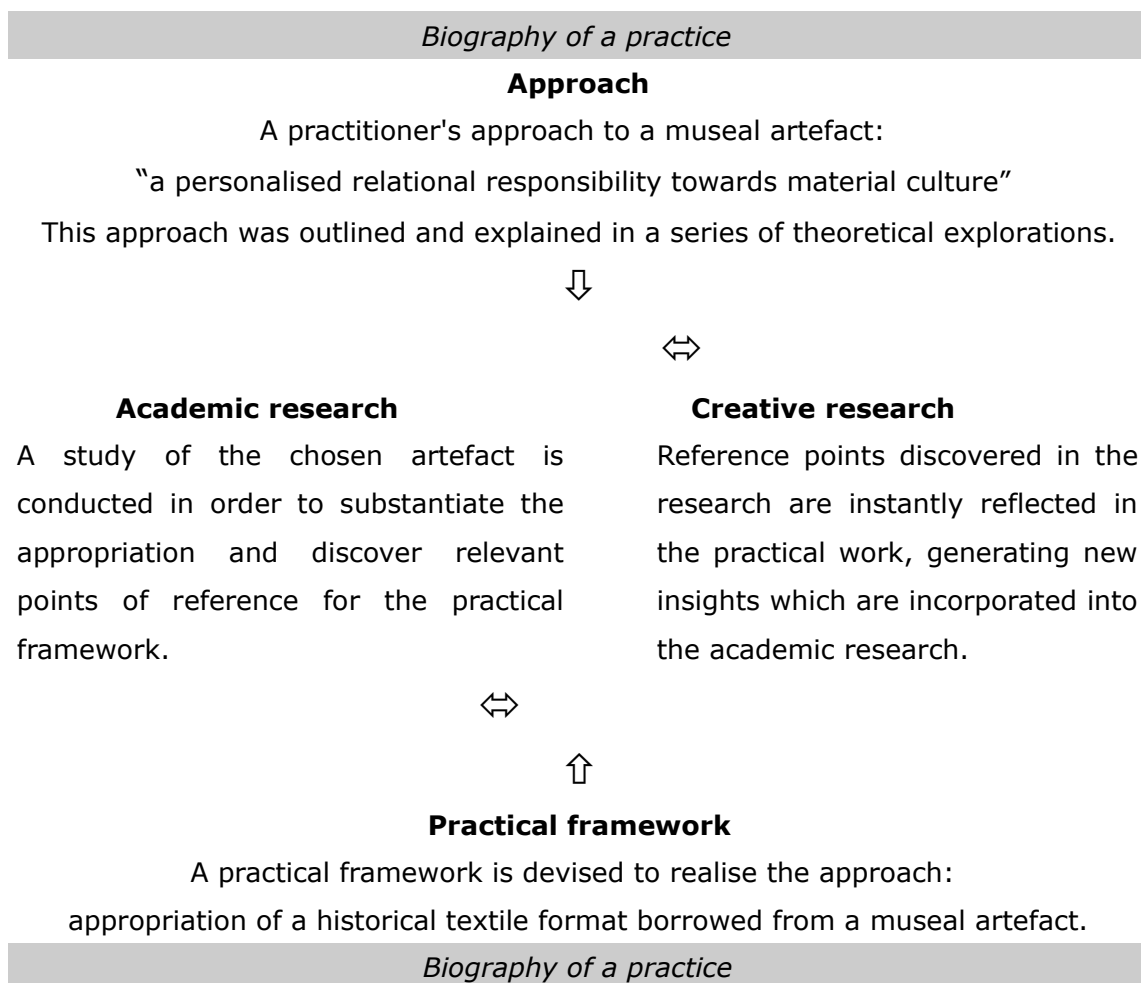
An appropriation of traditional textile format in contemporary textile practice makes way for the "re-actualisation" or re-politicising of the Fürth Torah binder. In the thesis, those concerns are positioned in the Israeli social context and reflected through my own textile practice and a "biographical" account of it. Through its practice-based and written components this thesis simultaneously reflects upon and makes way for the creation of works where my autobiographical female stories of Jewishness in Israel are expressed or "staged" in the form of a



fictional binder and related works in video and drawing.

The practice investigated “hands on” the particularities of the 1836 binder design, exploring its format, letters, images, materials and techniques, appropriating and reshaping them on the way. This practical exploration modified the research, shifting its emphasis towards the embodied and performative side of the binder and the rituals in which it took part.

In its entirety the thesis proposes a general design for a research-based practice. Alongside its contribution to the history of Torah binders and the discourse of contemporary textile practice, it unfolds intertwined and interrelated “biographies” of research and textile practice as a distinctive mode of knowledge. It is possible to present this general design in the following table:



This table is necessarily simplified, but it shows the principle behind the thesis. The advantage of this design lies in the flexible coevalness of the creative and the academic components, a coevalness which has allowed me to generate new insights and ideas for both the fields involved. The particular rules or guidelines according to which the appropriation has developed in each particular case are dependant on the

artefact in question, yet since the approach is formulated in the open terms of personal responsibility, the creative research acquires enough space to manoeuvre and negotiate the findings of its academic counterpart. The overarching biographical framework implies constant documentation and articulation of the shifting relationship between the two kinds of research.

Even though the thesis is preoccupied with textile practices and histories, in the long run its design could be adapted to any other field of material culture. Thus the design is primarily aimed at creative practitioners who are interested in museal artefacts. Yet, since the contemporary curatorial practices in the museum tend to be experimental and invite artistic participation of different kinds, this design can be useful also as a means of curatorial approach. Above all, though, the design is beneficial for students of the different creative disciplines who are eager, or simply obliged, to explore the historical heritage of their discipline. The design offers a personalisation of historical artefacts, an opportunity to create a live and "personified" link with the past, to discover its relevance and its constructedness and eventually to develop an entirely up-to-date responsibility for it.

The thesis was not planned to be part of the development of an educational method. However, I have used parts of the thesis as a platform for courses which I have devised for my students at the Department of Textile Design in Shenkar. It so happened (as it often does) that the writing of the thesis coincided with my development as a teacher and naturally I did not make a clear divide between the materials of the research and the materials of the courses. Since the thesis itself does not deal with pedagogy of design or of any other kind, at least not explicitly, if in times it lurks by consequence, I did not include any discussion of it. The preoccupation with my own practice and the Fürth binder appeared to generate such volumes of writing that the inclusion of another serious subject was simply beyond the scope of this PhD. Nevertheless it is clear that the thesis provides a primary platform for education in the creative disciplines, a platform which I intend to develop further, focusing on the hybrid practical/historical courses for graduate students in textiles. An outline of the courses devised so far is presented in Appendix 6.

Returning to the thesis as it is, several accomplishments can be pointed out. On the macro-level it is the entire framework of "the radical contemporaneity of material culture", i.e. the overall structure of the thesis is its most important and innovative outcome. I reiterate: it develops and theoretically grounds a functional design of a practice-based research, which combines and manages historical and autobiographical perspectives on material culture, particularly textiles. On the micro- or textile level, the research contributes to the philosophical debate around

textile cultures, examining cloth-related metaphors in Derrida's *subjectile*. At the same time *subjectile* is enacted as an operational conceptualisation of a textiles practice.

In respect to Torah binders, several points have to be made. First, the use of a binder as a conceptual and material model for contemporary textile practice is innovative, if not singular, keeping in mind Geraldine Ondrizek's work. Yet the use and context of my practice is very different. Second, I offer new anthropological insights on the binders as haptic mediators and address images on the seams in a way that was not available previously. Generally the status of seams and edges in ceremonial Jewish textiles, binders included, can be explored much further, just as some other aspects in the thesis were not developed as they would have led to entirely independent fields. Such is the relief in the Judaic embroidery and its relation to the changing Jewish conventions of images.

During the time of writing I published several articles related to the various aspects of the thesis and presented research papers at conferences and seminars, as well as organising seminars myself. The list of publications and papers is in the bibliography. The practical work was exhibited several times. Exhibition is a field of operation that I consider to be very important, especially in view of the relational and political aspect of the work. One of my initial intentions was to present the "fictive" binder side by side with the "original" one in the museal setting of the German-Speaking Jews Museum in Tefen, and organize a series of public events around it. The idea was met with enthusiasm on the part of the junior curator of the museum, Tamar Livne, but then flatly refused by the chief curator, Ruti Offek, who decided that the subject was too narrow and academic and thus could not be of interest to a wider audience - and definitely not to the visitors of the Jecke Museum. Probably the binder was too pink for the respectable nostalgia of the museum, another pointer towards the political value of the torn swaddling cloths.

Notwithstanding Offek's opinion, the work was exhibited in a much less specialised context and evoked plenty of interest from "the wider audience", academics and artists included. One of the most memorable reactions came from David Blumberg, the elderly chair of the Adi Foundation Prize, who slowly walked around the circular display several times, partially looking at the work, partially at the ground, and said: "What is left of a person, but a name and a date?"

Another exhibition venue that I wanted to explore was the Jewish Museum in Fürth. Initially I planned to exhibit first in Tefen and then take both binders to Fürth, to their strangely "native" town. Unfortunately the Fürth Museum, although generally cooperative, entered a long period of repair and restructuring, which is due to finish in 2014. I hope that eventually I will be able to explore this

venue, exhibiting the existing work, as well as with its derivations. Bringing the work to Russia and exploring the appropriate venues and histories there also figures as an option.

Even though the curatorial part of the practice did not come out as I intended, it is possible to say that the work was exhibited in venues that were appropriate and provided a context for it, as well as a measure of exposure to a limited, but interested public.

In terms of outcomes, the thesis has offered a distinctive account of the juxtaposition of textile practice and historical research and its critical examination. It suggests an epistemological framework through which links between cloth and auto/biographical narratives can be tied providing material and theoretical support to develop critical historically engaged practice. The thesis also develops a way of writing this epistemological story in a manner that sustains the continuity and mobility of practice-theory-history exchanges: no stage is final, every exchange or encounter, retaining its own biographical uniqueness, becomes a support for a new one.

Jerusalem  
December 2013

## Appendix 1.

### The Order of the Circumcision Ceremony.

According to: Hoffman, Lawrence A.; (1996); *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism*; University of Chicago Press. The order is brought on pages 64-77 according to a 19<sup>th</sup> century source.

Here is a short order of the ceremony as it has evolved in Germany up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In my account I do not refer to all the blessings recited, but only to those of central significance, and those that relate to binders and naming.

The rite was usually performed in the synagogue, with a quorum of ten men (*Minyan*<sup>105</sup>, מניין). This was a forum which is recognized in the official religious order as public and can ratify the rite. Apart from the quorum, the newborn's father, the *Mohel* (circumciser) and the *Sandek* (godfather) and sometimes *Ba'al Brit* (an assistant, another instance of the godfather) are present.

#### Stage 1: Introduction:

In the room candles are lit and a special chair is set aside for the honour of the prophet Elijah. The newborn is brought to the doorstep by *Ba'alat Brit* (godmother) and taken from her by *Ba'al Brit* or the *Mohel* himself. The men present rise and greet the newborn with the words: "May he who comes be blessed." They remain standing till the end of the ceremony. The father and the *Mohel* recite verses that confirm their readiness to circumcise the newborn. The *Mohel* places him on the Elijah chair and recites a blessing that expresses a hope of salvation through the keeping of the divine law.

#### Stage 2: beginning of operation

The *Mohel* places the newborn on the knees of the *Sandek*, there the *Mohel* performs the operation with a metal circumcision knife. Once the incision is made, the father says: "Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by his commandments, and commanded us to admit him [the child] to the covenant of Abraham our father." The men present respond: "As he has entered the covenant, so may he enter Torah, *Huppah* and good deeds."

#### Stage 3: Conclusion of operation and naming

The *Mohel* concludes the operation and cauterizes the wound, then takes a cup of wine and recites a blessing over wine. He continues with the blessing

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<sup>105</sup> Rubin, N.; (1995); pp. 97-98. The quorum of ten is desirable, but not necessary for *Milah* to take place.

that confirms the covenantal nature of circumcision (“blessed art Thou... who sanctified the beloved one from the womb, and set a statute in his flesh, and stamped his descendants with the sign of the holy covenant”) and the promise of deliverance through it. He continues to naming: “Our God and God of our fathers, sustain this child to his father and his mother, and let his name in Israel be (so-and-so, son of so-and-so, his father)”, wishes the father and mother will rejoice at their son and continues to the verses from Ezekiel 16:6: “I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, and I said to you: In your blood, live; I said to you: In your blood, live.” The Mohel puts some wine over the boy's mouth with his finger and continues to verses that call on those present to remember the covenant as an everlasting link between the generations of the patriarchs. He concludes with repeating: “As he has entered the covenant, so may he enter Torah, *Huppah* and good deeds.”

#### Stage 4: Conclusion

The Mohel stands up and recites a blessing that likens circumcision to a sacrifice and connects between it and the obligation to study and live according to the Torah: “Master of the universe, may it be your will that this be considered by you – and thus accepted as according to your will – as if I had sacrificed him before your throne of glory. In your great mercy, sent forth by means of your holy angels a holy and pure soul to (so-and-so) who was just now circumcised to your great name; and let his heart be open as wide as the opening of the hall leading to the interior of the Temple – open to your holy Torah, to learn and to teach, to observe and to do.” All the present recite the prayer for a child after circumcision: “May the One who blessed Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob bless this tender child who has been circumcised, and bring him complete healing, and may his father be worthy of the merit of raising him to Torah, to *Huppah* and to good deeds. Let us say 'Amen'.” The ceremony is concluded with *Alenu* prayer and a festive meal.

## Appendix 2 Lists of examined artefacts

	Legend
ms	machine stitch
ss	satin stitch
cs	chain stitch
bhs	buttonhole stitch
sts	stem stitch
dcs	double chain stitch
fs	feather stitch
np	needle painting
lcs	long chain stitch
RI	request image

	Legend
JTAFc	Judaica
JTP	Paris
TBMS	Prague
OTB	Torah Binders

### 04/10/12 Magnes Museum Binders

total of 43 +30 irrelevant

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province	Maker	Number	Points of interest
1	binder	cs	1750-1801	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.49	Stitches
2	binder	cs, ss	1725-1775	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.30	Script, mille-fleur
3	binder	cs	1854	n/a	Germany	n/a	85.56.5.00	Stitches
4	binder	cs	1848	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.84	Stitches
5	binder	ss	1848	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.87	Wife present at circumcision?
6	binder	n/a	1845	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.81	Tree of life in a pot
7	binder	cs	1839	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.74	Tree of life in a pot
8	binder	cs	1833	n/a	Germany	n/a	85.56.4.00	Stitches
9	binder	sts	1832	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.68	Experienced drawing, bad embroidery
10	binder	cs, fs	1830	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.66	Stitches
11	binder	cs	1828	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.65	Stitches
12	binder	n/a	1821	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.63	Script

13	binder	ss	1819	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.62	Tree of life in a pot
14	binder	cs	1818	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.61	Stitches
15	binder	cs	1814	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.59	Stitches
16	binder	cs,np, lcs	1814	Munich	Bavaria	n/a	80.83	Lilienthal
17	binder	cs	1814	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.59	Family project
18	binder	cs	1813	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.58	Stitches
19	binder	cs	1809	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.54	Script
20	binder	n/a	1809	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.55	Script
21	binder	cs, sts +	1800	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.50	Sampler
22	binder	cs	1799	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.48	Stitches
23	binder	cs, sts, bhs	1791	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.45	Stitches
24	binder	cs	1786	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.44	Stitches
25	binder	cs	1783	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.43	Stitches
26	binder	cs, dcs, bhs	1777	Gernsheim	Germany	n/a	67.1.21.42	Stitches
27	binder	painted	1775	Hunrück	Rhineland	n/a	67.1.21.23	Script, decorations, good example
28	binder	cs, sts	1773	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.38	Stitches
29	binder	cs	1773	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.39	Stitches
30	binder	cs, bhs, ss	1770	n/a	Germany	n/a	67.1.21.37	Stitches
31	binder	cs	1768	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.36	Stitches
32	binder	cs, ss, sts, co	1767	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.25	Script, good example, Darmstadt Haggadah
33	binder	cs	1760	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.35	Stitches
34	binder	cs, ss, bhs	1759	Gernsheim	Hesse	n/a	67.1.21.34	Script
35	binder	cs, bhs, ss, fs	1750	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.19	Sampler
36	binder	cs	1744	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.18	Stitches
37	binder	cs, ss	1742	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.17	Script, good example
38	binder	cs, ss	1742	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.16	Script, good example, mille-fleur
39	binder	cs, bhs	1734	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.15	Stitches
40	binder	ss	1731	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.14	Stitches
41	binder	cs, bhs	1712	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.27	Stitches
42	binder	n/a	1697	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.10	Ribbon

RI

RI

RI



43	binder	cs	1685	Bechhofen	Bavaria	n/a	67.1.21.9	Ribbon
44	binder	n/a	1649	n/a	Germany	n/a	86.8.5.00	Ribbon

06/10/12

Magnes Museum

Other textile artefacts

total of 5

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province	Maker	Number	Points of interest
1	Sabbath towel	ss, cs	n/a	n/a	Germany	n/a	75.183.127	Tree of life in a pot, stitches
2	Sabbath towel	ss, cs	n/a	n/a	Germany	n/a	75.183.126	Tree of life in a pot, stitches
3	Tablecloth	ss, cs	1752	n/a	Germany	n/a	81.49	Tree of life in a pot, stitches, script, carnations, tulips
4	Matzah Cover	ss	1897	n/a	Germany	n/a	85.23.1	Naturalistic flowers, stitches, initials
5	Matzah Cover	emb, ms	late	n/a	n/a	n/a	75.183.160	Tree of life in a pot, stitches

06/10/2012 (17/4/2012)

Israel Museum

Other textile artefacts

total of 3

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province	Maker	Number	Points of interest
1	Sampler	Stitches	1848	n/a	Germany	n/a	165/19	Sampler
2	Mazzot cover	Beadwork	19 <sup>th</sup> cent	n/a	Germany	n/a	158/001	naturalistic embroidery
3	Towel	ss, sts, co, la	1814-15	n/a	South Germany	n/a	161/018	signature, tree of life in a pot

06/10/2012 (17/4/2012)

**Israel Museum  
Binders**

total of 10

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province	Maker	Number	Points of interest
1	binder	painted	1841	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/095	script, flowers – roses?
2	binder	painted	1850	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/68	vase, script, garlands
3	binder	painted	1842	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/109	vegetal motives, script
4	binder	painted	1845	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/087	vegetal motives, script, trimmed
5	binder	painted	1848	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/133	check image of tree online
6	binder	sts, cs	1802	Hamburg (?)	Germany	n/a	150/066	carinations
7	binder	cs	1808	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/105	script, carnations, acorns
8	binder	cs, ss	1813	n/a	Germany	n/a	150/092	stitches, carnations, acorns
9	binder	ss, sts	1830	Gailingen	Baden-Württemberg	n/a	150/227	Torah with diamond ornament, stitches
10	binder	sts, cs	1860	n/a	Germany/Austria?	n/a	150/112	acorns, tulip

**07/10/12**

**Magnus Museum, Israel Museum  
Other artefacts**

total of 2

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province/country	Maker	Number	Points of interest
1	Esther scroll	Engraving	18 <sup>th</sup> cent.	n/a	n/a	n/a	67.1.11.7	separations between portions of text
2	Esther scroll	painted, engraving	17 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> cents.	n/a	Cent. Europe	n/a	182/177 Steiglitz Collection	separations between portions of text

**07/10/12**  
**Jewish Museum New York**  
**Other artefacts**

total of 7

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province/country	Maker	Number	Points of interest
1	Esther scroll	painted	18 <sup>th</sup> cent.	n/a	Alsace	n/a	F 2130	separations between portions of text
2	Esther scroll	painted	1806/7	Frankfurt am Main	Hesse	Jacob ben Bezalel	F 3597	separations between portions of text
3	Esther scroll	painted, printed	1641	Amsterdam	Netherlands	Salom Italia (1619-after 1655)	D 76	separations between portions of text
4	Purim wall decoration	Wool and silk embroidery on Perforated paper	Late 19 <sup>th</sup> cent.	n/a	Palestine	Sarah Eydl Weisberg	S 1337	separations between portions of text
5	Mizrah	paper cut-out	c. 1870	n/a	USA	Joseph A. Michael	1987-140	Tree of life in a pot
6	Mizrah	paper cut-out	early 18 <sup>th</sup> cent.	n/a	Prussia	n/a	JM 3-70	Tree of life in a pot
7	Presentatio n urn	painted ceramic	1853-94	Copenhagen	Denmark	Bing and Grondahl	1983-231	Shape of the urn

**07/10/12**  
**Binders from Books**

total of 9

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province	Number	Maker	Museum/Collection	Notes	Book
1	Binder	ss	1693	Ichenhausen	Swabia, Bavaria	Td 12/94 10-11	n/a	Ichenhausen Synagogue	Tree of life in a pot, snake element	Mappot, 125, 130
	Binder	ss, cs	1693	Mackenheim	Alsace	2	n/a	private property		Mappot, 137, 149

2	Binder	ss, sts, cs, ls	1706	Ichenhausen	Swabia, Bavaria	n/a	n/a	Ichenhausen synagogue	floral embellishments of the joining seams	Mappot, 126, 131
	Binder	ls, ss, sts	1717	Ichenhausen	Swabia, Bavaria	Td 25/94, 10-11	n/a	Ichenhausen Synagogue	Opening and closing auxiliary element	Mappot, 127, 132
	Binder	ss	1720	Ichenhausen	Swabia, Bavaria	Td 26/94 10-11	n/a	Ichenhausen Synagogue	Auxiliary element in joining seams	Mappot, 128, 133
3	Binder	painted	1843	Mackenheim	Alsace	95	n/a	private property	Flower pots, Biedermeier patterns and colours	Mappot, 139, 152
4	Binder	painted	1934	Lyon	France	19.14.6		Gross Family Collection	Indoor plants in Huppah, signature	Mappot, 174, 178
5	Binder	emb.	1728	n/a	Germany	150/81	n/a	IM	Tree of life in a vase, carnations	OTB, 72
6	Binder	emb.	1728	n/a	Germany	150/55	n/a	IM	Rose in vase, yfrah ke shohsna	OTB, 72
9	Binder	emb.	1780	n/a	Austria	150/131	n/a	IMFC	Rose in vase, yfrah ke shohsna	JTAFc, 32-33

**07/10/12** total of 18  
**Other relevant artefacts from books**

#	Object	Techniques	Year	Town	Province	Number	Maker	Museum/Collection	Notes	Book
1	Valance	Gold emb.	1772/3	Höchstadt	Erlanger-Höchstadt, Bavaria	F 1285	Yakov Kopel	JMNY	Tree of life in a pot	Maase, 192
2	Curtain	Gold emb.	1799	Neulingen	Alsace	1153	n/a	Musee Historique Lorain, Nancy	Tree of life in a pot	Maase, 297
3	Curtain	gold emb.	1719/20	Sieradz	Poland	KSW 900/9	n/a	Sieradz Museum	tree of life in a pot/basket	Maase, 314
4	Torah breastplate	Silver	19 <sup>th</sup> cent	n/a	Germany/Austria	12328		Cluny	Elevating crown	JTP, 24-25

5	2 panels	emb.	1723/4	n/a	Italy	12353a-b	Sarah, wife of rabbi Joseph Hai Ashkenazi	Cluny	Tree of life in urn, signature	JTP, 35
6	Hanukkah Lamp	Silver	1814/17	n/a	Cent. Europe	12243	n/a	Cluny	Elevating crown	JTP, 54-55
7	Esther Scroll	painted, engraved	c. 1700	n/a	Italy	12296a	n/a	Cluny	Separations between columns, vases	JTP, 56-57
8	Pessah towel	emb.	1781	Oberzell	Bavaria	12368	n/a	Cluny	Tree with a snake, 2 columns with snakes	JTP, 107-112
9	Tfelin cases	Silver	18 <sup>th</sup> cent	n/a	Poland	187/39	n/a	IMFC	Vases with flowers	JTAFC, 34-35
10	Ketubah	Copper etching	1707	Hamburg	North Germany	179/223	n/a	IMFC	Vases with flowers	JTAFC, 38-39
11	Mizrah	painted	1833	Leutershausen	Ansbach, Bavaria	169/29	n/a	IMFC	Vases with flowers, Eden, script	JTAFC, 50-52
12	Amphora	Majolica	18th cent	n/a	Italy	136/75	n/a	IMFC	Vases with two handles	JTAFC, 60, 64
13	Hanukkah Lamp	Silver	17th-18 <sup>th</sup> cents.	Nürnberg	Middle Franconia, Bavaria	118/614	n/a	IMFC	Menorah springing from a vessel	JTAFC, 136, 138
14	Purim towel	emb.	18th cent	n/a	South Germany	161/55	n/a	IMFC	Tree of life in a pot	JTAFC, 150, 162-3
15	Pillow case	emb.	1774	n/a	Germany	158/27	n/a	IMFC	flowers, tulips, carnations	JTAFC, 180-81
16	Pessah towel	emb.	1804	n/a	Germany	158/29	n/a	IMFC	Tree of life in a pot	JTAFC, 180, 182
17	Towel	emb.	ca. 1800	n/a	Germany	158/30	n/a	IMFC	Tree of life in cross-stitch	JTAFC, 181-2
18	Curtain	Metallic thread emb.	1735	Prague	Bohemia	16.649	n/a	JMP	Tree of life in a vase	TBMS, 339

### Appendix 3

#### **Binder Preservation Report, August 2007.**

The binder is considerably well preserved. The most damaged part is the beginning of the first panel, where two holes subtract the upper parts of the letters בִּי in the name Tzvi. There are stains that overflow the boundaries embroidery without affecting it, which means they were present before it was applied. Such is the case with letter Lamed (ל) in the acronym for "under good constellation" and underneath Daleth (ד) and Lamed (ל) in the word יגדלו (bring him). Those could be attempts to remove blood.

Several stains cover the embroidery: a deep brown clearly outlined underneath the letter Yod (י) in the word טובים (good). Three last letters of the year - קצו, as well as a stem with leaves above them, are touched by a pale running stain, which reaches to the far bottom left edge passing the final ו. Beneath the ק, touching on the bottom edge of the fabric, two clearly outlined small stains appear one on top of the other. A bluish-grey small stain reminiscent of ink appears on the opposite upper edge. Its strong colour could suggest that it appeared later than others, and thus cannot be the drawing ink. Similar very small stains appear in the acronym שליט (let him live long and happily) on top of the ש and inside the horizontal bar of the ל. Tiny dotted stains of rusty brown appear underneath the upper line of the tulip garland on top of the words צבי בר (Tzvi son). Minuscule mould stains of greenish black surround the upper part of the hole in the name Tzvi. The surface of the fish in the number כ in the date is flattened, as if it had been subjected to heavy pressure for a considerable period.

The cloth is darker underneath some of the portions of embroidery. This could be either a reminder of the preparatory drawings or stains incorporated into the design. Drawing took place, though it was either not always followed exactly or was not completed entirely before the embroidery has begun. Mostly the underlying colour corresponds to the embroidery outline. The drawing can be seen clearly in the small, partially deteriorated letters of the text starting with וזאת התורה (and this is the Torah...) written inside the scroll. It is also discernible in the image of the scroll itself. The signature bears the remains of ink under the unintelligible reminder of letters following the initials בג (BG) and following the word פירט (Fürth).

## Appendix 4

### **Tokens of Cloth: Between Weaving and Embroidery**

In the following pages, groups of passages are presented similarly to how Derrida presented his final summarising remarks on the subjectile, i.e. a certain quote and an interpretative discourse around it. The aim of the passages is to outline the dialectics of weaving and embroidery as I experienced it through the research. Thus the selection of texts, even though some of them are well known and debated (Bible, writings of Anni Albers, Rodzika Parker's Subversive Stitch), is subjective and does not pretend to generalise the status of weaving and embroidery in contemporary art and culture.

This is one of the several means that I employed to write an autobiography from within the research: via encounters with texts on textiles that mattered and remained relevant throughout. This is the source of the word tokens in the title: these texts, quotes and passages formed around them persistently remained, surviving several editorial attempts "to make sense" of them, with a final resolution to present them almost as they are: tokens of articulation in a reflective process which accompanied the practical work. The value of this assembly is operational, articulatory, pursuing the idea to make place and space, dubious and fragile as they are, for thinking practice, i.e. sustaining conceptual and cultural links which mobilise and perpetuate practice outside the "proper sense" of a subject to be analysed within a particular disciplinary logic.

#### Weaving, 1.

Anni Albers, "On Weaving":

In the plain weave this intersecting of warp and weft takes place in the simplest possible manner. A weft thread moves alternately over and under each warp thread it meets on its horizontal course from one side of the warp to the other; returning it reverses the order and crosses over those threads under which it moved before and under those over which it crossed. This is the quintessence of weaving. ... The old truth applies here again – a process reduced to just the essential allows the broadest application.

Weaving in its basic form, a simple weave, operates as a simple binary grid, when one warp thread overlays one weft thread, and then vice versa. In the

iconic modernist definition by Anni Albers, simple weave is the quintessence of weaving, the necessity, a mother structure, whose purity has to be guarded strictly and reflected in the cloth design.<sup>106</sup> Weaving seen from this perspective is the ultimate functional-poetic basis of all textile production and creativity.<sup>107</sup> The principle at work here is that of restraint, a cleverly reductive rationality, whose conceptualizing or inventive power is predicated upon the loom's mechanism and the resulting highly structured and controlled character of the cloth's appearance, feel and texture.

### Weaving, 2.

Exodus, 26:1:

... thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet: with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.

The Exodus book calls weaving a "cunning work", (מעשה חושב maase hoshev), it is with figuratively woven cloth that the curtains of the tabernacle had to be made. חשב [h.sh.v] is a root that signifies thinking, rational calculation, reflection, in a reflexive form התחשב - a consideration and concern for others<sup>108</sup>.

### Weaving, 3.

Charles Earle Funk, *A Hog on Ice and Other Curious Expressions*, quoted in Mildred Constantine's and Laurel Reuter's book *Whole Cloth*:

Back in the fifteenth century, "whole cloth" was used synonymously with "broad cloth", that is, cloth that run the full width of the loom. The term dropped into disuse along the eighteenth century, except in the figurative sense. In early use, the phrase retained much of the literal meaning, a thing was fabricated out of the full amount or extent of that which composed it ... But by the nineteenth century it would appear that tailors or others who made garments were pooling the wool over the eyes of their customers, for, especially in the United States, the expression came to have just the opposite meaning. Instead of using the whole material, as they advertised, they were really using patched or pieces

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<sup>106</sup> Albers, Anni; "On Weaving" in Adamson G. (2010) pp.29-33.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid pp. 30-31

<sup>108</sup> *The New Even Shoshan Dictionary of Hebrew*. (1968). Entry < חשב > vol. 3. p. 849



goods, or, it might be, cloth that had been falsely stretched to appear to be of full width.

Woven textile is constructed; the "cloth" of this "textile" is always specifically manufactured as much as it is fabricated, made in a particular historically conditioned manner. Mildred Constantine and Laurel Reuter turned to this state in their 1997 volume *Whole Cloth*, which provided one of the first systematic surveys of the use of textiles in contemporary art. The very title of this work relates to the expression which historically saw the reversal of its original and acquired meanings: from a "whole cloth" as a cloth of a full loom width to a "whole cloth" as a garment fabricated from pieces, but presented as produced from a whole width. The expression has moved all the way from signification of authenticity and propriety to fabrication and deceit and it became one of the major interpretative motives in the discussion of artworks for the authors.<sup>109</sup>

#### Weaving, 4.

Paul Carter, *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research*:

The opportunistic, but always forward-moving trajectory of the shuttle symbolises the fact that local invention is always an act of exquisite timing.<sup>110</sup>

Calculus, fiction, labour and time are at the heart of a woven textile. The time of a woven textile is manifold: it is the historical time, the particular timing of its appearance and the time taken to produce this appearance. Paul Carter reflects on this coevalness of temporality, technicality and materiality in a woven cloth, a coevalness whose outcome is a certain becoming, "the right moment" when things happen. The opening of the shed and progress of the cloth on a loom are, according to Carter, the epitome of an opportunity, "the right moment" of invention, which is always bound to the duration of the production process. Local invention for Carter is an outcome of a "material thinking", a process-based creative research which operates outside the accepted boundaries of "creative" or humanitarian disciplines, producing a discourse which is:

likely to be occasional, generically disrespectful and promiscuous, and localised.<sup>111</sup>

I should expand: it is the particular, always specific and thus profoundly historical, timed and timely, moment of creation, the encounter of materiality of

<sup>109</sup> Constantine, Mildred and Reuter, Laurel. (1997). *Whole Cloth*. New York: Monachelli Press. See the introduction epigraph using an excerpt from Charles Earle Funk, *A Hog on Ice and Other Curious Expressions*, as well as the introduction itself on pp. 9-11.

<sup>110</sup> Carter, Paul. (2005). p. 14.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid pp. 8-9.

production and culture: its stories, fables and fictions. In this whole cloth invention and fiction do not stand apart.

Weaving, 5.

Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, "We Are Already In The Jaws Of The Book InterViews":

The interchanges of the writing constitute a weaving that makes the texts unique; it operates an all-out putting into relation of elements: from the big to the small, from low to high and vice versa, it forms very subtle networks. ... Such is the weaving: at the limit, in a sort of exaltation of the possibilities (of what is possible) of the text. ... Weaving, interchanges, reticular system, non-mastery of the subject of writing, all of this brings forth the exigency of the reading...<sup>112</sup>

Hélène Cixous, "Albums and Legends":

This is how she became a war widow in France where she received a small pension until the end. These little things, these ties are very strong weavings. I have vestiges in myself of a History that still had a pre-inhuman mask.<sup>113</sup>

Discussing the writing process with Hélène Cixous, Mireille Calle-Grouber relates to writing as multiple interchanges. Here interchange gains a properly textile meaning – the encounter of warp and weft threads in a piece of fabric. For Grouber this encounter signifies the mobility and dynamism of meaning and language in Cixous' prose. Another "double bind": in purely technical terms, interchanges of warp and weft create the fabric precisely because they fix the threads, interlace them in a particular order and angle, so that the multiplication of interchanges, involving each thread, strengthens the fabric and creates a pattern.

Another interchange, between History and story: the raw materials of autobiography which become enduring, embodied, "textilised" details of the past. Re-edited, enhanced or subdued by the work of writing, they do not let go of the story-teller. They are vestiges of a woven cloth in Cixous' text.

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<sup>112</sup> Cixous Hélène and Calle-Gruber, Mireille. "We Are Already In The Jaws Of The Book InterViews" in Cixous H. and Calle-Gruber, M. (1997) pp. 23-25.

<sup>113</sup> Cixous, Hélène. "Albums and Legends" in Cixous H. and Calle-Gruber, M. (1997) p. 189

#### Weaving, 4.

Patricia Klindienst, "The Voice of the Shuttle is Ours":

War and weaving are antithetical not because when women are weaving we are in our rightly place, but because all of the truly generative activities of human life are born of order and give rise to order. But just as Philomela can weave any number of patterns on her loom, culture need not retain one fixed structure.<sup>114</sup>

The myths of Philomela and Arachne, in the feminist reading of Klindienst, show the potential of weaving as the female acquisition of speech, speaking against (and despite) centuries of silencing of the female voice in the Western literature.<sup>115</sup> The loom acts not as a signifier of feminine "naturalness", as Freud suggests, but as a powerful cultural mechanism of story-telling, "an instrument that binds and connects". The multiplicity of its bindings and connections – of its interchanges - is irreducible.

#### Embroidery, 1:

Mireille Calle-Gruber, "Portrait of Writing Writing-thinking":

...exasperating tensions and contrasts, it [the writing] works frontwards and backwards, reversibility and meaning, adoption and option, tacking stitch and straight thread of narrative, twisted thread and chain of logic. ... Of wanting it retains the volition; of ability, the potential; of power, the possibility. In short it is a writing of the faculties and of the optional – not at all a writing of laws or of prerogatives. The latter, Hélène Cixous opposes a writing that is a weak force: that does not exercise mastery; that at most exercises itself in attempts.<sup>116</sup>

On both sides of her texts, backwards and frontwards, in between them, she is willingly weak: she stitches and tacks and twists and chains. She retains her mastery, she leaves it out of writing. The Greek ladies were different. Who is writing? Does it have a name other than Hélène?

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<sup>114</sup> Klindienst, P. (1984)

<sup>115</sup> Ibid pp. 25-33.

<sup>116</sup> Calle-Gruber, Mireille. "Portrait of Writing Writing-thinking" in Cixous H., Calle-Gruber, M. (1997) p. 141, original italics.

## Embroidery, 2.

Exodus, 26:36:

And thou shalt make an hanging for the door of the tent, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework.

Exodus 35:34-35:

And he [God] hath put in his heart that he may teach... Them hath he filled with wisdom of heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet...

Ezekiel 16:10:

I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk.

Embroidery or needlework (מעשה רוקם, maase rokem) is reserved for the entrance curtain of the tabernacle, which is not to come into direct contact with the Holy of Holies. Embroidery is mentioned in the Bible in reference to the teaching skill of Betzalel, the crafter of the tabernacle; and in reference to luxury clothing, at times in the context of a deprecation of the hubris and debauchery of the People of Israel.

## Embroidery, 3.

The New Evan Shoshan Dictionary of Hebrew, entry <רוקם>

The Hebrew root רקם [r.k.m], while signifying embroidery, can also be used as a signifier of intricate working, devising of something, plot and intrigue. In this last sense a rather common expression is: לרקום מזימה, to embroider/devise a plot.<sup>117</sup>

## Embroidery, 4.

At the same time Hebrew רקם also relates to working in a sense of "creation", a physical genesis of the body, as in Psalms 139:15:

לא נכחד עצמי ממך אשר עשיתי בסתר רקמתי בתחתיות ארץ

My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made  
in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of

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<sup>117</sup> *The New Even Shoshan Dictionary of Hebrew*. (1968). Entry <רוקם >. vol. 6. p. 2568

the earth.<sup>118</sup>

or

My bones were not hidden from you, when I was made  
in secret and sewed together in the depths of the  
earth.<sup>119</sup>

Other translations suggest “fashioned”,<sup>120</sup> “skilfully wrought”<sup>121</sup> etc., stressing the associations of intricacy, skill, and a rather strange sense of fancy, a spooky peculiarity of this secret making.

### Embroidery, 5.

Kathy O'Dell, “The Secret and the Stitch: Annet Couwenberg, Inside and Out.”

Reflecting on the work of Annet Couwenberg, O'Dell speaks of “the extortion of the secret”.<sup>122</sup> Couwenberg's work addresses histories of racism referencing eugenic charts from Nazi Germany - first in her stylised drawings and then in stitch. The stitch appears as “a signifier of tactility”, but not as its “direct manifestation”. The reproduction process (from real chart to drawing, from drawing to computer, from computer to sewing machine) that precedes the appearance of the final embroidery, for O'Dell, is a reason to suggest that the textile practitioners were the first to understand the “complexity of ... “the real” and its relationship with representation”:

[since the 16th century fibre artists] have increasingly understood that what they create by hand (sometimes thought to be more real by virtue of tactile interaction) is already a representation – indeed a representation of a representation, a copy of its own copy, which is already printed in a pattern book...

A tricky moment and a problematic passage, let's not engage in a discussion around the question of what is more real – a flower, its outline in a pattern book or its embroidery? The three are real enough to discuss their differences and relationships. But the extortion of the secret, which is “the real”, which is - in case of the work in question – racism, via stitch, which is somehow not

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<sup>118</sup> King James Version, available from:

<<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139&version=KJV>>

<sup>119</sup> New English Translation, available from:

<<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139&version=NET>>

<sup>120</sup> 1599 Geneva Bible, available from:

<<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139&version=GNV>>

<sup>121</sup> New American Standard Bible, available from:

<<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139&version=NASB>>

<sup>122</sup> O'Dell, Kathy. (March 2012). “The Secret and the Stitch: Annet Couwenberg, Inside and Out”. *Textile, The Journal of Cloth and Culture*. Vol. 10. (1) (30-43) p. 36

itself, since its "selfness" is predicated upon its tactility, of which it is deprived, serving as its mere signifier - or rather the viewer is deprived, because he/she cannot touch a piece of art in a gallery space. Substitution, subjectile - a case to prick a finger with a needle.

#### Embroidery, 6.

Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch*:

What women depicted in thread became determined by notions of femininity, and the resulting femininity of embroidery defined and constructed its practitioners in its own image. ... Limited to practising art with needle and thread, women have nevertheless sewn a subversive stitch – managed to make meanings of their own in the very medium intended to inculcate self-effacement.<sup>123</sup>

*When I went to study textiles in 1997, my grandfather was pleased, as for him it meant a proper preoccupation for a young girl. His approval was of a strange kind, since in the family "female preoccupations" were not practised. His educational agenda was a hybrid mix of Makarenko and 19th century Russian literature, brutally fused in his practice as a principal of an orphan's school in the post-war Soviet Russia. Boys had to bow when meeting a teacher, girls had to curtsy. My mother remembers it as a dull and indigent nightmare. The school was set in the forest, in a deserted mansion house, with land and farm animals. They grew their own food, they had an aeroplane. These things are never clear. Girls that curtsy also embroider. I've never curtsied. It is all too imaginary, too distant and too close.*

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<sup>123</sup> Parker, R. (1984) p. 215.

**Appendix 5**

**The Practice Journal**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage</b>	<b>Comment</b>
28/11/08	Sketch	I am working on the digital sketch of the binder for the Adi Foundation proposal, using the embroidered fragments done in the summer and scans of the swaddling cloths.
01/12/08	Sketch	Sketch completed, accompanying text done – all sent to the foundation
07/10/09	Tracing	I want to draw the birds, not sure what they mean. Meanwhile I am not going to draw them, but I hope they will be useful. The tracing is going well. The cut-outs are slightly wider than the actual shapes of letters that I need, but I hope I will be able to improvise with the embroidery itself to get the shapes a bit more slender than they are now. I will have to make some decisions regarding the printed flowers that I am going to embroider, as to how they work with the ornaments on the letters and how they work with the letter's shape. I already tried to position the letters on the fabric in a way that there will be some relationship between the letters and the printed flowers and the ornamental shapes within the letters. Some relationships start to develop, where they are part of the printed flower, actually getting into the letter, like in 'mem' in Shlomo. There are several places where this happens and it is going to be very interesting to embroider it, making those little decisions. I hope the ink I am using will be easy to remove, I've checked it, it is water-soluble, hope it will not be pipping out in some places. I am considering leaving some letters un-embroidered, just with their drawn out-lines. In that case I might have to redraw them with a pencil, because this ink is very easy erasable. Also this colour should not remain on the cloth.
29/10/09	Embroidery	Sarah and some flowers are completed
20/12/09	Embroidery	Haven't done much embroidery in a while, important questions that come up: the blending of the printed flowers within the letters and the use of the very bright colours (orange and blue); the floss was bought together with the rest of the beige-olive-white-brown silks, it is much thinner and very vibrant. The idea of buying them came after seeing the catalogue 'Rukodelie', or <i>Handiwork</i> , of Russian avant-garde embroideries in the 20 <sup>th</sup> century, Proun Gallery, Moscow. Currently I decided to work with the printed flowers. I am now working on the name of my grand-mother's father, Shlomo or Solomon, it seems there will be some relationship between the names Sarah and Shlomo. It is quite possible that Shlomo will be much more loaded with flowers and bright colours, while Sarah is primarily textual. These issues will have to be considered again later on. This is the first panel, a pilot in terms of design, and the subtle relationships between the floral language of the printed cloth and the textual character of the embroidery – these things will have to be considered in detail as the work progresses. I made the outline in the letter Hey, the end of Shlomo, just the outline in the intensely blue thread, even without the orange filling it could be used by itself, not sure in here, but perhaps in a different panel. It can provide the basic outline for the design. Another issue: the interaction of the flowers taken from the original German design with the printed flowers on the cloth, particularly the embroidered flower which stems from the lamed in Shlomo and integrates itself into the printed rose. If it is to be embroidered in the same colours, it can produce a kind of strange and peculiar hydride shape. Two technical discoveries which came up as I was doing this rose: 1. it is easier to make the thin outline of the rose with the tiny satin stitch in two parts, first to fill a line with some spaces between the stitches, then to go back and to fill in the spaces to complete the line, otherwise it is very difficult for the eye to concentrate constantly on the line. Apparently the hand develops a particular pace when applying the stitches, and it is better to go with this pace. The thing will be to learn how to do this more evenly than I have managed to do here. 2. I managed to find a much longer and thinner needle for the very delicate threads in the printed flowers, it allows me to work more finely and faster, as I can easily pierce the fabric twice and follow the tracing more precisely. Important observation: the overall integration of the big printed roses into the general design of the panel, the relationship of the inscription with the repeating pattern. The roses seem to add a kind of mark, a stop within the inscription, with three main positions: entirely covered by the letter, partially covered and thus showing a hole in embroidery in the section where overlay with the letter happens, entirely revealed. They add a kind of ornamental syntax. They also add another layer of meaning to the whole thing, the vernacular, colourful, expressive language of the pattern with the traditional, sacred, balanced, reserved language of the inscription.
25/12/09	Embroidery	Important issue: the left side. There is an idea of showing both sides of the embroidery on the right side of the binder – a thing to consider. Also it seems to work better when I am building up the design gradually, working over all of the panel in portions, rather than finishing one motive or letter each time. In this way I see the general picture coming together, more of a painterly approach.

<b>26/12/09</b>	Embroidery	Important concern of the work generally: the need to achieve a balance between the immediate narrative element in the project, i.e. the story to be told, the autobiography, and the 'purely' design or aesthetic element, i.e. to develop a distinct visual and material language, which has a link with the narrative, but can also exist in its own right. In another panel which will be done on the same fabric, I will have to take a different approach to the flowers. Rather than filling them in with embroidery I will leave them plain and fill the areas around them in the letters, producing a kind of windows. Such dense filling of the letters also exists in the Fürth binder. This should be a concern of this other panel. It is possible to say that the practical work develops in a way that mirrors or parallels the structure of the written thesis. The first parallel is the story written down on the binder literally, letters, words and whatever they convey. The second parallel is the story which develops through the intermingling of the embroidery and the printed pattern, the story of different colours, materialities, styles, the way they coincide, co-exist, mingle, attract or reject each other, opting for a new hybrid language. There is a link between those two strands, the narrative and the stylistic. There is the third strand, which is the whole autobiographical aspect written as a short story, which clarifies the inscription on the binder. Important question which arises is how this triple relationship - the framework story, the inscription on the binder and its style, its visual language - is going to be organized through the project. This relationship should form the backbone, the strategy of curating and exhibiting the work and its inscription into the thesis. A problematic issue: is there a lack of visual clarity, i.e. a design problem, which makes the work complicated, not immediate in its perception, or is it the initial complexity of the narrative, of the various ways in which narrative entangles in materiality and materiality entangles in narrative, another way of telling a story? I hope that it is not as clear cut, like a modernist idea of clearness. On the other hand the complexity and particularity of the narrative should not come at the expense of the visual quality of the work (not a very clear issue in itself, but nevertheless). It should be well formulated, but not just as illustration (yet another thing to explore, pros and cons, or why is this a question at all, is it really such a bad thing?). Illustration is clearly an issue here, since there is a very close relationship between the autobiographical and the historical narratives and the style of the binder. It's the initial framework which was set as the precondition of the work, that the design and colouristics of the historical Fürth binder were taken as the design foundation to be applied on my swaddling cloth fabrics, which are very alien to it in their appearance. It has already created a discrepancy or incongruence between those different elements that should be brought together. This is part of the experience, of the charade. This is also part of the 'message' regarding identity (illustration again!!!)
<b>04/01/10</b>	Embroidery	Sarah bat Shlomo panel is ready
<b>10/01/10</b>	Embroidery, photo	Added the small inscription "called Sonya" under Sarah, tried to photograph the panel for the catalogue, the results are not really satisfying – the lighting is wrong, too yellow, will send those meanwhile and improve the photos for later
<b>15/02/10</b>	Embroidery	I decided to give portions of the work to other embroiderers. The "was born" pink panel is embroidered by my mother. The outlines are almost complete, I will do the filling-in. I am giving the outlines and the finishings to be done to either Itamar Sagie, a craftsman and embroiderer, who teaches in Shenkar. Also I asked for recommendations from our embroidery teacher, Ruti, who suggested two of her past pupils to whom I can turn – I need to check with them on the coming Sunday. Yasmin Cohen, my ex-student, who also works with embroidery in the fine art context is very eager to participate. That brings a male element into the work :) I decided to give them mainly the contours of the letters, so that I can do all the filling-in.
<b>01/03/10</b>	Embroidery	I have given a panel to embroider to my mother, mainly the outlines, to speed up the work. The decision is mainly practical, but I need to take account of the conceptual issues at work here. Now 3 generations are entangled in the binder – grandmother and me in text, me and mother – in the making.
<b>08/03/10</b>	Embroidery	Working on the Sarah's date of birth panel, striped fabric, did the "be yom" - on the day. Bet – small letters in thin silk fill in the contour in thick silk, yom – worked according to the stripes, filled the red ones with white thread, leaving the space of the inner ornament, interesting optical effect, need to work more like this
<b>10/03/10</b>	Embroidery	Almost completed Heshvan, did it in the thick silk, not according to the stripes, but just filling in the shape of the letter and the inner flowers, very festive, shining appearance, close to the original binder; also started to work on the "not written" panel, started to embroider the "not", did it with thick white silk in the out-line, started filling in with small letters in orange and blue, in a row which takes all of the word, the idea is to fill in entirely, as if a block of text.
<b>15/03/10</b>	Photo	Did new images for the catalogue, this time with Boris, very good day lighting and proper camera, most of the four panels of the first binder are completed, so we took some very good details and did the whole binder in parts so that I can combine them in Photoshop. I joined the panels with pins and lay the binder in folds, so that the joinings are not apparent.
<b>16/03/10</b>	Photo	Completed the montage of the binder image for the catalogue, selected the details – all sent to Naomi Morag, the catalogue graphic designer



<b>17/03/10</b>	Display design	The exhibition designer, Rachel-Alma Lev, contacted me with an idea of how to exhibit the binder. They cannot adhere to my original suggestion of having it spread in whole length on a narrow tilted shelf, since the space does not allow it. Rachel suggests that I make a transparent perspex cylinder, mirroring in proportions a Torah scroll around which the binder can be wrapped. I need to think about that.
<b>21/03/10</b>	Display design	I considered the cylinder idea, also spoke with Max Epstein and his wife Anna – both artists with good spatial imagination. I don't quite like it eventually - I have a different idea, which they both liked: a narrow perspex disk, (basically – a band which is slightly wider than the binder itself) about 1.5m in diameter, up and bottom open, standing on slender metal feet. The binder is sewn to perspex on its upper and lower edges. In this way all of the binder can be seen while walking around the disk – an active mode of viewing which I really like, it stresses the length of the binder, of the inscription, of the story. It is a bit inspired by the circular display of the Dead Sea scrolls in the Israel Museum. We also discussed whether the perspex needs to be covered by cloth or left as is. With feet it can be either three thin ones, probably attached to a circular low stand on the floor, or one thicker foot which stems from a metal bar which crosses the disk in the middle and holds it together.
<b>22/03/10</b>	Display design	Rachel likes the disk display, she suggested that I hang it from the ceiling, rather than standing it on the floor. She'll consult with her technician. She suggests an entrance space for the hanging, just beneath the round window at the ceiling. The work will open the show in this way. I think it can work, need to see the space again. The perspex band has to sit on a metal one, to give it strength and form, so there is another material. The question is regarding the width of the metal part, should the binder cover it or not. I think that it should be narrower than the binder and I still need to consider covering the whole thing in cloth.
<b>22/03/10</b>	Embroidery	Thoughts: maybe to do a group meeting of the people who might work on the binder. I have ordered more thread, all arrived, I need to place another order. The work must be delivered to the Artist House on the first week of May, I have 44 days left to complete the embroidery and the finishing. I have to do 2 letters a day (including my lecturing), which gives me enough time after the whole piece is "written" to think of possible additions, such as illustrations. Rebecca Earley's visit to Shenkar was a very good event, there is a possibility in respect to the project to rethink the idea of conceptual recycling, which existed in the original proposal. Becky suggested developing a workshop for the Chelsea textiles MA student with art/museum orientation – I want to consider this seriously. She also suggested a contact: Dr Stephanie Moser, an archaeologist with an interest in new ways of exhibiting and story telling and artist participation in the museum display.
<b>25/03/10</b>	Tracing	Since I am running out of the swaddling cloths I decided to add a fabric from our old pillow case for both panels. It is a faded peach colour fabric with two delicate lines of Richelieu lace which I made part of the panel's design. In "Lavorko" they separate the "lamed" with a flourishing branch which opens the panel. A similar thing happens in the last "not written" panel: there the Richelieu separates the last letter "mem" from the rest of the word "rashum", written, further emphasizing the ending of the inscription, also opening a gap in the word – a curious thing, needs to be checked in some additional work.
<b>31/03/10</b>	Embroidery	I have met with Itamar and Yasmin in Shenkar, have given them their panels. Yasmin is working on the "Lavorko, was born" panel, Itamar is doing the Aktarina's "name not written". We agreed on a very reasonable rate of work which Itamar offered and which was ok with Yasmin as well. Itamar is also doing the trimming of the panels with narrow bands of swaddling cloths.
<b>06/04/10</b>	Embroidery and finishing	Following Cixous – the unmastered writing, weaving, interchange – it is here in this embroidery, in my actions of learning to write anew – embroidering and writing the thesis. The text of the binder is unmastered – an interchange of destinies (T. Mann, Joseph – not blessing, but destiny), of appeal to tradition and its un-doing, sliding upon the waters of religious way of life, without getting fully immersed in it – is it a fair move? Woman, immigration, identity – the ones that there are and the ones that are forced, can this be a "fruitful incoherence"? The striped panel of the Sarah's binder allows me to position little letters on the inside within the stripes, as within rows. Generally stripes provided a lot of experimentation with the letters, some optical effects when filling the red stripes with white thread, thus creating the shape of the letters.
	Embroidery	When working on the miniature letters that fill the big ones, some columns (I am in the letter beth in the Shabat) come out really tidy and clear with the letter shapes clearly recognizable, in the right proportions and sitting just in the middle of the stripe. Some are awkward, distorted, lamed often looks like a 5, it is a difficult shape to make in this miniature size. Which letters are of more concern and interest to me?

<b>12/04/10</b>	Embroidery and finishing	The letter shin seems like a ladder or like a face, it is a really interesting and complicated shape, needs to be explored on its own. The word Lioznov is embroidered in one colour, brown, and the writing goes fast, I try to write/embroider fast. The result is similar to the scripts found on ceramic ostrakons, scribbles, sharp shapes, mixed words. The bet in lioznov is a bit like a sand clock shape, I am filling it with text in opposite directions, to stress the polarity of its two parts. The shin sits well inside the cone that starts the upper part of the letter springing from the circle which unites its up and down. Shin is also like bony hand, like delta of a river, an opening up. I need to look at other Jewish textual sources, like calendars and amulets. My mother pricked her finger when she was embroidering the "Lioznov", there is a small stain and a couple of really tiny drops of blood by the "lamed". She wanted to try and wash this off, but I asked her to leave the stains. I did a bright blue outline for them and some small additions of the same colour through the word, so that it heightens the all-over brown tone of the letters. I think of this bright blue as a distant reminder of writing ink. So now my binder has blood on it, just as it is supposed to – but this is a blood of a woman who embroidered. It seems like a significant trace has been left here.
<b>27/04/10</b>	Embroidery	I finished the word "lo" or no in Sarah's binder – the small inner letters cover the contour of the big letter and are crossed by it as well. It is a interdiction or a refusal which is simultaneously transgressed and remains intact. I did the no in two stages, in the first one only the big lamed and some of the filling letters, which I tried to embroider in rows, really like a block of text, and later on the whole block of inner letters and the big alef. I did the second big portion of embroidery in one long effort by the end of which I felt that this "no" is one of the biggest achievements in terms of the "meta-embroidery" and the symbolic power of writing which this action allows. I think of it as a stand-alone element in the binder, a little poem, which I also have chosen to date with the smallest numbers underneath it. Itamar finished the contours of the Akaterina panel, mother did the flowers in orange and blue, so finally I did the inner letters in orange – finished embroidering each time when the inscription was over, so that there are some letters which are not filled in entirely. I drew straight lines inside the letters to embroider the small letters – a different result altogether from the ones I did freehand.
<b>28/04/10</b>	Embroidery	Completed the cherries and the bird in Akaterina, the panel is ready. Continued working on Elul – did vav and lamed.
<b>1/5//10</b>		Completed Elul and added the flags
<b>02/05/10</b>	Embroidery	Akaterina's panel with the date 00 – also done on the striped fabric, continuation of using the stripes as a basis for the graphics. I decided to add a flag image to the upper verticals of the letters, following the iconography of some Alsatian binders, where French flags were added as a statement and celebration of national loyalty. Even though this is a digression from the original binder design, the flags seemed pertinent here because of the "official" content of the panel, the 00 date of birth. I made the flags by covering the white stripes with red thread in satin stitch in one flag and covering the red with white in the other, so that I got long red and white flags, composed of embroidered and printed sections. Red here also refers to the Soviet flag, in a kind of humorous declaration of loyalty to that extinguished, yet living entity and its bureaucratic tenets. The general impression that the panel makes is colourful and festive, with some strange formal strictness which is due to the striped design and fine execution of some (not all unfortunately) details. This sort of enigmatic and stiff elegance I see especially in the letter "vav" in "elul" with a striped circle in its upper section. Some sort of numbness, a sight of a sign with no meaning, just a presence of a signifier. Filled and empty spaces in the letters with relation to the striped pattern are also of great interest and eventually contribute to the "conceptual", abstracted, estranged impression of the panel. The combination of the decorative chain stitch in the outlines of some letters, this constant presence and absence of the "decorative", the "feminine" signifier, the contour, the image. This is also present in the date "bet" "khet" which are done without the outline, just with small letters filling in the stripes according to the letter's shape. White on red and red on white in "khet" and dark green and golden yellow in "bet". All of these games necessarily stem from the twobig and empty zeros of the date of birth, which are embroidered in white thread, filling in, effacing the red stripes. I wanted to make the shape of the zeros a bit "digital" in nature, as it is composed of very small particles, printed dots or screen pixels, bringing to mind the original imprint of the date in my own ID. I really pushed the zeros to be the last images to embroider – even though they seem to be the "root" of the whole way of dealing with colours and letters in this panel. The choice of colours of the embroidery, their constant contrast with the already very bright and vibrant stripes also heightens the strange, incongruous festivity of the panel. The addition of the golden yellow threads for me provides a reminiscence of the red state flags which I remember from the Soviet school days, with their fabric trimmed with fake gold strings and embellished by glittering fringes.
<b>03/05/10</b>	Embroidery	Zeros, khet, be-yom – completed, started working on the "not" (Akaterina) – with drawn lines, colours – dark grey and orange, very contrasting, stiff, matching and underplaying the peach colour of the fabric.
	Ideas	The striped designs of the letters brought after them some drawings of angelic and demonic schematic figures composed of bold geometric shapes, in many respects – influence from the figures of Bruskin's <i>Alefbet</i> tapestry. Those can be developed into a separate series of small embroideries on striped fabric.
	Ideas	The phrase "the name is not written" seems to yield an independent series of works as well, based only on it. I am interested in the possibility of translating it and embroidering it in Russian and English. The issue of translation and the way in which the translation can be manifested through embroidery is of interest.

<b>04/05/10</b>	Finishing	Final details, last joining, the water-soluble marker doesn't really come off the fabric!!! Joinings – mainly done by my mother with me providing examples for the plants. The joining seams are too thick, I will probably have to redo them after the exhibition is over.
<b>05/05/10</b>	Mounting exhibition	6 hours of stitching the binder to the perspex fixture, looks good, no mistakes with holes, need to take care of lighting
<b>08/05/10-10/07/10</b>	Exhibition	Adi Foundation "Rapture and Repair" Jerusalem Artist House
<b>28/04/11</b>	Video	Spoke to a friend Lev Golitzer, a video editor, he really liked the suggestion for the short film, agreed to shoot and help with editing. Some useful advice from Lev: dark background – white might reflect, dark will blend with the external space; possibly some narrow board to elevate the binder, additional lighting – can be just a couple of 100 watt bulbs; better to do several takes of the video and additional separate recording of the voice – then to remix the best versions; the movement of the binder should proceed from left to right side of the screen; colours can be adjusted during editing.
<b>30/04/11</b>	Video	Introduced the idea of the film to grand-mother – no problem, easy consent. We did a couple of trials in winding-unwinding the binder over her old dinner table, the difficulty and the most important factor in the moving image – rhythm, which depends on the coordination between the two winders. When they tried the second time, I saw the beginning of coordination, a slow rhythm was coming into being I started to sing the song and mother followed. As I expected it was helpful: movements became more coordinated, mother adapted the pace of the song to the movement of grandmother's hands – grandmother's deafness was a factor to be considered. The auditory aspect then becomes complex – it is between a hearing and a deaf person that the binder unwinds with the song. Issues to consider: black velvet sticky background, the location of the shooting, dress of the two women, another camera to document the shooting.
<b>08/05/11</b>	Video shooting	Did a day of shooting yesterday, 4 takes, none of them satisfactory. Main issues: the movement of the binder, the rolling should be very slow; there must be a clear beginning and ending with a clear black shot, my hands setting the rolled binder into the centre of the shot, two pairs of hands entering simultaneously from both sides, the singing should start the moment the unrolling begins (this is very important); the song can be divided – one part, one humming of a melody, then it will cover the whole sequence. There must be a clear narrative, even though the action is very simple. Another problem – moire effect, which we were able only partially solve by changing the zoom.
<b>22/09/11</b>	Exhibition	Kaunas Biennale: textile'11: REWIND – PLAY – FORWARD

## Appendix 6

### Exhibitions:

#### 2014:

The First Israeli Biennale of Textiles, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv, Israel. Curator: Irena Gordon.

#### 2013:

*Stories of the Torn Swaddling Cloths*, Gallery of the Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles, Goldsmiths College, London.

The embroidery and video work reflects on the emergence of a contemporary Russian-Jewish female identity in Israel, fabricating links between 19th century Jewish ceremonial textiles and the autobiography of the artist.

The work will be exhibited in the context of the Pasold<sup>124</sup> 2013 Conference, titled: *Sourcing the Archive: New Approaches to Materialising Textile History*. The conference aims to explore "how tacit knowledge of material and affective relationships can be traced through the words we think with (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, 2003) with a view to asking: how can our engagement with textile sources extend our knowledge of the past?". The embroidered binder and the video work *On My Dear One* will be exhibited in the Gallery of the Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre for Textiles in Goldsmiths College, together with a selection of historical textiles from the Goldsmiths Textile Collections.

#### 2011:

*Rewind: Personal Story*, Kaunas Textile Biennale, Lithuania

The embroidered binder and the video were selected in the open call exhibition as part of the Kaunas Textile Biennale 2011. From the exhibition brief: "The narrative as a new strategy of contemporary art is intertwined here with a specific task. This task is to speak through textile, which is understood as a connotation, a hint, a conceptual mediator of experience."<sup>125</sup>

#### 2010:

*Rupture and Repair*, exhibition of the Adi Foundation Prize for Jewish Expression in Art and Design, Jerusalem Artists House, Israel.

From the Adi Foundation website: "They who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy,' declared the psalmist, expressing the dialectical relationship between rupture

<sup>124</sup> The Pasold Research Fund promotes and supports research on textile history, broadly defined. It does this by giving financial assistance to researchers, by organising and supporting conferences and workshops and by publishing a monograph series and a major journal, *Textile History*. <<http://www.pasold.co.uk/>>.

<sup>125</sup> <[http://www.bienale.lt/2011/?page\\_id=61&lang=en](http://www.bienale.lt/2011/?page_id=61&lang=en)>.

and repair in Jewish thought. As the subject of the competition for The Adi Prize, Rupture and Repair resonated with artists creating in a wide variety of media whose works refer to Jewish history, prayer and ritual, midrash (homiletics) and folk tales, Israeli society, and family chronicles."<sup>126</sup>

### **Exhibitions review**

Exhibitions is a field of operation that I consider to be very important, especially in view of the relational and political aspect of the work. One of my initial intentions was to present the "fictive" binder side by side with the "original" one in the museal setting of the German-Speaking Jews Museum in Tefen, and organize a series of public events around it. The idea was met with enthusiasm on the part of the junior curator of the museum, Tamar Livne, but then flatly rejected by the chief curator, Ruti Offek, who decided that the subject was too narrow and academic and thus could not be of interest to a wider audience and definitely not to visitors to the Jecke Museum. Probably the binder was too pink for the respectable nostalgia of the museum, another point to the political value of the torn swaddling cloths.

Notwithstanding Offek's opinion, the work was exhibited in a much less specialised contexts and invoked interest exactly from "the wide audience", academics and artists inclusive. One of the most memorable reactions came from David Blumberg, the elderly chair of the Adi Foundation Prize, who slowly walked around the circular display several times, partially looking at the work, partially at the ground, and said: "What is left of a person, but a name and a date?"

Another exhibition venue that I wanted to explore was the Jewish Museum in Fürth. Initially I planned to exhibit first in Tefen and then take both binders to Fürth, to their strangely "native" town. Unfortunately the Fürth Museum, although generally cooperative, entered a long period of repair and restructuring, which is due to finish in 2014. I hope that I will be able to realise an exhibition in this venue, showing the embroidery and video work, as well as with their future derivations. Bringing the work to Russia and exploring the appropriate venues and histories there also figures as an option.

Even though the curatorial part of the practice did not come out as I intended, it is possible to say that the work was exhibited in venues that were highly appropriate and provided the right context for it, as well as a measure of exposure to a limited, but interested public.

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<sup>126</sup> <[http://www.adifoundation.co.il/Exhibition\\_eng.asp](http://www.adifoundation.co.il/Exhibition_eng.asp)>. "The Adi Foundation was established in Jerusalem in 2001 and honours the memory of Adi Dermer, née Blumberg, a young artist who passed away in the prime of her life.

The Adi Foundation was established to continue to address the subjects that inspired Adi's creativity, in particular the link between beauty and sanctity. The Foundation promotes and nurtures artistic work that examines the relationship between art and Judaism, and endeavours to combine Jewish values with design and artistic expression. The Foundation supports the creative and philosophical activity of artists and intellectuals concerned with these issues, and encourages a productive dialogue between them as well as with other sectors of Israeli society."

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## Illustrations

All photographs presented here were taken by myself, unless otherwise stated.

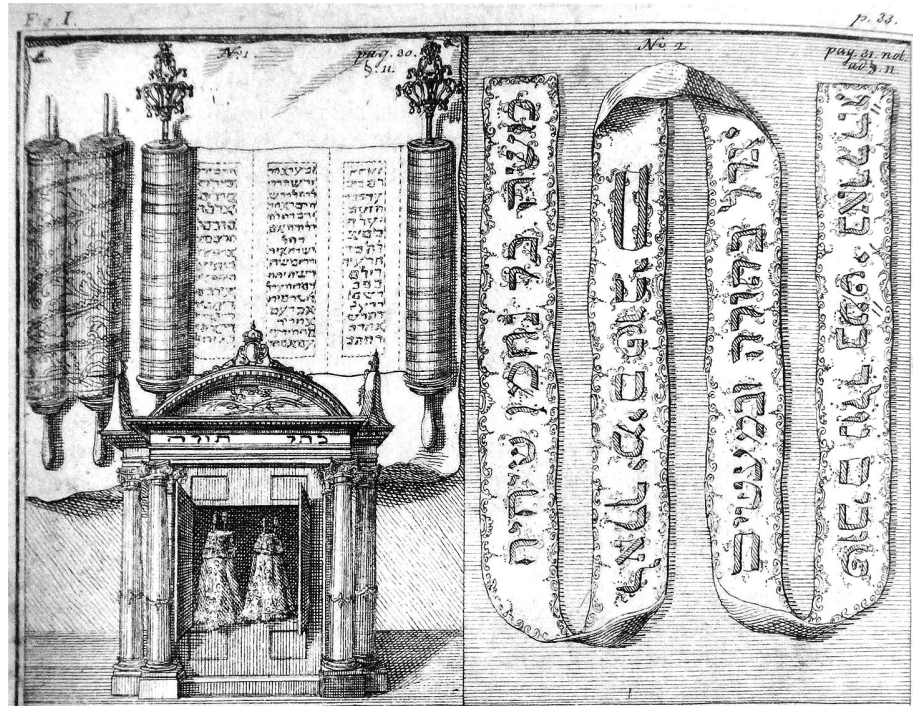


Fig. 1. Torah scroll, Holy Arc and Torah binder. Illustration from Johann Christoph Georg Bodenschatz's *Kirchliche Verfassung der heutigen Juden sonderlich derer in Deutschland...*Coburg, Georg Otto, 1749

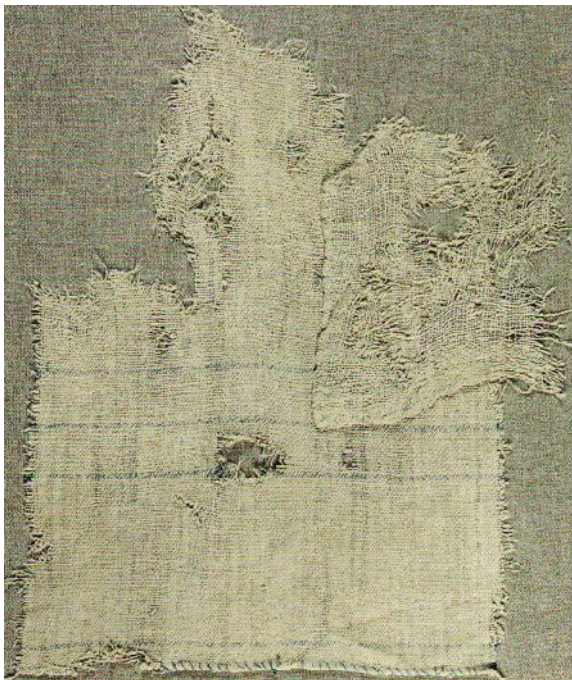


Fig. 2. On the left: A linen Torah scroll cover from Kumran caves, Judea desert, 1st century AD. On the right: A wool Torah scroll cover from Nahal Hever caves, Judea desert , 120-135 AD.





Fig. 3. Torah scrolls in the Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam. The central scroll is dressed in black due to the Atonement Day. It is wrapped in a *Yeri-ah*, tied with an *Avnet* and covered with a *Meil*. Source: Yaniv, Bracha. (2008). *The Work of Embroidery*, Jerusalem: Ben Tzvi Institute, p.261



Fig. 4. The binder is visible on the opening illustration to the "Song of Songs" in 1320 *Machzor Meshulash*, "a triple cycle" - a compilation of prayers for the three pilgrimage festivals: Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot. Source: Yaniv, B. (2008) p.24



Fig. 5. Examples of German binders: Torah binder (fragment), 1737, embroidery on linen, num. 150/54, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.





Fig. 5a. Examples of German binders: Torah binder (fragment), 1737, embroidery on linen, num. 150/54, Torah binder (fragment), block-print on linen, num. 150/65, both in IMJ.



Fig. 6. Image of a swaddled baby on a block-printed Torah binder from 1762, num. 150/65, Israel Museum, Jerusalem.





Fig. 7. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (German, 1800-1882). *The Godfather Awaits the Child*, 1867 . Oil on canvas, 55.2 x 68.5 cm. JMNY. Source: [http://www.thejewish-museum.org/onlinecollection/oci/201111\\_2/w445h600/tri\\_55479\\_1999-97.jpg](http://www.thejewish-museum.org/onlinecollection/oci/201111_2/w445h600/tri_55479_1999-97.jpg)



Fig. 8. Moritz Daniel Oppenheim (German, 1800-1882). *The Presentation at the Synagogue*, (fragment), 1869. Oil on canvas; 71.5 x 57 cm; Jewish Museum New York (JMNY). Source: [http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/201111\\_2/w220/tri\\_55480\\_1999-98.jpg](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/201111_2/w220/tri_55480_1999-98.jpg)



Figs. 9-10. Torah binder, 1836, Fürth, Germany. Silk on linen, 3.2 m x 18 cm. Museum of the German Speaking Jewry (MJSJ), Tefen, Israel.







Fig. 11. Torah binder, 1836, Fürth, Germany. "Tzvi called Hirsch bar Yoel"



Fig. 12. Torah binder, 1836, Fürth, Germany. Signature of the maker: MADE BY (B/H)"G (?-L-?/M-N) FING(ER)SPI(GE)L [HOLY COMMUNITY] FIRT.



Fig. 13. Torah binder trimmed with fabric. Israel Museum, Jerusalem (IMJ), num. 150/087, JRSO.



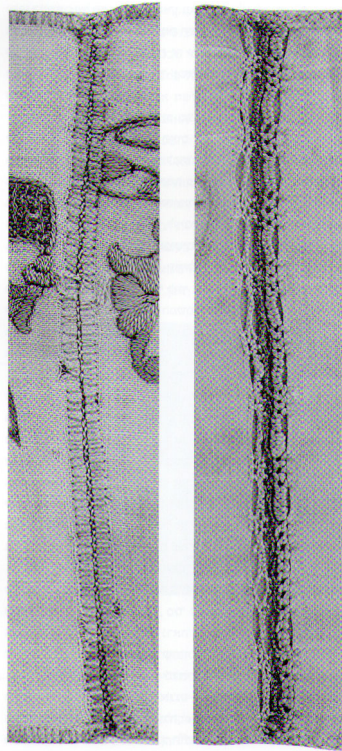


Fig. 14. Examples of fag-goting in joining seams of German binders. On the right: a binder from 1611. On the left: a binder from 1719. Source: Yaniv, B. (2008) p.89.



Fig. 15. Joining seam of the 1836 binder from Fürth, left and right sides. The seams are made discreet with hemming stitch, then simultaneously emphasised and concealed by means of embroidered images.



Fig. 16. A 1814 binder of Munich-born Menachem Lilienthal in the collection of Judah L. Magnes Museum (JLMM), Berkeley, num. 80.83. Source: [http://farm4.staticflickr.com/3403/4558791104\\_a7966a4384\\_b.jpg](http://farm4.staticflickr.com/3403/4558791104_a7966a4384_b.jpg)



Fig. 17. A 1897 German Matzah cover embroidered with colourful flowery garlands in satin stitch, signed with the initials of its maker (Num. 85.23.1, JLMM). Source: [http://www.magnesalm.org/multimedia/images/jpg/85-23-1\\_1.jpg](http://www.magnesalm.org/multimedia/images/jpg/85-23-1_1.jpg)





Fig. 18. An Alsatian Passover cushion cover with exquisite botanical embroidery. Num. JM 5-75a, JMNY. Source: [http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/201001\\_1/w445h600/tri\\_49454\\_JM-5-75a.jpg](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/201001_1/w445h600/tri_49454_JM-5-75a.jpg)



Fig. 19. A Matza cover richly embroidered with bright wool and beads, bearing depictions of grapes, wheat and blessing cup. Num. 158/001, IMJ.



Fig. 20. A German arc curtain from 1730/1 with an example of Baroque metallic embroidery. Source: Yaniv, B., (2009), p. 58.



Fig. 21. Images of doves in the 1836 binder.





Fig. 22. Flowers and plants in the 1836 binder: tulips, jasmine, carnations, possibly Callistephus (China aster) or marigold, oak and hazel



Fig. 23. Joining seams of the 1836 binder. From right to left: (1) two thin stems of carnations with buds and leaves, grown in a pot or a basket, tied to a supporting stick, which actually cover the seam; (2) a thin conical tree with white round fruits among rare foliage and a curling serpent, adjacent to a vase with a triple white lily; (3) an indoor plant (possibly a pothos) with white buds grown in a pot, also supported by a stick.





Fig. 24. A visual exegesis of the written text: images of deer and bull in the 1836 binder.



Fig. 25. Image of the Torah scroll in the 1836 binder. "And this is the Torah that Moses put before the sons of Israel by the Lord in the hands of Moses."



Fig. 26. Image of the Huppah in the 1836 binder: a monumental wedding canopy resting on two thick columns with heavy drapes.





Fig. 27. A 1814 silver Hanukkah lamp (num. 12243) and a 19th cent. Torah breastplate (num. 12328) from the Cluny Museum of Medieval Art in Paris. Source: Klagsbald, Victor A. (1982). *Jewish Treasures from Paris: from the Collections of the Cluny Museum and the Consistoire*. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. pp. 24-25, 54-55.



Fig. 28. A fragment of a 1814 towel signed by Pairly (פעיירלי) (Num. 161/18 IM in IMJ).





Fig. 29. Torah curtain, 1723-3, signed by Elkana Schatz, in the collection of the Israel Museum. Source: Benjamin, Chaya; "Sacred Beauty: Treasures of Judaica and Jewish Ethnography" in: (2006); Beauty and Sanctity: the Israel Museum at 40, ex. cat.; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; un-paginated.



Fig. 30. Flowers on the joining seams: a professional mark of the embroiderer? Torah binder, 1706, a mark of the embroiderer Ichenhausen synagogue, no inventory number. Source: Weber A., et al. (1997), pp. 126, 130-1



Fig. 31. Auxiliary vertical graphic elements, which mark certain points in the text. Binder from Ichenhausen, 1717. Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 25/94, 10-11. Source: Weber A., et al. (1997), pp. 127, 132



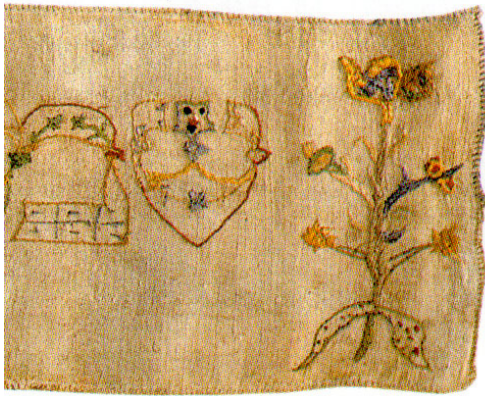


Fig. 32. Torah binder from Ichenhausen, 1720. Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 26/94, 10-11. Source: Weber A., et al. (1997), pp. 128, 132



Fig. 33. 1693 binder from Ichenhausen, Ichenhausen synagogue: inv. no. Td 12/94 10-11. Source: Weber A. et al. (1997), pp. 125.



Fig. 34. Torah binder from Mackenheim, 1693, private property: inv. no. 2. Source: Weber A. et al. (1997), pp. 137, 149.



Fig. 35. Vertical floral insertions dividing the inscription into portions. Esther Scroll. Engraver: Salom Italia (1619-after 1655); Amsterdam (Netherlands), c. 1641; Pen-and-ink and print on parchment; 20.2 x 250.4 cm; JMNY, D 76. Source: [http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/nov08allgood/w445h600/tri\\_44709\\_d76.jpg](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/nov08allgood/w445h600/tri_44709_d76.jpg)



Fig. 36. Vases containing flowers or blooming trees were common elements in the arc curtains. Yakov Kopel Gansch, Torah arc curtain, 1772, metallic embroidery, Southern Germany, 235 x 164 cm. Source: Yaniv, B. (2008) p. 192.



Fig. 37. Passover towels present a whole paradisaical scene. A towel of 1828/9, JMNY num. F 5004. 141 x 41.5 cm Source: [http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/200911\\_4/w445h600/tri\\_48887\\_F-5004.jpg](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/onlinecollection/oci/200911_4/w445h600/tri_48887_F-5004.jpg)





Fig. 38. The 1836 Torah binder from Fürth. A Classicist vase with a triple white lily.



Fig. 39. Torah binder, 1845, watercolour on linen, 305 x 20 cm. (Num. 150/087 JRSO, IMJ) Image of a serpent as an extension of a long-stroke letter.



Fig. 40. Personal objects display at The Museum of the German-Speaking Jewry, the biographical space for Jeckes.





Fig. 41. Showcases of the Jewish ritual objects in MGSJ.



Fig. 42. The display of the everyday life of German Jews with reproductions of the Moritz Daniel Oppenheim's grisailles *Family Scenes from Jewish Life of Former Days*.





Fig. 43. The painted binder of Menachem Goldaner, 1906, not on the Judaica display of MGSJ.



Fig. 44. The painted binder of Eliyahu Rosenzveig, 1847, not on the Judaica display of MGSJ.



Fig. 45. *Stories of the Turn Swallowing Cloth*, 2010, embroidery, silk and rayon on cotton, 18X425 cm. Juxtaposition of the "source" and its remaking.



Fig. 46. Louise Bourgeois, *Spider*, 1997, steel and mixed media, 175x262x204, photograph by Marcus Schneider.  
Source: Bal, Mieke. (2001). *Louise Bourgeois' Spider: The Architecture of Art-Writing*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.





Fig. 47 Geraldine Ondrizek, *Torah Binder, A Boy's Chromosomes*, 1997, embroidery.  
Source: <http://academic.reed.edu/art/faculty/ondrizek/familyphotos/DSCN0413.jpg>



Fig. 48 Geraldine Ondrizek, *Family Photos*, 2002. An art residency at the Farh-hochschule fur Kunst, Knustseminar, Schwabishhall, Germany.  
Source: <http://academic.reed.edu/art/faculty/ondrizek/familyphotos/DSCN0440.jpg>



Fig. 49 Elaine Raichek, *A Postcolonial Kinderhood*. 1994. Installation view, The Jewish Museum, New York  
Source: [http://elainereichek.com/Images\\_Press/09.APostColonialKinderhood\\_94/01.APostColonialKinderhd94install\\_w.jpg](http://elainereichek.com/Images_Press/09.APostColonialKinderhood_94/01.APostColonialKinderhd94install_w.jpg)



Fig. 50 Elaine Raichek, *Untitled (Jesse Reichek)*, 1994, hand embroidery on linen, 28.6 x 31.8 cm.  
Source: [http://elainereichek.com/Images\\_Press/09.APostColonialKinderhood\\_94/06.Smplr\\_IfYouThink94emb\\_w-.jpg](http://elainereichek.com/Images_Press/09.APostColonialKinderhood_94/06.Smplr_IfYouThink94emb_w-.jpg)



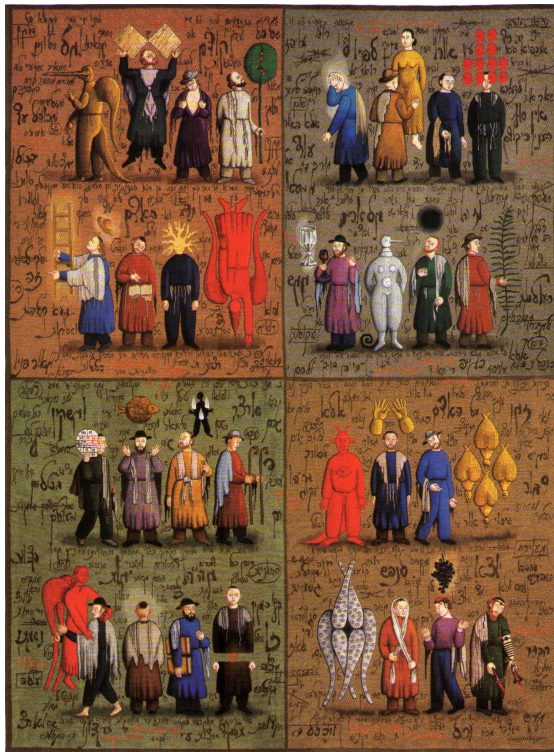


Fig. 51 Grisha Bruskin, *Alefbet*, (fragments), 2001. Tapestry, silk, wool, linen, overall size (5 parts) 300 x 1100cm.  
Source: Bruskin, Grisha; (2008); *Grisha Bruskin: Alefbet Tapestry Project*; Palace Editions.



Fig. 52 Liah Altman, *Memory and Forgetfulness*, 2009-2010. Tapestry, wool, flax, 120x170 cm.  
Source: *Kaunas Biennial Textile '11: Rewind*. (2011). ex.cat. Curator Virdjinija Vitkieniė. p. 76





Fig. 53 My swaddling cloths.



Fig. 54 Tracy Emin, *Automatic Orgasm*, 2001. Appliquéd blanket, 263 x 214 cm, Saatchi Collection, London.  
Source: <http://knitpurlandstitch.files.wordpress.com/2008/08/tracy-emin-blanket1.jpg?w=490>





Fig. 55 *Ushak 4*, 2001, mixed media on C-print, 160x73 cm.





Fig. 56 *Rendering of Writings, Landscape*, 2003. Found materials, pins, 50x30 cm.



Fig. 57 Sample book of Soviet printed textiles, 1959. Samples from the Cotton Printing Mill by the name of Vera Slutskaya.  
Source: <http://pechexod.livejournal.com/35975.html?thread=120967>



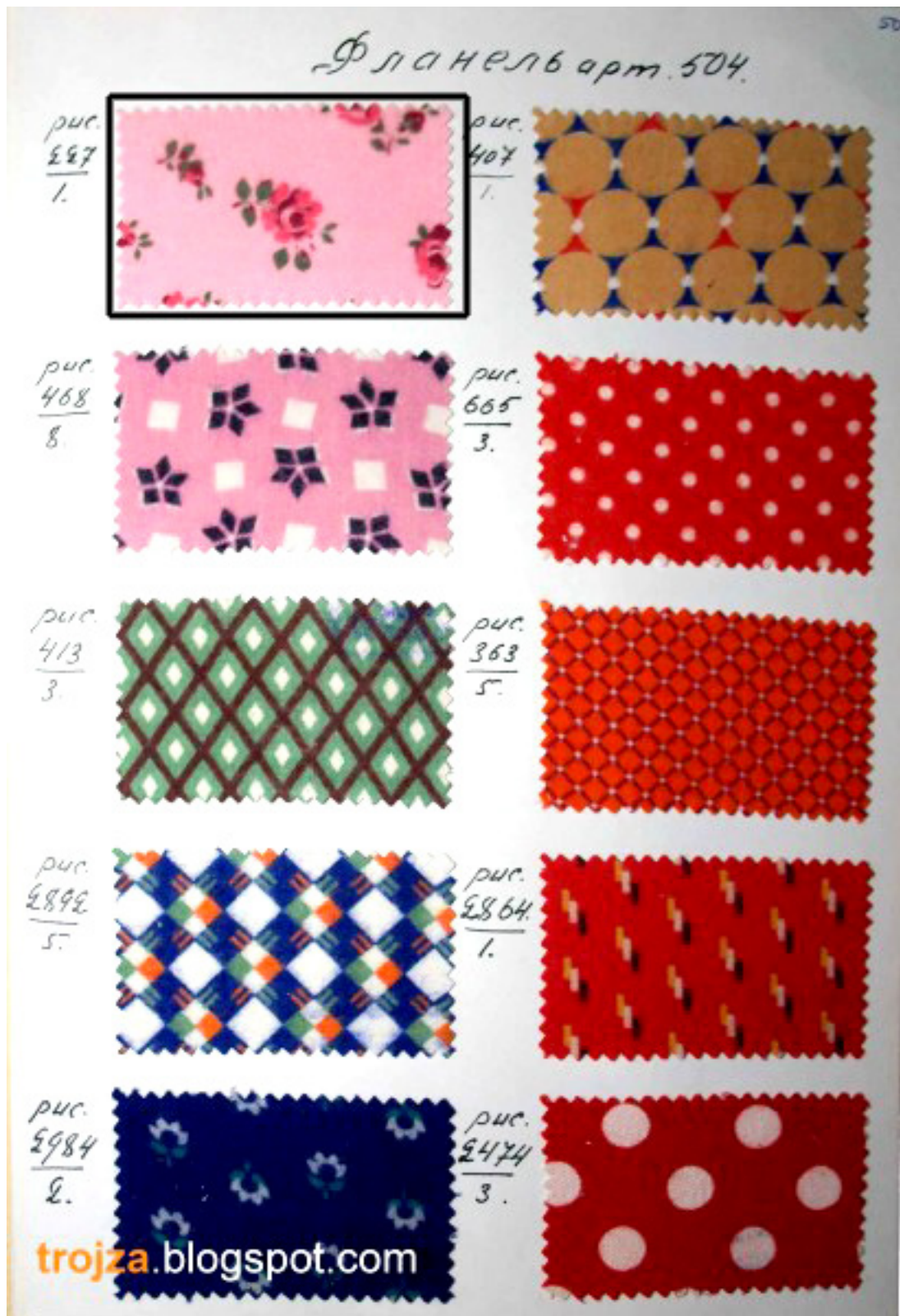


Fig. 58 Sample book of Soviet printed textiles, 1959. Samples from the Tejkovskaya Mill.

Source: <http://pechexod.livejournal.com/35975.html?thread=120967>





Fig. 59 Sample book of Soviet printed textiles, 1959. Samples from the Trehgorka Mill.

Source: <http://pechexod.livejournal.com/35975.html?thread=120967>





Fig. 60 Contemporary printed pattern from Kohma Mill.



Fig. 61 *Stories*: "The name is not written"

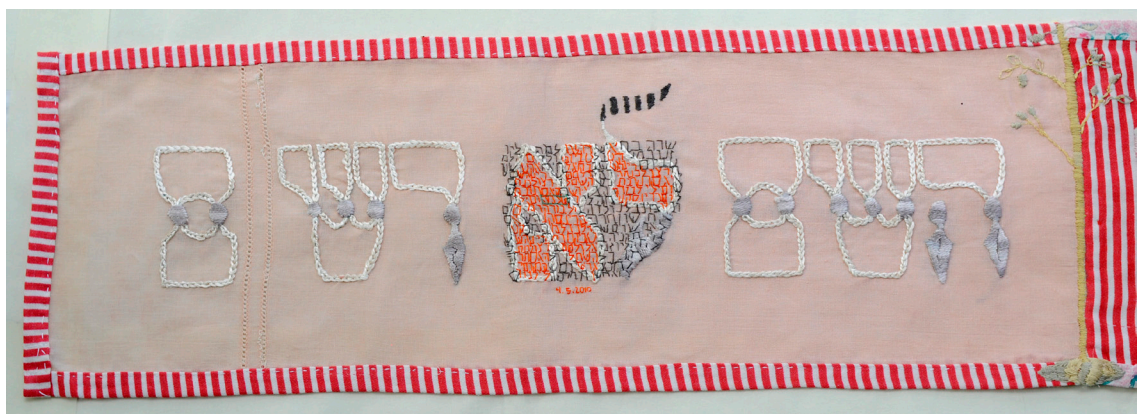


Fig. 62 *Stories*: "The name did not write."



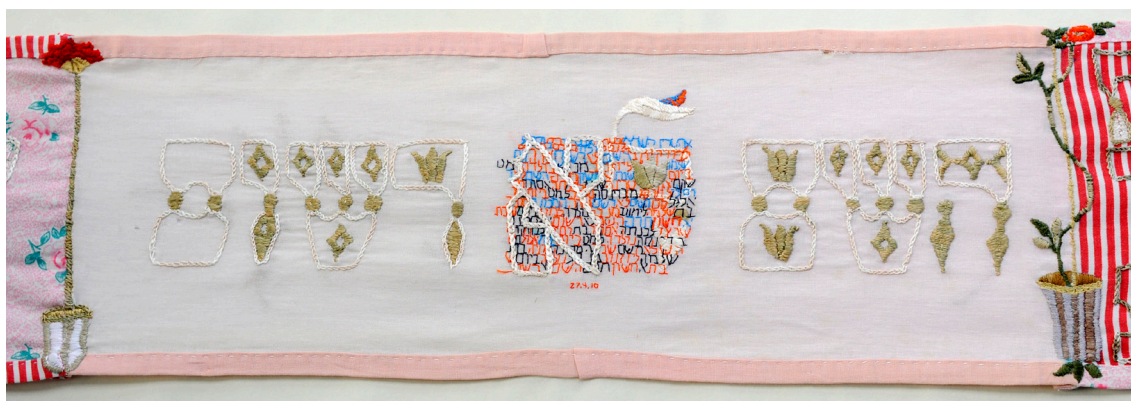


Fig. 63 *Stories of the Turn Swallowing Cloth*, 2010, embroidery, silk and rayon on cotton, 18X425 cm. 8 panels.





Fig. 63a *Stories of the Turn Swallowing Cloth*, 2010, embroidery, silk and rayon on cotton, 18X425 cm. 8 panels.





Fig. 64 *Stories*, fragment.



Fig. 65 *Stories*, fragment.



Fig. 66 *Stories*, fragment.





Fig. 67 Ganna Sobachko-Shostak, *Fishes* pillowcase, embroidery, 53x53 cm. Realised by L. Avdeeva in 2008 according to a 1920 drawing. Boichuk Decorative and Applied Art and Design Institute, Kiev.  
Source: Handiwork (2009). ex. cat. Proun Gallery, 5-7/2009, curator: Marina Loshak. Moscow, p. 50



Fig. 68 Evmeniy Pshechenko, Vasil Dovgoshia, *The Horse* panel, embroidery, 68x52 cm. Realised by V. Kostukova in 2007 according to a 1920 drawing. Private collection, Kiev.  
Source: Handiwork, p. 44.



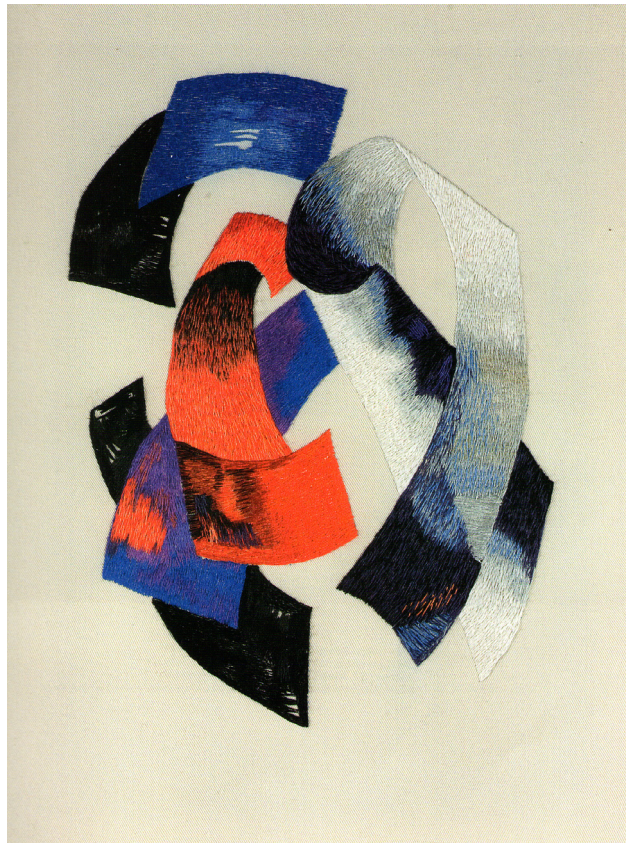


Fig. 69 Alexandra Exter, an embroidery study from the series *Colour Rhythms*, circa 1916-1917. Realised by V. Zsurakovskaya in 2008. Boichuk Decorative and Applied Art and Design Institute, Kiev.  
Source: Handiwork, p. 61.



Fig. 70 *Stories*, fragment. "Ekaterina".





Fig. 71 *Stories, fragments. "Not"*.





Fig. 72 *Stories*, early experiments with embroidery.







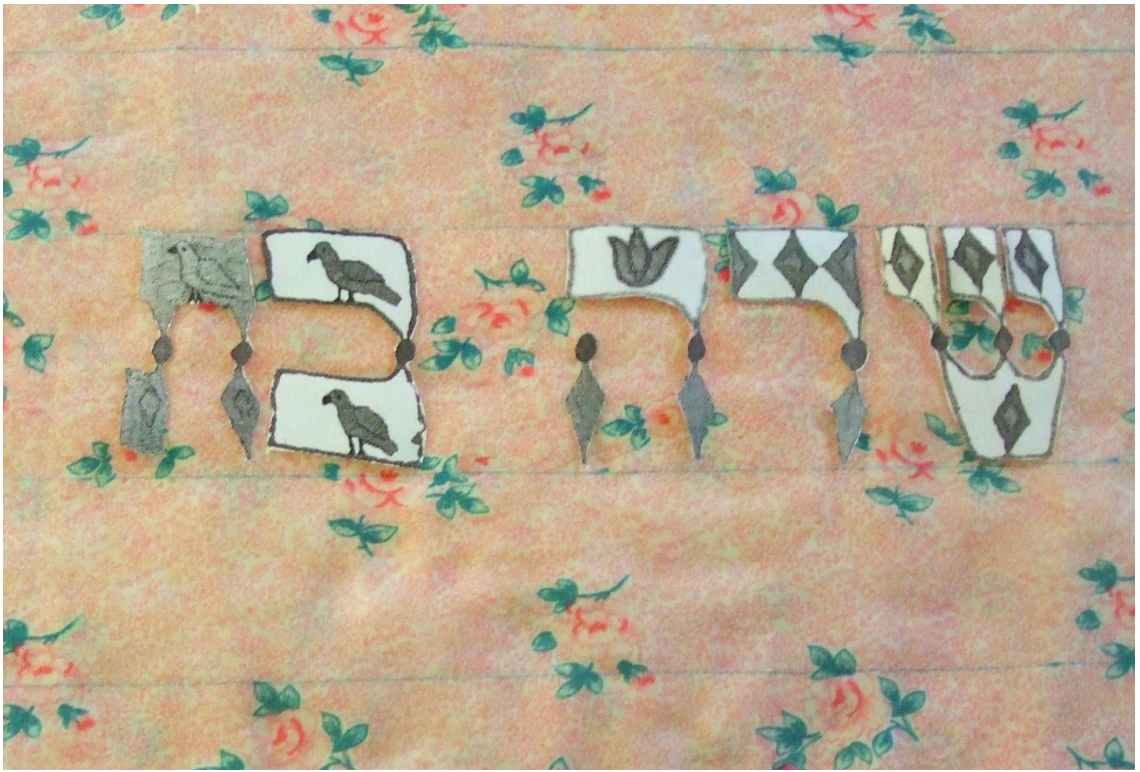


Fig. 76 *Stories*. Preparations, paper cut-outs



Fig. 77 *Stories*: the word שָׂרָה (Sarah) the first panel.





Fig. 78 *Stories*: the letter ה in the word נולדה (born) in the second panel.



Fig. 79 *Stories*: the family name ליוזנוב (Lioznov) in the second panel.





Fig. 80 *Stories*: the letter ב in the word שבת (Sabbath) in the third panel.

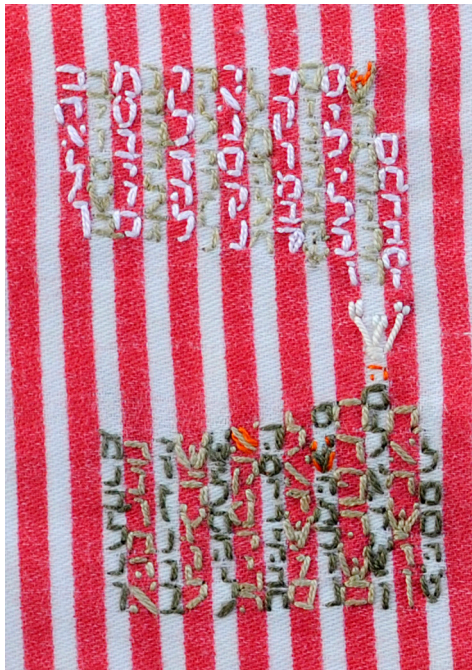


Fig. 81 *Stories*: the letters ב and ח in the date in the seventh panel.





Fig. 82 *Stories*: selective filling-in or covering the alternating stripes with horizontal stitches.



Fig. 83 El Lissitzky, curtain for the Torah arc, 1919, chalk on canvas, silk embroidery, 139 x 90.5 cm, the collection of Sergey Gregorianz, Moscow. Source: *Handiwork*, p. 44.



Fig. 84 El Lissitzky, proposal for a PROUN street celebration, 1923. Source: [http://rosswolfe.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/lissitzky\\_proun-street\\_celebration\\_design\\_2786-08.jpg](http://rosswolfe.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/lissitzky_proun-street_celebration_design_2786-08.jpg)





Fig. 85 *Stories*: images of plants on the joining seams of the panels.



Fig. 86 *Stories*: embroiderer's blood stain at the right side of the letter, outlined with blue embroidery.





Fig. 87 Display of the work in the Artists House, Jerusalem, *Rupture and Repair*, exhibition of The Adi Foundation Prize for Jewish Expression in Art and Design, curator Emily Bilsky, exhibition design Rachel Lev, 2010. Display: metal and perspex, diameter 1.5 m.



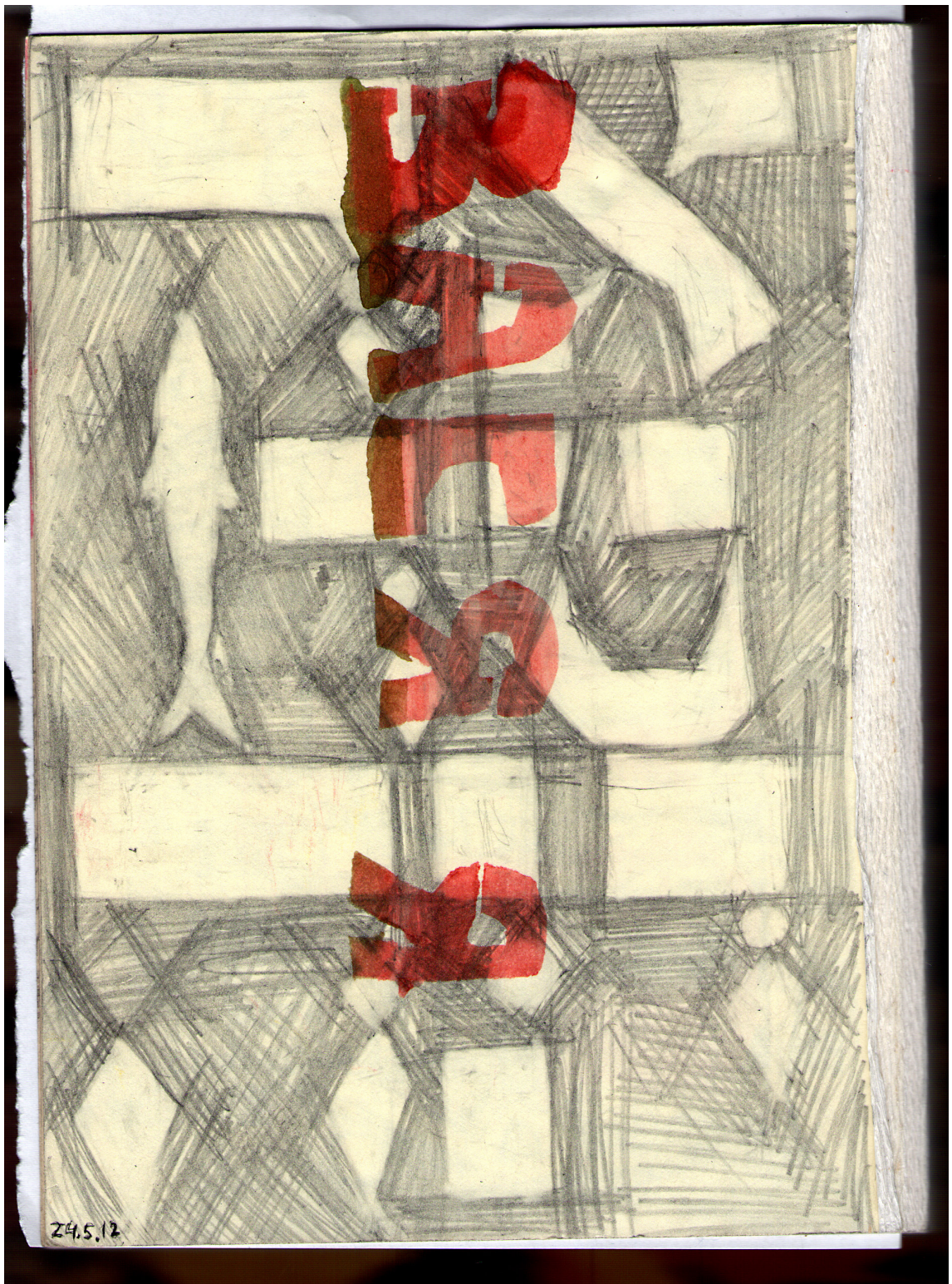


Fig. 88 *BACЯ Я (VASYA I AM)*, artist book, cover page, started in 2012, ongoing, pencil and watercolour on paper, 15 x 20 x 2 cm.



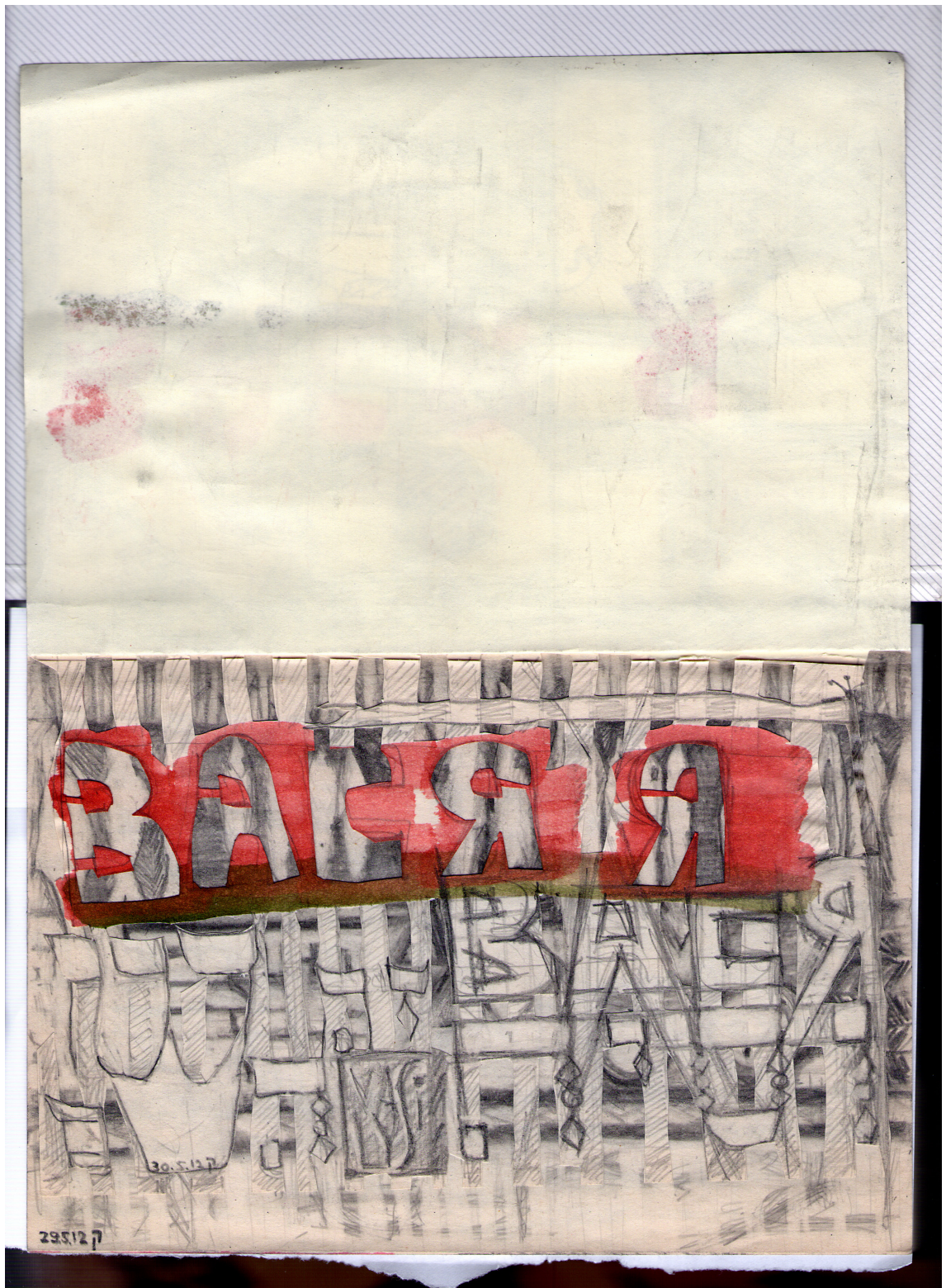


Fig. 89 *ВАСЯ Я* (VASYA I AM), pages from the artist book, started in 2012, ongoing, pencil and watercolour on paper, 15 x 20 x 2 cm.



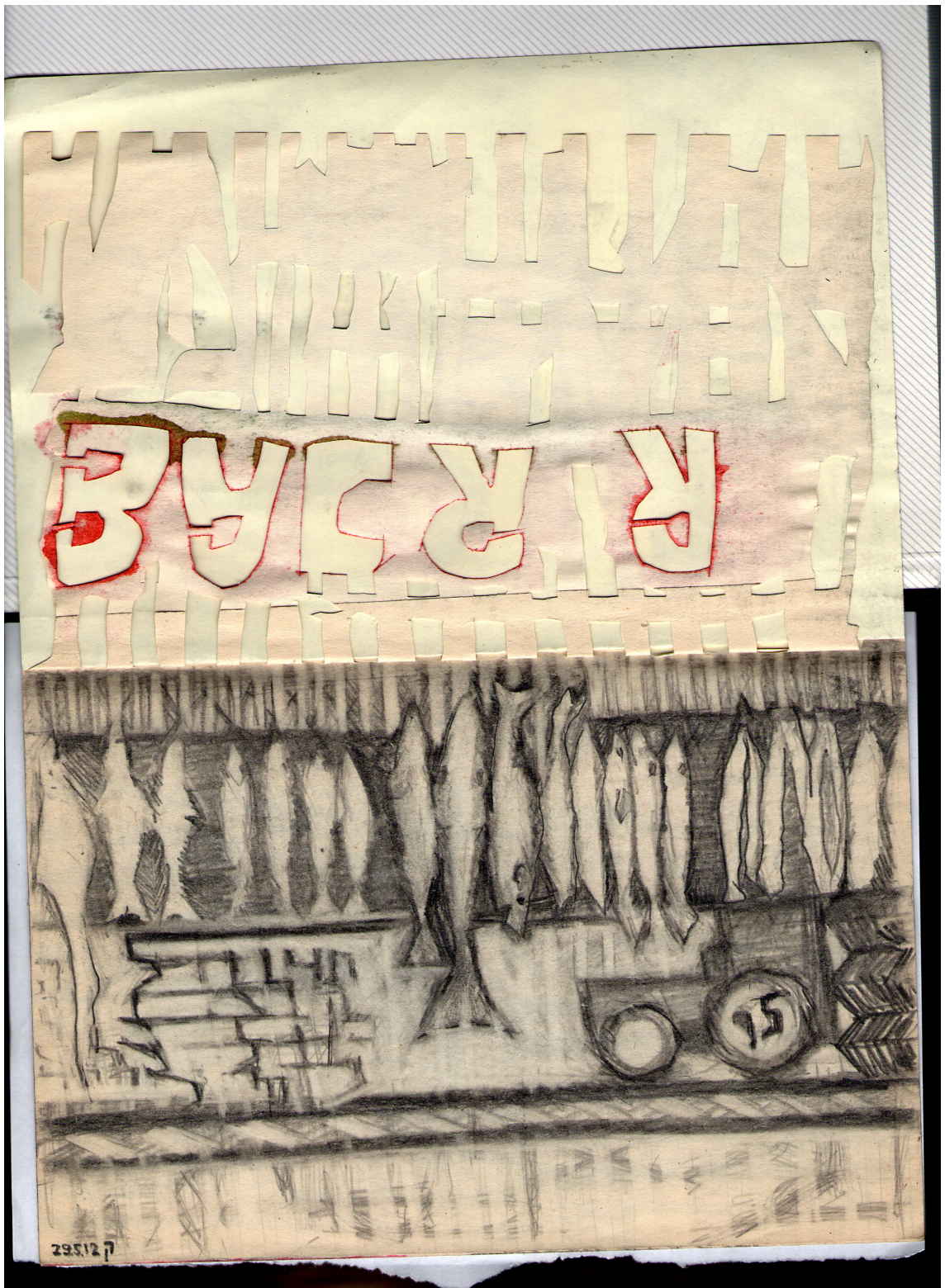


Fig. 90 *ВАСЯ Я (VASYA I AM)*, pages from the artist book, started in 2012, ongoing, pencil and watercolour on paper, 15 x 20 x 2 cm.



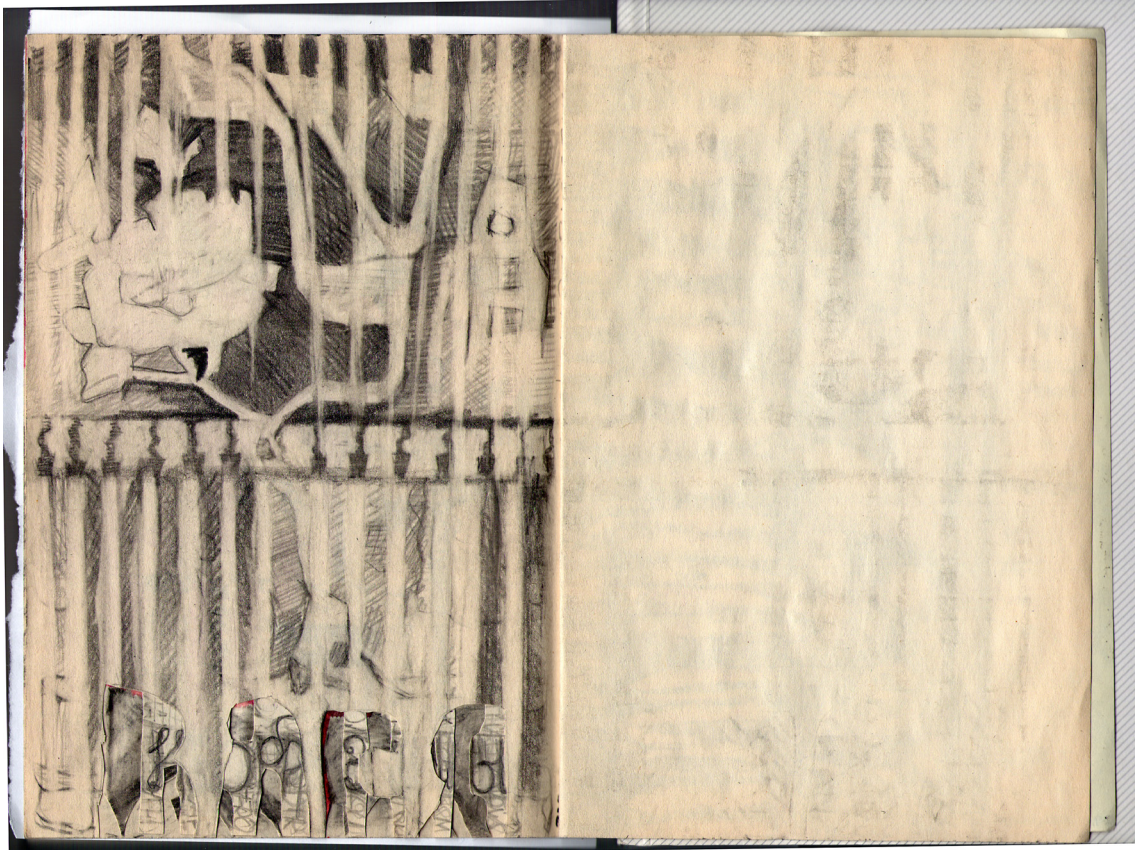


Fig. 91 *ВАСЯ Я (VASYA I AM)*, pages from the artist book, started in 2012, ongoing, pencil and watercolour on paper, 15 x 20 x 2 cm.



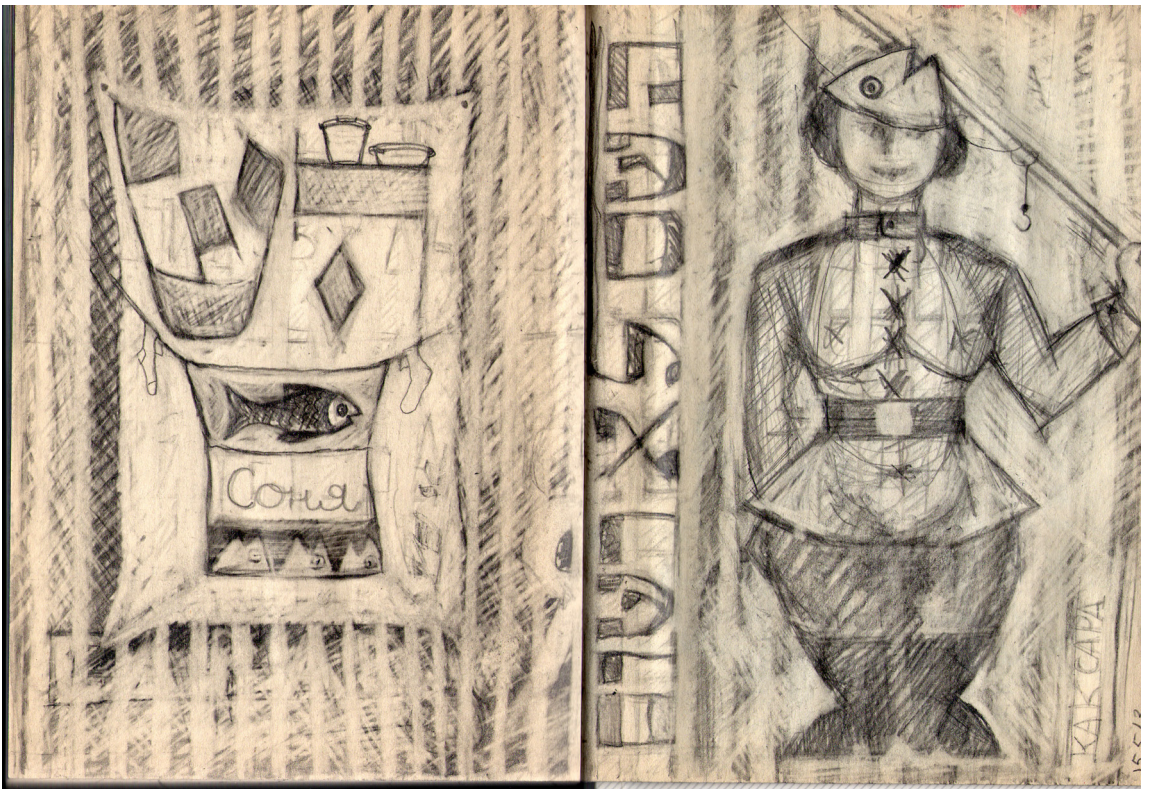


Fig. 92 ВАСЯ Я (VASYA I AM), pages from the artist book, started in 2012, ongoing, pencil and watercolour on paper, 15 x 20 x 2 cm.