

# JACQUELINE ROSE AND ESTHER SHALEV-GERZ

## In Dialogue

In 2008, a new chapter of Esther Shalev-Gerz's ongoing project *Portrait of Stories* was commissioned by an organization called The Public in Sandwell, UK. Synchronously, the influential writer and psychoanalytical thinker Jacqueline Rose agreed to begin a dialogue with Esther Shalev-Gerz on whom she has since intermittently published. In 2013, Jacqueline Rose and Esther Shalev-Gerz resumed their dialogue – first in person in London and subsequently through written correspondence.

**Jacqueline Rose:** My first question, Esther, is how do you get people to talk, or what do you feel you have to give to the people you talk to, for them to be able to do so? It's very intimate what you do, and potentially painful.

**Esther Shalev-Gerz:** I think I never give the impression of it being painful or intimate. I simply invite participants to come and talk. My invitation to them comes from an intuitive place. When I was invited to conceive a permanent artwork for the new building – the Multicultural Centre in Botkyrka, a suburb of Stockholm – the commissioners expected me to produce a sculpture, or something to that effect. At this point, I began by researching this centre's history, material holdings, and about the people living in the vicinity. This neighbourhood is almost exclusively inhabited by waves of immigrants to Sweden. I conceived of the project *First Generation* by inviting a number of the inhabitants to answer rather open questions. I asked, "On your coming to Botkyrka, what did you lose, what did you find, what did you give, and what did you get?" We never necessarily listen to what immigrants themselves have to say.

Instead we listen to everybody else's opinions about them. However, when they are given the opportunity to speak out, with their own voices, they disclose very surprising and undefined, but very immediate and intimate things.

What we societally and culturally do with the concept of the archive has always been problematic to me – we take real life and categorise it – by sizes, types, and other discriminants, which result in the archive being disengaged and disconnected from a particular life and subject. I try to create an encounter where people have the space to talk. Of course it is dramatic because dramas are based on human experience. From direct human contact and immediate presence one can catalyse an experience in ways that wouldn't be possible with a secondary device or situation, although these can also generate wonderful possibilities. It is my axiom that inviting people to participate is a way to access the immediate state of affairs; those people are like us, as Jacques Rancière says in *The Emancipated Spectator*, we live in the same world and are nourished by the same things that they are as they place their lives in the same moment in time. This approach implies that “the work” can only come into being after “the work” begins.

**JR:** I'm very interested that you say you want it to be the “immediate” state of affairs. It's as if what you are talking about is the need for recognition and I'm reminded of a moment in *The Heat of the Day*, a novel by Elizabeth Bowen, an important English modernist writer who is increasingly being recognized, written at the end of the Second World War where the young working-class girl Louie reads the newspaper and it's talking about people like her and she suddenly feels as if she exists for the first time. It's as if what you are saying is that just the fact of asking them to speak constitutes an identity and a dignity and a form of political self-recognition.

So my next question is, in the project *Portraits of Stories*, do you feel that the participants are talking to you, or are they more talking to themselves, excavating their own minds, discovering things they didn't know before? Who do you feel they are addressing when they speak?

**ES-G:** I realized this project from 1998 until 2008 in three different languages and four different places and asked the participants, “What story must be told today?” I think the participants were addressing the world when answering, I don’t think they were talking to me, they are talking to the now. In Sweden, where I don’t speak the language, participants were talking to me in Swedish and before it was translated I didn’t understand them. But, this also says that I believe the act of listening stimulates and enables communication. I think listening, just this simple availability of presence – not thinking about anything else but being immersed in the act of listening, even to a foreign language – initiates dialogue. This is also the case when I do a presentation at a conference. The way people listen to me enables an interesting and specific flow.

**JR:** This could be seen as a psychoanalytical paradigm. Lacan says in *The Function and Fear of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* that the patient either starts talking to him or about themselves and that when they can talk to him about themselves they are cured. Now that notion of full speech as the cure was something that he modified dramatically in his later work. Nonetheless it seems to me that what you are talking about is creating a situation of enablement for people, who, as you say, are not used to being listened to, “giving face to the faceless” to use your own phrase, by making people see: “Look these people also talk”. So, first of all my question is, do you see any link with psychoanalysis in what you are doing in getting people to find ways of talking, simply because someone else is listening?

**ES-G:** In the First Generation project I filmed the participants when they were listening to their own answers.

I think psychoanalysis, as such, is a new procedure, but talking is a much older procedure, including the construction of attention to the one that speaks. I use new devices such as recording equipment. In my work I gather material slowly towards the exhibiting of what that material will become, as in a museum for instance. In the process, whilst recording, my main concern is that I know it will end up in a

museum and will bear a certain kind of authority that has the characteristic of opening up space for public listening. Psychoanalysis is a procedure that analyses the psyche. I'm not a psychoanalyst, I'm an artist and whilst new procedures are of interest to me, I don't purport to provide cures and my work is not therapeutic. I haven't myself undergone a full psychoanalytic analysis but I do have an interest in speech. If psychoanalysis is a process that can bring us together, then it is of value to me.

**JR:** I know you said you don't want the works to be "too moving", but if we could just move to discuss *Between Listening and Telling: Last Witnesses, Auschwitz 1945-2005*. It is one of the most moving of your works although I would also want to say that *White Out – Between Telling and Listening* is also incredibly moving. There is something about watching people reflect on something in a way that you feel they haven't necessarily reflected before, that to me, is one of the links to psychoanalysis. It is quite overpowering watching the silences in the Auschwitz testimony, so I have two questions: How have you survived the stories that people tell you? And, where do these stories go? I take very seriously that you say this is a public process. So perhaps there is a link both to psychoanalysis and to civic space as Hannah Arendt thought it. Maybe what you're doing is linking those two in some way, so it's public, but at the same time, even if you don't feel the space you're conjuring up is intimate, but rather is the soliciting of a public form of recognition, nonetheless what comes across is very intimate and very painful and sometimes beyond the limits of what can be spoken. So how do you survive that? What does it do to you?

**ES-G:** What it does to me? That's a good question. It leads me to invent new *dispositifs* in my artworks. When I was young, I heard testimonies in different formats. I didn't understand them but I really tried to. Now they move me very much, which is sufficient to convince me that this is what I have to do. Our generation accomplished something very important but hasn't yet created a legacy from it. I think every generation does something with what it inherits. It's an obligation. In fact we are all forced to do something with it. I think we did an enormous amount of thinking about what it means to obey and disobey, what it means to collaborate or not to collaborate. It's very important for me to reflect and

detail those thoughts in my work and to show how they are being addressed in the world today.

Sometimes I say liberty is given to me when I am commissioned to do a work. In this way dialogue represents liberty in my art. There is something very interesting in this and I like to say this is my liberty.

The way people approach me and what they ask me to engage with is constantly thought provoking. It's actually interesting that they trust I will be able to deal with it. That means that I have to find a way to meet this expectation. It is also important to understand what a commission is as it comes with conditions and expectations. Historically commissioners were individuals or institutions with power and resources – monarchies and churches, kings. Today, we can also think of society as a commissioner. In thinking that way, I am aware that we already have someone, someplace, some moment that each project works towards. In that sense there is always a future destiny – real or not – for the work.

**JR:** I'm intrigued by this because if I've understood you correctly, what you're really saying is that the work you do gives you a form of freedom and we'll come back to that in a minute. It gives you a form of freedom but it's also as if people and their demands on you are soliciting something that was already there. So on the one hand all these projects are deeply implicated in who you already are. Maybe, therefore, what you are saying to me is that you can deal with what is told to you for two reasons. Firstly, because in the commissioning of the project something has been recognised about you. Secondly, because it is an historical process to do with what our generation has to understand about itself and an accounting that is not yet complete. Therefore these projects are already waiting for you and that's how you survive them.

Let's look at it in terms of the relationship between the two participants, Isabelle Choko and Charlotte Fuchs in your work *Does your Image Reflect Me?* from 2002. This is one of your most interesting projects for me. When I first read about it I thought Charlotte Fuchs, the German woman from Hannover was going to have been, if not a Nazi, then certainly a bystander. It turned out that she was an anti-Nazi

whose husband, a famous actor, put himself at risk with the things he said. Did you know anything about her before you started? Did you know she was going to be an anti-Nazi?

**ES-G:** No. I didn't know anything. As an artist I feel I have to strive towards the place that is neither there, nor yet imagined. This is not only about the idea of *the new*, but about the new that is yet to be designated as such in the world. Meaning it's there already. Then it's about how you emphasise components and accord visibility to certain aspects. Sometimes I work towards the project through particular types of research. There is usually a moment that grabs me and when I know I have become engaged. I then have no choice but to complete the work. This is, in itself, something important that happens between telling and listening.

In 2005, with the work *Between Listening and Telling: Last Witnesses, Auschwitz 1945-2005* such a moment just dawned on me. I had just given my refusal to the project. But the idea and its *dispositif* formed in my mind despite my refusal. I had no choice but to phone and say I had changed my mind. I had given birth to a very elaborate and costly exhibition that was selected from among other project proposals. It would be realized because it carried the potential to exhibit both the possibility and impossibility of testimony – it was able to respond to something difficult to do and to consider : What does it mean to survive? And what does it mean to give testimony, with words, about an embodied experience?

**JR:** You're saying something so interesting – that, on the one hand, the place is not yet there and you don't know, and, on the other hand, something about this work comes to the place you already are, without knowing it, so it's a fantastic mix.

**ES-G:** I think to *not know* is the primary condition. If I realize something that everybody already knows and that I also already understand, it will neither be interesting for me to realize, nor for the others to

experience. For me the *not knowing* is a means to open up something that is construed as already known. This is where, in my work, I absolutely need to be in order to construct the constellations in ways that can capture the *as yet unknown*, or make it *more known* or to even *reveal*. I think that is what art is about – to make “it” emerge to the surface, so as to surface “it”. For art actually this surfacing is primary. It can happen via photography, where the camera shows more than our eyes can see or remembers more than we are able to. That is why I use photography with its limitations, to expose, to *surface up* what is potentially there and what is not there and to symbolise that there are, in the midst of our knowing, unknown places.

**JR:** You have just described what the British American psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas would call “the unthought known”, in his book *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*. You’ve just offered a beautiful account of bringing to the surface the not yet known. Your phrase “surface it up” is wonderful because in English you would talk about “bringing something to the surface” but you have underscored the fact that surface is a transitive verb, like Barthes describing writing as a transitive verb.

Let’s talk about *dispositifs*, which is to say you work with sculpture, photography, video, and text. The relationship between video and recording and sound – making images speak, for example – is very complex in your work.

One example I’m thinking of is in *Sound Machine* from 2008. You hear the sounds of the factory before you enter the installation. You separated them, as if somehow the factory mustn’t be completely actualized inside the experience you are about to give, which in a way is about remembering something that’s been destroyed. So, in terms of differing form and *dispositifs* – what do you think you can do with their multiplicities?

**ES-G:** In the separation of forms, media, or elements within my installations I do this to simultaneously create openness and acknowledge distance and possible loss. I’m often trying to create a place and

also ways to get to this place. The installation's multiple components offer a personal journey. The visitors are invited to move in order to experience the work. The tables designed for *MenschenDinge* in 2006 enable the visitor to hear each participant talk by moving from one individual viewing station to another. It is also possible to navigate between these videos and the wall-based photography. But it's relevant to also say that a work cannot be concluded, without the visitor.

In the *Monument Against Fascism* from 1986 one component is the text panel that iterates the work's process and the other is what is written on the column that would be behind you, until it was buried underground and then you stand on what previously was its tip.

There is always movement, I believe moving activates something in our brains and bodies. In *First Generation*, I installed the sound source in one place and the images of the faces of the speakers listening to themselves in another location. This invited the visitors first to see the participants' listening faces and to then physically move to listen to what was being said. In this *dispositif* I filmed fragments of the participant's faces listening to their own answers. And that was the first thing visitors could see: a silent video projected from inside onto a glass façade. By entering the building one could listen to all the spoken answers, and a space for the visitor to experience was created between these components. I deliberately created the sound recording to be longer than the video so they would be installed and read from two distinctive machines.

**JR:** Therefore, the spectator has to move between so they can also never contain or completely control the experience. I think that relates to what you were saying about something *not yet known*.

It sounds to me as if you were describing something dissonant, if one was thinking musically, of all the political debates about Adorno on music or in Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus* for example. One could say that to be creative in the 20<sup>th</sup> century requires you to be the respector of dissonance. Not just the respector of difference but the respector of dissonance because if you harmonize your world you are lying. Do you see any links with the word "dissonance" that evokes any feelings for you? Do you see



that as part of what you are deliberately doing and trying to produce – that you can't get comfortable in any way?

**ES-G:** I think getting comfortable is not what I am looking for. And to introduce a place for dissonance, if that indeed is what it is about, is important. What I do know is that I have to create a place for the viewer. I think maybe Georges Perec did that too: to propose an empty space. To construct such an empty space, one has to take things apart. You have to show that empty spaces are created and have the same value.

I'm trying to make something of a particular situation and while attempting to do that, I conjure new relations between elements. In order to achieve that, I construct a certain kind of aesthetic – the dissonance is there to show that you cannot capture everything; in effect – the consequence of the impossibility of capturing entirety. A camera is selective and cannot capture everything that we can see. A voice recorder cannot capture what is meant to be said. There is always another space that is in becoming. And even if I use today's technology, it still won't capture the origins of feelings.

In conceiving two recent retrospectives of my art, one in 2010 at the Jeu de Paume in Paris and the other in 2012 at the Musée cantonal des Beaux Arts in Lausanne, I was surprised by a particular aspect of visitors' responses to my work. This was their interest in my research. In my practice, the research is incorporated into the work and its complexities – the research is not edited out as if it were preliminary. There is research in art today, there is a place for it – research in art is reclaiming the place that it always had but was never formally visible.

People appreciate and enjoy this type of complexity today; researching and the process is now a natural act. I recall, in 2000, at the opening of my installation *Inseparable Angels – The Imaginary House for Walter Benjamin*, a museum director asking if I really needed to present the whole paragraph instead of just a sentence of the texts I was using. I responded that this text was an excerpt from the *Theses on the Concept of History* by Walter Benjamin and that not only did I want the entire selected

excerpt, I also needed to include the other seven texts. In that installation I incorporated those texts being read in a video. I re-exhibited this work recently in the Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver in 2013, adding the printed version of the excerpts and noticed that the visitors appreciated listening and reading the material.

**JR:** Ok, I want to challenge you, because, on the one hand, you are saying this is the way art history and practice is moving because it's multiple media and an incomplete aesthetic, and so on and so forth, which would suggest it's hyper-modern, but then on the other hand you explicitly make your appeal to Paul Klee, quoting him on the war: "I have long had this war inside... And to work my way out of the ruins I had to fly"; and to Walter Benjamin's famous account of the angel of history – both in your 2000 exhibition, *Inseparable Angels – The Imaginary House for Walter Benjamin* – which means the work is also situated in the heart of modernity, which means it is also shocking and almost archaic (they are both in their different ways talking of the agony of that war in the mind). Archaic, not just because of the allusions to Benjamin and Klee but many people don't read anymore. I would want to say that you are more radical than you are allowing because you are not just bringing in the modernity of multiple aesthetic forms but you are also doing two other things: you are insisting in a way that Berthold Brecht would have loved – and Walter Benjamin, of course – that the work of production is part of the project – it's a point about labour, and secondly, you are saying, "Please pause, read, think and take time", which might not be normally seen as aesthetic time i.e. contemplation for example, or absorption, or whatever.

I would want to say that there's a dissonance in this and there's a dissonance between different temporalities and it relates to your point about this generation, that there are legacies – from the Second World War for example – that are not complete. Something is still in need of being remembered. So it's not for nothing that you go back to Walter Benjamin because that political project is not over and to some extent you could be seen as part of it.

Which leads me to my next question. Somewhere between Auschwitz, the Saami community, and the democracy project, or as I call it, the new democracy project of *Portraits of Stories*, there is a very extraordinary journey (to call it range would, I think, trivialize what you do). How do you see the links between the different strands in your work? I mean, how do we get from Lapland to Bergen-Belsen to Aubervilliers?

**ES-G:** What I am sensitive to in Klee is the fact that coming back from the war, he became “as hard as a diamond” and desired only to be able to fly. Benjamin, through his quotations, expresses his vision of how the world was degrading between 1920-1940. Both these men, through brilliant art or written expression, give testimony of their time. But I also think that the way the Saami woman in *White Out*, who is from Lapland and Stockholm, and the two protagonists in *Does Your Image Reflect Me?* – one a camp inmate, the other from the city of Hannover – share their voices, and because of their being from different places, a much broader, open, and surprising perspective on a world, than what we may otherwise assume, is enabled. This needs to be audible and included in the world of representation. The link can be called an attempt to construct a portrait that is inclusive of the acts of telling and listening, of two places mutually embedded in a human being. Like in the plurality of voices in Aubervilliers, again where people are from other places in the world; or the portrait of a state of being such as the feeling of a certain solitude that results from a political past in Lapland and Stockholm, or the portrait of an experience of proximity and also of worlds apart such as in Bergen-Belsen and Hannover.

**JR:** So, would you say all your projects come under the title of democracy as they are all about inclusion? Didi-Huberman has described your work as a *res publica* and if you think of Hannah Arendt – what you are creating, over and over again, is a public space of participation and that’s what would link them all. In one interview, when you are talking about including the sounds within the images, or giving voice back to the image, you also comment that speech and sex are the two things not taught in schools, do you remember what you said?

**ES-G:** What we are taught in school is to read and to listen but not to speak, so we are not taught the importance of speaking. We are not taught about sex, they don't teach us to speak, we are not taught how to be parents, we are not taught main functions that we need to actually operate in this world. So this world, in an odd way, is somewhat unconscious of itself. In our present status we are allowed to speak, but what we articulate can mean many different things at once.

This absolutely fascinates me and that is why I prefer this mode of working to scripted cinema, though I do enjoy movies. In movies the performed script is between the beginning and end credits that list all those who were involved and crafted the movie. That script is pre-formulated – dictating when to speak and what is to be said. This form presents speech as if we know how to talk and to do so without hesitation. In my work I use what is usually omitted: voices, images, and stories that were neither listened to before, nor included in our shared representation. So I also summon and include the difficulties people have in articulating a subject and how powerful it is when speech becomes a moment of sharing, when something is said aloud to another. That is an act of democracy.

**JR:** A difficult moment or process of sharing something aloud might be a good definition of what we call democracy. But I'm fascinated of course by the analogy of sex. I mean none of your work, nobody in any of your works as far as I know, talks about sex and I'm not going to suggest for a minute that they should, but that is such a brilliant analogy because you're saying in schools you're not taught to talk and you're not taught about sex, nor are you taught to talk about sex. What is wrong with so many movies is that everyone acts as if everyone knows what to do with sex and as if everyone knows how to use language – so it's as if what you are trying to bring to the surface, or "surface it up", to use your wonderful expression, is a kind of stuttering of speech and the body. And you have a double demand: that people speak of something they haven't spoken about before and that people who are often not listened to be allowed to speak and be listened to. So it's a new form of expression, which contains what speech, both privately and publicly, mostly cannot contain. It's a new form of communication, it's a new public space. At the same time, and crucially, you also want to register, inside that process, the

impossibility of what they are doing, the difficulty of it, the suffering of it, the hesitancy, the kind of nervous tic, the stutter, the incapacity, otherwise we would be in a Hollywood movie. So then you are saying something very important about the way in which you record and are listening, as eliciting something in the form of its impossibility and I think that's beautiful. I understand that you are investigating trust in relation to your work, how does this relate to form? Why trust in relation to art?

**ES-G:** In a way I am interested in capturing and constructing what is really there now. We never use the word trust in art. It's interesting that we use it in politics and economics. We use it in relation to families, but not in discussing art. We walk into these wonderful huge museums, in the centre of our towns, where art is hung on pre-destined walls. We encounter a sheet of paper, a canvas, a screen or an object and we are asked to trust that this will give us an experience about ourselves and our lives. Yet, we never call on the word "trust" in art. In spite of the fragility and the possible new use of materials, means, and constructions.

The constellation of trust informs my work. When I'm invited by a museum to create a new artwork the process begins by them trusting my art and the artist I am; then I invite people to participate in my project and they trust me and I them; visitors come to the exhibition space to experience the work and they again extend this trust. Although the term "trust" is often used, not much is said about it. I am personally aware that I place great trust in art as a form with its fragility, vulnerability, that can convey simultaneous antagonism such as between trust and distrust or mistrust.

For this reason I applied and received a grant from the Swedish Research Council for a three-year research project with the title *Trust and the Unfolding Dialogue*.

**JR:** You are saying that the commissioners have to trust you, the museum has to trust you, the people speaking to you have to trust you, and the people coming to the exhibition have to trust you. I think you are underplaying your remarkable capacity to elicit those forms of confidence and trust which are very

clear from what the curator of the Wolfsonian exhibition *Describing Labor* in 2012 says about you, that you have the ability to elicit trust.

In *Daedal(us)* in 2003, you thought maybe the people who were going to have the images projected on to their houses might object, or there might be a problem. There was drug dealing in the area and maybe the police would be involved. But it all turned out to be fine, so you do create impossible moments of contact and dialogue between different social groups. I, nonetheless, have a question, if we're talking about trust. If you think psychoanalytically, we can't trust ourselves because we are subjects of the dreams and of nightmares and we don't know, or at least reject consciously, the history that we most need to know. It would be great if everyone underwent analysis between twenty-one and twenty-four years of age, but most people of course don't, as we live in a profoundly anti-analytical culture where all this is mostly unacknowledged. Nonetheless, I would want to say you can't simply trust yourself. So when I look at your work, I feel that there's more tension than the description you've just given me allows for. Do you never feel that the content is resisting the form? In a way you've described it already; but because you have the videos, the sound equipment, the multiplicity of screens, the dissonance between the inside and the outside of the museum space in terms of sound, something is being registered about the impossibility of what you are doing. So what is the relationship between the difficulty of all that and everybody trusting everybody else? They just seem so different to me or rather to rest on such different premises about what language can communicate, what we are able to communicate to others and to ourselves.

**ES-G:** Trust is difficult as well. It happens in thin air. I don't say they are always already trusting, rather it is about the possibility of trust as a form and the understanding of the invitation as being toward something not yet entirely known and so easy to capture.

In my work *Echoes in Memory* at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich in 2007, the video installation presented the faces of the people working in the museum listening individually to me. Their

expressions modulate between polite distrust and doubt as I am retelling them the stories about the Queen's House that their colleagues previously told me. This calls the idea of trust into question, setting it out in a way that acknowledges vulnerability, places it at risk of being re-interpreted, because if you agreed on "this" and didn't do "that" – it's not necessarily a diminishing of trust, perhaps it's then more about how your trust and trustworthiness change.

In *White Out* I read Asa Simma a collection of sixty quotations by Swedish and Saami leaders of their vision of a possible commonality between these two peoples that I edited to construct a particular reality. She reacted to my reading by telling me her own stories shaped by other political visions.

Don't forget this is edited. Sometimes not at all, sometimes partially, and sometimes I then exhibit previously omitted parts on text panels, as in *Sound Machine*.

**JR:** That's a perfect answer as what I hear you saying is you've been working on this for three years, so you can't begin by pre-empting it, and that if there's something called "trust", it's trust in its interrogative form. So it's trust with a question mark and as a process, not as something sentimental – it's not "I trust you".

**ES-G:** No it isn't. Let's say that when a person starts talking to me about something, and I listen, there is an element of trust involved. This will be very delicate to articulate since I've never said anything about this before, but this involves some form of recognition of what he/she wants *to say* and to see happen; and when I'm back home I have to go back to that moment and edit the material in a way to reveal the moment where the person suggested what they want to say or how they presented their position.

In the editing process, it can be hard to represent someone "becoming" what he or she seems to want to express. My attempt to reveal this puts it at risk of disintegration. I have to go back to the material again and again, picking up these little bits, and bringing them back to what I remember emerged in myself, from what this person wanted "to be" or "to say". The difficulty is to hold onto that and yet still

deliver a work. This editing process is a kind of collage. Sometimes in the final work very little original material remains but what does remain holds the capacity to suggest the whole. Other times a great deal of the original material is retained. This is a form of sculpting.

There are always two capacities at work, which I described as reaching the moment of acknowledgement. Getting there depends on my capacity to listen and also being put into question. When I edit the material, I strive to recall what I remember initially happened while the material was being shot.

**JR:** I think that's great. What you seem to be saying, in a sense, is that your task is to deliver the difficulties of the process. So there is a trust, which then is immediately fragile. It's as if trust is vulnerable to itself, it's one of those things that, the moment you claim it, you're on the verge, you're in touch with everything about it that makes it almost impossible to do so. You've previously said sixty percent of people involved in *Between Listening and Telling: Last Witnesses, Auschwitz 1945-2005* had never spoken about it before, forty percent had never spoken to their families or anybody else at all and only one asked for their CD back because he had never said to anyone that he was in Auschwitz and he didn't want people to know.

**ES-G:** He did want them to know. He gave the interview but afterwards came back and just couldn't have it be shown in the exhibition. After listening to himself answering he decided he didn't want to share it in the exhibition. In 2010, a group of young historians addressing the silences in my work came up with this question: If silences were to be included in historical data, then should history be rewritten? They quoted the testimony of one of the survivors who said: "Look I gave my testimony with a very calm heart, but to survive – there is more to it than that . . ." and then he goes on for a little while, but what he was saying is that you should know there are still things that we don't talk about now or that we cannot talk about as survival is much a more complex process.



**JR:** Ok, so there are still things we don't talk about and how, then, would you write a history out of the silences which arise from what you can't speak and can't be spoken, which is rather a different point from that of the history of the victors, although they are related. Not just that the victors get to write the history but also that there are still things we don't talk about and that survival is more than speech. You are suggesting that when we look at something like the Auschwitz testimony, we need to be aware of the incompleteness of the project. So I'm hearing over and over again the idea an aesthetic that at one and a same time brings to the surface what is previously invisible or unspoken, but also does so in the form of its necessary incompleteness – otherwise it would be redemptive and your work is not in any way redemptive, as you said you're not trying to cure anything.

I now want to ask what is important question for me, which is about the gender component of your work. This really struck me when I was going through your works again, between *Sound Machine*, and its five mothers and daughters, *Eve Passes the Apple to Eve* and perhaps above all Rola Younes' incredible story in *D'eux* or *On Two* (which I think could also be translated as "Of Them"), also your own story about your mother hiding in the forest to escape Nazism and what she could and could not pass on to you as a result, and then also in *Does Your Image Reflect Me?*, the story Charlotte Fuchs tells of how she was breastfeeding her baby during an air bombardment of the city and the baby was spitting out the milk during dinner. It felt to me as if this time there was a real strand running through all your work about gender, or being a woman.

**ES-G:** Well, you know, even as I walked from the train to your house I was performing the same thing, I am walking, I am a woman, I am in the world. On the way to London from Paris, I was working on the train the whole time, people saw me doing that and it was important to me that this was seen, as well as whatever I needed to for work. I would prefer to find my feminine part there. This is also one of the reasons I teach. When I read newspapers I count the numbers of women depicted in them and I notice there are always many men and very few women in spite of the gender distribution on the planet being more or less fifty percent. Maybe the world would be very different if voices of women sharing the same

experiences were expressed proportionally to men, and we can't even imagine what society would look like if that happened. I deliberately craft my works from this perspective, so you can call it feminism, or democracy, or just being in the world, or whatever. I am a woman for whom it is important to address my way of doing and see how other women experience it: be it as workers, as survivors, or as people in the world. I think and notice we are lacking of representation, there is just not enough.

**JR:** You have previously said to me that one of the reasons you teach in Sweden is because men have a plan, they organize – they pee together, they go to work together – and to be a woman is to be much more alone, that a woman doesn't have the same political format or frame. "Each one", you said, "therefore has to create herself". Do you think that the fact that Rola Younes is a woman is part of her extraordinary story and what she wants for herself, to learn Hebrew for example, and to listen to the narrative of the "enemy", to cross over linguistic and national boundaries?

**ES-G:** When I met Rola Younes she was twenty-five years old, originally from Lebanon but living in Paris. Rola embodied this extraordinary idea – she would learn all the languages of her neighbours like Yiddish, Hebrew and Persian and then read their histories in their own languages. She believed this would give her an insight into who they are. I was very struck by this. She then talked about being a minority and how important that is for her personally, as she thinks this gives her a good point of view, rather than the majority viewpoint.

However, the way she articulated this was surprising to me – so it inspired me to produce a work in 2009 around her, *On Two*, which has two participants – Rola Younes and Jacques Rancière. I first met and heard Rancière talk at the gallery Jeu de Paume, where in fact *On Two* was later exhibited in my career survey. Younes and Rancière had never met before and as with participants in some of my other works, their encounter took place in the *dispositif* of the work itself. With this work, very unusually, for me, it was I who invited their participation. So a meeting can also occur within an artwork and bring two people together and moreover people who are extraordinary. Their propositions – in and through the

artwork – allows barriers to be moved and for us to experience other possible perspectives than those offered to us through that form of encounter. As a young woman I think Rola particularly brought a shift in perspective about the ability to move boundaries. Now she is learning Russian and Roma. In the work she talks a lot about her relationship with her mother, about being born in the middle of the war in Lebanon, stating that the bombs are still there among them. She considers herself with a political freedom that emerges from her upbringing in the specific political reality of Lebanon, amongst multiple communities with heterogeneous histories within the same period of events.