



CHAPTER 3

“And a More Offensive Spectacle I Cannot Recall”: Humour in ... *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky* (1999)
by Suzanne Treister

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Consider I have been speculating upon the destinies of our race until I have hatched this fiction. Treat my assertion of its truth as a mere stroke of art to enhance its interest. And taking it as a story, what do you think of it?

– H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, 1895

Jokes, according to Sigmund Freud, follow “the new interests of the day” (Freud, [1905] 2002, p. 12). The contemporaneity of a joke—what Freud calls its ‘factor of topicality’—cannot, he argues, “simply be equated with the rediscovery of what is familiar: it has to be fresh, recent, untouched by forgetting” (p. 12). In other words, while the new is a necessary ingredient in successful joke-making, it must supplement, rather than displace, the familiar. This Freudian imperative characterises the humour in the

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artist Suzanne Treister’s 1999 digital work ... *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, an interactive CD ROM that drew its inspiration from contemporaneous videogames. By following the time-travelling exploits of Rosalind Brodsky, the viewer of this work both rediscovers the familiar and encounters the topical. Indeed, much of the work’s comedy is established by balancing details drawn from a distinctly 1990s landscape—including, of course, the CD ROM on which it is inscribed—with Brodsky’s travails to different historical (and occasionally planetary) contexts.

Brodsky’s excursions are documented in ‘Rosalind Brodsky’s Perpetual Time Travelling Diary’—a significant textual component of the CD ROM—where they are narrated in short, perfunctory entries, most of which are paired with an accompanying image. In one entry, Brodsky relays a trip to Mars where she makes “a few pieces of Land Art” but is only able to take one photograph because her camera runs out of film (Treister 1999, a: 4). “I really love all this red earth”, Brodsky writes, “It reminds me of the Soviet Union but without all the people, a sort of abstract and timeless version, millions of Lenin banners ground to red dust” (a:4) (Fig. 3.1). While Brodsky’s Mars might be ‘abstract and timeless’, the reference it summons—the collapse of the Soviet Union—combined with the entry’s date—7 July 1997—firmly situates her *in* history, albeit the historical period in which Francis Fukuyama claimed history itself had ended (Fukuyama 1992). This diary entry, in which Brodsky plays the role of both time traveller after the end of history *and* artist after the end of art, captures the comedic pulse at the heart of ... *No Other Symptoms*. Oscillating between the serious, the absurd and the banal, the laughter provoked by the work is not always side-splitting, but it does clear the way for a serious intervention to be made in how Brodsky’s principal destination—the Holocaust—was being approached in art and scholarship of the 1990s.

“WHAT IF I GOT HERE FIVE MINUTES LATER, THEN
WHERE WOULD I BE?”

The disc on which ... *No Other Symptoms* can be played slots into a paper sleeve at the back of a small hardback book bearing the same title. It was published in 1999 by Black Dog Press and can still be purchased (and played) today. When the work has been exhibited, most notably, at the



Fig. 3.1 Suzanne Treister, ... *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, 1999: Rosalind Brodsky in Mars (still). Image courtesy of the artist

2002 Sydney Biennale, it is installed on a computer for viewers to explore at their leisure. While neither CD ROMs nor museums frequently court laughter, humour is essential to the operation of ... *No Other Symptoms*, permitting those who encounter the work to be drawn into the world of its protagonist. The work's comedic tone is primarily established through Brodsky's diary, in which daily events are delivered as pithy one-liners:

1 July 2015. At the Institute, was experimenting with my costume to rescue my grandparents from the Holocaust. Suddenly found myself on what turned out to be the film set of *Schindler's List* in the year 1994. (Treister 1999, a: 4)

Impeccably paced, the equal weighting of the two sentences mimics the rhythm of a set-up and punchline in a conventional joke. Treated as such, the diary entry's 'punchline' points to a decisively bleak outcome, the



Rosalind Brodsky in her Electronic Time Travelling Costume to rescue her Grandparents from the Holocaust ends up mistakenly on the set of Schindler's List. Krakow, Poland, 1994.

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Fig. 3.2 Suzanne Treister, ...*No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, 1999: Rosalind Brodsky on the set of *Schindler's List*, 1993 (still). Image courtesy of the artist

accompanying image furnishing the joke's black humour (Fig. 3.2). A woman in a full-length silver gown topped with a matching leather helmet stands behind a suited man holding a clipboard. The man is, of course, Liam Neeson playing the titular character in *Schindler's List*; the woman is Rosalind Brodsky, decked out in one of her three time-travelling costumes. Neeson's character was based on a real person: Oskar Schindler, the German

businessman who saved thousands of Jews from the concentration camps during World War II by employing them in his factory. As such, Brodsky and Schindler are united in their ambition to reverse the fate of those destined to be murdered in the Holocaust. Unlike Brodsky, Schindler is successful in his rescue mission. The encounter is staged by Treister using the photographic technique of superimposition, and the selected film still depicts the scene in which Schindler saves his Jewish accountant from a train bound for Auschwitz at the eleventh hour: “What if I got here five minutes later? Then where would I be?” asks Schindler (and Brodsky).

It is not only the delivery that draws this diary entry closer to the conventional jokes towards which Freud’s analysis was directed in 1905. So too, does Treister’s balancing of the familiar, the Holocaust, with the topical, *Schindler’s List*. The two are, of course, related, and Spielberg’s film had not only foregrounded the Holocaust in the 1990s imaginary, but had also translated it for an American audience: European history retold in English with Polish accents. As such, Spielberg participated in a broader tendency at work in 1990s America, which would be characterised by Michael Berenbaum, the director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), as ‘The Americanisation of the Holocaust’ (Berenbaum, 1990). Both the USHMM and *Schindler’s List* opened to audiences in the same year, a twinning that piqued the interest of historian Peter Novick, who opened his book *The Holocaust in American Life* by asking “why in 1990s America—fifty years after the fact and thousands of miles from its site—the Holocaust has come to loom so large in our culture” (Novick 2000, p. 1). Novick answered his own provocation by offering a survey of America’s changing relationship to the Holocaust, which he divided into three stages: the war and immediate post-war years (1933–1961); what he calls the ‘transitional years’ (1961–1978) and the contemporary context (1978–1999). Novick’s primary contention was that the ‘Americanisation of the Holocaust’ was commensurate with the dehistoricisation of the Holocaust, a process that rendered the Holocaust a bearer of eternal truths rather than a historical event (110). For Novick, the Holocaust was reconfigured into a ‘consensual symbol’ in the 1990s—a reconfiguration in which *Schindler’s List* participated (p. 7). Rosalind Brodsky’s erroneous arrival at the set of *Schindler’s List*—attempting to reach the Holocaust but remaining in 1990s America—used comedy to point to the same conclusion.

“I DON’T WANT TO CHANGE HISTORY, I WANT
TO BE PART OF IT”

It took Treister four years to complete ... *No Other Symptoms*, and her efforts took place within a fairly lonely landscape of artists working with digital media in London. Having originally trained as a painter, Treister’s digital work dates from 1991, when the purchase of an Amiga computer prompted her to swap her oils for the Deluxe Paint II software. According to Treister, when artist friends would visit her studio, the sight of her new computer installed on her workbench would often provoke the question: “Of course, you’ll only be using it to work out your paintings won’t you?” (Treister 2006, p. 58). Treister’s work during the early 1990s would do little to alleviate the concern registered by her peers. Indeed, before work on ... *No Other Symptoms* began in earnest in 1995, when Treister did use paint, it was only to work out the design for her CD ROM rather than the other way around. The painted covers of Treister’s series of fictional floppy-disc programmes, *Software*, for example, depict ‘sets’ from ... *No*



Fig. 3.3 Suzanne Treister, *SOFTWARE/Q. Would You Recognise a Virtual Paradise?/Entrance to the Study of the Virtual Castle*, 1993–1994, oil paint on cardboard boxes and floppy disk, 22.5 × 16 × 4 cm (×2)



Fig. 3.4 Still from Suzanne Treister, *... No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, 1999: Rosalind Brodsky's study

Other Symptoms—including Brodsky's study, bedroom and dining room (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4)—as well as recurring motifs, such as Black Forest Cake, which Rosalind Brodsky bakes from disassembled Polish pierogi in one of the CD ROM's video components, 'Rosalind Brodsky's Time Travelling Cookery Show' (Figs. 3.5 and 3.6).

As with the design for *... No Other Symptoms*, the character Rosalind Brodsky was also originally conceived in analogue. First used by Treister as a pseudonym during the 1980s, the name was then assigned to her alter ego, whose debut was occasioned by the exhibition *Pretext: Heteronyms* in 1995. Inspired by the novelist Fernando Pessoa's multiple authorial



Fig. 3.5 Suzanne Treister, *SOFTWARE/Q. Would You Recognise a Virtual Paradise?/Black Forest Cake*, 1993–1994, oil paint on cardboard boxes and floppy disk 22.5 × 16 × 4 cm (× 2)

identities, Treister, alongside the exhibition's 19 other artists, created her own 'heteronym' based on an artist who believes she has discovered time travel. The short text submitted by Treister on Rosalind Brodsky would form the basis for ... *No Other Symptoms*, which, despite being developed into a CD ROM, remained invested in the curatorial ethos guiding *Pretext: Heteronyms* that "we can still speak the subject—however provisional" (Steyn 1995, p. i). Acknowledging that Brodsky was first spoken (as Treister's pseudonym) and then written (as her heteronym) into existence permits an understanding of ... *No Other Symptoms* that avoids overdetermining its form; a necessary task given that the CD ROM is one element of a larger series of multi-media works carried out from 1995 to 2006. Either starring Brodsky or 'authored' by her, at the core of this project is a character portrait that becomes unfixed through the proliferation of different versions. True to the character's origins, what is exposed in the construction of Rosalind Brodsky is not what is made possible by



Fig. 3.6 Still from Suzanne Treister, ... *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, 1999: Rosalind Brodsky's time-travelling cookery show

the screen, but rather what kinds of discoveries language can yield when play is re-introduced to subjectivity.

From the outset of the project, Treister fostered suspicion around Rosalind Brodsky's defining characteristic: her discovery of time travel. Originally, this was enacted by refusing Brodsky her own account of her travails in the short statement Treister submitted for *Pretext: Heteronyms*, which began with the declaration: "Rosalind Brodsky suffers from delusions, particularly in relation to fantasies of time travel" (31, Treister 1995). This detached third-person account cast doubt on the reliability of Brodsky's claims, a strategy that Treister then expanded in ... *No Other Symptoms* by folding in multiple conflicting accounts of Brodsky's time travel to the work, including case studies written by the five psychoanalysts Brodsky believed herself to have visited: Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Carl Jung, Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva. These case studies support the hypothesis that Brodsky is merely delusional (although Jung comes close

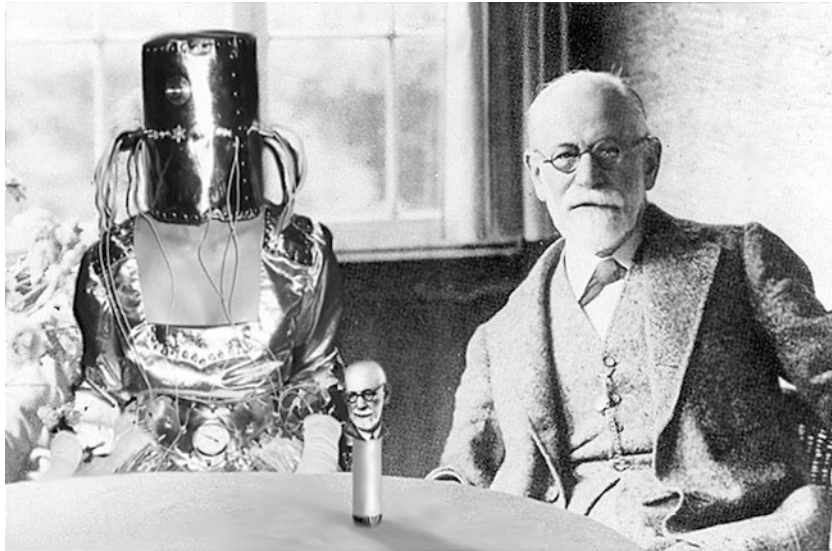
to believing her), yet each psychoanalyst has a different explanation for the perceived pathology. Of course, the case studies' role as part of ... *No Other Symptoms* has the opposite effect; if they were indeed 'authentic' documents (in the context of the work), Brodsky's claim would be corroborated.

Together with Brodsky's diary, the case studies written by her analysts form the CD ROM's primary texts, bringing together third- and first-person accounts of Brodsky's time travel. On the authenticity of Brodsky's discovery, these texts are not diametrically opposed; indeed there are instances in Brodsky's diary that serve to support, rather than disprove, the diagnosis that she may be entirely delusional:

This morning went to Vienna 1928 for another session with Freud. He was very concerned about the fact that I refused to take off the silver helmet that covered my face. What was I afraid to see? He asked me. What was I afraid to see? I asked myself. Without my helmet I would be back in my own time, but I could hardly tell him that that was what I was afraid of or he would have thought me crazy. (a: 2, Treister 1999)

The entry is illustrated by a photograph where Brodsky has been inserted next to Freud, who meets the gaze of the photographer rather than Brodsky (Fig. 3.7). The encounter is also documented in Freud's case study on Brodsky, in which, believing he was speaking to another one of his patients, he diagnoses her compulsion to fashion vibrators adorned with the heads of men and buildings she admired (along with the image of Brodsky, the 'Freud' model is inserted onto the photograph of their encounter) as a way of dealing with the repressed fear of her father's castration (b: 19, Treister 1999). Later in their meeting, Freud makes another diagnosis, suggesting that Brodsky's conviction that she had discovered time travel was a pathology born out of a desire to change history, a diagnosis Brodsky flatly rejects, stating that rather than changing history, she wants "to be part of it" (b: 19).

In this fictive exchange, narrated by Freud and written by Treister, the operation of Brodsky's time travel is made explicit: it is the means by which Brodsky—and by extension, Treister—can *identify* with history. At stake in this shift of emphasis is history. By maintaining that Brodsky's excursions could conceivably take place in the 'real world', albeit a delusional one, Treister asserts the transformative potential of the present. This is in



Sigmund Freud with Rosalind Brodsky and the Freud Vibrator near Tegel, Berlin 1928
 © Rosalind Brodsky Institute of Millitronics and Advanced Time Interventionality

Fig. 3.7 Still from Suzanne Treister, ... *No Other Symptoms: Time Travelling with Rosalind Brodsky*, 1999: Rosalind Brodsky meets with Sigmund Freud in Vienna 1928

step with how Treister relates to Brodsky as an alter ego, primarily as a means by which her own past can be engaged. This is expressed most profoundly by the way in which Treister furnished her alter ego with a detail drawn from her own family history, conferring to Brodsky grandparents who were murdered in the Holocaust. That Brodsky repeatedly fails to rescue her grandparents from this fate reinforces Treister's approach to both her alter ego and time travel in ... *No Other Symptoms*: both function not to *change* Treister's past, but to situate her within it.

The journeys charted in ... *No Other Symptoms* offer a very different portrait of history at the end of the twentieth century than the one T. J. Clark posited in *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, which was published the same year as the CD ROM first debuted. For while Clark and Treister might have both looked back from the 1990s and seen a “ruin, the logic of whose architecture we do not

remotely grasp”, and while both might have attempted to make sense of that ruin from the standpoint of 1999, Treister departed from Clark by adding her alter ego to the rubble (Clark 1999, p. 2). In the foreground of that ruin—for Treister—was the Holocaust, a history Brodsky repeatedly ‘visits’ but does not change. Treister’s approach to the Holocaust in *No Other Symptoms* also brushed against how other artists were engaging the subject in the 1990s, an engagement perhaps best captured by the four works commissioned for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which opened in 1993. In each instance, the commissioned artist resisted figurative representation of the Holocaust. Ellsworth Kelly worked in monochrome, assembling three white panels to face a large ark; Sol LeWitt produced five large squares in muted blues and yellows and Richard Serra impaled the museum’s steps with a large rectangular steel slab. Joel Schapiro’s contribution edged the closest to figuration, pairing an upwards-turned bronze house with a tumble of three-dimensional rectangles approximating a person, but remained allusive in its address of the Holocaust.

For the art historian Linda Nochlin, Kelly’s decision to eschew colour for his contribution, *Memorial*, registered the ineffability of the event to which his memorial was directed, deliberately referring to “loss and memory: the always blank page of history that no transcendence can every inscribe, no wingspread, however generously conceived, can ever encompass” (Nochlin 1997, p. 77). While *Memorial* is a relatively late work of Kelly’s—an artist who had been formed by, but remained ambivalent towards, minimalism in the mid- to late 1960s—Nochlin’s analysis can be situated within the paradigm set by Rosalind Krauss in *Passages of Modern Sculpture*, in which Krauss characterised minimalist sculpture in terms of its “intentional or private centre” (Krauss 1977, p. 266). What both Krauss and Nochlin point towards is the capacity for works of art to represent the unrepresentable. Where Nochlin departs from Krauss is her suggestion that abstract art could address historical reality, a suggestion that was elaborated in Mark Godfrey’s 2007 book *Abstraction and the Holocaust*. However, Nochlin’s ‘always blank page of history’ is a far cry from the history encountered in ... *No Other Symptoms*, which, far from affirming that which is beyond human comprehension, writes its protagonist into the Holocaust.

“IT IS MY OWN VIOLENCE I DISCOVER IN THIS FILM”

In arguing for the Holocaust’s fundamental ineffability, Nochlin’s reading of *Memorial* slots into a tendency the philosopher Gillian Rose would characterise as ‘Holocaust Piety’ in her essay ‘Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation’, published in 1995. Invoking Friedrich Nietzsche, Rose contended that positioning the Holocaust as an event beyond human comprehension, and thus *outside of history*, avoids the terrifying truth that it may in fact be all too understandable, “all too continuous with what we are—human, all too human” (Rose 1995, p. 43). As such, Rose turns to *Schindler’s List* to develop her theorisation of ‘Holocaust Piety’ not because it resisted figurative representation—Auschwitz is depicted, albeit in black and white—but on the basis of the film’s moralising impulse, what Bryan Cheyette has called the film’s ‘underlying Manicheanism’, which renders the uncertain history it addresses certain (Cheyette 1997, p. 232). Adding scaffolding to the assumption that informs Brodsky’s erroneous arrival on the set of *Schindler’s List*, Rose suggests that Spielberg’s Auschwitz had supplanted Auschwitz proper in the 1990s imaginary because the film offered a more palatable version of events. In mythologizing both victim and villain, Rose argues, Spielberg constructed the film’s Nazi protagonist as an ‘ultimate predator’ whose senseless violence viewers could abhor, permitting them to identify solely with the film’s saviour, Schindler, and the victims (1995, p. 54). For Rose, such an approach to characterisation rebuffs the profound moral ambiguity of the Holocaust. Therefore, contrary to provoking a crisis of identity in which the viewer recognises the continuity between themselves and the history on screen, he or she can emerge from the cinema having cried “sentimental tears, which leave [them] emotionally and politically intact” (1995, p. 54).

Contrary to how character operates in *Schindler’s List*, the identification engendered through humour in *No Other Symptoms* lands its viewers in much less safe terrain. While both works render their respective leading roles sympathetic characters, Rosalind Brodsky is a very different protagonist to Oskar Schindler. Whereas in one of the last scenes of *Schindler’s List*, Schindler is given a gold ring inscribed with a quote from the Talmud: “Whoever saves one life saves the world entire”, Brodsky ends up saving no one, even though she supposedly has the means. Brodsky never has her *what if* moment, which, in the final scene of *Schindler’s List*, sanctions Schindler’s redemption. Seemingly, she would be satisfied with *just*

rescuing her grandparents—and thus tacitly approves the fate of everyone else. Moreover, Brodsky’s pretensions to altruism are tarnished with brazen self-interest: part of her motivation for bringing her grandparents to the twenty-first century is to film them for a gimmick on her time-traveling cookery show. Yet Brodsky is redeemed nonetheless by the audience’s identification, who discover their own ambivalence in her narcissism and become complicit in her actions through laughter.

In conceptualising ‘Holocaust Piety’ Rose did not simply offer a yardstick by which all Holocaust representations could be judged. For Rose, the reception of cultural works could be held in tandem with their production and distribution (1995, p. 41). In the case of *Schindler’s List*, Rose argues that the charge of ‘Holocaust Piety’ can be lifted in its reception, specifically *her* reception of the film, which yields the provocative reaction that “it is my own violence I discover in the film” (1995, p. 48). Rose’s explicit embrace of ambiguity appears to situate her in dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir, who seems to anticipate both Rose’s writings and Rosalind Brodsky’s excursions in the following excerpt from her 1948 book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*:

There was Stalingrad and there was Buchenwald, and neither of the two wipes out the other. Since we do not succeed in fleeing it, let us therefore try to look the truth in the face. Let us try to assume our fundamental ambiguity. (de Beauvoir [1976] 1948, p. 9)

The ambiguity expressed by De Beauvoir here, however, is in fact profoundly different to that which is proposed by Rose, or indeed Treister. Faced with the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, De Beauvoir, alongside Jean-Paul Sartre, proposed existentialism as a philosophy of ambiguity in which the assumption of one’s ambiguity was the end goal. While Rose is responding to the same historical crisis, she assumes her ambiguity to serve a different end, as a means of overcoming, rather than accepting the past.

Reflecting on the legacy of authoritarianism in 1962, Theodore W. Adorno stated “The past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken” (Adorno, [1962] 2005, p. 102). A year later, Hannah Arendt would characterise the actions of Adolf Eichmann as ‘banal’ (Arendt, 1963). Both Adorno and Arendt sought to highlight the

continuity, and thus the humanity, of the Holocaust. When Rose took up the same problem, she extended both authors’ prognoses to the 1990s. Specifically, Rose argued that the inner tendency of Fascism converged with the argument for the overcoming of representation in its aesthetic, philosophical and political versions—an argument that makes clear what is at stake for Rose when she equates ‘Holocaust Piety’ with the invocation of the ineffable (1995, p. 41). Yet while ‘Holocaust Piety’ is a problem produced by representation, for Rose it is a problem that can be resolved *within* representation. And, although Rose does not mention comedy as a possible means of resolution within her article on ‘Holocaust Piety’, she ended a paper on Hegel and comedy from 1993 by quipping that a “comic approach” might offer “a deeper and more drastic alternative to the current sacralising, commercialising and elevating into *raison d’état* as well as Providential anti-reason of the Holocaust in America and Israel” (Rose [1993] 1995, p. 76). This is the future ... *No Other Symptoms* gestures towards in its unsentimental, humorous, representation of the Holocaust.

“AND A MORE OFFENSIVE SPECTACLE I CANNOT RECALL”

In an article titled ‘Holocaust *Laughter?*’, Terrence Des Pres proposed that there was value in eliciting laughter in works of fiction that engaged the Holocaust (Des Pres 1988, p. 216). Comedy, for Des Pres, set pity and terror at a distance, thus permitting “a tougher, more active response” (1998, p. 232). Yet such an approach would chafe against the restrictions set for respectable study of the Holocaust, what Des Pres calls ‘fictions’, and which he condenses into three prescriptions that could equally be extended to artistic, as well as literary, engagements with the subject. The first prescription anticipates Rose, dictating that the Holocaust must be represented as a special case, a unique event that is “above or below or apart from history” (1998, p. 216). The second prescription serves to set limits on the forms Holocaust representations can take, ruling that they must be “as accurate and faithful as possible to the facts and conditions of the event, without change or manipulation for any reason”. As Ernst Van Alphen has correctly pointed out, such a prescription would imply that those undertaking the task of Holocaust representation should model themselves on archivists and historians, rather than authors, artists or, indeed, comedians (Van Alphen 1997, p. 94). It is the third prescription, however, not the second, that bears the heaviest on comedic representations of the Holocaust, as it appears to disqualify laughter as an

appropriate response: “The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonour its dead” (1997, p. 232). Yet, Des Pres in fact situates the works he chooses to analyse in this article within, rather than outside of, the logic of this particular prescription. This is because laughter, for Des Pres, is in fact deeply serious because it fosters an identification with the Holocaust.

In positing laughter as an appropriate response to representations of the Holocaust, Des Pres perversely elevated the role of satire about Holocaust representations, implying that the detachment fostered by ‘serious’ depictions could be broken down using comedy. This is exemplified in a scene in an episode of the television series *Seinfeld*, which satirises the rarefied air with which *Schindler’s List* was approached. In the episode, Jerry, the series’ protagonist and co-creator, is caught kissing his date during a screening of *Schindler’s List* by his nemesis, Newman. Compelled by their rivalry, Newman rushes to tell Jerry’s parents, in the knowledge that Jerry’s blatant disregard of the film will win their disapproval. Upon hearing the news, Jerry’s parents are, as Newman had hoped, incredulous. “Jerry was making out in *Schindler’s List*?” asks Jerry’s mother. “Yes”, Newman responds, “and a more offensive spectacle I cannot recall”. The episode debuted just a month after *Schindler’s List* had won ‘Best Picture’ at the Academy Awards, in addition to awards in six other categories, and only a few months after Oprah Winfrey declared on her talk show that she was “a better person as a result of seeing *Schindler’s List*”, and President Bill Clinton had “implored” the American public to see the film in an official state speech (Whitfield 2001, p. 1990). Providing the episode’s context, the aggrandising response to *Schindler’s List*—not the film itself—is the target of the episode’s satire. By parodying the acclaim, Newman’s speech registers the way in which *Schindler’s List* had been collapsed into the history it sought to represent, such that it would be logical to view an act of disrespect towards the film tantamount to disrespect of the Holocaust itself.

Both this scene in *Seinfeld* and that with which this article opened—Brodsky’s erroneous arrival on the set of *Schindler’s List* instead of Auschwitz proper—use comedy to draw a line between representations and the history they represent. What distinguishes Treister’s joke is that it circles back on itself, for unlike *Seinfeld*, it is set within its own Holocaust representation. However, in what Rachel Garfield has neatly coined Brodsky’s “travels through representation” (Garfield 2015, p. 332) *No*

Other Symptoms multiplies its representations of the Holocaust through Brodsky’s travels. These travels extend beyond filmic representations like *Schindler’s List*, and occasionally land Brodsky in documentary representation. In one particularly grim diary entry, Brodsky narrates an instance where she successfully time travels to Auschwitz, arriving at a spot where a group of Jews were getting off a train. After failing to locate her grandparents, but before deciding to leave, she is ordered to join the line, and only manages to activate her equipment “in the nick of time” (Treister 1999, a:1).

As with the majority of Brodsky’s diary entries, this is illustrated by a composite photograph in which the figure of Brodsky is overlaid onto an existing image. This image depicts a group of women and children queuing by a cattle truck; the Star of David visible on one of the women’s coats immediately situating the image within the context to which the entry refers. Unlike the photographs illustrating Brodsky’s excursions in film, the interruption of the silver-clad delusional time traveller in this particular scene is demonstrably stark. In addition to *Schindler’s List*, Brodsky also visits the sets *Dr Zhivago*, *The Wizard of Oz* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. Given the sham aesthetic of Brodsky’s costume—where protective metal is rendered in soft leather, purposive wires are encased in silk and the whole look is topped with a helmet that entirely obscures vision—it is conceivable that in each instance her presence could be explained by her having wandered in from a nearby set of a science fiction film. In the case of this interruption, however, there is no adjacent context into which Brodsky’s time-travel garb could easily assimilate.

The chasm that opens up between the original photograph and the image of Brodsky in this diary entry permits Treister to re-animate the archive. It is a strategy British artist Alan Schechner would similarly employ in 1993 when he digitally overlaid a self-portrait of himself holding a diet coke onto a photograph taken after the liberation of Buchenwald. In destabilising the singular authority of the image, both Treister and Schechner highlight the mythologizing impulse operative in documentary representations that reduce people to the history they evidence. As such, this image and that which illustrates Brodsky’s erroneous arrival on the set of *Schindler’s List* are two sides of the same coin. Both images point to the ways in which Holocaust representations—artistic or documentary—stood in the way of an active engagement with the Holocaust, both imply that the obstacle presented by Holocaust representations could be overcome *within* representation.

In addition to its reference to spectacle, there is a second sense in which Newman's exaggerated declaration about Jerry's *Schindler's List* faux pas relates to the comedy driving *No Other Symptoms*. This is Newman's reference to offence—"a more offensive spectacle I cannot recall"—which asserts the contentious terrain any jokes relating to the Holocaust necessarily navigate. This issue is somewhat side-stepped in both the episode of *Seinfeld* and the particular instance of Brodsky's erroneous arrival on the set of *Schindler's List* by rendering Spielberg's film, and not the Holocaust, the target of the joke. However, in ... *No Other Symptoms*, as well as the Rosalind Brodsky project at large, the Holocaust is the primary context for its tragicomic undercurrent. Des Pres, in asserting the importance of laughter in engaging with the Holocaust, lays the groundwork for Treister's path out of this predicament. Yet it is ultimately through the comedy in the work itself—not the reaction it elicits—that Treister is able to redeem any offence caused by ... *No Other Symptoms*. In a diary entry that subverts a well-worn cliché in the time-travel genre—one that was initiated in 1941 by Ralph Milne Farley's short story 'I Killed Hitler'—when Brodsky does encounter Adolf Hitler in Munich in 1913, rather than attempt assassination she steals one of his watercolours. Elsewhere in Brodsky's diary, she meets Jackie Mason and Howard Jacobson in the Catskills in 1985, but quickly tires and leaves in search of some bagels. In both instances, Brodsky flees from the particular into the general, choosing to substantiate neither her time travelling nor comedic credentials. Together they capture the comedic register of ... *No Other Symptoms*, which remains in the ordinary so that its viewer might identify with the extraordinary.

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There is a precedent for ... *No Other Symptoms*, a painting by Treister made in 1989 titled *Video Game for Primo Levi* (Fig. 3.8). The work is a part of a series made by Treister in 1989–1991 in which Treister added 'video game' to the title in order to activate the aesthetic experience, hoping that the viewer might arrive at the painting with the anticipation of a goal-oriented narrative. In *Video Game for Primo Levi*, a maze is formed out of reflective fuchsia locks, gold hinges and a single vertical stack of books. The goal in this painting is unclear, but the path through the maze is overlaid with miniature apple-green lightbulbs whose size and fragility imply the aim is perhaps to navigate the metallic corners without breaking any glass. Aside from the title, there is no reference to Primo Levi, but the association summoned by the maze—that of escape—provocatively

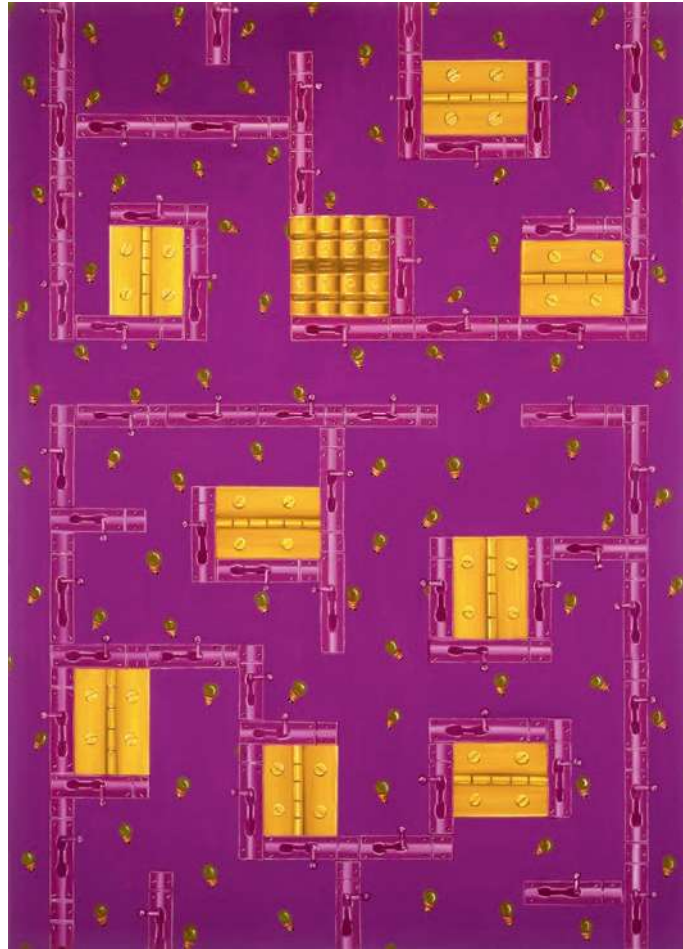


Fig. 3.8 Suzanne Treister, *Video Game for Primo Levi*, 1989; Oil on canvas 213 x 153 cm

transplants the Holocaust into the context of play. With ... *No Other Symptoms*, Treister realised what could only be implied in this painterly precedent. Whereas the viewer in *Video Game for Primo Levi* could only mentally navigate the gilded maze, the viewer of ... *No Other Symptoms* could actively click their way through the world of Rosalind Brodsky, they

could read her diary and her analysts' case studies, and listen to the music of her band *Satellites of Lvov*. Through play, Treister facilitated an identification with Rosalind Brodsky that would position the viewer within the history of the Holocaust; through humour, Treister rendered that history comprehensible. As such, while the image of Brodsky on the set of *Schindler's List* might indeed have offended those for whom both the film and its subject matter were sacred, for those willing to relinquish such pieties and submit to its humour, a different kind of aesthetic experience can be imagined, one that places the viewer within the artwork rather than outside of it. Couched within this joke, therefore, is Treister's crucial insight: in the context of contemporary art, laughter can be a deeply serious proposition.

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TELEVISION

'The Raincoats', *Seinfeld*, episode 18, season 5, April 28 1994; directed Tom Cheronos, written by Tom Gammill, Max Pross, Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld.