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## One Man and One Woman; or, Too Many Characters in a Conversation<sup>1</sup>

Roe Rosen and Katarzyna Bojarska

**Katarzyna Bojarska:** Your work comprises multiple elements: the study of many kinds of transgression and the possibilities of the iconoclastic gesture; the manipulation of the very concept of identity; challenging the boundary between historical fiction and artistic fiction, as well as between fact and fiction; blurring the boundary between the viewer's consciousness, the author, and presented characters; artistic manipulation both on an intellectual and an affective level; exploring the grey zone between victim and perpetrator, between eroticism and pornography, etc. Where shall we begin? Tell me about the background of Roe Rosen, his academic training and his travels away from and back to Israel.

**Roe Rosen:** My education at Tel Aviv University was in Comparative Literature and Philosophy, then I moved to NYC and studied art there. I came back to Israel with *Live and Die as Eva Braun* and a huge scandal followed. Before the show opened, the work's text (ten short segments) was published in a local Jerusalem newspaper and was immediately labeled as "Holocaust denial" and an offense to Holocaust survivors by right-wing politicians and commentators, and they demanded that the show be cancelled and the museum's budget be cut. They were soon joined by religious activists and other representatives of right-wing orthodoxy from all over the country. The project stirred up a scandal and a heated public debate in Israel. The shock in this case originated most of all in the shift of emphasis from the victims to the perpetrators, as the work seemingly offered an attempt at identification with the murderer(s). The Museum stood by me. What they did was to decide on some moral-safety warnings, information on the explicit images and content, etc. What I liked in particular was that they put out a visitors book and encouraged viewers to share



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun, number 2*, Acrylic, pastel and gesso on paper, 1995

their comments on the show. The results, from a sociological point of view, were quite amazing. There were no moderate reactions. Some claimed it was one of the most important things done on the theme of Holocaust memory and representation, others threatened that I would lose my life. So in terms of reception I think it was one of a very few works whose resonance transgressed the boundaries of the so-called art world.

**KB:** Why did you do it?

**RR:** What? This work? For many years I lived with the paradoxical conviction that such topics cannot be tackled in art, and yet that they have to be, the reason for that being simply that the question of the presence of the Holocaust has been constitutive for my identity.

Moreover, "holocaust," I felt, was not a singular or direct experience but a plethora of various phenomena that got intermingled and influenced me with a great power. The other thing being that I have known so many, too many, works of art "on the Holocaust" that I basically found unacceptable, especially the figurative works operating through prosopopoeia, that is, speaking for the dead, which attempt to authentically reenact what had happened, assuming as a matter of course an identification with the victim, and at times even speaking for the victim. What also made it impossible not to react were the political abuses of the Holocaust by the state of Israel, which also employed this prosopopoeial mode: as if the victims speak through us and we act on their behalf. Identification, in other words, becomes instrumentalization. The other, in a way no less obscene mode, would be abstraction (understood as the proper, high and respectable mode to tackle these issues): creating a vacuous space onto which an audience can project their own impossibility of accessing the event, the so-called empty space of commemoration. My take is that art should serve the experience of the embarrassment of being human, of being actively implicated, which is highly unpleasant. Abstraction provides an umbrella of decency that denies any kind of specificity to these historical questions.

**KB:** Ok. So you knew quite well what not to do.

**RR:** I did. So then, after many years of thinking and avoiding the issue, the conceptual premise of becoming Hitler's lover came almost as an epiphany, with



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, installation views, INIVA, Rivington Place, London, 2012

a strong sense of urgency. I was not that young any more; I was 32 and the question of identification was becoming quite pressing for me. Once I knew it was going to be Eva Braun rather than anyone else, I still needed to come up with the form of mediation.

**KB:** Did you know from the very beginning that it was going to be a combination of words and images?

**RR:** Not at all. Painting is my principal medium, but I always try to doubt painting. I wove it into this dubious relationship with photography and made it a parasite onto so many other images and sub-genres. The virtual reality scenario I created was supposed to be this poisonous seductive machine.

**KB:** Did you have the *Stalags* in mind in any way?

**RR:** Not directly, or explicitly, but they were definitely a point of reference. At the time I was more into things like Lina Wertmüller and her erotic imagery. What I took from her was the way of displacing libidinal investments and the sense of identification. The *Stalags*, even though they were pulp fiction, did a very sophisticated twist in terms of identification: it is not clear who you identify with; who you turn against or take revenge upon; are you a masochist or a sadist, etc. Ari Libsker's documentary is a great study of these ambivalences, also in opposition to the state-sanctioned porn of Ka-Tzetnik.

**KB:** Eva Braun was not the first female character you worked on and with.

**RR:** She certainly was not. Before her I already had a whole history of female effigies. I made a series of martyr paintings in which I redid Christian hagiography, casting myself as different female martyrs; Lucy, Barbara, etc. I felt that circumscribing Jewish identity by reenacting Christian mythology was a way of polemically dealing with constituting myself as Jewish from within the scene of the crime embraced by Christian rhetoric. Then there was



Roe Rosen, *Live and Die as Eva Braun*, mixed media on paper, 1995-1997



Roe Rosen, *Martyr Barbara 2*, from a series of 35 paintings, oil on paper, 23" x 30" each, presented with the saints' hagiographies, 1992

also a book entitled *Lucy*. At that time I also worked in New York City doing illustrations under the female name Anne Kastorp. So as you see I already had a whole gallery of female identities. But certainly that project took it to a different level.

**KB:** What is behind this?

**RR:** Vagina envy (*laughing*). It has to do with many aspects of the culture and times I grew up in; glam rock, for example, the emancipatory urge of being able to become whoever you wish to, boundless imagination. David Bowie, for example, was for me as a teenager a truly emancipatory figure, so different from everything I knew in the Israeli suburbia where I grew up.

**KB:** And there is also the antisemitic stereotype linking Jewishness and femininity. We'll come back to this later. In all of your works one can sense the great importance of the textual component. But it is not only in the combination of word and image, but also a separate branch, let's say, which is your novelistic practice.

**RR:** Between *Justine Frank* and *Confessions* I wrote *Ziona* (published 2007 in Hebrew), a novel about an Israeli superheroine. She operates in Tel Horef – you know, Tel Aviv means something like the mountain of spring, Tel Horef means the mountain of winter so it is a darker and more mythical version of Tel Aviv, surrounded by a wall. But she is a rather dysfunctional superheroine. She is a hybrid; she had an extra-terrestrial mother, while her father was a human scientist. When she was born she had some defects related to her super powers so her father introduced some bionic parts to her body, but he was assassinated before he completed the task. So she has some incredible abilities but she is imperfect. For example, she can fly but there is always an annoying noise accompanying her flight. She also needs to be a chain-smoker and drink a lot of coffee in order to maintain her super powers. Also, she suffers as a result of her super powers: she has an incredible sense of smell, so when she walks on the streets she smells all the shit, diseases, rotten food, etc. She is constantly attacked by stench. And she is also a compulsive masturbator.



Roe Rosen, *Martyr Lucy*, from a series of 35 paintings, oil on paper, 23" x 30" each, presented with the saints' hagiographies, 1991

**KB:** Does it also have a visual counterpart?

**RR:** No. When I began working on it, it was sort of similar to Justine Frank, in the sense that there was a fabricated history behind it. I wrote an essay explaining how *Ziona* came into being. That it had been a comic strip published in Ashdod, a city in the Southern Israel, after 1973. You know, the 1973 war was quite a humiliating episode for the Israeli army, so *Ziona* began as a kind of Zionist warrior who fights bad Arabs and ex-Nazis, bringing patriotic pride back to the Israelis. But it was then only an amateur comic fanzine. Then, during the years of punk, 1979-1980, she pops up again in Tel Aviv, but now as a kind of a travesty. In the punk version she is this ridiculous nationalist police woman fighting cool punks and always losing. And then during early 1990s, according to this fabricated history, all these strange incarnations find fans who idolize *Ziona*, in particular on the sexual level. And these fans are trying to bring American investors to get Marvel comics or some other company to buy her. But this failed. Finally, in early 2000 she suddenly became big in Japan as a Manga character – but completely detached from her Israeli roots and the political-cultural context. So the book attempts to be a sort of verbal retelling of the comic-story without any visual elements except for her logo, which is a play on the star of David with a Z in it, sort of like the Z from Zorro, but also like Zion. And I decided in the end not to publish this historical essay, but only the story itself.



Roe Rosen, *Martyr Eugenia*, from a series of 35 paintings, oil on paper, 23" x 30" each, presented with the saints' hagiographies, 1991

**KB:** In a country so saturated with history and so strongly built on history as a state foundation, how can you so easily play with histories? Are there any consequences to such a strategy, apart from the ones already mentioned? What is this drive to deconstruct and obstruct dominant fictions or narratives?

**RR:** Well, I think history is invariably instrumentalized and ritualized. It is always doctored: there is no clear distinction between the scholarly and authoritarian versions of history. But I grew up feeling I was fed a lot of lies and half-truths. All these numerous re-tellings were so ideologically invested that one feels compelled to add to them, to make one's own version of history. History is always put to use:

to get money to justify political power and aggression, to instigate wars. It is never out of a love of history that the "chosen people," Israelis, reach for it. So for me the question of who is allowed and how is one supposed to appropriate history properly has always been crucial. But there are also more personal elements to it; my own private space and personal memory vis à vis national collective narratives. It has very much to do with the twilight zone of what is perceived as past and what is perceived as present. Contemporary recollections of past events, such as the Holocaust, delivered today are part of the present. So when Israeli kids go to Auschwitz carrying Israeli flags, they are simultaneously happy to go abroad on an airplane even as they are supposed to be burdened and traumatized with the fixed narrative of the suffering of their ancestors. One additional element is the artistic tradition I encountered part of going to NYC in the 90s, i.e. appropriation and postmodernism, and the way it left me trying to articulate a different, more labyrinthine position. I felt myself to be in a paradoxical position, suspecting painting, yet insisting on its use as a minor, arcane art, which precisely because of its long history has a special power, a rich iconographic tradition that one can draw on in various ways.

I am saying this in order to disavow an image of myself as this very serious committed Foucauldian political critic heroically fighting against institutionalized Zionism, etc. If it was not going to somehow make me laugh, or sweat, it would not do. The body is always the first to tell you if something is wrong; the somatic transgression usually comes first and tells you that a border has been crossed. It does not happen often, but sometimes an idea will give me this sweaty, uncomfortable feeling, and then I know that it merits my attention. It is not about transgressing somebody else's boundaries, but my own. That personal sense of extreme discomfort, laughter, and engagement, happened with *Eva Braun*, *Justine Frank* and *Confessions*, for sure.



Anonymous photographer, Justine Frank, Paris, ca. 1928

**KB:** And yet we live in times when people sweat for real when the historical boundaries protected by certain institutions are transgressed, be it by art, literature or any other form of critical activity. Tell me how Justine Frank,

a fictitious interwar surrealist artist, a Belgian Jew, a painter, and a novelist, born in Antwerp in 1900, came to highlight certain blind spots of Surrealism and Zionism.

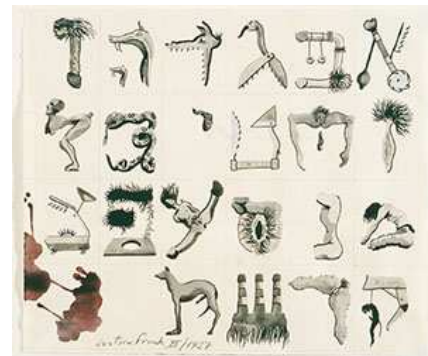
**RR:** Justine Frank operated within these two patriarchal scenes as a pariah of sorts. In relation to Breton and Surrealism, she offered a concoction of Jewish signifiers and scatological sexual depictions. In general, even though some of the surrealists (Man Ray, for example) were Jewish, they tended to suppress this aspect of their identity in their art, and in terms of sexuality, while the surrealist movement, under the sign of Freud, was highly invested in the representation of desire, their dominant model of convulsive beauty assigned women the role of a particular object of desire. Scatology, as well as homosexuality, were anathema to Breton's perception, so Justine Frank was highly disagreeable. And within the Zionist context in Palestine, Frank offers time and again a depiction of the diasporic Jew, the exact "degenerate" image that Zionism aspired to replace with a new, healthy Jew. Furthermore, as her depictions of Judaism borrow from gentile sources, and in particular antisemitic renditions of the Jew, she seems to suggest that this constitution of identity is neither natural nor self-determined, a highly disagreeable position in this context. The original thought behind this project preceded it by some 10 years. When I was still a student in NYC I wanted to do a series of fake documentaries (now we call them mockumentaries, but back then there were not so many cases of them). My idea was to invite other people to invent characters. The series was supposed to be called the *Obscene Personae*. The characters invented were supposed to be morally dubious; stylistically it could be whatever anyone would want, from talking-heads to the grotesque or the carnivalesque. The condition was that one had to feel uncomfortable about what one was doing, i.e. actually manipulating history, but also about the persona chosen. Because I felt incompetent about fundraising and production, I soon gave up on this project and it became one of those drawer ideas. It all came back when I began working on the Justine Frank character. I was mostly interested in the long history of silencing female desire and the history of pornography being the history of male desire. I came up with this figure who was supposedly an emancipated, sexually radical woman, and I felt that the really preposterous thing would be for me as a man to project my own sexual fantasies onto that female character. I assumed that that was what would make people uncomfortable or even enraged. But almost no one in Israel cared about it. But when I gave a couple of readings of the book *Sweet Sweat* in Tel Aviv, there was a moment when people got really



upset. Frank was a real socio-pathological character, systematically trying to make Tel Aviv society hate her. And in 1942 she came uninvited to the opening of this very important show called *Desert Light and Light Unto the Nations*, which was supposed to present the achievements of young Zionist society. And according to the story she came in, tore off her dress, and stood there naked cursing Marcel Janko, an artist very celebrated in Israel. And then she was arrested by the police. But she claimed that she was not the attacker, that on the contrary, she was attacked by a group of men who tried to rape her. So when I read this fragment, a person in the audience stood up and said: "you do not know your history! There were no rapes in Israel in the 1940s." Which in itself is not true, of course. As we know, when the Palestinian inhabitants of Jaffa were thrown out of their houses there were many instances of rape.

**KB:** It is always interesting which kinds of wounds get opened by these forms of representation.

**RR:** ... And who is the one who is going to be hurt and speak up. Do you recall that during the *Mirroring Evil* show in New York, Art Spiegelman published a cartoon in the *New Yorker* with a neo-Nazi doing some kind of anti-semitic graffiti on a wall and two curators saying, "Wow, this is very interesting revision of history." Then they cut the fragment off the wall and place it in the Jewish Museum. He hated the exhibition, Spiegelman! Ironically enough, Norman Kleeblatt, the curator, planned to title the show *PostMaus*. For him, as for many others, *Maus* was the first work of art that truly challenged the representation of the Holocaust and Nazism. And yet, Spiegelman hated the show. The reactions were extreme. I had to struggle with my piece because Norman wanted to censor part of the work, the golden showers scene. Funny that the problem was not the identification with a Nazi, but rather a fantasized form of perversion.



Justine Frank, *The Hebrew Alphabet*, from *The Stained Portfolio*, 1927

**KB:** As we have already said, you never know which wounds shall open... But when it comes to the history of visual representations, it is not so much the *Eva Braun* project as *Justine Frank* that touches deeply and rewrites not only history, but also art history. Why target Surrealism?

**RR:** First of all because these are two big paternal scenes for me: on the one hand the European avant-garde, especially Surrealism, and on the other, the pre-Israel Zionist community. The founding scenes for my own identity, and two historical episodes full of blind spots and missing threads in their narratives. If you identify with something, you feel emotional and critical at the same time. It is like language. I agree with the famous Lacanian saying that the unconscious is structured like language. It is so accurate. Language uses you, not the other way around. Like the atomic spy Mordechai Vanunu, who upon his release from prison declared that Hebrew was an ideologically corrupt language and refused to speak Hebrew, but nevertheless, as a native speaker would forever dream in Hebrew. So, even if I do not like certain traits of Zionism, these are elements that made me who I am. This point was put forward in an essay by Joanna Führer-Ha'Sfari, another invented character, called *I am My Own Grandma*. The title was borrowed from a beautiful silly American song from the 1940s about a man who marries his own stepmother thus becoming his own father, etc. and ultimately the man legally becomes his own grandfather. So here, I invented this mother-figure, a proto-feminist, anti-zionist, emancipated woman with a sense of humor, quite vulgar, also close to Jewish mysticism: all the things I really liked. However, every time we impose on someone the role of the mother or father, we forge them, we create them with an indispensable dose of violence. So, if I am the father of my own mother, I am my own grandfather. Here is the explanation of the title. I enjoy reinventing the genealogy of myself, different genealogies for that matter. There are two very important aspects to it: one is self-invention, i.e. the invention of one's past as a legitimization of one's present, the other is the uncertainty when one deals with the grey zone between fiction and historical facts and the moment when one decides that a character such as Justine Frank deserves to be real, to be a historical fact. That there is a role for her in both history and art history, if you like. I liked it when people believed in her, including a scholar like Ernst van Alphen who, when I sent him the book, was convinced that she was real.

**KB:** And she was!



Justine Frank, *Untitled (Self Portrait as a Black Woman)*, oil on canvas, 65 x 50cm, 1938

**RR:** Exactly. Justine Frank's first appearance was in an academic journal in Hebrew entitled *Theory in Crisis*. The premise of the essay was that any educated person would know the paintings of Justine Frank (even though no one ever saw them...), but that no one had yet written about her pornographic novel. The essay was accompanied by a few reproductions of paintings and some excerpts from the book, which still did not actually exist at the time. As a result of this essay, I was invited to give lectures on Frank by two Israeli professors of art history, both of whom did not realize it was a fake. It was quite embarrassing because the essay itself included a disclaimer stating that she was fictive, but only in the 42nd footnote, the very last footnote, which dealt with the myth that Jewish men menstruated and that of blood libels from the 16<sup>th</sup> century which claimed that Jews consumed Christian blood in order to heal male menstruation. Strangely enough this belief transformed into a scientific theory in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a time when many scientific attempts were made to differentiate between the Jewish and Christian body. The phenomenon of male menstruation was seriously considered. Today historians of medicine claim it may have to do with a very rare sickness involving genital bleeding. Even Sigmund Freud discussed this problem and its possible cure (in the form of nasal surgery) in his letter exchanges from before *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Of course, the conviction played with the idea of Jewish men as being effeminate. So footnote 42 in this essay narrated all this history but in the end declared that Justine Frank could not possibly know about it, being that she is a fictitious character. The funny coincidence was that in the very same issue of this journal, there was an essay by Ariella Azoulay on *Eva Braun*.<sup>2</sup> If one reads these two papers side by side, certain elements begin to resonate, also on the level of the images. So, upon being invited to give a lecture on Justine Frank, when I told one of the professors that I invented this character and asked her if she was not suspicious at all, she said that she simply assumed I was influenced as an artist by Justine Frank.

**KB:** This is really great. Everything fits perfectly into a story if one looks for certain already existing and logical genealogies. We all need them and we all look for them. The mistrust diminishes with the need to historicize. I was wondering, have you received any criticism from feminists?

**RR:** Not really. Feminism is such a wide and diverse field, beyond the essentialist position of a theorist like Andrea Dworkin. I consider myself a feminist. I teach

a course on pornography, beginning with the Renaissance and continuing with Marquis de Sade and then contemporary porn, and my stance is that I am not against pornography as such. I was in a panel discussion some time ago in Jerusalem on pornography and constitution and one of the speakers, whom I very much respect, equated pornography with sexual abuse and rape, a position I oppose, of course..

**KB:** It seems that the problem of pornography divides every feminist scene, Poland being no exception.

**RR:** I was very much inspired by books such as Laura Kipnis' *Bound and Gagged. Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, a kind of academic argument in favor of pornography, in which every chapter is devoted to a different form of pornography – I do not mean to get too much into it, as it is such a complex field. Coming back to feminism, I want to share with you one of my greatest achievements: I was the only male filmmaker invited to participate in the Créteil Women Film Festival, which was just fantastic. They took *Two Women and a Man*, which they considered a very important women's movie.

**KB:** How have you moved from *Justine Frank* to *Confessions*?

**RR:** There is always something in each of my projects that is interconnected. It has to do with language, speech and the voice: who has the right to speak and who has a voice. I have always been interested in changing voices, and in the question of representation: who speaks for whom and why. It is funny; I spoke with Guy Ben-Ner yesterday and we realized that for both of us everything begins with viewing an artwork as a machine that has to be reinvented each time. The content comes later. In *Confessions*, the foundation was this formal invention: creating a speech act in which the speaking person does not understand what s/he says. So there is this in-between state that relates in a way to certain forms of mysticism, speaking in tongues, spiritualism, or the way demons speak in certain B-movies. And then I realized that the most extreme case of a speech act in which one can stand in for the other is the confession.<sup>3</sup> It turned out to be very difficult for me to write a text that would be autobiographical, because, twisted as it is, the work had to be

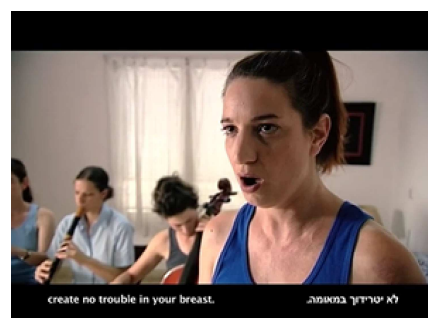


Roe Rosen, *Confessions Coming Soon*, 2007

autobiographical at the core to qualify generically as a confession. Initially, I thought the confessions would be delivered by little girls who did not speak English. I knew from the very beginning that the hybrid had to be not only linguistic, but also playing with the inappropriateness of the speaking person and the content of the utterance. So the literary task was to create a hybrid between myself and a little girl. It turned out to be extremely difficult; it was too much. Especially the moments in which my own sexual perversions were supposed to come out of the mouth of a little girl, it seemed wrong. Here somehow there seemed to be a limit for my experimentation with fantasies. I aspire to get to something that is clearly touching upon the limits of your acceptance, but you do not do it in an alienated, detached kind of fashion, but rather through self-implication. The accusing finger is not pointing outwards but inwards, if you know what I mean. So you are actively pursuing the moral dilemma and withholding any self-righteousness. There is this wonderful scene in *Happiness* by Todd Solondz when the son asks his pedophile father: "Father, are you going to fuck me as well?" And the father says: "No, I am not going to fuck you." Solondz brings you to a position that you would not think would be possible for you, the position of identification with the pedophile, which I think is very important. However, in my own case with the little girls I felt like I was beyond my own moral red line. Then there came a break-through. I was planning to do a trailer where I wanted to have someone speaking Hebrew without understanding the language, and I thought to use an authority figure, like an academic professor or a basketball player. And once the reversal happened and I decided to use the emigrant, illegal women workers, from Bulgaria, India, and Ghana, it also made the work more challenging and urgent on the political level.

**KB:** And there is your son, Hillel, in the trailer, who is possessed by his perverted and evil father and exploited, reading an English text, transcribed phonetically into Hebrew transliteration and displayed on a teleprompter. Thus this little boy becomes a kind of reverse Pinocchio, a kid turned into a puppet. One immediately thinks of B-horror films, or of the Dybbuk.

**RR:** Oh yes, but the *Confessions* in general is a feminine affair: there are three immigrants and an ensemble of nine female Israeli musicians, coming from both classical and rock music backgrounds. The model of



Roe Rosen, *The Confessions of Roe Rosen*, 2008

the project was very much based on classical references like St. Augustine or J.J. Rousseau, but also more popular ones, like Jerry Springer talk shows. I wanted to play with the culture of confessions and of exposing wounds. So it was important for me to combine and interweave these layers: religion and philosophy on the one hand and the mass culture industry on the other. So the interludes, the musical breaks, come from the latter. There are three songs and each of them is classical in its own genre, relating to death and sexual perversion. All three of them are originally in English but I translated them to Hebrew and they are performed in Hebrew. So also on that level there is the doubling of languages through translation. There is one more additional music video, the song *I was Called Kuny-Lemel*, which refers to this famous Polish-Jewish or actually Yiddish legend, about a matchmaker who dreams that he has this very good match to perform with the son of a rabbi, but the woman he is supposed to be married to is in love with this poor guy. The two men look very much the same. So there is a kind of switch: the rabbi's son is trapped in the forest by the other guy's friends so that the other one can get married to the woman. It was made into a musical and filmed in Israel in the 1960s (*The Flying Matchmaker*). I believe it was the first film I saw in my life. We did not have a television, so they took me to the cinema and it made an incredible impression on me. I must have been four or five. The scene of the switch is accompanied by a song about this confusion of identity: they say it is not really me, so who am I? It is a beautiful song. I translated it into English and it is performed in *Confessions* in English.

**KB:** Let me go back for a second to one quite troubling moment in the trailer when Hillel raises his arm in the Sieg Heil gesture, which he obviously does not understand. Is there any connection to the memory of the Holocaust you are trying to establish here? Could you elaborate on that a little?

**RR:** The Nazi salute gesture is not only performed by Hillel but also by my other "puppets." In his case, however, it gains certain weight. You are absolutely right. The way we did it: I was standing in front of him and raising my arm, asking him to imitate my gestures. All of a sudden he got confused and started asking me how to do it precisely. It was a moment when I realized he had no clue, no cultural reference whatsoever.



Roe Rosen, *Double Self Portrait*, 2005

I realized this historical gap between the two of us. Growing up in Israel, from day one of my conscious existence I was immersed in Holocaust memory.

**KB:** You mean in collective memory?

**RR:** And a personal one as well. My father is a Holocaust survivor. I actually speak about this in the film, which was something I thought I would never do. When *Live and Die as Eva Braun* opened at the Israel Museum and we had a meeting with the PR people, I said to them, listen, there is no way you are going to advertise this as the work of a son of a Holocaust survivor, because I do believe that it is such a loaded political issue. It is as if in Israel the privilege to talk about Holocaust memory is secured because my father is a survivor. It is an obscene logic I could not accept, so I wanted to hide the fact that he was a survivor. And they responded, you are going to be attacked, we are going to be attacked, and we have to use this information as an explanation of sorts. I did not agree. And then I ended up saying this myself. I was on a live radio program with a religious, right-wing politician who accused me of being a Holocaust denier. And I said listen, taking into consideration that my father is a Holocaust survivor, you are accusing me of denying myself and my family's history. That is simply impossible. With Hillel, I was fascinated by a certain detachment and shift in memory transmission.

**KB:** There is of course the language part we already touched upon, the way he speaks and struggles to convey the meaning and fails. The slips of the tongue are not only funny; they are uncanny.

**RR:** I think it is absolutely brilliant when he says "witch carpet" instead of "witchcraft," for example. These mistakes are numerous and important – the text is meant to collapse and be transformed by its flawed, displaced delivery. So one of the three "Roe Rosens" said "tears of a mother" instead of "tears of horror," or "the garbage is great" instead of saying "suffering is great" – but of course these beautiful mistakes are going to be missed by anyone who does not speak Hebrew her/him self.

**KB:** It seems to me that the very fact that some things are missing (or lost) in translation is a constitutive element of this project. That language to an extent becomes dysfunctional, which leads me to a question: who is your viewer?

**RR:** Hmm. I tend to think of art as a seduction machine. There is always someone to seduce and a seducer, and there is an element of prostitution in art. It is very much about an intimate relationship that promises to be beyond words and to touch you and make your body react. But at the same time it is also corrupt and socially inscribed and competitive, and it always entails this kind of masquerade. On the other hand, there is something very real about it: actual bodies that meet up. By constructing this seduction machine I do everything I can to lure the viewer, only to have him or her face something uncomfortable. Once they realize, it is already too late, they are in and want (even if subconsciously) to stay until the end. It is also a question of communication.

I do realize that at times my work is demanding and convoluted, that is also why I feel even more responsible for my viewer, to provide her or him with some way in. And this way cannot be exclusively intellectual. I am looking for more affective modes of operation.<sup>4</sup>



Roe Rosen, *Men in Israeli Culture (Stained)*, 2004

## Footnotes

1 These conversations were held and recorded in Tel Aviv in November 2008 and May 2012 and then reworked in writing.

2 See: Ariella Azoulay "The [Spectator's] Place: Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun" in her *Death's Showcase. The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press) 2003, 48-75.

3 On the concept of confession, see Roe Rosen, "Confession," *Maft'e'akh. Lexical Review of Political Thought* <http://mafteakh.tau.ac.il/en/issue-2e-winter-2011/confession/> Accessed March, 20 2014.

4 Rosen's work is currently on show in Lublin, Poland, where he exhibits together with Zbigniew Libera. <http://labirynt.com/en/roee-rosen-zbigniew-libera-noc-sadu/>