**“How Do You Feel the Holocaust?”
Holocaust Films and Constructing the Emotional Experience on Trips to Poland**

**Abstract**

Educational trips to Poland figure importantly in constructing Holocaust remembrance and in shaping the Zionist and Israeli consciousness. Many adolescents consider these trips a milestone in building their national identity; policemen, army officers, and high-ranking civil servants also embark on such trips as part of their professional training. This article discusses the role and meaning of participants’ emotional experiences in their visit to Poland. There is no doubt that directly encountering the places where the Holocaust occurred can trigger powerful emotional responses. At times, however, the expectations of participants—particularly adolescents—to have a tempestuous emotional experience is far from what actually takes place. Perhaps for this reason, some guides tend to amplify such emotions and adopt a highly experiential guiding style as a factor in constructing the experiences of the trip. To discuss these aspects and the emotional space that the trip occupies, the current article veers into the domain of visual media and uses thematic analysis to investigate ways in which the Holocaust is represented in motion pictures. In this context, I present the implicit tension that exists between two possible poles of representation: the cinematic attempt to reconstruct the past as realistically and dramatically as possible, as in Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List,* and the choice to conceal, represent allusively, and/or focus on survivors’ testimonies, as in Claude Lanzmann’s monumental film *Shoah.* In this article, I claim that this tension is not only an aesthetic matter relevant to a particular genre but is a choice about the artistic and ethical objective of historical film more broadly; in particular, it relates to how we choose to construct the memory of the Holocaust. Applying the categories of “reenactment” versus “testimony” to the Poland trips, I discuss the possible role of the emotional experience during these visits, and shed light on how participants may be prepared for and guided in their emotional voyage.

**Keywords:** educational trips to Poland; Holocaust films; historical memory; Holocaust education and remembrance; the emotional experience in education