Furnishing An Identity:
Philip Weiss, An Émigré's Contribution to Modernist Furniture Design in Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1950-1975

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the career of Philip Weiss in the furniture industry in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from 1950-1975, as the exemplar of a larger paradigm of émigré or foreigner culture, with a strong affinity to alienation, intellectualism, and Modernism.

The thesis contends that the Jewish émigré was attracted to Modernist principles because of its abstract structure, rejection of tradition, and avant-garde framework. Jewish individuals became prominent in the arts associated with Modernism, such as design, architecture, photography, and painting. Modernism enabled artists to express themselves without adopting conventional subjects, forms, attitudes, and techniques, and made it well-suited for the émigrés' position in the twentieth century. Modernism, with its attachment to intellectualism and exploration of new technologies and materials, was a natural fit for Weiss.

Weiss arrived in Canada as a Holocaust survivor and immigrant, and began to reshape the narrative of his life through the furnishing of his identity. He became a furniture designer and manufacturer, and acquired status and respect in his community. Modernism played a significant role in his personal and business life, and initiated a lifelong connection with its tenets of progress, innovation, and creativity.

Acknowledgments

Although the process of writing is a personal effort, the participation and direction of others have helped me to complete this thesis.

I am especially grateful to Professor Lynn Chalmers, my thesis adviser, for her invaluable encouragement and support. Her observations and advice were always perceptive and constructive. I extend sincerest thanks to Dr. Susan Close, my internal adviser. With her vast knowledge of theory and method, she always offered informed analysis and valuable commentary. Genuine appreciation goes to Dr. Oliver Botar, my external advisor from the Department of Art History. His historical background in Modernism and European history was helpful and important. I could not have wished for a more engaging team of advisers.

I offer heartfelt gratitude to my interviewees, Cynthia Coop, Michael Cox, Dianne Jackman, Debbie Lexier, Grant Marshall, and Margaret Stinson. Each was contacted because of the working relationship they shared with my father, Philip Weiss. The information they provided and memories they shared were exceptionally helpful and significant to this thesis. It was a great pleasure to visit and reconnect with all of them after many years.

It was so enjoyable to share and reflect about our wonderful family with my sister, Beverly Schwartz. This is our history, a central and fundamental component of both our lives. My brother-in-law, Bryan Schwartz, generously shared his superb knowledge in many areas of my topic and was always willing to provide help. Thank you to the rest of my family and friends who have been so patient with my absences.

To John (Jay) Richthammer, I offer my utmost appreciation for your wonderful help, editorial guidance, and outstanding support. It has been one of the most gratifying experiences to have had the opportunity to work with you. It was because of your enthusiasm, kindness, and incredible sense of humour that this thesis work turned into an amazing adventure.

After completing a thesis comprised of thousands of words, I am now at a loss for the precise words by which to thank my deserving family. My three adult children, Abby, Jill, and Richard, ended up being the finest support team. Intelligent, independent, and capable, they navigated their own lives while offering encouragement and praise to me along the way.

I am indebted, above all, to my husband, Eric Winograd. He always managed to be there with calm, understanding, and support. He had an uncanny ability to understand the thesis process and its difficulties, and offer, without doubt, the perfect amount of assistance and distance. Most importantly, he offered no criticism about how my thesis project ruined an exceptional summer at the lake.

This thesis only came to fruition after the death of my Dad, Philip Weiss. His sterling example of strength in the face of many adversities, lifelong guidance, and memories propelled me to complete this work. He was not only a survivor and witness to the ravages of war; he was an example of a man with a stoic determination to succeed with distinction in every segment of his life.

Dedication

This work is dedicated with love, to:

My Mom
Gertrude Weiss
(née Goot)
July 15, 1930
March 8, 1995
Gracious and Beautiful

My Dad
Philip Weiss
February 11, 1922
September 3, 2008
Witness and Survivor

My Sister
Shelley Weiss, LLB
September 23, 1954
September 10, 2002
Exceptional in all areas of life

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Introduction

Philip Weiss was a furniture designer and manufacturer in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I contend that my father's story, like those of his fellow émigrés, is also a vehicle for study and homage to an entire generation of new Canadians who contributed significantly to the cosmopolitan landscape of Canada, and to the adoption of Modernism.[1]

My interest in the European émigré, a term I use to describe the European immigrant arriving post-Second World War, was awakened in my late teenage years. I recollect being referred to as first generation, a label which defined children born in Canada but whose parents were immigrants who were called 'displaced persons,' or 'DPs.' I disliked those labels because they implied derision, and my family certainly did not seem to me displaced.

As a teenager, I learned that some of my Canadian friends and their parents considered most of the new Canadians to be an underclass. Based solely upon their accents, some immigrants were suspected of being less intelligent. Some of my friends' families believed that immigrants were not as sophisticated as were their own family members; they assumed that Poland, where my parents were born, was in the backwoods of Europe.

My father recalled being stunned when he arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, by the unrefined apparel and lack of sophistication of the first Canadians he met. He added that he had never seen the type of clothing people were wearing, such as plaid shirts and jeans. He expected to see the more formally dressed, typical European he saw

[1] Philip Weiss was born Filip Weiss but his given name was Anglicized upon his arrival in Canada in 1948.

in Austria after the Second World War. In relaying such memories, my father did not intend to be offensive or critical. He merely observed the irony of being identified, upon his arrival into Canadian society, as a simple immigrant who lacked intelligence or sophistication.

I have often been fascinated by the role identity played in how my father transformed himself from a person who spent five of his formative adult years in labour and concentration camps, to a person who immigrated to Canada, started an upholstery business, and received four Manitoba Design Institute awards for design merit and excellence for his innovative furniture products. During the Second World War, my father's life was in constant jeopardy from starvation, physical assault, and death. His opportunity for a university education was denied.

I began to read and formulate ideas about the foundation of Modernism, the history, beliefs, principles, and participants of the Bauhaus school and movement, and related history in Europe. Many of the school's philosophies were apparent in my education at the University of Manitoba's School of Architecture. A number of its professors had mentors or educators who had been aligned with or taught by Bauhauslers. The School of Architecture aligned itself with some of the Bauhaus teachings and was a very contemporary school of design with Modernist leanings.[2] Grant Marshall, an interior design educator at the University of Manitoba, awarded my father his first design contract. In an interview, Marshall stated he had first worked with my father when he operated a small upholstery shop from its second location on Main Street.

The Manitoba Design Institute, a section of the Government of Manitoba, was

[2] Interview with Grant Marshall by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 19, 2011; interview with Michael Cox by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, May 17, 2011.

initiated in the mid-1960s to showcase the marriage of industry and design in the City of Winnipeg. I traced the roots and developmental stages of the Institute and, through historical documents, examined its mandate to learn how my father connected with design and industry. In my father's archival records, I found his awards from the Institute and photographs of the furniture he designed and produced, and of his trade show booths. Debbie Lexier, an interior designer who was active in the Interior Design Institute of Manitoba, provided further confirmation of details of my father's career.[3]

As my research widened, it became clear that the scholarship on Modernism is vast and that this thesis would not be an historical account of the movement's history. Rather than repeat what has already been well-covered by others, I focused on re-appearing themes which related to my father's work. The focus is a discussion of core ideas that I propose attracted the émigré to Modernism. Themes such as turmoil and alienation from home and country, rebellion from a repressive past, rejection of traditional ideals, adoption of theories of abstraction and originality, art, design without mimetic references, and the use of innovative materials became the nucleus of this thesis.[4]

In *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, theorist Mieke Bal argues that in order for an idea or concept to be significant and consequential for cultural analysis, it must help us understand the object of that analysis.[5] The positioning of Weiss's background and the events of his past facilitate understanding of the trajectory of his life. Communication theorist Walter R. Fisher believes that people are narrative beings –

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[3] Taped interview with Debbie Lexier by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, Manitoba, May 25, 2011.
[4] Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and* Beyond (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 396, 464.
[5] Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 262.

storytellers – and the narrative paradigm advances that human beings experience and understand life in what he described as "a series of ongoing narratives," each with their own conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles and ends. Fisher argues:

> The Narrative paradigm is a fabric woven of threads of thought from both the social sciences and humanities. It seeks, like any other theory of human action, to account for how persons come to believe and behave. It differs from social scientific and humanistic theories in that it projects narration not as an art, genre, or activity, but as a paradigm.[6]

He suggested that significant and meaningful communication is essentially a type of reporting of events and storytelling.[7] Fisher also contends that by framing events in a story, individuals are permitted to interpret their environment and provide a framework for decision making. The narrative form of this thesis essentially reflects Weiss's life as narrator. Every year on May 5, my father announced at the dinner table, "Kids, today is the day I was liberated." He often told and reinforced the story of the years of his incarceration in Europe during the Second World War. Bal states that "human beings are ultimately the only place where memories live."[8] Weiss's memories juxtaposed with his ability to frame the events provided him with a structure for furnishing an identity.

Identity and cultural memory are significant to the premise of the thesis in linking the present to the past in all of the chapters. As Bal proposes, "The memorial presence of the past takes many forms and serves many purposes, ranging from conscious recall to unelected reemergence, from nostalgic longing for what is lost to polemical use of the past to reshape the present."[9]

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[6] Walter R. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration," in *Communication Monographs 51* (Dec. 1985): 357.
[7] Ibid., 351.
[8] Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, 37.
[9] Mieke Bal, Jonathan V. Crewe and Leo Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), vii.

The thesis includes historical context, personal narrative, an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter One discusses, through secondary research, an overview and a historical time line of the formation and practices of Modernism in Europe. The chapter also relates the impact of the Bauhaus, its demise due to the rise of National Socialism, and how it has lived on through its teachings, and canons. Many of the Modernist practitioners in various artistic genres had one or both Jewish parents. They became innovators, followers, supporters, and consumers of the Modernist sensibility. There is no intention here to provide an exhaustive or original description of Modernism and the role of Jewish people within it. However, the thesis illustrates how Modernism provided a remarkable fit and explanation of Weiss's choice to select and pursue the avenue of furniture design, when it was far from the dominant or most commercially viable idiom in Western Canada.

Chapter Two focuses on Weiss's life in Poland and Austria from the 1920s through the 1940s. It describes his birth, youth, some contextual history of the Europe of his youth, his upbringing and education, his Second World War experiences in the Holocaust, his liberation from the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria, as well as the time he spent in Europe after his release. The source material is primarily interviews with Weiss, and memoirs, and correspondence from his personal and business papers.

Chapter Three introduces Modernism in Canada beginning in the 1950s, the involvement of both the Governments of Canada and Manitoba, and the University of Manitoba, as well as the promotion of design in the Modernist ideology, and a glimpse of furniture producers in Canada in the early 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter Four is a case study, the Canadian story of Weiss from 1950 to 1975, and

the evolution of his furniture business from its initial small shop on Sargent Avenue in Winnipeg, to a manufacturing plant on May Street.

Chapter Five analyzes the role of Weiss's construction of identity, the company's philosophy and direction, and the context in which both he and the business operated. He framed a significant part of his business model on Modernist premises and resisted the employment of many of the traditional aesthetic systems and methods. There was neither sentimentality nor ties to the past; Weiss was in a new country, in the present, and expressed his desire for abstraction.

The Conclusion summarizes the results of the case study, in light of the literature review in Chapter One, the discussion of Modernism in Canada in Chapter Three, and the identities analyzed in Chapters Four and Five.

Weiss's personal and business papers, memoirs, reports, drawings, and photographs, as well as taped interviews and my recollections of many wide-ranging conversations with him over several decades, formed the nucleus of primary research for this thesis. I spent many years working part-time in his business, so was familiar with portions of its history. As an interior designer, I was in the same field as my father which brought me into contact with many of the people with whom he worked. I had the opportunity to travel with him to Poland and Austria in 2004. We visited the labour camps in which he was interned, now memorial sites marked by monuments. We spent one day in the Wieliczka Salt Mines, where he toiled as a prisoner of Nazi Germany, now a UNESCO heritage site. We travelled to Mauthausen, Austria, the concentration camp from which he was liberated. My father and I were together for a significant period of time on this trip, and I took the opportunity to ask him to reminisce on a variety of topics,

especially those relating to his early life, years of incarceration, his hopes and dreams, and his changing identities over more than eight decades of life.

Another important aspect to my research methodology included interviews with several long-time Winnipeg interior designers. They had worked with my father in the 1960s and 1970s on numerous commercial and residential projects. I proposed a list of questions, and posed some during interviews with designers Cynthia Coop, Michael Cox, Dianne Jackman, Debbie Lexier, Grant Marshall, and Margaret Stinson. The interview method afforded a source of interesting historical information based on the designers' histories in the design community and their working relationship with Weiss. The personal interaction or "conversation with a purpose"[10] between interviewer and interviewee, with questions providing the form, was helpful in exploring various aspects of the past.[11] The interviews were unstructured, albeit there was a defined list of questions important to the conversation but with room for improvisation. This allowed me to listen to their storytelling and permitted the respondents to guide me, rather than compelling them to follow a set guideline.[12] The process permitted me to later identify the main elements which related to the thesis even though all of the information collected was important from an historical perspective.

The interviews were simplified because I knew the respondents personally. They interviewees accepted without reservation the request to be interviewed, and the topic was familiar to them, as it was about their careers during a specific time frame. There are definite limitations to the interview procedure and although no research method is

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[10] Walter Van Dyke Bingham and Bruce Victor Moore, *How to Interview* (New York, NY: Harper, 1959).
[11] Barbara Baker Sommer and Robert Sommer, *A Practical Guide to Behavioral Research: Tools and Techniques* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 112.
[12] Ibid., 114.

free of interpretation, Barbara Baker Sommer and Robert Sommer acknowledge that the interview process is subject to more bias than other research methodologies.[13] The same two facts also complicated the process. I had previous contact with the selected subjects through university, business, and work. The information from any respondent is open to bias, simply by interaction and familiarity between the interviewer and interviewee. The bias is potentially not just the interviewer's but also the interviewees'.

All secondary sources were comprised of various design-related books, articles, and research reports based on primary data or sources. The works of theorists such as Roland Barthes on the theory of signs and signifiers, Pierre Bourdieu on social theory and cultural capital, Mieke Bal and Walter Fisher on narratology, and Sheldon Stryker and Steph Lawler on identity, all provided a solid theoretical framework upon which to build. In his discussion about Bourdieu, sociologist Loïc Wacquant contends:

> Unconscious schemata are acquired through lasting exposure to particular social conditions and conditionings, via the internalization of external constraints and possibilities. This means that they are shared by people subjected to similar experiences even as a unique individual variant of the common matrix.[14]

The 'system of dispositions' is an enduring, acquired set of perception, action, and thought. Its acquisition is often dependent upon the positions individuals occupy in society. Their classification is signified by their particular capital resources, which may be economic, cultural or social.[15] Economic capital refers to material and financial assets. Cultural capital designates symbolic goods such as skills and titles, and social capital is acquired by membership in associations or groups complete with their own

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[13] Ibid., 129.
[14] Loïc Wacquant (Robert Stones, ed.), *Key Sociological Thinkers* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd ed., 1998), 220.
[15] Ibid., 221.

social relations and obligations.[16] Their judgments of taste are related to status, acts of social positioning and distancing oneself from other specific groups not fulfilling certain requirements. Thus, cultural capital is an aesthetic judgment which results from class and upbringing.[17] Weiss was well-educated in Europe prior to the Second World War and, therefore, possessed some cultural capital. This may have, early on, placed him in the setting in which he found fulfillment and with which he furnished his early identity.

No singular affiliation exists between any ethnic group and Modernism but the connection between Modernism and its principles and 20th century Jewish émigrés is evident. This thesis argues that there is a strong connection in all areas of art and design. In *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, Peter Gay suggests that Jewish people became important supporters of Modernism. Additionally, the particular strength of Jewish émigrés lay not only with their work as art dealers, publishers, critics, journalists, and producers of plays, but as significant promoters of *avant-garde* culture.

Jewish artists exist in all areas of the artistic movements of Europe, from Art Deco to the Bauhaus. They are also included in the entire group of 'isms' such as Constructivism, Cubism, Expressionism, Impressionism, Minimalism, Orphism, Social Realism, Surrealism, Fantastic Realism, Abstract Impressionism, and Post Modernism. A large proportion were leaders, innovators, and significant contributors to the various segments of the art world as *avant-garde* artists, sculptors, architects, designers, photographers, gallery owners, dealers and art connoisseurs, includes: Anni Albers, textile artist/wife of original Bauhaus member Josef Albers, Diane Arbus, photographer,

[16] Ibid., 221.
[17] Ibid., 221.

Richard Avedon, fashion photographer, Marcel Breuer, architect/furniture designer**,** Marc Chagall, painter, Arne Jacobsen, furniture designer, Louis Kahn, architect, Sol LeWitt, Post-Modernist sculptor, Jacques Lipchitz, sculptor, Eliezar Lissitsky, artist, Amadeo Modigliani, painter, George Nelson, furniture designer/architect, Man Ray, photographer/painter, Mark Rothko, Post-Modernist painter, Art Spiegelman, Post-Modernist comic book artist, Alfred Stieglitz, photographer, Weegee [Arthur Fellig], photographer, and Max Weber, photojournalist.[18]

A significant number of artists and intellectuals wisely decided to leave Europe in the 1930s before or during the onset of the Nazi regime, as they found themselves at odds within the official culture and were seen as undesirables. They came to the United States of America; the opportunities that this talented, alienated, and unconventional group of artists received were enormous. By 1939, the year in which the Second World War began, several prominent members of the Bauhaus were already living and working in the United States. László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946), who was born of Hungarian-Jewish descent as László Weisz, later embraced Christianity, and moved to Chicago to start a new Bauhaus movement.[19] It was not a successful enterprise, but he later established the prominent Chicago Institute of Design. Josef Albers (1888-1976) taught at the Bauhaus since 1923, but had to leave Europe, as his wife, Annie, was Jewish.[20] The Roman Catholic Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) left Europe due to a continuing conflict with the Nazi government, which found his work 'not German enough' in character. He joined the newly-formed Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago. The Bauhauslers

[18] Jewish Virtual Library (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/artists.html).
[19] Kathleen James-Chakraborty, ed., *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 16.
[20] Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, 21.

were welcomed, appreciated, and given opportunities in North America to showcase their talents. As a result, they reached a level of fulfillment.[21]

Weiss, a Polish-born Holocaust survivor, arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and was classified under the collective label of 'immigrant.' Although some of his experiences in Europe were similar to those of his fellow survivors and compatriots, all of them had lived through different circumstances and lives in their countries of origin. The construction of Weiss's Modernist identity provided him with a sense of belonging, personal contentment, and a level of status and respect in his newly-adopted homeland.

[21] Ibid., 321.

Chapter One: Modernism in Europe: Bauhaus and the Emigré Exodus

Modernism is broadly defined as "a style or movement in the arts that aims to depart significantly from classical and traditional forms."[1] There is extensive academic attention and discussion surrounding the Modernist Movement, a paradigm that began during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The debates about Modernism in the literature address the development of the movement, its birthplace, class dynamics, sociopolitical upheaval, and its alignment with technology and industrialization. An issue about which there can be no argument is that at the turn of the twentieth century, Germany was home to some of the greatest Modernist artists and creative minds in the world. This group was comprised of architects, musicians, painters, designers, writers, and theorists. Collectively, they produced a body of work the world would come to appreciate as significant in the world of design.[2]

Modernism immediately situated the artists' identity as a part of a movement. It is essential to discuss three, related and noteworthy aspects, all inseparable with early European Modernist history. The first aspect was the early growth of European Modernism, the supporting canons and doctrines, and the enthusiasts and followers prior to the onset of the Nazi regime. The second integral part was Adolf Hitler's ascension to power, his hatred of anyone not fitting the 'Aryan ideal,' and his loathing of most everything related to Modernism.

Lastly, and of major significance, was the Bauhaus movement which originated in Germany. The Bauhaus and its teachings had a major impact throughout the world.

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[1] *The Oxford Dictionary*

[2] George H. Marcus, *Masters of Modern Design: A Critical Assessment* (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2005), 81.

From North America to Tel Aviv, home to the world's highest urban concentration of original Bauhaus construction, the sustained traditions and teachings are spread widely throughout the world.[3] Upon the Nazi-ordered demise of the Bauhaus, many of the movement's artists had the foresight to leave or managed to escape Germany. Many of them arrived in North America, and the new land on the other side of the ocean became the beneficiary of some of the Modernist movement's greatest artistic talents.

The Weimar Republic was named for the city in central Germany in which the German constitution was adopted in 1919. It was a parliamentary government created to replace the previous imperial form of government. Although there was enormous turmoil within the political and social arena at the time, a massive cultural revival was taking place in Germany. Weimar culture was flourishing in Berlin, the epicenter of innovation, in film, theatre, city planning, architecture, photography, painting, literature, sciences and education.[4] According to Israeli author and journalist Amos Elon, Weimar society reflected a sense of the new; and was a crucible of originality, which surpassed every other location in Modern Europe. In all areas of the arts such as design, music, film, theatre and literature, the Modernist movement blossomed and excelled.[5]

The Bauhaus, a school of art and architecture, was founded in 1919 in Weimar, the Republic's new capital city, by Walter Gropius (1883-1969), a young German architect. His manifesto was to create a pure and democratic institution, free of archaic architecture and the eclectic Victorian style, and to move the institution towards a new

[3] Amos Elon, *The Pity of it All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933* (New York, NY: Picador, 2002), 359.
[4] Ibid., 359.
[5] Ibid., 355.

structure.[6]

A well-assimilated population, the Jewish people living in Germany held a devotion to and reverence of their German culture and society, and contributed greatly to the country. Some were involved with the Bauhaus as students or followers of the movement. As Elon observed, the "prominence of German Jews and the contributions that they made became fully apparent only after they were gone."[7]

The Bauhaus, a state-supported institution, presented an amalgamated program of study. The curriculum was taught by faculty members who have since become synonymous with the history of the Modernist Movement. The architects were Walter Gropius, Hans Emil (Hannes) Meyer, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe; the painters were Paul Klee, Johannes Itten, and Wassily Kandinsky; and the designers were Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, Lyonel Charles Feininger, Marcel Lajos Breuer, and Oskar Schlemmer.[8]

The Bauhaus was an *avant-garde* institution which made long-lasting contributions to every segment of modern design. In addition to a unified curriculum, it collaborated with industry and became the site of some of the most significant influences in modern industrial design. As noted by sociologist Mauro Guillén, the accomplishments of the Bauhaus were far-reaching in scope, as it was involved in architecture, sculpture, furniture, product design, wallpaper, clothing, photography, music, and the performing arts.[9]

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[6] Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 316.
[7] Elon, *The Pity of it All*, 9.
[8] Elaine S. Hochman, *Bauhaus: Crucible of Modernism* (New York, NY: Fromm International, 1997), 1.
[9] Mauro F. Guillén, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical: Scientific Management and the Rise of Modernist Architecture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 58.

Moholy-Nagy joined the staff of the Bauhaus in 1923 and, with Gropius, focused on a new union of art and technology. They sent out a clear message, that this amalgamation was to create both innovation and a distancing from the repressive past. Bauhauslers held a common belief that the untested initiative was better than the tried and true and that the experimental was superior to the routine.[10] These core principles of innovation, and authenticity remained consistent throughout the various areas of design the school encompassed.

Several members of the Bauhaus were Jewish, as there was a powerful attraction for the Jewish people to Modernism on many levels. The movement enabled the artist and designer to express their ideas without adopting conventional methods, attitudes, and techniques. This made the Modernist field an ideal vehicle for the many Jewish artists of the early twentieth century. Ivan Kalmar advances that the 'assimilated' and the 'secular' Jews "were, if not the majority, certainly the creative element and the motor of Jewish cultural life."[11] The privileged but still marginal status of European Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century led to their powerful engagements with the *avant-garde* and major art movements in many sectors; as artists, brokers, proprietors, purveyors, and consumers. European Jews were perhaps drawn to these movements for their basis in optimism, an opportunity for acceptance, or just to diverge from the accepted status quo.[12]

Through Modernism, a connection for Jewish people was shaped. A significant number of artists abandoned their traditions and substituted abstraction with its focus on

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[10] Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, 2008, 2.
[11] Ivan Kalmar, *The Trotskys, Freuds, and Woody Allens: Portrait of a Culture* (Toronto, ON: Penguin Books, 1993), 293.
[12] Vincent Brook, ed., *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 158.

non-figurative conceptualism. The artistic *avant-garde* was highly attracted to Modernism as it challenged inherited symbols which reinforced behavior consistent with past values. As a result, they were interested in a visionary role for innovative forms, creative and imaginative ones, as harbingers of a fresh spirit and a new artistic life. Victor Margolin, design historian, observes that many artists of the time rejected the received traditions of representational painting for the creative visual language of abstraction.[13] Modernism's main beliefs and precepts advocated the rejection of decoration for the beauty of proportions, the simplicity of design, and the embracing of new industrial methods. As George Marcus's *Masters of Modern Design* states, "Modernism valued the qualities and practical needs of the new modern life and tried to fulfill its requirements, as well as express the spirit of the times."[14]

In *Between Exile and Irony*, Ruth Weisberg wrote, "The Modernist challenge to conventional forms of representation also gave Jews, as inheritors of a more abstract and disembodied God, certain advantages or at least few obstacles to overcome."[15] The Jewish tradition avoided literal representations of the deity in all respects, and tended towards a highly intellectualized approach to religion.

> A people worshipping a God who has no form, whose very essence is antagonistic to form, cannot relate to form in the same positive manner, cannot develop the same sense of form, cannot devote itself to a study of harmonies and the enjoyment of the beauties of form, as can those peoples who are used to seeing their gods represented in beautiful, appealing, touching, moving, or awe-inspiring visible and tangible forms.[16]

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[13] Victor Margolin, *The Struggle for Utopia: Rodchenko, Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, 1917-1946* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 4.
[14] Marcus, *Masters of Modern Design*, 2005, 74.
[15] Ruth Weisberg, "Between Exile and Irony," in *You Should See Yourself: Jewish Identity in Postmodern American Culture*. (Vincent Brook, ed.), 160.
[16] Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Mind* (New York, NY: Hatherleigh Press, 2007), 358.

Furthermore, the European visual arts tradition required many years of formal training and apprenticeship. Thus, Modernism permitted artists to express themselves at the highest levels of experimentation, without a sophisticated understanding of perspective, anatomy, and life drawing. When Jewish people did feel free to engage in design, they followed the Modernists' tendency toward universal principles of form.[17] Weisberg suggests that "Jewish artists, writers, and critics were also attracted to the universalist tenets which allowed them to transcend differences with other groups while placing greater emphasis on the intrinsic qualities, rather than issues of identity."[18]

While Hitler was gaining prominence on the political scene in 1925, Gropius, in the same year, relocated the Bauhaus from Weimar to Dessau due to the emerging political situation. The School moved into a new complex of buildings which Gropius designed and built using materials and forms compatible with contemporary technology. A tubular steel cantilevered seating system designed by Hungarian-born Marcel Lajos Breuer (1902-1981) was installed in the auditorium of the Bauhaus building. The structure's lighting was designed by his compatriot, Moholy–Nagy. Albers, who was born in Germany, designed glass and metal tableware, while Breuer produced tubular steel framed chairs and tables.[19]

In another part of Europe, France held an international exhibition, the 1925 *Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels*. The show was a vehicle to proudly display important industries and promote national interests. The intent of the exhibition was to encourage the blending of traditional French expertise with Modern technology, with the

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[17] Ibid., 353.
[18] Weisberg, "Between Exile and Irony," 160.
[19] Stanley Abercrombie, *A Century of Interior Design, 1900-2000: A Timetable of the Design, the Designers, the Products, and the Profession* (New York, NY: Rizzoli, 2003), 63.

exception of the strict Modernism of Swiss-born French architect Le Corbusier's *Pavilion de L'Esprit Nouveau*. Although many French designers and architects of the era designed for the wealthy, out of reach for the average citizen. Le Corbusier's furnishings for the *Pavilion* were bentwood chairs, which he described as "humble and of unadorned simplicity."[20]

By the mid to late-1920s, many Modernist designers in Europe classified furniture as equipment, similar to appliances, and no longer as merely decorative components. Modernist designers shared a common aesthetic, as defined by Le Corbusier - universality, simplicity, truth to the object, and rejection of allusions to historic styles. Furniture designers began using unconventional materials. The iconic *chaise longue*, which Le Corbusier described as a true "machine for resting," was Modern design in a sculptural form.[21]

Figure 1 – Le Corbusier's 1928 *Chaise Longue* of chrome, and painted metal (George H. Marcus, *Masters of Modern Design*, 1998: 72)

[20] Le Corbusier (1887-1965) was born in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland as Charles-Edouard Jeanneret. While not associated with the Bauhaus school, he worked for a time in Germany. For further reading, see Nicholas Fox Weber, *Le Corbusier: A Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).
[21] Marcus, *Masters of Modern Design,* 2005, 72.

The *Deutscher Werkbund* (German Work Federation), an association of artists, architects, designers, and industrialists, staged an exhibition in Stuttgart. Modernism flourished most, and developed its closest links to industry in Germany.

> The achievements of the *Werkbund* and the Bauhaus all need to be understood against the backdrop of a vibrant but troubled country, struggling to find its place in a part of a world caught up in the crosscurrents of authoritarianism and democracy, socialism and capitalism, and tradition and modernity.[22]

Tubular steel - technology formerly used in the manufacture of bicycles - was utilized for the advanced designs of cantilever chairs by Martinus (Mart) Stam, van der Rohe, and Breuer. The *Wassily Chair*, designed by Breuer in 1925, was revolutionary in the use of materials.

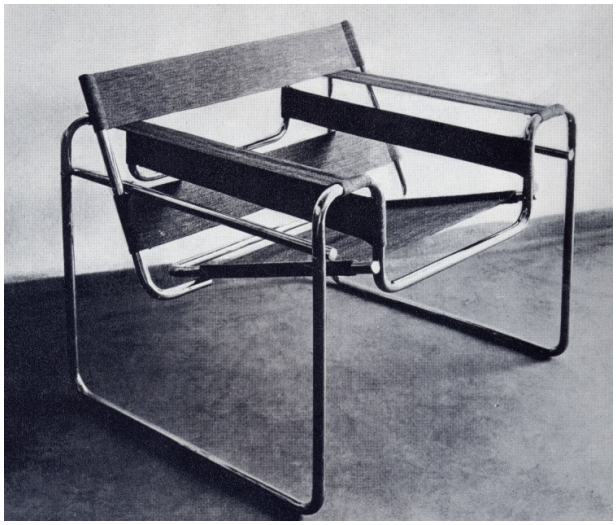

Figure 2 – Marcel Breuer's *Wassily Chair* in 1925. (Peter Blake, *Marcel Breuer: Architect and Designer*, 1949: 18)

The metal was not only innovative but also presented attractive advantages. The resilient material provided comfort without the necessity of springing the seat, the more

[22] Guillén, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical*, 89.

conventional method at the time. The metal was also affordable and hygienic.[23] Breuer described his design of seat furniture as relaxing on "springy columns of air."[24] He developed a range of metal furniture using a patented process of assembly which integrated flat bands of steel and aluminum.[25] Seamless steel tubing used in conjunction with leather straps produced a technological marvel. In his book *Chairs*, George Nelson contends that Breuer:

> …not only brought new material and techniques of manufacturing to the forefront but he also applied a new design principle by substituting a double 'S'-shaped support for the conventional four legs. This eliminated many joints and gave the chair comfortable resiliency at low cost.[26]

Breuer's *Cesca* chair, made from a continuous length of tubular steel with rattan seat and back, was also an achievement in Modernist industry. In 1929, Mies van der Rohe designed the *German Pavilion* for the international exhibition in Barcelona, Spain, and furnished the *Pavilion* with his *Barcelona* chairs and stools.[27] By the early 1930s, Mies van der Rohe was recognized at home and abroad as Germany's greatest architect.

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[23] Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, *Design of the 20th Century* (Köln, Germany: Taschen, 1999), 134-137.
[24] Ibid., 135.
[25] George Nelson, ed., *Chairs* (New York, NY: Whitney Publications, 1953), 48.
[26] Ibid., 18.
[27] Abercrombie, *A Century of Interior Design, 1900*-2000, 65-71.

Figure 3 – Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Chair*, taken in 1929. (George Nelson, *Chairs*, 1953: 8)

By the late 1930s, lamination, tubular steel, aluminum, glass, molded plywood, Lucite developed by DuPont; aluminum frames with wood slats and steam bent plywood were materials and shapes which began to appear in significant usage. There were also chairs with canvas or leather slings on frames, and metal framed outdoor furniture strung with cords and aluminum alloy. Furniture does not play a quiet role in the background of design. Stanley Abercrombie, who has written extensively about art, furniture design, and architecture, noted:

> At many stages of history, including our own, architects have occasionally imagined their design process as being guided purely by their efficient responses to utilitarian demands; it is hardly possible to imagine the designer of a chair having such a simplistic notion of his work. There are, after all, not so many different ways of sitting in a chair, but the variety of appearances of chairs are endless.[28]

The language of furniture is not entirely obvious, of course. It is a about connotation as well as detonation, of suggestion as well as statement, and of symbol as

[28] Stanley Abercrombie, *A Philosophy of Interior Design* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1990), 73.

well as sign.[29] The object can mirror one's identity, and speak about its designer or owner.

In other countries, such as Denmark, softer forms - both sculptural and organic - were being invented. These were suitable and adaptable to low-cost production methods, and delivered a type of organic modernism versus the rigidity of the Bauhaus designs. Although, by 1930, relatively few people read or discussed *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's manifesto of hate, Germans did take notice that five million of its citizens people were out of work with a sense of hopelessness about their future. Amid the chaotic state of the country, and with the economy on the verge of collapse, The Nazi Party used Germany's financial depression as its trump card. Hitler captured power on January 30, 1933. The Third Reich emerged and, with a ferociously-building momentum, devastated the Republican system and its democracy, leaving Germany in the hands of a despot. Hitler became Chancellor and systematically began to circulate decrees, persecuting whoever he felt was an enemy to the party cause, yet simultaneously promising a utopian vision of Aryan perfection and a strong, stable, economically-viable Germany. The Weimar Republic, a liberal democracy, was terminated.[30]

The Jewish people and many others who were considered by the Nazis as 'undesirables' were expelled from government positions, schools and research institutes all over Germany. On May 10, 1933, twenty-thousand books considered by the Nazis to be objectionable and detrimental to Germany were burned in Berlin. This infamous act ended any hope of rationalism and enlightenment. Jewish people were banned from practicing law and other professions. They, of course, were not the only populace

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[29] Ibid., 77.
[30] Christopher Simpson, *The Splendid Blond Beast: Money, Law, and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995), 59.

disqualified from various occupations and employment. The Nazis persecuted communists, democrats, homosexuals, anti-Nazi Christians, gypsies, political opponents, artists, and the intellectually and physically handicapped.[31]

Restrictions ranged from decrees about acceptable art, to dissolution of trade unions, to rulings on allowable architecture. With the relentless pronouncements of hundreds of limitations, most areas of German life were under the absolute control of the Nazi Party. The new regime decided what types of buildings were constructed, who designed them, who built them, and who could live or work in them. The totalitarian regime recognized that architecture was a powerful political instrument. Hitler, who was described by Elaine Hochman as a frustrated architect, regarded Modernism as decadent and subversive.[32] He preferred a type of pretentious classicism, and insisted that his favoured style represented Germany.[33]

The rise of the Nazis was orchestrated and fuelled by a propaganda machine of images which used media messages to produce a national ideology: "Its images of grandeur, monumentality and massive regimentation, are now icons for both a Fascist aesthetic and the practice of propaganda."[34]

On orders from Hitler, the Bauhaus was closed permanently in 1933. Many Jews at the Bauhaus, or working in the 'Bauhaus style,' fled Germany; several made their new homes in the British Mandate of Palestine. Erich Mendelsohn, one of the Jewish Modernist architects, left Germany and joined architects already practicing in Palestine.

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[31] Kalmar, *The Trotskys, Freuds, and Woody Allens: Portrait of a Culture*, 293.
[32] Elaine S. Hochman, *Architects of Fortune: Mies van der Rohe and the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 45.
[33] Guillén, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical*, 89.
[34] Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2001), 21.

Many had studied at the Bauhaus. They worked in various cosmopolitan cities such as Paris and Berlin, and were influenced by the ideas of Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier. They focused their considerable skills in designing buildings for the new city of Tel Aviv. The Modernist focus on new technology and innovative architecture allowed them to create a fascinating framework for a visionary utopian society.[35]

Today, Tel Aviv contains four thousand International style buildings. One of the key elements of Bauhaus architecture was large windows. However, in the hot sun of Israel, such a detail had to be adapted to the Mediterranean climate, by using narrow, smaller windows. The flat roofs, a key Bauhaus design element, were retained and buildings were raised off the street to create air flow and a garden room. The Bauhaus-styled buildings have been designated as an UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.[36]

Modernism had a significant foothold in Europe by the time the Nazi government took control. Most Modernists were at odds with the official culture of the Nazis. Hitler believed that true German art must never show suffering or trauma, rather it must be realistic, courageous and romantic, and must present rustic scenes, panoramas of peasant life, and landscapes.[37] Some of Germany's gentile artists were also under serious threat. Berlin-born Expressionist painter and graphic artist Walter Gramatté was targeted by the Nazis as a creator and purveyor of *Entartete Kunst.*[38] In 1933, during the rise of the Nazi regime, some of Gramatté's paintings were part of a posthumous tribute exhibition which

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[35] Barbara E. Mann, *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* (Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press, 2006), 21.
[36] Ibid., 43.
[37] Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York, NY: Marlowe & Company, 1976), 11.
[38] *Entartete Kunst*, translated from German to English, means 'degenerate art," a term used by the Nazis to describe Modernist art.

was launched in Hamburg and was set to be displayed in ten other German cities.[39]

> Walter Gramatté did not fit into the Nazis concept. On the contrary: his graphics were taken out of the *Museum der bildenen Künste* (Museum of Fine Arts) at Leipzig because they were branded "degenerate," like those of his older friends Erich Heckel and Karl Schmidt-Rotluff. Gramatté shared the fate of a large number of contemporary German artists.[40]

Hitler authorized the confiscation of what he considered depraved art from more than one hundred museums in Germany. The expropriated paintings were then unveiled by the Nazis on July 19, 1937 at a carefully staged exhibition entitled *Entartete Kunst*, shown in Munich and later in other German cities. During his first year in power, Hitler's agenda was to return to the *Volk* whom he considered a "truly German culture, a German art, a German architecture, and a German music, which will restore our soul."[41]

The exposition of confiscated Modernist art included the work of practitioners from throughout Europe, ranging from Germanic artists such as Beckmann, and Grosz, to European artists such as Kokoschka, Picasso, Matisse, Cezanne, and Van Gogh.[42] In the exhibition catalogue, the works were referred to as scandalous, dangerous examples of art created by the mentally disturbed. The show was seen by over two million visitors.[43]

Hitler's rise to power sounded the death knell for Modernism in German arts, including music, painting, design, architecture, theatre and literature. The quest for total control over culture, high and low, over business directors and bowling clubs, editors and

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[39] Walter Gramatté died in 1929 at age 32, but his widow, the composer Sophie-Carmen (Sonia), worked tirelessly to ensure that his art continued to be seen and appreciated. When she immigrated to Winnipeg, Manitoba with her second husband, Austrian State art historian Dr. Ferdinand Eckhardt, she brought with her much of Gramatté's art. Ferdinand and Sophie-Carmen spent the rest of their lives promoting Gramatté's works through exhibitions, books, and retrospectives in Winnipeg, throughout Canada, and around the world.

[40] Claus Pese (ed.), *Walter Gramatté 1897-1929: Catalogue raisonné of the Oil Paintings* (Köln, Germany: Wienand Verlag, 1994), 36.

[41] The German term *volk* translates into "the folk" in English. Gay, *Modernism*: *The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, 423.

[42] Ibid., 85.

[43] Hochman, 302.

soccer teams, advanced with the widespread approval of the German people.[44] In 1938, The Museum of Modern Art in New York launched a retrospective entitled *The Bauhaus 1919-1928*, comprised mainly of the work of German artists whose work had been labelled as 'degenerate,' Marxist, Communist, Jewish or Bolshevist by Hitler in the previous year at the notorious *Degenerate Art Exhibition* in Munich.[45]

By 1939, many important Modernist artists, including members of the defunct Bauhaus, had left Europe for North America while the exodus continued of those who could still depart. Most were leftists and liberals, many were Jewish, but all were distancing themselves from dictatorship, war, and the persecutions. The exiles, intellectuals, and artists packed their significant talents, left their homes, and created a major impact collectively in North America. Walter Cook, Director of the New York Institute of Fine Art, acknowledged, "The Nazis shake the tree and I collect the fruit," or "Hitler is my best friend. He shakes the tree and I collect the apples."[46]

Ironically, the totalitarian regimes which desired to destroy Modernism ultimately and unwittingly dispersed it throughout the world, as the architects, designers, painters, and founding members of academies emigrated to Britain, the United States, and other locations around the world. A few noteworthy artists taught in elite universities. Gropius was appointed chair of the architecture school at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, Mies van der Rohe became head of the architecture school at Chicago's Armoury Institute, and Albers became a professor at Yale University.[47] According to Peter Gay:

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[44] Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, 418.
[45] Ibid., 320.
[46] Ibid., 320.
[47] The Armoury Institute in Chicago later became the Illinois Institute of Technology. Guillen, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical*, 90.

> ...not all eminent European immigrants were Modernists. Nor were some immigrant Modernists, necessarily fleeing from Nazi or communist powers. All of them though, Jews and Gentiles alike, who had been unwelcome outsiders to their official culture, permanently enriched their new homeland.[48]

Modernist theorist Jeffrey Saletnik observed, "Objects were essential to the construction of the individual, critical and collective identity at the Bauhaus, both as tools and as indices."[49] Some of the most famous icons of twentieth century design are chairs created by Bauhauslers. Breuer's *Wassily* and *Cesca* chairs and Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Chair* and ottoman, as well as his iconic Chaise Longue, remain in production today as Modern classics.

Universities and other institutions in other countries became the beneficiaries of skills and knowledge of the designers, artists, architects, and educators. Their multitude of design commandments ranged from 'form follows function,' 'truth to materials,' real not fake,' 'original not pastiche,' to 'less is more.' Modernist design changed the world.[50] The movement spoke of optimism, timeless universal principles, human dimensions, and advances in engineering, all designed for the common improvement of the world.[51]

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[48] Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*, 320.
[49] Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei, eds., *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse, and Modernism* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2009), 6.
[50] William Smock, The Bauhaus Ideal: Then & Now (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2004), 18.
[51] Ibid., 18.

Chapter Two: Philip Weiss: His European Narrative

After it regained independent statehood in 1918, Poland was the fifth largest state in Europe. Its topography included flat terrain, but soaring mountains at its borders, and primeval forests, and deep rivers throughout. The temperature fluctuated between warm summers and cold winters. The main large cities of Krakow, Warsaw, Vilna, and Lwów were cultural centres, as well as homes to internationally-acclaimed universities. Historically, Poland was inhabited by many nationalities but with very large Ukrainian and Jewish minorities.[1] The country was home to the music of Chopin and the scientific discoveries of Copernicus and Marie Curie. The major religion was and is Roman Catholic. Following the First World War, the nation was in a relatively stable economic situation. Its money, the złoty, was the single common currency. Although the country was agrarian-based, its Polish Jewish citizenry mainly worked as artisans, traders, or small shop keepers.[2]

It was amidst this social, economic and political climate that Philip Weiss was born on February 11, 1922, into a Polish Jewish family in Drohobycz, Poland.[3] The city, located at the edge of the Carpathian Mountains, was a blend of Eastern and Western culture. It was populated by a mixture of different citizens, ranging from the Austro-Hungarian aristocracy, to Poles and Ukrainians of different ethnicity, status and religions. The city of Drohobycz was also the birthplace of Weiss's parents and grandparents. His grandfather and two great-uncles fought in Italy during the First World War for Austria.[4]

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[1] Volodymr Kubijovyč, "Drohobych (Drohobycz)" in *Encyclopedia of Ukraine* (Edmonton, AB & Toronto, ON: University of Alberta, University of Toronto, and Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies), 1-2.
[2] John Radzilowski, *A Traveler's History of Poland* (Gloucestershire, GB: Arris Publishing, 2007), 1-2.
[3] Now known as Drohobych, in Western Ukraine.
[4] Philip Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays* (Winnipeg, MB: privately published, 2007), 17-18.

According to Weiss, his youth was unexceptional, interesting but not extraordinary. He grew up in a secular family which was more attracted to world topics and subjects, rather than to theological issues. His father, Solomon David Weiss, was a respected fashion designer and tailor, and his mother, Cylia (née Wagner), worked as a legal secretary. Weiss was the middle child of the family with an older sister, Erna, and a younger brother, Leo. Weiss and his family were busy with work, school, and family outings and dinners.[5] Life was enjoyable for the family, and Weiss excelled in school. However, every facet of their lives was about to change.

Weiss attended a public high school, Drohobycz Lycee. He recalled being educated by highly cultured and knowledgeable teachers. Among them was Bruno Schulz, who taught drawing and handicrafts at the school. Schultz was a painter, graphic designer and draughtsman, now regarded as one of the great Polish authors and artists of the 20th century.[6] Weiss was interested in history and world politics and soon became painfully aware of the rising tension on the world scene. He listened by radio to Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on January 30, 1939 and hoped that war was not inevitable.

Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact on August 23, 1939. Hitler considered it a national shame Poland had been awarded former German territory during the First World War. His goal was to regenerate Germany into a power with which to be reckoned.[7] He gave speeches about his Utopian vision of Germany, spewed hatred toward Jewish people and other groups,

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[5] Ibid., 18.
[6] Jerzy Ficowski (Theodosia R. Robertson, transl.), *Regions of the Great Heresy: Bruno Schulz, A Biographical Portrait* (New York, NY, and London, GB: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2003), 5.
[7] John Keegan, *The Second World War* (Toronto, ON: Key Porter Books, 1989), 31.

and relayed what constituted in his mind a pure and true German.[8] On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and divided the country into two occupied zones: German and Soviet.[9] Weiss lived under Soviet annexation. Life was difficult, but he believed that most Polish Jews were grateful to be under Soviet occupation. While the standard of living decreased under Soviet rule, he remembered that cultural life thrived in Poland. The people were introduced to the Bolshoi and Kirov Ballet companies, the Bolshoi Opera, Russian classic literature, and the latest in Soviet propaganda cinematography. Jewish people in Soviet-occupied eastern Poland had a considerably easier existence than those living under German occupation in western Poland.[10]

In capturing Poland, Hitler's intentions were to transform it into a German colony, destroy the Polish way of life, and enslave its people as a servile underclass. Although born Roman Catholic, Hitler rejected Catholicism chiefly because Christianity was Jewish in origin, and protected the racially inferior.[11]

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked Russia in what was called Operation Barbarossa. Weiss's birthplace of Drohobycz was transformed by the Nazis into a ghetto in which Jewish people were partitioned from the local population. Hunger, cold temperatures, and the lack of medical supplies in the ghetto made life difficult. The main reason for Weiss's survival in the harsh conditions of the ghetto was his father's tailoring skills. Solomon Weiss worked as a tailor for the Gestapo officers, and knew many of them individually. Through this connection, Solomon occasionally received extra food

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[8] Gitta Sereny, *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 58.
[9] Keegan, 180-181.
[10] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 23.
[11] John Cornwell, *Hitler's Scientists: Science, War, and the Devil's Pact* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2003), 324.

and other rations from them for his family.[12]

The Drohobycz ghetto was liquidated and destroyed in June 1943. Then 20 years old, Weiss was sent to *Städtische Werkstätte,* a labour camp on the outskirts of the city. The building in which he worked was a former Jewish high school. In addition to tailoring, ammunition and horse brushes were being manufactured for the German military. In the midst of this, the inmates of the camp were also ordered to produce toys for German children. When the Nazis decided to destroy the *Städtische Werkstätte*, Weiss was taken to work at the Beskiden camp, which was an oil refinery.[13] He worked there as manual labourer; he filled and hauled large drums of paraffin, cleaned the grounds, and carried wood.[14]

Weiss and his brother, Leo, lived in one work camp near their home town, while his mother, father and sister lived in another. The brothers received a warning from a camp messenger sent by their father. The elder Weiss had just learned that everyone at the Beskiden camp was to be moved. He instructed them to leave the camp immediately. They decided to jump the fence at different times so as not to attract attention. Leo jumped to safety but as soon as it was Weiss's turn, the SS militia surrounded the camp and he was trapped. A short time later, in May 1944, he was on a transport to Plaszow concentration camp located on the outskirts of the city of Krakow.

During his internment in *Plaszow*, Weiss was one of many inmates sent to work underground in the *Wieliczka Salt Mine* in southern Poland.[15] He worked in the tunnels, mining the salt for the Germans who were also using the mine as an ammunition factory.

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[12] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 27.
[13] The Beskiden oil refinery was located near Krakow, Poland.
[14] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 28.
[15] The *Wieliczka Salt Mine* operated from the 13th century until 2007, chiefly as a table salt producer.

The mine is sometimes referred to as the underground salt cathedral of Poland and is now a UNESCO Heritage Site. The salt mine has many chambers and rooms, filled with sculptures of religious figures, objects, and chandeliers. The aforementioned are all carved out of salt, but they were created by the traditional Polish miners, not the prisoners.[16]

In September 1944, Weiss was relocated to the Mauthausen concentration camp, located approximately 20 kilometres from Linz, the capital of Upper Austria. Mauthausen was once a peaceful village along the Danube River, with its beautiful medieval architecture, and a stunning panorama. The concentration camp was infamous for its rock quarry and the 186 stairs leading to it, known as the "Stairs of Death."[17] Boulders were carried up and down those stairs for no purpose other than to inflict psychological and physical torment upon the internees. In mid-November 1944, there was an urgent call for qualified machinists to work in the *Hermann Göring Werke* factory in Kraśnik in eastern Poland. Weiss realized he would not survive if he worked any longer in the quarry. Although he had no training as a machinist, he applied for the work. The *Hermann Göring Werke* factory manufactured aircraft, and steel plates for tanks, railway, and armoured cars. Under constant allied bombings, it produced steel until the last days of the Second World War.[18]

While working in the factory, Weiss heard that the German military was being decimated and that the Nazi defeat was, perhaps, imminent. With determination, he

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[16] Conversation between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd while they stood in the Wieliczka Salt Mine in Poland in 2004. See also Janusz Podlecki, *Wieliczka Salt Mine* (Uzhgorod, Hungary: Karpaty Publishing House, 2004).
[17] Paul Le Caer and Bob Sheppard, *Mauthausen: Album Mémorial* (Paris, France: Editions Heimdal, 2000), 5.
[18] Ibid., 43.

"mustered the will, as did others, to live through the darkest years of the bestial Nazi regime and the complete disintegration of human behaviour."[19] At age 23, Weiss was liberated from Mauthausen by the United States Army. He had survived and later reflected on his experience:

> How do I, a human being who, during the five years of incarceration, was dehumanized, describe my liberation and return to so-called 'normality' of life? It was an unbelievable day of many fantastic events: exultation at the sight of an American soldier entering the camp – the first black man I had ever seen in person - and the once invincible S.S. men now begging for their lives and carrying white flags of surrender. The camp was alive, no more a place of death but of rebirth.[20]

This date of his liberation, May 5, 1945 was forever etched into Weiss's memory. It was the day on which he began a new identity as a Holocaust survivor, but also as a person who was free to go anywhere in the world and do anything he wished.

Weiss's immediate goal was to restore his health and find a way to feed and house himself in those bewildering days following his liberation. He was five feet, ten inches tall but weighed only 95 pounds when he was freed. With only a 'Provisional Identification Card for Civilian Internee of Mauthausen'[21] verifying his identity, Weiss and three friends settled into the basement of a house in Linz, Austria.[22] Their everyday tasks were simple and basic: finding food, and maintaining the premises. Within a short period, he registered as a survivor with the American and Austrian authorities, as well as with the Organization of Survivors for Linz.

Weiss was then hospitalized for three months in Linz. Due to prolonged

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[19] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 38.
[20] Ibid., 38.
[21] "Provisional Identification Card for Civilian Internee of Mauthausen," in name of Filip Weiss. Office for Polish Jews, Linz, Austria, June 26, 1945, The document contained Weiss's internee number, 87226, his fingerprint, and the dates 1942 through 1945 when he was incarcerated in the *Mauthausen* concentration camp. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[22] The three friends were Weiss's fellow internees at *Mauthausen*.

malnutrition in the concentration camp, his legs were grossly swollen, and he was given one year to live. He remembered that the nourishing food and skilled care he received in that hospital as the reasons for his recovery. Upon discharge from the hospital in the autumn of 1945, Weiss found employment with the American Red Cross's 'Civilian War Relief Effort.' He worked in various capacities from kitchen manager, to warehouse supervisor, to food storekeeper. Weiss soon realized that he was valued by his employers when he received rewards, such as a 'civilian pass' with which he gained admission to various events and places.[23] He also was given food parcels for extra work rendered to the American Red Cross.[24]

For several weeks in the fall of 1945, Weiss was charged with the responsibility of acting as 'civilian ration overseer and mess controller' in the US Army-controlled camp. Second Lieutenant Jack L. Noll wrote:

> Mr. Weiss has…done a very creditable and efficient job in the handling of the rations for this lager [camp]. He is extremely resourceful and reliable and has maintained a high standard of cleanliness and order. I can recommend him as being a very valuable man.[25]

Positive letters of recommendation from various officials were found in Weiss's personal papers, tucked away with other important documentation from Linz, Austria. He attached great significance to work he did as a free man and the respect and appreciation of his superiors helped tangibly to begin the restoration of his identity as an autonomous human being.

When the American Red Cross camp closed in late April 1947, Weiss's superior's

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[23] Correspondence from Malcolm B. Gott, Commander of the Kleinmünchen Displaced Persons' Camp near Linz, Austria, August 18, 1945; 'Civilian Pass,' issued to Filip Weiss by Staff-Sergeant Alton Benson, Kleinmünchen, August 29, 1945. Collection of Philip Weiss.

[24] Correspondence from W. Peter Joray, Special Representative, American Red Cross Civilian Relief, regarding Filip Weiss, May 28, 1946. Collection of Philip Weiss.

[25] Letter of recommendation for Filip Weiss from Jack L. Noll, Second Lieutenant, Infantry, US Army, Linz, Austria, October 13, 1945. Collection of Philip Weiss.

letter of recommendation illustrated the desire for him to succeed:

> Filip Weiss has had a most responsible position as store room keeper…Large amounts of food, clothing, and cigarettes were entrusted to him. I have always found him to be most honest and trustworthy…and a very willing worker who did not object to hard tasks, often, after closing hours. It is with pleasure that I write this recommendation for a real gentleman and a loyal friend.[26]

At this point, Weiss had no knowledge of the fate of his family in war-torn Europe. After the Second World War, the British Broadcasting Corporation began releasing and beaming names of survivors over the radio airwaves. Weiss's family, then living in Silesia, Poland, was very happy when they heard his name. His mother, father, sister, and brother travelled to Linz in late 1947 so that the family could be reunited. As a 'permission card' in Weiss's papers attests, the camp supervisors facilitated the meeting. The card noted that, "the bearer, Filip Weiss, has permission to remain in the main lounge and to visit his family in the following hours, from 8-9 and 2-8."[27] The Weisses were one of the few fortunate Polish Jewish families to survive the war as an intact family unit.

In late 1947, Sam Herbst, a garment union executive from Winnipeg, Manitoba, arrived at Linz camp. He was on a mission sponsored through joint efforts of the Government of Canada, the Canadian Amalgamated Garment Union, and the Canadian Jewish Congress. Known as the "Tailors' Project," it provided assistance to Holocaust survivors who wished to immigrate to Canada, provided that at least one member of the family was a tailor.[28] This propelled Weiss into another identity, that of émigré. He and his family sailed to Canada aboard the *USS General G.D. Sturgis*, a Second World War

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[26] Letter of recommendation from W. Peter Joray, Linz, Austria, May 1, 1946. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[27] Permission card, US Army, Linz, Austria, issued to Filip Weiss, Autumn 1947. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[28] Allan Levine, *Coming of Age: A History of the Jewish People of Manitoba* (Winnipeg, MB: Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada and Heartland Associates, Inc., 2009). 275.

US Navy ship.

They disembarked at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on Weiss's 26th birthday, February 11, 1948.[29] His identification was stamped 'landed immigrant garment worker.' The second part of his journey was from Halifax to Winnipeg. Weiss remembered the train ride, especially because he found quite unbelievable the huge expanses of emptiness, miles of whiteness, and the distance from city to city. Weiss was also impressed with the impeccable service by uniformed waiters in the dining cars.

Figure 4 – Philip Weiss as he appeared in 1950. (Philip Weiss Collection)

Weiss disembarked at the Canadian National Railway station, where he was greeted by various officials from the government, and representatives of the

[29] Mitic Duivenvoorden, and Trudy, and J.P. LeBlanc's *Pier 21: The Gateway that Changed Canada* (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1988) is an excellent account of the famous entry point.

Amalgamated Garment Union, and the Canadian Jewish Congress.[30] In order to re-pay $400, the cost of his passage to Canada, Weiss became a Government of Canada-contracted garment worker for one year. His first job in Winnipeg was at Stall's, a garment factory. Later, he moved to another clothing factory, Sterling Cloak, as a cloth cutter.[31] Weiss's remuneration was $18 per week, five dollars of which had to be remitted to the Government of Canada. In an interview for *Coming of Age: A History of the Jewish People of Manitoba*, Weiss wryly noted that, "never before in the history of the garment industry were so many coats and gloves sewn by workers educated at the finest schools in Europe."[32] However, despite the professional demotion, many émigrés who had survived the Holocaust and other oppression felt that "being free compensated for all the inconveniences."[33]

As a young man in Europe prior to the Second World War, Weiss was interested in studying architecture, history, and engineering. By the time he arrived in Canada, broke but not broken, university or any further education was out of reach. Weiss needed to learn English at night school, to work to support his family, and to adjust to his new life in Canada. He remembered those early days as a 'new Canadian' as being demanding and difficult. However, learning English was his first priority. There was so much new information to read, to learn, and to understand. There were Canadian traditions to discover, and Canadian customs to acquire. Weiss confronted these challenges with great curiosity and interest, as he had a strong desire to fit into Canadian life.

He noted that little social interaction took place between the Canadian Jews and

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[30] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 42.
[31] In his National Employment Service "Claimant's Identification" booklet dated 1952, Weiss's occupation was listed as a 'cloth cutter.' His home address was 184 Cathedral Avenue, Winnipeg.
[32] Levine, *Coming of Age: A History of the Jewish People of Manitoba*, 297.
[33] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 43.

the Jewish émigrés.[34] However, Weiss did not yearn for the past. His happy youth was a fleeting memory, tied to a bygone era of unspeakable circumstances. He was in a new country, learning a completely new language, and hoping to start a new life. In his early years in Winnipeg, Weiss discussed little about his suffering at the hands of the Nazis. Few people wanted to hear about any of the survivors' experiences and, regardless, many Canadians, well-sheltered from the turmoil in Europe, could hardly believe that such an event had occurred. There was a certain amount of derision for the immigrant or D.P. or displaced person in post-war Canada.[35]

To his delight, Weiss met Gertrude Goot in 1948 at St. John's High School, where they were both enrolled in night classes.[36] She, too, was born in Poland, in the town of Lupkow, and had lived in Russia during the Second World War. They were taking English lessons, as well as learning the necessary information for their Canadian citizenship. Philip and Gertrude married in 1950 and began a life together full of hope and promise. They worked and saved. They dined at Child's Restaurant located in the Moore Building on Portage Avenue, and danced to Glen Miller's big band tunes at the Royal Alexandra Hotel on Main Street until they went home via street car in the early morning hours. They had a social circle mainly of European immigrants who, like them, had come to Winnipeg in wake of the Second World War. They went to movie theatres, both to be entertained, and to learn the language. Weiss shared that his mother, Cylia, came home one day from work with news about a movie at the Deluxe Theatre on Main

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[34] Conversations between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, 2006.
[35] Oliver A.I. Botar, *A Bauhausler in Canada: Andor Weininger in the '50s* (Oshawa, ON: Gallery One One One, 2009), 100.
[36] The future wife of Philip Weiss was born Gicia Gutte in Lupkov, Poland, on July 15, 1930. Her names were Anglicized to "Gertrude Goot" upon her immigration to Canada. St. John's High School was situated on Salter Street in Winnipeg.

Street. She insisted that the film must be excellent, as it had been showing for a long time, and the name of the movie on the marquee was *Cool Inside*. Weiss's early years in Winnipeg contained many special, memorable times, and he often reminisced about them with clarity and fondness.[37]

Philip and Gertrude had three daughters, Francis (Francie), Shelley, and Beverly. They simply hoped that the children should be happy, content, well-educated and, especially, free. The stories which emanated from the Weiss' émigré identities and experiences provided their children with a seemingly endless font of amusing stories. Philip and Gertrude, too, laughed at humorous situations which transpired mainly due to their unfamiliarity with new Canadian phrases and their meanings.[38]

When his contractual obligation to the government ended, Weiss was free to pursue whichever direction he desired. He continued working in the clothing industry for one more year, living with his in-laws, in order to save a small amount of money with which to start his own business. While he worked in factories in Winnipeg, Weiss heard discussions about what options were available to 'newcomers,' given their rudimentary language skills and status of recent arrivals. A significant number of Jewish émigrés became grocery store and hotel owners, as that was familiar territory to those who had been shop keepers and pedlars in Europe.[39] These ventures never appealed to Weiss. The decision to found an upholstery company was likely a straightforward shift from fabric on a garment to fabric on furniture. Having some skill as a cutter in the clothing industry, Weiss prepared for his future; he and his wife Gertrude's younger brother, Harry Gutte,

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[37] Levine, *Coming of Age: A History of the Jewish People of Manitoba*, 298.
[38] Conversations between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, 2006.
[39] Russell Gourluck, *The Mosaic Village: An Illustrated History of Winnipeg's North End* (Winnipeg, MB: Great Plains Publications, 2010), 50.

opened *Hi-Grade Upholstery and Drapery Service* in 1952.

Clarence D. Howe, federal Minister of Reconstruction, declared that the economic future of Canada lay with the expansion of immigration, including displaced persons from Europe. The problem, he claimed, was that Jewish people were not suitable for certain jobs and, therefore, not a proper fit to aid development. In fact, between 1935 and 1948 (the year Weiss arrived), only 5000 Jewish immigrants gained admission to Canada.[40] Jewish groups searched for ways to bring Jews to Canada. The needle-trade proposal, the fur-workers plan, and the first–degree relative program all opened doors for Jewish immigration.[41] Weiss was a grateful beneficiary of such immigration ventures.

> Eventually, 98,000 displaced Jews entered Canada [by 1950]. A close working arrangement was established between the western centres of [Canadian Jewish] Congress and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services. The organizations co-operated well at the regional and national level. In 1948, a large number of immigrants arrived.[42]

In 1956, Philip and Gertrude Weiss formally became Canadian citizens.[43] Citizenship signified the bestowing of another identity. They were no longer newcomers in the eyes of the government; their new identities were that of *Canadians*. Weiss never dreamed that, near the end of his life, he would become a published author, and be awarded an honourary degree from the University of Winnipeg in his beloved adopted city.[44]

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[40] Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948* (Toronto, ON: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982), 251.
[41] Ibid., 275.
[42] Canadian Jewish Congress, *Pathways to the Present: Canadian Jewry and Canadian Jewish Congress* (Toronto, ON: Webcom Limited, 1986), 69.
[43] Certificates of Canadian Citizenship issued to Philip Weiss and Gertrude Weiss, October 12, 1956. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[44] At age 81, Weiss received an Honourary Doctor of Laws from the University in Winnipeg at its Spring Convocation on June 1, 2003. The citation read: "Philip Weiss has made it his life work to educate young people about the Holocaust." Collection of Philip Weiss.

Chapter Three: Modernism: An Overview of Winnipeg and Canada in the late 1940s and 1960s

Following the Nazi-orchestrated demise of the Bauhaus in Germany in 1933, many of its students and teachers emigrated to North America and resumed teaching.[1] The fundamentals of Modernist design were reflected in their course work and structured on the principles and precepts which had journeyed with them. Indeed, the Bauhaus influence and contribution was visible in every area of Modern design from architecture, painting, product design and furniture. Their ties to industry were a strength of the Bauhaus philosophy.[2]

The events of the Second World War in Europe had a direct impact on the furniture manufacturing industry in Canada. Due to restrictions and shortages of various materials, resources which might have been used for the furniture industry were no longer available. Although some furniture factories were converted for the war effort, the furniture industry did still benefit from some new products created through related war industries. The Polymer Corporation, formed in 1943, built the first synthetic-rubber plant in Sarnia, Ontario, when Canada was unable to obtain supplies of natural rubber from Southeast Asia at the beginning of the Second World War. The Perkins Glue company of Pennsylvania opened a subsidiary plant in Kitchener, Ontario, specifically to supply resin products and vegetable wood glue for Canadian furniture manufacturers.[3]

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[1] Éva Forgács (John Bátki, transl.), *The Bauhaus Idea and Bauhaus Politics (*Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press, 1995), 16.
[2] Mauro F. Guillén, *The Taylorized Beauty of the Mechanical: Scientific Management and the Rise of Modernist Architecture (*Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 58.
[3] Virginia Wright, *Modern: Modern Furniture in Canada 1920 – 1970*. (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 87.

European trade was in a complete state of failure at the end of the Second World War, while Canada emerged, albeit only temporarily, as one of the world's leading exporters of manufactured goods.[4] Britain created a Council of Industrial Design, the important component being the joint support of manufacturers, industry and government agencies. This commission was seen as a progressive and important development. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Canada established its own federal government agency, the National Industrial Design Committee, to reform Canadian industrial strategies.[5]

In 1945, Canadian-owned companies produced most of the household furniture for domestic use. Although there was much interest in pressure moulding, the furniture industry by and large did not often use plastics. Smaller Canadian manufacturers involved with the domestic market could not afford the expensive production involved with the fabrication of moulds and casts. They limited themselves to wood construction which required less capital investment. [6]

A serious housing shortage occurred in wake of the Second World War. Many veterans returned to Canada and found that there was nowhere to live. With the huge baby boom and immigration swell, many families shared accommodations because they were unable to find housing or rental properties. In 1946, the Government of Canada created The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It loaned money provided that consumers could afford a down payment. Families took out mortgages in those early years, developers created the sprawling suburbs and shopping centres, and the bungalow,

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[4] Ibid., 88.

[5] Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years (*Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 123.

[6] Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*. (Toronto, ON: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2001), 20.

with the one-car garage, became commonplace. In the period which followed the Second World War, the optimism and financial comfort of some of Winnipeg's citizens saw them move to bungalows in the suburbs.[7]

The University of Manitoba in Winnipeg is situated in the same time zone as Chicago, a mid-Western city in the United State. Both cities had many similar characteristics in the early 1950s. They were centrally located within their countries, and were flourishing economically after the Second World War. Chicago had constructed the remarkable *Merchandise Mart*, which showcased the latest trends in home furnishings. It was an important resource for designers, architects, decorators, and furniture manufacturers. Influenced by the architecturally-savvy Chicago area, Winnipeg became a training ground for budding Modernists.[8]

The teaching of architecture at the University of Manitoba began in 1913. By 1948, the University of Manitoba Senate established the School of Architecture with separate departments of Architecture and Interior Design. The history of the Interior Design Department was written by Joan M. Harland, who taught there from 1939 to 1980, and was Head of its Department of Interior Design from 1953 to 1976. The history highlights the department's history, coursework, curriculum, philosophy, and growth. The syllabus and department section from 1948 to 1958 featured a basic introduction to fundamentals of design, both from an historic and a contemporary perspective.[9]

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[7] Russell Gourluck, *The Mosaic Village: An Illustrated History of Winnipeg's North* End (Winnipeg, MB: Great Plains Publications, 2010), 29.
[8] Gotlieb and Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 4.
[9] Joan M. Harland (Ruth Stirk, ed.), *The History of Interior Decoration/Design at the University of Manitoba 1938 – 1997 (60 years)* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba, 1997), vii.

The reference books specified for coursework were indicative of the Modern direction of the program. Included were the following: *Elements of Design* from the Museum of Modern Art, author and designer Dal Fabro's book, *How to Build Modern Furniture*, and Felsted's book, *Design Fundamentals*. Under the theory section, the programmed books were *Visions in Motion* by László Moholy-Nagy, *Mechanization Takes Command* by Siegfried Gideon, and the *Taste Makers* by Russell Lynes. The interior design courses were about materials and colour, applied design, art history, furniture design, construction, and industrial design. Lectures were given on Modern theories of art and the works of contemporary designers and architects.[10]

Scholarships were awarded to students by the large department stores, T. Eaton Company, and Hudson's Bay Company, along with prizes donated by various smaller companies. Included in the awards section was the Globerman Chair Prize for the design of a contract chair. This award was donated by a local furniture manufacturer, *G111*; one of the owners, Abraham Globerman, taught furniture design and construction at the University of Manitoba's Department of Interior Design.[11]

In 1949, John Alonzo Russell (1907-1966), an American trained at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, became Dean of the School of Architecture. He was instrumental in the initiation of eminent Modernist buildings in Manitoba, through his education, philosophy, teaching, publications, and involvement with the arts community.[12] As well as his position as Dean, Russell was a member of the Museum of Modern Art in New

[10] Ibid., 78.
[11] Ibid., 26.
[12] Serena Keshavjee, ed., *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945 to 1975* (Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 8.

York City. The museums' exhibition materials were made available to the school.[13] Given the remoteness of Winnipeg to any city having significant artistic activity, slide and illustrative materials, travelling exhibitions, visiting lecturers, including world famous architects, provided contact for the students and professors with the international scene. Students were privileged to experience the Walter Gropius exhibition in 1954 and the Le Corbusier exhibition in 1959, as well as to confer with and listen to renowned speakers such as Sibyl Moholy-Nagy and Buckminster Fuller.[14]

Grant Marshall earned his Bachelor of Interior Design at the University of Manitoba in 1955. He remembers Russell as being instrumental in creating forward-thinking programs in both architecture and design, and for being involved in other projects and organizations such as the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. Russell actively encouraged Marshall and other students[15] to help with sets for various performances as a way of keeping up with the culture in the Winnipeg.[16] Students were encouraged to experience the culture and design of other cities, as well. The first field trip was a visit to Minneapolis in 1952. The city was a manageable driving distance and later, as part of the coursework, Chicago was added to the travel itinerary. These trips were arranged in order to visit galleries, exhibitions, museums, commercial and residential interiors, and to study important examples of both historic and contemporary works of interior design.[17]

Winnipeg's participation in promoting design during the important post-Second

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[13] *Perspective*, Annual Magazine of the Students' Architectural Society, University of Manitoba, 1950.
[14] Ibid., 12.
[15] Dianne Jackman, another of the students encouraged by Russell, received her Bachelor of Interior Design in 1955 from the University of Manitoba.
[16] Taped interview with Grant Marshall by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 17, 2011.
[17] Joan M. Harland (Ruth Stirk, ed.), *The History of Interior Decoration/Design at the University of Manitoba 1938 – 1997 (60 years)*, 48.

World War decade was substantial. A central individual was A. James Donahue (1918-1996), an architect who was an enthusiast, advocate, and pioneer of contemporary design sponsorship in Winnipeg. Born in Regina, Saskatchewan, he completed a Master's degree in architecture at Harvard University under the guidance of eminent Bauhaus architects, Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer.[18] After working in Ottawa as a city planner and housing researcher, Donohue moved to Winnipeg in 1946 where he established an architectural practice and taught at the University of Manitoba.[19]

Donahue was also a furniture designer and manufacturer, chiefly in moulded plywood and aluminum. Virginia Wright notes that Donahue's "parallel interest in material applications would have been encouraged by his studies under Breuer, who had been a furniture pioneer in the use of bent steel tube in the 1920s and of moulded plywood in the 1930s."[20] His pieces are now known as some of earliest archetypes of Canadian Modernist residential furniture.[21] One of Donahue's chairs was called variously the *Canadian Coconut Chair* (in honour of George Nelson's *Coconut Chair*), or the *Winnipeg Chair*. It was created in the basement of the University of Manitoba's School of Architecture by Donahue and some of his architecture students.[22]

In February 1959, the first building in Canada constructed exclusively as a School of Architecture was designed and built for the University of Manitoba. It was a state-of-the-art structure which included studios, drafting and lecture rooms, offices for staff and

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[18] Wright, *Modern: Modern Furniture in Canada 1920-1970*, 98.
[19] Ibid., 142.
[20] Ibid., 98.
[21] Helen Delacretaz, *Habitat: Canadian Design Now Le Point sur le Design Canadien. (*Winnipeg, MB: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 2005), 15.
[22] Gotlieb and Golden, *Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 79.

graduate studies, an architecture library, a photographic laboratory, and a woodworking machine shop. The architect for the new school building was Donahue, while the interior designer was Marshall, by then on staff in the interior design department.[23]

Russell encouraged University of Manitoba architectural students to travel out of the country to further their education and professional experience. Two Winnipeg architects, Morley Blankstein and Isadore Coop, worked with Mies van der Rohe in Chicago.[24] Marshall remembers that Russell was instrumental in creating forward-thinking programs both in architecture and design at the University of Manitoba.[25] Interior design enthusiasts came to Winnipeg, as it was the only interior design degree program in Canada. A significant amount of commercial design work in Winnipeg was done through the University of Manitoba by graduates and faculty of the School of Architecture. Construction escalated within various sectors across Canada during the 1950s and 1960s, such as government buildings, hospitals, office buildings, airports, high-rise apartment buildings, and universities and schools. Public and private ventures and investments also were noteworthy during this remarkable economic time.[26]

In conjunction with the Department of Trade and Commerce, the federal government became more actively involved in design in the early 1960s. [27] In 1963, the same year in which the Manitoba Design Institute was founded, the Department of Industry became the new bureau assigned to ensuring accountability for design in

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[23] Ibid., 59.
[24] Keshavjee, *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945-1975*, 11; Interview with Cynthia Coop by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 14, 2011.
[20] Taped interview with Grant Marshall by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 17, 2011.
[26] Keshavjee, Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945-1975. 45.
[27] Gotleib and Golden, *Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 7.

Canada. As Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden note in *Design in Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*:

> With a very business-like approach, and an interest in the improvement of product design in the Canadian industry, the National Design Council held exhibitions and trade missions and bestowed awards to various industries.[28]

The National Industrial Design Committee issued two publications for manufacturers in 1949. One booklet was entitled, "Good Design Will Sell Canadian Products." The other was "How the Industrial Designer Can Help Your Business."[29] By 1950 a national study on residential furniture was conducted by John Low-Beer and James Ferguson. Key furniture manufacturers in Ontario and Quebec were interviewed and surveys were conducted within the industry. The study's findings revealed that there was considerable room for improvement in Canadian furniture design. However, one of the major problems was the unwillingness of the manufacturers to risk investment in new design.[30] The study also recognized a correlation between architectural practice and furniture design, and suggested incorporation of existing design courses should either expand or amalgamate.[31]

The Government of Canada hoped that some of the ground-breaking materials and processes produced for war-time could be adapted and translated into innovative products during peacetime. The new types of glues and resins which had been created for military landing and cargo barges began to be utilized by the furniture manufacturers. The application and use of new materials, such as aluminum sheets, magnesium rods,

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[28] Ibid., 7.
[29] Wright, *Modern: Modern Furniture in Canada 1920 – 1970*, 128.
[30] Gotleib and Golden, *Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 5.
[31] Wright, *Modern: Modern Furniture in Canada 1920-1970,* 130.

plywood, chemical plastics, and cellulose compounds for furniture - along with new products - became the goal and hope for the furniture industry.[32] Advanced moulding techniques developed for plywood and aluminum in aircraft manufacturing translated into the production of bent and laminated wood and moulded plywood furniture.[33] Plastics for moulded chairs were made from glass fibres and reinforced cotton layers melded with epoxy resin layers and then baked.[34]

The first government-sponsored design centre, a significant milestone, was completed in April 1953 in Ottawa. At the opening ceremony, Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent announced the establishment of annual Design Merit Awards for industrial products. He acknowledged that this would be beneficial to the Canadian industry in terms of well-designed, saleable, and attractive products for domestic and foreign markets.[35] St. Laurent remarked, "The competence of the professions, the integrity of science, the quality of taste, were being steadily lowered by the influx of young people of fine natural endowment and inadequate intellectual training." Indeed, if anything distinctive in the arts and letters were to rise in Manitoba it would have come from the mingling and fusion of its many peoples. Geographically, Manitoba was Canadian; 'culturally it was European, in all strands of life.'[36]

The Department of Transport commenced its very ambitious program for installation of art in new Canadian airports.[37] The Canadian government was prepared to

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[32] Ibid., 91.
[33] Ibid., 92.
[34] Ibid., 98.
[35] Ibid., 152.
[36] William Lewis Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, 1957), 470.
[37] William Withrow, *Contemporary Canadian Painting* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 13.

support this proposal for art work commissions for the new airports being constructed in Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver. Winnipeg received a piece by Quebec Modernist artist Alfred Pellan for its new airport.[38]

> The Depart of Transport initiated its ambitious program of art for the airports of Canada. The project fortunately came under the bold leadership of J. R. Baldwin, Deputy Minister of the Department, who had been encouraged to follow the European example of providing a percentage for works of art in all new government buildings.[39]

With the turbulence of the Second World War and the aftershock on the economy, Canada was in a state of flux. In particular, there were minimal resources available for the manufacturing sector. As noted earlier in this chapter, veterans and émigrés arrived in Canada to find a lack of housing. Simultaneously, furniture manufacturing was on the rise. New technology and materials were being used. Furthermore, with the use of steel, resins, aluminum and new plastics, the design of furniture also expanded and flourished. One of the catalysts for Modernist furniture and architecture in Canada, particularly in Winnipeg, was the influence of the Bauhaus and its followers.

The furniture industry's success was, to a great extent, due to the design effort of German, Dutch, Polish, and Scandinavian immigrants.[40] During this time period, mass immigration transformed a nation's future.[41] Richard Gwyn points out that contemporary Canada was not so much built but enriched by post-Second World War immigrants, as the hardest physical labour was done earlier by the original settlers. The magnitude of

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[38] Ibid., 13.
[39] Ibid., 13.
[40] Oliver Botar, *A Bauhausler in Canada: Andor Weininger in the 50s* (Oshawa, ON: Gallery One One One, 2009), 22.
[41] Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism Without Wales: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1995), 222.

immigration to Canada at this early time is without equal. It forged a cosmopolitan Canada which surged with energy from a group who made it a livelier, more creative, and a richly-textured society.

The furniture industry in Canada became home to many celebrated designers, such as: Sigrun Bulow-Hube, Robin Bush, Donohue, Jacques Guillon, Jan Kuypers, Earl Morrison, and Russell Spanner. Some were from Europe, and all were winners of National Industrial Design Council awards for significant pieces of furniture. Bulow-Hube was born in Sweden, studied in Germany and Denmark, and immigrated to Canada in 1950. She founded her own design firm, and created furniture, usually in the Scandinavian manner using oil-finished woods. Jan Kuypers, a Dutch designer, studied furniture design at the Academy of Art and Architecture in the Hague. He arrived in Canada after seeing an advertisement for a position at Imperial Furniture. Kuypers became the company's chief designer, and used birch as his main medium. He constructed a minimalist product which was a competitor to the new popular Scandinavian manufactured goods.[42]

Russell Spanner was a Torontonian whose family owned Spanner Products, a furniture and woodworking factory which produced kitchen furniture. He developed a signature line called *Ruspan*, a modern line of armchairs, dining tables and chairs, and coffee tables.[43] The furniture had a casual but stylish look, along with Spanner's characteristic design of sharply-angled, splayed and tapered legs, bevelled wood edges,

[42] Wright, *Modern: Modern Furniture in Canada 1920 – 1970*, 143.
[43] Ibid., 130.

boomerang arms, and seats constructed from interwoven canvas webbing.[44]

Earle Morrison and Robin Bush designed furniture together, and won many industrial design awards. They also worked with Peter Cotton on creating furniture products which were constructed from new forms of metal tubing. They were located on the Canadian West coast, which was in the process of developing a Modernist aesthetic. They were successful because they had no traditions to uphold.[45] Jacques Guillon, born in Paris, France, was a Montreal designer who studied architecture at McGill University. He constructed the *Cord Chair*, which is considered by some to be a Modern masterpiece. It has a sense of balance and is a combination of strength and delicacy.[46] Julien Hébert designed an aluminum chair, which captured the attention of an Austrian manufacturer. Sigmund Werner, who immigrated to Montreal to escape the Nazis, hired Hebert to design a line of outdoor aluminum furniture products.[47]

After the Second World War, consumers essentially had two choices for home décor. They could continue with furniture which looked traditional and maintained a sense of history, or they could challenge the status quo, and recognize Modernism, with all its newness.[48] By the 1960s, *Danish Modern* became popular in Canada for those who were style-conscious aficionados; Scandinavian design was viewed by many designers as the natural choice of sensible, Modern consumers. Michael Prokopow suggests that:

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[44] Gotlieb and Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: From Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 74.
[45] Ibid., .63.
[46] Ibid., 58.
[47] *Martin Racine and Alain Findeli*, "Julien Hébert and the Emergence of Industrial Design in Canada," *Design Issues*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Autumn 2003).
[48] Michael Prokopow, "Deign to be Modern: Canada's Taste for Scandinavian Design in the 1960s," in Alan C. Alder, ed., Made in Canada: Craft and Design in the Sixties (Montreal, PQ/Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 95.

> This was the style of the forward-looking, forward-thinking people. Scandinavian Modernism was a critically important moment in the nation's post-war ideological determination to be a modern nation. Teak settees, teak chairs, pendant lamps, Flokati or Rya rugs became the rage and a distinct style of the time.[49]

The decision to go Modern was a powerful inclination in some parts of Canadian society. It was more than merely a matter of personal taste. In the early 1960s, Modern implied a progressive and advanced thinking about the meaning of objects in everyday life and how issues of style were, in truth, issues of identity.[50] Easy-to-manage comfort and style were "the hallmarks of the Scandinavian moment in Canadian domestic history."[51] Examples included sofas upholstered in wool, and simple coffee tables with slanted legs. The Canadian designers who styled in the Swedish or Finnish way were: Bulow-Hube, Walter Nugent, and the Kaufman and Imperial firms, all located in Ontario.[52]

This chapter gives an impression of some of the furniture designers who received Canada Council awards for their designs. During this time period in Canada, Weiss was starting his small upholstery shop in Winnipeg and working at building his business.

[49] Ibid. 95.
[50] Ibid., 98.
[51] Ibid., 98.
[52] Ibid., 96.

Chapter Four: Philip Weiss, Limited: A Case Study

The North End of Winnipeg, where Philip Weiss lived following his arrival in Canada, housed an assortment of ethnic groups. Many emigrated at the turn of the twentieth century and created distinct, vibrant communities. Within this unique part of Winnipeg, one could hear many different languages spoken, including German, Polish, Yiddish, and Russian. Small, family-run grocery stores graced nearly every corner, and Main Street, and Selkirk and Dufferin Avenues were commercial centres of the district. These shopping destinations proffered a variety of services: meat markets, bakeries, delicatessens, farmer's markets, and clothing stores.[1] They met all the requirements for shopping, religious and educational needs and, for some émigrés, wrought a level of comfort by allowing them to socialize and work with people of similar backgrounds. They came to start new lives, and were willing to work long days in arduous jobs which often had extended hours. Historically, the North End has been populated largely by families with relatively low incomes, although most did not sense that they were poor.[2]

During the 1950s in Winnipeg, the economy was improving steadily and the populace felt the upward swing. "In the period of optimism and financial comfort that followed the Second World War, Winnipeggers, like their counterparts in other North American cities, began moving to the bungalows of the suburbs."[3] Architectural historian David Burley observed that "the optimistic recovery of capitalism after a decade and a half of war and depression and the state's new willingness to intervene and plan social

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[1] Russell Gourluck, *The Mosaic Village: An Illustrated History of Winnipeg's North End* (Winnipeg, MB: Great Plains Publications, 2010), 33, 131, 137, 165.
[2] Ibid., 30.
[3] Ibid., 28.

and economic development unleashed forces of creative destruction."[4]

The demand for housing in Winnipeg following the Second World War created the highest rate per capita of new house construction in Canada.[5] As subdivisions developed, shopping centres were to become integral components of the community house development. Canadian social historian David Burley notes:

> A healthy urban and national economy, which, during the 1960s confronted no serious setbacks to its record expansion, fed Winnipeg's growth.[6]

There was an impressive list of construction projects such as: the Manitoba Theatre Centre, Winnipeg City Hall, the James Richardson & Sons, Limited Building, and the Lombard Place Development.[7]

In 1952, Philip Weiss and his brother-in–law, Harry Gutte[8], opened *Hi-Grade Upholstery & Drapery Service* on 625 Sargent Avenue in central Winnipeg. Their business card indicates that the various types of products and services available through their small shop included: made-to-order chesterfield suites, remodelling, upholstering, repairs, and custom made draperies. Both Holocaust survivors, the young émigrés were fulfilling their dreams of creating a company.[9] They were accustomed to, and willingly worked, long hours with the intention to make a successful life in Canada for themselves and their families. In an interview late in his life, Weiss paid tribute to his brother-in-law

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[4] David G.. Burley, "Winnipeg and the Landscape of Modernity, 1945-1975," in Serena Kashavjee, ed. *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945 to 1975*. (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 29.
[5] Ibid., 33.
[6] Ibid., 33, 38, 40, 44.
[7] Ibid., 48.
[8] Harry Gutte immigrated from Poland. Some family members anglicized their surname to 'Goot,' but he did not.
[9] Harry Gutt, his sister Gicia "Gertrude" (later to marry Philip Weiss), and their parents, Ewa and Avraham, were transported east by the Russian Army during the Second World War. Soon after he immigrated to Canada, Gutte was employed by the Winnipeg furniture company, *Century Craft*, prior to joining Weiss in business.

and business partner:

> Harry was the inside man and I was the outside man. I was out walking the streets, knocking on doors, getting work. Harry worked by himself at the shop using an old hand sewing machine all day long as well as evening overtime.[10]

The initial concept and foundation of the company's production was based on residential work. Frames for the variety of sofas, loveseats, chairs, and ottomans were readily available locally from various companies as prêt-à-porter or custom-constructed as desired. Unfortunately, Gutte died two years later at the young age of twenty-two. The sudden loss "forced me to think about my future and the possibility of continuing running the business without any fabrication skills," Weiss remembered.[11]

> In 1954, I struggled with the decision of closing the business and my wife, Gertrude, gave her opinion which was to forge ahead. We hired a man and with no actual advertising – only mouth-to-mouth – we struggled but survived. The economy was developing rapidly, with more people, more buying. We were showing new contemporary versus the heavy, overstuffed pieces some of the people bought for their new homes. Cities started to grow, farmland became new residential communities, office buildings [were built] and there was prosperity, an explosion of economy.[12]

In the midst of great uncertainty about his future, Weiss carried on the business. With the steadily-improving Canadian economy, he found that the company required more space and better visibility. By the mid-1950s, *Hi-Grade Upholstery & Drapery Service* moved to 266 Main Street, opposite the Canadian National Railway station. At this location, Weiss met Grant Marshall, an interior design educator at the University of Manitoba, who also operated his own design studio and retail furniture and accessories

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[10] Taped interview with Philip Weiss by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, February 11, 2006.

[11] Philip Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Essays and Reflections* (Winnipeg, MB: privately published, 2007), 44.

[12] Ibid., 44

company, *Furniture Square*, on Graham Avenue.[13] Marshall recollects that he went to see what Hi-Grade Upholstery & Drapery Service had to offer. He parked at the back of the building, and entered through the back door, where he found Weiss and his wife, Gertrude, working. Weiss and Marshall soon developed a working relationship and friendship while collaborating on many of the designer's commercial and residential contracts. When the new School of Architecture at the University of Manitoba was constructed in 1959, Marshall was contracted by the University as the interior designer for the project. On his recommendation, Weiss became the supplier of many of the upholstered furniture pieces for the main floor, student and staff lounges, and offices. Among the furnishings produced by Weiss was a two-seater sofa for the School's Head of Architecture, John Russell.[14] Weiss appreciated working with them all, as he reminisced later in life:

> I worked with Grant Marshall at the School of Architecture and displayed at the Manitoba Design Institute shows and was heavily involved in the design field with designers and architects, both residentially and commercially. I also worked with designers Margaret Stinson, Cynthia Coop, Dianne Jackman, Michael Cox, Paul Petrie, and many others.[15]

Ever afterward, Weiss credited Marshall's support as being the catalyst for the expansion and success of his company. He hired more employees and his showroom and workshop were enlarged.[16] The company name, *Hi-Grade Upholstery & Drapery Service*, remained the same but the revised business card was changed to read "Designers and

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[13] Taped interview with Grant Marshall by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 19, 2011. In 1958, Marshall re-branded his business as *Design Associates* in a new location with a larger retail presence, on Osborne Street in Winnipeg.

[14] Ibid. John Russell later became Dean of Architecture at the University of Manitoba. Abraham Globerman, co-owner of Globerman Brothers, or *G111*, also constructed furniture for the new School of Architecture at the University of Manitoba.

[15] Taped interview with Philip Weiss by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, February 11, 2006. Weiss also worked on several projects with the consortium formed by University of Manitoba interior designers Cox, Jackman, and Petrie.

[16] Philip Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, 44.

Builders of Fine Furniture."[17] When Weiss first opened the business he had limited background information regarding the current Canadian furniture industry so he was producing primarily wood-framed furniture. In the early years of the venture, he had limited investment resources and a very small staff base. This hindered Weiss as far as developing his own expertise with complicated moulds and expensive machinery.[18]

Despite the challenges he faced, Weiss was determined to improve his knowledge, let his creativity take him to new places, and produce new, exciting furniture designs. As time progressed, he became acutely aware of the context of his times; he knew who was working in the industry, he followed the trends, and studied the various clientele bases in Winnipeg.[19] Any boost to Canada's economy to him signalled fresh, new ideas and the potential for business prosperity. Independent designers and small business owners such as Weiss were realizing the climate for professional work was developing, The Manitoba Design Institute was established in 1963 by an Act of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.[20]

Weiss's field was becoming professionalized. The goal of the new organization was to promote Manitoba firms, support them in creating new, well-designed products, and improve the design, quality, and value of existing manufactured goods. Additionally, the Institute served to educate the general public of the need for good design.[21]

Once he was awarded larger, more complex contracts, Weiss felt sufficiently secure to expand and relocate from his small, largely residential-focused upholstery shop

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[17] Business card for *Hi-Grade Upholstery & Drapery Service*, Winnipeg, circa 1962. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[18] Taped interview with Philip Weiss by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, February 11, 2006.
[19] Ibid.
[20] "The Design Institute Act," C.C.S.M. c. D40, *The Province of Manitoba Legislative Assembly*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, June 24, 1992.
[21] [First] *Annual Report of the Manitoba Design Institute for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1964*, as presented to the Province of Manitoba. Collection of Manitoba Legislative Library.

in central Winnipeg, to the south end of the city. The business moved into a strip mall at 667 Stafford Street and was divided into two separate commercial entities. The main floor contained a retail store front called *Furniture Plaza*. It showcased mid-century modern pieces as well as other various styles of furniture. The shop carried original pieces from Scandinavia and Denmark, as well as original Canadian designs. On the lower level, the upholstery shop continued under the name *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company*.

Figure 5 – A trade show Scandinavian display setting by *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company* when it was located at 667 Stafford Street, ca. late 1960s. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

Buoyed by professional support, a healthier economy, and an increased confidence in his abilities to flourish in his adopted home, Weiss relentlessly sought knowledge and business contacts:

> I went to Chicago, to the Merchandise Mart, and various furniture shows, read magazines, spotted trends, and started carrying products for the main floor level of the store. Consumers started to be impacted by the new Danish and Scandinavian imports that were arriving from Denmark,

> Holland, and Norway. The business grew and I became involved in good, sizeable projects.[22]

As the economy's upward trend continued, Weiss's company grew and increased its design and supply of top quality furniture for offices, public buildings and institutions. Among those were: Winnipeg City Hall, the Winnipeg Public Safety Building, Lions Manor, School for the Deaf, Manitoba Liquor Commission Head Office, Grace Hospital, Canadian Wheat Board, Canadian Cancer Society, Selkirk Mental Hospital, and Cranberry Portage Collegiate.[23] As furniture and design historians Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden advance:

> The residential market was tougher to crack so wily furniture manufacturers pursued commercial and institutional contracts. These communities, where architects and interior designers had the power to influence taste, were more sensitive to good design. It helped that buyers were also accustomed to longer lead times, sometimes up to three months when ordering furniture from American firms like Herman Miller and Knoll. Canadian companies sometimes grabbed a toehold in the market simply by shaving three weeks off a delivery date.[24]

Weiss also could produce pieces within a shorter time frame than could many of his American competitors. Margaret Stinson, a 1960 graduate of the School of Interior Design at the University of Manitoba, remembers being hired in 1964 by Green, Blankstein, Russell, and Associates to complete the interior design work on the new Winnipeg City Hall on Main Street. After finishing the layout of the offices and meeting other requirements, she was instructed to select and orchestrate the furnishings for the interior. The tendering process was agreed upon with a mandate to use local product. Stinson had recently returned to Winnipeg after living in London, England, and had

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[22] Taped interview with Philip Weiss by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, February 11, 2006.
[23] "Price List," *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company*, Winnipeg, circa 1960s. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[24] Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs* (Toronto, ON: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2001), 64.

limited knowledge of local furniture manufacturers. She recollects asking her supervisor at the firm for information as to who produced contemporary, quality, upholstered goods. The response was, "call Philip Weiss at *Hi-Grade Upholstery*. He is really good at proportions and his product is excellent."[25] Stinson arranged for Weiss's company to become the supplier of some of the upholstered sofas and chairs to the bidding contract dealers. As Stinson further noted, the sofas were in "Florence Knoll style" with simple, classic lines which graced the generously-scaled public lounges and council building.[26]

Figure 6 - Winnipeg City Hall lounge featuring upholstered sofas produced by Philip Weiss, ca. 1965. (Margaret Stinson Collection)

With such opportunities, designers such as Weiss were expanding in scope and breadth, as was the objective of The Manitoba Design Institute. Its overall purpose was to contribute to the growth of the economy through marketable and saleable local goods. Manufacturers from within the Province were asked to submit products or models to be appraised and considered, and seminars were given to inform them about the power of

[25] Taped interview with Margaret Stinson by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 20, 2011.
[26] Ibid.

strong industrial design, efficient production processes, methods of distribution, marketing, packaging, advanced manufacturing methods and techniques in various areas of industrial design.[27]

The Institute was, by its mandate, industry-based. A relationship with the following related organizations was cultivated to synchronize procedure and achievement in the field of industrial design. The National Design Council in Ottawa, the Manitoba Association of Architects, the Interior Designers' Institute of Manitoba, and the Art Directors' Club of Winnipeg[28] were all contacted and notified about the direction of the Institute. Seminars entitled, "A Manitoba Furniture Manufacturers and Opportunity to Export" introduced speakers from the industry who shared their knowledge of the latest technology in design and manufacturing. Additionally, a library and the dissemination of a newsletter provided members with current material, not readily accessible, about contemporary design methods and development. Solid industrial growth in Manitoba during the 1960s imbued the Province with genuine sales opportunities.[29]

In a further effort to assess, endorse, and promote the work of Manitoba manufacturers, the Institute convened the inaugural meeting of the "Product Review Board" in Winnipeg in November 1964. The Board was comprised of two of Canada's first industrial designers and manufacturers, J. Rowan, and Sidney Bersudsky; both

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[27] *Annual Report of the Manitoba Design Institute for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1967*. Collection of the Manitoba Legislative Library.

[28] Loren Ruth Lerner and Mary F. Williamson, *Art and Architecture in Canada: A Bibliography and Guide to the Literature* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 109. The Art Directors' Club of Winnipeg was formed in 1964 to presents its "Annual Exhibition of Advertising Art and Editorial Art." Graphic designers from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta were invited to enter their work. In 1970, the organization's name was changed to the "Visual Communications Association of Winnipeg.

[29] *Annual Report of the Manitoba Design Institute for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1965. Collection of the Manitoba Legislative Library.*

operated industrial design firms in Toronto, Ontario.[30]

The Institute sponsored seminars and gathered data from specific industry groups, and other programs were developed in 1965 to assist manufacturers at various levels. From the beginning, the Institute excelled at marshalling expertise from various fields. Some of the presenters and adjudicators who visited Winnipeg are now considered Canada's earliest and most important furniture designers. Jan Kuypers, director with the Ontario-based industrial design firm Dudas, Kuypers, Rowan Ltd., detailed the key developments in contemporary furniture design and the advancements in industrial design. Virginia Wright noted that Kuypers:

> …was probably the best-known furniture designer in Canada during the 1950s. His designs for the Imperial Furniture Company were sold throughout the country, some in unprecedented numbers.[31]

In the Institute's inaugural year, twenty-five products were reviewed by a board of professional industrial designers. Each product was analyzed and advice was provided for increased marketability and economic viability. Following an evaluation of the product as to the outstanding nature of its design, quality, and concept, an *Award of Excellence* was bestowed upon the selected designer. The awards were designed to reward manufacturers and encourage the development and application of good quality industrial techniques to their products. The first awards for excellence from the Institute, a government agency, were announced two years earlier, in the February 1965 issue of *Industrial Canada*.[32] The award constituted local Manitoba recognition and the early award-winning pieces were displayed for public viewing at the Hudson's Bay Company

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[30] Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 16.
[31] Virginia Wright, *Seduced and Abandoned: Modern Furniture Designers in Canada – The First Fifty Years*. Exhibition Catalogue (Toronto, ON: The Art Gallery at Harbourfront, 1985), 21.
[32] "Chamberlin Design by Canadians" in *Industrial Canada* (February 1965), 8.

retail store in Winnipeg. This was a time of growth in the Province and furniture developed, designed, and manufactured in Manitoba were being actively promoted. The "Winnipeg Furniture Show," sponsored by the Manitoba Furniture Association in conjunction with the Trade, Development and Marketing Branch, was held in 1966 at the Winnipeg Auditorium. Over two thousand members of the public attended this promotional event. Fifteen manufacturers had booths which showcased their products to potential buyers, many of whom attended from not only within the City of Winnipeg, but from out-of-town.[33]

In 1965, Weiss took a bold step. He entered his *Tub Office Chair* in the Institute's annual competition. Much to his personal and professional satisfaction, the chair won the Award of Excellence.[34] Weiss's work was described in the Department of Industry & Commerce's monthly publication, as well as in the Winnipeg print media.

> The [Product Review] Board felt that the tub chair was well-constructed as a contract furniture piece that can be used in reception areas, offices, or conference rooms. Although the design is not unique, the chair is comparable with pieces to be found anywhere else in North America. It is a very comfortable chair and the quality of materials and workmanship relative to price is outstanding.[35]

The Board acknowledged that the design of the chair was not unique. Other chairs in the contract marketplace had comparable design elements. Yet, the quality of construction, level of seating comfort, and ability to be an effective contract product several settings impressed the judges. They voted that the tub chair had significant merit.

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[33] *Annual Report of the Manitoba Design Institute for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1966*. Collection of the Manitoba Legislative Library. The Winnipeg Auditorium building at 200 Vaughan Street later became the Archives of Manitoba, Hudson's Bay Company Archives, and Manitoba Legislative Library.
[34] Certificate. Manitoba Design Institute, *"Award of Excellence Presented to Hi-Grade Upholstery Company for Upholstered Tub Chair, December 16, 1965."* Collection of Philip Weiss.
[35] "1965 Awards of Excellence," *Department of Industry & Commerce Magazine*, Province of Manitoba, December 1965. Collection of Philip Weiss.

The chair design featured a horseshoe back with leather upholstery, supported on a four-pronged stainless steel swivel base. The fact that portions of the chair's style were not unusual held no sway with the judges. As Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden advance, imitative designs were also being produced by well-known manufacturers:

> Herman Miller and Knoll 'owned' the organizations specifying corporate and institutional furniture. At best, Canadian designers created furniture for secondary areas. Frequently, their 'original' designs were much more imitative than one might have hoped.[36]

Figure 7 – *Tub Office Chair* for which *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company* won its first Manitoba Design Institute's *Award of Excellence* in 1965. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

Weiss was deeply gratified to receive one of the Manitoba Design Institute's first awards. Subsequently, he set to work improving his designs and taking more stylistic risks. In 1967, he had been in the furniture business for 15 years, and had lived in Canada for 19 of those years. The days of advertising the business by word-of-mouth had passed. Weiss now had a stylish brochure and price list and the products were

[36] Gotlieb and Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: From Tea Kettles and Task Chairs*, 64.

available with variations, including wooden or chrome-plated metal legs, or bases of oiled walnut and foam rubber seats in various shapes and styles.

In the autumn of 1967 Weiss entered another chair into the annual competition of the Institute's *Award of Excellence*. The *HG 65-20 Chair* was a simple, black leather upholstered tub chair, with a curved and vertically fluted back, perched on a chrome pedestal base.[37]

Figure 8 – *HG 65-20 or Tulip Chair* (front and side views), which won the 1967 Manitoba Design Institute's *Award of Excellence*. (Philip Weiss Collection)

Weiss was influenced by Eero Saarinen's *Tulip Chair*, designed for the Knoll Company in 1956. The Finnish-born American industrial designer and architect said famously that his pedestal base was generated from his desire to "clear up the slum of legs."[38] The chair design used a limited ensemble of materials. There was no added ornament, and minimal decoration. It also had the practical advantage of being easily manufactured by an

[37] The *HG 65-20 Chair* was re-named *Tulip Chair* in the early 1970s.
[38] Anonymous, "Art: The Maturing Modern. Architect Eero Saarinen," *Time Magazine* (July 2, 1956): cover story.

operation with small capital and equipment. The chair had a distinctive visual personality and a designer's sense of form. The construction of this chair was pivotal to the construction of Weiss's Modernist identity. The design of the chair marked his position, stating definitively that he was not a traditionalist. The chair signified refinement with the use of padded fluting inside the form, distinction by the integration of seat back and armrest in one nicely-proportioned gesture, sophistication with the incorporation of the chrome pedestal base, which referenced Saarinen's designs for Knoll, and excellent craftsmanship. The same characteristics which defined the chair were characteristics with which Weiss aspired to be associated. The *Tulip* was not just a chair. It symbolized his individuality, his social aspirations, and his relationship to the design world. It represented a negation of the past and a promise of the future.

Weiss received the Institute's *Award of Excellence* in December 1967 for his *HG 65-20 Chair*, in recognition of outstanding design, functional efficiency and saleability. While he was celebrated in both Manitoba government publications and in the Winnipeg media,[39] Weiss was not mentioned in any other design literature as a prominent name in the national furniture industry or as having any significant status in the design world. He was certainly not in the company of the legendary Canadian furniture designers, Sigrun Bulow-Hube, Robin Bush, A. James Donahue, Jacques Guillon, Jan Kuypers, Earle Morrison, or Russell Spanner, all of whom were mentioned in Chapter Three.

However, the conferring of professional recognition by the Manitoba Design Institute was substantial to Weiss at a personal level. It represented recognition for his expertise and it brought new opportunity, and acceptance. He was identified with a

[39] "Product Designers Recognized," *The Winnipeg Tribute*, December 1966.

product of quality and design significance.[40] The design progression from his 1965 chair to his 1967 creation illustrated marked growth. The Product Review Board's earlier observation about Weiss's initial entry and its lack of distinctiveness resonated with him. When he submitted the 1967 *HG-65-20 Chair*, it was easily evident that it conveyed more design presence and *avant-garde* sensibility while still retaining the mark of the high level of quality which was an integral part of Weiss's business model.

The 1967 chair was instrumental in the future of Weiss's design career, as it situated his loyalty to and identity with the Modernist movement. His work then became synonymous with style, daring, and contemporary elegance in simplicity. Although his company received awards almost annually for several years, Weiss never took anything for granted and was revitalized by each successive honour.[41] He was photographed with Sidney Spivak, Manitoba Minister of Trade and Commerce, in 1969, receiving his award. Years later, Weiss still appreciated the significance in having shaken Spivak's hand. The awards, photographs with Institute board directors, provincial ministers, and others were displayed in Weiss's office long after they were of any business purpose.

In 1969, Weiss's acrylic and metal sofa/ love seat were produced. The design of the pieces used two, one and a quarter inch thick slabs of acrylic, as side members, drilled to accept the two, one inch diameter rods of stainless steel. These rods formed the seat and back support systems. The materials used for this product had significantly appreciated in cost and complexity. Fabric straps wrapped from front to back on the stainless rods, derived from Mies van der Rohe's low-slung *Barcelona* chair. The back

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[40] Conversations between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, 2006.

[41] Certificates. The Manitoba Design Institute presented Weiss's Hi-Grade Upholstery Company with, among others, its *Award of Excellence* for the "*Lounge Chair*" in 1966, its *Award of Design Merit* for the "*Acrylic and Metal Two-Seater*" in 1969, and its *Award of Merit* for the "*Institutional Seating System"* in 1971. Collection of Philip Weiss.

and seat cushions were constructed of foam wrapped in a layer of Dacron and covered in off-white corduroy fabric. The *Acrylic and Metal Two-Seater* furniture piece won the Manitoba Design Institute's *Award of Design Merit* in 1969.[42] The original black and white sketch by Weiss has no information or indication of materials or construction, but illustrates its conceptualization.

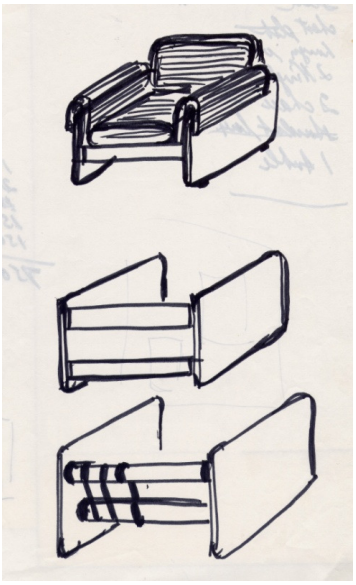

Figure 9 - Weiss's hand-sketch, ca. 1970s, of his Lucite chair, *Illusion*. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

Figure 10 - Side view of *Illusion*, a love seat by *Philip Weiss, Limited*, of Lucite, fabric, and metal, ca. 1976. For this creation, Weiss won a design award from the Manitoba Institute of Design. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

[42] Manitoba Design Institute, "*Award of Design Merit,*"1969*,* for the "*Acrylic and Metal Two-Seater*" manufactured by *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company*. Collection of Philip Weiss.

Even as a novice in the industry, Weiss did not have small ambitions. Few modest upholstery shops were involved in the design world. Nonetheless, this was where he built his independent place and individual identity. He experimented with technical advances when financially able to, and maintained integrity and standards in his designs and completed products. Weiss was involved in the complete design process, from concept to completion. He welcomed the control and the success that this gave him.

Three sets of love seats were produced and sold for residential use. However, the cost to manufacture them became too prohibitive and Weiss did not make more. Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden contend:

> In the sixties, designers and artists adopted plastic as the quintessentially democratic material, liberating it from its former status as a lowly imitator.[43]

The debate on plastic as inventive, original, or just imitation, was clearly apparent in the 1969 plastic furniture seminar held at the Manitoba Design Institute. In discussion about whether or not there was a 'natural plastic look,' Robin Bush, the conference's vice- chair, took a Modernist position in calling for appropriateness and sound economics.[44] The discussion became irrelevant as bold and colourful sculptural designs emerged, and new plastic furniture became available in the commercial marketplace. In fact, Canadian manufacturers did not venture substantially into plastics because of the associated high production costs. The manufacturing industry remained more ensconced in wood production, which required less capital investment.

In 1970, Weiss purchased the former McMahon Carpet building at 41 May Street

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[43] Gotlieb and Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: Fifty Years from Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 20.
[44] Ibid., 20.

in Winnipeg, and became his own landlord.[45] The move to a larger facility, with significantly better manufacturing capabilities, afforded him the opportunity to re-brand the *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company*.[46] He changed the name to *Philip Weiss Limited*, and became a strictly commercial manufacturer. Weiss accepted residential commissions only from previous clients, designers or architects. This shift came when Weiss found that custom work for residential clients was fraught with difficulties. However, he enjoyed the challenge, and often added an element of irony or humour to his stories:

> A couple comes in and they want a sofa comfortable for both of them. She is five feet tall and he is six feet, two inches. I know that what she will like and find comfortable will not suit him, and vice-versa. They think I can accommodate both of them. I tell them, either she will need a cushion behind her to eat up the depth or he will have to be uncomfortable. I am not a miracle worker.[47]

One of the methods by which Weiss advertised his business was by staging at Winnipeg trade shows display settings of his recent work. He prided himself on showcasing the latest furniture pieces produced by his company.

[45] Winnipeg's May Street became Waterfront Drive.
[46] In 1972, Weiss received a federal 'development incentive grant' which enabled him to hire more than a dozen new employees. "City Firms Get Grants," *The Winnipeg Tribune* (June 1972).
[47] Conversation between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, 2006.

Figure 11 - The *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company's* display at a trade show held at the Winnipeg Inn, 1967. A set of *Tulip Chairs* is seen at bottom left, with Weiss's *Imperial Sofa* anchoring the setting. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

Figure 12 - Living room setting featuring upholstered pieces by *Hi-Grade Upholstery*, Winnipeg Inn, 1968. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

Figure 13 – Lounge system by *Philip Weiss, Limited*, at a trade show at the International Inn, Winnipeg, ca. 1976. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

A logo was designed which featured the first letters of Weiss's given and family surnames, PW, and incorporated a silhouette of a chair.[48] At this stage in his business, he was secure that his product was of excellent quality and, thus, had the confidence to use his own name as the company's identity. A new, full-colour company catalogue, "Introducing a Portfolio of Fine Furniture," was sent to various businesses, design, and architectural offices. Each item of furniture was named: The original *HG 65-20* became the *Tulip Chair* and Weiss's Lucite pieces were entitled *Illusion*.[49]

During his early years in Winnipeg, Weiss met John Hirsch, an orphan from Hungary. Years later, Hirsch co-founded the Manitoba Theatre Centre. The new theatre

[48] The creator of the logo was Winnipeg designer-illustrator, whom Weiss contracted to produce the 1976 catalogue for Philip Weiss, Limited.
[49] "*Introducing a Portfolio of Fine Furniture*." Catalogue of *Philip Weiss Limited*, Winnipeg, 1976. Collection of Philip Weiss.

complex was designed by Number Ten Architectural Group, and constructed in 1970. Weiss was pleased to win the commission for the manufacturing of the long, wood benches for its lobby.[50] It was one the first projects Weiss completed in his newly-expanded plant on May Street.

Figure 14 – Manitoba Theatre Centre's main lobby benches, ca. 1976, as produced by *Philip Weiss, Limited*. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

The 1960s and 1970s continued to be decades of development and growth. The University of Manitoba's Fort Garry Campus benefited. Historian John (Jack) Bumsted noted that:

> …[the 1960s was] in many ways the 'golden decade' at the U of M. It was a period of rapid growth – of buildings, of enrolment, of faculty, of

[50] Serena Kashavjee, ed., *Winnipeg Modern: Architecture 1945 to 1975* (Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 48.

budgets. Everywhere in Canada, there existed a psychology of growth.[51]

Weiss's archival material includes several large photographs which testify to his design work in the University Centre building at the Fort Garry Campus at the University of Manitoba in the early 1970s.[52] The project's chief architects were Isadore Coop,[53] R. Douglas Gillmor, and Carl R. Nelson, Jr., of Number Ten Architectural Group.[54] The design team, The IKOY Partnership, was Weiss's contact throughout the project.[55] While University Centre officially opened in September 1969,[56] Weiss's furniture was installed in 1971. The photographs in Weiss's collection depict various angles of the original students' lounge area, complete with his custom-made modular furniture units.

[51] John M. (Jack) Bumsted, *The University of Manitoba: An Illustrated History* (Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 148.
[52] Collection of Philip Weiss. University Centre is also known as the University of Manitoba Students' Union (UMSU) building.
[53] Coop studied in Chicago under Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.
[54] Interview with Cynthia Coop by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 10, 2011; Obituary, "Isadore Coop," *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 6, 2003.
[55] Taped interview with Margaret Stinson by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 20, 2011. Stinson stated that the IKOY interior design team for University Centre consisted of: Roy Izen , Stanley H. Osaka, James Yamashita, and Ron Keenberg; Correspondence from Ron Keenberg to Philip Weiss, 1971. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[56] Wayne Foster, *From Rural Parkland to Urban Centre: One Hundred Years of Growth at the University of Manitoba, 1877-1977* (Winnipeg, MB: Hyperion Press, 1978), 80. See also University of Manitoba Students' Union fonds at the University of Manitoba Archives.

Figure 15 – Soft-seating pieces known as *Obies* manufactured by *Philip Weiss, Limited*, for student use in the main lounge of University Centre, University of Manitoba, ca. 1973. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

The *Muffin Chair*, designed by Weiss in 1972, used two separate sections of foam for each seat and back module. These pieces were then connected with chrome brackets which joined the seat to the back. The foam-filled cushions were produced with divots or mini craters, which generated a more complicated upholstery process but also created an unusual look. The chairs, designed for relaxed seating, were lightweight, connectable, and flexible, with the seat height low to the ground. Weiss's product shows influences of the 1+1 modular seating series created in 1964 by Chris Sorenson, a Danish-born, Montreal-based designer. His foam modules with leather connecting straps could be opened to form ottomans or daybeds. Sorenson's modules were ordered by the University of Alberta for use in its Student Union Building.[57]

Figure 16 - *Muffin Chair*, designed and produced by *Philip Weiss, Limited*, as shown at the Interior Designers' Institute of Manitoba Trade exhibit, Winnipeg Inn, March 1973.[58] (Collection of Philip Weiss)

[57] Rachel Gotlieb and Cora Golden, *Design in Canada Since 1945: From Tea Kettles to Task Chairs*, 95.
[58] "Relax on Foam-Filled Cushions," *Winnipeg Free Press* (March 1973).

Weiss's considerable contract work for the University of Manitoba also included the furnishing of its Faculty Club. The chairs and sofas produced for this space are still in use, and were re-upholstered for the first time in 2010. This is indicative of the quality and longevity of Weiss's product.[59]

The Centennial Concert Hall's restaurant, *Downstairs at the Concert Hall*, was constructed in 1972.[60] Grant Marshall, the interior designer for the decidedly *avant-garde* project, worked with interior designer Phillip Moody, while Weiss produced the banquettes and upholstered club chairs on metal bases. The banquettes, Marshall notes, fit exactly between columns and were perfectly constructed. A design feature by Marshall was the display of photographs of performing artists as well as an enlarged version of a score from one of Winnipeg composer Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté's concertos. The well-designed and appointed restaurant closed after only two years.[61]

[59] Conversation between Lynn Chalmers and Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, 2011.
[60] The Winnipeg architectural and engineering firm of Smith Carter designed Centennial Concert Hall in 1967.
[61] Taped interview with Grant Marshall by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 19, 2011.

Figure 17 – *Downstairs at the Concert Hall Restaurant* as designed by *Grant Marshall Interiors*. The restaurant featured banquettes and upholstered club chairs on metal bases by *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company*, 1972. (Collection of Grant Marshall)

Figure 18 – View of Centennial Concert Hall's *Downstairs at the Concert Hall Restaurant*, 1972, which featured an enlarged wall version of a musical score by Winnipeg composer, Sophie-Carmen Eckhardt-Gramatté. (Collection of Grant Marshall)

In the early 1970s, Weiss increased his company's capacity to design and manufacture for commercial projects, especially for hotels and restaurants. He was involved in less creative contracts, but the work was of larger scope and allowed him to work outside of Manitoba.

> I construct one prototype and I ship it to the designer, architect, or client. They approve it or I make changes they specify. After they sign off on the final prototype, I build as many as they want. The hard part is the development of the first one, not the next 10, 50, or 100. I used to make one custom-designed sofa or chair, spend hours meeting with the designers and clients and then go over the details with the framer, cutter, and sewer. This was time I could never recoup in the sale of the product.[62]

The respect accorded Weiss's work, via the awards he won and casual peer reviews, motivated him to pursue work beyond Manitoba. For this thesis, the narrative of Weiss's career and business history is charted in a shorter timeline than the actual existence. The 1950s to the mid-1970s was the key period in its formation and trajectory. His arrival in Canada and the forging of his professional identity occurred in this time frame. The later history of Weiss's business included extensive work with Lakeview Hotels across Canada and in the United States, including hotel projects in Whistler, British Columbia, and in Breckenridge, Colorado. *Philip Weiss, Limited* ceased operations in Winnipeg in 2002 when he sold the building and its contents, and retired from the furniture industry.[63]

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[62] Conversation between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd, circa 1980s. Throughout her career as an interior designer, Winograd worked for and with her father, Philip Weiss. They often discussed his various projects and reminiscences. The last location of Philip Weiss, Limited, was on Ferry Road in Winnipeg.

[63] Recollection of Francie Winograd, July 14, 2011.

Chapter Five: Furnishing an Identity: An Analysis

Identity is a difficult term to characterize, as it has no single definition. The word identity comes from the Latin root word *Idem*, meaning same or identical. Yet, it reflects contrary descriptions of both uniformity and distinctiveness. No one has a singular or lone identity. Individuals hold various positions, are members of an assortment of groups, are adherents of various religions, and have individual traits.[1]

> An identity is a set of meanings that define who one is, when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group or claims a particular characteristic that identify him or her as a unique person.[2]

One may have numerous and various identities as one occupies different roles throughout one's life. The significance of identity is also in its connection, dependence upon, and relationship to society.[3] Identities are often multi-faceted in structure, with ethnicity being a significant feature which was made important either by the individual or by external circumstances. To interpret the choices they have made, individuals construct a narrative of the self, which gives a sense of order to complex lives.[4] This held true in the case of Philip Weiss. He lived various identities, held multiple stations, and had varying statuses. Some of these identities were certainly not of his choosing, but were forced upon him by others. Conversely, a number of his identities were self-selected. Identity can have little to do with the core or basic nature of a person but relates to how they imagine themselves within society or how society envisions them.

Sheldon Stryker, one of the leading American sociological theorists and

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[1] Steph Lawler, *Identity: Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge, GB: Polity Press, 2008), 2.
[2] Peter James Burke and Jan E. Stets, *Identity Theory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.
[3] David Gauntlett, *Media, Gender, and Identity: An Introduction* (Oxford, GB: Routledge, 2008), 108.
[4] Burke and Stets, *Identity Theory*, 5.

contributors to identity theory, believes that there is a corresponding identity to every person's assorted positions in life. Such "internalized positional designation" allows one to see one's self in that position or role. Stryker posits his theories of identity through the paths of changing loyalties or commitments to a particular identity, the course of identity development, and the prominence and importance of one's identity. He also notes that societal positions can be assimilated by the person and thereby influence their social contacts.[5]

As a young man in Poland, Weiss considered himself both Polish and Jewish, as well as a son and a brother. Any kind of identity was really his sense of self. As describe by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan:

> Self is a set of motivational processes with a variety of assimilatory and regulatory functions. In addition, the self does not simply reflect social forces. Rather, it represents intrinsic growth processes whose tendency is toward integration of one's own experience and action with one's self of relatedness to the selves of others.[6]

Weiss's identity was based upon relationships with his family, friends, home, and school. Emotions such as happiness or sadness were the primary parts of self. In his memoirs, Weiss shared that as a boy, he was shy, was not outspoken, was occasionally bullied, and loved hiking in the forests. His conduct, such as his indifferent attitude to many kinds of food, saved him during his incarceration. Weiss watched what he ate and because he was reticent, quiet, and kept to himself, he did not get much notice from the Nazis and, thus, he did not cause situations in which his life may have been ended.

As Hitler rose to power, he initiated a campaign of propaganda and hate based on

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[5] Ibid., 89.

[6] Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, "A Motivational Approach To Self: Integration in Personality," *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, Vol. 38 (Richard Dienstbier, ed.) (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990): 238.

an ideology which was adopted by a large number of people. To that end, Hitler established *The Nuremberg Laws on Citizenship and Race, Legalizing the Separation of the Jews from the German Race*, to determine who was or was not Jewish.[7] The categorization of men, women and children as Jewish was an integral part of the Nazi Party's initial process to destroy the entire race. The preliminary procedure of observable identification involved ordering every Jewish person to wear the yellow Star of David, a piece of cloth which was sewn onto their shirts or coats.[8] This was a visible, required badge of shame. Cultural scholars Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright note that:

> The capacity of images to affect us as viewers is dependent on the larger cultural meanings they invoke and the social, political and cultural contexts, in which they are viewed.[9]

The founders of semiotics were the American philosopher Charles Pierce in the nineteenth century and Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, at the beginning of the twentieth century.[10]

> The process of interpretation is derived from *semiotics*. Every time we interpret an image around us, whether consciously or not, we are using the tools of semiotics to understand its signification, or meaning.[11]

Roland Barthes, French literary theorist, offered a contemporary application to both Pierce's and Saussure's use of semiotics. Barthes' study remains one of the most essential and influential in the understanding of signifying units and sign systems. Images may also be produced within the dynamics of social power and ideology, which

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[7] Peter Wyden, *The Hitler Virus*. (New York, NY: Arcade Publishing, 2001), 80.
[8] Nelly Toll, *Without Surrender: Art of the Holocaust* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 1978), 28.
[9] Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*: *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25.
[10] Ibid., 28.
[11] Ibid., 28.

can be both harmful and constructive. The word 'ideology'[12] is often linked with propaganda, a term connected with negative connotations. Propaganda can use a method of false representation and attract people to a viewpoint through pretense and deception.[13] A significant example of this was the Nazi's manipulation of documentary cinema. One of the most powerful propaganda films was made by Leni Riefenstahl, a German director working for the Nazis. It documents a Nazi rally, choreographed to appear as if the whole German nation fully supported him.[14] Barthes formulated the theory that the representation or image, together with its connotation or meaning, forms the sign.

A sign is often contextual. For example, when we see a pink ribbon today, we immediately think of the campaign for breast cancer. Yet, in Nazi Europe, those deemed homosexual were forced to wear a pink badge to signify their sexual orientation, just as the yellow Star of David was an instantly recognizable signifier of those of Jewish descent. Numbers, symbols or letters tattooed on a young person's arm today would be just that. If one had knowledge of the Second World War and met someone in their 80s or 90s with numbers tattooed on their forearm, it would be clear that the individual was a survivor of the Holocaust concentration camp system. The theory of signs is a system for understanding images, yet the construal of the image is dependent upon the situation and can have different signification.[15]

When Weiss became a concentration camp inmate in Nazi Europe, he was stripped of his identity as a human being. As part of the Nazi *modus operandi*, internees

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[12] The *Oxford Dictionary* terms ideology as the "science of ideas, visionary speculation, ideas at the basis of some economic or political theory or system."
[13] Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, 21.
[14] Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking, 162*. For further reading on Leni Riefenstahl, see Audrey Salkeld, *A Portrait of Leni Riefenstahl* (London, GB: Random House, 1996).
[15] Ibid., 29.

became a number, a statistic, a signifier of being less than human. Any individual classification to which one belonged was removed. All cluster groups, particularly Jews, homosexuals, and the mentally or physically challenged, were viewed by the Nazis as pariahs with distinctive designations. Internees' heads were shaven, they were given the same striped uniform and their identifying numbers were tattooed on their arms. The internees became *persona non grata,* literally and figuratively, voiceless, faceless and nameless within the concentration camp system throughout Europe. Prisoners had no sense or expectations of what may transpire, as there was no precedent to this life or events in the concentration camp.[16] Weiss's autobiography, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, was published in the last year of his life. Despite the passage of more than six decades, the stripping of his identity remained clear:

> From the time of landing in Plaszow, then Wieliczka, and later on in Mauthausen, I did not possess a belt, underwear, socks, shoes, toothbrush, toothpaste, and any toilet paper. I also did not have any soap, or a comb, although I did not need one because my hair was shaved off…We were given our striped uniforms and wooden clogs (unmatched). At this moment we became full-fledged Mauthausen inmates. Now every day consisted of the same routine: assembly in the early morning, bread, coffee, margarine, work until noon, a meal break consisting of soup (dark water), bread, sometimes marmalade, then work until six, again a ration of bread and coffee and sometimes a piece of cheese.[17]

There is extensive literature on concentration camp survivor history: the difficulties in adapting to their new-found freedom, their efforts to forget their past, and the challenge of forging new lives in unfamiliar countries after their indescribable experiences.[18]

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[16] Eric S. Mankowski and Julian Rappaport. "Stories, Identity and the Psychological Sense of Community," in Robert S. Wyer, Jr., ed., *Advances in Social Cognition* (Vol. 8, 211-226). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1995, 217.
[17] Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt*, 33, 37.
[18] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. New Haven, CT, and London, GB: Yale University Press, 1991), 9.

One year after Weiss was liberated from Mauthausen, the Nazi concentration camp located on the outskirts of Linz, Austria, he began working for the American Red Cross. The Society was a recognizable symbol of assistance, trust, and integrity, and was one of the first groups which provided kindness and stability to Weiss. He was issued a 'Member's Identity Card' in July 1947. This document contained his photograph and signature. On its cover was printed, 'Self-Aid of the Jewish former Concentration Camp Inmates of Upper Austria.'

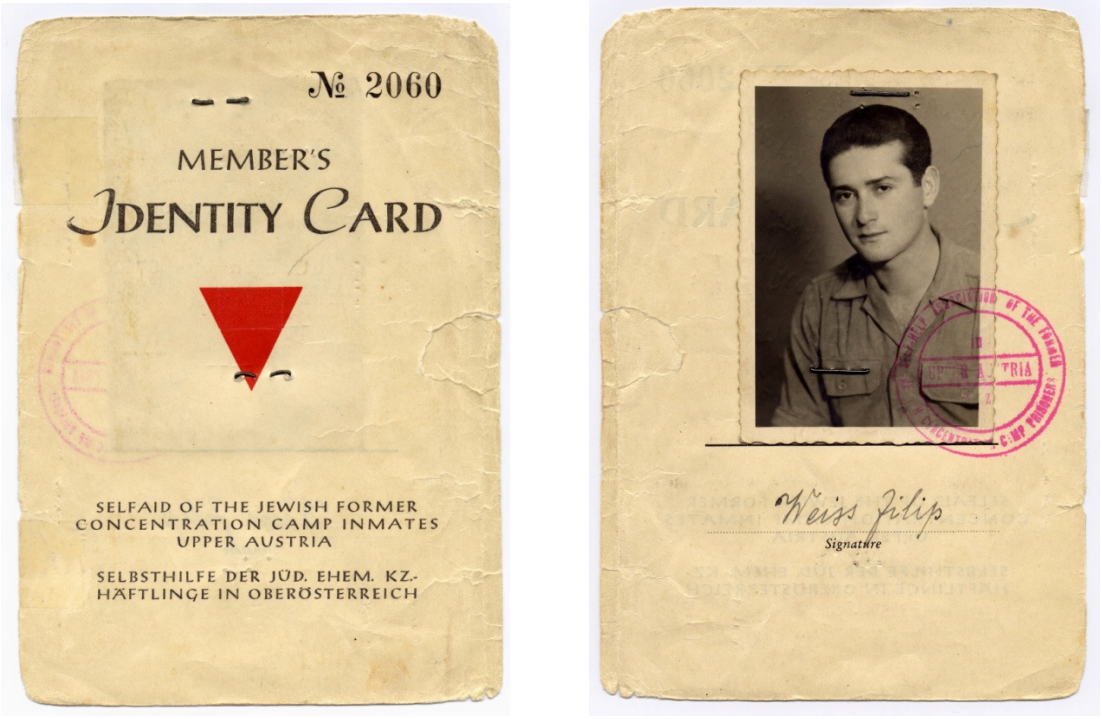

Figure 19 – Philip Weiss's "Member's Identity Card" issued in Austria in 1947. The photograph was taken in 1945, shortly after he was liberated from the Mauthausen concentration camp. (Collection of Philip Weiss)

This was a provisional identification card for internees of Mauthausen, produced as temporary identification for detainees after liberation.[19] Weiss was then considered a

[19] 'Member's Identity Card**,** Self-Aid of the Jewish Former Concentration Camp Inmates, Upper Austria.' Weiss's card was number 2060, and was issued in 1946 in Austria in the name of Filip Weiss. (Collection of Philip Weiss).

'former' concentration camp internee, another marker in his history of identities, and a status and identification he would never discard. In his book on oral testimony of Holocaust survivors, Lawrence Langer discusses the forms and function of memory.[20] Although individual stories are diverse, common threats unite the narratives. Recurrent memories include: anguish, courage, fear, futility, hope, loneliness, and survival.

The surviving documentation from Weiss's work with the American Red Cross Society mentions his 'above average intellect,' and his strong work ethic.[21] This is an early sign of the strengths which would carry him through his long life. Once Weiss's work with the Red Cross was completed, he made the journey to what would become his new home in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. He was at once a member of the immigrant group and of the Jewish concentration camp survivor group. The friends Weiss made and the social circles in which he moved in his early Canadian years were comprised of either survivors or émigrés, just like him. This is how he was seen by others and how he identified himself. As he was growing up, most of Weiss's peers and friends were of similar backgrounds, mainly Polish and usually not many from other backgrounds.[22] It has been discussed in the literature that community and cultural-based narratives often do not characterize or differentiate the individuals' own experiences. Their own particular personality is often suppressed by group norms. As noted by social psychologist Eric Mankowski, survivors' identities became symbiotic with the aspects of the identity they represented, such as an immigrant or survivor group.[23]

The internees who survived the war and came to Canada were from diverse walks

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[20] Lawrence L. Langer, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, 9.
[21] The documentation consists of approximately six letters of reference from various officials. (Collection of Philip Weiss).
[22] Recollections of Philip Weiss by Francie Winograd, 2011.
[23] Mankowski and Rappaport. "Stories, Identity and the Psychological Sense of Community," 217.

of life and many disparate countries. The entire group was classified under one umbrella as survivors and displaced persons, without reflection on their prior lives, their education levels, or even their individual stories. They found themselves with a universal collective description, knowing that although they were framed as one group, they were individuals striving for their own particular legacy. Prior to the Second World War, in their countries of origin, Weiss and most others were individuals with skill sets and capabilities. Some were from the intelligentsia while others had simple academic knowledge. Yet, upon arrival in a new home such as Canada, they all received similar labels from co-workers, neighbours, and sometimes even by their own community. They were considered a lower class than 'real' Canadians. Such treatment, unfortunately, continues to categorize or otherwise socially marginalize immigrants. In 2011, a national newspaper ran a feature story on Bharati Mukherjee, who was born into a well-to-do family in India. As a young Bahraini woman she had immigrated to Canada but left the country 30 years ago in frustration when she was perceived as being less of a person and certainly one with no viable status. "I hadn't yet accepted and still haven't accepted social demotion as a consequence of immigration,"[24] Mukherjee stated.

Émigrés were not only foreigners but orphans as well, not at home in their new home, and with no discernible home to go to. This sense of dislocation and alienation is discussed by memoirist Eva Hoffman, whose parents escaped Nazi persecution by hiding for years in Ukraine. She has written extensively about the implications of survivors' experiences. She observed:

[24] John Barber discussed 'social demotion' in "Pioneers of the Cross-Cultural Landscape." *The Globe and Mail*, Arts Section (Toronto, June 15, 2011), Cover, section R.

> Identities are malleable and multidimensional and although we not only define ourselves, we are also defined by circumstances, culture and perceptions of others and most of all, the force of an internalized past.[25]

In the case of a large number of émigrés who came to Canada following the cessation of the Second World War, their ability, or even desire to, attach memory to their ancestral home, was gone. There were no furnishings, photographs, papers, objects, or art work to pass from one generation to another, and no existent reference point with items from one's own past. Many émigrés arrived with virtually no personal possessions except for their passports and other identification papers. They may have possessed a few material items, purchased after the war, or something they received from their sponsoring families or communities upon arrival. However, in the absence of tangible reminders of their past, the émigrés' motivation to be modern was greater for those families which had no generational record of inherited forms.[26]

When Weiss arrived in Canada, he carried only personal documents and no tangible reminders of his heritage such as property, furnishings, or heirlooms. This was distinctly different from the immigrants who left ancestral homes in secure lands and found permanence, whether from inherited material goods. The Jewish people were wanderers who had been exiled from many countries. During the Second World War, any form of asset, property and objects especially, were confiscated by the Nazis. As sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has advanced, the upper classes have always had a preference for antique products, which may directly represent family continuity through inheritance.

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[25] Eva Hoffman. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust (*New York, NY: Public Affairs Press, 2004), 24.

[26] The notion of 'inherited forms' was discussed by Joy Parr in *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Post-War Years*, 185.

> …every material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance. Family heirlooms not only bear witness to the age and continuity if the lineage and so consecrate its social identity, which is inseparable from permanence over time.[27]

When Weiss founded his upholstery business in 1952 and, later, when he became a furniture designer, few companies in the city of Winnipeg had by then ventured into contemporary design. Most preferred the conservative, more traditional designs and products, the 'permanence' discussed by Bourdieau. The dichotomy between Europeans who had no intention of continuing the centuries-old traditions versus those who held strong to the long-established art form of hand-carved furniture was emphasized by two Manitoba firms.

Best-known of the traditionalists was the *Villarboito Company*, located at 401 Youville Street in St. Boniface. It produced heirloom pieces carved with designs dating to Louis XV or Victorian periods. These elegant, intricately hand-carved Honduras mahogany furnishings were the antithesis of anything resembling Modern but were highly sought after by Winnipeg's elite who desired this particular style and historical inheritance.[28]

The other well-known company was *Cramer's Fine Furniture* at 1164 Main Street in Winnipeg. Although less intricate in style than the Villarboito brothers' creations, Philip Cramer and his son, Louis, also produced traditional furniture. Both worked in mahogany and walnut woods. Ultimately, with no apprentice carvers to carry on their

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[27] Pierre Bourdieu (Richard Nice, transl.), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 76-77.

[28] The Villarboito Company was operated by three brothers: Pietro, Oreste, and Melchior, all of whom immigrated to Winnipeg from Albano, Vercellese, Italy, in the early part of the 20th century. Telpner, Gene, "Veterans of a Dying Art: These Local Craftsmen Work With Skilful Hands to Make Fine Furniture," *Winnipeg Free Press* (February 22, 1958), 29-30; Kennedy, Margaret, "Hand-Carved Furniture: Local Firm Vies with Space Age to Salvage an Ageless Art Form," Leisure Magazine, *Winnipeg Free Press (*October 7, 1967), 3; Research on Villarboito and Cramer families and companies by John Richthammer (2001-2011).

legacies, the Villarboito and Cramer companies and the golden age of traditionalist, custom furniture manufacturing in Manitoba faded away.[29]

In an effort to eschew the traditional position, Weiss placed emphasis on the new and the progressive form of furniture. He recognized and felt comfortable with working in the more intellectual and *avant-garde* side of Modernism, as it essentially mirrored his belief in hope and optimism within his new-found life. [30]

The symbiotic relationship between Modernism, its attachment to cultured contemplation, and fabrication with original materials within a simple methodology, was natural for Weiss. There was satisfaction with the clean lines, the unadorned, and the non-mimetic nature of modern product. Historian Joy Parr concurs:

> The will to 'be modern' was felt acutely in the post-war years. People who came out of the Depression did not see the past as particularly desirable. If you look at the styles of the Depression, Duncan Phyffe, Chippendale, dark mahogany, it had all the connotation of what we wanted to put behind us. Somehow the thought of your living room being furnished with this was to identify with that era…rather stodgy, over-decorated, not bright, not exciting, not original.[31]

Considered an *avant-garde* movement, Modernism usually indicated a desire to attain an experience in an alternative-to-mainstream culture. Most Modernist movements shared in the common beliefs of distancing the past, questioning of traditions, and embracing abstraction over realism.[32] Weiss was born into a middle class family; his father, Solomon, was in the clothing design business. Since he had a promising early education, he might have anticipated continuing on to university. Modernism allowed

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[29] Villarboito produced only custom-made furnishings so each piece was slightly different from another. As the Villarboito brothers died, their designers and carvers, Carlo Fusetti and Karl Bundt, eventually operated the business until its closure circa 1971.
[30] Recollections of Philip Weiss by Francie Winograd, 2011.
[31] Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Post-War Years* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 182.
[32] Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 360.

him to position himself as a manufacturer within a distinctive, contemporary movement, different from the group identity placed upon him by his refugee status. Weiss valued the sophisticated wishes of Winnipeg Modernists and delighted in producing furniture which held their attention and appreciation. Sturken and Cartwright suggest:

> Taste, however, is not just a matter of individual interpretation. Rather, taste is informed by experiences relating to one's class, cultural background, education, and other aspects of identity. Taste, thus, can be a marker of education and an awareness of elite cultural values.[33]

Weiss's affinity for Modernism and the realization that a connection had formed, created a new, distinctive identity for Weiss. The Modernist vocabulary gave him a sense of confidence, a special position in society, separate from his traditional associations. The patrons, designers, and architects accepted Weiss for his knowledge, individual expertise, and talents:

> In everything he did, there was not only the craftsman's attention to detail, but the eye of an artist. His aesthetic self complemented his character. His productions, both material and literary, were meticulous, clean, and elegant. He would never embellish a surface to disguise an underlying structural weakness. The foundation had to be solid and true.[34]

Commitment to one's identity, observed cultural historians Peter Burke and Jan Stets, includes the value and respect one receives from one particular identity which might ultimately be the prominent one or the ideal self.[35]

In 1965, Weiss submitted a chair design, his first product for professional review, to the Manitoba Design Institute. Thus began his long affinity for and highly-valued relationship with the design community. The newly-formed connection to designers and architects positioned him in an elite group, within the commercial and residential

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[33] Ibid., 48.
[34] Bryan Schwartz, *Eulogy, Philip Weiss*, Shaarey Zedek Synagogue, Winnipeg, September 5, 2008.
[35] Burke and Stets, *Identity Theory*, 40.

furniture marketplace, in Winnipeg.[36] The furniture objects Weiss designed and for which he won awards served to mirror the self, or were an expression of the self he envisioned.[37] Galen Cranz, an authority on furniture design, suggests that the chair's evolutionary direction has not only been focused toward the sensible or practical but also by the designation of status. She asserts:

> What is true of the chair is true of all the artifacts we create. We design them, but once built they shape us. The chair offers a glimpse into our collective ideas about status and honor, comfort and order, beauty and efficiency, discipline and relaxation. A chair can also come to stand for a whole person or to express a person's individuality.[38]

Cranz's discourse on the consumer of the chair and on how it may mirror one's identity is similar to the ways in which furniture speaks about its designer. Chairs held an interest for designers as they were products which satisfied, as in 'this is me and what I like.'

Regarded by his peers as a successful contemporary furniture designer and manufacturer, supplier and consultant to the architects and designers, Weiss had solidified his new Canadian identity. Cultural analysis demonstrates how the participation of the object, manufactures significance when examined and analyzed. Mieke Bal refers to a 'close reading' which one can use to uncover a potential association between concept and object.[39] Weiss's pedestal base chair was not simply an object: it had a meaning. In semiotic terms, the object (sign) conveyed meaning (signifier). The object immediately conveys a message. Weiss was designating his position, stating in no uncertain terms that

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[36] Conversations between Philip Weiss and Francie Winograd. See also his autobiography.
[37] Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Post-War Years*, 181.
[38] Galen Cranz, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body, and Design* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), 15-16.
[39] Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 9.

he was not a traditionalist. As Baudrillard observes, objects have no inherent meanings but they do have certain connotations and can signify an identity.[40]

Although it was his significant identity at the time, 'furniture manufacturer' did not become Weiss's only identity. In 1966, he was invited by the German government to testify in the court proceedings in Bremen against Friedrich Hildebrandt, who had been a high ranking officer of the Schutzstaffel (SS).[41] After Weiss's testimony at this war crimes tribunal, held that October, he was approached by Renate Reinke. She introduced herself and disclosed that she had been a member of the Hitler youth group and that her father had been an SS officer. Reinke appeared daily at the criminal proceedings to gather material for a book she planned to write about Hildebrandt, and Weiss's home town of Drohobycz, Poland.[42] Weiss contemplated Reinke's past juxtaposed against her role of humanitarian. Her courage to speak out and write against her country and family left an unforgettable impression upon him.

Meeting Reinke changed Weiss's life and focus.[43] On what was his first and last trip to Germany, he resolved to educate others in Manitoba, especially the youth, about the years of terror of the Second World War. Concurrently with the operation of a flourishing business, Weiss devoted himself to Holocaust education as an author and speaker. After seeing the film *Schindler's List*, produced and directed by Steven Spielberg, Weiss felt that it was the ideal vehicle by which to educate students about the Holocaust. The film recreated Plaszov, which, coincidentally, was the first concentration

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[40] Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press, 1981), 66.
[41] Friedrich Hildebrandt was hanged in 1948 for war crimes.
[42] Philip Weiss, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays* , 45. Renate Reinke's book is entitled *Antworte Mensch!* [*Answer Man!*] (Bremen, Germany: Schwiefert-Verlag, 1968), 2.
[43] Correspondence from Renate Reinke to Weiss, 1966. Collection of Philip Weiss.

camp in which Weiss was interned after being separated from his brother, Leo. He notified numerous schools of his plan, solicited their interest, and personally rented movie theatres so as many students as possible could see *Schindler's List*.[44]

Weiss was gratified to know this gesture had enlightened some of the uninformed. Even into his 80s, he later travelled to small towns in Manitoba to speak to students, and to the Holocaust Education Center in Washington, D.C., for the remaining years of his life.

> Philip believed that his mission as a survivor of the Holocaust was to bear witness. The truth must be told about the destruction, and more than that, about who and what was destroyed; about the lives and hopes that preceded the terror. He was haunted by the fear the individual identity of many who perished would be forever lost to memory.[45]

In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer focus on various aspects of the story, such as ordering, directions, and possibilities in their theory of the narrative. Weiss's unfolding story followed a path which allowed him to reflect on his past while shaping the narrative of his life through action and words. Walter Fisher believes that individuals are storytellers or narrative beings and their tales are a progression of continuing narratives. He suggests:

> A significant feature for compelling stories is that they provide a rationale for decision and action. As such, they not only constrain behaviors, they also determine it.[46]

Ultimately, Weiss educated thousands of young Canadians about the Holocaust. This was done for the singular purpose of sharing his knowledge with a younger generation, and not for any acclaim or attention. Indeed, during a large, formal dinner in

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[44] Weiss rented the film *Shindler's List* in 1994 from the Canadian Forces Base in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He subsequently had the film shown in cinemas across the city. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[45] Schwartz, *Eulogy, Philip Weiss*, 2008.
[46] Walter R. Fisher, "The Narrative Paradigm: An Elaboration." *Communication Monographs* 51 (December 1985): 364.

his honour, Weiss was surprised and pleased to receive a personal letter from Steven Spielberg. The eminent director wrote:

> Mr. Weiss, your commitment and your action are inspirational. G-d [God] bless you for the work you've done and continue to do, and for the impact you've made in ensuring that the events of the Shoah are never forgotten – that the world listens, and learns from a darker past.[47]

In his role as president of the Winnipeg Holocaust Remembrance Committee and with the Jewish community council, Weiss was instrumental in successfully lobbying the Government of Manitoba to erect a permanent Holocaust memorial on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature. When it was dedicated in 1990, the monument was the first of its kind erected on public property in Canada. Under Weiss's and the committee's direction, the requirements emphasized the wish that it be based on simplicity, without unnecessary embellishment and ornamentation.[48] The preference Weiss held for a marked lack of ornamental clutter had its roots in the paradoxical words of the influential architect Le Corbusier, who wrote: "Modern decorative art is not decorated."[49] Weiss remained true to the Modernist principles of "less is more."

Alec Katz, a Manitoba architect, designed a simple yet stirring monument which greatly impressed Weiss and the committee.[50] The eight-foot high Modernist-inspired memorial is in the shape of a 'broken' six-sided Star of David, and features seven polished black granite panels inscribed alphabetically with the names of over 3500 Holocaust victims.[51]

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[47] Correspondence from Steven Spielberg, Universal City, California, to Philip Weiss, ca. 1990s. Collection of Philip Weiss.
[48] Recollections of Philip Weiss to Francie Winograd, circa 1980s.
[49] George H. Marcus, *Masters of Modern Design: A Critical Assessment* (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2005), 65.
[50] Alec Katz was born after the Second World War to Holocaust survivors.
[51] The Manitoba Holocaust Memorial was dedicated in September 1990 (*Jewish Post and News*, September 19, 1990).

Philip Weiss, Limited closed in 2002. At age 80 and after fifty years of operating a busy, creative, and rewarding furniture manufacturing company, Weiss felt it was time to devote even more time to Holocaust education, and to spend as much time as possible with his family. Many of the original prototypes he created for various offices and government buildings, as well as his award-winning pieces from the 1960s and 1970s were still in the factory showroom prior to closing but most were eventually sold. These pieces meant something to him after all those years and he kept them not only for posterity but because they were his creations, his hard work, and his identity.[52] Weiss's black leather tub chair on a chrome pedestal base was his foundational piece of furniture. The chair signified the beginning of an innovative approach to his business, and the merging of industry with designers and architects.

Michael Cox, former head of the Department of Interior Design at the University of Manitoba, recalls Weiss's sense of design proportion as being impeccable. Cox pointed out that the sofa in his Winnipeg living room, constructed by Weiss over 30 years earlier, remains in original condition, except for the upholstery, and remains a 'perfect example' of Modernist design principles.[53] Cox described the proportions and scale of the sofa as perfect for his room. It was shallow in depth but exceptionally comfortable.

Dianne Jackman, an interior designer and retired educator in the Department of Interior Design at the University of Manitoba, worked with Weiss on many projects. She expressed her belief that the best work done by interior designers was always via team collaboration. There was the need to rely on contractors, trades people, and suppliers for

[52] Recollections of Francie Winograd, 2011.
[53] Taped interview with Michael Cox by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, May 17, 2011. He received his Bachelor of Interior Design in 1969 from the University of Manitoba, and is a former Dean of the Faculty of Architecture. Apart from his design and academic career, Cox is also a painter.

their cumulative knowledge and skill sets. She calls Weiss her "go to man" for furniture for various and varied projects. He had the understanding of how to construct the furniture as well as an appreciation of the 'hand' and malleability of the fabric. "I relied on him to steer me correctly, and I trusted him," she said.[54]

Grant Marshall relates that, "Weiss could understand what the designer was envisioning and how to construct the piece of furniture to their specifications or sketches."[55] As discussed in Chapter Four, Marshall was a catalyst for Weiss's business. He provided numerous contracts, mainly residential projects. Marshall had many clients interested in purchasing custom-made products, specifically-designed and constructed for them. Weiss was able to manufacture these creations. Self-educated, with expertise in his field, his products were lauded by many of the people for whom he manufactured. Marshall also mentioned that he was exceptionally pleased with Weiss's work and artistic sensibility.

Still the epitome of an impeccably-groomed European gentleman, Weiss died at age 86 in Winnipeg on September 3, 2008.[56] Until his last days, he read, wrote, spoke to youth and adult groups, and worked toward a greater cooperation between all citizens.

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[54] Taped interview with Dianne Jackman by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, July 7, 2011.
[55] Taped interview with Grant Marshall by Francie Winograd, Winnipeg, April 26, 2011.
[56] Weiss's death was widely noted by the media. Among others, a tribute appeared in *The Globe and Mail* ("Lives Lived," by Allan Levine, December 22, 2008). Weiss' son-in-law Bryan Schwartz delivered the *Eulogy* on September 5, 2008 at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue, Winnipeg. See: http://bryan-schwartz.com

Figure 20 – Philip Weiss at age 81 in his condominium in Winnipeg, ca. 2002. (Weiss Family Collection)

Conclusion

It is evident throughout the various areas of design and the arts, from painting to literature, to architecture, that Modernism constituted a radical break with the past. The Modernist movement eschewed inherited notions of the traditional, and instead centred on simplicity, geometry, and originality of forms. There was a negation of ornament, historical facades, and a focus strong on fundamentals of conceptualism, and accessibility. The Modernist ideology, beliefs, and tenets became a perfect vehicle for many groups of people of various ethnicities, cultures, and countries.

The construction of identity or "furnishing an identity" is the main thematic structure of this thesis. The Jewish connection to Modernism is a subtext to the narrative of Philip Weiss. The Nazi ideology stifled Modernism, *avant-garde* thought, and any artistic form of abstraction. While he was not yet a Modernist designer, Weiss was sentenced, under Nazi rule, to slavery and an existence of exceptional hardships in the camps. After being liberated from the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria in 1945, he journeyed to Winnipeg with much uncertainty about his life but an appreciation of the prospect of a future.

Identity can be dynamic and changing amid situations in an individual's life. Additionally, most individuals have various identities throughout their lives, some that characterize, others that distinguish, and those which situate and define. Present are external forces that might control identity and past experiences that can influence identity. All people have individual, collective, and cultural identities. Weiss's identity in the thesis is offered through narrative analysis, an account of his past, the establishment of his business, and the development of his reputation for excellence and

quality of product. The story situates his experiences, which in turn allows the reader to arrive at an understanding of how Modernism shaped his business direction and assisted him in the creation of identity.

Weiss was part of the "tailors' project" which brought tailors and their families to Canada following the Second World War. During their first year in Canada, they worked in factories to repay the cost of their passage. When he began his employment in a clothing manufacturing plant, Weiss made friendships with a few individuals in the clothing manufacturing plant where they all worked. However, Weiss continuing as a career factory worker, given his family background and educational level prior to the war, was unlikely. The labour, which was neither interesting nor stimulating, was demeaning to an educated young man. In fact, it motivated him to improve his circumstances.

Pierre Bourdieu's theories about cultural capital illuminate the likelihood that Weiss's capital was already invested at the time of his internment. He most likely had expectations based on his middle-class background, and an innate sense of where he wanted to be. After the Second World War, Weiss worked to actively attain the place where he experienced contentment with the professional respect afforded to him. Working with design professionals, combined with the recognition achieved through the Manitoba Design Institute competitions, developed a high level of self-esteem and a sense of self-worth in Weiss. When he entered his chairs in the Institute's competitions, Weiss was introduced to other professionals in his field and, thus, became part of a community of manufacturers with similar goals. Operating within the Modernist ideology in the field of furniture design, mirrored his own attraction to the philosophy of

abstraction, and minimal ornamentation. Weiss used his limited financial assets to press forward and position himself distinctively in an environment which furnished him a level of status. Weiss was no longer socially demoted. He was no longer the survivor of war or the displaced person or immigrant anymore. Weiss's identity was incrementally being constructed as a respected furniture designer and manufacturer.

When he received the commission to produce some of the contemporary furniture pieces for the new School of Architecture building at the University of Manitoba in 1959, Weiss became immersed in the world of design. He felt he was considered knowledgeable and qualified because the business was growing. More designers and architects approached Weiss with larger and more complicated projects and new business opportunities grew.

Weiss meticulously kept the letters of commendation he received while working for the American Red Cross in Austria, as well as all the important identity cards and documents issued after his liberation. Weiss's Red Cross supervisors, who entrusted him with stores of food, cigarettes, and vital supplies for the entire displaced persons' camp, described him as having above-average intelligence and an excellent work ethic, which resulted in his in promotion to positions of authority, significant at the time. These positive endorsements played integral roles in forming and framing Weiss's approach to business.

Later correspondence written by designers and architects also helped to construct and illuminate Weiss's identity. They accentuated their appreciation for his technical and design expertise, and the quality of execution. In interviews with Grant Marshall, Michael Cox, Margaret Stinson, and Dianne Jackman, the designers all spoke about the

traits that Weiss represented professionally. They remarked on Weiss's skill with proportions of furniture, his knowledge of construction of complicated pieces of furniture, and his perceptiveness about fabrics. Most importantly, he understood and appreciated their designs, loved new challenges, and enjoyed working with professionals and their clients to supply a product with which all would be proud.

Weiss was never interested in the product only for the sake of monetary remuneration. The Province of Manitoba's Department of Industry & Commerce magazine, Weiss's *Tub Chair*, his first entry into the Manitoba Design Institute's annual competition, was a product was of exceptional quality for a reasonable price. In the creation of his identity, he was more interested in approval from the design community in the form of respect for his knowledge and capability, repeat business and satisfaction with his product. Weiss also wanted to ensure that clients received good value.

The establishment of Weiss's *Hi-Grade Upholstery Company* was his most significant achievement in the early years. For Weiss, that identity was integral to his personal and family life, his business persona, and to his drive and dynamism**.** He worked exceptionally hard to create a future for himself and his family. This was a different form of survival, one over which he had control. Weiss was intent on demonstrating his honesty, integrity, ability, and work ethic, which was the identifying foundation for his personal and business model throughout his career. He had endured and survived the incredible hardships of war; there was no doubt he was going to create a future.

In his early years, Weiss worked to launch a business showcasing quality products. Later, he enjoyed approval from the architecture, business, and design

communities; all appreciated the design, expertise, and knowledge with which he characteristically imbued his work. Although he distanced himself from historical forms, Weiss's connection to his past always re-emerged on the path he travelled while furnishing his identity. By the early 1970s, as *Philip Weiss Ltd*., he trusted his own name to signify the excellence and value in his product, as well as customer trust in a company.

After testifying at a war crimes tribunal in Europe, Weiss returned to Winnipeg and became a Holocaust educator. The years he spent in Nazi camps were central to his identity, an aspect which shaped his beliefs and thoughts. What transpired during those years defined his being, until his death. Weiss related his life in the camps to his life in Winnipeg, from his personal distaste of striped pajamas, which resembled his concentration camp uniform, to buffet food lines**,** which reminded him of how food was provided in the camps. Fundamentally, a new identity became dynamic only when his primary business identity was secure. Early in his career, few people he worked with in the business community were privy to his background. The professional group of designers and architects with which he associated positioned him outside his past as émigré, yet still offered him an entrance into the business world. He had two separate and distinctive identities, overlapping and working in tandem. From 1950 to 1966, his business identity eclipsed the more silent survivor self, while after 1970, the side of educator and witness to the past emerged as predominant. Conceivably, to him, this last identification as Holocaust educator remained his enduring one. Weiss had already secured his place in the furniture industry. With that knowledge, he devoted more time to the complex and difficult undertaking of speaking extensively about his past.

> Philip had no institutional haven, no university or institute, to support his intellectual work. He had to live in the practical business world as well as in the realm of ideas and fundamental belief…He came to a new country, starting with nothing, a stranger to the language and the culture, and created a small furniture-making business…He had to start over again more than once, but, as in all things within his control, he overcame all the obstacles and disappointments.[1]

After many years of personal scholarship, Weiss enjoyed the unexpected reward of receiving an Honourary Doctor of Laws from the University of Winnipeg, for excellence as a Holocaust educator. From his arrival in Winnipeg as an émigré in 1948, his schooling truncated by the Second World War, to standing in the robes of academia before a university community, was a very proud moment in his eight decades of life.

The Holocaust was instrumental in Philip Weiss's life and way of life, but the persona he forged of furniture designer and manufacturer situated him in the milieu into which he worked so hard to gain admission. This was a world of style he appreciated, a world of business enterprise he valued, and a world which identified him in the way he wanted to be seen. He was where he belonged.

Perhaps, had his life been ordinary, he would have been more ordinary. Against all odds, he was liberated, reunited with an intact family, and arrived in Canada with only his identity papers. He was given a new life and he created a new one. There was no doubt he was going to furnish an identity.

[1] Bryan Schwartz, *Eulogy, Philip Weiss*, Shaarey Zedek Synagogue, Winnipeg, September 5, 2008.

Appendix I – Interview Questions Posed to Design Practitioners

Open-ended interview questions with various practitioners in the design community, concerning Modernist design in Winnipeg, Manitoba, during the 1950s and 1960s.

1. What is your name and educational background?
2. From which university did you receive your degree(s)?
3. Describe the design climate in Winnipeg in the early years of your career.
4. How did you start your career and/or business in Winnipeg? Describe the influences at the time in design, business, technology, government involvement and opportunities?
5. How did you get so involved in modernist or contemporary design? What were the major influences?
6. Did the Modernist paradigm play out larger in the commercial sector that in the residential sector?
7. Do you believe that modern has no memory of heritage or past? Was there a battle between traditional and contemporary?
8. Canada was an industrial machine in the early 1950s and 1960s. How did the productivity as well as manufacturing impact Winnipeg and design here?
9. What was and is your perception of Canadian design? Was there a nationally distinctive design during your formative career years, other than Bauhaus?
10. Describe the design culture of this era, as in the furniture stores in the city what they sold as well as the importance of the department store.
11. There certainly was not the ready-made furniture in the past as there is today. Philip Weiss was involved with many designers in Winnipeg in various areas of construction and production of furniture, both commercially and residentially.
12. Describe what you recollect about his business and the custom furniture industry in Winnipeg.
13. What can you tell me about the Manitoba Design Institute, its importance in the design community, and the significance of the awards it presented to individuals?
14. The annual Manitoba Design Show, held at various locations in the city, was an important and meaningful event in Winnipeg. What knowledge can you impart about the shows, how you remember them, and the importance they played in the design community?
15. The Modernist paradigm has reentered the design world with a vengeance. Is it interesting for you to see the resurgence of this brand of furniture? Why did it lay dormant for a while and why do you think it has resurfaced with such power?
16. What thoughts do you have about the design world of today?

Appendix II - Interview Consent Form

University of Manitoba

Department of Interior Design

Faculty of Architecture

Research Project Title: *Furnishing an Identity: Philip Weiss, An Ėmigrés Contribution to Modernist Furniture Design in Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1950-1975*

Researcher: Francis R. (Francie) Winograd

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

My Master's thesis is about contemporary furniture design in Winnipeg, after 1950, with specific reference to Philip Weiss, a European émigré. I would like to trace the history of the Modernist design in Winnipeg. Your knowledge of the history of design in the community during this time period is very significant to my research.

1. I would like to set up one or two interviews with you, for about two hours each.

2. I do not anticipate any risk.

3. I will be using a recording device when I am interviewing you, so this interview will be recorded and transcribed. My professors and committee will have access to the research data.

4. There will be no confidentiality as my professors, I, and anyone reading my thesis will have access to the information to be used in the thesis. The consequences will be people will be able to know more about you and the company.

5. The findings or other study-related feedback will be made available to you at your request, and it would be my pleasure to forward the thesis upon completion.

6. Credit in the thesis will be given to you for your participation.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this

waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal researcher: Francie Winograd:
Telephone: 204-488-7635

Supervisor: Professor Lynn Chalmers:
Telephone: 204- 474 -9458

This research has been approved by the Joint –Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Printed Name
Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature
Date

Image Release Statement

I, _____ hereby certify that I give Francis R. (Francie) Winograd my consent to the use of my design photographs in her Master of Interior Design thesis. I understand that the thesis and images will be available online.

Print Name of Image Owner

Signature of Image Owner

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