Sounding Through Silence:
Inter-Generational Voicings in Memoir, Memory, and Postmodernity

by

Veronica Maria Delphine Bhandar
B.F.A., University of Victoria, 2007
B.A., University of Victoria, 2008

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ABSTRACT

This thesis brings together two disciplines—creative non-fiction memoir and literary/historical critique—that seek to open avenues of discourse with regard to the legacy of the Second World War and the Holocaust for subsequent generations. Ruth Kluger's Holocaust memoir *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* and its English Language version written ten years later, *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered,* are analyzed for their postmodernist challenge to traditional notions of testimony and genre. W. G. Sebald's novel *The Emigrants* is examined for its "imagetext" constructions that act to elucidate aspects of mourning and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (dealing with the past). This thesis is a post-structuralist approach that performs, through memoir, the construction of identity/subjectivity, but it is also a journey, performed in the spirit of belated mourning, that is part of the larger historical postwar discourse regarding the inability to mourn.

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to my children Tristan, Ramen, and Brandon

to my beloved grandchildren, Bishop, Zeria, Isha, Saisha, and Ella

and especially

to my mother, Elisabeth Willms-De Smet

who lives in my heart, always.

Introduction

Not long after my father's death in Kitimat B.C., I travelled to Germany to visit my mother's gravesite. My father had carried my mother's ashes, seventeen years earlier, to a small village on the Rhein River and had placed the urn in the grave of Maria Wange-Willms, my maternal grandmother. I had visited Oma Mimi's grave in 1969 after graduating from High School but had not returned to Europe since that time. In the year before his death, my father began to persuade me that I should make the effort to revisit relatives and forge connections.

In May of 2002 I arrived in Unkel am Rhein and stayed at the house of my aunt Hanna. In short order my aunt, now well into her eighties, took me on foot down through the cobblestone streets of the medieval town toward the cemetery. It was early morning. The mist over the river obscured the vineyards that climbed the hills on both sides. At that hour the trees—stunted, over-pruned—that lined the river promenade, withdrew into their own stillness. My aunt stopped here and there to point out the local landmarks: the *Gefängnisturm,* for instance, is a small, squat tower where Beethoven had been locked up for at least one unruly, drunken night. But it was a small statue of a Madonna and child tucked into an alcove in the ancient city ramparts that drew my attention. Eyes downcast, the Madonna sat behind an intricate gate of iron filigree. She held the Christ child on her knee, and although he clasped her neck with one hand, he turned away from her, craned to see what lay beyond the gate. His legs extended outward as if to free himself from his mother's grasp, from the complicated folds of her skirt.

I carried white roses, my mother's favourite, to place on the grave. My aunt stopped for a moment to pour water into a container from a tap located at the entrance to the cemetery. "For the flowers," she said, and threaded her way through the rows until we arrived at my mother's grave. The gravestone was unremarkable, an upright slab of polished granite. Simple, except for one significant detail. There was an inscription—in English—below my mother's name: it read: *Hi kids, I knew you'd pass this way, love Mom.*

The writing of this thesis begins with a flash of recognition. I had heard my mother's voice seventeen years after her death and came to understand that my presence at her grave, in a country largely unfamiliar to me, constituted a homecoming. This sense of homecoming has expanded, in time, to include coming home to a culture that I had disavowed, and a language that I had forgotten. Homecoming has encompassed not only the healing of familial rupture and a filling in of gaps in family narrative, but also an acceptance of historiography—the legacy of the Third Reich, the aftermath of war, the Holocaust. My mother's initial restorative gesture, meant only for me (and my brother), enters, through the writing of this thesis, a larger forum that includes discursive encounters with the Holocaust through an examination of scholarly discourses, as well as literary works that take the Holocaust as their subject. However, my mother's call home—sincere, apologetic—requires that I stand with her in her history while at the same time exploring and uncovering the secrets that determined the shape of her life—her silences, self-abnegations, and insularities. By surrendering to the pull of the spectres in my mother's life I hope to banish the shadows, negations, and obfuscations in my own. As a self-reflexive measure, I augment my mother's narrative

by adding my own voice in hopes of making transparent my struggle with her history. To this end, the sustained tenor of this thesis is one of compassionate inquiry.

The springboard for this thesis is also a serendipitous cache of letters given into my hand more than five decades after the events they describe took place. Sent to me after the death of my mother's youngest brother Gerold by his cousin Greta G. in 2005, these letters comprise a small but potent archive of communiqués between Gerold and his sister Elisabeth during his internment as a POW in France at the end of the Second World War. Hidden among these letters was an unintended stow-a-way, a letter Elisabeth (Else) had written to Hanna Mohr, a young woman engaged to marry Else's other brother Olaf, also a POW in France at that time. Reverberations that might have affected those who lived at the heart of the events revealed in the letter have long since been extinguished with their deaths, but this fact does not in any way diminish the effect of the letters. They serve as testimonial fragments to life lived under extraordinary circumstances.

This thesis acknowledges a postmemory[1] position in relation to my mother's experience of the cauldron of the Second World War. The effect of unresolved trauma is examined, in part, through the lens of Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). Hirsch acknowledges that all memory may be mediated, and that postmemory is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (22). Hirsch maintains that postmemory

[1] Hirsch states: "I have developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I believe it may usefully describe other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences" (22).

"characterizes the experiences of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (22).

Hirsch's emphasis on an imaginative, creative investment suggests that postmemory aligns itself to new and varied approaches to life writing. Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, for example, is a memoir that intertwines a contentious father/son relationship with the transference of Holocaust testimony from father to son. The study of life writing reveals that self-representation and self-location, anchored in culture, are fraught with contemporary notions of gender, genre, geography, positionality of the subject, and historiography. Katrina M. Powell teaches that "the postmodern self is often a performance of social expectations and codes, and [that] notions of constructed, shifting, and multidimensional selves are [presently] being explored across disciplines" (135). Spiegelman subverts, (as does Ruth Kluger,[2] whose Holocaust memoir *Still Alive* is analyzed as part of this thesis), "social codes and expectations" (Powell 135) with regard to Holocaust testimony by weaving testimony through the web of a troubled inter-generational relationship.

Spiegelman's memoir is precipitated by a comic strip he created in which he responds to his mother's suicide, an event that took place when he was twenty years old. Entitled "A Prisoner on the Hell Planet" (100), the comic strip, as it appears in the first volume of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, delineates the character, Artie, processing his mother's death, together with his inherited guilt over Holocaust survival, sheltered away from his father's gaze. Mala, Artie's father's second wife, discovers the comic and unsuccessfully tries to hide it from her husband, Vladek. Artie is surprised: he tells

[2] *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* uses the German spelling Klüger, whereas the English language version *Still Alive* discards the umlaut, hence Kluger. For consistency, this thesis gives preference in the text to the American spelling, Kluger.

Mala the comic strip "appeared in an underground comic book [where] I never thought Vladek would see it" (99). Ruth Kluger voices a similar dilemma with regard to her memoir. Although she represents a telescoping of generations by virtue of having been imprisoned in Auschwitz together with her mother, she writes and publishes her memoir *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* in German because, as she confesses in *Still Alive*, "I thought if I wrote it in German, my mother wouldn't see it, as she had no contact with things German and even considered my career (German Professor at the University of California at Irvine) an embarrassment" (210). "Prisoner on the Hell Planet," created in 1972, is the genesis, then, of the larger graphic memoir *Maus*, in which Spiegelman records, and bears witness to, his father's survival in Auschwitz. In the strip Spiegelman dons a concentration camp uniform, and oscillates between recognition that his history is fused with that of his survivor parents, and a desire to distance himself from their history. As with Ruth Kluger, whose internment in Auschwitz is seen, retrospectively, as an impenetrable encapsulation, a "timescape" (67), Spiegelman envisions his positionality as the son of Holocaust survivors as a kind of prisonership relegated to an extraterrestrial space, the "Hell Planet" (100). Through creative endeavor—transcribing his father's Holocaust testimony—Spiegelman effectively disembarks from the prisonership of his mother's suicide. Victoria A. Elmwood explores how trauma is transformed in Spiegelman's memoir:

> We can look to *Maus's* multitiered metanarrative structure for evidence of productive, though not always cooperative, interaction taking place between father and son that allows for a relationship in which Art Spiegelman creates an identity for himself with respect to his parents' experience of the Holocaust.

> Spiegelman is most successful in creating a place for himself in the family by soliciting, shaping, and representing his father's story…. In addition, Spiegelman's role as narrative facilitator provides a means by which he narrates himself into the family legacy without appropriating the experience of the Holocaust as his own. (691)

Despite his role as narrative facilitator, Spiegelman exhibits, through his character Artie, an inherent resistance to transcribing his father's experiences. In a sequence that employs a masked double entendre, Art's father Vladek attempts to pass down his used winter coat to his son Artie. To ensure he wears the coat, Vladek has thrown Artie's jacket in the garbage bin. Artie's reluctance to wear his father's *Mantel* (the Yiddish, and also German, word for coat) reveals a strong resistance to bearing the *mantle* of his father's history. Vladek cajoles Artie with unintended irony: "After you wear it a little, you'll see how good it looks" (Vol.1, 69). As Hirsch points out, postmemory rises out of the pressurized, inescapable space of inherited trauma. As Vladek takes his leave of Artie, (who stands wistfully at the garbage bin looking for his old jacket), he reminds Artie that the transmission sessions must continue: "So don't forget, Artie, you'll call me this week and we can talk" (69). Spiegelman closes the sequence with Artie wearing his father's coat home—he has no choice. Artie's resignation proves that the mantle of his father's history has been unconsciously assumed, after all. Spiegelman's memoir, which seeks to integrate and heal inherited trauma through an imaginative investment, exemplifies Hirsch's notion of postmemory. That this investment is also self-reflexive is amplified by Spiegelman's inclusion of his own image, visually embedded in the creation itself. Shown seated at his drawing table wearing a mouse

'mask', and with armed concentration camp guards poised to shoot at him from the periphery, Spiegelman injects himself into the cataclysmic framework of his father's narrative, albeit with the acknowledgement that his role is performative, mediated, and arguably perilous.

As Hirsch states, postmemory is a notion that encompasses any second-generation individual, or groups of individuals, who experience inherited trauma. This thesis also explores the notion of postmemory from the position of the German-Canadian diaspora. Christian Lieb's dissertation on the migration of Germans to Canada from 1945 to 1961 emphasizes that this diaspora[3] is made up of two groups, "ethnic German refugees and German nationals" (11), each with a distinctive pattern of integration. Lieb states: "German nationals left [Germany] most often for economic reasons, a sense of adventure, and other considerations" (12). These 'voluntary migrants' were not "forced by circumstances beyond their control" (12). Lieb ascertains that "patterns emerged that strongly suggest that the distinct self-identification of ethnic Germans and German nationals made the latter more likely to integrate" (12). Under Lieb's definition, I fall into the German national category. As part of the process of integration into Canadian society, I have been inculcated, through the education process in Canadian schools, to a version of history with regard to the Second World War told exclusively from the perspective of the conquerors. Further, my mother's silence regarding her wartime and postwar experiences in Germany, intended in part to shelter me, obstructed my relation

[3] Lieb states in his abstract: "Germans are among the largest ethnic groups, both in Canada as a whole and in British Columbia" (iii). As Lieb does, I use the term 'diaspora' "not in the context of the Jewish Diaspora forcefully scattered across the world since Roman times" (9) but also not, as Lieb does, "for a minority group of distinct ethnic identity, culture, and language that was exposed to experiences ranging from hostility by a major group to expulsion from their homes" (28). I use the term, rather, in the spirit of Dominique Schnapper's definition: "Since 1968, the term has seen a genuine inflation—especially in the United States. It has since designated all forms of dispersion, until then evoked by the terms *expelled, expatriate, exile, refugee, immigrant, and minority*" (25).

to European family, and to historiography. Subsequent study of this historiography reveals that a socially, culturally, and politically motivated taboo grew out of Germany's struggle to rebuild from the ashes and rubble of defeat, as well as from a desire to deny complicity in the Holocaust. German suffering during and after the war has been, justifiably, repressed and eclipsed by the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis upon Jewish and minority populations, but perhaps not for reasons, or in ways, that are easily apparent. Kerstin Mueller Dembling's analysis of the inter-generational response to the legacy of the Holocaust mentions philosopher Karl Jaspers'1946 plea for "an open and self-reflexive approach to the crimes committed during the Nazi period" and reveals how this plea "was not supported by the political culture during the immediate postwar decades" (477). Dembling refers to historian Norbert Frei, who, she claims, "has shown that West German chancellor Konrad Andendauer's 'policy for the past' resulted in amnesty for Nazi officials, and even the release of convicted war criminals, facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration into postwar society" (477). Dembling adds that "Germans have consistently distanced themselves from the perpetrators by viewing them as extra-terrestrials, criminals or demons, or by interpreting the Holocaust as an abstract, industrial, bureaucratic, and anonymous process that seemingly did not involve human beings as persecutors" (478). Dembling notes that during the 1960's student protest movement, although the second generation turned an unflinching gaze upon the crimes perpetrated by the Third Reich, a distinction remained between what was discussed within individual families with regard to the Nazi legacy and the "Holocaust discourses … historical writings, and media debates" (478) that followed in the wake of the student protests.

For a member of the German-Canadian diaspora growing up in a northern town in B.C. during the 1960's, the debates taking place in Germany were non-existent. In a sense, ours was a family frozen in time. If we spoke German at all, it was assuredly a pre-1950's vernacular, a fact I quickly realized during my visit to Germany in 2002. We were busy integrating into Canadian society, unaware of the German *Historikerstreit* (historian's quarrel) and other changes taking place in postwar Germany. In hindsight it appears our parents shared with their compatriots in Germany a tacit refusal to speak about the Nazi legacy and the experience of war, albeit at a great distance. In my own family, my mother proved steadfast in the perpetuation of this refusal. War creates caesura in the lives of women. The aftermath of war, as exemplified in Helke Sander's film *BeFreier und Befreite,* (Conquerors Take Liberties) and the anonymous, belatedly published diary *A Woman in Berlin*, provide disturbing examples of how women negotiated the immediate postwar era—especially rape, following the Russian occupation in 1945. In the absence of fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers who had yet to return from POW camps across Europe and in Russia, women were also designated to clear the ruined cities of debris. After *Stunde Null* (*zero hour)* had passed and the advent of a new order under Konrad Adenauer had been established, women were directed to return to the maternal, gender specific values of *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (Children, kitchen, church).[4] The era of postwar reconstruction eclipsed and silenced experiences of rape, hunger, and the fate of children born of rape

[4] Susan Ingram and Katrina Sark chart the rise of *Haute Couture* as it manifested in Berlin directly after the war. Women's dresses, made out of fabrics such as parachutes, were designed to show German ingenuity and, arguably, to return esteem and an outward appearance of purity. A promotional photograph from that era, for example, shows a woman in a diaphanous white, long-sleeved gown, with her arms spread wide and eyes cast skyward. Seen from below and posited against a blank (blameless) sky, the woman appears, in turn, glamourous, demure, but also pure—Madonna-like.

or coercion. As a member of the German diaspora in Canada, Elisabeth Willms was able to sequester her former life but this did not mean that she was able to embrace her new, adopted one.

This thesis examines the effect of war through the lens of my mother's experience but with an eye toward Kaja Silverman's notion, through Elmwood, of 'heteropathic identification' which equates to 'feeling and suffering with another' (694). Elmwood, who posits Silverman's assertions through Hirsch's postmemory, seeks to apply 'heteropathic identification' as

> a model for the second generation that must seek resolution with respect to their parents', (or guardians') traumas. Such empathy is productive only if the experience and feeling of the other are not subsumed in an 'appropriative identification' in which 'the viewer can too easily become a surrogate victim.' Thus the second generation is warned to exert caution in its struggle with the traumas of figurative or literal parents—to negotiate a distance, a refusal to appropriate the experiences of others that still allows a critically distanced rapprochement that avoids unethical claiming or a prolonging of the first generation's witness to trauma. This endeavour produces what Hirsch defines as a 'hybridized narrative.' (694)

To write a hybridized thesis with its disparate voices of creative non-fiction and scholarly discourse, and in which one attempts to locate the 'self,' is to place oneself in the dynamic, hybrid space of dislocation. The fact that the writer of this memoir is herself a member of a postwar diaspora and therefore already positioned in a space of dislocation, complicates the project. Michael M. J. Fischer in his essay regarding

multiple voicings in memoir counters the widely held notion that "autobiographical voices are often thought of as deeply singular attempts to inscribe individual identity" (79). Fischer claims they are, however, "not only mosaic compositions but may often be structured through processes of mirroring and dialogic relations with cross-historical and cross-cultural others and thus may resonate with various sorts of double voicings" (79). Fischer theorizes on the Francophone term "sondage" which he translates as "soundings, for the search techniques of an exploratory dig" (79). With its layering of textual analysis, memoir, archival letters, and graphics, this thesis represents a "mosaic composition" (79) in which the voice of my mother, Else, alternates with my own.

This thesis is also an interdisciplinary approach to memoir that challenges traditional notions of genre. Autobiography/memoir has grown into a field that privileges multiple perspectives. Nancy K. Miller cites "memory studies, trauma and testimony, law and ethics, illness and disability, ethnography, performance, and visual culture—photography, video [and] graphic memoir" (545) as comprising this burgeoning field. Miller also notes that it is "perhaps … time to understand the question of relation to the other—to others—as being as important, foundational, to the genre as the truth conditions of [Lejeune's] 'autobiographical pact'" (544) which Miller reiterates as '"the engagement that an author takes to narrate his life directly (her life, or part of it, an aspect of it) in a spirit of truth'" (538). In relation to Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking,* a memoir written following the death of her husband, Miller states: "Didion's memoir exemplifies the notion, argued persuasively by feminist theorists, that the female autobiographical self comes into writing … through a significant relation to an 'other.' Miller also invokes Mary Mason's essay "The Other

Voice," in which "Mason challeng[es] the standard of the autonomous self" (544) using "early-period examples of women's life writing in which the other provides the authorizing conditions for self-production" (544). Susan Stanford Friedman, states Miller, argues against '"Isolate Individualism"' in women's writing, not only because it is "the privilege of power" but also because women "intimately share in a collective identity" (544). Miller quotes Leigh Gilmore's '"task of autobiography" as sorting out precisely "how selves and milieus ought to be understood *in relation to each other*'" (544).

The 'other' in this project is my mother Elisabeth (Else), the woman of the postwar German-Canadian diaspora who also stands in for others like her. Socio-political forces and psychological paralysis brought on by the trauma of war have been determining factors in the 'silence' that characterizes many of my mother's generation. This thesis seeks to address, but not redress, postwar silence and to examine the cascading effect of this silence on subsequent generations. In her analysis of two German films released in 2005 that take as their subject "generational difference" (477) with regard to memory of the German legacy, Dembling points to characteristic silence, as exposed in Jens Schanze's film *Winterkinder*. Dembling states:

> Schanze's subtitle, Die schweigende Generation, of course refers not only to his mother, but to his mother's generation, and his film points out that silence of this generation did not only occur between the second and third generations, but also within the second generation, and furthermore characterized the relationship between the war generation and their children. For example, Antonie [Schanze's mother] says that she never spoke to her own mother about

> her father's actions during the Nazi period because she felt that this would have been 'unfair' to her mother. Here again, Schanze gives us a glimpse of the role of loyalty and identification with a parent or spouse that influences how a family constructs a narrative about itself. (485)

In his film, Schanze reveals that his mother's family had been expelled from Nova Roda, an ethnically German region in Poland. Dembling notes that Schanze's interest in this traumatic event in his mother's life, an event of which she had never spoken, leads him on a journey back through East Germany and Poland together with his mother. Dembling discerns:

> In Antonie's recollections it is clear that this event traumatized the young child; she tells how she had to leave behind friends without saying goodbye, and how she did not know when she would see her father, who stayed behind. Their train trip took them through a country in turmoil where the possibility of being separated from each other loomed everywhere. The film later reveals that Antonie never talked about this past with her daughters, and they realized that it was a profound and traumatic experience for her….As the film progresses and the family travels to Nova Roda, it becomes clear that the stories of the father's involvement with the Nazis, and her flight from Nova Roda are inseparable; her silence has repressed memories of both.…However, [Schanze] does not allow the story of suffering to eclipse the need to investigate the grandfather's guilt … both strands become part of the family's narrative of the past. (485)

Dembling notes that, just as *Winterkinder* addresses familial silence around the Nazi legacy, "it also creates a space in the family narrative for the trauma of expulsion"

(485). Extrapolating from Dembling's observation, it could also be said that my own mnemonic terrain, as presented in this thesis, creates a space in my own family narrative for my mother's trauma regarding her wartime experiences.

Of particular interest to this thesis is Antonie's claim that speaking to her mother about the father's complicity in the Nazi past seemed '"unfair' to her mother" (485). Antonie's assertion reflects a protective spirit, that of a child toward the parent. The mother/daughter dyad as it is presented in this thesis invokes Virginia Woolf's "Angel in the House" but does so in the guise of *the good daughter in the house,* an entity with which Antonie, arguably, is also familiar. In a speech Virginia Woolf gave to the National Society of Women's Services on the subject of "Professions for Women" she conjured up a Victorian "phantom" she called "the Angel in the House" (150).[5] This phantom—bane of women writers—presses continually into the writer's domain, interfering with the writer's authentic voice. She is, as Woolf describes her, emblematic of Victorian womanhood, and as a cultural construction she inhabits the 'psyche' of all women. This interiorized construction of womanhood is particularly antithetical to truth in women's writing. Woolf describes her thus:

> She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught, she sat in it—in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all I need not say it—she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her

[5] Woolf takes the "Angel" from a poem entitled "The Angel in the House" by Coventry Patmore, which celebrates the bliss of domestic life and the woman at the heart of it. Woolf's speech was given on January 21, 1931.

> chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace. In those days—the last of Queen Victoria—every house had its Angel. And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words. She made as if to guide my pen. (150)

The "shadow" of the Angel's "wings" continually falls upon Woolf's page as she begins to write a critical review of a novel written by a man. Against Woolf's true inclination—that of a writer seeking to express her own opinion—the Angel strives to coerce her back into an alignment with womanly conciliation, flattery, deception and charm. "To put it bluntly" Woolf states, "women [must] tell lies if they are to succeed" (151). In spite of the strictures governing women writers Woolf decides that she must "kill" the Angel if she wants to express the truth about "human relations, morality, sex" (151). Woolf tells her audience, in whom she perceives a "freer" attitude than that of the previous generation, that "killing the Angel of the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (151). What remains after the Angel has been dispatched, Woolf surmises, is "a young woman in a bedroom with an inkpot. In other words, now that she had rid herself of falsehood, that young woman had only to be herself" (151).Woolf questions what that might mean, to be herself, and concludes that this selfhood is unknown and will continue to be unknowable until woman "has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill" (151).

As a woman writing in the memoir genre, I have my own constricting Angel, handed down along matrilineal lines. This Angel assumes the shape of the 'good daughter' who does not transgress certain spheres of familial narrative governed by silence and taboo, nor seek to shatter the reflection—however distorted and

protective—of her maternal line.[6] The memoirist, as Angel in the House or 'good daughter,' does not seek to fill the ruptures in familial narratives brought on by trauma and war, nor seek to redress the societal strictures that keep such ruptures secured in place. Rather, she falls back on Woolf's paradigm, which is to say she sacrifices veracity and authenticity for the veneer of respectability that remains intact when women's experiences are subsumed into the overarching, prevailing cultural narrative. The dilemma of the Angel's shadow crossing the writer's page is compounded when the memoirist is also subject to positionality vis-à-vis a historiography that works against 'speaking.'

As I have outlined, I intend, in this thesis, to explore what it means to write a memoir that takes into consideration questions of positionality, historiography, postmemory, truth and authenticity, and the elasticities afforded by the memoir genre's burgeoning incursion— *gratis* postmodernity—into the realms of imagetext, graphic memoir, and testimony. This thesis also examines postmodern tropes as they appear in Holocaust memoir and testimony with a focus on the debate regarding postmodern literary theory and its ability or inability to authentically foreground eyewitness accounts of what is, to this writer, inarguably, the most heinous of genocides in this, or any other, time.[7] In tandem with, but not in counterpoint to, the study of Holocaust testimony, the memoir portion of this thesis will track the writer's coming to terms with

[6] To expand this notion, I refer to the film *The Nasty Girl* in which the protagonist of the film uncovers her town's complicity with the Nazi past. The film reveals that the individual who searches for the truth is also subject to consequences. Revelation comes at a cost to the one who seeks it: the 'nasty girl' must resolve how to live in the world she has willfully altered.

[7] American Jewish writer Cynthia Ozick, who declined an invitation to speak in Germany because she felt Germans needed to accept the loss of the Jewish population in their midst stated: "What defines the Holocaust is not the murders alone, but their invisible corollary: the complete erasures of Jewish academies, libraries, social and religious bodies—the whole vast and ancient organism, spiritual and intellectual, of European Jewish civilization" (117).

the ruptures and silences in familial narratives regarding wartime experiences that have had long-term and far-reaching effects. These narratives—necessitated by shame, guilt, and the inability to assume responsibility—were sequestered, then later subsumed, into the new life in the diaspora. The memoir portion of this thesis also explores what it means to write from a margin governed by controversy and taboo. German wartime suffering can never be viewed as a counterweight to Jewish Holocaust suffering.

In terms of scholarly analysis, this thesis explores, through Ruth Kluger's Holocaust memoir *Still Alive*, how postmodern tropology affords the requisite critical distancing that allows readers of trauma memoir to engage with the work without becoming subsumed in the narrative, or appropriating the trauma for themselves. Kluger maintains that the experience of Auschwitz is a "timescape" (67), unknowable to all but those with direct experience. A discussion with regard to traumatic memory and the nature of memory more generally, follows from Kluger's premise. Deconstruction theory and the philosophical thought of Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas frame an account of Kluger's survival in Auschwitz so as to privilege discourse on the Holocaust with regard to truth and ethics. Derrida's concept of 'the trace' or 'the gap' is brought to bear in this regard. An analysis of Kluger's description of her salvation at the hands of an inmate in Auschwitz reveals how an act of altruism reinstates Kluger's faith in individual acts of selflessness, but also how this altruistic gesture creates "a gap" (109) through which "freedom may appear as the uninvited angel" (109). This chapter argues that the appearance of a 'gap' opens the way for a transmission of Derrida's 'trace,' which manifests as ethics and responsibility.

Ruth Kluger's *weiter leben: Eine Jugend*, the original version of Kluger's Holocaust memoir, was written following a collision with a bicycle that left her, for a time, bedridden in a German hospital. The accident reawakens for Kluger, now fifty-seven years old, the trauma of the Holocaust. Although this thesis makes reference to both the German language version of the memoir, and to *Still Alive*—the English language version written nine years afterward in 2001—a preference is given to the English language version in terms of quoting from the text. Although this thesis is primarily interested in Kluger's stance with regard to her German audience, a word about both texts is apropos. For the benefit of her American audience, Kluger brings in examples in *Still Alive* that resonate for them, for example, a repeated reference to Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. Temporal consideration is also notable: in the timeframe between the writing of the two texts, Kluger learns the truth regarding the disappearance of her father and brother during the Holocaust and the second text reflects a correction in this regard. A significant difference between the two texts occurs with regard to their respective endings: *weiter leben* ends with Kluger's description of her life in California and a dedication to the German friends in Göttingen who saw her through her recuperation and who "*in Stücken mitgelesen und mitgeredet und hier und da mitgelebt habt"*(284)[8] (periodically read and discussed the work in progress, along with her), while *Still Alive* closes with a poignant scene that describes Kluger's mother's relationship with her great granddaughter Isabella. "I look at a snapshot of the two of them rubbing noses, a smile of total affinity on both their faces … more than ninety years between them, but whenever they were together, chatting

[8] Quotations appearing in German are placed in italics throughout this thesis. Their English translations are un-italicized.

and touching, they met in a present that miraculously stood still for them, time frozen in space and space made human" (214). *Still Alive* ends with the words "Perhaps redeemed" (214). Most importantly, the analysis of Kluger's memoir engages with the question of the possibility of redemption, and argues that the postmodern begins with thinking about the Holocaust.

This thesis also explores, through W.G. Sebald's collection of short stories entitled *The Emigrants*, how a German writer living in the English-speaking diaspora comes to terms with his positionality vis-à-vis the Nazi legacy. Using Katja Garloff's notion of a hermenuetic 'gap,' this chapter explores the possibility of the transmission of testimony from Jewish Holocaust survivor to non-Jewish German witness, and not only debates the efficacy of this transfer, but examines where it leads. Sebald's oeuvre, marked by circuitous travelogues and a dense, almost impregnable tropology constructed, paradoxically, to create a space of reflection and mourning, also makes use of enigmatic photographic images and ekphrasis. Sebald's palimpsests afford a unique opportunity to examine the work of a writer powerfully driven to engage with the victims of the Holocaust (and their descendants), and who does so in an oblique, tangential manner with remarkable results.

Sebald's narratives—sustained elegies—play with notions of counterfeit and sleight of hand in order to foreground questions of representability. In the narrative "Dr. Henry Selwyn" for example, Sebald throws up a number of dualities and enigmas. Windows and mirrors obscure rather than reflect: the unnamed narrator notices, on his arrival at the manor house to which he has been invited for dinner, that "sash windows … glinted

blindly" (4)[9] and mirrors in the dining salon exhibited "blind patches" (120). Throughout the text, details provide an air of indeterminacy that border on deception. We learn that Selwyn has changed his name from Seweryn and has kept his Jewish immigrant origins secret from his Swiss wife. The house itself, with its warren of hidden servant staircases and hallways, points to another world behind the present one, a world, the narrator suggests, of which we may be only dimly aware. The narrator muses: "Often I tried to imagine what went on inside the heads of people who lead their lives knowing that, behind the walls of the rooms they were in, the shadows of servants were perpetually flitting past" (9). The thesis chapter entitled "Imagetext" is a meditation on the theme that shadows represent a screen that stands between Sebald's protagonists and the Holocaust. Ultimately, Sebald questions textual and photographic representations—their veracity and reliability, and their ability to authenticate. Sebald's text-image manipulations bring the reader to thresholds of the liminal—to portals that intuit the world that exists behind the 'blind spot,' and to the possibility of truths that cannot be apprehended directly.

The memoir portion of this thesis is both a *working through* in terms of mourning, and a *seeing through*, which implies critical distance. Although it does not seek to prolong the witness of trauma, the memoir engages with themes of loss regarding familial narrative, language, and culture. Uncovering the secrets in Elisabeth's life requires an obstinate adherence to the belief that, through postmodern memoir, the unveiling of a larger truth is indeed possible. Ruth-Ellen Joeres and Angelika Bammer in their joint exploration of truth in memoir refer to Philippe Lejuene's "autobiographical pact" which provides an assurance that writing, narration and

[9] Only the English language version of Sebald's text is referred to in this thesis.

protagonist all cohere. Joeres and Bammer assert that "in memory, factual truth competes, and can be in tension with, other kinds of truth. We recognize ethical, emotional, and even aesthetic, truths" (n. pag.). As both are in the process of writing memoirs, Joeres and Bammer agree to hold a conversation in which aspects that pertain to creative process and representation are paramount while at the same time keeping "in mind the great variety of truths [with which] anyone writing a story about her life will be confronted" (n. pag.).

In culling from the work of other, self- reflexive memoirists, one might consider Mark Doty's essay, in which he revisits a memoir he wrote about his sister's wedding in 1960 when he was in first grade. Doty's retrospective realization is that, overall, his allegiance is to memory, not to history. "You can tell the facts" he claims, "without saying much of anything about how the facts *felt*. Therefore, some memoirs are much more interested in the process and character of remembering than others: in these it sometimes feels that memory itself is a form: associative, elusive, metaphoric, metonymic" (12). In misremembering the name of the street on which he lived, Doty claims "the process of misremembering is itself revealing" because "my interest was in how it felt to be that boy, in the world as he understood it, and that world is a construction, a set of associations tinged by obsessions and fascinations, a landscape as interior as it is external" (12). Doty concludes:

> The real is always larger than we can comprehend, alive with dimensions, shifting, a great confluence of causes and effects. But it's an imperative that we make something thrumming with the seen and unseen, with the whispers of

> ghosts and the pressure of the hour, the comings and goings of the living and the dead. (14).

This thesis is particularly interested in exploring memory—its vagaries and mutability—and acknowledges that, as Doty succinctly observes, memory is "as interior as it is external" (14). The realm of interiority must find expression so that memory approaches something akin to a whole truth.

Powell states it is our understanding of genre that allows us to "reject available forms" (105). I would agree, and add the term *elasticity*, which permits a tenuous connection to genre while at the same time stretching its boundaries to include postmodern notions of feminism and post colonialism. Through the elasticity that postmodern memoir allows, a truth larger than that of subjects in relation to historiography, or subjects in relation to one another, can be unveiled. Whereas the scholarly work in this thesis discusses veracity in memoir with regard to testimony and engages with the notion of a "gap" through which testimony can, arguably, overcome limits imposed by cultural and historically generated taboos, the memoir portions of this thesis create transparent scaffolds which favour perceiving past and present in simultaneity rather than as a lateral movement backward through time. I refer to Doreen Massey's argument regarding spatial imagination, as it is brought forth in Lindsay Christopher's analysis of Toni Morrison's *Paradise*. Christopher interprets Massey in the following way:

> Geographer Doreen Massey argues that the dominating Western geographical imagination, in particular, assumes that space is and has always been like a surface, a flat given with people and landscapes stuck on it. This thinking, she

> argues, allows one to consider other people, cultures, and places as 'phenomena' on this surface that do not necessarily have their own historical and temporal trajectories. They're just there. These unconscious tendencies to understand space as 'just there' leads us to collapse space into time, thinking that time only begins when we encounter a particular geographic space. (91)

Of particular interest to this thesis is Massey's insight that "the dominating Western geographical imagination … allows us to ignore the vast amount of narratives existing simultaneously in one space" (91). This thesis intuits that, just as a geographical imagination exists, there exists a corresponding field of memory in which layers of memory occupy a single space of cognition. Christopher observes with regard to Massey's layering of geographical space, that "this layering challenges our spatial perception [and]forces readers to confront the contemporaneity of all historical trajectories in one space explode[ing] the spatialized dichotomies of insider/outsider, center/periphery, local/global, in here/out there, with us/against us" (91). Invoking Fischer's notion of *sondages*, soundings through the layers of memory may do more than explode Massey's "spatialized dichotomies" (91), significant as this may be. Soundings may also yield therapeutic effect, as the conclusion of this thesis reveals.

This hybridized project takes as its primary focus the intergenerational rift that occurs between the second postwar generation and their parents with regard to the parents' complicity in the Nazi regime, either as active participants or as bystanders. It must be acknowledged, however, that third and fourth generations do not harbour the same resistance to the perpetrator generation that the second generation exhibit, but are nonetheless inheritors of the original trauma. It is incumbent upon members of the

second generation, therefore, to engage with the silences and omissions that characterize what Erin McGlothlin describes, through Dembling, as "phantom pains" (492). Dembling quotes McGlothlin:

> For children of the survivors, this experience is one of unintegrated trauma and rupture in familial continuity; for the children of perpetrators it is the family's unintegratable history of violation and brutality. The event that has marked the second generation of both legacies is inaccessible, yet the mark of that experience remains and, like the phantom pain, continues to haunt its bearer. (492)

The visit to my mother's gravesite in 2002 began a journey that led, inevitably, to the writing of this project. It was a summer of exceptional experiences, one of which, in particular, has simmered—unassimilated—for a long period of time. That summer I travelled to Bremen inside my mother's skin. As I write these words—'inside my mother's skin'— I am aware they are provocative, perhaps even dangerous. It is both a *wrong* image and a *right* one—*wrong* because it appears to conflate my mother's experiences with my own; *right* because the yearning for intimacy with my mother—always elusive— is in part satisfied through this encounter. We flew from Frankfurt to Bremen through a pearl haze that thinned out at intervals to expose patches of green below—the vast, variegated fields of the North German alluvial plain. Each rent in the cloud, with its clear sighting to the ground below, brought a shudder of recognition accompanied by an uncanny sense of return, as if I was coming home to a familiar landscape of childhood. I had never seen any part of that countryside from such a viewpoint. I *had* seen, however, growing up and living in Canada, documentary footage

of the Second World War British saturation bombing on Germany. The drone of the airplane and the sporadic flash of fields and canals through filaments of cloud conspired to create a split-scene: I felt myself to be inside a plane carrying deadly bombs, while at the same time, down below, I felt myself to be my mother running through the streets toward the bunker, her hair and coat on fire, as she had once described to me. In that moment I was the *deliverer* of death—through me the bombs would fall. In that same moment I was the woman running through the burning streets—through her I was the *receiver* of death.

To reiterate Elmwood with regard to Art Spiegelman's graphic memoir, Elmwood observes that *Maus* succeeds because Spiegelman does "not appropriate the experience of the Holocaust as his own" (691). One wonders, then, if my experience of flying to Bremen 'in my mother's skin' falls short of the requisite heteropathic identification, meant to create critical distance without sacrificing empathetic response. Does this description eschew, or prolong, trauma for the victim and for others? Regardless of the answer, I remain tethered to, and enthralled with, this split-scene experience—troubled by it, yes, but not unhappily so. It is the closest point of entry, for me, to that part of my mother's life.

Perhaps Dembling puts it best when she quotes from German Psychologist Ulla Roberts: *"Und manche Enkel sagen, die Eltern haben anklagend gefragt, worauf die Großeltern gar nicht hätten antworten können. Die Enkel fragen anders"* (Some grandchildren say, their parents asked questions in accusation, to which the grandparents would not have been able to answer. The grandchildren ask differently") (481). Dembling turns toTanya Dückers, the German author of *Der nüchterne Blick*

(The Backward Glance). Dückers declares that it is not her intent, as a granddaughter, to break with the grandparents as her parents did, but rather to stir the grandparents to memory.

The dedication in Gerold Willms' *Endstation unbekannt: Eine Reise durch die Vergangenheit* ("Destination Unkown: A Journey through the Past"), a memoir about growing up in Germany and about his experiences during the war, reads: *Gewidmet meinen Kindern, um die unausgesprochene Frage zu beantworten: "Und was hast Du damals gemacht?"*(Dedicated to my children, in answer to the unasked question "And what did you do during that time?") In honour of the mother who, I intuit, hovers over this project, I seek, finally, to ask the unasked questions, and to release the "phantom pain" not only for myself, but also for my children and grandchildren, who *also* will not ask, unless I tell them.

Chapter 1: Early Days, Kitimat

I boarded ship in Amsterdam in the summer of 1956 bound for New York together with my mother, father, and younger brother. I was six and a half years old and have no memory of that event. Our destination point was Kitimat, on the northern B.C. inland coast. My memories of this journey manifest as densities of colour and emotion. After days of seasickness spent in a darkened stateroom, I find myself transported to the expansive dining lounge. A waiter wearing white gloves places before me an orange sorbet nestled in a crystal glass. Orange blazes against a shock-white table cloth. Days later I sprint to victory in an on-deck footrace and receive a prize. Later still, I wake, sobbing, inside the cabin of an airplane reduced to the half-light meant for sleep. My father, to whose chest I am firmly pressed, directs my gaze to the streets of Chicago below. In the inky darkness, bracelets of light. The journey across America is a series of awakenings after bouts of sleep. I wake in another plane, this one just large enough to hold our family. The sky outside is deep-afternoon blue. Below us, an ocean-wide vista of snow covered peaks, close enough to touch. The plane dips suddenly, as if to capsize: wingtip down, we enter a green canyon that threads its way toward glints of water.

Unmediated visual mnemonic terrain—that which awe sears onto the retina—returns time and again with the potency of the first encounter. These memories, vivid and sparse, are bound by their equivalent intensities. Without the context that narrative provides, they constitute a dynamic terrain alive without language. I saw these things but had no words for what I saw. It is only much later that language revisits these nodes of remembered experience, to explain and contextualize. For instance, while writing a

eulogy for my father's funeral, it occurs to me that the ice-capped mountains of the Coast Range are *white sentinels*— signposts at the entry point to our new life. Over time, the unmitigated sense of childhood wonder yields to symbol and figuration. Where once there was only wordless cognition, meaning insinuates. Decades later, as I flew over the polar route from Europe, I chanced to see the Rocky Mountain range from thousands of feet above Alberta. The tug to earth was almost unbearable. I had entered again the chasm through which we first flew by floatplane into Minette Bay on that hot July day in 1956, and knew instantly that, for me, a sense of *belonging* is entered, *symbolically*, through mountains.

Images of travel to a new continent feel pre-lingual precisely because they combine moments of awe with a point of crossover between languages. The child who registers the sea of white peaks speaks Flemish and German—languages she divests almost instantly upon arrival and entry into an English-speaking school. Words that once signified *snow* or *mountain* in the native tongue, recede, and are quickly extinguished. And yet, these images, released from the bonds of language, remain undiminished in vivacity. They are mysterious and numinous precisely *because* they exist without language.

The hole in the rainforest to which we came was in the process of being cleared by a five-ton wrecking ball. Strung between two tractors by a length of cable, the ball was dragged through dense bush and razed everything in its path—environmental rape by today's standards of forest stewardship. Alcan, and its power station, Kemano, were testosterone-driven projects fueled by postwar optimism and cold war paranoia. The only aluminum producer on the Pacific rim at that time, Alcan smelter made pots, pans,

and airplane parts, and became one of the ten most desirable global targets for the 'other side,' should we engage in nuclear war. The Nishi family, the only Japanese-Canadians in our town at that time, built a nuclear fallout shelter under their house. At school we practised ducking under our desks in preparation for a nuclear attack.

Fig. 1. Photograph: Wolfgang, Elisabeth, Veronica. Kitimat, 1956. © V. Bhandar 2013

Together, under prolonged months of cloud, rain, or snow, we—the teachers waiting for schools to be built, doctors and nurses awaiting a "real" hospital, families from all parts of Europe, skilled and unskilled labourers— remain in a state of chronic impermanence. Situated at the upper end of ninety mile long Douglas Channel, Kitimat is still very much a town on paper. A utopian postwar miracle-in-the-making, designed to keep people anchored to a tough climate, it is the wettest place, with the exception of Prince Rupert, in the entire country. U-shaped streets back onto miles-long grass corridors, pathways, and sidewalks. The first houses open onto the green corridors. To those of us who live in them it seems as though these houses have been turned around in error due to the feverish construction pace: their front doors face away from the street. This intended anomaly, however, goes well with all the other skewed elements that occur when a community is thrown together from cultures that have come from everywhere and have recently been at war with one another. The soccer field behind the YMCA, for instance, where men on the German and Italian teams routinely come to blows, is fused in my memory with small, waxed brown paper bags filled with freshly roasted fava beans, still warm in their skins, cooked by a Portuguese vendor who set his stand up on the sidelines. And as for the carefully planned green spaces, at fourteen years of age my friend Anne and I clamber out of her basement window to roam the vast green corridors at 3:00 a.m. More likely than not we meet others like ourselves, very often groups of boys we know from school, also roaming through the cool, damp night. On the mountains that ring our valley, a pervasive stillness aligns itself with the deeper, immeasurable stillness of endless tracts of forest. Snowcaps on the mountains appear lit from within; trees are 'familiars' in league with our teenage madness. We

could knock on any door in the middle of the night and be taken into safety. Doors are often left unlocked, so certain are we of our neighbours.

The first wave of labourers brought in to build the aluminum smelter live aboard the Delta King, a stern wheel riverboat anchored in Douglas Arm that had been pressed into bunkhouse service due to lack of available housing. A tiny settlement—more bunkhouses, tents, huts, a makeshift hospital, and the Hudson Bay Trading Company—bruises the shoreline where it meets the mouth of Anderson Creek. The entire enclave appears to sit several yards back from the water with mountains rising steeply behind. We teeter on the edge of permanence. The rainforest into which we have all plummeted is being pushed, pulled, and torn apart. Our town-site grows into the spaces light has not touched in a thousand years; air cracks with the sound of the five-ton wrecking ball under which trees buck and roll; bonfires of slash sink into days of smoke, smoulder, and smudge. A train pulls in behind the two story Gordon Hotel daily, delivers pre-fabricated house constructions that will become Hulla houses, one of three designs created by architects in New York to serve the little city they are dreaming up on paper.

Before my parents can speak English, they have made friends with Icelanders and Laplanders who are equally handicapped. Liquor has a way of blunting inhibitions around language; week-end parties are legendary. Photographs of my parents taken in the first two years after our arrival reveal a scarcely concealed homesickness that looks like illness. They appear thin and vulnerable, and there is a palpable sadness in their postures. My aunt Hanna writes from Germany: “Else, are you experiencing a recurrence of your old heart ailment?” to which Else replies, “No, but if there was a bridge from me to you, and it was made of broken glass, I would walk it barefoot to

come home again." Yet, it was my mother who, disembarking from the float plane in Minette Bay, overrode my father's instant revulsion to wilderness. "We have come this far," she said, "and here we will stay."

We carry our various languages and cultures like torches that soon sputter out in the damp. Sullen, impregnable forests and mountains that reach straight down to our back door invite a kind of *greening* of the brain in which the landscape invades our collective psyche and pushes everything else out. While our parents cope with isolation and learn a new language, we run down to catch minnows in pools alongside the river, or build forts just inside the forest wall—forbidden territory that bulldozers have barricaded with slash. There are bears who've grown accustomed to eating out of the hands of the labourers in the makeshift camps. We are warned. And while in the pages of my Grade One Reader Dick and Jane run and jump through leaf piles raked along boulevards lined with deciduous trees, I know the real world of spruce and fir does not *let down* under pressure of wind or snow. Our backyards collapse into gullies of devil's club and skunk weed; the forest soughs and breathes, every inch of it as alive as we are.

Winter finally opens into spring, and the pussy-willow buds are the first sign of change. During warm-weather gym classes we propel our bodies down a forest trail knotted with exposed roots that leads to Hirsch Creek. On one side, where a tree has capsized, a thick plank of light falls through the preternatural gloom, illuminating ferns that shoulder the base of giant spruce and fir. These are our constants: a shank of light when one least expects it, the shock of a clear blue sky after thirty consecutive days of rain, or sun that rockets off snow so bright it presses our eyeballs back into their sockets. While Dick and Jane leap into the soft leaf-beds of an indistinct suburban

elsewhere, the rainforest sends out filaments to claim us. We live and play on the edge of a world for which we have no language, no narrative. It's all just *the bush, the river, the chuck*. Kitimat is brooding—dark with weather. Once you climb over or under the log jams that mark the town limit, you enter a dimension where stillness is the mean. Foliage moves only because we animate it in passing. A shiver runs through the underbrush, then, a message that we—our sunburnt legs, our shrill child voices—are *inside.* The forest watches us, but without appetite. Elizabeth Anderson Varley will one day provide a tamed vision of our world in her book *Kitmat My Valley,* an account of the pioneering days of the Anderson family on the Kitimat River estuary. This demystification of place confuses me still. How to reconcile images of sturdy pioneers raising cattle on the tidal flats with my own darkly metaphysical experience? Photographs from her family archive reveal a languid river delta teeming with fish and fowl, the forest studded with the harvestable bounty of blueberries and salmonberries that the Haisla people, living across the Channel, came, in their season, to gather and share. Once our self-sufficient town is up and running, this relationship between the pioneers and the Haisla disappears. Varley's dedication reads: "Affectionately dedicated to my parents, the first strangers who came to the Kitimat Valley, and to the Haisla people, who were never strangers" (n. pag.). We, who have assembled in the valley from all parts of Europe, do not seek out the Haisla, and they, so it appears, have no need of us.

It has been said of the Australian writer Patrick White that the alien landscape for which his descriptive language was insufficient gave rise to a new language, a new synthetic form of writing. We are Portuguese and Dutch, Finnish and Italian,

Norwegian and German, Yugoslavian and Ukranian. Struggling to overcome our deficiencies in the prevailing language, we are unaware that a language born of place is sympathetic to place and spirit, that here, other languages pre-exist us by millennia. Decades will pass before Eden Robinson's novel *Monkey Beach* teaches me that the land in which we both grew up, and which I thought I knew, belonged to the Haisla, and that it was infused with mythology and lore that stretched back in time to the recession of the Ice Age.

In the earliest years—1956-57—we remain tentatively tethered to our nationality. My parents decide to buy a half-duplex on Bulkley Street. The day my mother takes possession of the house is a contentious one. She spends the morning scrubbing wine stains from the living room walls with a bucket of hot water and Spic and Span. Her arms swing in wide, circular arcs as she works her way across the freshly painted pale grey surface. She is taking possession of these walls in anger—walls the carpenters, eager to celebrate the completion of the first house on that street, have seen fit to defile. No formal complaint is made by my parents. It's a company house, and we are lucky to get it, having spent our first three seasons in a one-bedroom basement suite in which the walls, during the extensive rain-time, sweat incessant runnels of water. This house, and the anger with which it is being blessed, belongs entirely to my mother. In time she will wallpaper, slipcover, and hang filmy expanses of pink and yellow flounce, the Sears Catalogue curtains. She will rent out one or two of the three bedrooms to smelter workers when money is scarce. For now, she hangs our expensive Belgian carpets at rakish angles against the chastised walls. This is the first dwelling she has actually owned—it's hers entirely. The kitchen counter has a lift-off lid at one end that reveals a

top-loading, built-in washing machine. My father takes a picture of my mother lifting the lid of this concealed wonder and sends it home to Europe. In the photo my mother wears an apron with a ruffled hemline and open-toe high-heeled mules with pink faux feathers across the bridge. Her hair, set and curled at the salon, is white-blond.

Our neigbours at the other end of the side by side duplex are Italian—a perennially old couple with an indeterminate number of children. My father calls this couple "Mama and Papa." He approaches Mama at the back fence to tell her he is going to paint his half of the duplex. Good, she nods, and indicates with her hands that they will paint theirs, too. My father buys gallons of pale blue paint at the hardware store, transforms our side of the house into a baby-blue confection with white trim. "Papa" paints his half hunter green with brick red trim. Unsettled by the bombast next door, my father puts up a fence that starts eight feet high where it attaches to the house, then staggers down in sections to waist-height where our yard meets the street. This blocks our view of Mama and Papa's place. One day in summer Mama comes again to the back fence. In broken English she invites my mother to her front garden, shows her the dahlias and roses fighting for life in the shadow of the staggered fence. My mother loves flowers of all kinds. She claims she does not know how to grow them herself. "We are city people," she iterates and reiterates, and I, who can still recall the cobbled streets of Ghent—the stone guild houses, the massive buttresses of the cathedral—truly do not recall a single leaf or blade of grass from that world. After work, my father fetches the hammer and dismantles the fence quickly, assiduously. In short order, our two houses are fenced off, once again, by dahlias—flamingo pinks, fire-reds, sun-

yellows. Their bobbing heads set up an intermediary clamour between ascendant-blue and earth-anchored green.

Many decades later, while walking through a museum in Bonn dedicated to the civilian history of World War Two in Germany, I open a door that leads to an outside garden. A plaque informs me city dwellers in the postwar starvation years had been quick to turn every available piece of sod over to edible matter. I realized, suddenly, that, for my mother, the act of gardening may have signified a return to years of hunger, to failure, to *Stunde Null* (zero hour), the end of days.

Starting school meant we bent our ears to the new language and left our Portuguese, Italian, Yugoslavian, Dutch, and German at home. The new language is taking root at home, too, especially for those of us who are German. The wreckages of war have slipped only slightly below the horizon, and the heat of conflagration still simmers. A "good" German, in the eyes of my parents, Canadianizes quickly. My mother has no patience for the Brauns next door, who summon their children for supper in the old, Bavarian-inflected language and who chatter with other German neighbours in the same dialect. Tell-tale German traits fall to a sort of ridicule in our house. The German hobby farmer in Terrace, a forty-mile drive from where we live, sells freshly killed rabbit at Easter. My mother makes a stew with onions and wine out of this rabbit. On the farm there is a deep ravine with a creek running through it. The farmer has built a wooden bench up on a bluff that looks down over a sharp bend in the creek. Each time we visit, the farmer beckons us to the bench. It reminds him of the *Lorelei*, he says, that famed hairpin turn in the Rhein River where sirens lured sailors to their deaths. At each renewed encounter with the *Lorelei*, my father rolls his eyes, turns away, bitterly

amused. There is something unseemly in the farmer's gesture of nostalgia. We must not emulate this behavior. And yet, the rules regarding the degree to which we are permitted to be German are arbitrary. I am never quite sure what makes Rainer Hartmann—young, unmarried, and who lives in the duplex behind ours—acceptable to my parents when so many other Germans around us are held in suspicion, ridicule, or contempt.

The Sandbus who live across the street from us are Norwegian. One of my favourite playmates is their eldest daughter, Randi. Mr. Sandbu picks wild mushrooms in their season and hikes the dreary, fogged-in mountains. During a steep hill climb—Randi has invited me—he will not let me put my lips to the mouth of the water skin, makes me lean my head back, open my mouth wide, and let the water drizzle in from a significant height. Such is my sensitivity to being other, I think he does this because he dislikes me. Although his accent tells me that, like me, he is a foreigner, I suspect there is a hierarchy in terms of foreignness and I am wrongly foreign, a kind of contaminant. This notion is reinforced by Mrs. Sandbu, who will not let me touch her baby, Mona.

The pejorative term D.P. is commonly produced in skirmishes between "Canadian" kids and the "rest of us." Although it is a term we do not fully comprehend, the delivery of the term at the height of a squabble leaves little doubt as to its connotation. In my case, it usually brings the conflict to an abrupt, tearful end. I run home to tell my parents. One of our live-in boarders, who worked his way across the prairies, teaches my brother and me to retaliate with the phrase "Saskabush farmer," also an ideation we do not fully comprehend, but use anyway. Slights and slurs, freely brandished, are passed from child to parent where they often take root in resentment and distrust.

Appearing as Canadian as possible becomes paramount, but some of our given names work against this. My brother is called Wolfgang Johann; our schoolmates are Reinhold, Sigmund, and Werner. The girls are named Hannelore, Heidi, Dagmar. And the boy called Dietmar, who was routinely beaten by his teacher in a rural classroom in Alberta because he was German, arrives in Kitimat renamed "Dick," a name most likely lifted from our Grade One *Dick and Jane* Readers.

The link to our past manifests itself mainly through food. Although we adapt to eating pan-fried steaks—made popular in the work camps and relatively inexpensive in the supermarket— together with a variety of canned vegetables and the everyday boiled potatoes, my mother also turns out dishes from the old country. When ripe plums, sagging in their purple juices, appear in the supermarket, she bakes a flat, dense cake layered with sliced plums and crisscrossed with braided pastry brushed with egg white. On a Sunday morning she makes an unleavened, skillet-sized pancake heavy with thin slices of tender, sweet apple. The whole plate-sized entity is set before me, sprinkled generously with granulated white sugar that slowly dissolves into a lake of melted butter. Corn on the cob, which appears at the dinner table in other people's houses, is taboo. Corn, my father says, is fed to the livestock in Europe and is unsuitable for the likes of us. New Year's Eve brings the rarest of treats—smoked eel—ordered in advance from Lilo's Tuck Shop. Its scent is redolent of far-away; its flesh is dense, light, and dry.

My parents never exchange gifts with one another at Christmas, but my brother and I receive one gift apiece, delivered after the supper hour on Christmas Eve under cover of darkness by the *Christkind* (Christ child). My mother bundles us into the bedroom I

share with my brother and instructs us that we are not to come out until the *Christkind,* who signals his arrival by ringing the doorbell, has made his delivery. The chime of the doorbell evokes for me a plump cherub who hovers in mid-air in his swaddling clothes. His tiny hand reaches for the doorbell with the same poised gesture as in a painting of him that hangs above the bed in my parents' room. There, seated on his mother's lap, baby Jesus sweetly blesses a kneeling Saint Francis. In *our* world, the *Christkind's* cheeks and eyes are bright with winter cold. At a given signal, we race from our room to find the gifts of the Magi unwrapped and waiting under the tree—a doll seated upright in a plastic bathtub for me; an enormous fire engine with flashing lights and rotating ladders for my brother Wolfi.

Afterward, as we listen to the 33s spinning on the record console, my mother identifies arias from operas she has seen. At those moments, she seems to hover on the periphery of another age. She lifts her chin slightly, a mannerism that cues us she is entering the realm of memory and is about to pull something arcane out of a hat, something we cannot know from our own insular world. She recites details of specific operas but never reveals with whom she has attended these affairs, or where.

When the era of television strikes our town—it is 1962 before the Kitimat-Terrace region erects a receiver on Copper Mountain that is able to capture and transmit a signal—it envelops us in the lives of The Beverly Hillbillies, Doctor Kildare, I Love Lucy, and the Donna Reed Show. Again, I catch glimpses of my mother's former life. A name on the Ed Sullivan catches her eye and I ask, "Is it German?"

"Yes. But Jewish."

"How do you know?"

"Because Jewish names are different … a little beautiful, like the names of flowers." She gives several examples. Einstein means one stone. Rosenblum means rose blossom. She knows things I do not, but she rarely lifts what she knows out of the shadows. Everything that comes from her emanates as isolated enigma. Memories are contracted, and like dense objects that have too much mass, they exert an inexorable pull. Once, after I ask her if she has ever been a member of the Nazi party, she relates a story about her mother, Mimi, who she sometimes called *Mamuschka*. Mimi, bombed out of Bremen, wanted to move to the village of Unkel am Rhein where her son Olaf was to be married to Hanna Mohr, the daughter of the caretaker of a large estate.

"Your grandmother went to the mayor's office," my mother says, "and asked to rent a house, but she couldn't get one. Day after day she tried, but the answer was always no."

"Why?"

"They just didn't want to give it to her. She was not from that town."

"What did she do?"

Without looking at me directly, my mother says, "I went together with her down to the mayor's office, but before we went I put on my pin from the *Partei*—just here—where I knew they would all see it." She points to a spot where the lapel of her jacket would have been.

"What happened then?" I already have a good idea of what happened from the self-satisfied look on my mother's face.

"They had a house for her. And *right away.*"

"Why did they do that?"

"Because they knew what could happen."

Such is the power of a little pin a-fixed to my mother's lapel—a wordless passport. It becomes increasing anathema to me that my mother derives, at intervals, a sense of entitlement from that other world. More often, however, a sense of loyalty or pride that emanates from that sphere is quickly shunted out of sight, lest it bring scrutiny or harm. "I joined the party very late," she says by way of excuse, "and then it was only because I had to." When she turns sixty-five and becomes eligible for her government pension, my mother hesitates, will not come forward to claim it. "What if they look and find out I was in the *Partei*?" she asks my father.

My mother intimates there has been another world, but when she speaks of it she seems frozen in an aperture that connects this life with that one. I know the other world to be real, however. In rare moments when my mother truly awakens to memory, its presence shines through her skin. In those moments a vignette from that other place, wavering in its fragility, is, for a short time, illuminated. I see, then, the third-floor walk-up apartment in Bremerhaven, from which Elisabeth and her brothers watch the arrival of their father's merchant marine ship. I hear the trained parrot her father has brought from Brazil calling the children *zum Essen* (for dinner). I see the family seated together at the table—Willi, Mimi, Else, Olaf, Gerold. Willi teases the wife he has not set eyes on for a year; he tells her she has once again failed to adequately carve the "eyes" out of the peeled potatoes. "*Die Kartoffeln sehen wieder so freundlich aus,"* he says. (The potatoes look so friendly, as usual.) A frameless, contextless world in which images rise and fall. I might have asked, what made your father go to sea? What kind of man was he? Where did his people come from? But the aperture is quickly closing

and my mother needs to be on this side of it—*my* side. Rising from her place on the sofa, she walks to the kitchen, or the bedroom, or into the barren yard—anywhere that the day's work beckons—and all is extinguished.

Chapter 2: Meditations on the Use of Imagetext in W. G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*

Photographs in W.G. Sebald's semi-autobiographical collection of stories *The Emigrants,* like the drawn images in Art Spiegelman's Holocaust autographic memoir *Maus,* when presented in tandem with text, act to bring antithetical qualities of critical distance and empathy into close proximity. Together they address and communicate inaccessible aspects of grief, mourning, and traumatic memory. *The Emigrants* charts the borders of what is permissible between non-Jewish Germans and Jews with regard to Holocaust representation: it offers sudden, unexpected moments of recognition that circumvent long-established taboo, creates space for what may be considered trangressive transmissions of testimony, and makes deep incursions into the uncanny in-between world of ghosts.

This chapter privileges the work of Katja Garloff, Enrique Martinez Celaya, and Roland Barthes in order to shed light on the notion of an "epistemological gap" in the witnessing of testimony, and explores the ways in which this gap opens the way for new modes of transmission. Sebald's positionality is that of a non-Jewish German diasporic writer working from a geographical periphery while striking at the heart of trauma and loss resulting from the Holocaust in Europe. Sebald's narrative strategies enact this loss in multiple ways: he layers temporal geographies in order to position his non-Jewish narrators at the site of original Jewish trauma; he delivers his non-Jewish narrators to arguably transgressive, unexpected moments of identification with the victims of the Holocaust; he uses photographs that emphasize dissonance occasioned by "the moment we ought to have but are unable to have" (Celaya 143). This

dissonance coincides, on a pictorial plane, with Garloff's notion of an epistemological gap.

The term "imagetext," coined by W. J. T. Mitchell, refers essentially to the overwriting of a photograph with a text or "prose picture" (9). Stefanie Harris notes in her meditation on memory and photography that Mitchell works to depose the binary of word and image using new terms such as "textual pictures" (109) and "pictorial texts" (209) in order to eliminate the separation that acts to make one or the other subordinate. Rather than being merely illustrative of one another (as when a photograph is explained with a caption), text and image become mutually independent, opening the way for a hybrid "imagetext" in which neither image nor text appear in isolation but rather exhibit a new form. Harris cites Kaja Silverman's argument for "the possibility of an ethical relationship between the viewer and the photograph" and in which "we do not use photographs for our own ends but are given the psychic wherewithal to participate in the desires, struggles, and suffering of the other, and to do so in a way which rebounds to his or her, rather than to our own, 'credit'" (385). Harris, through Silverman, posits Roland Barthes notion of the *punctum*.[10] "The 'prick' of Barthes *punctum,"* Silverman iterates, "results from the eye looking from a position that is not assigned or culturally validated in advance, whereby an otherwise insignificant component of the screen comes into contact with one's own mnemic reserve" (385). The narratives in *The Emigrants* are shaped by the desire of their non-Jewish protagonists to embody an ethical relationship to the past in order to align themselves in a non-transgressive manner to victims of the Holocaust. This chapter

[10] Barthes describes a photograph's *punctum* as a "kind of subtle beyond—as if the image launched desire beyond what it permits us to see" (59). Barthes maintains the *punctum* is "uncoded" (510); "it provides a tiny shock" that has the capacity to "prick" the viewer (49).

seeks to explore the ways in which Sebald's use of photographs gestures toward this alignment.

Photographs in *The Emigrants*, rather than forging an alliance with or remaining allegiant to the text, foreground an ethical relationship vis-à-vis photograph and viewer. Harris observes how Sebald's entire oeuvre explores the terrain of "wrongful trespass—how does one tell the story of the past, another's past, without lapsing into sentimentality, or worse, distorting any comprehension of the past altogether" (381). Sebald's use of photographs in *The Emigrants* includes images that appear, in turn, enigmatic, allusive, evidentiary, and banal. Seen in conjunction with the texts they accompany, and with reference to Sebald's pre-texts[11] that surfaced as part of his estate, the photographs resist conventional analysis. Richard T. Gray, in examining Sebald's pre-texts, asks whether Sebald's emendations open "up greater interpretive space" (405). While Harris seeks to expand Mitchell's original definition to include an ethical framework for the media known as imagetext, Marianne Hirsch expands the term imagetext in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* to include all family photographs which, she argues, "are composite, heterogeneous media, 'imagetexts': visual texts, that is, whose readings are narrative and contextual but, which also, in some ways, resist and circumvent narration" (271). One can derive from these evolving definitions that there may be no stable, universal term for the notion imagetext. Once the binary of text and image, with its hierarchical dispositions, is dissolved, imagetexts evolve into new constructions.

[11] Pre-texts, Gray explains, constitute "the early stages of a project [in which] Sebald seems to have concentrated on smaller segments of text, subjecting these passages to constant and minute re-writing … even when making only stylistic changes" (388).

Sebald's use of photography in conjunction with text also results in an unquiet disjunction that raises questions of representability, particularly with regard to the Holocaust. For example, "Max Ferber," the closing narrative in *The Emigrants*, contains a meditation on the pictorial veracity of the book-burning incident in Nazi Germany in 1933 in which Ferber's Uncle Leo reasons that the book burning photograph is a distinct forgery. Leo states: "The books were burnt on the evening of the 10th of May, but since it was already dark, and they couldn't take any decent photographs, they simply took a picture of some other gathering outside the palace … and added a swathe of smoke and a dark night sky" (183). Sebald, through various examples like this one, cautions the reader against an implicit trust in photographs as evidence. In the narrative "Paul Bereyter" the text reveals that Paul wrote an inscription beneath a photograph in which he is seen sunning on the coast of Dalmatia. According to the text, Paul's caption reads: "always … one was, as the crow flies, about 2,000 km away—but from where? –and day by day, hour by hour, with every beat of the pulse, one lost more and more of one's qualities, became less comprehensible to oneself, increasingly abstract" (56). Contrary to what the text reveals, the accompanying photograph of a relaxed young man, shirtless and in sunglasses, does not contain the inscription and thereby belies Bereyter's state of mind. Omissions such as this trouble the narrative: are images to be read as evidentiary, as corroborative adjuncts to the text, or as subversive elements? Are the photographs *found objects* that stimulate story-telling, or does Sebald *search out* images that will augment the creation of critical distance within the work? We know from Gray's study of the emendations to Sebald's pre-texts that Sebald made a conscious choice in the evolution of his narratives to take

his personal image out of the photographs he employed because personal photos work against "the incapacity to name" which Barthes finds instrumental for the existence of the *punctum.* Gray examines Sebald's literary estate, which had been acquired by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach in 2009.[12] Gray notes that one of the "central impulses" (387) in Sebald's writing is a "mania for connections and coincidences" (387) and the way in which these mirror Sebald's own writing practice. Sebald has described his hand-written texts as palimpsests that he is compelled to write "over and over again, until [he feels] that a kind of metaphysical meaning can be read through the writing" (388). Gray analyzes the revisions and transformations in Sebald's writings with an eye toward shifts in "thematic emphasis and 'metaphysical meaning'" (389), and notes that Sebald fastidiously erased the "obvious" (389) in his writing and that his revision "turns on contrary tendencies, one that hones for precision and clarity and another that loosens the textual threads so as to create openings for interpretive speculation and engagement on the part of the reader" (389). Gray explains how the predecessor to "Dr. Henry Selwyn" entitled *"Verzehret das letzte selbst die Erinnerung nicht?"*[13] (Destroy the final [or ultimate] thing[s], just not memory) (390),[14] contained an image of Sebald riding a bicycle in front of Prior's Gate, the dilapidated estate that his unnamed narrator of his story seeks to inhabit. Gray states:

> The illustration with which 'Verzehret das letzte selbst die Erinnerung nicht?' opens has a markedly different tone and function. It presents a youthful image

[12] Gray states in 2009: "at present Sebald's papers and manuscripts are still closed to the general scholarly public, since a major exhibition, based on materials that make up his literary 'remains,' is being prepared by the archival staff at Marbach" (387).
[13] Gray states: "These words are drawn from Friedrich Hölderlin's poem 'Elegie,' written in 1800, a sustained, melancholic deliberation on the experience of loss and its emotional consequences" (389).
[14] Gray's translation.

> of the author, Max Sebald himself, riding a bicycle in front of a high stone wall. This photograph includes a caption—an anomaly in the context of Sebald's later use of illustrations—that reads 'Fotografiert von O. im Früjahr 1971 vor der Mauer von Prior's Gate.' (Photographed by O. in the spring of 1971in front of the wall at Prior's Gate, 391).

Gray postulates, rightly, that Sebald removed the photograph from the text because its emphasis on factuality and documentation shifts "the weight of Sebald's narrative in the direction of genuine autobiography" (292) and this in turn works against interpretive loosenings and openings in the text.

Roland Barthes states, in his sustained meditation on photography *Camera Lucida,* "What I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance" (51). Written following the death of his mother, Barthes's text proves to be a poignant search for the mother in photographs that, although faithful in likeness, stubbornly refuse to present his mother's essence. Barthes's scrutiny of photographs offers important insights into their effect on the viewer, as well as the process by which the viewer hopes to possess the image. Barthes's interest is drawn by photographs that produce in him a certain "internal agitation" and the awareness of the "pressure of the unspeakable which wants to be spoken" (19). Barthes divides photographs into two categories: those that cohere to "the general field of interest" he relegates to the "*studium.*" Barthes uses the term "unary" and determines that "the photograph is unary when it emphatically transforms 'reality' without doubling it, without making it vacillate (emphasis is a power of cohesion): no duality, no indirection, no disturbance" (41). Newspaper photographs, Barthes establishes, adhere to this classification: These

photographs "can shout, but cannot wound" (42). The "*punctum,*" on the other hand—"that accident that pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me" (27)—has "the power of expansion" (45).

> The longing to inhabit (a photograph) is … fantasmic, deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or to carry me backward to somewhere in myself: a double movement … looking at these landscapes of predilection, it is as if I were certain of having been there or of going there. (Barthes 40)

Despite the fact that photography insists that the thing we are looking at has actually been present, Barthes notes that photography "actually blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory" (91). This chapter, then, explores the nature of photography through the lens of Roland Barthes's meditation on photography, *Camera Lucida*, as well as essays on photography by Cuban/American painter Enrique Martinez Celaya. Photographs can appear compliant and resistant, definitive and circumspect, visible and invisible—and not at all the simple agent of time's immortalization, as one might expect. Barthes observes: "Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner a photograph is always invisible; it is not it that we see" (6). Celaya's elucidations on photography are sunk primarily in his artistic practice and bring a close, hands-on perspective that is useful in establishing how the praxis of photography illumines the work of Sebald against "establishing the historical record" (Klebes 128).

2.1 Celaya's "Photography as Grief"

While on a trip to Berlin with the express purpose of writing and painting, the American painter Enrique Martinez Celaya took many photographs in an effort to

document the historic district (the Mitte), in which he was staying, as well as the overall changes that were taking place in the city. "I tried to document what was happening around me," he states in his lecture entitled "Photography as Grief" (141), "as well as less obvious aspects of the city—the decaying courtyards, the new Jewish shops, the cemeteries, the non-threatening colours of the new police, the fenced-in city lots with their fine linden trees" (141). On his return to the U.S. he developed the photographs he had taken in Berlin and discovered they did not yield what he had expected. People, architecture, even temporal aspects, had all become indeterminate. "Rather than being undeniable records," Celaya maintains, "my photographs of Berlin were documents of questionable veracity, and the more I looked at them the more questionable they seemed. Were they even 'my' memories?" (141-42). Celaya determined that the photographs failed as a classifying and organizational tool. Although we use photography as a classifying tool ubiquitously (Celaya mentions clouds, butterflies, cancers) "this usage depends on the invisibility of the photograph as a device" (142). Celaya explains this notion with careful deliberation:

> That is, the photograph must present its image as fact instead of a mediated experience, and the user of these photographs then looks *through* them, not *at* them. For all this to work, the photograph must be credible in its objectivity, and whatever failures it has in that regard are usually considered limitations of the technology or the user, rather than a limitation of photography itself. (142)[15]

Celaya brings an interesting speculation into his meditation on photography. The more one looks at a photograph, he suggests, "the less one knows it" (143). Distinction

[15] For discussion on photographs that ask us to "look *at* them," see Marianne Hirsch's analysis of the photographic work of Cindy Sherman in *Family Frames.* Sherman's photographs ask us to look *at* them, in other words, to become aware of social constructs in producing identity.

between observer and photograph "as something occurring outside of oneself" begins to fall away so that eventually, "meaning detaches … as a reaction to this distancing effect between the present of a photograph and the present of the observer" (143). Celaya observes that the meaning of a photograph is unstable and this "opens interpretive possibilities" (143). Celaya questions whether, in the course of these possibilities, two moments are merging or whether "these memories [are] in fact the product of an alternate present, of the in-between world of ghosts" (143). The most startling aspect of Celaya's train of thought is the notion that, "rather than photographs being commemorations of the dead [the dead of time or presence], [they] could represent memories belonging to the dead" (143). This notion is enhanced by the process of photography itself, which is ghostlike and seems to lift a presence from another unseen world and bring it into focus in this one. Celaya states: "Photography is a conscious and unconscious construction made possible by a chemical record that is almost not there. Like the grooves of a record, the chemistry of photography holds grief as potential and waits for ghostly relief" (146). Celaya extrapolates from this separation of observer and photograph that there must also be a corresponding "related interplay between the 'present' of the photograph and the 'present' of its observer" (143). Celaya decides that two temporal moments occupy the same space and the observer enters into two temporal dimensions—his/her own, and that of the photograph. And yet, Celaya notes that what arises from the experience of looking is the realization that this is a moment we "*ought* to be able to have" (144), but are unable to have. Celaya identifies this conundrum with a "longing" which is "an outcome of the temporal gap between myself … and the scene in the photograph" (144).

Celaya suggests that photographs "whisper" to us, or create the impression that we are eavesdropping. Eavesdropping on the past opens the door to Celaya's notion of an in-between world of ghosts where ghosts have their own memories, and suggests that photographs have the capacity to transport us into this world. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer arrive at a parallel revelation in "What's Wrong with this Picture?" Hirsch and Spitzer quote from Sebald's *Austerlitz* in which Sebald's protagonist repeats something he has heard about a stirring in photographs, a "small sigh of despair … as if pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us, remembered the roles that we, the survivors, and those no longer among us had played in our former lives" (182). To augment Sebald's observation, Hirsch and Spitzer state:

> It seems to us that this may be the clearest articulation of what we fantasize and expect of archival photographs: that they have a memory of their own that they bring to us from the past … that they carry not only information about the past, but enable us to reach an emotional register. (188)

2.2 Photography as Lacuna

The Emigrants, as a compilation of four stories,[16] connects themes of dislocation, memory, and loss across the breadth of the work. Each story is an encounter between the narrator and a mysterious other marked by trauma. This other either commits suicide, or, having arrived at a lonely plateau in life, dies unattended by family or friend. The unnamed narrator's position in each story is one of witness and reclamation: he *hands over* the life-details of a series of trauma victims that he

[16] This thesis does not examine one of the four narratives, "Adlewarth." Although its protagonist is a Jewish emigrant living in America who returns to travel through Europe, and although this story is linked to the others through enigmatic allusions, this particular narrative focuses on the 'outsider' as homosexual, rather than as Jewish, and so is deemed to fall outside the analysis and argument presented here.

encounters and this re-telling reads as if it were testimony. Sebald's narrative "Paul Bereyter," the second in the collection of four stories that comprise *The Emigrants,* begins with Bereyter's suicide and works backwards toward his childhood, retracing Bereyter's life through the mediated accounts of a narrator identified only as a former student, as well as through a Mme. Landau, who befriended Bereyter while on a visit to Salin-les-Bains in France in 1971. The narrator begins the story thus: "In January 1984, the news reached me from S that on the evening of the 30th of December, a week after his seventy-fourth birthday, Paul Bereyter, who had been my teacher at primary school, had put an end to his life" (27). Stationed at the top half of the page on which these words appear is a black and white photograph of a railway track that curves out of view. The photograph is devoid of human presence: it precedes the text and so does not refer to place or context. As such, the photograph invites us to inscribe meaning upon it from our own mnemic reserve, or to hold meaning in abeyance—to defer the moment of meaning until we receive word from the text as to how the photograph is to be interpreted. Because the image of the railway track (it could exist anywhere) appears prior to the opening of the narrative, it will, of necessity, hinge itself at the first opportunity to that portion of the text that binds it to the narrative. This hinge occurs in the second sentence: "A short distance from S, where the railway track curves out of a willow copse into the open fields, he [Paul Bereyter] had lain himself down in front of a train" (27). The placement of the photograph in conjunction with the text is important: if it had appeared *after* the revelation of Bereyeter's suicide it would have confirmed our suspicion that photographs are incontrovertible links to the past that act to authenticate facts proclaimed in the text. The photograph might even have suggested

we are witness to the actual place of suicide as our acculturation behoves us to consider photographs as evidentiary proof or visual documentation. And yet the photograph of the railway pre-empts our understanding of its context. The detailed textual rendering of the location of death which follows the photograph conjures the landscape in which Paul Bereyter lays himself on the tracks. The text informs us that the tracks lead from a "willow copse" (27) but there is no willow copse in evidence in the photograph. A disjuncture occurs, as text and photograph do not precisely coincide, and this once again raises a spectre regarding representation. Does the photograph as found object initiate a narrative? Or does Sebald take a photograph of railway tracks in order to augment his text?

Sebald's placement of the photograph creates a brief moment of suspension in which the meaning of the image is held in abeyance and the viewer is invited into a scrutiny that lapses into reverie. Having skirted the image for signposts to meaning and finding little or nothing to attach to, the viewer perforce falls back onto his/her own mnemic reserve, which may include a distant memory of departure or arrival by train, or a moment of anticipation—perhaps of impending catastrophe or joy, or suspension—the act of simply waiting for something to happen. The ensuing text guides us through a series of memories which begins with Paul's death, then moves in reverse chronology through the era of the "Third Reich"—with its trains as arbiters of death—back to the source of Paul's childhood fascination with trains. Near the end of the narrative, and after we learn that Paul Bereyter's betrothed, Helen, was taken to the Nazi death camps by rail, the narrator gives an account of Paul Bereyter as a young boy. Paul spent his summers with an aunt and uncle in Lindau where, for long hours, he

watched the trains come and go from the island to the mainland and back again. So enamoured was he of the trains and the imaginary journeys they represented, he never once returned from the seaside on time for meals, which led his uncle to muse that Paul "*would end up on the railways*" (63). As the narrative progresses, the introductory photograph of the railway track, initially generic enough to open interpretive possibilities for the viewer, loses its innocence; it becomes overlaid with the history of the "Third Reich" and the trains that transported millions of Jews and others to their deaths. Moving backward in time, the narrative eventually re-arrives at a time of innocence and enchantment that predates this era. The tale comes full circle, riven with tragic loss.

The question arises: does Sebald's illustration intend simply to open the reader to interpretive possibilities, or has Sebald found a subtle way of making the observer of the photograph complicit in Bereyter's suicide? Sebald's narrator fantasizes the suicide scene as follows:

> As I pictured him, he had taken off his spectacles and put them on the ballast stones by his side. The gleaming bands of steel, the crossbars of the sleepers, the spruce trees on the hillside above the village of Altstädten, the arc of the mountains he knew so well, were a blur before his short-sighted eyes, smudged out in the gathering dusk. At the last, as the thunderous sound approached, all he saw was a darkening greyness and, in the midst of it, needle-sharp, the snow-white silhouettes of three mountains: the Kratzer, the Trettach and the Himmelsschrofen. Such endeavours to imagine his life and death did not, as I had to admit, bring me any closer to Paul, except at best for brief emotional

> moments of the kind that seemed presumptuous of me. It is in order to avoid this sort of wrongful trespass that I have written down what I know of Paul Bereyter. (29)

This imagined evocation of the moments prior to Bereyter's death establishes a close, fictive identification with the victim and is immediately deemed by the narrator to be the moment of "wrongful trespass." A similar evocation takes place in the closing story, "Max Ferber," wherein Sebald projects an act of complicity between a photograph and its' viewer. The narrator of "Max Ferber" attends a photo installation created by Genewien, an accountant who had been contracted to document the Litzmannstadt Ghetto during the era of the Third Reich. The narrator becomes aware that he is standing in the very position inhabited by the photographer, Genewein, who takes a picture of three young Jewish women, who, we can assume, are soon to perish in the Holocaust. Sebald's narrator observes: "The light falls on them [the three young women] from the window in the background, so I cannot make out their eyes clearly, but I sense that all three of them are looking across at me, since I am standing on the very spot where Genewein the accountant stood with his camera" (237). This notion opens the possibility of the present day narrator and the accountant Genewein sharing the same temporal space through geographical placement, albeit that the present day vantage point is informed by loss, history, and the encroachment of time. Kaja Silverman's insight toward the possibility of an ethical relationship between photograph and viewer, one that rebounds not to the credit of the viewer, but to the subject, manifests here.

Sebald's photograph of the railway—its extreme close-up, low-angle perspective—invites the viewer to inhabit the space where Bereyter lay his head on the tracks. As we have seen, our encounter with the railway photograph presages its context. As Celaya observes, photographs that fail as a classifying tool invite a separation that becomes the moment we cannot have but ought to have. Allowing our gaze to graze beyond the boundary of the photograph, however, does not constitute release back into the world outside the photograph. As Celaya points out, a separation has occurred in which observer and the moment to be observed, no longer coincide. Celaya contends: "The attentive engagement with a photograph expands awareness beyond the self, and this expanding awareness creates a hollowness, a vacuum in consciousness which decenters subjectivity and blurs the distinction between inside and outside. Loss and destruction echo within that cavity created by the hollowing, and grief is their echo" (145). Sebald's photograph of the train track manifests as a doorway into the mnemic reserve of the dead Paul Bereyter and delivers him to us in ways that the text alone cannot. Sebald's story "Paul Beyreter" begins with the epigram: "There is a mist no eye can dispel." There is an occlusion beyond which vision cannot penetrate and this occlusion is constituted by the Holocaust, which, by virtue of its unrepresentability becomes a veiled presence. The photograph is a good simulacrum to describe this state: behind the constructedness of the photograph, who or what awaits? Whose photographs, and hence, whose memories, are they? We may locate something of ourselves by accident, as Barthes notion of the *punctum* proves. Or we may enter into the gap, or lacuna, that the uncoded photograph engenders for us.

2.3 The shock of recognition

Lindsay M. Christopher determines that a layering of narrative trajectories in one geographical space invites us "to confront the contemporaneity of all historical trajectories in one space" (91). Christina Kraenzle in her study of German transnational writer Yoko Tawada's fictive travelogues recalls "postcolonial theory's often used metaphor of palimpsests as a way of imagining place as socially constructed over time, over-written by a succession of cultures that have inhabited it" (254). Art Spiegelman's second generation Holocaust memoir *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* makes use of imagetext constructions to reinforce a sense that multiple narratives occupy the same temporal and geographical space, and that this space—contested or otherwise—is the prerogative of memory. Using a graphic novel format Art Spiegelman charts a disputatious son/father dyad in the shadow of the larger examination of his father's internment in Auschwitz. In taking down his father's testimony, Spiegelman places himself firmly in the space prescribed by Hirsch's notion of postmemory. Spiegelman's format is particularly suited to a layering of narrative geographies as they pertain to Artie and his father Vladek as first and second-generation Holocaust survivors.

Marianne Hirsch, in her study of the relation between photography and second-generation Holocaust trauma, uses the term "postmemory" which she claims is "distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection"(22). Hirsch adds:

> Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Postmemory

> characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated. (22)

Spiegelman's renderings chart the difficulty inherent in separating the normative tensions between a father and son, in which the son strives for independence, from the obligations that Holocaust survivorship brings to the relationship. Transformed originally from an evocation of grief for his mother's suicide, *Maus* became a collaborative work, a meld of Vladek Spiegelman's Holocaust oral testimony and Art Spiegelman's imagined, hand-drawn depiction of events filtered through his positionality as second generation postmemory Holocaust survivor. As mentioned previously, Victoria Elmwood, in her examination of the transformative aspects of trauma between generations with regard to *Maus,* claims "Spiegelman's role as narrative facilitator provides a means by which he narrates himself into the family legacy without appropriating the experience of the Holocaust as his own" (691).[17] Elmwood observes:

> To begin to answer the need for an ethics of narrative in the special case of postmemory, we might look to the concept of heteropathic identification, in

[17] Arguments to this effect can be found in Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust.* Bauman uses the term "hereditary victim" (236) and states "hereditary in this case is mainly imagined, acting through the collective production of memory and through individual acts of self-enlisting and self-identification. Thus the status of the 'Holocaust children,' that is, of hereditary victim, is open to every Jew, whatever his or her parents might have been 'doing in the war' or whatever was done to them in the war" (238). Bauman develops his argument, however, in a direction that stands contrary to the argument proposed in this thesis. Bauman refers to second generation Holocaust survivors as 'children manques', or 'flawed children' who, paradoxically, bear a 'vested interest in the hostility of the world, in fomenting the hostility of the world and keeping the world hostile" (239). Of the state of Israel, Bauman writes: "The flawed children of the martyrs do not live in homes; they live in fortresses" (240). This thesis prefers to recognize postmemory and heteropathic identification as the means whereby second generation inherited trauma motions toward the healing of familial rupture.

> which survivors' children find a way to claim the event itself that acknowledges their distance from the dramatic events in question. It is a matter of finding a way not just to acknowledge the distance between themselves and their parents' traumatic experiences, but to make that distance central somehow to the process of plotting an identity. (718)

Spiegelman's graphic image technique overrides text to allow for immediacy, as well as for sudden, surprising apprehensions—the shock of recognition—on the part of the reader of temporal, historical, political, and geographic layers that would otherwise not make themselves apparent with the same instantaneous force. The more compelling aspect of Spiegelman's imagetext format is his ability to wordlessly evoke layers of historiography simultaneously, as evidenced in the chapter three, "And Here my Troubles Began" (75).

Chapter three spools out absurd Jewish and African American stereotypes, but does so in tandem with a chilling account of Vladek's forced march from Auschwitz near the end of the war. The chapter opens with Artie, Francoise (Artie's girlfriend), and Vladek planning an excursion to Vladek's rented vacation home by way of the supermarket. Vladek decides he wants to return a few half-eaten grocery items to the grocery store enroute. He tells Artie, "Ever since Hitler I don't like to throw out even a crumb" (78). Spiegelman's delineation of Vladek's behaviour in the Shop-Rite reflects the pejorative Jewish stereotype of the miser: using guilt and persistence to persuade a grocery clerk to take back a half-eaten box of Special K cereal, Vladek approaches an apprehensive Artie in triumph. "You see?" Vladek says, "I exchanged and got six dollars worth of new groceries for only one dollar!" (90). Continuing on their journey to the summer

cabin, Artie reveals he has been reading about an act of resistance in Auschwitz that resulted in the destruction of some of the crematoria: “Some prisoners working in the gas chambers revolted. They killed 3 S.S. men and blew up a crematorium” (79). This, in turn, stimulates Vladek’s retelling of the event from the perspective of his personal history. Vladek replies, “Yah. For this they all got killed … and the four young girls what sneaked over to ammunitions for this, they hanged them near my workshop” (79). The visual frame that corresponds to this sequence of dialogue depicts the bodies of four women hanging in the trees. Spiegelman draws no distinction between temporal landscapes: memory is everywhere omnipresent—the young women are hanging in the American landscape through which the car is seen to be travelling.

Following a sequence that describes Vladek’s forced march from Auschwitz near the end of the war, Francoise stops the car to pick up a hitchhiker. Vladek shouts: ‘A hitch-hiker! And—oy—it’s a coloured guy, a Shvartser! Push quick on the gas!” (98). The African American’s speech is a Huck Finn-inflected dialect, which resurrects yet another stereotype. Vladek responds with unapologetic, overt racism. “I had the whole time to watch out,” Vladek states after the hitchhiker disembarks, “that this Shvartser doesn’t steal us the groceries from the back seat!” (99). Over and above these caricatures, however, the chapter takes on a darkly nuanced, deeply sinister tone that resonates from the powerful framing of the Auschwitz hangings superimposed on the American landscape. By placing the hanged Auschwitz women in *American* trees, Spiegelman subtly evokes the history of slavery and, in particular, the lynchings that exemplified an era of brutality and persecution. This superimposition of two separate narratives of racial intolerance moves us beyond individual meditations on female

Jewish resistance or on black American victimhood, to a simultaneity in which America's savage history with regard to slavery shares the same geographical and temporal space as Jewish martyrdom and resistance. Wordlessly, and without didacticism, the reader comes upon the discovery of these tandem histories of oppression and murder through Spiegleman's imagetext construction, which allows for a sudden, powerful, and direct insight.[18] Returning to Massey's notion of spatialized dichotomies, one can argue that Spiegelman's framing creates a new topography, one that not only privileges memory for first and second generation Holocaust survivors separately but, through the shock of recognition, allows multiple narratives to flash into existence simultaneously.

2.4 Positionality: Writing from the diaspora

Mark. R. McCulloh observes in *Understanding W. G. Sebald* that Sebald's "novels are specifically concerned with what it means to be a European—and, moreover, to be a European writer—in a time when European culture, despite the ubiquity of its remaining architectural monuments, literature, and artworks, is vanishing" (24). This section seeks to explicate and locate Sebald's positionality and ethical stance regarding the legacy of the Holocaust through an examination of images and text as they occur in the compilation of four stories entitled *The Emigrants.* This segment also interrogates the question regarding "form" and suggests that the form *The Emigrants* takes—a map through which the reader navigates the deeper layers of the past—is in service to what Karen Remmler refers to as the German-Jewish symbiosis (3). Remmler's insightful

[18] It is noteworthy that Ruth Kluger, looking back on the moments following her escape from Auschwitz, also evokes a Huck Finn analogy. "All I can say…is that these are not the adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Nigger Jim, floating down the river on their raft, experiencing a somewhat sinister but mostly humourous journey" (*Still Alive* 138). Written specifically for an American audience, this analogy, which attempts to parallel Jewish and African American histories, lacks the shock of recognition.

elucidations, when combined with those of Katja Garloff, contest the notion that Sebald is a European writer. Sebald is positioned, rather, as a writer who works in the German language, but as a member of the German diaspora located in England. As such, Sebald brings a unique sensibility, one that Katja Garloff, in her exploration of the emigrant as witness, describes as possessing an "epistomological advantage" (39) particularly with regard to the subject of the Holocaust. Sebald's foothold in two worlds expands his perspective but also acts to disenfranchise him from living fully in either one. Garloff quotes philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who states: "emigration [is] an instance of departure without arrival and without return" (qtd. in Garloff, 79). The narrator in "Max Ferber," on his return to Germany after a long exile, reveals an incipient antipathy: "I felt increasingly … the mental impoverishment and lack of memory that marked the Germans, and the efficiency with which they had cleaned everything up" (225).

As a corollary, the narrator in "Max Ferber" is aware that travelling to a new place does not necessarily result in new beginnings. Emanating from the landscape, regardless of where the narrator finds himself, are ghost presences, as in "Dr. Henry Selwyn" wherein the narrator proclaims: "And so they are ever returning to us, the dead" (23). The narrator is everywhere orphaned: he cannot return to Germany, for it has become anathema, and he cannot lose himself in the diaspora because wherever he goes he encounters the orphans of the Holocaust. An inevitable and inescapable historiography stands, together with questions of ethics and responsibility, at the centre of Sebald's oeuvre.

Much scholarship has been directed toward Sebald's serpentine writing style, his abundant use of allusion, and his ubiquitous use of the motif of wandering. In terms of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (dealing with the past) and the Holocaust, what might have been a risky foray into themes of loss have proven to be deep incursions, via the vagaries of memory, into the realm of subjectivity and what Sebald's narrator in "Dr. Henry Selwyn" purports to be wrongful trespass. Sebald's protagonists often find themselves lost, only to re-emerge at the point of original departure. It has been noted that they do not reappear unchanged by their journey. And yet, as John Zilcosky sets forth, Sebald's narrators and protagonists strongly *desire* to *be* lost, and yet are unable to accomplish this feat:

> Whereas traditional literary travellers get lost in order ultimately to find their way home, Sebald undermines this narrative, but not as we might expect: he does not claim that we are all hopelessly lost and thus unable to come home. Rather, he demonstrates how our disorientations never lead to new discoveries, only to a series of uncanny, intertextual returns. Instead of providing accounts of nomadism, Sebald tells stories in which subjects can never become sufficiently disoriented, can never really lose their way… the traveller, no matter how far away he journeys, can never leave his home. (102-03)

Zilcosky claims he is "working against the grain of what has already become a recurring argument in Sebald criticism: that Sebald's heroes are post-modern nomads, figures of disorientation desperately lost at the turn of our twenty-first century" (102). Before embarking on readings of three texts by Sebald, Zilcosky briefly elucidates romantic and postmodern paradigms from *The Odyssey* through Goethe's *Italian*

Journey to Barthes's *Empire of Signs* in which "lostness" is simply the means by which the narrator ultimately discovers himself and/or ensures that, by getting purposefully lost, "he will never suffer the agony of *really* losing his way" (104).

> More interesting than the fact that we might always be lost is, for Sebald, the fact that we might always know where we are, whether we like it or not: when we find ourselves in the same hotel in a city we have already visited; when we become disoriented only to keep circling back to the same spot; when we move away from our homes only to see our pasts creeping in everywhere around us. It is this persistence of the familiar, this *unheimlich* (uncanny) *in*ability to lose one's way that haunts Sebald's travel narratives. (104)[19]

What is it, one must ask, that fuels, and *thwarts*, this desire to lose oneself in one's geographical location? Is geographical displacement an analogy for psychic displacement, and if so, what manner of psychic displacement and why? As Zilcosky determines from his reading of "Max Aurach,"[20] the desire to lose one's way and to remain lost, stems from Sebald's narrator's interface with historiography, and in particular, the Holocaust. Sebald proves, however, that one cannot step out of history, though valiant attempts in that direction are undertaken. In the end, the dead are always with us, as the narrator's final observation in "Dr. Henry Selwyn" elucidates. The inability to lose one's way equates to the inability to *step outside* one's burdensome historiography. Gisela Brinker-Gabler invokes, in her introduction to the collection she edits with Markus Zisselberger, Austrian postwar poet Ingeborg Bachmann's *Die*

[19] Zilcosky's notion echoes that of Freud's "uncanny" as the return of the repressed, experienced as the uncanny familiar.
[20] "Max Aurach" is the original version of the narrative renamed "Max Ferber" in *The Emigrants.* For clarity, Max Aurach will be referred to as Max Ferber in this text.

Gestundete Zeit, which Brinker-Gabler translates as "borrowed time." Brinker-Gabler elucidates this notion of borrowed or mortgaged time as "the enormity of the burden to live after the Holocaust and the permanence of silence affecting every aspect of life and relationships" (2).

Of interest in this struggle to lose oneself is the notion that Sebald is a diasporic writer. He writes in his mother tongue,[21] German, to be sure, but does so sitting, off-shore, in England. This position affords Sebald a foot in two realms, divided, in terms of historiography, into the conquered (Germany) and the conqueror (Great Britain and her allies) and allows Sebald, to view, externally, the historical positioning of victim and perpetrator as it existed in postwar Germany. Katja Garloff's study of the emigrant as a privileged figure in trauma theory in *The Emigrants* cites Agamben. Garloff focusses her attention on missed encounters, as that of Max Ferber who, in reading his mother's memoir—a lucid, detailed account of a vibrant Jewish-German assimilated community in the Weimar Republic prior to the rise of Nazism—decides to pass the memoir on to the narrator of "Max Ferber."

Max Ferber is an artist who has cornered himself in an atelier in an abandoned industrial sector of Manchester. He paints in a compulsive manner, adding and subtracting layers of paint and graphite from his canvases and drawings until they create a pile of dust and detritus at his feet. Ferber is a Jewish survivor whose parents placed him on the *Kindertransport* that ferried Jewish children to England. Although Ferber has almost no recollection of his childhood with his birth parents, his work is a

[21] Sebald's writing style—rhythmically prosodic, with hypotactical syntax forms abandoned by postmodern writers, hearkens back to nineteenth-century German prose.

compulsive 'working through'[22] of the loss of his family, as well as, the vast loss brought on in the Holocaust. Ferber initially ascertains that his work is "to serve under the chimney" (192), a double entendre that brings together the urban landscape of Manchester and the crematoria at Auschwitz. His atelier, like his drawings, is engrained with the same dust that covers the ubiquitous chimneys of industrial Manchester/Auschwitz. Garloff reads the evasion and subsequent transmission of testimony by Ferber into the hands of another as "the disruption of a communicative circuit" which then leads to "the establishment of new chains of transmission, and ultimately, guarantees that the story is passed on" (82). Garloff states:

> It seems that the mother's text placed such strong demands on the reader that Ferber had to evade them altogether and passed them onto another person. Whatever the mother's message was, it did not fully reach its intended reader—since it might have destroyed him—yet it is precisely because the hermeneutic circle is not closed that a process of transmission sets in. (82)

Garloff notes that the ongoing debate regarding the "unsayability" (77) of the Holocaust (the impossibility of human language to describe the events) has "shifted toward the insight that the Holocaust has disrupted not so much the referential function of language but its ability to address" (77). Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, through Garloff, assert that the Holocaust stands as an "event without a witness" (77), an event in which "the very possibility of address, the possibility of appealing, or turning to, another" (81) was extinguished not only because the Nazi's silenced or killed most of the physical witnesses of the Holocaust, but also because the bureaucratically

[22] 'Working through' relates to Sigmund Freud's theory of 'working through' the resistances of the unconscious by means of repetition.

administered genocide destroyed the ethical dimension of language, its capacity to forge bonds between human beings. Holocaust testimony, then, both expresses this

> crisis of language and restores some of the lost capacity by opening up a communal and communicative space in which the truth can emerge. (81)

The emigrant, Garloff posits, has an "epistemological advantage" or "double perspective" initiated by the condition of exile, and this advantage allows for a "hermeneutic of exile to argue for the possibility of testimony" (78).

The notion of the *gap* as a means of transmission is useful when it is conjoined with a discussion of the symbiosis in which Germans and Jews find themselves in the post-Holocaust era, a notion that has been reinforced by the metaphoric and unbridgeable concept of the *abyss*. The concept of the abyss arose in response to discourses that postulate the Holocaust as a *Sonderweg* (unique event). Karen Remmler, in arguing for "a deeper understanding of the methodological divide between historians and literary scholars," writes:

> On one side of the divide stand scholars who study German-Jewish relations as they manifest themselves in history and everyday lives of self-identified German Jews. On the other side are those who study the relationship as an expression of language—not necessarily separate from the lived lives of German Jews, but embedded in literature, in poetry, in art, and in the memoirs that defy the division between reality and imagination. (4)

Remmler claims that "it is the answerability, the imperative to respond that connotes the encounters between Germans and German Jews" (15). According to Agamben's theory of the speechless communicating without speech to the speaking world, "to bear

witness is to place oneself in one's own language as if it were dead, or in the dead language as if it were living—in any case, outside both the archive and the *corpus* of what has already been said" (79).

Garloff argues that "exile is a paradigmatic predicament that forces one's own language to be reborn … for the exile writer's words are dislodged from what is being said at home and herself has first to be reconstituted after the loss of all existential certainties" (79). Agamben, Garloff states, "projects a paradoxical experience of time—which he also compares to the messianic hovering between an incomplete past and an indeterminate future—onto the spatial movement of emigration" (79).

> This brief glimpse into the work of theorists of testimony shows that their use of figures of displacement is neither arbitrary nor merely illustrative. Rather, it captures their shared idea that in testimony the possibility of transmission emerges from the impossibility of speech. It is precisely because an experience cannot be verbalized that it demands to be rearticulated in search of new addressees. (79)

Garloff articulates that, for Felman and Laub, the figure of the emigrant acts as a site for working through trauma, whereas "Agamben cites emigration as an instance of departure without arrival and return" (79). Agamben's positioning of the emigrant decisively affects how we view Sebald's narrators; they endeavour to lose themselves in their perambulations through landscape, but cannot. According to Agamben, by entering the synapse between the speaker and the speechless, one enters a realm where transmission from the world of the speechless to the world of the speaking is possible. Herein, the abyss, which has often been characterized as the unbridgeable rift between

victim and perpetrator, or between the drowned and the saved as characterized by Primo Levi, becomes a dynamic space of possibility. As Garloff states: "Likewise, testimony, if it is at all possible, is a departure to new expressive possibilities rather than recovery of lost speech or memories" (79-80) and provides an interpretation of "Max Ferber" in *The Emigrants* as an example of an emigrant whose anticipation that life in a new country will auger in a new life is undermined by his first glimpse of Manchester from the air—a glimpse that affords a ruined, deserted landscape that will come to stand in for his own feelings of displacement and the unworked-through trauma from childhood.

2.5 Missed Encounters and Moments of Sudden Recognition

In the late 1930's in Germany Max Ferber's mother writes an exquisitely evocative and detailed memoir of village life as she experienced it growing up in Steinach, in Lower Franconia, that provides almost no indication that daily life in Europe is growing ever more precarious and intolerable for its Jewish citizens. As Garloff accedes, and as is typical for Sebald's German narrators as they approach the plane of Jewish experience, "although the narrator announces initially that he only excerpts the papers, the first-person-narration and the lack of linguistic shifters tend to make us forget his interventions and read these pages as the mother's unmediated narration" (82). This sleight of hand allows the binary position of victim/perpetrator to blur. The account of village life is captivating in its detail and points time and again to the seemingly happy assimilation of non-Jewish Germans and German Jews. Although Ferber reminds us that his parents are caught in a life-and-death struggle to escape the Nazi Regime during the time that Luisa Ferber is writing her account, her memoir

recounts an idyllic pre-Nazi life. Ferber reads his mother's memoir twice, the first time superficially. Upon a second, meticulous reading, Ferber reveals that he is unable to engage with the work because it appears to him as "one of those evil German fairy tales in which, once you are under the spell, you have to carry on to the finish, till your heart breaks, with whatever work you have begun—in this case the remembering, writing and reading" (193). Turning to the narrator, Ferber states: "That is why I would rather you took this package" (193). Implicit, too, in this statement, is the role Sebald himself plays as writer. The taboo placed on the appropriation of Jewish experience by non-Jewish Germans is overcome with a subtle maneuver that directs us to envision the author, Sebald, as the arbiter of remembrance, writing, and reading, who must engage with the painful work that breaks the heart. Garloff, however, is concerned with the transmission of testimony and not necessarily with the dilemma regarding the wider field in which Sebald himself operates—one in which close identification with Holocaust survivors by Germans is considered taboo. Garloff examines a scene in which the narrator, in search of the place where Luisa Ferber grew up, finds himself in a gated, locked, defunct Jewish cemetery that decries mourning. Sebald writes:

> When I reached the gate, it turned out that neither of the keys fitted the lock, so I climbed the wall. What I saw had little to do with cemeteries as one thinks of them; instead, before me lay a wilderness of graves, neglected for years, crumbling and gradually sinking into the ground amidst tall grass and wild flowers, under the shade of trees, which trembled in the slight movement of the air. (223)

A single stone, placed here or there, reveals someone visited the graveyard at some point in time, near or far. Max Ferber's parents, having vanished in the Holocaust, are commemorated by empty graves erected, the narrator assumes, by Ferber's uncle Leo. While roaming among the grave stones, the narrator's chance encounters engender moments of recognition that place him in the same *space* as the other:

> A shock of recognition shot through me at the grave of Maier Stern, who died on the eighteenth of May, my own birthday; and I was touched, in a way I knew I could never quite fathom, by the symbol of the writer's quill on the stone of Friederike Halbleib, who departed this life on the 28th of March 1912. I imagined her pen in hand, all by herself, bent with bated breath over her work; and now, as I write these lines, it feels as if *I* had lost her, and as if *I* could not get over the loss despite the many years that have passed since her departure. (224-25)

Two distant temporal moments are layered, one on top of the other, bound by the common bond of writing symbolized in the quill that emblazons the grave marker. This constitutes not so much a closing of a breach as a simultaneous layering of temporal geographies precipitated by a moment of recognition. For a brief moment, as the narrator sits at his writing desk, he recalls that *other* writer, Halbleib, who sleeps among the dead. The narrator's profound sense of loss, triggered by his association to the dead woman through writing, is also, by virtue of the abandoned Jewish cemetery and the German-Jewish names found there, an act of mourning for the murdered German Jews. In this way, an empathetic instance of identification with the victims of

the Holocaust arises unexpectedly through an experience that is made possible only through the narrator's possession of Luisa Ferber's memoir.

Remmler posits that face-to-face encounters between Germans and Jews usually fail and that "intertextual correspondences can substitute" (4). Remmler provides a short synopsis of a failed encounter between the poet Paul Celan, a Holocaust survivor, and the German pro-Nazi philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Remmler asks "is it the absence of German-Jewish symbiosis that conjures up the hope for a presence of space, even imaginary, in which the impossible and thus failed work of symbiosis can take place? How can a word of reconciliation be spoken?" (911). Remmler also questions whether there can be a shared space 'in the presence of the other' or must "Germans and Jews live bound by the silence of the dead, whose words only begin to speak when the physical encounter is no longer possible?" (12). Paul Celan, Remmler notes, was unable to obtain the 'word' he seeks from Heidegger. "Without this word," Remmler argues, "the void cannot be filled and the symbiosis remains imaginary" (13).

> The remembrance of the failed correspondences between Germans and Jews can provide a model for thinking about German-Jewish relations to terms of *Eingedenken,* that by now familiar mode of Benjaminian commemorative insight that is born through recognition of the dialectical images of forgotten moments of rapprochement. (14)

Garloff, in examining the cemetery scene, finds that the narrator's creation of "an alter ego with whom he can empathize" reveals that a chance encounter that leads to a moment of recognition "shows how much mourning has become a purely private act of commemoration" (84). Garloff separates recognition from knowledge (84) "in the

sense that knowing means to bestow a mental representation on something and make it commensurate with other things, whereas recognizing means to sense a presence without subsuming it to existing representational forms" (84). This distinction is paramount for Garloff because it allows the narrator to access "a history that has been silenced in public" (85), *and*, one might add, one that has been rendered taboo by the victim/perpetrator dynamic. As Garloff notes, Sebald is ever mindful of "this dilemma between simultaneous need for and injunction against an imaginative identification with the victims of history" (85).

Garloff focusses not on an empathetic identification of the narrator with his subject, Max Ferber, but rather on their asymmetrical and missed encounters, and states that "this missed encounter between the writer and the person who is both the subject and addressee of his writing generates a new form of literary testimony" (86). Garloff argues that missed encounters—in particular the narrator's missed opportunity to hand Ferber a short version of his life that might well have ended Ferber's amnesia, as well as Ferber's inability to carry on with his mother's memoirs and the subsequent transmission of these memoirs into the narrator's hands—create "the suspension of closure [which] widens the circle of addressees because it gives an impetus to literary writing" (87).

> Like Agamben, Sebald postulates the existence of a *gap* between victims and their witnesses, although in Sebald the gap tends to separate victims from non-victims—often Jews from non-Jews—rather than survivors from *Muselmänner*. And like Agamben, Sebald suggests that the careful preservation of this gap is necessary to transmit an experience that eludes both narrative and spatial

> memory. The textual incorporation of photographs and journals whose authenticity remains questionable has to be seen in this context. The insertion of what may or may not be historical documents allows Sebald to hover between the claim to authenticity and the creation of fictions that come to substitute for irrecoverable memories. (88)

It is not because he restores voice to those who are voiceless "but because he accepts the gap between the speechless and speaking—and between the descendants of victims and of perpetrators—as the irrevocable condition of his own literature" (88).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores themes of circularity in Sebald's *The Emigrants*, with particular attention given to the inability of Sebald's protagonists to escape their historiographical placement as progeny of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. As a non-Jewish German, Sebald is careful to self-regulate against close identification with Jewish victims of the Holocaust in adherence with a taboo placed on the descendants of the perpetrator generation.[23] Sebald's protagonists, therefore, undertake metaphorical journeys that emphasize this condition. In the end, Sebald's fictions reveal a world not unlike that of the 1960's British television series entitled "The Prisoner" in which actor Patrick McGoohan, an unknown British agent named number six, is held captive on an island—a utopia that masquerades as a dystopia—from which there is no escape. Each episode concludes with the prisoner being reminded that his world is merely a construction created to hold him: he cannot re-enter the 'real' world. Sebald's "Dr.

[23] The term perpetrator is used here and elsewhere in this thesis as part of the perpetrator/victim binary: it refers to the postwar positioning of the Nazis and their followers as perpetrators of the Holocaust, and the positioning of Jews and others who were victimized and murdered in the Holocaust, as the victims. From my vantage point as second generation to the perpetrator generation, the use of this term, although arguable, still seems apropos.

Henry Selwyn," for example, recounts a named narrator's visual apprehension of his immediate surroundings, which is constantly undercut by illusion and counterfeit. The narrator inhabits a liminal space in which temporal and spatial boundaries continually dissolve under the pressure of his gaze. Given themes of feint and counterfeit, as in "Dr. Henry Selwyn," Sebald's imagetext constructions reveal, ultimately, that there is a world beyond the frame that is encircled by a border one cannot cross. As readers, we glimpse the 'external' world only for a moment, then sink back again, as in a dream from which one cannot awaken, lured by a labyrinth of allusions that woo us toward other constructed realities, other richly textured, subsuming worlds. Photographs in Sebald's works are a means whereby the reader surfaces out of the immersive fictive narrative. This chapter asks the question: into what sort of realm does the reader surface, and why? Photographs, with their evidentiary nature, are undercut by the text itself. The four narratives, though separate and distinct from one another, share common images and references that bind them inextricably to each other and hint of a substrate from which repeating elements percolate upwards. The effect, finally, is to see Sebald at work—his process revealed. Thus the reader never surfaces at all into the real world to which the photographs adhere, but rather into the finely wrought cage of Sebald's intimate struggle with history. This thesis, through an analysis of "Dr. Henry Selwyn," "Paul Beyreter," and "Max Ferber" in *The Emigrants*, explores the manner in which Sebald's constructions are designed to entrap and deceive, but do so with an eye toward methodological transparency and ethical purpose. Throughout Sebald's *The Emigrants* we are privy to the unnamed narrators' influences, and to their most intimate thoughts and preoccupations, which, it can be argued, are also the scarcely disguised

thoughts and peregrinations of Sebald himself. Sebald creates empathy for the victims of trauma on a narrative level while simultaneously achieving critical distance through the use of photographs. The finely wrought architecture of the four stories that comprise *The Emigrants* reveals not only Sebald's deep preoccupation with historiography but his realization that escape from this historiography is utterly impossible. What may yet be possible, Sebald suggests, is the transmission—compassionate and wrenching in equal measure—of the testimony of others, particularly the Holocaust testimony that is forbidden to German perpetrators and their descendants. "Max Ferber," the fourth and final narrative in *The Emigrants,* when expressly read through the lens of Katja Garloff's "The Emigrant as Witness: W.G. Sebald's *Die Ausgewanderten,*" reveals a hermeneutic *gap.* This gap constitutes a paradox: it is both the bridge and the abyss; it is both the evocation and extinction of the taboo that exists between Holocaust descendants and German perpetrator descendants.

This chapter explores how dissonance in the work of Sebald creates a powerful tide of ethical concern that carries the reader to unexpected shores of consonance. Garloff notes:

> Sebald suggests that the careful preservation of a gap is necessary to transmit an experience that eludes both narrative and spatial memory. The textual incorporation of photographs and journals whose authenticity remains questionable has to be seen in this context. (88)

Through Gray's analysis of Sebald's pre-texts, we have seen how Sebald endeavours to suspend closure by excising the personal, documentary element from his photographic

illustrations and works toward the use of uncoded images in order to allow his metaphysical themes to emerge.

The inclusion of photographs in *The Emigrants* splits the topography of reading. Sebald's images often appear mysterious when seen in conjunction with the text and point the way toward a broad, as yet unrevealed thematic or metaphysical interpretation. Whereas reading a text is a linear process that unravels through plot, characterization, and interval, two dimensional images, with their four borders, are apprehended at a glance. This chapter argues that two dimensional images scattered liberally throughout the text stimulates a *crossing over* for the reader and gestures toward a non-linear textual reading, one which is also strongly reinforced by recurring references such as the man with the butterfly net, and Werner Herzog's film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser*. These elements percolate upward, appearing first in "Dr. Selwyn" and continuing on through the narratives to "Max Ferber." The meta-view of the collection reveals narratives running under and behind the four stories in such a way as to enrich, but ultimately, subvert, the project. This subversion is particularly noticeable in the diary/testimony of Luisa Ferber's evocative memoir. Because Luisa's account is entirely subsuming in its rich evocation of daily life, the sudden re-arrival of the butterfly man, who first appears in "Dr. Henry Selwyn" jolts the reader out of immersion in the text. Artifice is made visible, and Sebald's hand is unexpectedly discernible, but to what end? We must accede that we are witnessing Sebald's constructivism at work; it acts as a frieze that stands between the narrative itself and what is glimpsed of the nihil[24] beyond.

[24] In an interview with Maya Jaggi, Sebald states, regarding the Holocaust: "It was clear you could not write directly about the horror of persecution in its ultimate forms, because no one could bear to look at

Critics of Sebald's oeuvre have lauded and criticized the dense, allusive architecture of his narratives, what McCulloh refers to as "strange lands … to which we all conceivably have access—through literature, history, and fantasy … a metaphysical monism, an entire 'intellectual world'"(20-21). Sebald's detractors (they are few and their criticisms are often modified by a general praise) include the writer Andre Aciman. In an essay written for the *New York Times,* Acimen states the following with regard to Sebald's work:

> They are works about how works impart meaning, about how relative all meaning is, and about how inadequate all literary constructs are destined to remain. But they are seldom about anything else—which is why, once you remove the patina, and the dream-making, and the intertextual cross-references … they lack … depth of vision and the unencumbered impulse to come up with what is probably the most necessary thing a good author needs: which is form. (23)

McCulloh reiterates Arthur Williams' notion regarding literary influences in the work of Sebald, which he refers to as '"intratextuality,"' the way the text seems to communicate within itself, referring to the same or similar incidents, events, persons, characteristics, works of art, works of literature, and coincidences—at intervals throughout the book" (56). This chapter argues that allusive references, as they recur across separate narratives, rise to the surface like particles emanating from a vast substratum. The unremitting pressure this substratum exerts from below drives elements to the surface where they are made visible. As Roland Barthes explains in

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these things without losing their sanity. So you would have to approach it from an angle, and by intimating to the reader these subjects are constant company, their presence shades every inflection of every sentence one writes" (n. pag).

Camera Lucida, certain photographs contain within them the "pressure of the unspeakable, which wants to be spoken" (19). Sebald seems to intuit this hidden pressure as an aspect of photography: his imagetext constructions double, through text and image, the pressure exerted from below, a pressure that stems from the Holocaust and proves inescapable and omnipresent. Unbearable horror and grief is held in abeyance until it finds ghostly release.

McCulloh emphasizes that Sebald's lyrical evocations of landscape are often described from a lofty vantage point "almost aerial … and there is an associated sublimity with the fluid motion of water" (17). Perspective from a higher ground appears to McCulloh as "an angel's perspective" which is also, he surmises, "the perspective of memory" (17). Even here, however, cracks appear in the firmament, as related with quiet drama by the narrator in "Dr. Henry Selwyn" during an after-dinner slide show hosted by Selwyn and his friend Edwin Elliott at Prior's Gate, the manor house that the narrator and his wife Clara have rented. Selwyn and his friend had gone on an excursion to Crete some years before.

> The low whirr of the projector began, and the dust in the room, normally invisible, glittered and danced in the beam of light by way of a prelude to the pictures themselves. Their journey to Crete had been made in the springtime. The landscape of the island seemed veiled in bright green as it lay before us. The fields of potatoes and vegetables across the broad valley floor, the orchards and clumps of other trees, and the untilled lands, were awash with green upon green, studded with the hundreds of white sails of wind pumps. (15, 17)

This bucolic, lyrical scene quite literally ruptures beneath the prolonged, intense gaze of the dinner guests. As the narrator explains, “We sat looking at this picture for a long time in silence too, so long that the glass in the slide shattered and a dark crack fissured across the screen” (17). Sebald seems to suggest that even the angel’s perspective, as McCulloh would have it, is violable. An incipient nihil is a mere rupture away. What will the viewer see? “A few polished bones” (23), as the narrator claims in speaking of the remains of a mountain climber found at the site of a retreating glacier—evidence of the dead who are always with us. And yet, this scene too, is but a screen—a tangential way of looking at those *other* bones, the ones we are not meant to see, but are seen everywhere in Sebald’s oeuvre, nonetheless.

Chapter 3: Sister Saga

The train to Nordenham on the North German coast is a slow train that slides through big sky country. Wind and cloud stream in from the North Sea. Light falls hard here—I notice this after leaving the soft contours of the Bavarian south with its grape-vine studded hills, gullies, and streams overhung with vegetation. If the south is shadow-land, then the north is clarity. The land is crisp, the farms scrupulous and tidy, the cattle safely tucked away. There's not a cow in sight anywhere, though this is cattle country. I had travelled through open landscape in the south, too, through fields of lavender that burned blue to the horizon. Twenty years after my mother's death I carry with me the insufficient pieces of her personal history, particularly where they concern the existence of a baby I know almost nothing about. On this northern plain I tend to squint or avert my eyes, whether from intense light, or from seeing too far too fast, is difficult to determine. High clouds the size of continents do not impede the stereoscopic brightness.

Aligned against the horizon, wind turbines punt the air in unsynchronized arcs. Passive scenery, windmills, and the motion of the air-conditioned carriage in which I am travelling slide me into train-think. Train-think is merciful; it registers a passing nuclear reactor as benign. The reactor's pinch-pot neck, rising from a wide base, reminds me of hand-thrown clay on a potter's wheel; its shape is distinctly feminine. In opposition to train-think, writer-think cuts through the painterly abstraction; it calculates how far the reactor—rooted and deadly—is located from the nearest urban

centre and recalls *Accident: A Day's News,* East German novelist Christa Wolf's juxtaposition of her brother's brain surgery with the simultaneous events of the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl.

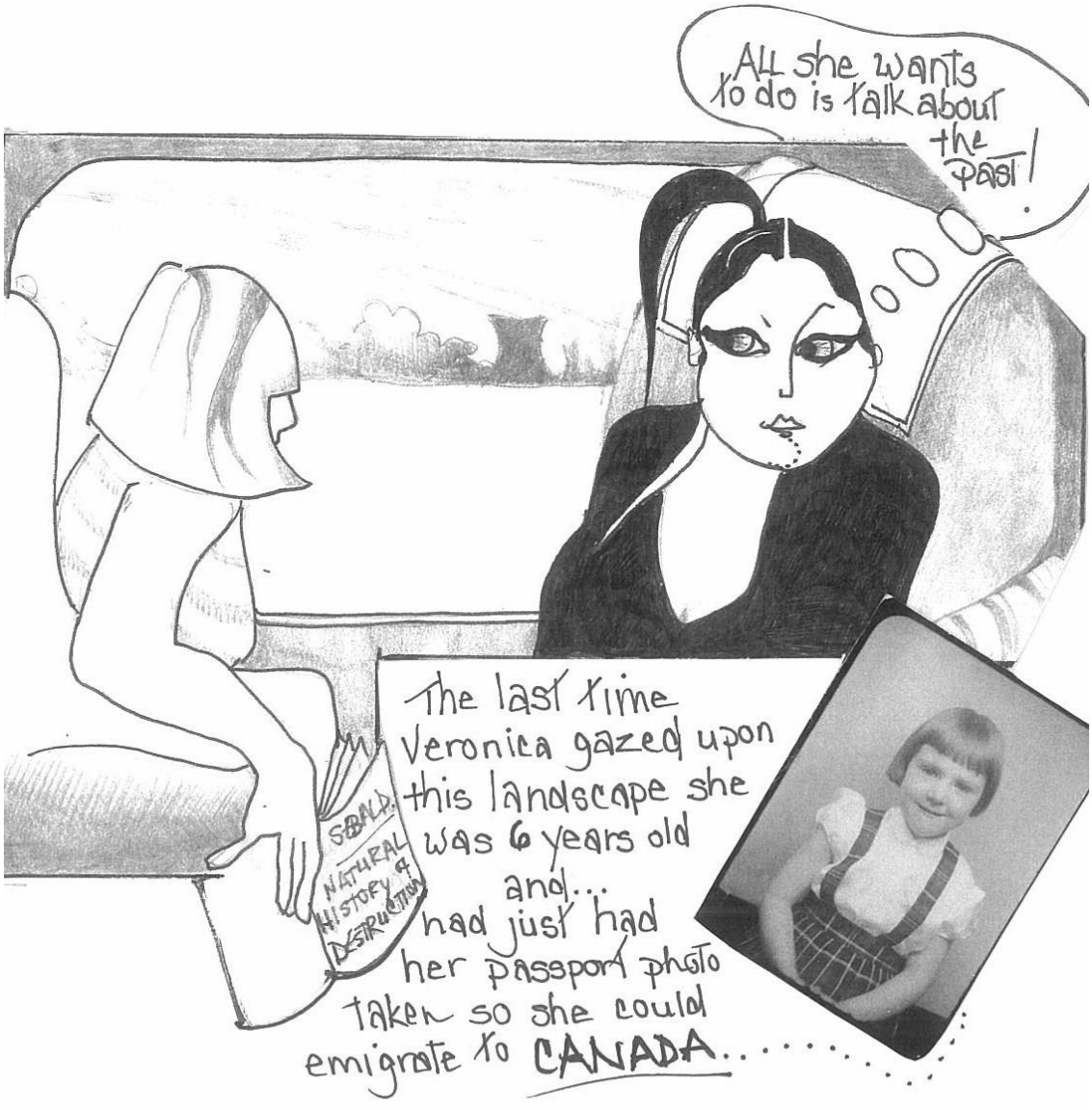


Fig. 2. Composite image: Graphite on paper, *Untitled*. Photograph: Veronica, 1956. © V. Bhandar 2013.

My travelling companion, a six-foot-something twenty-three-year old brunette with kohl-rimmed eyes, is wearing a long black dress that I fear will—like Isadora Duncan's scarf caught in the wheels of her carriage—catch in the automated doors. It's a grand, dark, goth-y dress that shows too much cleavage. Patricia, the daughter of my mother's much younger cousin Erika, has decided to accompany me on the search for the, as yet, undocumented, secret baby to which my mother gave birth during the postwar occupation years. This baby is the oversized doll that shrinks the doll house. Her legs stick out, stiff and inelegant, beyond the confines of the little rooms, the rooms themselves having grown mute around her potent silence. Lately, the baby's presence is contentious and revelatory. I had just returned from visiting my mother's family in the Rhein Palatinate region. Else had pockets of old friends there—Adie and Rupert, for instance. Standing at the open door of the elderly couple's small, narrow house, I introduce myself simply as Else's daughter. "Ah…Monika," Rupert exhales. Monika, I will find out later, is the name my mother gave to a little girl fathered by a soldier in the American Occupation Zone at Bremerhaven. That same day, over an afternoon meal of black bread, sliced meats, and herring salad, my cousins warn me that Else will now become the new black sheep, a distinction previously afforded their *other* aunt, the one whose child had been fathered by the local priest. *"Lass Tante Else bloß kein schwarzes Schaf sein."* (Don't let Aunt Else be a black sheep.) Here, then, is the moment Virginia Woolf speaks of when she evokes the angel in the house. To preserve my mother's reputation, should I destroy or embalm the letter—sink the entire episode back into the shadows of its own historical moment?

I tell my cousins I am enroute to Nordenham to see if there are records confirming the child's birthdate and date of death. Like many babies born in the first two years after Germany's surrender to the Allied forces, the child did not survive her mother's hunger. Although I am looking for hard evidence, I have in my possession something deeper and closer than proof, a handwritten letter Else wrote to Hanna in the summer of 1946. Hanna is the woman poised to marry Else's brother Olaf upon his release from a French POW camp. The letter dated 4.8.46 opens with expressions of gratitude for gifts of fruit (a scarce commodity in the ruined cities) that Hanna has sent her, then thanks her for "*vor allen Dingen das liebvolle Verständnis, das Du meiner Lage entgegengebracht hast. Später müssen wir einmal unter uns darüber sprechen.Wenn Du alle Einzelheiten erfährst, wird auch Dir die ganze Sache in einem anderen Licht erscheinen."* (above all, the kind understanding that you have brought to my situation. Later on we must speak together about this. When you grasp all the details the whole thing will shine in a different light). I have pondered Else's letter many times from a position made omniscient by the breadth of time. My mother's letters are most often written on sheets of vellum as sheer as tracing paper. To peer down through the transparent layers of script is to encounter a temporal topography. Else's lost child is caught between the pages, preserved, as if in amber. "*Jedenfalls hat mich der Herrgott für diesen Fehltritt, wenn es einer war, schmerzlich bestraft dadurch, daß er das Kleine wieder zu sich nahm in dem Augenblick, als ich begann, das ganze Glück einer Mutter zu genießen."* (In any case, God has punished me painfully for this misstep, if it indeed was one, by taking the little one back to himself in that very moment when I began to experience the joy of being a mother). The pressures of my own dark imaginings

always intercede at this point in the letter. The child, I will soon see from the records, is eight days old when she dies. God "takes her back" in the very moment a mother's love comes into being. Eight days. What feelings did the mother have for her child up until that moment of embrasure? I am reminded of the film *BeFreier und Befreite (Conquerors Take Liberties*), Helke Sander's study of the victims of mass rape after the fall of Berlin. German hospitals, we are told by doctors and health care workers interviewed, were flooded with women wanting, and receiving, abortions. Interviews with adult children born of rape reveal their often compromised positions growing up. A woman raped by Russian soldiers tells her son his father was American. The boy engages in a fantasy growing up that he is, in part, a fragment of the culture of the Wild West. Charli Carpenter's research regarding children conceived in war reveals that those born out of "genocidal rape" (24) are often killed by their mothers or allowed to die after they are taken home from the hospital. Carpenter states that, even if "the child's extended family might treat the child with love, stigma might be expressed by neighbours, peers, and other community members" (27). In the unlit caves of my own conjecture, I wondered if Else, struggling to garner maternal feeling, had contemplated infanticide. The father of the child, had, of necessity, abandoned both baby and mother. Liaisons between the Allied Forces and German women were, in principle, strictly forbidden. In a letter written to her brother Gerold in France, Else expresses regret that she cannot send him anything more for Christmas than a couple of cigarettes as she has been without work with the *Amis* since the previous summer. The month her employment ends coincides with the impending birth, but not a whisper of this birth will ever reach her younger brother. A strong centrist impulse among the women in the

family ensures that knowledge of Else's "situation" is sequestered. Under gentle prodding, a female cousin might remember, while scanning her childhood memories, that her cousin Else spent several days in an upstairs bedroom "cooling her breasts."

A letter written by Else's grandmother Maria to Else's mother Mimi after Else has married and moved to Belgium, gestures toward relief: *"Jetzt hast du keine Sorgen mehr, um Elschen, die ist ja Gott sei Dank gut versorgt, lebt in ganz feinen ruhigem Verhältnis. Da bin ich so froh drüber, sie ist ja auch feines Mädchen immer gewesen, und passt in dem Kreis jetzt wo sie lebt. Nun wünsch ich ihr noch einen kleinen Stammhalter. Dann wirst Du dann bald Grossmutter, dann kannst Du auch mal wieder son bisken*[25] *Heia-popeia machen."* (Now you have no more worries over little Else, she is, thank God, well placed in a refined, quiet family. I am so happy about it, she was also always a refined young woman, and fits into the circle where she now lives. I wish her a little heir. Then you will be a grandmother, too, and you can make a little hoopla.)

The first grandchild—unmentioned, unreferenced—perhaps unloved by the women in my mother's family, has no burial place, no site of mourning, no placement in the world. Inexplicable, then, is the canvas I painted years prior to *any* revelation. Entitled "Keepers at the Gates of Memory" the painting includes my two grandmothers (each is a sentry stationed before an evocative landscape) and my mother, who holds a baby in her arms. The baby turns to look directly out of the painting at the viewer in a way that suggests someone has called her name. But whose name is it? Veronica.…Monika? What whispered conversation, passed between women, is lodged in the recesses of my

[25] "Son bisken" is Bremer dialect for "*so ein bisschen."*

own childhood memory—perhaps even pre-lingual memory—that would elicit such an image decades later?

Fig. 3. Composite image: Acrylic on canvas: *Keepers at the Gates of Memory*, 1998. Photograph: Elisabeth Willms-DeSmet, 1948. © V. Bhandar 2013.

I press the pages of the letter down with my hands to smooth them out, to quiet them. Released, the leaves spring back into their former shape, into the shape their ancient folds and creases dictate. Else has opened herself, finally, to feelings of mother-love. She tells Hanna, *"Später, wenn Du selbst einmal dieses Glück empfinden wirst, wirst Du verstehen können, daß man Tränen des Schmerzes vergießen kann, die mit Herzblut nicht aufzuwiegen sind."* (Later, when you yourself discover this joy, you will understand that one can shed tears of pain that cannot be made up for with heart's blood). And so the words build an edifice of sorrow, to which I will be compelled to respond five decades later. There would be other letters, and a life-long relationship between Hanna and Else, but the subject of the baby would not be broached again. The closing words of Else's letter straddle an aquifer of grief. "*Das Schicksal gibt uns manches Rätsel auf und oft geht man nah am Abgrund vorbei. Es gibt Schmerzen, für die kein Trost groß genug ist."* (Fate sometimes presents riddles and often one passes along the edge of the abyss. There is pain for which no consolation is great enough).

I had not seen the Germany that had been blasted from the earth by carpet bombing. I had seen, as a child, the beginnings of reconstruction and had slept in the house my uncle built on a slight rise overlooking the Rhein River. Pansies grew beside the walk that led to the front door. *Stiefmütterchen,* Tante Hanna called them. Little stepmothers, with black and purple faces. The house was freshly stuccoed and stood alone amid fields of strawberries—a white soliloquy. Today, the walkway is bordered with roses. Evergreens block the views from the picture windows that look onto the street and the river beyond. Although my personal motives are not brought into question, my cousin's

wife has chastised her mother-in-law for brandishing a letter that reorients the way they view their beloved Tante Else.

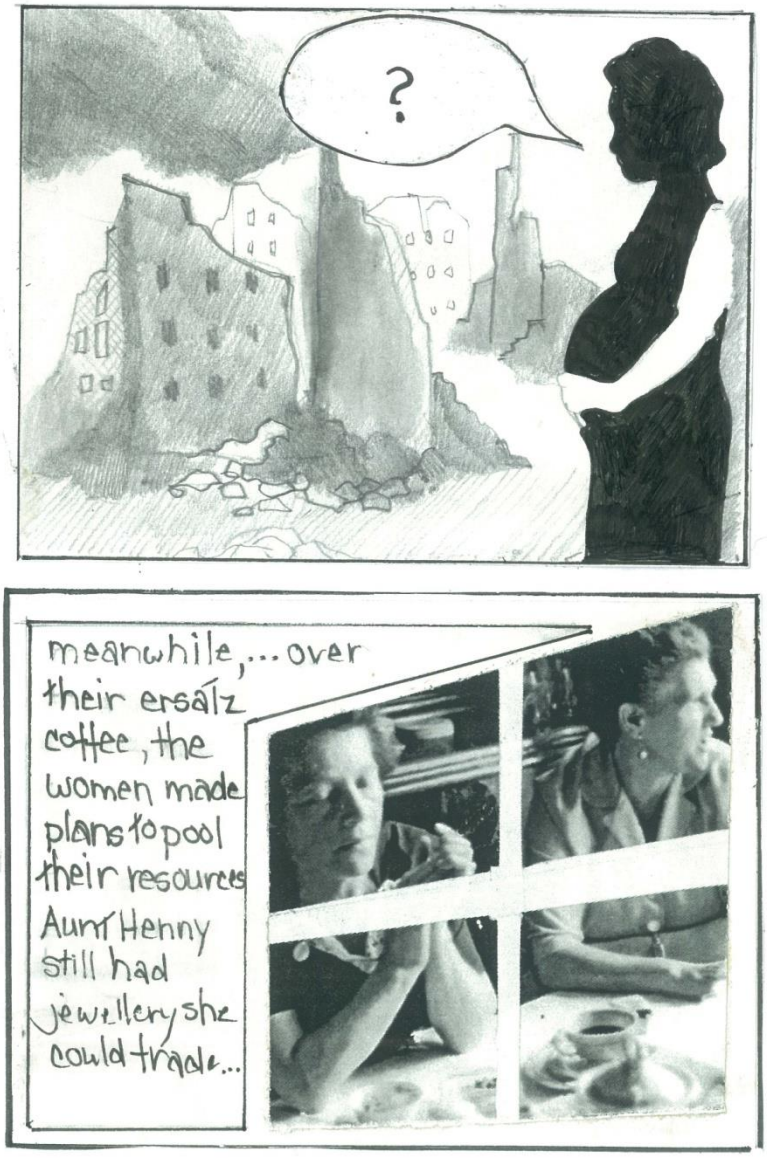


Fig. 4. Composite image: Graphite drawing *Untitled.* Photograph: Sophie Schmidt-Steeger, Henny Schmidt-Backhaus. Nordenham. © V. Bhandar 2013.

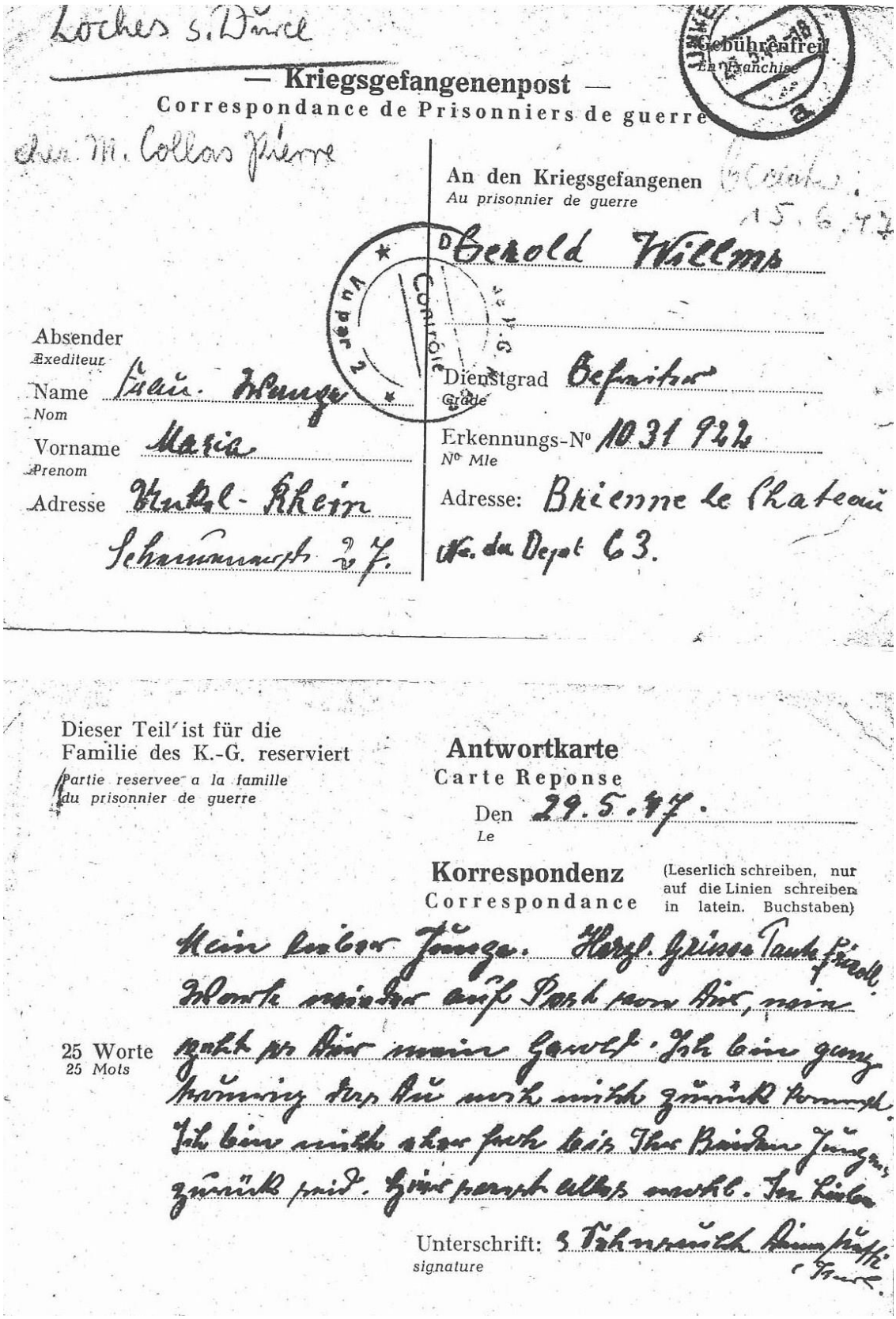
Patricia, however, embraces my quest. She has three siblings she has never met, the result of Erika's first marriage to an American soldier stationed in Germany about the

same time Elvis Presley disembarked in uniform at Bremerhaven. Erika's marriage ended in Texas after five years. Three children, all born in the U.S., remained behind with their father. An undergraduate student at Bremen University, Pat hosts a radio show that allows her to indulge in her passion, JRock. She shows me a photograph in which she is standing, oak strong, amid a group of spider-thin Japanese rock musicians. Erika refers to her daughter affectionately as "my little elephant." There are children on the train this morning heading to school—farm children about eight or nine years old. They overhear Pat and me speaking English and make their approach, the most competent English speaker in the fore, the rest bunched up behind. Come closer, Pat says. I ask the leader if they all speak English. Yes, they are learning it and want to know where I'm from. Canada, I tell them, British Columbia. The leader pauses. I recall an incident in a restaurant in the Black Forest where, over a plate of steak and onions, I had encountered the same question and a similar disappointment in a child's face. Canada? These children would rather that I came from Florida and spoke fluid Disney.

We arrive in Nordenham about noon. A cold wind blows in from sea. At the bottom of a wide flight of steps, in the open concourse, stands a life-size replica of a cow painted the festive blue one encounters in Mexico. It is out of synch with its surroundings, the cowless fields. Pat suggests we walk to the *Standesamt* (Records Office). There are tiny gardens in front of the houses and the wide streets curve in gentle, pleasing arcs. We walk into the town centre, past Café Victoria, the nightclub once owned by Else's Uncle Eduard. My mother had found safe harbour here after the reign of phosphorous bombs, which had driven the family out of Bremen. Café Victoria

had been requisitioned by the Americans as an officer's club. Two of Else's uncles operated a still in a house nearby and made liquor for the *Amis* out of plums and other fruit that grew in the walled-in garden next to *Onkel Edu's* club, fruit the children were forbidden to eat. The women in the family worked, in various capacities, in the club while they waited for what was left of husbands, sons, and brothers to return from POW camps in Russia and France.

The first letters the women sent to the POWs allowed a maximum of twenty-five words, the surface space being the size of a postcard. When I first encountered postcard fiction, I had no idea I would one day meet its progenitor, postcard prisoner-of-war mail. Both genres (one has to believe these letters were ubiquitous) share micro-fiction's extreme compression. Every word, of necessity, belongs. It was expressly *verboten* to scribble up the sides of the letter, even if you had not filled up your word quota. In spite of these regulations the letters seem always to exceed the word count. My mother, for the time that she was put to work for the *Amis* in Bremerhaven, had secured the use of a typewriter which provided the space her large, loose handwriting disallowed. *Oma* Mimi sometimes began her letters with *Mein lieber, lieber Junge* (My dear, dear boy), even though the repetition "dear" wastes one word out of the precious twenty-five allowed. In one of these missives she lists what she is receiving as her ration of food (for 10 days, 140-180 grams of meat, 70-125 grams of butter, four pounds of bread, sugar … cheese), presumably to ease her young son's fears that she is starving. Her son Gerold, meanwhile, reports back from a vineyard in the Champagne district in France where he is knee-deep in grapes after a long period of starvation labouring in a road gang.



Loches s. Dürel

— Kriegsgefangenenpost —
Correspondance de Prisonniers de guerre

Gebührenfrei
En franchise

Herr M. Collas Pierre

An den Kriegsgefangenen
Au prisonnier de guerre

15.6.47

Gerold Willms

Absender
Exediteur

Name Fräul. Wange
Nom

Vorname Maria
Prenom

Adresse Kuckel-Rhein
Schaumannstr 27.

Dienstgrad Befreiter
Grade

Erkennungs-N° 1031 922
N° Mle

Adresse: Brienne le Chateau
Abt. du Depot 63.

Dieser Teil ist für die Familie des K.-G. reserviert
Partie reservee a la famille du prisonnier de guerre

Antwortkarte
Carte Reponse

Den 29.5.47.
Le

Korrespondenz
Correspondance

(Leserlich schreiben, nur auf die Linien schreiben in latein. Buchstaben)

25 Worte
25 Mots

Mein lieber Junge. Herzl. Grüsse Taufe Pinsel. Wenn wieder auf Post von Dir, mein Paket an Dir meine Gewehr. Ich bin ganz traurig das Du noch nicht zurück kommst. Ich bin mit aber froh bei Ihre Brüder Jungen zurück sind. Gütt pumpt alles wieder. Ich Liebe

Unterschrift: Deine Tochter Maria
signature

Fig. 5. Letter: Maria Wange-Willms to Gerold Willms, 1947. © V. Bhandar 2013.

Gradually, restrictions ease and, although inhibited in size to a single one-sided page, letters take the more natural form of gossip, news of conditions at home, advice, and anxious well-wishing. When this length restriction, too, is waived, Else's letters contain a sense of poetic space filled with strange, incomprehensible reassurances and intimate fictions spun to ward off the stench rising from under the rubble. In a letter dated 2.X.47 Else responds to Gerold's query whether he should accept a voluntary extension of his captivity in France, or return home. He is working on a farm in the Champagne district, his conditions are favourable, the family is kind and generous, and he receives passes to attend social functions (dances) in the local village. It is obvious his labour is needed, as France begins to rebuild. Else writes: *"Vielleicht ist es sogar der beste Weg für Dich, denn hier in Deutschland ist es momentan trostlos für Euch junge Menschen. Alle was hier keine Arbeit findet, und das sind 80%, kommt unweigerlich unter die Räder. Es herrscht hier gerade unter der Jugend eine moralische Verkommenheit und sittenloses und gesetzloses Elend, das zum Himmel schreit. Zerlumpt und verworfen, das ist alles, was ich Dir aus Deutschland berichten kann. Durch den Hunger werden automatisch und unweigerlich Verbrecher-typen hochgezüchtet und oft kann sich nicht der Beste mit allen zu Gebot sichenden guten Versätzen vor diesem Weg in den Abgrund nicht mehr schützen. Daher hoffe ich sehr für Dich, lieber Gerold, daß es in einem Jahr hier besser aussehen wird oder aber wir erliegen alle und dann ist es sowieso alles egal."* (Perhaps this is the best path for you, as here in Germany it is hopeless for you young people for the moment. All those who cannot find work, and that is 80%, are ploughed unwillingly under the wheels. There prevails now, among the youth, a moral depravity and lawless misery that cries unto

Heaven. Tattered and cast-away, that is all that I can tell you about Germany. Through hunger, criminal types are automatically and inevitably bred up and often the best of us cannot with good intentions command protection on this path through the abyss. Therefore I very much hope for you, dear Gerold, that in one year everything here looks better, or else we will all succumb, and then it won't matter anyway.)

Pat and I discover the *Standesamt* at the crossroad of two wide streets. Built in the 1960s, the structure is genuinely mid-century modern, an unornamented concrete and glass cube. The room that holds the records has a locked door. Pat knocks, and a woman comes to let us in. Such a small room for archives, what could possibly be stored here? Unlike its neighbouring city, Bremerhaven, Nordenham had been spared shelling in the war. I presume that records have been preserved. There is a second woman in the room sitting at a computer screen. Behind her, a wall of glass looks out onto something like a bamboo grove that casts a pale green pall into the room. The two women move quickly and with some excitement, once the mission had been established. The first foray into the files produces no trace of Else or her child. The younger of the two women climbs onto a stepladder and eases a heavy ledger from its position in a storage cubby located near the ceiling. The war, I see, has been shelved very high and out of reach. As the woman leafs through the book, I notice that the forms, though typewritten, contain elegant hand-written entries. A lost art, this kind of patient, languid penmanship. Suddenly, there she is, Monika Maria Elisabeth. The 'M's in her names are lovely flourishes—arabesques. The woman behind the counter spins the book around so that I can read it for myself. *"Die unverehelichte, Stenotypistin Else Maria Elisabeth Sophie Willms … hat am 23. Juli 1946 um 12 Uhr 40 Minuten zu*

Nordenham im Kreiskrankenhause ein Mädchen geboren. Das Kind hat die Vornamen erhalten: Monika Maria Elisabeth." (Stenographer, Else Maria Elisabeth Sophie Willms, unmarried, gave birth to a girl on July 23, 1946 at 12:40 in the Nordenham Hospital. Child's given names: Monika Maria Elisabeth.) At the bottom of the form, in smaller print, are the words: *Tod des Kindes am 31.7.46* (Death of child 31.7.46).

The woman behind the counter asks if I would like a copy. *Ja, ja, bitte.* Confirmation, finally, to silence the inchoate truths I carry inside my own being, truths that need to be uncloaked, deciphered, *seen through*. No one remaining in Else's family can remember, with coherence or certitude, who had fathered the lost child or what the circumstances of Monika's conception had been—rape, coercion, love. No one could say what had become of the small corpse. Did the baby receive a burial, or was she put into a grave with someone else, a relative perhaps, or with other babies?

It is up to me to scaffold what I can from skeletal fact, from memory and intuition. The letter Else wrote to Hanna is an aperture to another world, one in which I am not my mother's firstborn. A cannibal god resides there; from time to time he tilts the world, displaces us; from time to time he scalds the inside of our mouths so that we cannot speak. Embroidered with a crewelwork of words, your letter, Else, is a blanket for your newborn child, a shroud. *If only I could send it back*— back to the rooms of your keening, to your world of rubble and scree.

Chapter 4: Holocaust, Memoir, and the Postmodern

In his examination of the relationship between postmodernism and the Holocaust Robert Eaglestone concludes that the underpinning of postmodern philosophical thought is the event of the Holocaust itself, an event poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida, through Eaglestone, claims "has obsessed everything that I have ever been able to think" (179). Eaglestone cites Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas as two postructuralist philosophers to whom this underpinning can be attributed, and whose bodies of work are

> saturated with the Holocaust, and both seek to bring into philosophical discourse that which lies outside it….Neither are therapeutic: they do not aim principally to resolve problems in thought or to offer self-development. Quite to the contrary: both are insomniac or, worse, wounding philosophers, aiming to shake their readers and audiences from slumber. (10)

Eaglestone asserts that "the event of the Holocaust is already a horizon that orients our time, certainly in the West, even now, three or four generations afterwards" (12), and aims "to show that postmodernism in the West begins with thinking about the Holocaust, that postmodernism—understood as poststructuralism, a still developing tradition of post-phenomenological philosophy—is a response to the Holocaust" (2) Eaglestone writes:

> Postmodernism's concern with reason, its rules, and its limits leads to a concern with the edges and outsides of discourses … where one discourse shades into another, where philosophy becomes autobiography … or where fiction challenges how it is to be understood, means that this sort of thinking is

> sensitive to the ways in which many sorts of claims are made and discourses are used in the same text, often in the same sentence. (4)

Eaglestone weighs in with the term "truth", which he determines "has been central not only to the major debates in philosophy, but the humanities in general" (6) and surmises that "the ideas about truth have been taken for granted and not discussed (in literary studies and in history)" (6) because, in part, "they have been unclear about the ways in which they have been referring to or relying on their different concepts of truth" (7). Eaglestone, who draws Andrew Bowie into his argument, quotes Bowie:

> The philosophical question of truth can either become reduced to the attempt to give an alternate explanation of how it is we can generate valid evidence (for testable facts and theories about human or non-human nature) … or it becomes a location of ways of thinking which have no obvious place in a world where calculability and pragmatic success increasingly dominate public discourse about truth, [a location which] confronts us with the deepest questions about self-understanding. (164-5)

Eaglestone extrapolates from Bowie that "these two versions of truth—truth as explanation, corresponding to evidence and states of affairs, and truth as in some way revealing of ourselves, of 'who and how we are'—not only operate at the same time, but have a complex interrelationship" (7). Levinas, Eaglestone observes, argues that "truth itself, even the form of truth not amenable to 'calculation and pragmatic success' relies on ethics, on justice" (7).

> One understanding of truth is comprehensive and positivistic, the other is existential, involved with ethics and a sense of 'how the world is for us.' These

> two understandings of truth—both are unavoidable in modernity—are in tension with each other, sometimes productively, sometimes negatively. (9)

"It is the Holocaust," Eaglestone asserts, "that leads to the 'doublenesses' and aporias characteristic of postmodern thought, which are themselves prefigured in the work of Levinas" (259). Eaglestone states, in response to Levinas's assertion that philosophy is a failure:

> No philosophy can offer a final answer. In a way, this might be a trope that echoes the inability of many writers of testimony to achieve closure, to finish writing: there is always more to say, the story to be told again …Thus while there may be no answers to questions set by the Holocaust, we are not allowed to escape worrying about it, or about the countless other wrongs that take place in our world, our time. (277)

This chapter explores Holocaust memoir through the lens of postmodern philosophical thought, in particular, the notion of the trace, which is both enigmatic and intrinsic in the present moment, yet embodies what is left over from the Holocaust after everything has disappeared. Derrida refers to the trace as the "cinder." This chapter also interrogates, through Eaglestone, how the work of Derrida and Levinas underlies the instabilities characteristic of postmodern thought and writing, which includes the self-production of the postmodern subject, and how this so-called instability manifests in testimony. Deconstruction, it will be argued, reveals the trace, which opens to reveal ethics. This chapter interrogates how the trace coincides with the creatively invested postmemory constructions that subsequent generations bring to the Holocaust, far from the originary moment.

Leigh Gilmore examines the way in which "postmodernism's potential as a critical method is on the historical move, its relation to autobiography reciprocal and contested" (*Autobiography and Postmodernism* 3). "Postmodernism," she states, "is an umbrella term usually used to designate, broadly, postmodern culture as a situation rather than a fact or discernable practice." Lacking a "disciplinary or scientific stability" (15), it nonetheless "derives much of its influence from its definitional instability; it may be attached to a number of phenomena though none are fully reducible to its name" (14-15). Gilmore's focus is on the constructed autobiographical 'self,' as well as autobiography's generic definition: she reflects on subjectivity and personal history, for these are, in her estimation, the "stable" (5) elements that define the life-writing genre. Gilmore asserts that autobiography and postmodernism share an interest in "theorizing the subject" (3) together with "skepticism about generic typology" (5).

An examination of Ruth Kluger's memoir *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* and its English language version, *Still Alive,* affords an opportunity to examine certain aspects of postmodern writing "phenomena" such as the reversal of genre expectation in Holocaust memoir with regard to truth, sovereignty, memory, and mourning. The Holocaust as singularity has oriented Levinas and Derrida toward a philosophy that is concerned with what stands outside philosophy and which can be intuited through a 'gap.' The contours of this line of thought is explored through Eaglestone, and applied, primarily, to Kluger's text, with additional reference to Leslie Morris's discussion of postmemoir as outlined in her chapter entitled "Postmemory/Postmemoir" (291).

4.1 Reception of Ruth Kluger's Memoirs

Ruth Kluger is an American scholar and Holocaust survivor whose memoirs *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (Living on: a Childhood) and *Still Alive* were published first for a German audience in 1992 and rewritten for an American audience in 2001 after the death of Kluger's mother, who figures prominently in both texts. Published in Germany to considerable acclaim, *weiter leben* establishes itself as a Holocaust memoir addressed to a German audience by an Austrian born Jew. *Still Alive*, heralded by Kluger as "neither a translation nor a new book: it's another version, a parallel book … for my children and my American students" (210), raises its own concerns regarding testimony and the postmodern notion of a dynamic subject who responds to cultural, temporal, and social influences. Pascal Bos notes that German audiences embraced Kluger as "an important postwar author" (220) whose work signified a return to Germany and to her mother tongue. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent German reunification, Kluger's work seemed initially to herald a new avenue of discourse for a united Germany no longer divided along ideological lines regarding the Shoah. However, Bos charts the problematic nature of the reception and address of the memoir, citing the German audience's inability to rise to the challenge Kluger extends, namely her invitation to enter into a dialogue regarding the German-Jewish symbiosis[26] and the Holocaust.

Bos wonders whether it may have been better had Kluger written her memoir for an American audience only, as "a great deal of academic discourse on the Holocaust is

[26] Morris indicates the term "symbiosis" may no longer be current in German-Jewish scholarly discourse as the Holocaust begins to move beyond living memory into new relationships afforded by postmemory. However, as a second generation memoirist speaking from the diaspora, the term cannot be dismissed out of hand. My generation, caught in the time capsule of the German diaspora, still grapples, through parental legacy, with the unresolved past.

produced in North America" (221) but deems Kluger made a deliberate choice in writing for a German audience. German audiences viewed it as a success story that rose out of Kluger's unlikely survival in Auschwitz. "The focus of these critics' analyses" Bos claims, "falls on Kluger's prewar life as a Jewish girl in Vienna, on her miraculous selection, and on her postwar success as a *Germanistin*" (221). Kluger herself, however, consciously steps outside the parameters of traditional autobiographical narrative to comment on—and to alert her audience to—the problematic nature of construction in Holocaust testimony. She states:

> Now comes the problem of this survivor story, as of all such stories: we start writing because we want to tell about the great catastrophe. But since by definition the survivor is alive, the reader inevitably tends to separate, or deduct, this one life, which she has come to know, from the millions who remain anonymous. You feel, even if you don't think it: well, there is a happy ending after all. Without meaning to, I find that I have written an escape story, not only in the literal but in the pejorative sense of the word. (137-38)

Kluger also identifies German postwar inability and/or unwillingness to openly engage with the fact of the Holocaust:

> People do not want to hear about it, or only in a certain pose, with a certain attitude, not as a partner in dialogue, but as one who subjects himself to an unpleasant task, with a kind of reverence which easily reverses itself into irritation. For the objects one reveres, like the ones one hates, one tends to keep far away from oneself. (110)

To illustrate her point, several appearances in the text of Gisela, the wife of Kluger's Princeton colleague, highlight the chasm that remains between non-Jewish Germans and Jewish Germans. Gisela underestimates the intense suffering Kluger experienced as a child, while she simultaneously amplifies the postwar suffering of her own non-Jewish compatriots. As Kluger recalls:

> Auschwitz, says Gisela, that's another matter. From all she has heard it must have been a pretty tough place for a young girl, but then I wasn't there all that long, was I? I got off lightly, she continues, for I was able to emigrate to America and was spared the first terrible postwar years in Germany. (79)

The inclusion of Gisela heightens Kluger's critical stance toward her German audience and acts to deepen and expand her interpretation of remembrances in an unexpected direction, namely toward that of her brother, the "anonymous murder victim" (79) whose ghost haunts both Kluger and her mother. Gisela's impression that the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where young Ruth and her mother were first sent, couldn't have been "all that bad" (73) is undercut, too, by Kluger's description of the camp environment, her vivid memories of degradations, overcrowding, and near starvation. Despite the fact that Theresienstadt was, for Ruth, "a mudhole, a cesspool, a sty" (87) it contained a potent sense of community. Kluger's family had been non-orthodox, assimilated Viennese Jews; the camp was the first place Kluger actually felt herself to be an integral part of Jewish culture. The remembrance of friends with whom Kluger shares scarce food, as well as time away from her controlling, often erratic mother at a crucial period during which she seeks to establish her own autonomous, teenage identity, provides the impetus for Kluger to give way, grudgingly, to a portion

of Gisela's assertion that something positive has come out of the Theresienstadt experience after all. Kluger admits:

> In a way, I loved Theresienstadt, for the nineteen or twenty months I spent there made me into a social animal. So the German wife of my colleague was right, after all, when she said Theresienstadt wasn't all that bad? (86)

One is compelled to ask, however, not all that bad in relation to what? Kluger refers, by way of comparison, to Vienna, where she "suffered from neurotic compulsions and tics" [and] "had been an oddball child … an outcast" (86). In Theresienstadt, Ruth is afforded distance from the mother, who, she feels, deliberately incapacitates her.

> When I embraced my mother too vigorously at the end of a lonely day, she would assure me that I had just then almost strangled her, and that the hand of a child who has hurt her mother, even though inadvertently, grows out of the grave for all to see. (55)

Passages in the text, like this one, that interrogate normative expectations associated with Holocaust narrative, raise the ire of a number of critics—primarily American—who take issue with what Linda Schulte-Sasse identifies as the "ordinary" relationship between a mother and daughter in a format that eschews the "high drama of Holocaust survival" (472). Schulte-Sasse states that the "textbook perfect mother-daughter neurosis re-anchors the Holocaust in a reality that is too familiar, too close" (472) and this creates a "challenge to the cherished Holocaust paradigm" (472). Kluger's reception with some American critics, deemed "ambivalent to negative" (649), is attributable to her memoir's decidedly feminist stance and what they identify as an inappropriate mother/daughter antipathy.

4.2 Self-production and Genre Elasticity in Testimony

Leigh Gilmore maintains that feminist criticism and theory have gained considerable ground in bringing politics and postmodernism together in terms of the topic of self-production, and in what she describes as "a notion of the human agent as producer of culture as well as its most complicated text" (*Autobiography and Postmodernism* 17). Betty Bergland asks, in her study of autobiography and subjectivity, "do we read at the center of autobiography a 'self,' an essentialist individual, imagined to be coherent and unified, the originator of her own meaning, or do we read a postmodern subject—a dynamic subject that changes over time, is situated historically in the world and positioned in multiple discourses?" (9). Holocaust testimony, in particular, is problematically situated with regard to this question because the 'eye (I) witness' that records and remembers must remain sovereign. Despite testimony's imperative to this end, Kluger experiments with genre expectation: she sets up a reversal, a binary—albeit an implicit one—of 'this—*not* that.' Kluger opens her text with the statement: "Their secret was death, not sex" (15). In the first of Kluger's reversals, young Ruth, "under the blanket" (17) on the sofa, feigns sleep and bends her ear to adult secrets, one of which is that death, *not* sex, is "the forbidden news" (15). Continuing with this trope, Kluger attributes her interest in the torture of a male cousin at the hands of the Nazis to curiosity, *not* sympathy. An aunt lost to a heinous death in the gas chamber is despised, *not* revered. Kluger recounts her aunt's tyrannies in detail—her refusal to allow young Ruth to drink water after eating cherries, the confiscation of Ruth's prized collection of used streetcar tickets, (deemed unhygienic), the forced feeding of breakfast cocoa with its thick, sticky layer of film, and the

ridicule of a child's penchant for poetry. These remembrances create a dour litany of resentment in a girl who "hated her [aunt] with a child's needle-sharp aversion, and who can't forgive her, even after a death that is as hard to imagine as it is impossible to forget" (20). Kluger's beloved brother Schorschi did *not* die in a transport bound for the East, but was shot in Riga. Ruth's less than unconditionally loved father did *not* die in the gas chamber, as Ruth imagined, but in a transport bound for the East. Most striking of all is Kluger's assertion that her mother survives Auschwitz *not* out of luck or outward action, but because the paranoia and madness she exhibits—out of place everywhere else—is commensurate, Kluger determines, with the death camp ethos. If Kluger's reframing of "the cherished Holocaust paradigm" troubles fundamental generic expectations vis-à-vis testimony, to what purpose does Kluger bend genre? Eaglestone quotes Derrida, whose decision to go "out of the wheel rut" in philosophy is a "position [that] is sought because [Derrida] desire[s] to 'focus attention on the ethnocentrism, which, always and everywhere [has] controlled the concept of writing'" (283).

Kluger's memoir is a self-aware, consciously wrought work that employs strategies designed to disrupt the possibility of reader identification. After a poignant passage in which she describes her mother's generosity toward a fellow camp inmate, Kluger breaks the narrative spell: "Dear reader, don't wax sentimental" (123). Eaglestone elucidates the perils of reader identification as it pertains to testimony: "on ethical grounds a reader should not become identified with a narrator of testimony as it reduces and 'normalizes' or consumes the otherness of the narrator's experience and the illusion that such an identification creates is possibly pernicious" (43). Eaglestone

maintains that testimony should be recognized as a new genre, one that seeks to voice the unimaginable, and cites Gillian Banner, who takes up Primo Levi's "'injunction and command' to remember, 'not as a passive act, but as a vigorous engagement with the present'" (40). Eaglestone states: "To understand testimonies as a genre in their own right is to play a part in erecting a dyke against their easy consumption" (41). Kluger, who enacts her *Verfremdungseffekt* in numerous ways, nonetheless desires to bridge the distance between herself and her audience: "If there is no bridge between my memories and yours and theirs, if we can never say 'our memories,' then what's the good of writing any of this" (93). However, Kluger also engages in a paradox: she simultaneously acknowledges that the distance she wishes to bridge is unbridgeable: "You may and can speak about your war experiences, dear friends, I cannot. My childhood falls into the black hole of this discrepancy" (109). Kluger's paradox does more than accentuate the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis; it points toward lack of closure, toward an impulse to write and re-write testimony that arises in response to that which is un-writable, unimaginable.

Eaglestone invokes the Levinasian notion of *listening*, which gives the appearance in his work as if he has been 'struck dumb' or rendered speechless. Eaglestone, through Lyotard, describes Levinas's speechlessness as —'"a response to the Holocaust"' (274) which is

> enacted in and by his philosophy. If his [Levinas's] work is based on what Lyotard calls the 'prescription to place myself in a prescriptive situation,' then his response to the Holocaust is precisely this listening to the contradictory, painful, traumatized (274) [and to] 'the cries of the victims of the Holocaust'

> (255) [that] ‘are inextinguishable: they echo and re-echo across eternity. What we must do is listen to the thought they contain. (274)

Kluger departs from the notion of bridging ‘your’ memories and ‘my memories,’ to auger a third space in which she exhorts her audience to *listen.* She asks her audience to pause, to absorb without analysis, the I-witness account of her miraculous salvation at the hands of another inmate at Auschwitz. Kluger recounts:

> What happened next is loosely suspended from memory, as the world before Copernicus dangled on a thin chain from Heaven. It was an act of the kind that is always unique, no matter how often it occurs: an incomprehensible act of grace, or put more modestly, a good deed. Yet the first term, an act of grace, is perhaps closer to the truth, although the agent was human and the term religious. For it came out of the blue sky and was as undeserved as if its originator had been up in the clouds. I was saved by a young woman who was in as helpless a situation as the rest of us, who nonetheless wanted nothing other than to help me. (106)

Kluger’s saviour is the 19-year-old female clerk who transcribes the identification numbers of those inmates chosen by the SS selection officer as suitable for labour over imminent destruction. Twelve-year-old Ruth—three years underage, underdeveloped and starving—is initially rejected in the selection process. Ruth is urged by her mother to try again. Kluger attributes the possibility of rejoining the line for the second time to a kind of “orderly chaos” (106) that had more to do with inmate invisibility because they were considered worthless “*Menschenmaterial*…human substance” (106) than with any lack of Prussian organization. On the second attempt, Ruth is saved by the

young clerk who gets up and leaves her post just long enough to advise Ruth to lie about her age. The second SS officer, a less severe version of the one Ruth encounters in the first line-up, defers to his clerk's discretion: she "is strong" the clerk argues, "look at the muscles in her legs, she can work" (108). Kluger passes inspection. Her retrospective view—hyperbolic and impassioned—harbours an elemental awe:

> What more do you need for an example of perfect goodness? Never and nowhere was there such an opportunity for a free, spontaneous action as in that place at that time. It was moral freedom at its purest. I saw it, I experienced it, I benefited from it, and I repeat it, because there is nothing to add. Listen to me, don't take it apart, absorb it as I am telling it and remember it. (109)

Kluger's imperative, "listen to me," engenders a kind of dialogic intimacy: the "me" in "listen to *me"* presupposes a "you" that the "me" addresses, and this "you" is brought into close proximity to a transmission that is of the utmost importance. In this, Kluger's directive reaches a new emotional register in which no dialogic response is sought or required. The command— *listen*—acts to stop the reader short, so to speak, and this sets the stage for the ensuing pause in which the reader is asked not to analyze or think, but rather to 'absorb' a truth of "who and what we are" (Bowie qtd. in Eaglestone, 9) that is antithetical to the reality of the camp. Kluger states: "In a rat hole, where charity is the least likely virtue, where humans bare their teeth, and where all signs point in the direction of self-preservation, and there is yet a tiny gap … that is where freedom may appear like the uninvited angel" (109).

One cannot overestimate the importance of the gap: it is out of the gap that "freedom … the uninvited angel," or what could be called 'right action,' comes. The

gap reveals that which lies outside philosophy, out of which ethics manifests. As has been argued in the chapter entitled "Imagetext," it is an epistemological gap that offers the possibility of the transmission of testimony from one human being to another. It is out of the gap, as Derrida and Levinas reveal, that ethics and responsibility—of one human being to another—arise.

4.3 'Falling' into the Gap

It is important to reflect, prior to an examination of the constructed autobiographical self as it occurs in Holocaust testimony, on Derrida's notion of the trace and how this avenue of philosophical thought contains within it not only the 'trace' of justice and ethics, but also the past and future of a singular event. As Eaglestone explains:

> The trace is … the moment of disruption in thought, it is what exceeds philosophy. It is the disruption of intelligibility (it interrupts systems of thought) and the limit of intelligibility (it cannot be described). Without the trace, deconstruction would be impossible. It marks the infinite appearing in the finite, the ethical in the material. The trace … is where what is outside philosophy—the other, however understood or manifested—is made manifest within philosophy: and the task of deconstruction is to reveal—to open—this. The opening or unveiling of the trace is what deconstruction does: and if deconstruction is justice, unveiling the trace is a discourse in justice. (286)

Derrida's work with linguistic binaries uncovers a slippage in time. The lapse in time refers to thought: it reveals, or opens, a gap through which an absolute "other," or absolute alterity (here Derrida owes a debt to Emmanuel Levinas), appears. Derrida determines that thought is born of repetition, but an event, which does not repeat, is

always new and seen as singular. Thought, which is repeatable, is not separate from the singular event, however; the two entities are heterogeneous and this condition gives rise to Derrida's term *différance.* An event that takes place in the present moment is experienced as singular yet is inseparable from the thought process conditioned by repeatability of the past. It is also inseparable from a (messiah-less) messianic anticipation of the future that Derrida calls justice, or the democracy to come. Derrida concludes that justice, in order to be just, must exercise a certain undecidability, and this undecidability creates a paradox so that justice is impossible—it must, of necessity, remain on the horizon of our anticipation as a future that we anticipate will come. Although an event experienced in the present appears singular, it carries within itself a seed of the past. This trace Derrida also calls 'the cinder.' The cinder is that which remains after the remains of the Holocaust have disappeared.

Eaglestone clarifies that the trace is the appearance of an infinite responsibility: "Derrida's work has been concerned with deconstructing ethnocentrism, racism, and so on. It grows out of singularities, from specific times, places, and texts. And for Derrida, singularity was the Holocaust, with its continuing echoes." Eaglestone refers to the "uniqueness debate" (291) in which the Holocaust is seen as singular and states that the claim of uniqueness is troubled by the claim of the universal. The Holocaust is linked to other genocides, yet stands apart from them. Testimonies, Eaglestone believes, are attempts to enact the particular.

Kluger's testimony, then, is the enactment of the particular, singular event of miraculous survival that contains the trace—through the trope of the uninvited angel—of the ultimate good. "It was moral freedom at its purest" Kluger states, "I saw it … I

repeat it" (109). Kluger experiences the dimension of the angel, or the moment of ultimate good, as a tiny gap. The gap opens to ethics and infinite responsibility in that, having 'seen' it, she is, by her own admission, compelled to 'repeat' what she has seen and thereby enacts the responsibility inherent in the trace. What, then, of the reader who engages with this testimony? The exhortation in the text to *listen* creates a pause, a hesitation, a hermeneutic gap that opens to ethics and to infinite responsibility. To listen is to fall into this gap, into exteriority—into that which stands outside philosophy where "the ethical is made manifest" (283).

4.4 The Autobiographical Pact and Ipseity

In 1974 Philippe Lejeune coined the phrase "autobiographical pact" in order to establish parameters regarding the generic definition of autobiography in a literary field he believed had been ravaged by the deconstructionists. Lejeune insists that the historical "self," the one whose name appears as the author of an autobiographical piece of writing, be essentially accurate, and that autobiography be classified as a "retrospective prose narrative that a real person creates about his own existence when he emphasizes individual life, particularly the history of his personality" (*On Autobiography* 14). Frederic Regard, following the same line of reasoning, explains:

> The narrative signs a referential pact, and it relies on at least two presuppositions: 1) the permanence of an origin, of the truth of a name, and 2) the belief in the history of the signatory's formation, defined as *ipseity*, the identification of the self with the self, all the more affirmed because it is repeated, uncovered, and recovered through a series of events. Autobiography is seen … as the narrative of a historical truth of the author. (3)

Lejeune would later soften his definition to "an autobiographer is not someone who speaks the truth about himself, but someone who says that he speaks it" (*Rough Drafts of the Self*, 125). Regard argues that this repositioning "raises the question of a certain rhetoric of the self, but also, because of the effects of such a promise on the reader, [raises] a notion that suddenly allows us to think of the 'pact' as a double positioning: the writing self, on the one side, and the "life-reader" on the other" (3).

Paul De Man, in writing about LeJeune, affirms this double positioning. De Man notes that the reader becomes the judge "in charge of verifying the authenticity of the signature and the consistency of the signer's behaviour" (174), and this leads back to a transcendence of the reader over a subject that is no longer a subject with "mirror-like self-understanding" (174), hence "the study of autobiography is caught in this double motion, the necessity to escape from the tropology of the subject and the equally inevitable re-inscription of this necessity within a specular model of cognition" (174). De Man elaborates:

> for just as autobiographers, for their thematic insistence on the subject, on the proper name, on memory, on birth, eros, and death, and on the doubleness of specularity, openly declare their cognitive and tropological constitution, they are equally eager to escape from the coercions of this system. Writers of autobiography and writers *on* autobiography are obsessed by the need to move from cognition to resolution and to action, from speculative to political and legal authority. (174)

This chapter asks, however, what occurs when the writer of testimony is subject to the effects of trauma, when trauma interferes with the movement, however obsessive,

from cognition, through resolution, to action? Schulte-Sasse states: "At the heart of Kluger's *Verfremdungseffekt* is the meticulous distinction she draws between memory and knowledge" (472). Ruth Kluger, as a death camp survivor, has intimate knowledge of conditions that those who have not experienced the camps cannot possibly imagine. Charlotte Delbo, a non-Jewish Holocaust survivor whose memoir explores the notion of "deep memory" delineates between *seeing* and *knowing*. Delbo, speaking from her experience in Auschwitz, relates how within the confines of the camp, one *knew* things that the eye, out of necessity, refused to *see*. It is this discrepancy between knowing and seeing that fuels Kluger's need to ultimately *see* the group of camp inmates trudging through the streets of Straubing from her own position of freedom after her escape from a forced march at war's end. The fact that the inmates are no longer invisible to her is only possible because she is positioned outside the camp, away from the imperative against seeing. Rather than avert her gaze, she concentrates keenly in an effort to remember and to bear witness, and comments that "when a few weeks later the Americans occupied the city of Straubing, none of its citizens had seen anything. And in a sense no one had. For you haven't seen what you haven't perceived and absorbed. In that sense, only I had seen them" (146).

Kluger shares with Auschwitz survivor Delbo an emphasis on the impossibility of return. While on a visit to Göttingen, Germany, Kluger suffers a violent collision with a young man on a bicycle. Propelled back in time with sudden, uncontrollable force by the accident, Kluger's resultant concussion sets the stage for a fluid, liminal state in which memories of her unhappy Austrian childhood and internment in various concentration camps tumble forth in chaotic, inchoate, order. Notably, Kluger's

memoir does not launch itself from the point of the accident. The accident that becomes the genesis of her memoir is revealed only in the epilogue: it is here that Kluger lets her hair down, so to speak, and relates, in unmitigated form, the extent of her emotional and physical terror. It is important to examine the impact of the accident on Kluger and how it relates to the German reception of the memoir and the notion of 'return.' Bos suggests Kluger's German readership hailed the memoir as a return to her language and culture. Rather, it represents the return of the repressed. Kluger's description of the accident bears the signs of post-traumatic stress: the trauma of the past bleeds through into the present moment:

> At the last fraction of a second I jump to the left, and he, too, swerves to the left, in my direction. I think he is chasing me, wants to injure me, and despair hits like lightning. I crash into metal and light, like floodlights over barbed wire. I want to push him away with both arms outstretched, but he is on top of me, bike and all. Germany, Deutschland, a moment like hand-to-hand combat. I am fighting for my life, I am losing. Why this struggle, my life, Deutschland once more, why did I return, or had I never left? I had become the victim of my own hit-and-run nightmares. (206)

For Kluger, the event is a repetition of her fall, on her arrival at Auschwitz, "from the transport into the camp, from a closed space into the pestilent air" (95). Kluger's genre-bending memoir, with its strong narrative voice and its incisive, self-conscious awareness of the discourse that pervades the German-Jewish symbiosis, (and what might possibly be done about it), collapses in the epilogue into helplessness, into a black hole, into what Charlotte Delbo calls 'deep memory.'

4.5 Deep Memory

Victoria Stewart's study of war trauma as represented in women's autobiographies examines Charlotte Delbo's testimonial memoir, and the effectiveness of life writing as a tool of survival for Holocaust survivors. Quoting from Delbo's *None of Us Will Return*, Stewart reveals how Delbo creates coherence out of inassimilable experiences through the act of writing. For Delbo the camps were "a separate universe" (Stewart, 123). Stewart quotes Delbo:

> No doubt I am very fortunate in not recognizing myself in the self that was in Auschwitz. To return from there was so improbable that it seems to me I was never there at all. Everything that happened to that other, the Auschwitz one, has no bearing upon me, does not concern me, so separate from one another are this deep-lying memory and ordinary memory. I live within a two-fold being. The Auschwitz double doesn't bother me, doesn't interfere with my life. Without this split I would not have been able to revive. (115)

Stewart identifies the dissociative aspect of survivor experience as the source of Delbo's ability to write or speak about Auschwitz in a "measured, rational way" (116). In pragmatic, everyday memory "words revert to their commonplace uses" (116). Stewart delineates a distinction: "External memory can be consciously engaged and works through language, while deep memory arises involuntarily and works through physicality" (116). Stewart quotes R.A. Kincaid: '"It is not only the problem of the referent, that is, the experience of atrocity, of deeds too horrible to recount in words, that threatens the verbal representation of the experience; it is, rather, the loss of faith in the process of signification itself, begun and completed at Auschwitz"' (116).

Kluger shares with Delbo the contradiction that, as survivors, they are forever separated from the ordinary world by their experiences, yet they continue to live in that so-called ordinary world. Kluger states in *Still Alive:*

> We who escaped do not belong to the community of those victims, my brother among them, whose ghosts are unforgiving. By virtue of our survival, we belong with you, who weren't exposed to the genocidal danger, and we know there is a black river between us and the true victims. (138)

Kluger also believes that there was nothing to be gained or learned from the Holocaust experience, and that 'good' and 'bad' were arbitrary features of a "blind alley of a civilization gone berserk" (95). Returning to De Man and the question of autobiography and its obsession with moving from cognition, through resolution to action, one could argue that, in Holocaust testimony, the cognitive faculty that records is impaired by trauma and is therefore caught in the wheel of repetition. If the cyclical writing and re-writing of testimony is a response to that which cannot be reconciled, namely everyday memory and deep memory, or memory and knowledge, then we return to Eaglestone's observation that writers of testimony experience difficulty in achieving closure—there is always more to tell. There are no easy answers, nor is there resolution. There is only the unimaginable singularity, again and again.

Despite the chaos, and perhaps through the bond of common language and the culture in which she was raised as a child, Kluger is able to reach out to her German audience in a way Delbo fails to do. Where Delbo uses the function of writing to save herself, Kluger uses it to communicate her desire to bridge the rift that characterizes the German-Jewish symbiosis. Indeed, for Kluger, the writing of her memoir *is* the bridge.

Searching for common ground with her German audience, she fixes on the immediate postwar period in which non-Jewish Germans and Jewish Germans shared the desolate landscape of occupation and defeat. She writes, as we have already seen, "if there is no bridge between my memories and yours and theirs, if we can never say 'our memories' then what's the good of writing any of this?" (93). In both *weiter leben* and *Still Alive* Kluger works against the contrived narrative arc, fragmenting the text with self-referential intertexts and distancing effects in order to prevent identification on the part of the reader. She asks that the reader engage differently, in dialogue, and foregrounds the impossibility of identification with the Holocaust experience by emphasizing a sense of strangeness. She is aware, however, that her audience desires some measure of identification with the survival aspects of her narrative and asks how she can best avoid this eventuality. Kluger states: "How can I keep my readers from feeling good about the obvious drift of my story away from the gas chambers and the killing fields and towards the postwar period, where prosperity beckons?" (138). Dislocation and contradiction figure prominently in postmodern texts. Kluger divides her memoir into geographical locations—places that she has passed through as though they were "stations" (*Stations* was to have been the original title—changed because of its reference to Christian ideology). The camps, or stations of Theresienstadt, Christianstadt, and Auschwitz are "timescapes" —"evocations of places at a time that has passed" (67). They act as fragments that highlight the constructed nature of the text. By enveloping the camp experience in a time capsule, Kluger effectively signals to the reader that there remains no possibility of reader identification with these experiences. Division of the entire text into 'stations,' or select fragments, acts to foreground the

unsettled character of a life in constant flux, and of a narrator who professes that, at any moment she is capable of packing her bags and thinking up the reasons for leaving afterward. Kluger is a narrator for whom the names of places she has inhabited "are like the piers of [blown up] bridges" (69). If we don't find the bridges," Kluger iterates, "we'll either have to invent them or content ourselves with living in the no-man's land between the past and the present" (69). Memory becomes a contested trope, as the reworking of the deaths of Kluger's father and brother, Schorchi, illustrate. Believing her brother to have died in a transport, Kluger later discovers, through an eye-witness account, that Schorchi was shot in Riga and that her father died in a transport heading toward the East. This revelation creates a quandary: Kluger must now re-contextualize the deaths, and her relation to them. The question arises, had she not learned of the truth of these deaths prior to publication, or perhaps not at all, would the inaccuracy of the accounting have diminished the overall 'truth' of the deaths themselves? Leigh Gilmore states: "autobiography draws its social authority from its relation to culturally dominant discourses of truth-telling, and not … from autobiography's relation to real life" (9). For Kluger, however, caught up in the work of the English language version of her memoir, setting the record straight was important.

4.6 Generic Confusion and False Memoir

Finding that the book review editors of the *New York Times* had categorized the memoir about his parents' experience in Auschwitz as fiction, Art Spiegelman, author of the graphic memoir *Maus: A Survivor's Tale,* writes in a letter to the editors: "I know that by delineating people with animal heads I've raised problems of taxonomy for you. The borderland between fiction and non-fiction has been fertile territory for

some of the most potent contemporary writing. Could you consider adding a special 'non-fiction/mice' category to your list?" (539). Nancy K. Miller, from whose article "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of Memoir" the above quote was culled, turns her critical eye to James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*—a memoir that skirts even Lejeune's "spirit of truth" in that Frey admittedly manufactured fictional details in order to create the requisite 'narrative arc' he thought his readers would require—and to Elie Wiesel's *Night*, as works that have suffered from "genre confusion" (539). In Miller's view, "despite the documented authenticity of the author's experience [*Night*] had been … classified as a novel on some high-school reading lists, in some libraries, and in bookstores"(539). Gilmore observes: "What we can call autobiography's resistance to genre can now be taken as a crisis in genre itself " (6).

In her essay "What Do We Teach When We Teach Trauma?", Leigh Gilmore outlines the events that took place while she was teaching trauma texts, in particular, Wilkomirski's false Holocaust memoir *Fragments,* published as an authentic, first-hand account as a child survivor of the Holocaust. Gilmore discovered that the students in her class were sharply divided in their response to the memoir, once it was revealed as an imaginative work, not testimony:

> Because the students' awareness of these revelations followed closely on their reading the memoir, they did not feel like Wilkomirski's dupes. But they did differ over the value of what they had read. For some, it was the work of a disturbed person who had hitched his fragile megalomania to the Holocaust. They found him monstrously overreaching and ultimately pathetic and wanted

> to dispatch author and book. Others were willing to let go of their sense of Wilkomirski as a child survivor of the Holocaust without wanting to disavow their powerful encounter with its representation. Despite the fraudulence of Wilkomirski's stated identity, he had, they argued, not represented the Holocaust fraudulently. Nor, they insisted, had he strengthened the hand of the Holocaust deniers, for Wilkomirski had imagined nothing more horrible than what had transpired historically. Their argument was that when trauma has a secure historical foundation, such as the Holocaust and the civil war in Guatamala, the autobiographer does not bear the sole burden of witness, and, as such, his or her account does not have the capacity to invalidate historical events. (*Teaching Life Writing Texts* 372)

Gilmore closes her argument with the conviction that autobiography is fertile ground on which to create a discourse that allows us to hear cases of trauma that emanate from all parts of the world. One instance of international trauma, Rigoberta Menchu's testimonio *I, Rigoberta Menchu,* discloses the abuses and torture of the Guatamalan indigenous community under the governance of a brutal regime. Menchu, who received the Nobel Prize for her work, was criticized for blatant inaccuracies in her text by anthropologist David Stoll, whose research revealed discrepancies he felt ought to discredit the entire text. Menchu did not actually witness the death of her brother by torture, as she had claimed. However, as Paul Jay points out in his examination of autobiography and photography," aboriginal and native populations tend to record and value group experiences over individual experiences and therefore Menchu acted within the scope of her culture. Following Jay's line of reasoning,

Menchu could be said to be the spokesperson for the collective experience of her people, sanctioned by them to speak as a witness on their behalf. However, Gilmore asks: "what readings of autobiography are possible when the linguistic element ("I") upon which one would most wish to depend for some sense of stability, some sense of being at home in a word, offers both collectivity and individuality?" (*Teaching Life Writing Texts* 7).

Leslie Morris, in her examination of postmemory, and what she terms postmemoir, determines that, as we move further and further away from the "originary moment" of the Holocaust and from historical memory that comes down to us through testimony and witness, the task is no longer to adhere to the specific generic of "memoir" but rather to "reflect on how the proliferation of memoirs today circles around the Holocaust and the elusive notion of German and Jewish identity" (293). Morris explains that her reluctance to use the term German-Jewish symbiosis arises from her disbelief in the possibility of the term:

> While there are still memoirs being published that seek to capture history 'wie es eigentlich gewesen ist' (as it actually was) there is now a corpus of texts that challenge the very undertaking of writing history (personal and political) and that highlight the difficulties inherent in any attempt at interpretation of the Holocaust. Thus the discursive space of the Holocaust now encompasses texts that explore the uncertainty of authorship, experience, and identity and the slippage not only between national and ethnic identities, but also between fact and fiction, between trauma and recovery, between Jew and non-Jew, between victim and perpetrator. (293)

Morris contends that the Holocaust, moving beyond the sphere of memory, place, and lived experience, enters the imaginary of other cultures and geographical locations as postmemory/memoir. "Thus," states Morris, "the German-Jewish symbiosis is recast as the newly refigured presence of Germans and Jews in texts that probe the contours of memory and the contours of the act of writing and, most significantly, in texts that move beyond the memory of the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis" (292). Morris seeks to examine texts in which the blurred lines between fact and fiction offer traces and echoes that push at the boundaries of genre. Significantly, among the texts she selects to examine, is Wilkomirski's *Fragments,* a work of fiction marketed as a Holocaust memoir, that came under the rubric of false memoir after it was proved by an investigative journalist that Wilkomirski had an assumed persona and was not Jewish, but was, in fact, Dösseker, the illegitimate, adopted son of a Swiss couple. Morris includes Wilkomirski's fictional work in her examination because she believes that 'post' "is the space conceptualized by post-Holocaust art in general" (292) and that the borders of postmemory have expanded to include the diaspora. In relation to *Fragments*, Morris coins the phrase "crisis of memoir" (292), choosing to address those hybrid forms (some of them false) that "take up recent challenges to the notion of original in art" (293). Morris states:

> Holocaust remembrance in these texts is a postmemory that 'after Auschwitz' cannot be traced back to an originary moment of the Holocaust itself, but rather circulates—in the present—as representation, as melancholia, as elegiac repetition. Challenging the viability and possibility of history, knowledge, and

> subjectivity, these memoirs as postmemoirs are marked by metareflection about the Holocaust, memory, and the limits of art. (293)

Memory, always mediated, "unfolds as an ongoing process of intertexuality, translation, metonymic substitution, and a constant interrogation of the nature of the original" (293). In the final thrust of her argument, Morris states that false memoirs, like *Fragments,* reveal "their own status (and failed status) as memoir, thus signaling their participation in the elegiac mourning for the loss of viability of poetic and narrative form" (293).

Morris's abiding interest in memoir resides at the limits of form, where the compulsive need to tell overrides veracity, and fact and fiction become blurred, beyond the repetitions of grief. Morris shows us that, after the remaining Holocaust witnesses have ceased to exist, the postmodern, postmemory generation may well herald the devolution of the idea of 'pure' witnessing.

What, then, are we to make of deconstruction and the philosophical thought that leads, inevitably, to Derrida's cinder? Kluger's exhortation to *listen* opens a gap in which ethics and responsibility, or the metonymy of the uninvited angel, manifest as potential. As she takes her readers into her confidence—seeming to whisper into their ears—her exhortation to listen reaches a new register, one that is intimate, insistent, urgent, and immediate. It is the appearance of the uninvited angel—the trace, or cinder—that brings infinite responsibility into the present moment, into the here and now. This ineffable trace is passed, through the exhortation to listen/pause, to the reader, who, having fallen into the gap, carries the trace forward. In this way, the trace of the originary moment of the Holocaust can be said to seed itself, to self-perpetuate.

Can the same be said of Wilkomirski's false memoir, or any other memoir like it? To reiterate an earlier passage, some of Gilmore's students did not want to disavow "their powerful encounter with [the] representation" of Wilkomirski's rendering of the Holocaust. The desire to abide within the representational orbit of the work because of its powerful effect on them, suggests the students had been subsumed. They were willing to relinquish the author but not the text: truth as pragmatic and testable fact rousted the author, but the possibility of existential truth, the truth of 'who and what we are' held them in thrall. Would Gilmore's students have chosen—and this Gilmore does not address— to support Wilkomirski's representation of the Holocaust had they viewed it as empirical data, powerfully represented, that could not possibly bear within it the trace of one who has been there? Kluger's assertion that the concentration camps were "timescapes" (67) inaccessible to all but the inmates themselves means she must feel her way toward overcoming the stricture of the unimaginable if she is to reach her audience with her experience. The incommensurable selfless act to which Kluger is a witness, and from which she benefits, recreates, even as she writes from the distant vantage point of memory, a gap or stillness through which ethics manifests: it calls her to action as she writes. "Listen to me" (109), it says. And afterward, "I repeat it."

The presence of the gap—in this case invoked by Kluger's exhortation to enter the present moment—offers hope that postmemory/postmemoir generations will do more than simply engage in "metareflections of Holocaust, memory, and the limits of art" (293). Can Morris's "melancholia" and "elegiac repetition" that "circulates" far from the originary moment deconstruct to unveil the trace—that intrinsic, self-perpetuating mark of the Holocaust that opens to the dimension of thought which brings us face to

face with the other, to the victims whose inextinguishable voices echo in eternity, and who exhort us to listen to the thought that they contain? Eaglestone closes his text with the assertion that there are "many ways in which this event has to be thought" and this, too, is "a form of witnessing and so taking responsibility" (346).

> Not witnessing through the imagination, but as a culture, both Western, and perhaps the world. Moreover, this witnessing and responsibility is not just at the level of content, recalling specific instances, but…at the level of framework, of how we think and how we think about thinking. (346)

"The Holocaust" Eaglestone maintains, has "changed our intellectual map of the world" (346).

Chapter 5: Facts About My Mother[27]

The day after my mother-in-law Amar Kaur died, my husband and I visited her body in the hospital. It was a mid-November afternoon, calm and dry after a night of high winds. We were led by hospital staff to a small building outside the hospital proper—an annex with a bank of clerestory windows that looked back at the upper floors of the old vine-covered hospital. The light that entered and fell on Amar Kaur was soft grey and cast no shadow. She had died suddenly of a heart attack at home with us the previous night. While we flew through the rooms of the house in our efforts to resuscitate her, to awaken others, and to call for help, wind scrabbled at the windows in urgent bursts. We pumped her chest and called out to her, believing she might still hear us from that far off place to which she had taken herself. Yet, here we were the following day, standing over her body, the trauma of a failed CPR attempt behind us, the crippling days of grief still to come. Her arms lay at her sides. Her hands, palms down, had been composed to look natural. This belied the shape they had taken immediately upon death—deflated, askew, like gloves from which the hands had been withdrawn. She was still dressed in pajamas and the peach wool cardigan she had knit herself. Someone had seen to it that the front of the cardigan was buttoned. Three small safety pins dangled near the hem. I knew she kept them where she could reach for them at any moment, not only for utilitarian purposes, but also just to touch, to assuage anxiety or to garner luck. My husband gently pried one of the pins open, pulled it from its berth of peach wool, closed it, and dropped it into the pocket of his trousers. He did

[27] Chapter title is in homage to Lorna Crozier's poem "Facts About my Father," a poem that grew out of the difficult task of speaking about her father after his death.

this without speaking. His was the quiet theft of a talismanic object which the body of his mother still seemed to covet.

I envy my husband his mother's safety pin. It is the small, shiny, utilitarian spring that stitches together planes of separation. Things that threaten to come apart are sutured, often invisibly, as under a skirt or inside a blouse. The loose hem of a pant leg, the strap of a slip or bra—to all of these the humble hinge—that tense bit of rolled wire—willingly ministers. The word *safe* is contained within the boundary of its name. Its appearance in hotel rooms, along with soap and sewing needles, indicates its ubiquitous usefulness and comfort.

Among the few objects left to me to conjure my own mother is a molar filled with hammered gold. The root to which the gold adheres has browned to the colour of balsa wood; the tooth is almost weightless. It is an unsavoury object—intensely personal—that speaks to the hidden aspects of the body. No one would want such a thing, least of all my brother. Our mother's tooth, a last remnant spared cremation, was kept for years in a drawer beside her bed. Something to store and value, my father would have said, for he was bookkeeper, archivist, and overseer in all matters that secured the predictable orbit of our small household planet. The gold filling, my brother and I were told, was installed during our mother's employment as a civil servant in Berlin during Hitler's Third Reich. That she did anything other than housework came as a revelation to us and yet, there was something oddly reconcilable about the imagined woman who took dictation and moved crisply through her duties in the offices of the Third Reich, with the housewife who pierced and buttonholed the top-sheet on the beds of our live-in boarders. Each sheet was steam-ironed, then smoothed and folded over the top of the

winter blanket so that it covered, precisely, one third of the bed. Three oversized buttons, round as plates, secured each sheet to its corresponding blanket. No one we knew had such extravagance—sheets and blankets bound together with pearled buttons. As the boarders turned and shifted in their sleep the geographies of their beds remained neat and driftless. Some boarders had nicknames like 'Sufficient Hank' and came from the prairies. Did the efficiency and foreignness of the coat-button bed (there was no trace of such things in the Sears catalogue) beguile them as it did me?

The gold tooth, we were told, was one of a number of perks our mother received after she joined the Nazi party. It meant little to me, except that it seemed notable that gold was free to members of the *Partei.* Who paid the cost? How was it afforded? Such questions were always met with a shrug from my mother, and a dismissive "*na ja."* The expression "*na ja"* was synonymous in my mother's world with "you might well ask" and "I don't know." It was open-ended enough to leave me to my own inchoate speculations, which always anchored themselves, finally, in an imagined safe harbour.

One day in late spring, Mr. Penner, our Grade 9 Social Studies teacher, closed the black-out drapes in our classroom, rolled out the projector, and began screening a film. It was the last half hour before lunch. We had been studying the Second World War and this was to be the culmination of the overview of that historical period. Before screening the film of the liberation of Auschwitz, he growled "*This* is what the *Germans* did."

"*Na ja"* also means, "well, yes" and "of course." It means, "I agree" and "you are right." And so it was that the euphemisms of our childhood house were obliterated by

the sudden knowledge of what the Germans had done. They had done a monstrous, inexplicable thing to the Jews of Europe, and our mother, who must have known of it, would not tell—not on that day as we sat around the table over soup, nor any other day. Perhaps she did not know that at Auschwitz there was a room where they melted the gold fillings taken from the mouths of the victims. I will not believe that she did not know. The stenographic pools of the postal services of the Third Reich surely were places where missives of all kinds went to and fro, even unto the awful netherworld of Auschwitz itself. At the age of fourteen, I realized the *na ja* of my mother no longer befit our house. The carefully stitched blankets in the house of my mother's *na ja* could not prevent the sleepers from drifting in their safe-boats to the shores of hell.

I had no desire in childhood to quell the unbearable provenance of my mother's gold crown. It is different now. I cannot be at peace with this object, yet cannot move apart from it. It survives, an unquiet artifact, in a wooden box wrapped in linen at the bottom of a drawer that is seldom opened.

Once, after our mother had been dead for some months, my brother said, "I can see her face clearly but I can't remember the sound of her voice." He had been closer to her than I had been and took seriously this particular failure to remember her in all her completeness. My brother had a gift, a self-created oddity. Given to night terrors as a child, he had trained himself with marvellous rigour to dream only of Daffy Duck. In adulthood he had traded this screen dream for an equally rigorous insomnia. I suggested he reconstitute the old outflow from childhood and evoke our mother, Else, while asleep. The next time we spoke he told me he had taken my suggestion. In his

dream, he said, the telephone rang and when he answered it, there was our mother, her voice as clear as a bell.

I fear the gold tooth from the Nazi era will one day speak to me in the voice of the one who owned the gold before it was installed in my mother's mouth. Gold is immutable and can have many incarnations. Even now, the gold remains unchanged from the day it was bonded to my mother's tooth. It could be melted down or reshaped tomorrow and fashioned into a setting for a ring or brooch. I myself am powerless to alter it, though I long to hold something of my mother close. The tooth is the last vestige of Else, contains her DNA, but like a radioactive isotope, it cannot be held.

I have not looked at the tooth since I placed it in the drawer many years ago. I am inclined to steer clear of it, although I'm aware of its presence and acknowledge that it belongs to me. After I'm gone, my children will find it and the eldest among them, my daughter, will recall that it was Oma's tooth. She will wonder what to do with it, how best to discard the woody, desiccated pulp and preserve its valued gold skein in memory of her beloved grandmother. Unaware of its provenance, my children may refashion the gold into something usable, as we are wont to do with old things. Thus, the secret gold's intolerable legacy—to live on in lustre while holding at its very heart the destruction of the world—rests with the one who still bears the memory of that other world.

And what has become of Amar Kaur's talisman? It nests, finally, in her old sewing basket among rolls of coloured thread, ribbon, pincushions and thimbles. Enshrined in memory only, it lives in the stories we tell ourselves—the gestures of love and loss. With each telling, mother and son take their shapes again under the clerestory

windows. Whether embellished with one nuance or another—the timbre of the light, the colour of a cardigan, the path of a bird across the glass, the ceaseless hum of the hospital—the tale holds at its center the stainless steel safety pin that belonged to Amar Kaur. Stainless. Without stain.

"There is a greater reality in what we remember than in what we experience. Memory makes the essential choices; it is the inventory of meaning."

Marilynne Robinson[28]

Chapter 6: Epiphany

In the street in front of the duplex where I live, there is a spot where my friends and I play hopscotch. My mother can watch me as I play in this spot, as the wide kitchen window faces directly onto it. On those days when it doesn't rain, my friends Randi and Donna bring chalk to draw the hopscotch squares, and I run into my bedroom to retrieve the 18-carat gold chain, fine as spider's silk, that I am not allowed to use for hopscotch. When I toss it into the game, the gold seems to drift light as bird feather, then, suddenly remembering its own weight, drops soft and accurate into the desired square. This chain provides me with a considerable advantage over my friends, who are burdened with trinkets that skitter and slide beyond the chalk-drawn lines.

Across the street from our house sits the two-storey house of our Norwegian neighbours. Their house has a symmetry that our duplex lacks, a pleasing proportionality that has something to do with a careful alignment of windows. As I hop through the squares on one foot, then two, then one again, I remain aware of my mother's gaze. As distracted and harried as she is by kitchen work, my mother's watchfulness is, nonetheless, a cavernous embrace, as if she holds me in an ever-expanding field of attention from which there is no escape, no matter how far away my playing takes me. Although my mother's all-seeing-ness feels relatively benign,

[28] Attributed to Sandford Pinsker (*Conversations with Contemporary American Writers*) in Laura Barrett's "Framing the Past: Photography and Memory in *Housekeeping* and *The Invention of Solitude*" (109).

Randi's mother's gaze, directed from the opposite side of the street, scalds me with cold reproach. I contract under this gaze, like water to ice; I falter in the game.

My father is returning home at the end of his shift at the aluminum plant. His prized Corvair takes the corner slow to give us time to gather up our charm bracelets and trinkets and clear the street. Where am I positioned now, as I see this? Suspended in air, as the gold chain seemed to be, bodiless, seeing with eyes that are not eyes, omniscient. Memory is a series of rooms—a house of rooms for the bodiless I/eye to inhabit. In the rooms of memory one can circumambulate the furniture, reposition this object or that in order to acquire a more encompassing view. In this memory, I am the child at the level of the street. My eyes follow the flight path of a gold chain as it moves toward its target. In this memory, I am also the observer who sees all simultaneously—the game in progress, my father's measured approach, and the hopscotch—a nexus between my mother's distracted gaze and Mrs. Sandbu's guarded stare, which imprints me with an amorphous shame that I can neither digest, nor cast off.

The awareness that the position of the observer changes within the space of memory itself, that the I/eye moves over mnemonic terrain like a handheld camera in search of the optimum angle, creates a three dimensional space. As I hover, another memory begins to coalesce, to superimpose. This fresh memory is separated, temporally, from the first by a year or two.

I lie belly-down in the front yard and inhale the scent of just-cut grass. An electric storm is rising, a rare event in the Kitimat river watershed, so rare, in fact, that I have never experienced one. Lightning silvers the ring of mountains, thunder rolls up out of the earth—I feel it in my belly. Suddenly, standing before me in the street as if dropped

from the sky, is a wild mountain goat. Where does he come from? How did he get here? His eyes scroll back inside his skull. He is made of the same electric stuff as the charged air. His white coat blanches silver under the veins of shooting light. The pulse of something sacred moves through him, and from him moves through me.

What impulse makes me speak of this? Is it possible for one memory to heal another? Can memory be more than condensed, isolated nodes of experience that surface periodically like quarks in the field of time? As omniscience, I hold these two memories together in the same space of seeing. The child who plays in the street looks up to witness her future—one in which a storm and a goat conspire toward sanctity. Above the storm another I/eye peers down through the sediments of experience in the same way I behold my mother's letters. The field of memory is translucent. It beckons and entices the beholder toward revelation.

In order to reach the hopscotch, which lies directly below the space sanctified by the wild mountain goat, I must pass through the sacred space, and as I move I cannot help but pull the ether of what is there down with me, down toward the hopscotch, the nexus—that space where I locate myself as abject, as "other." The falling-through-sanctity ignites the entire field of memory, sets it on fire until it burns with the sacred all the way through, right down to the street, right down to the child standing there. From the street I look up to watch the flight path of a gold chain as it makes it way toward its target.

Conclusion

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who have produced a primer on autobiographical writing, state:

> Readers often conceive of autobiographical narrators as telling unified stories of their lives, as creating or discovering coherent selves. But both the unified story and the coherent selves are myths of identity. For there is no coherent 'self' that predates stories about identity, about 'who' one is. Nor is there a unified, stable immutable self that can remember everything that happened in the past. We are always fragmented in time, taking a particular or provisional perspective on the moving target of our pasts, addressing multiple and disparate audiences. (47)

Smith and Watson's perception of the past as a "moving target" is applicable to this thesis: the writer's perspective has, within the bounds and timeframe of the writing of this project, moved from mourning the past toward healing. I have discerned, through the writing process, a change in position from reading memory as unintegratable—the expression of an inherited, repressed familial trauma that works against closure (the flying to Bremen split-screen memory)—to memory as labile and dynamic. My utterance of the split-screen version of memory is fraught with hazards: in speaking it, I find myself wrong-footed, or worse, self-accused of a transgression regarding the appropriation of my mother's trauma. This recognition is afforded by the fact that the memoir portions of this thesis are located within a framework of scholarly discourse vis-à-vis the historiography of the Second World War and the Holocaust. And yet, the childhood memory of the hopscotch game resonates differently; it appears uncontaminated by what Hirsch describes as narratives that precede our birth, albeit

clothed in the era of suspicion and distrust afforded German immigrants in the Kitimat of 1956.

Smith and Watson, quoting James Olney, provide a useful model for gauging different kinds of mnemonic experiences. They state:

> James Olney has distinguished two models of memory at work in Augustine's fourth-century *Confessions:* the archaeological and the processual. The archaeological model of memory is spatial, 'a site where … [he] can dig down through layer after layer of deposits to recover what he seeks'; memories so recovered will be unchanged, if decaying over time (*Memory and Narrative*, 19). In contrast, the processual model for memory is temporal, 'bring[ing] forth ever different memorial configurations and an ever newly shaped self.' This kind of remembering is imagined as a process of weaving that makes new forms from strands that are also in process. (17)

The hopscotch memory adheres more to Olney's second model than to the first, but as a simultaneous seeing, and not an interweaving. Mutability proves it is dynamic, and its incompleteness hearkens to the anticipation of a coming-into-being. Olney, through Smith and Watson, points out that, "different memorial configurations" (17) will arise from the fluidity that his model represents. Memory is not just a retrospective glance, but a terrain wherein multiple narratives exist simultaneously. The storm-goat epiphany reveals that memory is also the locus of healing.

In 2004, the year before Else's brother Gerold died, Hanna Mohr gave him the letter Else had written in 1945 that revealed she had given birth to an illegitimate baby. Greta. G., who had travelled to Unkel am Rhein with Gerold to visit friends and

relatives there, said Hanna took Gerold aside on the last day of his visit and handed him an envelope. Greta recalled how Gerold took the letter out of its envelope, read it, then placed it, without comment, in the inside pocket of his jacket. The letter did not surface again until after Gerold's death, when I discovered it among his other letters. Perhaps Hanna had decided, finally, that she had kept the secret long enough. Perhaps, as she could not bring herself to speak out about what she knew, Hanna passed the letter on to someone she thought would know how best to disseminate the information it contained. Gerold's memoir had just been published, and he had become somewhat of a family celebrity. As it happened, however, Gerold shelved the secret: it came into my hands only by accident, when Greta decided that letters Else had written to her brother while he was a prisoner of war should be turned over to Else's children, rather than to Gerold's children, who were all living in Ireland, and with whom she had little contact.

When I arrived in Unkle in 2005, it was with a very different purpose from the previous visit, which entailed visiting my mother's grave. By the time I arrived, my aunt Hanna had been chastised by her children for releasing the letter, and would say nothing about the events it described except that she had seen Else in Unkel in 1945 when Else was *hoch schwanger* (very pregnant). She claimed she could not remember any other details from that time, and so I contented myself with the notion that my aunt had seen Else only from a distance, perhaps getting on, or off, a train. After all, Else had written in her letter, "We must speak together, and when you grasp all the details, everything will appear in different light."

Once, several years ago, after an old tree was felled in my yard, I found a brass water spout buried some inches inside the surface of the trunk where it had become

encapsulated as the tree grew around it. The water spout, its purpose unknown, was being consumed, and with each passing year, it retreated deeper into the tree's flesh. For Else, there was no place to grieve the dead child. The baby had been reabsorbed; she nested inside concentric rings of impregnable silence. Something needed to be felled—split open—before she could become visible again.

The mother/daughter dyad, as represented through a layering of archival letters, and graphic and photographic representations, creates a dialogic mirroring, or, as Fischer puts it, a "second voicing" [that acts to] draw attention to the ways in which individuals construct themselves through mirrorings with others" (99). Fischer observes, in relation to "dual-voiced" renderings, that he is struck by the "mirroring relationships between the life history of the author and the life history of the subject … and the ways in which the life histories of sometimes long-dead individuals provoke reflections on clarification and self-reconstruction in contemporary lives and reinterpretations of moral traditions" (97). The memoir portions of this project foreground the writer's positionality as a second generation postwar immigrant who is located both as a member of the German national diaspora, and as a member of the postmemory generation with regard to the trauma of the Second World War. The memoir, however, also seeks to position the writer in relation to others—to third and fourth postwar generations, in other words, children and grandchildren, for whom the Holocaust and the Nazi legacy are either non-existent, or deemed to be of little consequence. Hirsch's notion of postmemory describes my own struggles with my mother's history, particularly the events surrounding the death of Else's child and the silence surrounding her wartime experiences. As Elmwood observes, "The second generation's

postmemories are sites of 'projection, investment, and creation'—blank spots that serve as catchalls for the varieties of harm that humans can inflict on each other" (694).

Had the baby lived, she would today be my half-sister. As is the case with the split-scene memory of flying to Bremen in my mother's skin, the unanticipated discovery of a sibling known only as Monika is troubled by a persistent pull *toward* the appropriation of trauma, and *not* its desired corollary, heteropathic identification. If there is a *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) discernable here, it is the fact that the child can only be viewed as ephemeral, as trapped within her mother's letter, a passing shadow. Nevertheless, against an avalanche of self-doubt, I have attempted, at other times and in other formats, to reify Monika, to breathe life into her, to internalize her. I embody her, now, through memoir, as it is unlikely my mother's letters will impart the same urgency to, or have the same value for, those who come after me.

The mother-daughter dialogic performed in this project also takes into account issues that relate to gender. Virginia Woolf's notion of the Angel that prohibits her writing is reworked as *the good daughter in the house* in order to foreground the ways in which familial loyalty is sundered when long-held taboos and silences are breached. Powell states: "It is not the fact of a life that makes a story but the way it is crafted and performed. In this way, the control over the event—in some cases trauma—lies with the writer" (140). I felt it was important to emphasize the tension inherent in transgressing social expectation with regard to filial loyalty. As Woolf puts it, what remains after the Angel has been dispatched is a woman seated in a room with a pen and an inkpot, free to do and say as she pleases, freed of self-doubt and the desire to

please—the strictures embodied in her gender. What of such freedom, however, when it invites possible censure or ostracism from familial and cultural spheres?

When I began this thesis, I was concerned with how two disparate voicings—that of creative non-fiction (memoir), and that of scholarly discourse—might best be articulated within the scope of a single project. Katrina M. Powell refers to the term "performative" when speaking about how texts are constructed. Powell describes how "performative autobiography … critiques its own form while displaying it to readers who use it to construct a life" and how "scholars and artists of performativity examine the intertextual dimensions of texts" (137). This project is performed as an oscillation between scholarly analysis, which befits the perceived need for critical distance with regard to themes that relate to the Holocaust, and personal memoir, which adheres to a deeply empathetic response to my mother's experience. I chose, therefore, to alternate portions of each, with memoir segments arranged in a discursive pattern, as befits the nature of memory, with its non-linear trajectories.

The process of writing in this way has taught me that separate voicings are not problematic. Although they may differ stylistically, they are joined in one purpose—to inquire into what it means to live with familial rupture created by war, and also what it means to think about the event of the Holocaust from the positionality of the second-generation postwar German-Canadian diaspora. That the two disparate discourses are conjoined, and not commingled, is emblematic of the continued struggle I experience as a non-Jewish German-Canadian dealing with Holocaust themes. One could argue that the thesis arose out of cognitive dissonance, and that this dissonance cannot be quelled. To illustrate further, I offer, as example, a dialogic discussion entitled

"Postmemory Envy?" between mother and daughter Elizabeth R. Baer and Hester Baer, who debate their positionality with regard to a Holocaust diary[29] written by a family member, Nanda Herbermann. A Catholic interned in Ravensbrück concentration camp for women because she resisted the Nazi regime, Herbermann wrote a diary afterward entitled *The Blessed Abyss.* Hester Baer desires to maintain a critical distance from the diary, while Elizabeth Baer relates to it differently because it provides a sense of authorization for a Holocaust scholar who

> [feels] like a trespasser in the field of Holocaust Studies—a non-Jew trained in literature with no facility in German, Polish, Hebrew, or Yiddish. Finding Herbermann and working on her book gave me 'postmemory,' a claim to the Holocaust as legacy that gave me a toehold in a field where legacy matters.' But, as Hirsch acknowledges, these experiences produce a critical tension around adopting a pose of victimhood or appropriating a trauma. Even as I write this, I experience anxiety that writing about myself in the context of the Holocaust is self-indulgent. (80-81)

In my own case, I felt unauthorized to speak about the Holocaust on any level except the discursive, wherein a critically distanced stance legitimated the encounter, and worked against any danger of appropriation of Holocaust trauma. This is not so with regard to my mother's story: as Else's daughter, I feel authorized, and yet, this too, remains contested ground. As I have argued, and as Hirsch admonishes, the claim to postmemory proposes risk: hence Kaja Silverman's term 'heteropathic identification.'

[29] Elizabeth Baer notes that Hebermann's non-Jewish status impacted the way the memoir was classified with regard to genre. Rather than classified as testimony, the memoir was shelved with works that were descriptive of the camps, in this case Ravensbrück.

This has been the most difficult aspect of my memoir—to create distancing while at the same time engendering empathy, and with an eye to establishing agency.

Hester Baer cites Linda Alcoff's concern with post-structuralism and the "problem of subjective agency" (87):

> My disagreement [with post-structuralists] occurs, however, when they seem totally to erase any room for maneuver by the individual within a social discourse or set of institutions. It is that totalization of history's imprint that I reject. In their defence of a total construction of the subject, post-structuralists deny the subject's ability to reflect on the social discourse and challenge its determinations. (417)

Hester Baer states "Alcoff proposes the notion of 'positionality' to name 'woman' as the site of social processes rather than as the bearer of a set of attributes that are 'objectively identifiable.' Seen in this way, being a 'woman' is to take up a position within a moving historical context and to be able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context"' (87). If positionality is useful to describe the ways in which Elizabeth and Hester Baer negotiated their respective relationships to Herbermann's diary, then it can also be brought to bear here, where, arguably, it is applied to the separate streams—memoir and scholarly discourse. Each is negotiated differently, as befits the discursive characteristics of each genre, and as befits my positionality to both the events of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

With regard to Holocaust testimony, Eaglestone aligns it, initially, with postmodern novels, which he deems "mix genres, try to defy identification, lack closure, [and] foreground their own textuality" (70). Eaglestone claims testimony also makes use of

these tropes, but with a difference: in testimony, something "stubbornly persists," a link to a "forgotten wound," or more accurately "to a remembered event" (70).

Analysis of Ruth Kluger's Holocaust memoir reveals a gap through which ethics and responsibility manifest. Kluger calls her reader to witness beyond the historical account of testimony, which she deems is an inaccessible "timescape" (67), and asks instead, as Eaglestone does, if there are other ways by which truth reveals itself. In Kluger's case, the altruistic gesture of a fellow inmate forms an island of grace in the horror that is the reality of Auschwitz and, counter to what the camp ethos reinforces, reveals that this is *also* "who we are and how things are in the world" (Eaglestone 70). Kluger's recollection of this event creates a caesura in the narrative, a gap, so to speak, in which she seems instinctively to intuit that she has reached a point of intersection with her reader that is unlike other admonishments in the text in which she argues for mutual communication. By entreating her reader to pause, and to listen together *with* her, Kluger pulls her reader into a space where judgements are momentarily suspended. This space opens into Derrida's anticipatory moment of the coming-into-being of ethics and responsibility. Kluger's command to stop and listen posits her reader at the threshold of such a moment.

Eaglestone affirms that "testimony is an encounter with otherness" (71) that eschews reader identification with the experience of the Holocaust, and it does so necessarily to subvert any reversion of otherness to sameness. Testimony is its own genre, Eaglestone posits, "and it is this genre—one that is strange not least because it denies the commonly accepted process of identification—that holds best the memory of the Holocaust" (71). This thesis has argued that Kluger breaks with genre expectation

by foregrounding her troubled relationship with a mother who is also a survivor of Auschwitz. The closing images in *Still Alive,* however, are of generational continuity, albeit this continuity leapfrogs the second and third generations to align with the fourth. Great grandmother and great granddaughter are twin poles of innocence, the child "whose mind hasn't reached maturity," and the woman "whose mind [has] gone beyond ripeness … sharing some genes, sharing affection" (214). Kluger, in contemplating her mother in this snapshot, ends her memoir with the words, "perhaps redeemed" (214). Kluger's vantage point as regards her mother—her positionality—remains a contentious one. Kluger cannot speak to her mother's redemption. Unlike Spiegelman, who "write[s] himself into a family from whose founding trauma he was absent" (Elmwood 691), Kluger's presence at her mother's trauma, and her first-hand experience of that same trauma, precludes a definitive answer. In order to claim redemption for her mother, she would also claim redemption for herself, and this she does not do. And so the final words bring a final qualification: the memoir ends with an oppositional stance—*perhaps* redeemed. As Hester Baer clarifies: "We do not make ourselves out of a whole cloth because it is the 'historical context' that makes positions available: we can struggle against or accede to the terms that our context makes available" (87). Despite the fact that it subverts Holocaust genre expectation, Kluger chooses not to relinquish her struggle with her mother, but, softens it with a qualification—"perhaps." By including her granddaughter Isabella in the closing scene, Kluger suggests, as Dückers [through Dembling], acknowledges, the grandchildren (and by extrapolation, great grandchildren) "ask differently" (481).

I end this conclusion with a final word about Sebald, whose serpentine, labyrinthine maneuverings through the spaces of Holocaust subject matter—complicated by the fact that he is a non-Jewish German writer—lessen the cognitive dissonance that the subject of the Holocaust affords me. Richard Gray quotes Sebald, who, in speaking about his writing process, states: "My texts are written like palimpsests … over and over again, until I feel that a kind of metaphysical meaning can be read through the writing" (388). Gray confirms that Sebald "hone[s] the text in such a manner that its 'metaphysical meaning' increasingly shines through" (388). However, a passage from "Max Ferber," the final short story in *The Emigrants*, delineates a departure from Sebald's ubiquitously tangential and oblique handling of Holocaust themes. Bordering on the transgressive, this passage also stands as an overt gesture of resistance to the strictures historiography places on non-Jewish Germans when dealing with the subject of the Holocaust. The passage in question follows the transfer of Ferber's mother's testimony into the hands of the narrator. After reading Luisa Lanzberg's account, the narrator decides to visit Steinach, the location described in the diary, and the Jewish cemetery there. A council chamber official gives the narrator directions to the cemetery, and a set of keys with which to open the locked gate. Sebald includes a photograph in the text, of a sign affixed to a Jewish Cemetery gate, which states: *"Dieser Friedhof wird dem Schutz der Allgemeinheit empfohlen. Beschädigungen, Zerstörungen und jeglicher beschimpfende Unfug werden strafrechtlich verfolgt."* (This cemetery is protected by the general public. Willful destruction and other mischief will be prosecuted) (222). "When I reached the gate it turned out that neither of the keys fitted the lock," says the narrator, "so I climbed the wall" (222-23).

Given that the narrator's exploration of the cemetery yields a sudden flash of momentary identification with a Jewish writer buried there, and that this identification is taboo, the breach of the wall is a necessary step toward that encounter, and toward closing a circuit, as Garloff argues, with regard to the transmission of testimony. The narrator transgresses the rules prescribed by the sign on the gate and *breaks into* the space that is closed to him. In this way, the narrator resists the space assigned to him by historiography. Sebald suggests that such resistance is a necessary step toward mourning. Of the writer he finds there, and with whom he makes a connection, he states: "it feels as if *I* had lost her, and as if *I* could not get over the loss" (224). Sebald's emphasis on the narrative "*I*" reinforces the power of the taboo with regard to non-Jewish Germans appropriating the experiences of Jewish-Germans. The climbing of the wall signifies what Hester Baer identifies as "taking up a position within a moving historical context, and [being] able to choose what we make of this position and how we alter this context" (87). It is my hope, that in the writing of this interdisciplinary thesis, I, too, have 'climbed a wall.' If I can then turn and unlock a gate from the inside to let my children in, I will have accomplished all that I set out to do.

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