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Recent Literatures of the Holocaust: Negotiations with (post)Memory and the Archive.

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

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24th day of May 2010

Dedications

I would like to dedicate this paper to my husband Thomas Dessein, whose consistent love, support and patience made the writing of this dissertation possible.

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Abstract

The primary aim of this dissertation is to investigate the manner in which certain examples of post-Holocaust second and third generation literature negotiate questions of memory, history and the archive, when writing about the Holocaust from a specific spatial and temporal remove. This is undertaken via close readings of three texts, namely: *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, *Austerlitz* by Sebald and *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer. Each text required a slightly different theoretical approach and exhibits a different set of subject positions, however they all share the characteristics of generic blurring, self-conscious narration and intertextuality and use these to dramatise their own provisionality. I make specific use of Marianne Hirsch's term postmemory alongside various theories of the archive including Derrida's *Archive Fever* in order to describe these texts' relation to a remote past. In particular I analysed *Maus* in terms of postmemory, while considering Spiegelman's complex visual palimpsest as an archive. *Austerlitz* was analysed via conceptions of the uncanny and a Derridian elaboration of the concept of the spectre. With specific reference to the inclusion of photographs in the text I show how the spectre of the Holocaust comes to haunt the text, allowing the author to reference it indirectly. *Everything is Illuminated*, which I believe is an under-theorised text, was analysed in terms of its epistolary structure and its engagement with silence and absence in order to analyse the expression of postmemory from the additional temporal remove of the third generation. Using Hal Foster's view of the archival impulse expressed in certain art forms I conclude that these texts exhibit an archival approach to the events of the past. I argue that in highlighting its own provisionality each text avoids expressing an authoritative version of the past, and thus avoids the destruction of the heterogeneity of the archival trace.

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1 Introduction

Holocaust[1] scholarship has largely been defined by debates surrounding the question of its representation. From within these debates further questions have emerged concerning the discourses of history and fiction, primarily, regarding which of these is the most appropriate discursive form in which to depict the events of the Holocaust. These problems become ever more pertinent as our temporal remove from the Holocaust grows and our access to its events becomes ever more mediated. In what follows I plan to consider three examples of Holocaust literature, namely: *The Complete Maus* (1996) by Art Spiegelman; *Austerlitz* (2001) by W. G. Sebald; and *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) by Jonathan Safran Foer as they relate to questions of history, (post)memory and the archive. All three texts are written by second and third generation authors (or so called post-Holocaust authors) and as a result all of the texts engage with questions of how to write about the Holocaust from a specific temporal and spatial remove. The aim of my research is to analyse how this interaction with the past occurs; in specific I am interested in the authors' engagements with multiple texts (intertextuality[2]), the blurring of disparate genres and self-reflexivity. For the most part, I am interested in

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[1] How we apprehend and respond to the events of this era cannot be separated from how it is figured in language (what figures, tropes and metaphors are available for its representation). It has become common academic practice for those writing about the Holocaust to preface their work with a discussion about the appropriate manner in which to name the Nazi Genocide of Jews during the Second World War. As James E Young explains, how the Holocaust is presented in figures and archetypes creates as much knowledge as it reflects (1988:84). Hence, it is necessary to discuss the terminology used to label this period in history.

The names Sho'ah and Churban, which have gained currency in recent scholarly work, frame the Holocaust with reference to Jewish scriptural history, and "[invoke] other destructions" which form a frame of reference within which the catastrophe of European Jewry during World War II has come to be understood (Young 1988:85). While Sho'ah refers to a more general destruction, Churban refers directly to the destruction of the first and second temple. Resulting from their religious connotations, both names shape meaning in terms of a divine scheme of sin and retribution (ibid,:86), and thus distancing these events from human agency. Between 1957 and 1959 the term Holocaust came to be used to refer to the destruction of European Jews during the Second World War. Unlike the terms discussed above, the term Holocaust does not refer to specific past events, and removes this event from a specifically Jewish framework of understanding. The term refers to a more general destruction via fire (ibid,:87) or to a burnt offering, thus retaining certain religious connotations, specifically Christian connotations often implying martyrdom or even the martyrdom of Christ (Agamben 1999:28-29; an extensive and highly critical discussion of the term can be found in Agamben 1999: 26-31).

As we can see, none of the ways the Holocaust has been figured in language can be seen as objective, and while some critics such as Berel Lang have tried to propose more objective alternatives, it is difficult to escape the problematics inherent to any of these terms. I have chosen to use the term Holocaust, irrespective of its problematic connotations, as it figures the events within a framework of understanding that is not specifically Jewish and is free of the Zionist connotations inherent in Sho'ah. I believe it is useful to retain the use of these terms, as opposed to alternatives proposed from within the academy, as they refer us to the metaphors, figures and archetypes within which people have come to understand and make meaning around these events. Furthermore, I use this term while acknowledging, as Friedlander has done, that any term currently in use is inadequate (1994:253).

[2] The concept of intertextuality is highly contested in its meaning, usage and implications: for poststructuralists it is used to disrupt ideas of stable meaning and for structuralists it is used "to locate and even fix literary meaning" (Allen 2000:4). Despite its conflicted usage it remains a useful term as it serves to foreground a text's interconnectedness, relationality and interdependence on other texts, and as a result texts can no longer be separated from the "cultural or social textuality out of which they are constructed" (Allen 2000: 5 and 36; see also Still and Worden 1990: 1). Intertextual structures range from the "explicit to the implicit" and do not rely on conscious

the manner in which these texts dramatise their own provisionality: through the self-reflexive ways in which they highlight their own mediated nature and their distance from the events of the Holocaust.

Furthermore, I concern myself with the manner in which these texts negotiate problems of memory and postmemory (which will be defined in the following sections), in relation to the constraints implied by their particular spatial and temporal remove from the events they narrate. In this regard I focus on the manner in which memory is preserved, recorded and archived within the context of the individual and the family[3] and how the texts in question position themselves at the intersection between the public and the private, the communal and the individual. In my analysis, the archive is a metaphor, a lens, through which post-Holocaust texts and their interaction with history, memory and the fragments of the past can be considered. I would like to address the possibility that authors of postmemory are also engaged in an archival project in their literary works or, in Hal Foster's terminology, exhibit an archival impulse. The postmodern[4] and, in fact, the postmemorial nature of these texts shows any connection to the past to be provisional, thus the archives created are always incomplete. While some critics (for example Crownshaw and Long) have applied archival theories to works of literature these links have not be adequately theorised and it is only through Foster's elaboration of the archival impulse and by my application of this theory to literature that this is made possible. The works of postmemory under analysis in this study are archival in the sense that they are created through a gathering together of fragments (fictional, familial and historical). They show themselves to be fractured and provisional and, in this provisionality, are able to avoid the archivolithic violence of consignation (to be defined in detail later in this chapter) and open out toward the heterogeneity of the archival trace.

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authorial intention (Frow 1990: 45 – 46). As a result "[t]he identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation" (Frow 1990: 46).

[3] Marianne Hirsch defines the family as follows: "[t]he 'family' is an affiliative group, and the affiliations that create it are constructed through various relational, cultural and institutional processes" (1997:10). The family's construction is dependent on its social, cultural and historical context and therefore cannot be taken as a hermeneutic or all-encompassing term. In addition one cannot ignore the various pervasive myths that accompany Western familial self perception and hierarchies.

[4] Postmodernism is a term often only loosely defined and subject to much critical debate, while I am unable to enter into this debate, I will attempt to briefly define this term as it will be used for the remainder of this study. Commonly postmodernism is associated with the usage of irony, pastiche, and parody as well as a playfulness and selfconscious and self reflexive narration (see Hutcheon 1989: 18; Waugh 1992:5).Furthermore, Postmodern literature often suggests a scepticism toward grandnarratives (see Waugh 1992:5; Jameson 1984: 53), as Hutcheon explains Postmodernism's concern is to "de-naturalize . . . those entities we experience as natural" showing them to be culturally encoded and constructed (1989: 2). An important site of conflict around postmodernism it its political and ethical potential. Hutcheon argues that rather than being politically bereft, postmodernist self-reflexivity and playfulness can exist alongside a certain "worldliness" creating an uneasy tension "that provokes an investigation of how we make meaning in culture" (Hutcheon 1989: 18; see the converse of this argument in Jameson in which he argues that postmodernism epitomises a new depthlessness (1984: 59-62)).

While the Holocaust and its representation in language, literature and art have received extensive critical attention, it remains a valuable area of study as it is a key site of identification for many authors writing in the shadow of its events. Those authors writing from the perspective of the second or third generation after the Holocaust now become what Eva Hoffman calls a "hinge generation"[5] whose representation of the Holocaust will form the means by which these events are received and understood in future generations. The study of these texts therefore forms part of an attempt to articulate how these events are being figured and framed in recent Holocaust literatures. Furthermore there remains the increasing concern that the hyper mediated nature of the events' representations may result in their commoditisation. Efraim Sicher has argued that in our hyper mediated culture we should be increasingly aware and critical of how the Holocaust is represented and examine what forms contemporary representation of the Holocaust take and their consequences (2000: 57). Second and third generation authors' access to the Holocaust is indirect and always already mediated. Therefore the threat I am discussing is not necessarily, or at least not exclusively, a concern that once the last survivors of the Holocaust die that it shall be forgotten, but rather that the ways in which it is to be remembered and presented in literature need to be carefully assessed. The concern articulated above is not that the Holocaust will be forgotten, but rather that it will be presented in singular static ways that provide easy sites for identification and identity building, and that resultantly it will become a symbolic trope representing evil in some general sense, thereby erasing the specificity of individual experience of this event. Therefore, it is not only a question of whether the Holocaust should be remembered, but rather in what ways this 'memory' should be presented. As we become increasingly removed from the events of the Holocaust, what new questions and problematics arise with regards to narrating this event? In light of these concerns, an analysis of the complex negotiations with history and memory undertaken by certain second and third generation authors examining the Holocaust seems not only to retain its pertinence but to be essential.

The excess of material available on the Holocaust in multiple media may, rather than perpetuating memory of these events, induce a kind of forgetting. Reneé Green, in discussing what he calls the cancelling out effect of the archive, suggests that this effect is a result of a kind of "negation in abundance . . . which is possible when confronted with more than is comprehensible" (Green 2006: 46). Furthermore there is a threat, or so Sicher suggests, that the Holocaust (as a result of this excess of representation) will become merely a "trivialized trope . . . a representation of memory or as a memory of a memory in a twilight culture of simulacra and hypertext" (2000: 58). Thus, when considering any representation of the Holocaust one

[5] Eva Hoffman coins the term "hinge generation" to describe the second generation after a calamity or cultural trauma, she argues that it is among this generation that "that the meanings of awful events can remain arrested and fixed at the point of trauma; or in which they can be transformed into new sets of relations with the world, and new understandings" (Hoffman 2003:103). Thus for Hoffman the generation immediately following an event of great cultural trauma is the generation that frames how this event can be apprehended and understood, as well as defining the cultural and ethical impact these events will have for future generations.

must be aware of this threat, that through over or excessive representation the Holocaust will become little more than a simulacrum and that its representation will lose all affect. This threat that the excess of information on the Holocaust results in an erasure of memory and reduction of these horrific events to a trivialized trope, is a concern that is addressed in each of my chosen texts both in their form and content, and in their attempts to archive memory, and at times to represent the events with renewed affect.

In what follows I intend to further theorise the writing of second and third generation authors of the Holocaust[6], specifically in their engagement with the problematics highlighted above. It is important to note that while children and grandchildren of survivors do not necessarily have a special ethical responsibility to remember and represent the events of the Holocaust, different subject positions do seem to imply different issues or problematics. In specific these questions hinge on the issues of appropriation and co-option which will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter. I conduct my analysis literature produced by second and third generation authors with reference to the concept of postmemory, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch, used to describe the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors and their relationship to the history and memory of the Holocaust[7] (please see the following section for an extensive definition). However Hirsch's term, while highly useful, remains insufficient to fully account for the relation to the fragments of the past exhibited in these texts. As a result I additionally consider these texts through Hal Foster's understanding of the 'archival impulse' in art. I believe that the archive is a useful metaphor to describe the negotiations with memory and history undertaken in certain second and third generation novels, and this metaphor allows one to envision these works as the outcome an archival impulse (to be discussed in detail in the following sections) which facilitates a reading of the texts' strategies and characteristics not only as an attempt to draw together disparate fragments of material, both public and private, fictive and factual, but also as an attempt to produce affect (thus separating them from the project of postmodernism as a whole[8]). It is my hope that as a result further analyses can be undertaken from this standpoint which will prove productive in shedding light on the work of postmemory as articulated in literature that responds to genocide and atrocity retrospectively from a generational and temporal remove.

In what follows I do not intend to undertake a survey of all recent Holocaust literature, but rather I have chosen to closely analyse three specific texts which I believe will adequately illustrate (and at times

[6] Although I do not believe that a generational connection to the Holocaust necessarily results in an increased ethical responsibility to remember or record the events of the Holocaust. I do believe that the Holocaust may (although not necessarily) have a more significant impact on an individual with these familial ties.

[8] In Jameson's definition of the postmodern (which is not entirely the one I ascribe to in this paper) postmodernism is accompanied by a certain lack of depth (both literal and figurative) which is then "accompanied by a transformation of the depth of psychological *affect*, in that a particular kind of phenomenological emotional reaction to the world disappears" (Jameson as quoted by Stephanson 1989:4).

problematise) my broader argument. I have chosen these three texts because they share certain literary features and techniques that I believe are essential to a text of postmemory: intertextuality, palimpsest and generic blurring, as well as the specific manner they each engage with questions of history and memory. While all three texts are written from a specific spatial and temporal remove from the Holocaust and share a number of textual characteristics, each text illustrates a contrasting subject position: in *Maus* we encounter a child of Holocaust survivors; in *Austerlitz* we encounter a man whose parents died in the Holocaust and a second generation German narrator; and in *Everything is Illuminated* we encounter both the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor as well as the grandchild of a Ukrainian bystander/ perpetrator. Further, the choice of these texts allows me to draw a specific trajectory with regards to postmemorial relationships to the Holocaust. Both *Austerlitz* and *Everything is Illuminated* begin to suggest the possible inter-subjective relationships available to second and third generation Jews and second and third generation members of the perpetrator collective, thus suggesting the possibility of future interaction and dialogue.

Literature Review:

The field of analysis, literary and otherwise (philosophical, psychological and historical to name a few), regarding the Holocaust is extensive and has grown rapidly in the last decade. The questions that have emerged from these debates focus on ethics, truth, representation, history, trauma and memory and it would be impossible and unnecessary, considering the scope of my project, to attempt to tackle all of these concerns. As a result certain key theorists in this field have received little or no attention (like Shoshanna Feldman and Dori Laub, whose work on trauma and testimony has had a fundamental impact on all those in the field who have studied the Holocaust in this vein). I have focused my discussion solely on those theories that concern the question of memory and the archive as they pertain to the specific generation of literature with which I am concerned.

1 Representation of the Holocaust

The question I propose to consider here, however obliquely, is a question of representation which has been a central concern in academic debate around the Holocaust. As a result I feel it is necessary to briefly introduce and discuss the current debate around Holocaust representation. The starting point for most discussions of Holocaust representation is the following statement made by Adorno that, "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"[9] (1962:312). Many scholars who have taken Adorno's statement as their point

[9] Cited in Feldman and Laub. 1992. *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York and London: Routlege pp.34. Adorno 1962. "Commitment", in *The Essential Frankfurt School* Reader, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, New York: Continuum. Here it is worth noting that Adorno later goes on to qualify his position in stating that: "[I]t is only art that can henceforth be equal to its own historical impossibility, that art alone can live up to the task of contemporary thinking and of meeting the incredible demands of suffering,

of departure have argued that to apply narrative coherence and structure to the fragmented, 'unspeakable[10]' and unknowable experience of the Holocaust implies the possibility of making sense of the Holocaust, and, even more problematically, deriving the pleasures inherent in artistic response from these atrocities (Langer 1975:2) or implying the possibility of identification[11]. One of the repercussions of Adorno's radical statement has been seen in the attempt, within Holocaust scholarship, to distinguish between aesthetic and documentary representations of the Holocaust (Hirsch 1997:23)[12]. Therefore it is no longer only a question of whether the Holocaust should be represented, but what the most appropriate mode for representing the Holocaust might be[13].

In much of the discourse surrounding Holocaust representation, the question of the Holocaust's so called 'unspeakability' has been raised from a number of different perspectives. Jean-François Lyotard in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* addresses a structural 'unspeakability' with regards to Auschwitz (in specific, but his conclusions do bare relevance to the Holocaust as a whole). His argument begins as follows: "You are informed that human beings endowed with language are placed in a situation such that none of them is now able to tell about it" (1988:xi). For Lyotard, Auschwitz provides the following impasse to language: even if one has seen with one's own eyes a gas chamber, one would need to witness it being used to kill at the time it was seen; however, the only manner to witness this occurrence would be to die in a gas chamber, and if one is dead one cannot testify to the existence of a gas chamber (Lyotard 1988:3). As a result, for Lyotard, Auschwitz becomes an event without a witness. As Agamben explains, at the centre of testimony is "something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority" (2002: 34). For Agamben: "testimony is the disjunction between two impossibilities of bearing witness; it means that language, in order to bear witness, must give way to non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness" (2002: 31). Language in testimony advances toward non-language (Agamben 2002: 39). For Agamben, it is never simply a question of the Holocaust's unspeakability because, as he makes clear, the outpouring of survivor testimony and literature regarding the Holocaust in recent years bears testament to its

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of politics and of contemporary consciousness, and yet escape the subtly omnipresent and almost unavoidable cultural betrayal both of history and of the victims" (Feldman 1992:34). Here we see Adorno comes to point out both the impossibility and the necessity of artistic production with regards to the Holocaust.

[10] To see a converse of this argument see Berel Lang in *Holocaust Representation: Within the limits of History and Ethics* where he claims that there is decisive proof that the Holocaust is in fact 'speakable' and that there is an ethical imperative to provide access to these facts via the appropriate discourse.

[11] This problem is discussed extensively by Robert Eaglestone in the *Holocaust and the Postmodern* pp.102-133.

[12] See Van Alphen *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* pp.17-19 for a further discussion of Adorno's perspective.

[13] I do not agree with those who believe the Holocaust to be a singular or unique event in human history, but rather see it as one of a number of events of extreme cultural trauma that have emerged out of specific social and cultural contexts. Like all events of the past (this will be covered in greater detail later in this chapter) our only access to it is through its textual representations, thus our access to it is always mediated.

speakability, but rather that at the centre of this language is a lacuna, as Lyotard would have it a 'negative phrase', that suggests that element of the Holocaust that cannot as yet be phrased[14].

Here I briefly want to consider the argument Friedlander presents in his introduction to *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"*, which I believe successfully draws together many of strands of criticism already discussed, where he states that the Holocaust (which he refers to as *Sho'ah*) "carries an excess, and this excess cannot be defined except by some sort of general statement about something 'which must be able to be put into phrases [but] cannot yet be'." (1992:20). I would argue that, while to some extent it is clear that the Holocaust can be narrated, this narration is qualified by and riddled with gaps, holes and absences (haunted at its margins by the excess Friedlander describes, that which cannot, as yet, be phrased)[15]. Finally, it is these gaps and lacunae (irrespective of their origin), specifically within familial histories, that second and third generation authors (with whom I am concerned) have to engage. They are forced to encounter the problem of (a) creating continuity and identity from an obliterated world and history while (b) respecting and acknowledging the gaps and absences inherent to Holocaust narratives and (c) to avoid excessive or unquestioned identification (as described by Eaglestone (2004)). As we will see later in my argument, both postmemory and the archival project imply a pressure towards closure, which can and should be problematised by considering Henri Raczymow's concept of "[m]emory [s]hot [t]hrough with [h]oles" which insists that the gaps and absences in memory should never be filled (1994:100) (see footnote 20).

Over time a hierarchy has emerged in Holocaust scholarship where either history or literature has been prioritised over the other discursive form[16]. There are those critics, like Berel Lang, who stress the importance of historical representation of the Holocaust, emphasising the need for a literal rather than

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[14] In contrast others such as Cathy Caruth and Shoshanna Feldman consider the individual psychological implications of trauma. The word trauma literally means a wound, in the psychological sense it implies a shock to the "tissues of the mind – that results in injury or some other disturbance" (Erikson 1995: 183) and resulting in long lasting disturbance of the individual's development (Hoffman 2004: 35). For Freud the result of a traumatic experience is the repression of its memory (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 166-167). This repression is often accompanied by repetitive flashbacks or dreams of the event (ibid). As van der Kolk and van der Hart explain psychoanalytic theory "has always attached crucial importance to the capacity to reproduce memories in words and to integrate them in the totality of experience" through narrative (ibid). This requires the patient to acknowledge the memory of the traumatic event and reintegrate it into their broader life history via subjective narrative (ibid: 176). The immediate accuracy of the flashback is transformed into the accessible subjectivity of narrative language and can thus be assimilated by the individual into his or her autobiography. However the questions raised by an analysis of a text through the paradigm of trauma studies are less relevant to this study as such readings concern the psychological impact of trauma on an individual's psyche, and cannot be applied to his or her descendants (direct or otherwise).

[15] See Agamben, Giorgio *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* where he discusses the silences, gaps and lacuna inherent in Holocaust testimony. In this subtle analysis he discusses the manner in which those who cannot speak, what he calls the Muselmann, speak through the gaps and the absence in survivor testimony.

[16] For a full outline of the dichotomy that emerges between literature and history in academic study of the Holocaust see Van Alphen *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* pp. 16-37.

figurative discourse when representing the Holocaust[17] (the latter of which he deems to be inappropriate). Others, like Van Alphen, place importance on aesthetic (or literary) representation. As we shall see in the following section, History can never truly be separated from its representation in discourse, and as a result remains a textual production subject to interpretation whose authority or objectivity is proven to be illusory. Here I take the position posed by Lawrence Langer, among others, that the heterogeneous nature of literature allows it to extend beyond the boundaries imposed on historical discourse. In other words, literature can illustrate the excess inherent in the Holocaust and the difficulties in its representation. However this should by no means imply that the two discourses are mutually exclusive. Those who consider the generic characteristics of Holocaust fiction (Young 1988; Vice 2000; Eaglestone 2004) have recognised that the historical facts of the Holocaust remain within and draw the limits (Lang 2000) of any piece of Holocaust fiction. Thus fictional representation of the Holocaust is always circumscribed by the empirical reality of its actual events. It is necessary to problematise the dichotomy that has been constructed between the two discourses, as it is clear that Holocaust literature can never truly be separated from the history of the Holocaust. Holocaust fiction thus allows for a necessary slippage[18] between the two genres and this is precisely what theorists like Langer begin to point us towards. The slippage between these two discourses is evident in all three texts that will be analysed. This is specifically clear in their generic blurring, avoidance of stable labels and self-reflexivity, which allows these texts to engage in a dialogue with history.

2 The Problem of History

The question of history and the Holocaust is surrounded by a number of highly nuanced debates and the scope of the current discussion will not allow me to address these arguments in extensive detail. It seems, however, necessary to provide a rudimentary introduction to these debates as they effect the era of Holocaust writing with which the current dissertation is concerned. Second and third generation Holocaust literature is involved in a constant engagement with the relationship between the past and the present, as well as the relationship between the events of the past and their textual representation in the present. Thus the writing of history and our engagement with the past is a key concern for many of these authors.

In order to understand the role played by history in the writings of many second and third generation authors, one must first consider characteristics of written history, as it is only through its representation in language that the authors in question have access to the past. Roland Barthes, in a chapter entitled "The

[17] Here Lang replaces the dichotomy between historical and imaginative discourses, with a dichotomy between literal and figurative language, prioritising the literal over the figurative. In Lang's discussion he fails to recognise the possibility inherent in figurative discourse to represent that which cannot be represented literally (Van Alphen 1997: 29). For a useful discussion of Lang's position see Hayden White "Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth" in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution*" (ed Saul Friedlander) pp. 37-53 and Van Alphen *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory* pp. 24-33.

[18] This view begins to be posited by James E. Young in *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, and in Van Alphen's *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature and Theory*.

Discourse of History" in *The Rustle of Language*, begins to question the relationship between historical discourse and other forms of narration. He recognises that the perception of historical discourse as objective and authoritative is connected to and justified by its relationship to ideas of the "real" and the "rational" (Barthes 1989:127). According to Barthes's formulation: in historical discourse the writer or sender (the historian) is perceived as absent from the text, and as a result when reading history one is under the illusion that history tells itself, thus explaining why historical discourse is viewed as objective (*ibid*,: 131-132). This produces what Barthes calls the *referential illusion* "since here the historian claims to let the referent speak for itself" (*ibid*: 132). Therefore Barthes shows how textual characteristics of historical writing produce the illusion that history is naked, objective and inherently connected to the "real" by masking its own constructedness.

Hayden White makes the argument that, once history is converted into language and thus subject to emplotment, it belongs to an order of discourse and as such cannot be separated from relativity (1992:37). Like Barthes, White thus challenges the truth claims of historical discourse by drawing our attention to its textual constructedness[19]. White shows that the transformation of past events into narrative history is itself not only a construction but an interpretation of the events of the past. He argues that history that narrativises events of the past is "a discourse that feigns to make the word speak itself and speak itself *as a story*" (emphasis author's own) (White 1980:7; *also see* White 1984:3). However, how a narrative is emplotted, what genre it conforms to, effects how it produces meaning and how it is interpreted (White 1984: 18-19), thus the illusory transparency of narrative history in fact obscures the manner in which it produces and constructs meaning.

Furthermore, narrative history comes to impose a certain temporality onto the events of the past; continuity comes to govern the discourse (White 1980: 14). Narrative history comes to enforce temporal continuity and linearity onto events that are in reality diffuse and fragmented, thus even the temporality of narrative history implies its constructedness. Narrativising events always serves a particular power or authority, it is always governed by and reflects a particular set of power relationships. It requires one to "envision a set of events as belonging to the same order of meaning" and this requires one to utilise a "metaphysical principle which translates difference into similarity" (White 1980:19). Thus there is a kind of misrepresentation and erasure inherent to this discourse that imposes the illusion of singularity and unity onto the diffuse and fragmented

[19] Similarly, Van Alphen argues against those who believe that historical genres are situated outside the realm of the imaginative; that they are simply mimetic and free from construction (1997:26). He goes on to stipulate that the main genres of Historical realism, testimony and the diary, often prioritised in Holocaust representation, are constructed according to the narrator's ideological beliefs and cultural context (Van Alphen 1997:31).

nature of human experience. By constructing information into a single order of meaning one erases the heterogeneity of meaning that can be drawn from a singular event. These questions become, however, even more complex when the subject in question is the Holocaust. Some might argue that it is an ethical necessity to circumscribe the events of the Holocaust within a specific order of meaning that emphasises a specific understanding of the events and the relationship between the perpetrators and their victims. Yet, one may also argue that part of the crime of the National Socialists was discursive and served to reinforce singular and all-encompassing readings of events that rejected heterogeneity and multi-vocality, and sought to erase all conflicting understandings and interpretations of events. Furthermore, many suggest that the Holocaust is a period of history that evades comprehension and understanding and as a result imposing a singular trajectory and order of meaning onto events is a misrepresentation.

The argument against the postmodern approach to history outlined above is that if history can be read as relative or as textual, then the facts of historical events may be erased and called into question (this is specifically concerning with regards to the Holocaust where Holocaust denial remains a problem). Linda Hutcheon, however, provides a striking argument against such a position. She argues that "[t]his is the paradox of postmodernism, the past really did exist, but we can only know it today through its textual traces, its often complex and indirect representations in the present" (1989:51). She goes on to add that "[to] say that the past is only known to us through textual traces is not, however, the same as saying that the past is only textual" (Hutcheon 1989:51; see also Hutcheon 1988: 88-89). White also seems to take up this point, that while events did happen and facts remain constant, our only access to these events and to these facts is via the texts in which they are represented, and accordingly these textual representations cannot be separated from their position within discourse, and thus are subject to the relativity inherent in all forms of discourse.

The questions and debates raised above remain pertinent to my current discussion, as they relate to the manner in which history is apprehended and understood. One could argue that all of the texts with which I am concerned necessarily address these debates around history as they are all texts that pose the question: How should the history of the Holocaust be told, remembered and preserved through texts? The texts which I intend to discuss are all concerned with the interpretation and emplotment of events of the past, and are written in the knowledge that our only access to the events of the past is through texts, and as a result is indirect and mediated.

3 Memory

I believe that memory is a key point where questions of history, literature and fiction intersect, as well as suggesting an intersection between the public and the private, the individual and the community. Annette Kuhn argues that "memory never provides access to or represents the past 'as it was'" the past is always mediated through human memory (1995: 157). For Kuhn memory is "always already a text, a signifying system . . . memory is neither pure experience nor pure event. Memory is an account, always discursive, always textual" (1995: 161). Thus, like history, memory does not provide direct access to the events of the past but rather a subjective interpretation of these events. Furthermore, memory is produced within a particular social, cultural, political and economic context, and is thus not formed only by the individual, but rather by the individual in relation to the collective.

I think it can be argued that each of the three texts I consider is an example of what Kuhn calls 'memory work'. For Kuhn 'memory work' is the conscious performance of memory, it is "an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory" (1995: 157). 'Memory work' remains sceptical of assumptions about the authenticity, transparency or 'truth value' of memory, treating it as material for analysis and interpretation (Kuhn 1997: 157). She further argues that: "[m]emory work makes it possible to explore connections between 'public' historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity, gender, and 'personal' memory" (Kuhn1995:5). For Kuhn, memory work allows one to explore the complex intersections between official and public narratives of the past often, in the form of history and private recollection as well as those narratives of the past that are received within the intimacy of the family sphere, that are of a similar order to memory. Memory work is therefore a reconstruction of the past through memory that remains critical of its engagement with memory and the events of the past. The self-reflexivity of each text under analysis in this study is evidence of this critical engagement with the events of the past and how they are represented in the present.

The complex interaction between the public and the private inherent to memory becomes specifically pronounced with regards to second and third generation Holocaust literature, where memory of the Holocaust is always mediated[20]. However, before we embark on a discussion of the theories that surround memory that is ultimately mediated as a result of a spatial and temporal remove, I will briefly address two versions of memory found in survivor testimony: deep memory and common memory. Saul Friedlander

[20] This does not imply that first generation, survivor, testimony is not mediated, (see Young (1988)) but rather that this process is more pronounced and directly textual with regards to the children (and grandchildren) of survivors.

drawing on Lawrence Langer's argument in *The Ruins of Memory*[21] (1991) defines these two forms of memory as "ultimately irreducible to each other" (Friedlander 1993:119). Friedlander defines common memory, on an individual or collective scale, as that which "tends to restore or establish coherence, closure" and implies the possibility of recovery (1993:119). In contrast, deep memory is that which "continues to exist as unresolved trauma just beyond the search of meaning" remaining difficult or impossible to articulate and represent (Young 2000:14; see also Friedlander 1993:119). Deep memory haunts and destabilises common memory, making the pressure toward coherence and stability inherent in common memory necessary but inadequate (Young 1997:37). Friedlander presents a question in his argument which I believe will be useful for and points towards the necessity of my research: Can deep memory of the Holocaust remain after all the survivors have died? (Friedlander 1993: 119).

This points our discussion towards the work of Marianne Hirsch who coined the term "postmemory"[22] to describe the interactions with memory experienced by children of Holocaust survivors.[23] However as Hirsch herself suggests, the term's usage can be extended to include a wider group of individuals, as will be the case in my usage of the term. Postmemory is distinguished from memory by a temporal or generational remove from the event and is distinguished from history by a deep personal affiliation (Hirsch 1997:22). "Postmemory," describes the "relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experience of their parents, experiences that they "remember" only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 2001: 218-219, *see also* Hirsch 1997:22)[24]. Hirsch argues that postmemory is a powerful form of memory

[21] Langer articulated these two terms (as well as a number of other terms for survivor memory) without direct reference to psychoanalysis, but rather through detailed textual analysis of a substantial number of survivor testimonies.

[22] Marianne Hirsch differentiates the term postmemory from the term coined by Toni Morrison, namely "re-memory"[22]. While these terms emerge from highly different contexts one can see them as linked by the fact that they both refer to collective trauma as remembered by the children of trauma sufferers. Marianne Hirsch argues that while "re-memory" involves "transposition" of memory, postmemory involves a different form of "identification" which is mediated by various textual representations rather than the bodily identification associated with "re-memory" (2002: 76).

[23] Here it is necessary to mention two theorists who have similarly defined and described the experience of memory by the children of survivors. The first (whom Hirsch herself refers to), Henri Raczymow, speaks of "Memory Shot Through with Holes" which he describes as "[a] memory devoid of memory, without content, beyond exile, beyond the forgotten" (1994:100). Like Hirsch Raczymow emphasises the absences inherent in the work of postmemory, Hirsch however begins to theorise how these absences are (at least partially) filled through a process of imagination and investment.

The second, Forma I. Zeitlin, puts forward the idea of a "vicarious witness". Zeitlin shows that there are certain shared common elements amongst those authors who attempt to link the past (of the Holocaust) to the present. She claims that their attempts remain coloured by their sense of "their own belatedness" (Zeitlin1998:6), their temporal remove from the event that for many children of survivors shaped their sense of self. In addition, she argues that: "[c]ommon to these efforts is an obsessive quest to assume the burden of memory, of rememoration, by means of which one might become a witness oneself" (ibid). Like Hirsch she shows the increasing role of invention and imagination for a generation for whom access to the Holocaust is becoming increasingly indirect and mediated (ibid: 8).

[24] It is important to note that Hirsch later qualifies this definition by emphasising the fact that it is not only children of survivors who engage or are implicated in the work of postmemory (2001:220).

precisely because it requires an "imaginative involvement and investment" as part of the process of remembering (Hirsch 1996:662). Here Hirsch is referring to the individual's interaction with information concerning the Holocaust, whether it is survivor testimony, history or family photographs, which requires the individual to imaginatively and personally engage in the process of recollection. Thus the traces of the past that are available to them are purely textual, and as a result their access to the event remains mediated.

As a result of their spatial and temporal remove from the events of the Holocaust second generation 'memory' of the Holocaust is essentially different from that of first generation survivors, its "basis is in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness" (Hirsch 2001:220). In Hirsch's definition of postmemory, memory is mediated in three ways: (i) representation, (ii) projection and (iii) creation (2001:220). This process is often based on absence rather than presence; voids in memory and narrative. However, "[p]ostmemory – often obsessive and relentless – need not be absent or evacuated: it is as full and as empty, certainly as constructed as memory itself" (Hirsch 1997:22). Hirsch argues that the aesthetics of postmemory are ostensibly Diasporic (defined by their temporal and spatial remove) and as such require one to simultaneously "[re]build and . . . mourn" (Hirsch 1997:245). The above statements imply, at least from my perspective, a danger inherent in the aesthetics of postmemory where the author, in his/her attempt to rebuild, to fill empty memory, may impose coherence and meaning and thus understanding and identification, onto an unknowable past (thus abolishing all traces of deep memory).

Similarly, as Richard Crownshaw has noted, a concern emerges with regards to Hirsch's work that the adoption implied in postmemory may result in appropriation[25] (2004:216): this may be particularly concerning when postmemory extends beyond familial ties of identification. In Crownshaw's brief critique of Hirsch's work he points toward a problematic that Hirsch herself has noted: "These lines of relation and identification need to be theorised more closely . . . how, more importantly, identification can resist appropriation and incorporation, resist annihilating the distance between self and other" (2001:221). This problematic can be highlighted by the following statement by Eva Hoffman (who is herself a child of survivors) in which she describes her reception of and engagement with the knowledge of the Holocaust:

> It is no exaggeration to say that I have spent much of my life struggling with this compressed cluster of facts. They were transmitted to me as my first knowledge, a sort of supercondenced pellet of primal info – the kind from which everything else grows, or explodes or follows, and which it takes a lifetime to unpack and decode. The facts seem to be such an inescapable part of my inner world as to belong to me, to my own experience. But of course, they didn't; and in that elision, that caesurae, much of the postgenerations' problematic can be found (2004: 6).

Hoffman's comments suggests the difficulty she has distinguishing between the events experienced by her parent's generation and her own experience, and the ethical necessity of this distinction. This problematic is

[25] He makes this statement with regards to Hirsch's use of Geoffrey Hartman's concept of "witnesses by adoption" which she then relates as retrospective witnessing by adoption (2001:221).

clearly even more pronounced when the individual engaged in the work of postmemory is further removed from the event either temporally or via cultural or national identity. It seems to me that it is specifically in the manner in which postmemory is narrated that these lines of identification can be further theorised. Furthermore, as we will see in Young's definition of *vicarious memory*, many authors and artists of postmemory resist appropriation and incorporation by illustrating how their postmemory of the event has been mediated by multiple received narratives and texts, thus distancing the artist from the event and highlighting the mode of textual production. In the texts included in this study, their characteristics of self-reflexivity serve to highlight their mediated distance from the events of the past.

James E. Young furthers Hirsch's elaboration of the term postmemory by coining his own terminology used to describe the works of art and literature that result from artists' postmemory. Young notes that the post-Holocaust generation of artists (in this instance this should be taken to include authors) who are born into a postmodern, media saturated world do not presume to address the Holocaust "outside the ways in which they have *vicariously* known and experienced them" (emphasis my own) (2000:1):

1. Via survivor testimony and memoir;
2. Through countless novels, poems and histories of the Holocaust they have read and the numerous visual representations (photographic and otherwise) they have encountered.

Young emphasises the fact that these artists and authors have "hyper mediated experiences of memory" and as a result cannot record the Holocaust without acknowledging the way their knowledge of the Holocaust was received and mediated (2000:1). Young, in part drawing on Hirsch, comes to refer to this form of memory as "vicarious memory" or a "vicarious past" (2001:1). Young's emphasis is on the vicarious nature of this memory, which is translated into fiction and art through the focus on transmission and reception of narratives of the past as much as the narratives themselves. All the texts that I will analyse avoid, with varying degrees of success, the danger inherent to postmemory of appropriation by highlighting the constructed and mediated nature of their projects.

Clearly the question of postmemory is not simply one of memory but of generational transmission and how those living in the present relate to the traumatic events of the past. While the second generation children of Holocaust survivors have received much attention in academia, I have chosen to address three highly different texts, each of which illustrate a distinct position with regards to the events of the Holocaust differentiated by differing distance from or proximity to the Holocaust. Hoffman argues that at the crux of the second generation's engagement with the past is the following difficulty: "that it has inherited not experience, but its shadows" (Hoffman 2004: 66). She argues that the second generation experiences its relationship to the events of the Holocaust as uncanny (see a more detailed description of the uncanny in chapter 3):

> The uncanny, in Freud's formulation, is the sensation both very alien and deeply familiar something that only the unconscious knows. If so the second generation had grown up with the uncanny . . . like hamlet's father, the ghosts demand devotion, sacrifice, justice, truth, vengeance (Hoffman 2004: 66).

Not only is this experience uncanny, but it is spectral: the second generation lives with, is haunted by, the ghosts and spectres of the past. This idea of haunting suggests the way in which subsequent generations relate to the events of the Holocaust as a past that refuses to be forgotten or entirely 'put to rest', and continues to effect and shape their experience in the present. Each author not only considers the memory or postmemory of the Holocaust, but also what it has meant to live in its shadow, and how the past continues to shape and effect, to haunt, the present.

4 Holocaust Photography

Photography is not only important to my analysis in so far as it relates to Hirsch's definition and elaboration of the term postmemory, but also because detailed photographic analysis will be necessary in my reading of both *Maus* and *Austerlitz*, and a theoretical background in photography will be useful in understanding Foer's use of a "prose picture" in *Everything is Illuminated* as an important site of postmemory. While Foer's text does not contain any actual photographs, a key symbolic device in the text is what Hirsch calls a "prose picture" (1997:7) (in very simple terms a photograph described in a text but never seen), the photograph of Augustine. Furthermore, photography becomes an important medium through which these authors, especially Sebald, come to engage with the events of the Holocaust. Photography not only implies a special seemingly material link to its referents but also suggests a complex invocation of both life and death. As a result, it retains a prioritised role in how we come to imagine the past in the present.

In her work on photography Hirsch draws on the writings of Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* and uses a Lacanian analysis (specifically using the concepts of the look, the gaze and the screen[26]) to discuss the

[26] It is clear that "Lacan's writings on visuality theorise the important role of seeing in the formation of the subject" (Hirsch 1997:101). In the "mirror-stage" Lacan shows how the visual is inherently connected to ego formation in the subject. For Lacan the ego comes into being when the subject first apprehends his/her image reflected in the mirror, and as a result begins to differentiate him/herself from the (m)other (Bevenuto and Kennedy 1986:54). The spectral image provides a projection of an illusory ideal self as stable and unitary, which is at odds with the child's actual bodily experience as fragmented. The child's mirror image, or ego ideal, provides the promise (or anticipation) of potential self mastery (Grosz 1990:33; Benvenuto and Kennedy 1986:54).

In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan further theorises the subject's relationship to the visual, through a complex discussion of the eye, the gaze and the screen. In his discussions Lacan separates the eye from the gaze, or as Kaja Silverman explains "Lacan sharply differentiates the gaze from the subject's look, conferring authority not on the look but on the gaze" (1996:19). Hirsch explains that the symbolic intrudes into the imaginary through the mechanisms of the gaze and as such the gaze is the "manifestation of the symbolic within the field of vision" (Silverman 1996:168). As such the gaze represents "the determining Other that shapes the image as well as the looking process" (1997:101). As Lacan explains: "This is the function that is found at the heart of the institution of the subject of the visible. What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze

various looks and gazes that constitute family photographs. In Roland Barthes' (1980) canonical text *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, which provides a useful point of departure for my discussion, he discerns two manners in which photography may be read or apprehended. The first is the *stadium*, which Barthes describes as follows: "The *stadium* is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste . . . [t]he *stadium* is of the order of *liking*, not of *loving*" (emphasis authors own) (1980:27). The *stadium* is, therefore, the general manner in which photographs are read. The second manner of apprehending a photograph is the *punctum*. The *punctum* is that which breaks through, pricks, punctuates the *stadium*. Barthes explains "[t]his time it is not I who seek it out . . . it is this element which rises from the scene [of the photograph], shoots out an arrow, and pierces me" (1980:26). The *punctum* is that which unsettles, disturbs and disrupts the *stadium*, and while the *stadium* is always culturally coded, the *punctum* is not (the disruption and distortion of the *punctum* may be unintended by the artist) (Barthes 1980:51). Both these terms provide insight into how photographs are read, and simultaneously imply the possibilities of readings unintended by the artist, that disrupt the normal process of viewing photographs, that lacerate and provide emotional affect for the individual viewer.

For Hirsch photographs are prioritised sites of postmemory. This may be explained by the fact that the photograph implies an illusory material connection between that which was photographed and the photograph itself (what Barthes calls "çe a été"[27]), and this in turn seems to imply a prioritised link to the events of the past. Hirsch, paraphrasing Barthes, states:

> The referent is both present (implied in the photograph) and absent (it has been there but is not there now). The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and dead other (Hirsch 1997:5).

Similarly Susan Sontag argues:

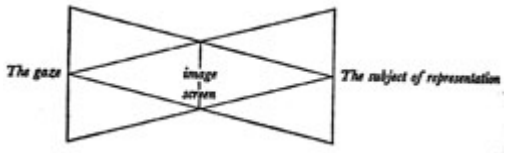
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that is outside" (1979:106). Thus the subject of the visible is determined within the gaze of the Other. The gaze is the unaprehendable agency, the Other "through which we are socially ratified or negated as spectacle," for Lacan we depend on the gaze of the Other "for our very confirmation of self" (Silverman 1996:133)

The screen is the mediating factor between the subject and the gaze. As Hirsch explains:

> The *image* and the *screen* intervene between the subject and object of the [gaze], structuring the system of representation in which looking takes place . . . it is . . . the place of ideological determination, and thus also where looking is redirected and thus possibly altered. (1997:104).

As one sees from the diagram below (Lacan 1979:106), the screen is that which intervenes between the gaze and the subject, thus the screen is the "locus of mediation" (Lacan 1979:107).



[27] Barthes argues that the photographic referent differs from referents in all other systems of representation as the photographic referent is not an "*optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lense, without which there would be no photograph" (italics authors own) (1980:76).

> Such images are indeed able to usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, some thing directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask (1979:154).

Hirsch notes that such a reading of photography must be qualified; like any representational form the photograph is constructed and framed (and with digital photographic tools can now be modified and even fabricated) and as such is subject to human agency and intentions. Photographs are defined by absence: their frames are limited, we see only what is framed by the camera's lens.

At the same time, photographs are flat and two dimensional. They provide no information other than what can be seen. Therefore the use of photography in texts of postmemory signifies absence and loss, because while photographs provide an illusory link to a past referent there is nothing within their flat surfaces that hints toward the complex history of loss that they come to represent for the author or artist (Hirsch 1997:9 and 23; *see also* Barthes 1980:106). Annette Kuhn argues that in as much as photographs 'speak' truth, authenticity or presence, they may also 'speak' "silence, absence and contradiction" (1995: 154). In part this fact that photographs signal absence as much as presence, allows for the work of postmemory, for an imaginative engagement and narrativisation of the photograph. The difficulty in reading and engaging with these photographs of the past is to engage with their possible meanings while not erasing the absence they gesture towards.

Photographs are also prioritised sites of postmemory because they simultaneously evoke both life and death, as has been noted by many theorists of photography, including Sontag and Barthes (*see* Barthes 1980:76). As Sontag states: "Photography is the inventory of mortality . . . [p]hotographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people" (1979:70). Cadava situates the deathly quality of photographs in their ability to objectify that which is photographed. As subjects of photography, placed before the photographic lens, "we are mortified – that is, objectified, 'thingified,' imaged" (Cadava 1997: 8). This is further elaborated in the following:

> The image already announces our absence. We need only know that we are mortal – the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be here, or rather, we will only be here the way we have always been here, *as* images. It announces the death of the photographed. This is why what survives in a photograph is also a survival of the dead (Cadava 1997: 11).

The photograph always (in this sense) contains a kind of death. The photograph is also always a return; something now absent is made present. It is a haunting: a spectre, the return of the dead. As Cadava explains: "the return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting" (1997: 11). By describing a photograph as a spectre, one is also able to illustrate its relation to the past. The photograph is intimately connected to its referent, it appears to be a return of what once was, yet it is opaque, two-dimensional and unyielding. It signals simultaneously presence and absence, life and death.

Here one must consider how much more important this paradox must be when looking at a photograph of an individual prior to the Holocaust, posing for a family portrait unaware of the destruction that will ensue. Such a photograph not only brings together that individual's life and death, but comes to represent the life and death of an entire world about to be destroyed. Furthermore, it seems to me, that the memorial role of the photograph, and the photographic gaze, remains separate and distinct from memory that is immediate and alive, the individual who is photographed is fixed in time, separated from both the past and the future, frozen in an immemorial present, and can only be reinvested with a past and future by a filial look (or possibly the imaginative look) of postmemory.

5 The Archive

Like memory, the archive is a key point where concerns over the public and the private intersect. While the archive seems to have received (with a number of exceptions such as Giorgio Agamben) rather little attention from Holocaust scholars, who tend to focus on the substrate of the archives (often museums and memorials) rather than archives themselves. Important debates have emerged concerning the role of the archive, alongside Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever* (1995). Like many others writing on the topic of the archive, Derrida's thesis will be my point of departure for both my discussion of the archive itself and how it has been conceptualised in contemporary theory, as well as how the archive can become a useful metaphor for novels of postmemory.

Derrida's *Archive Fever* begins with an entymology of the word archive (or, rather a description of the word's own archive), which provides considerable insight into how the archive works as a concept. Beginning with the word *Arkhé* he reminds us that within the archive of the word archive are two hidden principles, *commencement* and *commandment* (Derrida 1995:1):

1. The principle according "to nature or history *there* where things *commence*" (*ibid*).
2. The principle according to the law, at the site of authority and social order, "*there* where men and gods *command*" (*ibid*).

Therefore the memory, sheltered within the word archive, from itself, which it forgets, of the name *Arkhé* implies that the archive is both the starting point for history and knowledge and that it is subject to, and implies authority (Derrida 1995:2).

Derrida explains that the *Arkhé* of commandment comes from the Greek *Arkheion* and *Archons*; the *Archons* were superior magistrates and the *Arkheion* was the name given initially to the house (domicile), the

physical address of these senior magistrates (*ibid*:2). The *Archons* "who . . . held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or represent the law" (*ibid*:2) and as a result it was their homes, the *Arkheions,* where official documents were filed. In this Derrida reminds us that the archive's substrate is essential to its role: "The dwelling, this place where they dwell permanently, marks this institutional passage from the private to the public, which does not always mean from the secret to the nonsecret "(*ibid,*:2-3). This is implied by the fact that the *Archon's* domiciles (their private homes) become the substrate where public documents were accumulated. The *Archons*, as Derrida further explains, were also given the authority, of commandment, to interpret the archives (1995:2). Thus their authority was two-fold, both over the physicality of the documents and their interpretation (thus over the production of knowledge). It is here that Derrida's work begins to bare relevance to my argument, here we see hidden within the archive of the word archive the link between the public and the private beginning to take shape[28], as we have seen earlier, the postmemory of second and third generation authors is situated at the apex between private memory and public records of the Holocaust. Their act of writing itself often implicitly suggests this movement from the private to the public. This is most evident in *Maus* where a private family history enters the public sphere in the very act of the text's production.

As previously stated, the authority implied by the archive is the authority over the production of knowledge: what is included and what is excluded in the archive also constructs what histories can be told with reference to it. Derrida shows the importance of the archontic power in authority over the production of knowledge in the following passage:

> The archontic power which also gathers the function of unification, of identification and of classification, must be paired with the power of *consignation.* By consignation we do not only mean, in the ordinary sense of the word, the act of assigning residence (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate but here the act of consigning through *gathering together signs.* (Emphasis author's own) (Derrida 1995: 3).

This gathering together of signs is an attempt to create a single 'corpus' in which "all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration" (*ibid*). Heterogeneity, or that which is outside the unified corpus, threatens archontic law. Thus, as Brent Harris explains, the act of archiving is also that of classification, unification and identification, "while the archive does not house the complete past, its consignation creates the illusion of unity" (2002:163). We see here that the role of the archive is that of commandment and authority over the production of knowledge and history, as well as the site of its commencement; the place in which these forms of knowledge begin.

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[28] Here it is worth mentioning the context of Derrida's argument, one should note that Derrida is concerned with a specific archive (Freud's home) which makes the transition between public and private of critical importance (i.e. from private domicile to institution).

I believe one of Derrida's key interventions into the conception of the archive is in linking the archive to Freudian psychoanalysis. For Derrida the archival project is inextricable from repetition and as a result the death or destruction drive (Derrida 1995: 12). As he explains: "right on that which permits and conditions archivisation, we will never find anything other than that which exposes it to destruction" (*ibid*). As Crownshaw notes, "[t]here is no preservation without destruction" (2004:219), the archive, therefore, works in opposition to itself, against preservation, towards forgetting (Crownshaw 2004: 219; Derrida 1995:11-12). As Kujundžić points out, the aporia of the archive lies in this paradox: "no memory or testimony is possible without the archive", but "memory and testimony are possible only without the archive" (2003: 166). The relationship between the archive and memory that Derrida articulates becomes specifically important for my own research. For Derrida the archive occurs at, or within, a paradox:

1. "Because the archive, if this word can be stabilised so as to take on signification, will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory" (Derrida 1995:11).
2. However the archive, by consignation in an external place, makes repetition, reproduction and memorialisation possible. It is precisely at the breakdown of "spontaneous, alive and internal" memory, that memorialisation and reproduction can occur (*ibid*).

Harris explains that the archive, for Derrida, is also a place where memory is deposited, not a repository for "spontaneous alive memory", but rather "memory that has been preserved and remains 'publicly available' through inscription" (2002:164). However, it is the act of inscription on an external substrate that makes repetition possible and thus threatens the archive with destruction.

For Kujundžić, who draws extensively on Derrida, any archival practice by definition has to "announce its own desire for the unique, singular, indivisible space and memory" (2003:167) to create a single corpus or body of knowledge implied by the desire or archival violence of consignation (Derrida 1995:78). For Kujundžić, Derrida's work draws our attention to this originating archival impulse (or as Derrrida would have it drive), a "primordial jealousy" for singularity or oneness, which is at the very heart of the archive and has the capacity "to erase any archival trace, even the trace of its own archivisation" (2003: 167). As Derrida implies, that which makes archivisation and memorialisation possible, its consignation in an external place which assures the possibility of repetition and reproduction, also exposes it to destruction (1995:12): at the heart of the monument or the archival substrate is also an archivolithic violence that threatens the archive with erasure. The archive leaves a trace, a mark, an impression of itself on the material substrate of the archive (Kujundžić 2003: 168). It is this trace that ensures the repetition and the survival of the archive: "it opens the archive to the future" (Kujundžić 2003: 168). Kujundžić justifies this position by explaining that "[w]hile their origin resides in the archivolithic event, traces have the capacity for dispersion beyond its unifying control" (2003: 176). It is this opening to the future that evades the pervasive power implied in the figure of the *Archon*, the lawmaker and keeper of the archive. While Kujundžić is highly

dependent on Derrida for his formulation of the archive he reminds us that archives do materially exist despite this destruction or death drive, what seems to allow for this is the heterogeneity of the archival trace that opens up to the future.

While Derrida argues that the idea of the archive cannot be separated from its substrate, its domicile, it seems equally clear that one cannot talk of the archive without considering the archive's relationship to the documents and traces that constitute it. As Kujundžić explains "the archival impulse requires inscriptions, writing, graphic traces and translation, in order to launch itself into historical and material existence" (2003: 174). This relationship can initially be considered via Paul Ricoeur who argues that the notion of the document is linked in contemporary usage to the idea of support or verification (2006[29]:67). Ricoeur sees documents as traces left by the past, and that if history is to be considered a true narrative, documents validate it (2006: 68). Merewether argues that from this perspective "traces are not simply residual remains, signs and clues, but material evidence, the stuff of history, the archive" [30] (2006b:122). However, Merewether critiques Ricoeur's argument as follows; he notes that to admit to the paradox that the past is past while the trace remains "is to recognise the discontinuity and heterogeneity of the trace to its originating referent, to the event. The appearance of the trace would then be a past that has never been present. It is rather bound to the future, always coming after, opening onto a horizon that exceeds it referent" (Merewether 2006b: 122). Thus the trace rather than being directly connected to the events of the past and as a result able to act as a verification of history as stable and true, it remains detached from its referent (the event) and becomes heterogeneous in its possible signification.

While the relationship between literature and the archive has been inadequately theorised, Hal Foster in his analysis of the archival impulse in art does provide a precedent on which to base my argument. For Foster the archival impulse exhibited in certain forms of art consists of both an attempt to collect, archive and make present fragments of the past, and an attempt to engage with archive itself. Furthermore, Foster comments on "the will 'to connect what cannot be connected' in archival art" stating that "this is not a will to totalize so much as a will to relate – to probe a misplaced past, to collate its different signs. . . to ascertain what might remain for the present" (2001: 21). Thus archival art attempts to avoid the totalising violence of consignation. The work Foster describes "is archival since it not only draws on informal archives but produces them as well, and does so in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet

[29] This piece was originally extracted from: Ricoeur, P. [trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer] 1988. *Time and Narrative,* vol.III. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 116 – 119.

[30] Clearly the link suggested here between history and material reality must be problematised in light of my discussion of the construction of historical discourse in the previous section entitled "The Problem of History". Seeing the archive as providing a direct link to the past is an illusion that is based in the belief that a document acts as a trace that is directly linked to its referent – the past event. However, as Hutcheon reminds us, if the archive is comprised of documents but documents are texts and as such subject to interpretation, then the archive's link to reality is purely illusory (Hutcheon 1989: 81).

constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private" (2004: 5). The archival impulse presented in the texts I intend to consider is equally provisional (though not unrelated to Derrida's archive fever and thus the death drive), they not only collect together historical and fictional material, but also question the very nature of their projects, highlighting their own constructedness through their self-reflexive construction or narration. As Foster states: "[p]erhaps all archives develop . . . through mutations of connection and disconnection, a process this art also serves to disclose" (2004: 6). The archival impulse that Foster describes is not merely concerned with the events of the past and our access to these events in the present, but what the fragments of the past may mean for the present and the future. The inherent heterogeneity of the texts I have chosen to discuss threatens the illusory unity of the archive. In dramatising the heterogeneity of the archival trace they are able to problematise the illusion of unity implied by the archive.

Foster importantly argues that in archival art the use of the postmodern techniques of citation and pastiche do not serve to erase the original, rather the links drawn and the juxtapositions highlighted are in these cases charged with affect (2004: 6 -7). He illustrates this point further when he explains that unlike other forms of postmodern art rather than projecting " a lack of logic or affect," archival art assumes fragmentation to be a condition "not only to represent but to work through, and pursues new orders of affective association, however partial and provisional, to this end, even as it also registers the difficulty, at times the absurdity, of doing so" (Foster 2004: 21). As we shall see it is the question of affect that is so central to the archival impulses displayed in these novels that, in using postmodern techniques of pastiche, self-conscious narration and intertextuality, are able to produce affect while noting the provisionality of their own attempts.

Each of the authors I consider is faced with the problematic tension inherent to the archive between memory and its erasure. In different ways they all seek to archive memory without negating it. Perhaps the only possibility for this to be achieved is in the provisionality of each of their projects, which is emphasised by their fictional and self reflexive features which reject the authority of their narratives and question their own mode of production.

Overview

Using the theories of the archive, history and postmemory, as outlined above, I plan to conduct a textual analysis and close reading of the following novels: *Maus* by Art Spiegelman; *Austerlitz* by W. G. Sebald; and *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer. I discuss these narratives of postmemory in order to consider the possibility that they can be read as archival projects or as depicting an archival impulse (as described by Hal Foster). As I have mentioned, the focus of my analysis will be on the use of intertextuality, palimpsest (or layering of textual fragments) and generic blurring in these texts, as well as on their dramatisation of their own provisionality. Each text differs markedly from the other texts included in this

study and as a result each requires different theoretical approaches for their analysis. My hope is that this will provide a complex and nuanced approach to similar problematic from a variety of theoretical perspectives. By considering the problem from different perspectives I am able to consider how each text encounters and contends with its distance from the events it attempts to narrate.

In what follows I will first consider *Maus* by Art Spiegelman, a graphic novel set in Nazi Germany in which Germans are depicted as cats and Jews as mice. *Maus* is narrated by a fictive version of the author (Artie) and depicts his father's experiences in Nazi occupied Germany, as well as the complex manner in which the narrative is received and mediated. Although *Maus* has already received extensive critical attention in a similar vein from many theorists (see Marianne Hirsch (1997; 1992 – 1993; and 2001), James Young (2001) and Dominic LaCapra (1998)), it is an extraordinary text in its use of numerous mediums and genres in order to convey not only the narrator's father's narrative, but the narrative's transmission from father to son, as well as highlighting its own process of construction and 'constructedness'. I consider carefully Spiegelman's complex visual vocabulary, which can be seen to enact an archival impulse in the manner in which it collects visual references both private and public creating a visual palimpsest of postmemory. In my analysis I focus on the father-son relationship, as well as Spiegelman's self-conscious narration, in order to highlight the absent, deep memory, that lurks on the borders of the text (the mother's testimony, her absent voice). By considering these themes as well as the use of the graphic novel genre, the generic blurring and the inclusion of family photographs, I will begin to describe an aesthetic of postmemory and consider how Spiegelman's text can also be read as his personal attempt to archive his family history.

The second text I consider is *Austerlitz* by W. G. Sebald. This text, which remains resolutely plotless (by any conventional definition of a plot), recounts a narrative in which the protagonist, Austerlitz, has lost all memory of his childhood. The text, through a number of dialogues between the narrator and Austerlitz, charts the partial recovery of Austerlitz's memory. *Austerlitz* is written by a German author, thus suggesting an author with a fundamentally different relationship to the events of the Holocaust to that of the Jewish authors' of *Maus* and *Everything is Illuminated*. Hence, one would expect the problematic of co-option or appropriation inherent to the process of postmemory is more pronounced. The text seems to avoid this problematic in its ability to suggest the events of the Holocaust via their absence, rather than presence in the text; the narrator seldom refers to the Holocaust directly; we are haunted by the events of the Holocaust which are uncannily mirrored and obliquely referenced throughout the text. The text produces a constant tension between memory and its erasure. Within the text memory is often figured as a spectral return of the repressed. Furthermore, *Austerlitz* comprises a number of interesting engagements with questions of memory, postmemory and memorialisation, while simultaneously addressing questions of the archive via the characters of both the narrator and Austerlitz who are concerned with archival projects. Therefore, the value

of this text for my argument lies not only in the interesting subject positions it illustrates, but in its complex attempt to avoid the problematics of Holocaust representation by representing the Holocaust indirectly, as well as its use of photography which I show to have thematic links to memory and trauma.

Finally I consider *Everything is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, a novel that tells the story of a young American Jewish man's attempt to find the woman who hid his grandfather during the war. The narrative is split into two strands: the first, narrated by a fictional Jonathan Safran Foer and the second, comprised of letters from a Ukrainian tour guide and his descriptions of the trip. I am of the opinion that *Everything is Illuminated* is a text that has received inadequate critical attention. It is useful for my analysis as it masterfully addresses pertinent questions surrounding memory and history from the perspective of a grandchild of a Holocaust survivor. The additional temporal remove from the Holocaust is represented through a highly imaginative and playful depiction of the past, from which the Holocaust itself is strikingly absent. Through this analysis I begin to address the question of postmemory as it pertains to third generation authors and discuss the possibility that this text shows an attempt to archive familial history, through representing its absence rather than presence. In specific, I consider the text's epistolary structure, which provides new opportunities for and insights into engagements between third generation Jews and the grandchildren of bystanders and perpetrators. I also consider the hyperbolic fictional mode used in the section that narrates the history of Trachimbrod which in its excess archives absence rather than presence. Unlike *Maus* and *Austerlitz* this text's archival impulse lies in its exploration of fiction, language and storytelling rather than in visual images.

In the following chapters I will explore how literature written from a specific temporal remove from the events it seeks to describe engages with complex questions of memory and history. I achieve this by considering *Maus*, *Austerlitz* and *Everything is Illuminated* as examples of postmemory, which highlight their complex and mediated relationship to the past through the use of generic blurring, palimpsest, intertextuality and self-reflexivity (to name a few). Each text highlights its own provisionality and in so doing evades the archival violence of consignation and the pressure to rebuild a unitary past for simple identification implied by postmemory. Each text shows an attempt to consider what the fragments of the past, both public and private, mean for the present. By analysing very different texts and as a result by considering this problematic from a number of different theoretical positions, I am able to provide a nuanced account of the engagement with the Holocaust from a specific temporal remove as seen in each of these texts.

2 Testimony, History and Postmemory: the Familial Archive in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

In this chapter I will address Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as it relates to questions of postmemory and the archive. It is my intention to consider *Maus* as a work of postmemory, whereby the narrator imaginatively negotiates the gap between his father's testimony and his own narration via a complex narrative mode that incorporates multiple genres and textual references. If one considers Hirsch's definition of postmemory as a powerful form of memory precisely because it requires an "imaginative involvement and investment" as part of the process of recollection (Hirsch 1996:662), it seems necessary to argue that Spiegelman invites his reader to participate in the work of postmemory through his use of a very specific visual vocabulary. Furthermore, through an analysis of the complex visual palimpsest that constitutes Spiegelman's visual vocabulary, I argue that *Maus* can be read as exhibiting an impulse to archive public and private memory. Additionally, by considering Spiegelman's self-conscious narration and the father-son relationship, which is a prioritised site of engagement in the text, I consider the impact of the past on the present in the text. Further, I focus on the various voids, gestured towards by absent voices and absent texts, which provide a means through which deep memory (as defined in the introduction) emerges in and de-stabilises the narrative.

Marianne Hirsch and James E. Young have both provided useful analyses of *Maus* as a text of postmemory and their work will provide a point of departure for our discussion here. While both Hirsch and Young consider *Maus* to be a work of postmemory, they approach the text from rather different perspectives. Young primarily focuses on Spiegelman's self-conscious engagement with his own process of narration. By using the common postmoderrn device of the self-conscious narrator, Spiegelman enacts a complex negotiation with the narrativisation of the past, and the tension between fiction and history in his text. Young focuses on this aspect of Spiegelman's narration as a key element of his *vicarious memory* (as defined in my introduction):

> Like other artists in his antiredemptory generation, Spiegelman cannot escape an essential ambivalence he feels toward his entire memory enterprise. For he recognises that both his father's story and his own record of it have arisen out of a confluence of conflicting personal, professional, and not always heroic needs (2000:35).



Figure 2.1: Spiegel man, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 207

His self-conscious narration suggests not only ambivalence towards his own project, but also an understanding of the numerous conflicting forces that have shaped both his and his father's narrative. If we consider figure 2.1 we see Artie sitting at his drawing board listening to his father's voice on the tape recorder; while Vladek describes an argument with Mala, Artie keeps interrupting, eventually shouting "Enough! Tell me about Auschwitz!" (Spiegelman 1986:207). Here we see the convergence of numerous conflicting identities and motivations; Artie as son, and as child, feels guilty for his ruthless pursuit of his father's story and shrinks to childlike proportions in his chair while listening to this altercation on the tape recorder, thus literalising his position as his father's son and child. Futhermore, his diminutive proportions suggest that he is literally shrinking in shame, and is thus not entirely comfortable with his ruthless pursuit of his father's narrative. Simultaneously Artie as cartoonist/documentarian pressures his father for the story he wants to hear, the story of Auschwitz, unconcerned with the effect its telling may have on his father. By depicting this incident Spiegelman shows how numerous identities and motivations are continuously present and in tension throughout the text, and by making these conflicting identities evident Spiegelman also highlights the conflicts inherent to the text's construction, and its inherently mediated and constructed nature. Furthermore, this is an example of Spiegelman's self-reflexive narration which makes these conflicting impulses evident and as a result makes the reader aware of the text's construction and provisionality, thus highlighting the author's own uneasy relationship to his project.

As part of Spiegelman's self-conscious engagement with the narrativisation of this text is a critical inquiry into the relationship between history and narrative. Young argues that "Spiegelman's *Maus* makes a case for an essentially reciprocal relationship between the truth of what happened and the truth of how it is remembered" (2000:39). Throughout the text Spiegelman attempts to accurately document and represent his father's testimony, he is never afraid to point out its inherent incongruities or conflicts with historical

documentation. He is able to do this while still prioritising his father's testimony and memory as having an inherent truth-value. What Spiegelman gives us is a received history of events rather than direct access to the events themselves, and as such emphasises the process of transmission as much as the events narrated. Spiegelman is concerned with Truth and fact, but seems equally aware that our only access to the events of the past is mediated via some or other form of textuality, thus his text comes to suggest the possibility of an affective truth ('truth' that finds its value, not in historical verification but in its potential to invoke emotion or impact the reader). This is not to imply that Spiegelman attempts to undermine the truth of his father's narrative, but rather problematises the notion of stable historical Truths. Spiegelman seems critical of the processes through which we gain access to past events, prioritising the value of individual experiences and received oral histories over the authoritative narratives of the past.

If *Maus* does make a 'truth claim' it is not to historical or authoritative Truth (which is precluded by the mouse metaphor), but rather to the truth of Vladek's testimony, not in its factual validity (which Spiegelman does try to verify), but as an experiential truth based in Vladek's bodily experience of the Holocaust. This can also be seen in Artie's rigorous attempt to represent Vladek's testimony as it was told, making the process of transmission and mediation clear. This is emphasised by Spiegelman's maintenance of Vladek's particular idiom and immigrant's use of English. This is also highlighted in the conflicts between the father (Vladek) and the son (Artie) included in the narrative, and in Artie's self-reflexive narrative that is candid in problematising its own 'truth value'. When *Maus* does engage with questions of 'truth value' it is clearly situated within the family sphere; markedly removed from anesthetised and 'objective' historical discourse with its claims to empirical Truth. It is situated as affective, as based in the bodily experience of the father and the complex interaction between father, son and absent mother.

Unlike Young whose focus is on the self-conscious narrator in Spiegelman's text, Hirsch is concerned with Spiegelman's use of family photographs as key to his work of postmemory. Hirsch, as mentioned in my introduction, sees photographs as privileged sites of postmemory:

> They are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of post memory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality they signal its unbridgeable distance (1997:23)

Photographs are important constituents of postmemory as they simultaneously reinforce the past's existence and our unbridgeable distance from it. For Hirsch both family photographs and commonly repeated images of the Holocaust form a key element of Spiegelman's visual vocabulary, they are both central to his work of postmemory and as I will argue, the manner in which his text comes to act as a visual archive for postmemory. Drawing on the work already accomplished by Hirsh and Young I will consider Spiegelman's

complex visual vocabulary, his self-conscious narrative and Artie's interactions with Vladek as key sites where postmemory is conveyed and explored in this text.

Some Notes on Genre and the Problem of Taxonomy

Genre is an important site of engagement and mediation in *Maus,* the text's generic blurring is an important site of its provisionality and self-reflexivity. As many critics have noted, *Maus* is a hybrid text that straddles the boundaries between numerous genres; *Maus* is an auto-ethnography, an allegory, an oral history[31], a memoir, a novel and a comic book or graphic novel[32] (LaCapra 1998:146; Orvell 1992:118 and Rothberg 1994:669). The text's play with genre situates it at the cusp between fiction and history. Spiegelman's own humorous comments highlight this fact. These comments were made as part of a letter directed to the editor of the *New York Times Book Review,* which addresses *Maus's* categorisation as fiction in the *New York Times Book Review's* best-seller list.

> If your list were divided into literature and non-literature, I would gracefully accept the compliment as intended, but to the extent that "fiction" indicated that a work isn't factual, I feel a bit queasy . . . I know that by delineating people with animal heads I have raised problems of taxonomy for you. Could you consider adding a special "nonfiction/mice" category to your list? (1991).

However, Spiegelman has, elsewhere, stated the following:

> Although I set about in doing *Maus* to do a history of sorts I am all too aware that ultimately what I am creating is a realistic fiction. The experiences my father actually went through, there's what he's able to remember and what he's able to articulate. Then there's what I am able to understand of what he articulated and what I'm able to put down on paper. (1986)

It is clear that for Spiegelman *Maus* inhabits the fertile border land between history and fiction. While to call his work fiction is to undermine the reality of his father's experiences in the past, to call his work history (or perhaps even non-fiction) is to imply that we, as readers, or Spiegelman, as author/artist, have direct, unmediated access to the events of the past. As LaCapra argues, the hybridised nature of *Maus* "resists dichotomous labelling" (1998:146), and as a result to attempt to label *Maus* would undermine its hybridised aesthetic.

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[31] Michael Staub argues that *Maus* should be understood, not only as a comic book but as an oral narrative and history "that struggles to represent, in pictures and writing, spoken memories" (1995:34, *see also Brown 1993:1669*).

[32] John Witek states that "comic books . . . integrate words and pictures into a flexible, powerful literary form capable of a wide range of narrative effects" (1989:3). Spiegelman thinks of comics as "co-mix, to mix together words and pictures" (as quoted in Fein, 1991). In fact this concept should be taken a step further and be argued that Spiegelman's "co-mix" is a successful mixture of numerous generic influences and impulses, which results in a complex and flexible literary production.

Drawing Jewish Mice: the Visual Archive of Postmemory

Those critics who have addressed Spiegelman's *Maus* traditionally focus on two aspects of the text: its use of animal figures to depict its characters and Spiegelman's decision to represent the Holocaust in a cartoon or graphic novel form. Both of these aspects of the text have been sites of much contention and debate. In what follows I plan to discuss Spiegelman's use of the mouse metaphor as well as the intertextuality of his visual vocabulary in order to show how this text can be seen as an attempt to archive certain histories and memories. Further I will consider the inclusion of photographs in the text and their significance for the work of postmemory that *Maus* enacts.

The single most striking use of genre in Spiegelman's text is his highly controversial decision to depict his father's testimony in the form of a comic book or graphic novel. In his interview with Claudia Dreifus, Spiegelman makes it clear that he is aware of the debates surrounding Holocaust representation, quoting Adorno's dictum that to write poetry after the Holocaust is barbaric, Spiegelman acknowledges the problematics related to aesthetic pleasure when addressing the Holocaust in art (1989). Spiegelman however argues that by writing/drawing this narrative as a comic book he is avoiding hubris (Spiegelman 1989:35), that the comic book is a modest medium; "a medium that has a history of being without pretensions or aspirations to art" (*ibid*). Comic books resist both an aesthetic and a realist mode of representation and, in this manner, Spiegelman is correct, it is a humble medium. However, by depicting the Holocaust in this mode which was traditionally the realm of trivial children's humour or wish fulfilment fantasies Spiegelman ran the risk of simplifying and essentialising an inherently complex narrative.

Hillel Halkin, in a review of *Maus*, argues that *Maus* does nothing more than reaffirm and perpetuate Nazi dehumanising rhetoric, he blames this on both the inappropriateness of the comic book form to depict the Holocaust and the use of animal metaphors (1992:55). As he contends, "[t]he Holocaust was a crime committed by humans against humans, not – as Nazi theory held – by one biological species against another" (Halkin 1992:55)[33]. Conversely a number of critics have argued that it is the tension between the animal drawings and their description as Jews, Poles and Germans that makes *Maus* so successful (Orvell 1992:121). As Witek argues, *Maus* finds its antecedents in the "funny animal" genre of comic books which he believes "has developed its own distinctive, peculiar conventions and metaphysics" (1989:109). The "funny animal" genre includes characters such as Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge and can be defined by the "curious indifference to the animal nature of the characters" (Witek 1989:109). In Maus, rather than drawing naturalistic images of mice, Spiegelman's drawings are highly schematic, his drawings

[33] Orvell, alternately, makes a markedly interesting contention; he argues that *Maus* depicts the Holocaust as it would have been experienced by a Jew, as a "theatre of stereotypes, of masklike signs of danger or indifference" (1992:121). For Orvell Spiegelman's metaphor mimics the experience of Jews in Nazi Germany.

suggest mice heads on human bodies, or humans wearing mice masks. As in the "funny animal" genre "the 'animalness' of the characters becomes vestigial or drops away entirely" (Witek 1989:110). The mouse metaphor in *Maus* is fragile and often falls away serving to reinforce rather than undermine the 'humanness' of the characters.



Figure 2.2: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 149

During an interview with Esther Fein for *The New York Times* (1991) Spiegelman made the following comment concerning his use of animal figures in *Maus* to depict human characters: "All metaphors are a kind of lying. As soon as you make a correspondence, it only highlights the gaps. Nothing thoroughly interlocks" (Spiegelman 1991). It is precisely in this manner that Spiegelman's metaphor works; it works against itself, in its own negation, and in so doing reinforces his characters' humanness. If you consider figure 2.2 Anja and Vladek, who are in hiding in a cellar, encounter a rat. Anja shows signs of fear and distaste, and in order to keep her quiet and comfort her Vladek says "Those aren't rats. They're very small. One ran over my hand before. They're just mice." (Spiegelman 1973:149). In this ironic instance it is clear that neither Anja nor Vladek are aware of their physical similarity to the mouse/rat on the floor and the metaphor works, in part, because the characters are unaware of their own mouse-like dimensions. In addition, there is a visual irony at play, the realistic representation of a mouse or rat is juxtaposed against the schematic drawings of Anja and Vladek as mice. In this manner the visual metaphor works against itself, by highlighting the gap between the literal representation of a rodent and the images of Anja and Vladek it becomes clear that they are nothing like real vermin (to which they are compared by Nazi propaganda).

Spiegelman has ironically stated that *Maus* was made "in *collaboration* with Hitler" (italics author's own) (1994: 46). Spiegelman argues that it was Hitler's racial categories, his division of humanity into 'species' "into *Übermenschen* and *Untermenschen,* to 'exterminate' (as opposed to murder) Jews like vermin, to use

Zyklon B – a pesticide – in the gas chambers", that inspired his depiction of German's as cats and Jews as mice (*ibid*). He goes on to add: "My anthropomorphised mice carry trace elements of Fib's anti-semitic Jew-as-rat cartoons for *Der Strŭmer,* but by being particularized they are invested with personhood" (*ibid*). Thus, what Halkin's argument fails to acknowledge is the inherent irony of Spiegelman's depictions as well as their subversive potential, this is made evident in Spiegelman's ironic use of a quote by Hitler in the beginning of *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* that reads "The Jews are undoubtedly a race but they are not human" (Spiegelman 1986:10). What Spiegelman's drawings attempt to convey is that his characters internal personhood, their humanity, emerges irrespective of their depiction as mice. In what follows I analyse Spiegelman's engagement with the racial stereotyping of the Holocaust and assess how successful this engagement is in subverting and destabilising both the racist Nazi stereotypes and the Fascist aesthetic. In so doing I hope to show the manner in which Spiegelman's work provides a trace to this history of violent representation and rhetoric, while simultaneously undermining it, and argue that in the process Spiegelman creates a visual archive of postmemory.

By obliquely referencing the anti-Semitic cartoons of *Der Stŭrmer,* Spiegelman engages in a referential dialogue with anti-Semitic stereotyping in discourse[34]. Spiegelman makes us aware of this engagement in two separate instances in *Maus.* In the first instance Artie makes the following comment to Mala about Vladek: "mm . . . it's something that worries me about the book I'm doing about him . . . in some ways he is just like the racist caricature of the miserly old Jew" (Spiegelman 1986:133). In this self reflexive moment Spiegelman highlights the complex engagement between the self and racialised stereotypes. He fears to represent his father as he is, in case this representation is seen as simply perpetuating racial stereotypes of Jewishness propagated by the system he wishes to critique and undermine. Later in the text Françoise picks up a hitchhiker who happens to be a black man, represented in the comic as a black dog (American), and is berated by Vladek who says:

> What happened on you, Françoise? You went crazy or what?! I had the whole time to watch out that this *shvartser* doesn't steal us the groceries from the back seat! (emphasis my own) (Spiegelman 1992: 259).

Françoise expresses her frustration at the irony that, although Vladek was terribly discriminated against as a result of his race and religion in Nazi Germany, he is blind to the similarities between his plight and that of African Americans who have been (and arguably still are) unjustly discriminated against by the white majority in America. Part of what is conveyed in the above quote is Spiegelman's unwillingness to romanticise his father. As so often occurs in the course of this text Vladek proves a difficult character to

[34] Spiegelman, in an interview with Gary Groth (1995), speaks of his own experience of internalising racialised identities: "[b]ut all of this is to say that those images of the shiftless, lazy, sexualised, dangerous Black – or crafty Jew – are images I recognise and to one degree or another are phantoms that wonder around hovering near real people, . . . of various ethnic backgrounds" (1995).

like. This instance also highlights the highly complex negotiations around race with which this text is concerned.

One can argue that the 'ghost' or 'phantom' of anti-Semitism haunts Spiegelman's visual depictions and metaphors. In order to understand how Spiegelman's work relates to the discourses of anti-Semitism it is important to understand how anti-Semitism has functioned in western discourse[35]. An important reference point for this discussion will be Sander Gilman's *The Jew's Body*[36]. Gilman shows that through the construction of the Jewish body in the 19th and 20th century the 'Jew' comes to be seen, not only as religiously different, but as racially and biologically different[37] (1991:38). The Jewish body is thus constructed in direct opposition to its counter image, the Christian body, which ultimately became the Aryan body[38] (*ibid*). Hence we can see that Spiegelman's metaphor, his use of animal figures to represent human characters, replicates this belief in inherent biological differences between the races. If Jews are mice, then within an anti-Semitic framework Germans or self-proclaimed Aryans must be their antithesis, cats. Thus, at first glance, one can understand how theorists such as Halkin believe that Spiegelman's work merely perpetuates the racial stereotypes of Nazi Germany. However, Spiegelman's illustrations, which depict his characters as belonging to different species according to their race or nationality show an attempt to visually express the ways in which race is understood and internalised[39]. This is not to say that there are not 'real' shared genetic characteristics within racial groups, but rather that how these shared characteristics are figured in discourse and what they come to mean, has a



Figure 2.3: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 138.

[35] It should however be noted that no description of anti-Semitic discourse, or the role of anti-Semitism within 19th century or modern society, can be comprehensive within the constraints of the current study.

[36] Gilman, while emphasising the necessity for research into the manner in which Jewish women's bodies have been configured in western discourse, chose the male Jewish body as his key area of study; the body with the circumcised penis, which he understands as an image central to the western conception of the 'Jew' (1991:5). The circumcised penis thus becomes a key bodily marker of Jewishness.

[37] The construction of the Jewish body in language shifts from the religious rhetoric of anti-Semitism to the pseudo-scientific discourse of Social Darwinism (Gilman 1991:38).

[38] Gilman explains that: "By the 19th century the relationship between the image of the Jew and the hidden devil is found not in religious but in a secularized scientific context" (1991:39). Jewish difference and Jewish dangerousness came to be figured in scientific discourse and the "pathological" or "pathogenic" qualities of the Jewish body (Gilman 1991:39).

[39] . Gilman emphasises how the "pseudo-scientific" categories of race have had an "extraordinary importance in shaping how we all understand ourselves and each other" (1991:170).

fundamental impact on our understanding of self within society (Gilman 1991: 171). Spiegelman's metaphor visually represents the internalisation of racial stereotypes in society, specifically in the highly racialised context of Nazi Germany.

As I have previously contended, Spiegelman's metaphor works against itself, in its own negation. As the text progresses, especially in *Maus II*, it becomes clear that the characters are wearing animal masks. In the parts of the story set in Vladek's past, under Nazi rule where race is understood as a bodily actuality, the ability to don the 'correct' racial mask can be essential to the preservation of life. After leaving the Ghetto Vladek and Anja wear pig masks (to identify them as attempting to look Polish), however from beneath Anja's coat one can see a tail protruding, a sign of her inherently Jewish physicality (see figure 2.3) (Spiegelman 1992:138). As Vladek explains "I was a little safe. I had a coat and boots, so like a Gestapo wore when he was not in service. But Anja – her appearance – you could see more easy she was Jewish" (*ibid*). Anja is shown to be in more danger as she has physical characteristics traditionally associated with Jewishness (in the case of this image, a tail). Thus, in the context of Nazi occupied Poland any physical trait associated with Jewishness could mean death, and as a result the racial mask is shown to be more difficult to discard. In contrast in *Maus II* during the moments of Artie's self-reflexive narration he is shown to be wearing a mouse mask and other characters are shown to wear animal masks that signify different racial demarcations (Spiegelman 1992: 201- 207). These masks expose the fragility of the animal metaphor which, like a mask, can be discarded. However it is only in the modern context of Artie's self-refection that the masks can be discarded because they are no longer markers that signify one's right to live or die.

Art Spiegelman's work suggests a complex engagement with both the Fascist aesthetic and Nazi anti-Semitic caricature, illustrated in figure 2.4 a caricature of a Jew produced in *Der Stŭrmer* in 1944 under the title "Vermin". In this caricature the Jew is depicted as an insect or parasite, as vermin, with a bulbous nose to visually signify its Jewishness. The insect is shown to have grown to monstrous proportions, its size allowing it to dominate the world. By the time this caricature was published, the Jewish nose had become a marker of Jewish difference; an external sign, like the circumcised penis, of the Jewish internal 'pathology', or moral impurity[40]. Spiegelman's art, as well as his metaphor, is situated in opposition to the "anti-Semitic broadsheets and editorial cartoons depicting Jews as hook nosed, beady eyed *Untermenschen*, creatures whose ferret faces and rodent snouts marked them as human vermin" (Doherty 1990:74). Spiegelman's mouse drawings literalise these Jew as vermin stereotypes. However, the mouse metaphor in the text

[40] The perceived sharpness of the Jewish nose was seen to relate to specific Jewish characteristics; "a shrewdness into worldly matters" (Gilman 1991:171, as quoted from Eden Warwick's Notes on Noses (1848))

repeatedly falls away and is often shown to be ridiculous, as a result undermining the depiction of Jews as vermin in these anti-Semitic cartoons.

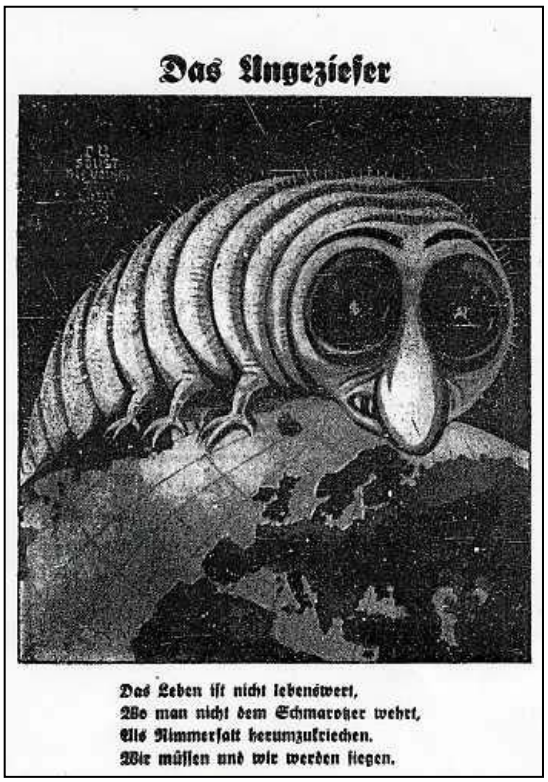


Figure 2.4: "Vermin"
Caption: "Life is just not worth living When one does not resist the parasite, Never satisfied as it creeps about. We must and will win.
From *Der Stürmer* 28 September 1944[1].

It has been argued that Nazism was as much an aesthetic movement as it was ideological or political (Doherty 1996:72; Sontag 1980)[41]. Susan Sontag explains that: "[w]hat is interesting about the relation between politics and art under National Socialism is not that art was subordinated to political needs but that politics appropriated the rhetoric of art" (1980:92). Sontag in her noteworthy paper "Fascinating Fascism" outlines and discusses the fascist aesthetic with regards to the cinematography of Leni Riefenstahl. Her argument bears relevance to our current discussion in the eloquent means by which she articulates the key themes of fascist aesthetics. She stresses the emphasis, inherent to the aesthetics of fascism, on beauty and physical perfection. She states that fascist aesthetics "celebrate the rebirth of the body and of community, mediated through an irresistible leader" (Sontag 1980:86). The themes inherent to the Nazi aesthetic established numerous binaries between self and other, for example: "[c]ontrast[ing] . . . the clean and the impure, the incorruptible and the defiled, the physical and the mental, the joyful and the critical"[42] (1980:88). As can be seen in figure 2.5 in a cartoon from *Der Strŭmer* one can see the intended juxtaposition between the highly idealised Aryan body and the grossly caricatured Jewish body. Hence, the Nazi or Fascist aesthetic, in placing such value on physical perfection, defines identity as a biological given and as such as racial.

[41] For critics, like Doherty, Maus can be considered a response to fascist aesthetics, as can be seen in Doherty's article: "Art Spiegelman's Maus: Graphic Art and the Holocaust" in American Literature, Vol. 68, No. 1, Write Now: American Literature in the 1980s and 1990s (March, 1996), pp. 69 – 84.

[42] As Sontag explains: "A principle accusation against the Jews within Nazi Germany was that they were urban, intellectual, bearers of a destructive corrupting 'critical' spirit" (1980:88).



Figure 2.5: Originally appeared with the following caption: "The Year is Over. The Struggle Goes On". Caricature published in *Der Strümer between 1928 and 1932* (http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/sturm28.htm)

It can, be argued (as Doherty has done) that Spiegelman's visual vocabulary in *Maus* acts in opposition to a Nazi aesthetic. Doherty's position is that cartoons, as a visual medium, do not partake in the emphasis on physical perfection inherent to the fascist aesthetic (as outlined above)[43]. By using "rough edges" and "broad caricatures", cartoons evoke rather than record human form (Doherty 1990:74). Spiegelman drew the panels of *Maus* in a one-to-one ratio. The standard approach is to draw images twice the size of the version to be published, thus allowing the artist to reproduce detail more easily. The effect of this is to produce the illusion of "a 'naturalized' image divorced from its production" (Brown: 1988:102). Young explains the impact of Spiegelman's unconventional approach in the following:

> Spiegelman reproduces his hand's movement in scale – its shakiness, the thickness of his drawing pencil line, the limits of miniaturization, all . . . put a cap on detail and fine line and so keep the pictures undetermined. (Young 2000:19).

Thus Spiegelman's drawings in *Maus* are relatively crude, gesturing toward mouse figures rather than realistically representing them. By drawing his frames in this way Spiegelman avoids any illusion of reality, there is no attempt toward perfection, we see the movement of his hand, the sketchiness of the drawings. The style of his visual representation of these figures makes one aware both of their constructedness and the process of their construction, in so doing Spiegelman both emphasises the mediated nature of his narrative (its distance from reality) and resists the overly realist aesthetic mode of Fascism.

In further resistance to the bodily perfection emphasised in the Nazi aesthetic, as well as the Nazi assumption that identity is defined by one's physicality and racial demarcation, Spiegelman's characters are not individualised because of their physical characteristics, but irrespective of them[44]. As Spiegelman, himself, explains:

> By using these mask-like faces, where characters look more or less the same, a sketchier drawing style, I am able to focus one's attention on the narrative while still telling it in comic

[43] This position however can be disputed when one considers comic book portrayals of 'super heroes', especially Superman, who arguably embody the fascist ideal of physical perfection, and exalts the white male body in an extreme portrayal of a flawless human body.

[44] A number of critics including Hillel Halkin and Alan L. Berger, have commented on the difficulty of individuating the characters in *Maus* (Berger 1995:37 and Halkin 1992:56). Berger comments not only on their similarities, but notes that their mask-like faces obscure discrete feelings and emotions (1995: 37).

> strip form. So that distancing device actually brings one closer to the heart of the material than a true comics approach (Spiegelman 1986).[45]

Thus, in part, Spiegelman's visual representation in *Maus* is designed to prevent the reader from being distracted from the narrative by elaborate life-like images or artwork. In accordance with this intention Spiegelman uses what he calls "a very sedate comic strip format" (1986): by this he means the frames of his comic book are usually square or rectangular and seldom overlap or are broken. He uses a visual vocabulary that requires the reader to actively and imaginatively engage with the given format[46] and "force[s] the reader into a relationship with the script" (Spiegelman 1986). In so doing Spiegelman engages the reader in the work of postmemory, by encouraging the reader to employ his or her imagination in order to interact with the material. Therefore it is through the narrative rather than the visual depictions and the reader's active participation in the text that the characters are individualised.

As we have seen in the above, Spiegelman's representation of Jews as mice is designed to undermine and problematise anti-Semitic representations of the Jew in caricature, social discourse and aesthetics; specifically those representations produced in support of National Socialism. However, in this aesthetic response, we see a trace, embedded in its own opposition that leads us back to these anti-Semitic representations. We are forced to understand that housed within the anthropomorphised mice of Spiegelman's *Maus,* is an ugly history of racialised representation of Jews. Thus, the image itself becomes an archive, referring back to its dark historical predecessors. By drawing Jews as mice and Germans as cats thus representing racial difference in terms of power relations and by referencing anti-Semitic images, Spiegelman's text remains haunted by the ghost of anti-Semitism and it is only from our modern perspective that these distinctions are rendered provisional.

Spiegelman's text engages in the work of postmemory not only in archiving and subverting anti-Semitic cartoons and the Fascist aesthetic but in archiving both familial and familiar images of the Holocaust. The process of postmemory, is highly mediated and involves a complex and imaginative engagement with the past and the process of recollection. As Young points out, a text of postmemory (or in his idiom vicarious memory) is inherently concerned with the manner in which information is received and mediated textually. *Maus* is compiled of numerous texts, both familial, in the form of narratives and photographs, and collective or public, in the form of images, narrative and film. This accumulation of multiple texts is nowhere more

[45] A quoted in Smith, Graham. 1987. "From Mickey to Maus: recalling Genocide through cartoon" in *Oral History* 15:1, pp. 26-34.

[46] As Spiegelman has stated elsewhere the mouse figures (or masks) act as alienation or distancing devices that prevent over identification with the characters (as quoted in an interview with Smith 1986). As Des Pres explains, "the cat-and-mouse fable, together with its comic-book format, work in a Brechtian manner to alienate, provoke, and compel new attention to an old story" (1988:229). A similar point can be found in Berger 1995:37.

evident that in the visual representations of Nazi Germany: which include three family photographs (as well as drawings of numerous family photographs) and references to images of the Holocaust recognisable from the public sphere. As Doherty adds, an important aspect of Spiegelman's aesthetic is the Holocaust itself, which through its multiple cinematic depictions has become "a permanent presence in . . . popular memory" (1996:75). In addition these numerous depictions of the Holocaust in popular media have created a number of visual signifiers for the Holocaust, or as Landsberg would have it an emerging Holocaust iconography (1997:71): "emaciated survivors staring blankly from behind barbed wire fences; bulldozers corralling and burying heaps of corpses; mountains of hair, eyeglasses, and suitcases" (Doherty 1996:76)[47]. Through its multiple visual references the text is able to refer to the way in which postmemory of the Holocaust is mediated by familial images of the past and images of the Holocaust received in the media. Spiegelman's text becomes a visual palimpsest, referencing images from both the public and private sphere, and in so doing, he is able to suggest both the way in which memory is apprehended at this temporal remove and visually archive memory as a palimpsest of fragments.

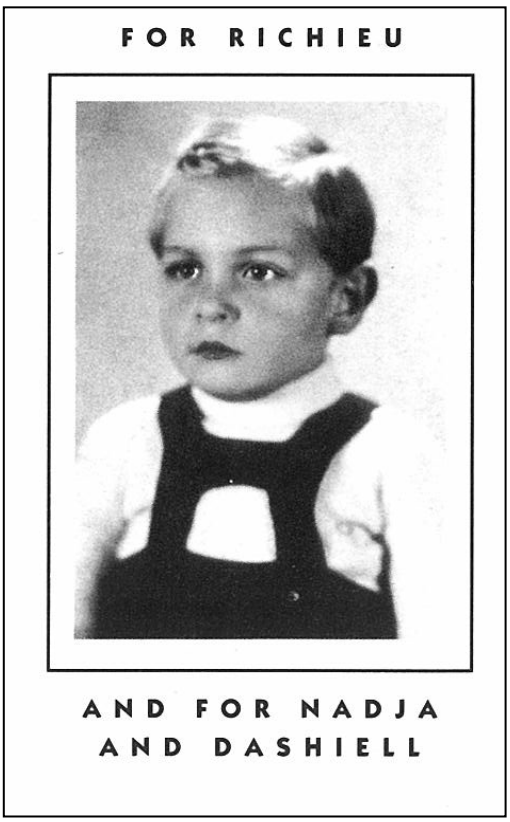


Figure 2.6: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus.* United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 165

An important part of this visual palimpsest is the inclusion of family photographs in the text. Marianne Hirsch has written extensively on the use of photographs and photographic references in *Maus* and it is to her work that the following analysis is indebted. Hirsch makes this comment on the use of photographs in *Maus*:

> These photographs [the photographs of Richieu, Vladek and Art Spiegelman as a child with his mother] connect the two levels of Spiegelman's text, the past and the present, the story of the father and the story of the son, because these family photographs are documents both of memory (the survivor's) and of 'postmemory' (that of the child of survivors). As such, the photographs included in the text of *Maus,* and through them, *Maus* itself, become sites of remembrance (1997:22).

Hirsch argues that these photographs situate Maus within a complex play of memory and history, at the brink between the collective and the individual, "mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death" (1997:22). The photographs institute Maus as a site of remembrance and suggest its link to a material reality. As we shall see they suggest meaning and memory in excess of their frames while

[47] A similar argument can be found in Hirsch's article "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" (2001), however, following Zelizer, Hirsch warns that these perpetually repeated images of the Holocaust become decontextualised and perhaps evacuated of meaning.

simultaneously remaining inherently limited and opaque. Furthermore, family photographs are intimate and private, and form part of a family's attempt to construct itself visually. In viewing these private photographs the reader feels both invited to share in this intimacy and irreducibly separated from the subject depicted in the photograph who remains unfamiliar. By including the photographs Spiegelman dramatised the movement from the private and familial realm to the public, which is implicit in this text's very construction.

In her articulation of the term postmemory Hirsch has pointed to photography as a prioritised site of postmemory (2001:223 and 231). I believe this is true for a number of reasons. As writers on photography such as Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, have noted, the photograph simultaneously invokes both life and death (*see also* Sontag 1977:70 and Barthes 1980:78-79). This is specifically true of Holocaust photographs:

> The Holocaust photograph is uniquely able to bring out this particular capacity of photographs to hover between life and death, to capture only that which no longer exists, to suggest both the desire and the necessity and, at the same time, the difficulty, the impossibility of mourning (Hirsch 1997:20).

This becomes clear when one considers the family photographs included in the text of *Maus*, At the beginning of *Maus II* there is a photograph of a healthy little boy, light reflecting off his neatly parted hair, staring, perhaps a little seriously, at something or someone just beyond the photograph's frame (figure 2.6). The photograph is accompanied by the inscription: "[f]or Richieu and for Nadja and Dashiell" (Spiegelman 1992:165). The inscription seems to address this simultaneous presence of both life and death; it refers both to the past, to Spiegelman's dead brother, and to life, to the future, Spiegelman's daughter. The photograph is simultaneously opaque and yielding to our gaze, the child in the photograph seems to embody health and emerging life, our vision, however, is haunted by the knowledge of his death[48]. One could argue that this moment of realisation, that this beautiful boy is dead



Figure 2.7: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 294

[48] As Hirsch has noted, one assumes the photograph is of Richieu, but are not given evidence to support this assumption (1997: 37), other than the child's dress and the graininess of the photograph.

and never grew up, creates what Roland Barthes calls a *punctum*[49]. Our process of viewing the picture of an attractive child is disrupted by the abrupt knowledge of his death. In this instance, however, the *punctum* is not sparked by a detail within the text, but by knowledge external to the photograph; the laceration or the prick remains the same irrespective. The photograph itself becomes a revenant, a return, a haunting, and its position at the beginning of *Maus II* suggests the manner in which the text itself is haunted by absent presences from the past.

Similarly, as I have mentioned in my introduction, the photograph has a second intrinsic paradox. Many theorists have considered the photograph as a *trace*, implying a material or physical connection between the photograph and its referent (Hirsch 2001:223). Roland Barthes takes this further to argue that "photography holds a uniquely referential relation to the real, not through the discourse of artistic representation but that of magic, alchemy" (Hirsch 2001:223; *see also* Barthes 1980:76). The link between the photograph and its referent, is thus, not something that can be explained by empirical thought, but rather lies within the realm of the inexplicable, the magical. The photograph emphasises the past's materiality, and the material connection between the past and present, while simultaneously remaining frustratingly flat and opaque in its two-dimemtionality and limited frame. Photographs signal "insurmountable distance and unreality" (Hirsch 2001: 224). Nowhere is this more evident than with reference to the photograph of Richieu discussed above; it is shown at the beginning of *Maus II*, and discussed in the text (we assume, but are never sure, that this is the photograph being discussed, but its inclusion draws our imagination toward it). For Artie the picture signifies the material existence of his older brother in the past, but remains entirely unyielding, providing no insight into the person that brother may have been. It is both a site where postmemory is fostered through an imaginative engagement and annulled by its flat surface; if anything it bares testament to our inability to know the past and to Richieu's absence. As Hirsch reminds us, if the photograph is a trace, "then it cannot ultimately refer to its incomprehensible, inconceivable referent that is the extermination of European Jewry" (2001:224); it remains ultimately inadequate. The use of photographs therefore highlights the provisionality of any attempt to gain access to the past.

One of the three photographs Spiegelman includes in *Maus* is a photograph of Vladek (figure 2.7). The photograph shows a young man in front of a curtain, staring directly into the camera lens, wearing a concentration camp uniform. Vladek explains the photograph as follows: "I passed a photo place what had a camp uniform – a new clean one – to make souvenir photos . . ." (Spiegelman 1992: 294). Vladek had this photograph taken to send to his wife, Anja, as proof of his survival. In this context, this photograph and the

[49] The *punctum* is an element from the scene that rises up and pierces the viewer. It is a "prick . . . [a] mark made by a pointed instrument" (1980:26). The *punctum* disturbs or disrupts the *stadium*, the general appreciation of the image, and pricks (stabs or marks) the viewer.

story of its creation, make the constructed nature of photographs evident, and show the 'truth claims' of photography to be illusory. What looks like a photograph of (an admittedly surprisingly healthy) camp inmate, is shown to be a later reconstruction by a recovered man of his inmate identity. In this instance a strange paradox emerges; Vladek stages or performs the identity of a camp inmate (many of whom died) in order to prove his well being, his survival, to his wife. The reader is struck by uneasy feeling that one could be looking at anyone, survivor or not, who happened to pass by the same photographer as Vladek and have his/her photograph taken in this uniform. The impulse to consider the photograph as simply a historical trace is, therefore, problematised by its staged nature[50]. By including this staged image Spiegelman further dramatises the limitations of seeing photographs as direct traces to an ultimately inaccessible past.

By including family photographs in his text Spiegelman breaks the boundaries of his frames (both literally and figuratively), and of his text. There is a radical contrast between the representational mouse figures and the human figures in the photographs, thus reaffirming the vestigial nature of the mouse metaphor and making the highly mediated nature of the visual representations in the text clear. This creates the illusion of moving from the highly mediated realm of the comic into the realm of the 'real'. However, as I have explained above, this relation to the 'real' needs to be problematised. This illusory link to the real is inevitably mediated by the photograph's inherent limitations. Hirsch argues that the power of the photographs Spiegelman includes in his text lies in their "status as fragments of history we cannot assimilate" (1997:40). For us, as readers, while the photographs may suggest an illusory link to a material past, the photographs remain doubly opaque, not only because of their flat surface and their limited frames, but because we cannot recognise the faces in the photographs, and thus cannot fully contextualise or narrativise them without prompting by the author.

Spiegelman's visual vocabulary not only utilises his family photographs but draws extensive visual reference to commonly used and recycled photographs of the Holocaust as, what Barbie Zelizer calls, "memory cues" (1998:180). In order to discuss Spiegelman's use of these visual cues, one must first discuss the role of photographs of atrocity in a postmemorial understanding of the Holocaust. As Barbie Zelizer explains the Holocaust was a singular moment in media coverage of war atrocity; it was one of the first events where images, specifically photographs, were prioritised over words in the representation of the event in its immediate aftermath (1998:12). The numerous images taken by American and British photographers, both professional and non-professional, have been multiply reproduced in the popular media gaining lasting iconographic significance.

[50] Further, Hirsch argues that while the photograph of Richieu at the beginning of *Maus II* symbolises his death, which remains incomprehensible, this photograph of Vladek symbolises his survival and life, as well as his eventual reunion with his wife (1997:38).

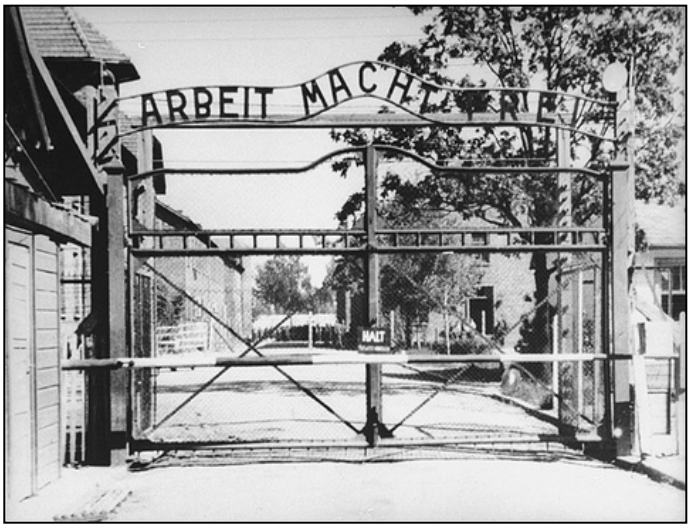


Figure 2.8: View of the entrance to the main camp of Auschwitz (Auschwitz I).
The gate bears the motto "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work makes one free). May 11, 1945 - May 15, 1945. Locale: Auschwitz, [Upper Silesia] Poland; Birkenau; Auschwitz III; Monowitz; Auschwitz II. USHMM, courtesy of Instytut Pamieci Narodowej



Figure 2.9: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 159.

Zelizer considers the role these photographs have played in memory, explaining that photographs are potent vessels for memory as they provide a "powerful building block to the past that connects the unimaginable with the imagined" (1998:13). As photographs provide an illusory authenticity and material connection to the past they also engage viewers in a process of imaginary investment that links the present moment of viewing the image to the material past depicted in the image. However, while Zelizer contends that much of our ability to remember increasingly depends on imagery, the use of photographs as building blocks for collective memory is particularly problematic as photographs have an illusory truth value and as a result "do not make obvious how they construct what we see and remember" (1998:6). Therefore, while photographs of the Holocaust may act as a short-hand for a broader set of events than those depicted in the particular image, they obscure their own constructedness.

In the post Holocaust generation Holocaust photographs have come to play a number of roles; the most important of these in the context of our discussion is their use as a vehicle of memorialisation in popular culture. They have come to act as "memory pegs" or visual cues (Zelitzer: 178-180). By this I mean that these images come to act as a short hand to reference public knowledge of the Holocaust, rather than the specific context within which they were produced. Problematically these photographs often appear in a decontextualised form, divorced from their original context (and continuously recontextualised in order to support their surrounding text). Zelitzer argues that in the 21st century, where we are increasingly dependent

on photos for making sense of our past (and present), the proliferation (or as some would contend the excess) of photographs of atrocity in the act of memorialisation becomes as much an agent for forgetting as it is for remembrance (1998:202). The public archive of visual memory, the numerous archives of photographs that are recycled and reused, increasingly comes to divorce images from their context, and in so doing omits information in aid of a specific and often limited vision of the past; thus the act of memorialisation via photographs both in the media and in memorials and museums becomes simultaneously an act of remembering and forgetting (of preserving and effacing the past)[51].

In Spiegelman's visual reference to common photographs of the Holocaust in his visual representation of Auschwitz he is reliant on the role of these images as "visual cues" for memory. If one considers figures 2.8 and 2.9, we can see that Spiegelman is using a frequently referenced photograph of Auschwitz's main gate (as shown in figure 2.8) as a reference point for his own illustration of his father's entrance into Auschwitz. Hirsch makes the following comments regarding the scene of Vladek's arrival at Auschwitz (as depicted in figure 2.8):

> Art Spiegelman in *Maus* draws Vladek's arrival . . . from Auschwitz through the main gate, which could not have been true in 1944 – 45 when the gate was no longer used in this way. For Spiegelman, as for all of us in this generation, the gate is the visual image we share of the arrival in the camp. The artist needs it not only to make the narrative immediate and "authentic": he needs it as a point of access (a gate) for himself and post memorial readers. (2001:228).

Spiegelman's work thus, in this instance, engages (perhaps unknowingly) in the double problematic that surrounds images of atrocity in our postmemorial era. He makes use of the image of Auschwitz's gate in order to provide his readers with an entry point to the now visually familiar world of Auschwitz, literally and figuratively, it is this gate that provides us entrance into the world of Auschwitz. The reader is expected to bring with them their own knowledge and postmemory that is triggered by their recognition of this familiar image. However in this process the image is decontextualised by its use to depict a historically inaccurate occurrence, in so doing not only is its mode of production effaced but it becomes a generalised iconographic symbol rather than a more specific historical trace. This instance highlights one of the problems inherent to the process of postmemory, that by narrating a past, which is only accessed via imaginative investment and engagement, the specificity of that past may be lost.

Spiegelman's visual allusions do not only derive from his reference to popular photographs of the Holocaust and an emerging Holocaust iconography, but also from extensive visual research. In 1978 and 1989

[51] We may recall that the archive in Derrida's formulation, as linked to the Death Drive and as such Archive Fever, always works against itself in its own destruction (Derrida 1996:12).

Spiegelman visited Auschwitz. At the Auschwitz museum he encountered pictures drawn by inmates entitled "Their Way of Witnessing" (Fein 1991). In his interview with Ester Fein, Spiegelman made the following comments regarding these drawings:

> The drawings returned me to the primal urgency of life there. . . [t]hey were not aesthetic. They were not artistic. The artists were trying to accurately report, almost like journalists. It was their way of witnessing. They showed things that could not be seen another way (1991)

Spiegelman has stated that these acts of witnessing were crucial to his visualisation and depiction of Auschwitz. Spiegelman's drawings of Auschwitz, therefore, create a hidden trace to these visual testimonies. Thus Spiegelman's representational mode not only houses within itself anti-Semitic caricature but also the pared down and representational aesthetic of these visual testimonies. In the use of these intertextual references, his inclusion of the influence of these lost voices into his own visual vocabulary, Spiegelman is able to archive them[52]. Similarly, Spiegelman includes diagrams and sketches based on detailed descriptions from his father (see Spiegelman 1996: 114 and 220). His use of both popular Holocaust iconography and intimate, highly specific images of the Holocaust, allows Spiegelman to create a visual vocabulary which is both accessible and highly complex. It is through his multiple sites of reference in creating this vocabulary that Spiegelman is in part able to avoid the dangers of over-identification and co-option inherent to postmemory. The text's attempts to self-reflexively highlight its own provisionality and constructedness also serve as part of Spiegelman's broader attempt to evade the dangers of appropriation inherent to the work of postmemory. However, these references to lost voices are largely hidden, and perhaps partially subsumed in Spiegelman's own aesthetic. Thus, if Spiegelman is able to evade the danger of co-option it is only in part.

Hal Foster in his article on the "archival impulse" in art argues that by using familiar sources "drawn from the archives of mass culture" the artists "ensure a legibility that can then be disturbed" (Foster 2004: 4). This legibility seems to be what Spiegelman achieves in his reference to the photograph of the gate into Auschwitz (which then becomes a symbolic gate for our perception of the world of Auschwitz). However, Foster argues they may also use obscure references "in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory" (ibid). Spiegelman's archival art uses both these forms of reference in his work by drawing on images of Auschwitz from the popular archive of mass media, as well as from his intimate familial archive and references to obscure visual testimonies from Auschwitz. Buy juxtaposing these different visual references he disturbs the legibility (and as such our ability to know or understand) provided by referring to images from an emerging Holocaust iconography.

[52] This is however limited as these references are less immediately evident than his visual references to an emerging Holocaust iconography.

As we have seen, Spiegelman's text creates a visual palimpsest; creating a layered vocabulary of visual reference which in its multiple strata archives numerous images. *Mau,s* in its work of postmemory, becomes not only an archive for past racial beliefs and stereotypes, but also seems to signal, not history itself, but rather the impossibility of knowing the past in any direct or unmediated form. While the photographs included provide referential links to the past, these links are shown to be provisional by the blankness of the two dimensional surface that comes to represent the failure of understanding when encountered with the events of the Holocaust. Spiegelman's use of photographs signals the unbridgeable gap between what can and cannot be known and in so doing simultaneously archives memory and its negation.

"My Father Bleeds History"[53]: the Family Narrative and the Slippage Between Past and Present in *Maus*

Maus is equally concerned with the process of its own writing, its own production, as it is with the narrative of the relationship between a father and a son and the narrative (oral history or recorded testimony) of the Holocaust. Through his skilful articulation of his frame tale, which provides the forum for his articulate self-reflexive narration, Spiegelman charts a complex slippage between the past and the present in the text, suggesting the continuing impact his parents' past retains in his present. This self-reflexive narration is central to understanding the text's attempts to highlight its own constructed nature and mediated distance from the past. The family interactions presented in *Maus* are shown to be inextricable from the inevitable impact of the past on the present.

Maus tells two stories simultaneously: Vladek's testimony and Spiegelman's imaginative record and interpretation of it. Through his self-reflexive narration, Spiegelman highlights the role Artie plays in Vladek's testimony, as well as emphasising the text's extremely mediated distance from the past, and the provisionality of any attempt to represent the past in the present. As Young contends, "[b]y making the recovery of the story itself a visible part of *Maus,* Spiegelman can also hint darkly at the story not being recovered here, how telling one story always leaves another untold, how common memory masks deep memory" (2000:29). As is often the case with Holocaust testimonies, Vladek's narrative suggests the narratives that could not be told, the voices that remain silent. An important absence suggested by Vladek's narrative is the untold story of his wife, Anja, which is made doubly inaccessible by her suicide and Vladek's subsequent destruction of her diaries. This absence, however, becomes a key presence that haunts the margins of the text.

[53] "My Father Bleeds History" (Spiegelman 1986) is the subtitle to *Maus I*

Spiegelman's narrative is itself an act of postmemory. His effort to document and retell his father's story is also an attempt to recuperate his relationship with his father and his connection to an obliterated world, and a lost history which, like Anja's diary, can never be recovered. Spiegelman's text attests to the fact that the legacy of the Holocaust still continues to effect the lives of Holocaust survivors and their children, as Berger explains: "[t]he most important event in the lives of the second generation happened before their birth", and their literature attests to the "presence of an absence" (1995: 23-24). This experience becomes clear when we see Artie explaining the following to Françoise: "Don't get me wrong. I wasn't obsessed with this stuff . . . It's just that sometimes I'd fantasise Zyklon B coming out of our shower instead of water." (Spiegelman 1992: 176). As the above statement makes clear, the history of the Holocaust as well as his parent's history has a lasting effect on Artie, and his narrative is structured within his self-conscious engagement with his parents' history and its impact on his experience in the present.

As has been discussed earlier in my argument *Maus* straddles the generic boundaries that exist between history and literature (or perhaps even fiction). As Berlatsky explains:

> As de Certeau and Foucault also suggest, history always asserts its referentiallity, insisting on the existence of certain events while simultaneously shaping them into an intelligible story that separates the present from the past. (2003:108).

As Hayden White, among others, has suggested, history is subject to emplotment, and as a result we only have access to the past via discourse. By foregrounding the modes of transmission and production Spiegelman avoids the authoritative discourse of History that claims to be both objective and transparent. Berlatsy explains that "even Vladek's oral narrative is specifically configured not only as history but also as "story". . . subject to the perils of emplotment" (2003:134). At the beginning of the text Vladek tells the story of how he met Anja after an affair with a woman named Lucia. After telling Artie the story he makes the following request: "But this what I just told you – about Lucia and so – I don't want you should write this in your book" (Spiegelman 1986:25). Spiegelman however does not keep his promise to his father, he narrates the story in its entirety including his promise to his father, thus suggesting that truth and an accurate historical record will be prioritised over personal relationships. This claim to authority and truth value is problematised later in the text. After a long monologue Artie makes the following comment to Françoise, "[s]ee what I mean . . . in real life you'd never have let me talk this long without interrupting" (Spiegelman 1992: 177). By making this comment Spiegelman foregrounds the process of narrativisation, showing the narrative to be constructed by the author's intentions and thus separate from reality. *Maus* avoids the closure of traditional historical accounts and through its self-conscious narration and construction shows its attempts to document the past to be highly provisional, and circumscribed by absence.

The inextricable link between the past and the present in *Maus* is made evident in the first few frames that act as a prologue to the body of the text. Artie, depicted as a small boy, approaches his father sniffling with tears; he has been abandoned by his friends who "skated away w-without" him (Spiegelman 1996:6). Vladek replies: "Friends? Your friends? . . . If you lock them together in a room with no food for a week. . . Then you could see what it is, friends!" (*ibid*). From this, one of the very first frames in Maus, one sees the family tale as inherently haunted by the experiences of the past. Vladek cannot simply comfort his disappointed child, rather the past bleeds into the present; the son's (seemingly petty) experience of loss in the present is mitigated by his father's experience of the past in Nazi Germany. This is one of the few instances in the text that directly addresses the impact Vladek and Anja's past had on Artie. However, because this instance is situated as a prologue, before the main body of the text, it also seems to suggest that the narrative to come is motivated and circumscribed by Artie's relationship to his parents' past and its effect on him.



Figure 2.10: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 239.

Spiegelman's text enacts a complex relationship between the lived present and the 'died' past. The past is shown to be increasingly present in the characters' lived experiences; many of the frames not only juxtapose the past and the present, but show them to be inherently linked. Artie's present is still haunted by the images and narratives of the past, this is typically represented in the text via graphic representations rather than the written narrative. In figure 2.10 Artie, Vladek and Françoise are driving through Catskill. Artie and Vladek are discussing the fate of a number of prisoners working in the gas chambers in Auschwitz who revolted. Vladek explains their fate: "Yah. For this they all got killed. And the four young girls that sneaked over the ammunitions for this, they hanged them near my workshop" (Spiegelman 1992:239). In this frame we are shown modern Catskill and a car driving through some trees, hanging from the trees we see legs and feet in camp uniforms (presumably the girls Vladek saw hung by his workshop in Auschwitz). In this frame the past physically intrudes into the present; the car and the hanging bodies exist simultaneously. Similarly at the beginning of *Maus II* a map of modern New York is superimposed onto a map of Auschwitz in Poland (Spiegelman 1992:166). The past and the present are shown to be mutually articulating and interwoven. The present in this text is never free of the haunting presences of the ghosts of the past.

Furthermore it is clear that Artie has difficulty separating these two temporalities (his present and his father's past), which I believe suggests the effect Vladek's past has on his son in the present. LaCapra believes that Spiegelman's *Maus* points toward the necessity of what he calls "memory – work and play in coming to terms with the burdens of the past that cannot simply be cast off" (1998: 151). For LaCapra Spiegelman's text enacts the working through[54] (in the psychoanalytic sense), as an ethical or socio-political action, of a past that cannot be transcended or ignored. By using the statements "coming to terms" and "working through" LaCapra projects a psychoanalytic frame onto intergenerational trauma: suggesting that the traumas of the past can be resolved psychoanalytically in the present, not by the survivors but their children. LaCapra's argument bares merit in emphasising the very real psychological impact parent's trauma during the Holocaust may have on their children, but this cannot be adequately explained through the psychoanalytic paradigm of trauma as their connection to these events is always already mediated and vicarious. Spiegelman's constant emphasis on the process of production, his own uncertainty about both the means of representation and the limits of his own understanding, strikingly qualify any claims to "coming to terms" or "working through" that theorists might make on the work's behalf. Artie expresses these concerns to Françoise as follows: "Sigh. I feel so



Figure 2.11: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 201.

[54]The process of "working-through" (as articulated by the neo-Freudian theories of Winicott) places emphasis on the need for an empathetic Other to bare witness to the subject's traumatic loss (Leventhal 1995). By giving testimony, articulating this loss, the subject is able to "work through" or process this loss, leading ultimately to a renewed sense of self-sufficiency (Leventhal 1995).

inadequate trying to reconstruct a reality that was worse than my darkest dreams. And trying to do it as a comic strip!" (Spiegelman 1992: 176). This point, however, should not be overstated. There is an inherent duality at work here; while the Holocaust has an inherent excess that eludes comprehension (which can be understood as the destabilising force of deep memory), there is a psychological necessity to engage with the past, and to narrativise past events in order to function within society (which can be understood as the necessary role played by common memory). However it seems highly problematic to suggest that the children of survivors can vicariously 'work through' their parents' trauma in the present, they can only access their parents' trauma from a mediated distance, which Spiegelman emphasises in his work. What their perspective and remove from the events in question, as well as their affective connection to the event allows them, is the ability to consider the lasting effects and resonances of the Holocaust in the present and consider how these are to be approached and engaged with.

Artie's self-conscious narration not only allows Spiegelman to make the process of the text's construction evident, but also allows him to question the ethics of his project. This self-conscious narration also allows the reader critical distance from both the father, and the son's narrative. Figure 2.11 is often discussed by critics in relation to the self-conscious nature of Artie's narration as it illustrates the highly complex intersection of a number of the text's concerns. In this scene Artie sits hunched over a drawing board, his face clearly covered by a mouse mask (which seems to emphasise the narrator's mediated position) and makes the following statements:

> Vladek started working as a tinman in Auschwitz in the spring of 1944. . . I started working on this page at the very end of February 1987. . . In May 1987 Françoise and I are expecting a baby. . . Between May 16, 1944, and May 24, 1944 over 100,000 Hungarian Jews were gassed in Auschwitz. . . In September 1986, after 8 years of work, the first part of *MAUS* was published. . . It was a critical and commercial success (Spiegelman 1996: 201).

What is initially evident in this scene is the stark number of juxtapositions in this monologue between different temporalities and events: the success of *Maus I* is juxtaposed against the death of 100,000 Hungarian Jews during the Holocaust. As is so often the case in this text, Artie's present shows itself to be intimately linked to his parents' past. However, these juxtapositions seem to simultaneously emphasise the incredible distance between Artie's present concerns and the horrors of the Holocaust. Sitting at his drawing board in the fourth frame on the page Artie turns to face his reader, thus breaking the frame, to directly address him or her. By directly addressing the reader, who in having possibly purchased the book is implicated in the text's commercial and critical acclaim, Spiegelman highlights and questions not only his motivations but those of his reader.

In the final frame on the page (figure 2.11) we see the source of the flies that have been visible buzzing around Artie's head in the preceding frames: his drawing board is perched on top of a pile of dead bodies. A number of intersecting conclusions can be drawn from this image. Firstly, like the monologue that accompanies it, the image is yet another example from the text showing the slippage between the past and the present. Artie sits surrounded not only by flies and dead bodies, but outside the window a guard tower is clearly visible. Second, the pile of bodies alludes to a powerful 'memory cue' drawn from an emerging iconography of the Holocaust[55]. Finally the cartoonist's drawing board is physically raised upon a pile of dead, emaciated bodies; when this is considered alongside the fact that this image is accompanied by a discussion of the text's critical success, it seems to suggest that the narrator is also self-consciously engaging with the ethics of profiting from the tragic history of the Holocaust. This is subtly reinforced by the dialogue bubble in the corner that reads: "Alright Mr Spiegelman we're ready to shoot!" (Spiegeman 1996: 201). This final phrase's strength relies on the ambiguity of the word shoot, suggesting both a film being shot by a camera and Jews being shot by a gun. Thus in this final reading this section of self-conscious narration can show evidence of an extreme scepticism regarding the commercialisation of the Holocaust and the role of *Maus* as a consumable item, as well as providing a powerful self conscious critique by Spiegelman of his own project.

As has been seen in my analysis of figure 2.11, *Maus II*, written in the shadow of the critical acclaim afforded its predecessor, "explicitly interrogates its own status in the public sphere, reflexively commenting on its own production and interrogating the staging of 'the Holocaust'" (Rothberg 1994:674). Spiegelman is both aware and critical of *Maus's* status as a commodity: as Rothberg explains, "*Maus* critiques popular productions of Jewishness and the Holocaust from within" (1994:667). This having been said, *Maus II* is also concerned with the family sphere, however it is in this part of the text that Artie is increasingly aware of the ways in which his father's testimony and his own narrative are mediated and commodified. The father-son relationship is a key concern in the text, which is qualified and destabilised by the absent voice of the mother, Anja. Rothberg argues that while both *Maus I* and *Maus II* consider the interplay between the past and the present, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* (as the title suggests) is more concerned with "a wounded or wounding of the familial body" (1994:674). The title itself suggests a link between memory, history and a physical wounding of the paternal body.

A considerable proportion of *Maus I* is concerned with finding the account Anja wrote of her experiences during the Holocaust. Vladek's burning of Anja's diary is situated as a rupture in the genealogical chain:

[55] See image of a heap of ashes and bones in Buchenwald, April 18, 1945 by NARA to be found in the USHMM archive.

Vladek explains that Anja had written her diaries in the hope that one day her son would "be interested" (Spiegelman 1986: 161). Vladek's destruction of the diaries is thus a destruction of Artie's heritage and his last remaining connection to his mother. Artie responds to Vladek's revelation that he had destroyed the diaries by calling him a "murderer" (*ibid*). Vladek's murder is of the narrative link between mother and son, both of whom seek to document the past. Staub argues that Anja's destroyed diary (and Artie's effort to recover the lost book) "becomes a working metaphor for the ultimate unrecoverability of all Holocaust experience" (1995: 35). While this argument is convincing I believe it has to be taken further. Anja's destroyed account becomes a trace in Artie's narrative that signals toward absent voices and vanished texts and threatens the stability of Artie's narrative by gesturing to the gaps and the absent presences. In describing the spectre, Derrida makes the following statement:

> It is something that one does not know if it precisely is, if it exists, if it responds to a name or corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non object, this non present present, this being-there of an absent departed one no longer belongs to knowledge (1994:5).

While this clearly cannot be taken literally, the metaphor of the spectre becomes a productive way of thinking about how the past can make its presence felt in the present. In the context of *Maus*, Anja's absent voice, and destroyed diaries are absent yet still retain an important role in the narrative being told. In being an absence whose presence is felt throughout the text, Anja becomes a spectre whose lost narrative haunts the periphery of the text.

The Anja and her lost testimony play an elusive but pivotal role in the narrative. The first volume centres on "the multiply disappeared story of Art's mother Anja" which becomes "the primary wound around which the story turns" (Rothberg 1994:676; *see also* Hirsch 1997:33 and LaCapra 1998:172). While this point may be overstated it is clear that to some extent Spiegelman's narrative project is part of an impossible attempt to recuperate or reconstruct Anja's destroyed narrative and legacy that had been irrecoverably lost (Hirsch 1997:34, see also Rothberg 1994: 676). Thus throughout the text Spiegelman's project remains always already provisional and signals our inability to fully recuperate the past outside the ways in which we receive its fragments and traces. As LaCapra states: "Anja seems to become a phantasmic archive that Artie hopes will provide him with a point of entry into the elusive, seemingly redemptive past that he tries to recapture" (1998:172). At first Artie believes that Anja's narrative will provide him with redemptive access to an unimaginable past. However, her suicide and Vladek's burning of her diaries suggests the destruction of their familial archive and the ultimate impossibility of accessing this archive. The destruction of Anja's diary creates a void at the heart of the familial archive, this void comes to represent the provisionality of any attempt to fully know or understand the events of the past in the present.

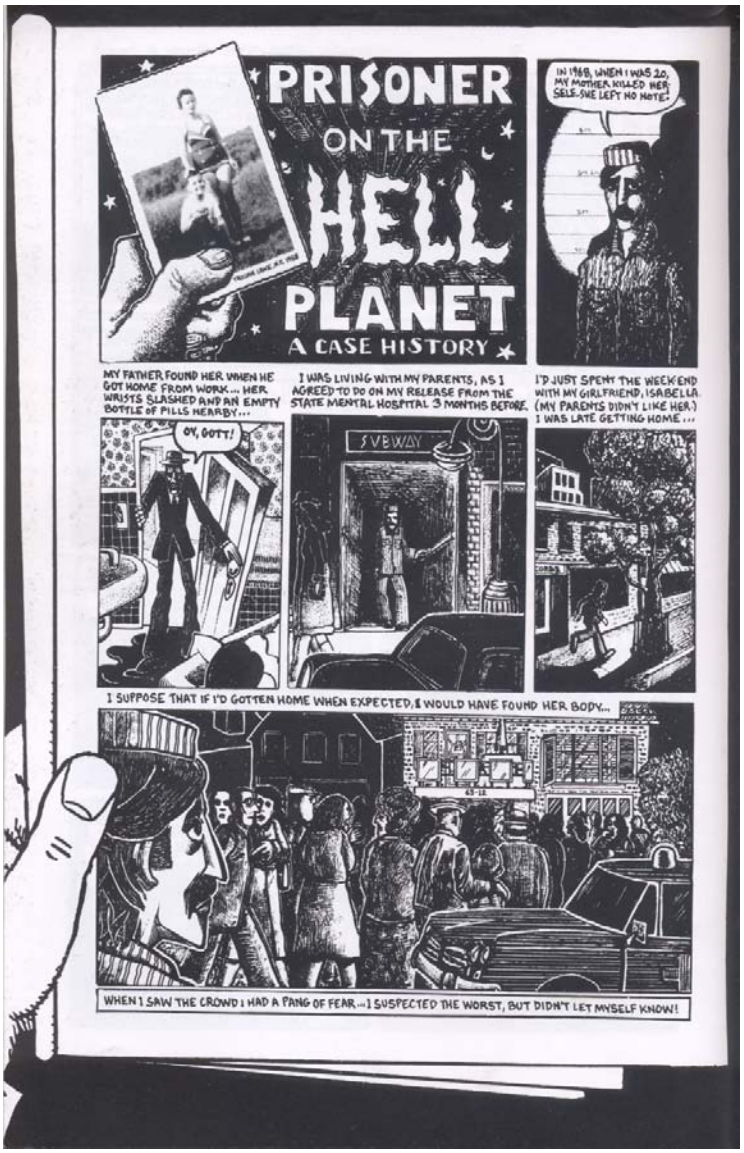


Figure 2.12: Spiegelman, Art. 1996. *The Complete Maus*. United States of America: Pantheon Books. pp. 102.

One cannot discuss Anja's role in the text without considering the insertion of "Prisoner on the Hell Planet" into *Maus* which causes a stylistic and temporal rupture with the body of the text; its black borders and human figures differentiating it from the rest of *Maus*. This insert is itself spectral, a revenant, a return of an abandoned text from the past which disrupts the linear trajectory of the narrative and, yet again, undermines the mouse metaphor by using human figures. It is framed as a text within a text, a comic book within a comic book; in the bottom left corner there is a hand, presumably Artie's, that holds the comic for us to read (see figure 2.12). "Prisoner" is a particularly interesting part of *Maus* as it is neither a part of the text nor can it be entirely separated from the narrative. Importantly, in this regard, the pages in this part of the text remain unnumbered and as such are further separated from the body of the text. Rothberg writes that "'Prisoner' draws attention to itself as at once in *excess* of the rest of *Maus* . . . and *less than* the mother (and the history) it seeks to resuscitate" (emphasis author's own) (1994:679). I believe this is a particularly apt insight. "Prisoner" is the only instance in the text where the maternal body is directly referred to both in the photograph of Art Spiegelman and Anja inserted in the top left corner of the page and the drawings of Anja both dead and alive. Our access to her however, is always already mediated through the nightmarish highly stylised illustrations of "Prisoner".

Through Spiegelman's inclusion of a photograph of himself and his mother in the top left hand corner of "Prisoner" (see figure 2.12), Spiegelman provides insight into how the entire insert can be understood and read. The photograph, especially for readers, is utterly opaque. It does not provide a direct link to Anja but only suggests the unassimilatable loss she comes to represent, the loss of the mother and maternal body.

Furthermore the history of the Holocaust it signifies is in excess of the photograph itself which shows a seemingly ordinary family scene, a child and a mother by a lake, the child smiling, neither figure's features entirely differentiated, that provides no clues to the mother's terrible past, or their future. Furthermore, this happy family scene is in stark juxtaposition to the family drama that unfolds in the "prisoner". The photograph is included for the normalcy it suggests and simultaneously undermines.

When considering "Prisoner" one must mention its sub-title "A Case History", this subtitle thus invokes a reference to the discipline of psychoanalysis and to the 'father' of psychoanalysis Freud. Furthermore, Witek contends that "Prisoner" examines Artie's "emotional stake . . . in understanding his parents' lives" and implicitly explores the psychological impact their past has had on his present (1989:100). In "Prisoner" Spiegelman depicts himself wearing the striped garb of a concentration camp inmate; showing himself as imprisoned by his mother's suicide. This is one of the few instances in the text where the psychological impact of the Holocaust on the children of survivors is gestured towards. Art wears a camp uniform to signify his own implicit connection to the Holocaust, however the camp uniform becomes a prison uniform, which seems to represent his psychological imprisonment. The psychological impact of his parents' past is also obliquely referred to when we are told that he had been released from the state mental hospital three months prior to his mother's suicide. The comic book insert ends with an imprisoned Art saying "You murdered me. Mommy, and you left me here to take the rap!!!" however this voice of self indulgence is not allowed to get the final word as a fellow inmate cries out "Pipe down, Mac! Some of us are trying to sleep!" (Spiegelman 1986: 105). As LaCapra has argued, "[t]he son is the crypt for the parents' traumatic residues, the ghosts and obsessions that are transmitted across generations, often in seemingly unconscious and distorted ways" (1998:154). In this instance however the son by wearing the camp uniform, is dangerously close to co-opting his parents' memory. It is the voice of the second inmate that prevents this co-option from occurring; by undercutting Art's self indulgent monologue the second speaker makes us aware that Art's pain and loss is not equivalent to that of his parents.

The present absence of Richieu in *Maus* is a site of deep memory in the narrative. It gestures toward, as does Anja's diary, what is not known and that which cannot be said: the lost voices and narratives of the dead. Richieu's image, his photograph also provides a site of contested identity for Artie who is required to navigate his postmemorial relationship with his dead sibling. This is made clear in the following dialogue:

> **Artie:** I wonder if Richieu and I would get along if he were alive.
>
> **Françoise:** Your brother?

> **Artie:** My ghost-brother, since he got killed before I was born. . . I didn't think about him much when I was growing up . . . he was mainly a large, blurry photograph hanging in my parents' bedroom.
>
> **Françoise:** Uh-huh. I thought that was a picture of you, though it didn't look like you.
>
> **Artie:** That's the point. They didn't need photos of me in their room. . . I was alive! . . . The photo never threw tantrums or got in any kind of trouble. . . It was an ideal kid, and I was a pain in the ass. I couldn't compete. (Spiegelman 1992: 175).

As the above makes clear, Spiegelman's only means to relate to a brother he never knew is through a process of imaginary investment. He can only know his ghost-brother through a blurry photograph that inhabits his parents' bedroom, and through the resentment he has for him as the perfect image which he cannot live up to. Richieu, like Anja, becomes a present absence that cannot be fully assimilated into the linear trajectory of the narrative, nor can he be ignored. This can be seen in the final frame of the narrative where Vladek says: "I'm *tired* from talking, Richieu. And it's *enough* stories for now." (emphasis author's own) (Spiegelman 1996: 296). In this final frame the apparently dying Vladek addresses Artie by the name of his dead son, Richieu. This confusion between the living and the dead son can be seen as signalling the spectral return of Richieu, however briefly into the text.

Maus suggests that the father's past and his son's present are inextricably linked. For Spiegelman, Vladek's narrative of his experiences during the Holocaust cannot be told without also considering its process if transmission and the relationships (between father and son; between father, son and absent mother) that circumscribe it, as well as the process of its construction and the narrator's scepticism regarding his own project. The text's self-reflexive narration serves to highlight its mediated distance from the events of the past, in so doing it renders any attempts to access the past provisional, always already incomplete or inadequate. The text navigates a complex terrain of proximity and distance: images of the past haunt those of the present, yet the mother's narrative remains entirely inaccessible and the photograph of Richieu remains equally unyielding. While the mediated nature of Spiegelman's text suggests the ultimate inaccessibility of his parent's experiences, his focus on the slippage between the past and the present, on haunting and spectres, also suggests the real impact of the past on the present and the present absences that, though intangible, continue to shape our experience in the present.

As I have previously argued Spiegelman's work exhibits what Hal Foster has called an "archival impulse", and as a result his utilisation of postmodern techniques such as the self-conscious narrator, intertextuality and generic blurring, do not seek to undermine affect, but rather to highlight the affective impact of the past on our present. However, despite its attempts to archive numerous voices and images there are always

fragments of narrative, images and voices that cannot be archived, his project remains provisional and unfulfilled, and like the archive, always threatened with erasure.

3 Uncanny Memory and the Visual Archive in W. G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*

In the following chapter I consider the relationship between memory and the archive in *Austerlitz* by W. G. Sebald (2001). In order to achieve this I analyse the manner in which the uncanny and the Derridian concept of the spectre can be related to the text's structure and use of photography. Furthermore, I focus on the intersection of these concerns in the text's attempt to engage with the events of the Holocaust from a specific spatial and temporal remove. I argue that the text's archival and postmemorial impulse results in a spectral remainder that haunts the periphery of the narrative, allowing Sebald to consider the impact of the Holocaust while seldom addressing its events directly.

Austerlitz differs markedly from the other texts I consider as it is the only text written by a non-Jewish author. Unlike *Maus* the postmemory conveyed in this text, is at least in part the postmemory of a descendent of perpetrators or at least bystanders rather than victims. Sebald's position as a second generation German writer becomes specifically interesting when one considers the threat of co-option inherent to the mechanisms of postmemory[56]. For while, as Eva Hoffman points out, the second generation descendants of survivors experienced an "anguished and sometimes excessive identification with the parental past, the defining gesture for the young Germans was of violent counteridentification" (2004: 123 – 124). This "counteridentification" also introduces a problematic into second generation German literature that must be considered, as Hoffman explains:

> Sympathy for the victim and a reparative urge are the decent responses in genocide's wake. But the desire to impersonate or appropriate the identity of the other in order to disburden oneself of one's own carries with it the risk of inauthenticity and the seed of bad faith. (2004: 123).

The above extract raises an important concern about German postmemory of Jewish lives: the threat that this "counteridentification" may result in the co-option or appropriation of a narrative other than one's own (Hirsch 2002: 76). As will be further discussed, by using a self-conscious narrative mode that highlights its mediated nature Sebald attempts to avoid over identification with the Jewish protagonist (Austerlitz), or co-opting his narrative.

I consider the role played by postmemory in the text by analysing the relationships to memory and narrative epitomised in the characters of the narrator and Austerlitz. This text is particularly interesting in relation to Hirsch's theory of postmemory as one can argue that Austerlitz experiences postmemory of his *own* life as well as that of his parents. In part Austerlitz constructs his memory of his own past through the narrative he

[56] As Hirsch explains: "postmemory . . . would be *retrospective witnessing by adoption*" (2002:76). However Hirsch herself notes the problematic inherent to this statement, she asks "how . . . such identification [can] resist appropriation and incorporation, resist annihilating the distance between self and other"? As we shall see, these questions become specifically interesting when the narrator involved in the project of postmemory is German.

receives from Vera (his childhood nurse and family friend) and the research he does in archives. Hence, he constructs a narrative of his past through a process of imaginative investment, akin to postmemory. Furthermore in considering the postmemory of the German narrator, who, as we shall see, acts as a playful trace to the author himself, may highlight the problems of over-identification and co-option inherent to the process of postmemory. As is suggested by Long, if Sebald is enacting a work of postmemory in the text it is from the subject position of "the descendants of the perpetrator collective" (Long 2007: 59). The fact that the narrator in *Austerlitz* seldom mentions his own past seems significant in this context and may suggest the narrator's inability to address the role his ancestors may have played in the atrocities of Nazi Germany. Furthermore Long suggests that "Sebald's concern with Jewish fates and families can be seen as a substitute for a more difficult engagement with the past that he and his narrators share" (Long 2007: 61). Therefore, it seems important to consider the absence in the text of Sebald's narrator's own familial heritage and past; his engagement not only with Austerlitz's history, but his own.

But is it a novel?

The question of genre has been considered extensively by scholars of Sebald's work; as a result the following paragraphs on genre are in part a summation of these opinions. Like *Maus, Austerlitz* is as concerned with the transmission of the narrative as it is with the content of the narrative itself. As such, the relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz is a prioritised site of engagement. However, unlike *Maus, Austerlitz* is not an autobiography in any direct manner, and is the most directly fictional and novelistic work in Sebald's oeuvre (Zilcosky 2006: 684 – 685). Sebald's work does however serve to problematise distinctions between genres and discourses. In *Austerlitz* there is a blurring of the boundaries between author and narrator, and as we shall see this plays an important role in rendering the boundaries between fact and fiction permeable (Zilcosky 2006: 679). By blurring these boundaries Sebald's text is able to problematise the distinction between the two genres.

Sebald has described *Austerlitz* as "a prose book of indefinite form" (as quoted in Franklin 2002:33), and actively seems to avoid the traditional genre of the novel. In the critical debates that surround Sebald's work and *Austerlitz* the author's tendency to destabilise genre is invariably commented upon (Bere 2002: 184; Long 2003: 117;Pane 2005; Zilcosky 2006: 679), as is the blurring of the boundary between fact and fiction (Zilcosky 2006: 679; Franklin 2002: 33). For Lewis, Sebald has created what she calls "intriguing fictional hybrids" (2001: 32). Here Lewis seems to imply that Sebald is not just amalgamating numerous generic forms, but from this amalgamation creating something distinct, a hybrid. Sebald's texts avoid totalising definitions through their reference to multiple sites of knowledge and meaning, both fictional and non-fictional, and are, in the conventional sense of a plot, almost plotless. This refusal of traditional generic

boundaries is an example of the text's self-reflexivity, which though less overt in *Austerlitz* than in *Maus* or *Everything is Illuminated,* highlights its constructed nature and its provisionality.

Austerlitz is a text that defies stable definitions. In fact, Sebald claims to have "an aversion to the standard novel" (as quoted by Atlas 1999:282). Atlas argues that "the discontinuities of the unconscious are the mainstay of his [Sebald's] art" (1999:281). This explains the often tangential narration, the long fluid sentences, the near absence of paragraphs and the many digressions on topics that range from zoology to architecture, inherent to the content and structure of *Austerlitz.* As a result the text emerges as a patchwork of oblique references and multiple digressions, loosely sutured together. Sebald, borrowing from Levi-Strauss, dubs his method *bricholage* (Atlas 1999:282). Falconer describes Sebald's method as the creation of texts that "are stitched together from fragments" to form a narrative (2001). *Austerlitz* takes the form of an elongated dialogue between the two men, in which Austerlitz recounts both his memories and numerous digressions on his interest in architecture. It is a text that is made up of an archive of fragments, pieces of information loosely tied together. Rather than the singular linear teleology presented in the traditional novel, the text suggests human experience is made up of fragments of memory, whose meaning remains elusive. The archive, therefore, becomes the perfect metaphor to describe Sebald's work.

His use of the technique of *bricholage,* weaving a series of fragments of history and fiction together, suggests perhaps an archivist's approach to narrative. One of the most illuminating examples of this technique can be found in the narrator's first visit to Breendonk[57]:

> Black striations began to quiver before my eyes, and I had to rest my forehead against the wall, which was gritty, covered with bluish spots, and seemed to me to be perspiring with cold beads of sweat. It was not that as the nausea rose in me I guessed at the kind of third-degree interrogations which were being conducted around here around the time when I was born, since it was only years later that I read Jean Améry's description of the dreadful physical closeness between torturers and their victims, and of the torture he himself suffered in Breendonk when he was hoisted aloft by his hands, tied behind his back, so that with a crack and a splintering sound which, as he says, he had not yet forgotten when he came to write his account (Sebald 2001: 33 – 34).

Later in this passage we are given the name not only of the text from which this account was taken but specific page numbers. In the above we can see the movement that occurs so often in the text, from the narrator's individual memory to specific cultural, historic and literary references. In this instance, rather than allowing his German narrator to introduce the crimes committed against the human body at Breendonk, Sebald narrates these atrocities with reference to Jean Améry who was held and tortured at Breendonk. This allows Sebald to discuss these terrible actions, but only from a mediated distance, made possible through an

[57] Breendonk was an internment camp set up by the Germans in Belgium from August 1940. Those imprisoned there included Jews and members of the Belgian underground.

intertextual reference rather than a direct description. By invoking Jean Améry, Sebald not only invokes the incidents mentioned, but Améry's texts and historical context as well. The effect of this is to distance the German narrator form his Jewish subjects and as a result co-option is prevented. Anderson makes the following comment regarding the references and documents Sebald incorporates into his texts:

> [T]he dilemma posed by all the "documents" in Sebald's texts, which point not so much to the reality of their representations as to the limitations of the human subject looking at them across an unbridgeable temporal divide (2003: 111).

According to Anderson, the references to documents in Sebald's text does not serve to validate the reality of their representations, but rather to reinforce the temporal remove and mediated distance of the past. The past in *Austerlitz* and this is true of all the texts of postmemory we will consider, is only accessible in a highly mediated form. The complex fusion of multiple texts that are included in *Austerlitz,* suggest an archival impulse, an impulse to draw together often disparate fragments of the past, and in this case allowing Sebald to discuss the violence committed at Breendonk without co-opting the narratives of the victims.

Sebald's text in its content and form seems to express an awareness of the debates surrounding the representation of the Holocaust; not only regarding the difficulty imposed on the second and third generation by their temporal and spatial remove from the events, but of the inadequacy of language when faced with the Holocaust (as described by Lyotard in *The Differend*). Evidently this is not a problem exclusively faced by authors of the second and third generation, but rather by all those who seek to represent the Holocaust in language, including the survivors themselves. The text's hesitance in its encounter with the Holocaust, which remains a haunting presence at the periphery of the text rather that an overt concern, suggests the possibility that both knowledge and language fail when faced with the events of the Holocaust. The description of the narrator's aforementioned visits to Breendonk, which becomes a metonym that allows the narrator to reference the concentration camps indirectly, is particularly marked by this awareness:

> Even now, when I try to remember them, when I look back at the crab-like plan of Breendonk and read the words of the captions – *Former Office, Printing Works, Huts, Jacques Ochs Hall, Solitary Confinement Cell, Mortuary, Relics Store and Museum* – the darkness does not lift but becomes yet heavier as I think how little we can hold in mind, how everything is constantly lapsing into oblivion with every extinguished life, how the world is, as it were, draining itself, in that the history of countless places and objects which themselves have no power of memory is never heard, never described or passed on (Sebald 2001:31).

The history represented by Breendonk is shown to be in excess of what one "can hold in mind", the narrator's attempts to think about his experiences at Breendonk are thwarted by a darkness that only grows "heavier", that threatens to lapse constantly into oblivion. Breendonk comes to represent a larger lacuna in both thought and language when encountered with the Holocaust, an event that many argue is in excess of our ability to comprehend it.

As with *Maus*, in order to come to terms with the form and content of the narrative one must, at least briefly, consider the rather complex relationship between fact and fiction in the text (see Franklin 2002:33). This complexity is most easily seen in the fact that the text itself plays with the possibility that it may be a real account. The numerous photographs in the text which seem initially to verify the reality of the narrative being recounted simultaneously problematise any sense of direct referentiality[58]. Furthermore, the numerous references to actual historical events, real buildings and contexts give the text an illusion of reality as a result of a complex accumulation of detail. Sebald in a number of interviews was intent on underlining that his characters were based on real sources (Cuomo 2007:111). However, the text's indeterminate genre and plot complicate its links to reality. The most direct instance of a self-reflexive engagement with the process of its own construction in the text is near the end of the narrative where Austerlitz passes on the key to his apartment to the narrator. Thus only in retrospect does "it become . . . clear that the plot is not simply the result of Austerlitz's narration, but in addition, if not much more so the product of the narrator's emplotment – of his bricholage" (Eshel 2003: 80). Furthermore, as we will see in what follows, the text highlights the fact that much of what we remember is tenuous and subject to erasure, thus in retrospect rendering all of the text's content indeterminate. This self-reflexive moment in the novel, therefore, renders everything that has come before it as provisional.

Sebald's text represents the past as remembered and narrated while simultaneously showing the extreme frailty of human memory. As Anderson argues, key to the ethics of Sebald's project is "*not* presenting history as a seamless, seemingly empty objective narrative of "real" events" (emphasis author's own) (2003: 110). He goes on to add that "the narrator seems to present those lives without mediation, not as they 'really happened,' but as they were 'really reported' to him" (Anderson 2003: 107). By focussing on the narratives as reported, thus subjective and mediated, rather than as historically accurate, Sebald emphasises the importance of the individual experience of the event without suggesting that these narratives are authoritative as they remain riddled with the gaps and lacunae inherent to human memory. This self-conscious engagement with the manner in which the past is received, especially the emphasis on the constructed and limited nature of memory, seems to suggest the text's own provisionality and its mediated distance from the past.

[58] This point is discussed in some detail in Anderson, M. 2003. "The Edge of Darkness: On W. G. Sebald" in *October* (106, Fall) pp. 102 – 121.

Sebald's use of narrator seems to simultaneously reinforce and problematise the text's link to the external world. The narrator's role is essential in mediating our access to Austerlitz's story. Franklin makes the following comment regarding the role of the narrator in Sebald's texts:

> [M]ost of Sebald's characters tell their stories through direct encounters with the narrator, in monologues. At a crucial moment in some of the monologues, Sebald will switch from third person, so that the narrator vanishes, leaving the character behind. Since he does not use quotation marks, the shift is seamless (2002:34).

Therefore at these critical moments in the narrative the narrator seems to disappear, leaving only the character's voice, allowing the character (in this case Austerlitz) to speak for himself. This method shows an attempt to allow Austerlitz to 'tell' his own story. In response to this phenomenon Crownshaw argues that:

> In making the boundaries between his words and those of Austerlitz indistinct, the narrator foregrounds the inevitability of the narrative reconstruction of someone else's life, just as Austerlitz's slow and painful recollection of his parents and his origins is inevitably a reconstruction of their lives (2004: 216).

I agree with Crownshaw in his contention that at some points the boundaries between the characters become indistinct; this is made structurally clear by the lack of quotation marks used when a character is giving a direct address. However it is worth emphasising that this blurring is often no more than momentary and the distinction between characters is quickly reiterated by the repeated "Austerlitz said" that punctuate the narrative. Thus, it is during both the moments when the distinction between the two voices is blurred, as well as when the distinction is reiterated that the narrative self-consciously reflects on the process of its construction and emphasises its mediated nature.

The relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz is given further complexity by the fact that the narrator is a non-Jewish German, and is thus simultaneously associated with Austerlitz's suffering (via postmemorial association) and with the violence of the perpetrators. This uncomfortable dual association is made clear in the following extract:

> However, if I could not envisage the drudgery performed day after day, year after year, at Breendonk and all the other main and branch camps, when I finally entered the fort itself and glanced through the glass panes of a door on the right into the so-called mess of the SS guards with its scrubbed tables and benches, its bulging stove and the various adages neatly painted on its wall in Gothic lettering, I could well imagine the sight of the good fathers and dutiful sons from Vilsbiburg and Fuhlsbüttel, from the Black Forest and the Bavarian Alps, sitting here when they came off duty to play cards or write letters to their loved ones at home. After all, I had lived among them until my twentieth year. (Sebald 2001:29).

This description of the "dutiful sons" and "good fathers" among whom the narrator grew up is juxtaposed against two descriptions of the tortures that occurred at Breendonk. By naming these SS officers "sons" and "fathers" suggests the narrator's intimacy with the men, however the adjectives "dutiful" and "good" carry at least a slight tinge of irony (To whom are they good, and dutiful; from what perspective?). The

indeterminate nature of the narrator's description of Breendonk and the difficulty he has remembering his trip there provides further insights: "My memory of the fourteen stations which the visitor to Breendonk passes between the entrance and exit has clouded over in the course of time . . . whether because I did not want to see what it had to show or because all the outlines seemed to merge in a world illuminated only by a few electric bulbs" (2001: 29-30). We are given two opposing reasons for his lack of memory. The second of which is pragmatic (the light was indistinct). The first subtly suggests the hesitance of the German narrator to see, figuratively to know or understand, the crimes committed by the "dutiful sons and fathers" who he had envisioned writing love letters and playing cards and the likes of whom he had lived among. This is juxtaposed with the harsh visceral and bodily account of Améry's torture: "when he was hoisted aloft by his hands, tied behind his back, so that with a crack and a splintering sound which, as he says, he had not yet forgotten . . . his arms dislocated from the sockets in his shoulder joints, and he was left dangling as they were wrenched up behind him" (Sebald 2001: 34). Unlike the narrator's unwillingness to remember, in this very visceral account Améry cannot forget, even if he wished to, the sound made when his arms were dislocated. The narrator in referencing Améry's own "description of the dreadful physical closeness between the torturers and their victims" (Sebald 2001: 33), prioritises this testimony over his own speculations. Unlike the anecdotal nature of the narrator's vision of the SS mess hall, the descriptions of torture are grounded in the words of others and through reference to the testimony of those who had experienced torture in Breendonk.

One cannot account for the role of history and memory in *Austerlitz* or discuss the complex structure of the text without first addressing the role of the narrator in *Austerlitz* and his relationship with Austerlitz. Anderson argues that the function of the Sebaldian narrator (and here he is speaking in rather general terms) is to "listen and bear witness. All of Sebald's books depend on this unbalanced narrative relationship between a protagonist whose richly documented life makes up the bulk of the story and a laconic, virtually invisible narrator to whom the story is told" (2003: 106). Long suggests that Sebald's hybrid form of prose fiction is inherently linked to, and manifests itself within, the relationship between the narrating voice and the past he represents, which in the case of *Austerlitz* is not his own. In considering the role of the non-Jewish narrator in *Austerlitz,* Garloff contends that "[b]y narrating Austerlitz's story and simultaneously exploring the narrator's investment in his story, Sebald re-establishes the grounds of narrative legitimacy" (2006:158). While, as mentioned above, the narrative allows a slippage between the first person narration of the narrator and his third person narration of Austerlitz, allowing Austerlitz to convey his narrative in the first person, I have argued that the role of the narrator as distinct from Austerlitz remains clear. Sebald himself seems aware of the dangers of writing a text on the Holocaust, specifically from the subject position of a German gentile. Sebald makes the following comments in this regard:

> I think certainly for a German gentile to write about Jewish lives is not unproblematic. There are examples that, writers attempting this in German in the 1960s and 70s, and many of these attempts are . . . shameful. In the sense that they usurp the lives of these people (as quoted in Cuomo 2007: 112)

Furthermore he states: "the likes of us ought to try to say how they received these stories. But there isn't a self-evident way of going about it" (ibid). The multiple mediation employed in this text, for example "Vera continued, said Austerlitz" (Sebald 2001: 246), is an attempt by Sebald to avoid co-opting the narrative he relates. The narrative is mediated both by the narrator and by the limits of Austerlitz's own memory. Austerlitz's memory of his past is mediated by the memory of others, just as our reception of the narrative is doubly mediated by Austerlitz and the narrator. As a literary device the narrator's mediation of the narrative we receive provides a distancing effect "because his presence highlights the level of mediation and reconstruction of the past" (Garloff, 2006: 166), thereby, perhaps, preventing the possible dangers of co-option suggested by the dynamic of postmemory.

We are told very little about the narrator himself in the text other than a few elusive details, as seen in the following: "soon after my return [to the United Kingdom] I went through a difficult period which dulled my sense of other people's existence, and from which I only very gradually emerged by turning back to the writing I had long neglected" (Sebald 2001:46). In instances such as this in the text we are given only the barest details of the narrator's life; that he was born in Germany, that he chooses to live in the United Kingdom, and that he is a writer or has an interest in writing. The details that are given produce a playful link between the unnamed narrator and the author, thus further rendering the generic boundaries permeable. By aligning himself with the narrator, Sebald allows the narrator to become his "uncanny" double[59]. Sebald, however, cautions his readers (in an interview with Arthur Lubow) not to confuse the narrator with an "authentic person" and by extension the narrator should not be confused with Sebald himself (Lubow 2007:169). However, while one must not overstate the relationship between Sebald and the narrator in

[59] The double is, in Freud's formulation, a key theme in the experience of the feeling he called the 'uncanny'[59]. He goes on to add that the double was originally an assurance "against the destruction of the ego" and a denial of the power of death, a result of the unbounded self-love of primary narcisim which Freud claimed dominates the mind of the child (1955:235). Thus the double, at least initially is related to subject definition. Furthermore Freud explains that: "when this stage has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (*ibid*). Bresnick argues that in the case of the 'double':

> The uncanny thus would not merely be something a given subject experiences, but the experience that momentarily undoes the factitious monological unity of the ego , producing what Freud describes as an effect of "doubling, dividing and interchanging of self" (234). (Bresnick 1996: 117)

The double, therefore results in a feeling of the uncanny as is calls into question the illusory unity of the ego. Thus the subject as bounded and singular is destabilised. In the familiar evasiveness of Freud's essay (its own uncanniness perhaps) this point is never clarified but should be linked back to Freud's definition of the 'uncanny' as nothing "new or alien, but something that is familiar . . . which has become alienated . . . through the process of repression" (155:241). Furthermore, Nicholas Royal argues that the double is always ghostly and can never be separated from the concept of *déjà vu,* and as a result from repetition (it is always already a revenant) (Royal 2003:183).

Austerlitz it is also clear that Sebald leaves subtle hints in his text connecting himself with the narrator that cannot be overlooked. It is precisely this intellectual uncertainty created by the subtle similarities between Sebald and his narrator that creates this uncanny doubling; where the boundaries between the world and the text, between fiction and reality become blurred. Furthermore, these playful references in the text linking the narrator and the author are also a tool of the text's self reflexivity, both suggesting a link to the world outside the boundaries of the text, and making this link to the real world uncertain an indeterminate, thus further rendering the boundaries of the text porous.

In *Austerlitz* structure, form and content are inextricably linked. The structure of the text defies traditional definitions of a novel and its content evades any attempts to relegate it to a single genre. Like *Maus*, the text's generic blurring serves not only as a literary device often associated with postmodernism, but to further the text's thematics, which in *Austerlitz's* case are, among others: the fragile nature of memory, our indeterminate links to the past and the (im)possibility of narrating the Holocaust. As we shall discuss in further detail, Sebald's text is archival in its attempts to draw together numerous seemingly disconnected fragments of information, narrative and images. The text's archival nature is essential to understanding its relationship to memory and history. In addition, the relationship between the narrator and Austerlitz, further suggests the indeterminate nature of the text. While on occasion the narrator's voice seems to fade allowing Austerlitz the opportunity to 'speak' for himself, this is undercut by the emphasis that his narrative is mediated through the consciousness and memory of the narrator. The element that links all these aspects of the text together is the emphasis they all place on the text's provisionality, its perpetual evasion of stable definitions or the authority of fact and history, all of which link to the text's thematics which emphasise the fragile nature of memory and our very provisional links to the past through history.

Uncanny Structure: Spectral Repetition in *Austerlitz*

In what follows I consider *Austerlitz's* uncanny structure of spectral repetition in an effort to illustrate the text's engagement with the events of the past and their presence in the present. In my analysis I consider the repetition inherent to the workings of the text, showing its very structure to be uncanny: the text haunts itself via doubling and repetition. I am interested in the manner in which this doubling, repetition and haunting in the content and structure of the text come to intersect with the text's work of postmemory. Furthermore, the use of these techniques allows Sebald to reference the Holocaust while seldom mentioning it directly. While others have noted the importance of the uncanny and the spectral in Sebald's work in general, few have considered its importance in *Austerlitz* in specific.

Hoffman explains that the second generation experiences its relationship to the past as uncanny: as the experience of dealing with shadows and being haunted by the spectres of the past (2004: 66). This is nowhere more evident than in Sebald's *Austerlitz* where the relationship between the protagonist and the past is invariably described as uncanny or spectral. Austerlitz is often quite literally haunted by his past. Freud defines the uncanny as the return of the familiar as unfamiliar: "the "uncanny' is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud 1955:241). Some critics (including Nicholas Royal and Hélèn Cixous) have commented on Freud's eagerness to excise Jentsch's (1906) conception of the uncanny as the result of intellectual uncertainty, from his own formulation (*see* Freud 1955: 221). In opposing Freud, Bresnick argues that intellectual uncertainty is essential to the experience of the uncanny (1996:114). Similarly Royal states that:

> The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself . . . seems strangely questionable. The uncanny is the crisis of the proper (2003:1).

This version of the uncanny is indispensible for my understanding of the uncanny in the text as the instances of the uncanny in the novel occur when Austerlitz feels his own memories and selfhood called into question, or when the reader experiences intellectual uncertainty and confusion in relation to the text.

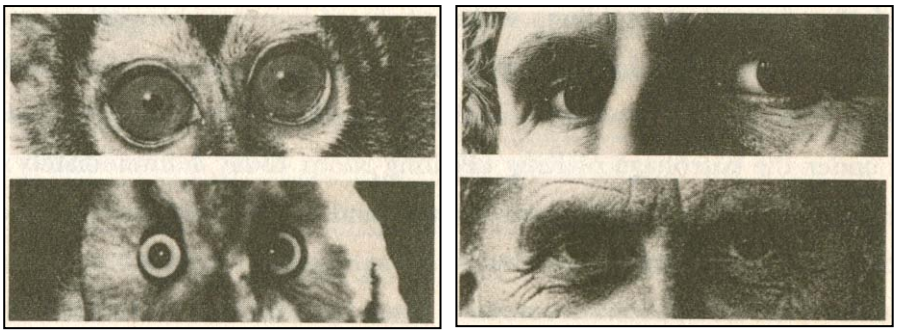


Figure 3.1: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books. Pp. 3.

To a certain degree my discussion will remain in keeping with Freud's notion of the uncanny. The uncanny in *Austerlitz* is also derived from the return of Austerlitz's repressed memories. It is important however to retain the link between the uncanny and intellectual uncertainty when considering *Austerlitz* with special reference to those points of the text where the boundary between the real and the unreal is blurred; where fiction and non-fiction seem to merge and the boundary between the two is called into question; and where temporality loses its linearity and collapses in on itself. Furthermore, these two understandings of the uncanny are often linked in the text. At instances where the reader is struck by intellectual uncertainty which he/she may experience as uncanny, Austerlitz is often being faced with the resurgence of repressed memories.

As Royal explains, that the uncanny is a "peculiar comingling of the familiar and the unfamiliar (2003:1). It is also linked (like the spectre) to "a sense of repetition or 'coming back' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat" (Royle 2003:1). Therefore the uncanny in the text has often been linked to doubling and repetition. The constant repetition of images and themes is central to Sebald's aesthetic and, as Michael Silverblatt has suggested in an interview with Sebald, allows Sebald to refer to the "invisible referent" of the Holocaust and the Concentration Camp (Silverblatt 2007:79). This "invisible referent" becomes an absent presence (or a present absence) in the text; a haunting absence that is experienced as presence, much like a spectre. The spectre, according to Derrida, is neither absent nor present, one cannot know it because "this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge" (1994: 4- 5). As Sebald explains (in the aforementioned interview): "So the only way in which one can approach these things [the events of the Holocaust], in my view, is obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation" (as quoted in Silverblatt 2007:80). Thus by evoking the strange experience of the uncanny and the spectral via the circular repetition and return inherent to the text's structure, Sebald is able to obliquely turn the reader's attention toward that which is not directly mentioned but haunts the text, the history of the Holocaust and of the Concentration Camps.

The opening scenes of *Austerlitz* suggest just such a series of doubles and repetitions. First we encounter two sets of eyes; two pairs of eyes of nocturnal animals and two pairs of eyes said to belong to "certain painters or philosophers who seek to penetrate the darkness" (see figure 3.1) (Sebald 2001:3). The eyes of the painters or philosophers are the doubles of the eyes of the nocturnal creatures, both of which are designed to "penetrate the darkness", only in different ways. The animal's eyes literally penetrate the darkness of the night, but the eyes of the painters or philosophers penetrate the darkness by bringing to light ideas that would have remained hidden (a painter in painting an object in such a way as to illustrate something about it that had been hidden, and a philosopher in attempting to explain the world whose mechanisms are obscured by an absence of reason, or knowledge). Furthermore, this image and the description that accompanies it seem to foreshadow a key thematic concern of the text, the attempt to penetrate darkness. In this instance it is not the literal darkness, but the darkness that obscures history and memory, within the text that remains largely impenetrable, as well as the darkness of the Holocaust, which seems to evade any attempts to understand it. Thus Austerlitz in his attempt to penetrate the darkness of his past becomes yet another double for the philosophers presented in figure 3.1. Similarly, the narrator (and perhaps the author) is yet another double in his attempt to penetrate the darkness of the Holocaust with his narrative. We can see therefore, that even in this early example, the numerous layers of doubles and repetition extend to suggest many of the text's thematics, specifically: the darkness that obscures history, memory and the events of the past.

Similarly the narrator sees the Antwerp station as a double for a zoo, and the passengers awaiting trains become doubles of the animals in the noctorama (Sebald 2001: 5). The numerous images of train stations provide a series of doubles throughout the text. The image of the train station is noteworthy as it carries multiple significations. Firstly train stations come to refer to Austerlitz's own history, his arrival in England in the *Kindertransport*, and the probable deportation of his parents in trains to ghettos or/and concentration camps. When discussing the Antwerp station the ghost of Austerlitz's own, unknown past is subtly evoked: "[i]n his studies of railway architecture, he said . . . he could never quite shake off thoughts of the agony of leave-taking and the fear of foreign places" (Sebald 2001:16). The fear and agony of travel that this quote mentions clearly refers, unbeknownst to him, to his own childhood dislocation and separation from his country and family. Secondly, the trains have become significant images in the emerging iconography of the Holocaust, representing the deportation of the Jews of Europe to concentration camps and ghettos. Finally, both the references to trains and rail networks suggest the increased mobility that accompanied the advent of the train that was so central to modernity (which is an important concern in the text). Furthermore, the image of the train is also part of a series of reflections and doubles; as Silverblatt explains "the train recalls a fortress, and there's a gradual opening out, an unfolding of structures and interpositions" (2007: 79). Austerlitz's discussion of train stations with the narrator leads into a discussion of military fortifications and architecture which ultimately leads the narrator to visit Breendonk. The fortress at Breendonk then becomes a double for a concentration camp, the destination of those Jews who were housed in Breendonk during the Nazi occupation of Belgium. These series of reflections and doubles lead us back to that which is so central to the text, but remains on its periphery, the Holocaust.

The text's structure is uncanny in its use of doubling and repetition, this doubling allows it to refer to the present absence of the Holocaust in the text, furthermore this repetitive structure make the text's structure spectral. In fact, *Austerlitz* is a text in which the protagonist's relationship to the past takes the form of a haunting. Freud states in "The Uncanny" (1955) that: "[m]any people experience the feeling [of the uncanny] in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead and to the spirits and ghosts" (1955:241). The uncanny in *Austerlitz* is also indelibly linked to the ghostly, the spectral and to haunting. Sebald's engagement with the ghostly in this text frequently occurs by showing the boundary between the present and the past, the living and the dead to be permeable. This idea of the spectral is also a way of representing the ways in which the present is still effected by the events of the past. Sebald makes the following statement in an interview:

> I have always had at the back of my mind this notion that of course these people [the dead] aren't really gone, they just hover somewhere at the perimeter of our lives and keep coming in on brief visits. And photographs are for me, as it were, one of the emanations of the dead (as quoted in Wachtel 2007:41).

He similarly states in an interview with Lubow that:

> These borders between the dead and the living are not hermetically sealed. . . [t]here is some form of travel or gray zone. If there is a feeling, especially among unhappy people, that there is such a thing as a living death, then it is possible that the *reverse* is also true (emphasis author's own) (as quoted by Lublow 2007: 160)

While the above should not necessarily be taken literally, it suggests, that one should always be aware that one is not free from the influence of the dead, their actions in the past and the effect of these actions in the present. The permeable nature of the boundaries between the living and the dead, which Sebald has suggested in interviews, is clearly integral to a reading of *Austerlitz*, as can be seen in the following statement made by Austerlitz regarding his childhood interactions with the local cobbler who had a reputation for seeing ghosts: "it was certainly Evan [the blacksmith], said Austerlitz, who once told me that nothing but a piece of silk . . . separates us from the next world" (Sebald 2001: 76). It is precisely at the points where there seems to be a slippage between the past and the present, the living and the dead, where intellectual uncertainty becomes uncanny. The spectral nature of Austerlitz's relationship to the past in the text suggests the boundary between the past and present to be permeable, and in so doing the author is often able to suggest the continuing effects the events of the past retain in the present.

In its emphasis on the lasting impact of the past on the present Sebald's text seems to make a similar plea to that made in the 'Exordium' to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994). In the 'Exordium' to his remarkable text Derrida bids us:

> [T]o learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But live *with them.* (1994: xvii – xviii)

Derrida goes on to say that this "*being-with* spectres would also be, not only but also, a politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations" (1994: xviii). It seems to me that this is central to Sebald's work of postmemory, to learn to live with the dead and to live with a past that, like a spectre, cannot be put to rest. This seems to be the ethical imperative implied by Sebald's text. Even though ghosts and spectres do not exist one must learn to live among them, learn to live among the present absences of our past that cannot be laid to rest and should not be ignored.

Austerlitz seems to be concerned with spectres of violence whose presence continues to be felt in the present, not only the violence of the Holocaust but the violence of European history. When Austerlitz describes Antwerp station, he evokes the violence carried out during the growing national zeal and capitalist expansion that fuelled colonisation. In this description Austerlitz explains how Belgium, "a little patch of yellowish grey barely visible on the map of the world, spread its sphere of influence to the African continent with its colonial enterprises, when deals of huge proportions were done on the capital markets and raw-

materials exchanges of Brussels, and the citizens of Belgium, full of boundless optimism, believed their country . . . was about to become a great new economic power" (Sebald 2001: 9). Hence Antwerp station comes to signify the "deities of the nineteenth century – mining, industry, transport, trade and capital" as well as the atrocities carried out in their name (specifically we are drawn to recollect the particularly violent nature of the colonial rule that took place under King Leopold) (Sebald 2001: 13). This is made apparent, a few pages later, in the following statement: "Austerlitz spoke at length about the marks of pain which, as he said he well knew, trace countless fine lines through history" (Sebald 2001: 16). This statement highlights what seems to be one of the text's key concerns: the manner in which the pain of the past marks both history and the present.

Some critics have criticised Sebald's portrayal of the Holocaust in Austerlitz, arguing that it suggests that the Holocaust was the inevitable culmination of modernity and the emerging zeal for rationality of the enlightenment (see Eshel 2003: 88 – 89). This argument states that in so doing Sebald absolves the perpetrators of guilt by showing the Holocaust to be inevitable and therefore suggesting it to be an event free from individual agency. Using the images of trains as his starting point Eshel makes just this point: "[t]he railway system and its 'time' . . . signify both modernity's promise and its perils, both humanities seeming freedom from the boundaries of nature and the all-encompassing, unprecedented alienation of humans, leading to their transformation to human material in the death camps" (2003: 87). Thus in Eshel's reading of Sebald, the dehumanisation of Jews in concentration camps is presented as the inevitable outcome of modernity. While this argument is evocative it seems to ignore the subtleties of Sebald's project. Charles Simic states that "[i]n his books Sebald has always been interested in the way in which individual, collective and cultural experiences deal with experiences that lie on the boarder of what language can convey" (2007: 155), the most striking of which is the experience of the Holocaust. By referencing the history of modernity and its violence, using various techniques of mirroring and doubling, Sebald seeks to evoke the ghosts of the Holocaust while mentioning them as little as possible.

The violence of the European past and the spectral presence of the Holocaust, through a series of uncanny doublings, are represented in the text as inscribed on objects and buildings, as inherent to one's physical environment. Important to Freud's conception of the uncanny, is the German version of this word, '*unheimliche*' which is more literally translated as 'unhomely'. This link between the uncanny and the 'unhomely' is often literalised in Austerlitz's relationship to place in the text. Austerlitz's sense of the uncanny is often sparked when an unfamiliar place is in fact familiar, or when an object recognises him rather than the other way around. In *Austerlitz* "[m]emories that cannot be shaken off are . . . represented in

spatial terms"[60] (Ceuppens 2004: 197); architecture and objects become ciphers for events and histories that lie at the borders of what can be spoken. Austerlitz is continually interested in the architecture of train stations and networks and discussions of architecture make up most of his conversations with the narrator. Buildings in the text are shown to be built on a palimpsest of history, which they often seek to erase. An important example of this is the Liverpool street station that Austerlitz visits during his nocturnal excursions through London. He describes feeling " a kind of heartache which, as I was beginning to sense was caused by a vortex of past time" (Sebald 2001: 182). He goes on to explain that the site on which the station now stands was once marshy meadows which during the Little Ice Age were used for ice skating, and later on the same site a hospital for the insane was built. He elaborates in stating the following: "I often wondered whether the pain and suffering accumulated on this site over the centuries had ever really ebbed away" (Sebald 2001: 183). The site itself and the building on it become a palimpsest where the pain of the past is layered, and remains present to be sensed as "a cold breath of air" on his forehead. Similarly:

> Sometimes, so Lemoine told me, said Austerlitz, he felt the current of time streaming around his temples and brow when he was up there [the eighteenth floor of the New Bibliothéque Nationale], but perhaps, he added, that is only a reflex of the awareness formed in my mind over the years by the various layers which have been superimposed on each other to form the carapace of the city. Thus, on the waste land between the marshalling yard of the Gare d'Austerlitz and the Pont Tolbiac where this Babylonian library now rises, there stood until the end of the war an extensive warehousing complex to which the Germans brought all the loot they had taken from the homes of the Jews of Paris (Sebald 2001: 401).

It is worth noting that when standing atop the New Bibliothéque Nationale Lemoine experiences the current of time around him, as well as the awareness of the way in which the city over time becomes a palimpsest of the past. The new building, a symbol of national pride, seeks to obscure and erase an unpleasant element of France's past, their collaboration with the Nazis. However, in Sebald's description the past is not erased, but layered. There seems to be a dual reference at work here, both referring to a public history that cannot be ignored or covered over as well as a metaphor for those memories that Austerlitz seeks to erase but that inevitably come to light.

Similarly, a particularly interesting example of the uncanny and of the intrusion of the past into the present in the text occurs during Austerlitz's visit with Marie de Verneuil, to Marienbad. Yet again, it is a familiar yet unfamiliar place that sparks in Austerlitz a sense of the uncanny. Austerlitz met Marie during his time working in the records department of the Bibiothéque National in Paris, and she becomes one of his few friends mentioned in the course of the text and perhaps his only chance at a romantic connection. In this part of the narrative Austerlitz describes himself as becoming increasingly withdrawn from his companion. He senses other presences around him, he feels surrounded by "mysterious signs and portents" and feels that

[60] Here Ceuppens is referring to the use of architecture in *The Emigrants* but this statement is equally informative, if not more so, with regards to *Austerlitz*.

the "silent façades of the buildings knew something ominous about" him (Sebald 2001: 304). It is in fact the familiarity (the homeliness) of Marienbad that creates this uncanny sensation in Austerlitz. The walls themselves seem to have knowledge of him that he does not possess; they are familiar with him, but not familiar to him.

Not only is the uncanny in this text linked to architecture and buildings, but also to the disruption and collapse of linear temporality. For Derrida the spectre is in excess of any traditional conception of temporality; in excess of any present as present (1994: xix). Like the uncanny, the temporality of the spectre suggests repetition. As Derrida suggests: "[a] question of repetition: a spectre is always a *revenant.* One cannot control its comings and goings because it is always coming back." (1994: 11) Ceuppens explains this as follows:

> The spectre is a revenant, a 'thing' that keeps coming back, especially when you least expect it. It is a past one would like to shake off but never quite can, a metaphor for the kind of inheritance one can never really assume, since it is not simply given but imposes itself (2004: 194).

Similarly it can be argued that the narrative temporality in *Austerlitz* suggests precisely the temporality of a haunting. A past that will not leave the present alone, that is contemporaneous with the present. A past that is never truly put to rest, that returns. As Derrida explains the spectre renders the distinction between the past and the present porous[61]. Derrida further explicates this connection as follows:

> If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence non-presence, non-effectivity, simulacrum in general, and so forth. There is first of all the doubtful contemporeinity of the present with itself (1994: 39).

Spectrality is that which collapses the binary between the past and the present (but also the present and the future or the future to come)[62] (Derrida 1994:40). The very notion of the spectre collapses teleology as thought of as the linking of ordered presents. Sebald's text undermines general linear temporality in two ways: first, by making the boundaries that separate the living from the dead, and the present from the past permeable; and second, by rejecting the tyranny of linear time. Thinking of the uncanny or the spectral in

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[61] This slippage between the present and the past that Sebald's text repeatedly explores, relates to what Derrida calls a *Spectrality Effect:*

> Before knowing whether one can differentiate between the spectre of the past and the spectre of the future, of the past present and the future present, one must perhaps ask oneself whether the s*pectrality effect* does not consist in undoing this opposition, or even this dialectic, between actual, effective presence and its other (1994:48).

The *spectrality effect* suggests an instant where the distinction between the past present and future present collapses. In those moments of haunting or spectrality where Austerlitz is no longer able to differentiate between the past and the present the border between temporalities is erased and the character experiences a *spectrality effect.*

[62] Derrida's conception of time in *Spectres of Marx* cannot be separated from the messianic. As Derrida states "[a]t bottom the spectre is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back; in the future" (2001: 39).

relation to *Austerlitz* cannot be separated from the cyclical temporality of return that Eshel argues is a key trope in the text (Eshel 2003: 78). This is evident not only in the return of the dead and the past, but also the return of the characters to a number of key sites. The most notable of these is the fort at Breendonk.

Austerlitz questions and undermines notions of linear time, often presenting us with a temporality of deferral and repetition. Amir Eshel considers *Austerlitz* in terms of what he calls a *poetics of suspension* by which he means "a poetics that suspends notions of chronology, succession, comprehension and closure" (2003:73). Our understanding of time[63] in the text as constructed is enhanced by considering the following quote:

> Time, said Austerlitz. . ., was by far the most artificial of all our interventions, and in being bound to the planet turning on its own axis was no less arbitrary than would be, say, a calculation based on the growth of trees or the duration required for a piece of limestone to disintegrate (Sebald 2001: 141-142).

Austerlitz's resistance to standardised time can be linked to the text's attempt to undermine any vision of temporality as the linear progression of self enclosed presents. Austerlitz suggests a sense of temporality where the present is shaped by and inseparable from the events of the past, caught in an uncanny cycle of repetition and return. More personally, Austerlitz states the following when discussing his own relation to time, and though it is rather a long passage it is worth quoting in full:

> In fact, said Austerlitz, I have never owned a clock of any kind, . . . A clock has always struck me as something ridiculous, a thoroughly mendacious object, perhaps because I have always resisted the power of time out of some internal compulsion which I myself have never understood, keeping myself apart from so-called current events in the hope, as I now think, said Austerlitz, that time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it, and there I shall find everything as it once was, or more precisely that I will find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously, in which case none of what history tells us would be true, past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment when we think of them, although that, of course, opens up the bleak prospect of everlasting misery and never ending anguish" (Sebald 2001: 143-144).

The above aptly shows the dual fear inherent to Austerlitz's characterisation as well as his relation to time; first that the past is gone and irretrievable, and second of the past dwelling eternally in the present (Eshel 2003: 73). This also suggests the text's concern with memory, both that the past is irretrievable, has been erased in memory, and that memory of the past is inescapable. While Austerlitz seems sceptical of any attempts to limit the past to a single place in a linear teleology, he is also afraid of its inevitable or perhaps inescapable presence in the present.

[63] Austerlitz shows time to be a construction specifically linked to the emergence of industrial capitalism. This can be seen in the following: "In fact, said Austerlitz, until railway timetables were synchronised the clocks of Lille and Liége did not keep the same time as the clocks of Ghent and Antwerp, and not until they were all standardised around the middle of the nineteenth century did time truly reign supreme" (Sebald 2001: 14). In so doing Austerlitz shows time not only to be a human construction but also to be linked to the industrialisation of the modern era and the tyranny of rationality and commerce that he links to train stations in his description of the Antwerp station.

Questions of the uncanny and the spectral emerge and intersect most clearly in those moments when Austerlitz's memories of his repressed past emerge; when the borders between the past and the present, the living and the dead are rendered permeable and when the temporal continuity of the text is disrupted. These instances are linked to both definitions of the uncanny that I have mentioned; the uncanny as a result of intellectual uncertainty and as the return of the familiar as unfamiliar in the return of repressed memories. This uncanny 'return' of memory can begin to be seen when Austerlitz describes the nocturnal excursions he would make walking through London under the cover of darkness, and returning via train at dawn. It is in one of these descriptions that the uncanny nature of the return of memory in the text can be most clearly seen:

> As I passed through the stations, I thought several times that among the passengers coming towards me in the tiled passages, on the escalators plunging steeply into the depths, or behind grey windows of a train pulling out, I saw a face known to me from a much earlier part of my life, but I could never say whose it was. . . In fact at this time, usually when I came home from my nocturnal excursions, I began seeing what might be described as shapes and colours of diminished corporeality through a drifting veil or cloud of smoke, images from a faded world: . . . a horse drawn cab in Spitalfields driven by a man in a top hat, a woman wearing the costume of the 1930s" (Sebald 2001: 180).

As Austerlitz comes closer to recalling his lost past, his own sense of the distinction between the past and the present becomes uncertain and it is this uncertainty that creates these uncanny effects. He is quite literally haunted by apparitions of a past that he cannot recollect and which intrude into his present. These moments of 'haunting', can be linked to the distinction made in earlier chapters between deep and common memory. These apparitions that intrude into the present can be likened to the intrusion of deep memory that cannot be incorporated into the linear teleology of common memory. Austerlitz's resistance to a normal view of teleology also suggests the impossibility of incorporating certain events into a linear understanding of time; the memories that make up deep memory resist incorporation into the linear teleology of common memory, and are rather linked to the repetition and intrusion of the spectre.

Austerlitz's description of Liverpool station, itself, seems to have significance in this regard. Austerlitz describes the station (prior to its renovation in the 1980s) as a "kind of entrance to the underworld" (Sebald 2001: 180). This is further illustrated by the photograph that accompanies it (figure 3.2), which shows the station to be almost entirely consumed with darkness with the light appearing as mist across the tracks. The mist-like light visible in the photograph gives the image an ethereal look and in looking at the image one gets the impression that the person wielding the camera is entering a strange world whose contents are almost, but not entirely,



Figure 3.2: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, pp.181.

obscured. It seems significant that the station is described as the "entrance to the underworld," as the underworld is the realm of the dead.

As mentioned earlier, Austerlitz describes the history of the land on which London station was built, and the ways in which this history effects the present. Most significantly he recalls the Bedlam asylum (yet another institution of significance in the text):

> I kept almost obsessively trying to imagine – through the ever-changing maze of walls – the location in that huge space of the rooms where the asylum inmates were confined, and I often wondered whether the pain and the suffering accumulated on this site over the centuries had ever really ebbed away, or whether they might not still, as I sometimes thought when I felt a cold breath on my forehead, be sensed as we pass through them on our way through the station halls" (Sebald 2001: 183).

In this manner Austerlitz (and through him Sebald) seems to suggest the ways in which a site's past haunts its present. This is emphasised in his further descriptions of the site's history. In this rather long description of the station Austerlitz explains that part of the station is built on an old burial ground, which was brought to light during the renovations and excavations of the station in the 1980s. Austerlitz, for reasons he cannot explain, photographs these bodies as they are excavated (see figure 3.3). The picture of these partially excavated bodies seems to suggest a past and a history that will not remain buried. The image of these corpses emerging from the ground conveys more than the description that accompanies them. The image suggests an excess of meaning that the narrative itself could not convey. The city itself, as described by Austerlitz, is seen to be built on a foundation of dead bodies that will not remain hidden.

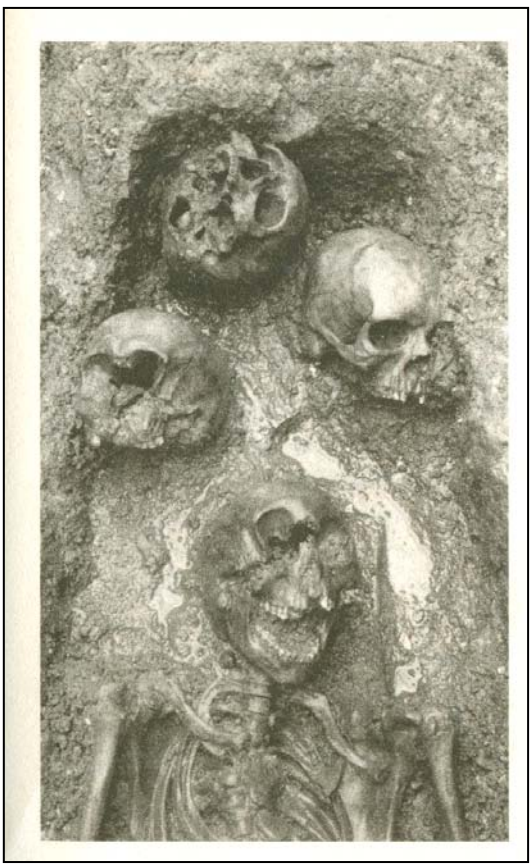


Figure 3.3: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, pp. 185.

As Austerlitz draws closer to recalling his past the text becomes increasingly uncanny, and the tenuous distinction between the past and present becomes increasingly thin. As can be seen in the following extract:

> Perhaps that is why, in the gloomy light of the waiting-room, I also saw two middle-aged people dressed in the style of the thirties, a woman in a light gabardine coat with a hat at an angle on her head, and a thin man beside her wearing a dark suit and a dog-collar. And I not only saw the minister and his wife, said Austerlitz, I also saw the boy they had come to meet.

> He was sitting by himself on a bench over to one side. His legs, in white knee-length socks, did not reach the floor, and but for the small rucksack he was holding on his lap I don't think I would have known him, said Austerlitz (Sebald 2001:193).

This scene occurs concurrently to Austerlitz's very first memory of himself as a young child (ibid). The instance is not described as a memory in and of itself coming from within Austerlitz's psyche, but rather as an actual occurrence that triggers his long buried memories. His past literally returns to haunt him or rather he himself becomes a spectral observer of his own past. In this instance at the moment of Austerlitz's recollection, the narrative's internal temporality shifts from being linear and collapses. Similarly, when Austerlitz visits Terezin Ghetto, where Agatha, his mother, was sent, he has an equally uncanny experience:

> [A] little later, when I was out in the deserted town square again, it suddenly seemed to me, with the greatest clarity, that they had never been taken after all, but were still living crammed into those buildings and basements and attics, as if they were incessantly going up and down the stairs, looking out of windows, moving in vast numbers through the streets and alleys, and even, a silent assembly, filling the entire space occupied by the air, hatched with grey as it was by fine rain (Sebald 2001: 281).

In this instance Austerlitz experiences an uncanny sense that the past and present exist contemporaneously; that time has not passed and that the inhabitants of Terezin are still alive within the Ghetto. Sebald's text gives us the sense that the dead can neither be put to rest nor can they be ignored, that they are never truly absent from the present. With the temporality of the spectre they always return. They are ever present among us, and the text begins to suggest that it becomes an ethical responsibility to acknowledge the presence of the dead among us ('to learn to live with ghosts' (Derrida 1994: xvii – xviii)) and a past that cannot be put to rest.

In *Austerlitz* the uncanny and the spectral become ways to articulate a very specific relationship to temporality and the past. The uncanny is linked to doubling, repetition and mirroring: the text's uncanny structure, through a series of doubles, is able to obliquely reference the events of the Holocaust while seldom referencing these events directly. As a result Sebald is able to bypass a number of the difficulties associated with representing the Holocaust, which is argued to be unrepresentable or at least problematic to represent, (as outlined in my introduction): he represents the Holocaust without representing it. He therefore does not apply closure, coherence and understanding on an event whose very nature evades understanding. In *Austerlitz* the return of repressed events of the past creates not only an uncanny sense of the familiar in the unfamiliar, but an often quite literal, spectral return of the past. This frequently involves a collapse of temporal boundaries as the ghosts of the past intrude on the present and the distinction between past and present begins to crumble. This provides a metaphor that allows Sebald to consider the way that events of the past retain affect in the present, leave traces in the present that cannot be erased. In this new conception of temporality the present is not considered a single moment in a linear trajectory, but rather as a palimpsest of time, from which the pain and corpses of the past may momentarily emerge.

Photography in *Austerlitz*: Trauma, Memory and Spectral Return.

The inclusion of photographs[64] in *Austerlitz* is perhaps its most elusive yet interesting feature, and has been the subject of much critical debate. Sebald's use of photographs in *Austerlitz* extends to include commentary on the nature of the medium itself. The illustrative function of photography in *Austerlitz* is highly provisional. Photographs are furthermore linked to the work of postmemory in the text, and can be seen to be evidence of the narrator's postmemory. In addition, Sebald's narrative and use of photography links it to both memory and trauma. Photographs, therefore, become important to my analysis because of their numerous associations and roles in the text. Primarily, however, I assess whether these photographs come to signify that which cannot be recuperated or assimilated; memory's absence rather than its presence. I consider whether these photographs come to archive and catalogue that which cannot be represented by narrative or language, and come to act as a ghostly supplement to the body of the text.

The photographs Spiegelman uses in *Maus* are directly autobiographical and come to symbolise his postmemorial investment in his parents' past, while simultaneously showing this process of postmemorial investment to be circumscribed by that which cannot be known (by the opaque two dimentionality of photographs and the limited nature of the photographic frame). In contrast, Sebald, for the most part, does not use photographs in *Austerlitz* to illustrate Austerlitz's parents' past (with the exception of the picture of a boy with startling blond curly hair and two photographs of Austerlitz's mother) the pictures are assumed to be taken by Austerlitz himself (and in part can be seen as symptomatic of his trauma). Rather than only depicting his work of postmemory they provide us with insight into his perception of the world around him. The photographs are however still sites of postmemorial investment for the narrator who places them in the narrative.

Photography in *Austerlitz* is both more and less than an illustration of the written text (Pane 2005). As Long explains, photographs in Sebald's text are simultaneously used to verify the authenticity of the narrative and the camera's status as a recording apparatus and to undermine this claim (2007:48), as a result they "paradoxically reinforce and undermine the credibility of the accounts offered and recorded by Sebaldian characters" (Pane 2005; see also Long 2007: 48). These images at once constitute and threaten the referential illusion often associated with photographs. The graininess and blurry quality of the photographs themselves

[64] Shaffer explains that "it has not been remarked that the difference in the functioning of the photographs as published in the German originals [of Sebald's texts] and as they appear in the English translations is so marked as to create a different relationship between narrative and photograph" (2005 : 54). If this position is true, which I have little means of verifying, then my analysis of the workings of these photographs can only be applied to the English additions of *Austerlitz*.

seems to undermine any attempt to read them as purely illustrative, and suggests the often provisional link between photography and reality. As Anderson suggests:

> Images are one of the great strengths – and question marks – in Sebald's writings. Without captions or attributions, they seem to come from nowhere, serving not as illustrations of the text but its slightly out-of-sync counterpoint, a kind of punctuation that subtly irritates and challenges our notion of what is real, what is fictional (2003: 109).

Thus Sebald's images cannot be considered as traces that directly link to the past. If they are traces to the past then they are heterogeneous in their signification, and imply no single or stable meaning, thus rendering the text's links to the past as highly provisional.

Photographs become linked to power via their seeming transparency, which "conceals a set of ideological implications, chief among them being the illusion of visual mastery conferred on the spectator whose all-seeing eye becomes the commanding point of the pictorial field" (Long 2007:49). As Barthes explains, the photograph is violent as "*it fills the sight by force"* and because it cannot be transfigured or transformed (1980: 91). The photograph's violence is in the visual mastery implied by the photographic gaze that captures and stabilises meaning. The archive and the photographic document both produce and authorise each other (Merewether 2006b: 122). Their functions are interdependent, they both create the illusion of re-presenting the world (ibid). Therefore the illusion that the photograph is tied to its referent makes the photograph critical to "the practice and the authority of the modern archive" (ibid). Furthermore:

> [P]hotography as a representational structure produces a certain archival effect. And, like photography the archive gains its authority to represent the past through an apparent neutrality, whereby difference is either erased or regulated. Both archive and photography reproduce the world as 'witness to itself,' a testimony to the real, historical evidence (Merewether 2006c: 160).

Thus the violence of photography and the archive is mutually articulating as they both attempt to preserve authority over knowledge and obscure their own constructedness. The photographs reproduced in Sebald's text however evade this violence as they are grainy and indistinct, thus rather than creating a sense of visual mastery produce confusion, or at least uncertainty. As Pane argues, these photographs: "manifest the disparity between the catastrophic events of history and the ability of human memory and archival technology to accurately recall" events of the past (2005). The photographs themselves illustrate their own limits as representational tools, and complicate any attempts to use them as authoritative links to the past, thus also suggesting the inherent limits of Sebald's archival project.

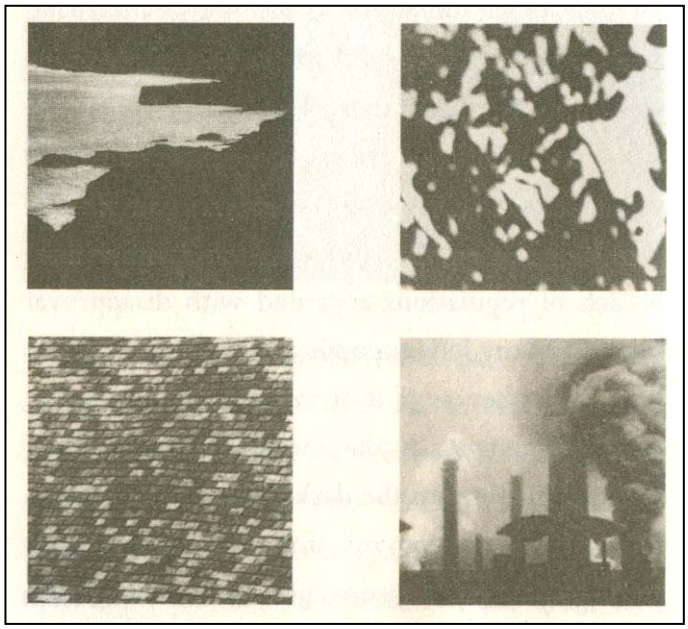


Figure 3.4: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, pp. 108.

As mentioned above, many of the photographs included in the text have very limited frames such as, a chair and a backpack (Sebald 2001: 55) and the eyes of "certain painters and philosophers" (Sebald 2001:3), whose very construction suggests its own provisionality and motions toward that which is outside the frame (for example an entire face). In these instances the photographs are used to create uncertainty, rather than mastery, in the viewer. The photographs included in *Austerlitz* profoundly illustrate the limits of the photographic image (see Figure 3.4). Garloff explains "the photographs do not illustrate the past but rather oblige their viewers to search for the past, however difficult this task might prove" (2006: 168). As we can see in figure 3.4, the limited nature of photographs' ability to represent reality is made evident. By photographing small sections of scenes or objects rather than the whole, the scenes or objects are transformed. These photographs are suggestive rather than directly representational. Like most of the photographs reproduced in the text, these are grey and blurred, the outlines of objects remain unspecific and the objects represented are unclear. Unlike traditional photographs that suggest the spectator's mastery over their subject matter, these photographs invoke a radical uncertainty in the spectator who is expected to decipher what is being depicted. These images suggest distance rather than proximity, and in so doing suggest the provisionality of any attempt to use them as a link to the past.

Barzilai has noted the usefulness of Freud's conception of the 'uncanny' in analysing the references to photography and memory in the text. As she aptly points out Barthes argues that "every photograph involves 'that terrible thing': the return of the dead" (Barzilai 2006: 211): the photograph is a revenant, a spectre. Furthermore Barzilai explains that "photography thus functions not only as a means for attempting to access the past but also as an emblem for the uncanny re-emergence of the past" (2006:211). Barzilai argues that the reproduction of photographs in Sebald's text reproduces for the reader, "the disruptive resurgence of the past for his characters" (2006: 214). The intrusion of the photographs into the flow of the narrative, thereby disrupting the narrative replicates the intrusion of deep memory into common memory inherent to the experience of trauma (Barzilai 2006: 217). Similarly to trauma itself photographs are used in the text to

disrupt the linear temporality of the narrative, and possibly come to represent deep memory or that which cannot be assimilated into the linearity of common memory.

As quoted in the previous section, Sebald sees photographs as "emanations of the dead" (as quoted in Wachtel 2007: 41). This belief that the dead do not remain in the past but effect the present is evident in *Austerlitz*, where memories return as visual presences or hallucinations that haunt Austerlitz. Furthermore as a result of the seemingly direct connection between the photograph and its referent, which Roland Barthes explains as follows: "[t]he photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there" (1980: 80), photographs of the dead simultaneously become "emanations of the dead" as well as evidence of the fact that a once present body is now absent. Cadava, following Walter Benjamin, links the photograph to death:

> The image [the photographic image] already announces our absence. We need only know we are mortal – the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be here, or rather, we will only be here *as* images. It announces the death of the photographed. This is why what survives in the photograph is also a survival of the dead (emphasis author's own) (Cadava 1997: 8).

The photograph not only signals its subject's mortality, but is both a repetition (a revenant) of the subject's image and a return (a spectral return of the dead). Photographs are also revenants, uncanny doubles of the living, and as a result become uncanny harbingers of death. As Cadava further explains: "[T]he return of what was once there takes the form of a haunting . . . [t]he possibility of the photographic image requires that there be such things as ghosts and phantoms" (1997: 11). As Roland Barthes explains in *Camera Lucida:*

> For the photographs immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: the photograph surreptitiously induces belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value; but by shifting this reality to the past . . . the photograph suggests that it is already dead (1980:79).

The strange concurrence of life and death which occurs in photographs suggests their spectral nature. Not only does the photograph imply both life and death, but as Cadava suggests, the return of the dead. The photograph is the return of a present moment, arrested in its presentness, but always already of the past.

The spectral nature of photography is seldom more evocatively described in *Austerlitz* than in the tale of the submersion of Llanwddyn (the submerged town in which Austerlitz's adopted father grew up prior to its submersion). This story was described to Austerlitz by Elias, who Austerlitz imagined was the village's sole survivor. Austerlitz describes his reaction to this story as follows:

> I imagined all the others – [Elias's] parents, his brothers and sisters, his relations, their neighbours, all the other villagers – still down in the depths, sitting in their houses and walking along the road, but unable to speak with their eyes open too wide (Sebald 2001: 72).

He goes on to add:

> This notion of mine about the sub-aquatic existence of the people of Llanwddyn also has something to do with the album which Elias . . . showed me. . . containing several photographs of his birth place, now sunk beneath the water (Sebald 2001: 72).

Because Austerlitz as a child had only seen images of the village in photographs he can only imagine the village and its inhabitants as trapped within an eternal present, even after death. The photograph that young Austerlitz finds most evocative is reproduced in the book and can be seen in figure 3.5, and shows a little girl with a doll by her feet and a dog on her lap. Part of the photograph's background extending from the right corner is dark, and for a moment it seems that the child will be engulfed in darkness. It is not surprising that it is the figures in these images that the child Austerlitz imagines walking down the streets "on hot summer days, when there was no one else around and the air flickered hazily" (Sebald 2001: 74). This instance foreshadows the spectral resonances photographs will come to have in the text, as well as the return of repressed memories that is often experienced in the text as spectral or uncanny.



Figure 3.5: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, pp. 73.

Critics have pointed out that photography becomes a key metaphor for memory in the narrative of *Austerlitz*[65] (Garloff 2006:163). Long explains that Sebald himself has, in interviews as well as in *Austerlitz,* suggested that there is a link between the verbal and the visual: that photographs demand narrativisation (Long 2007: 47). In order for photographs to become meaningful, to reach beyond their opacity and limited frames, they need to be narrativised, in part this is why Hirsch sees them as prioritised sites of postmemory. *Austerlitz's* thematic concern with the link between photography and memory can be seen in the following:

[65] Long, however, contends that the use of photography far exceeds the question of memory and should be linked to "many of the discourses and practices of modernity" with which he argues, Sebald is concerned (Long 2007: 5). By modernity, Long refers to the social, economic, political and cultural transformations that took place in European societies from the eighteenth century onwards (Long 2007: 1). Long critiques those who read Sebald's work purely in light of the dynamics of memory, trauma and the Holocaust, and suggests that Sebald's work is at least equally concerned with the history and the concerns of modernity (as similar point is made by Anderson 2003: 104 and 120). While this concern perhaps highlights the skewed nature of emphasis in critical interpretations of Sebald's work, it fails to acknowledge the fact that these two concerns, the Holocaust and modernity, are intimately linked in Sebald's work.

> In my photographic work I was always especially entranced, said Austerlitz, by the moment when the shadows of reality, so to speak, emerge out of nothing on the exposed paper, as memories do in the middle of the night, darkening again if you try cling to them, just like a photographic print left in the developing bath too long (Sebald 2001: 109).

It is clear, from the above, that the link between memory and photography in the text is in their very elusiveness. The process of memory is compared to that of photographic exposure, "shadows of reality" emerge seemingly out of nothing only to easily disappear; they emerge suddenly, yet disappear if handled incorrectly. This analogy is again fore-grounded in the following:

> Austerlitz told me that he sometimes sat here for hours, laying out these photographs or others from his collection the wrong way up, as if playing a game of patience, and that then, one by one, he turned them over, always with a new sense of surprise at what he saw, pushing the pictures back and forth and over each other, arranging them in an order depending on their family resemblances or withdrawing them from the game until there was nothing left but the grey tabletop, or he felt exhausted by the constant effort of thinking and remembering and had to rest on the ottoman (Sebald 2001: 168).

Photographs in this second extract are linked to the "effort of thinking and remembering". In both extracts the link between the photography, memory and meaning is shown to be provisional, elusive and trembling. Each time Austerlitz approaches his photographs it is to be surprised by what he sees: they are new again, or at least appear with new meaning; their meaning is shown never to be stable or singular. Barzilai recognises that the analogy between photography and memory in the text also points us towards the inherent limitations of both mediums: like memory which remains riddled with lacunae and absences "so the photographic frame not only allows the reader to see what has been preserved but also to sense that much remains unknown, outside of the frame" (2006: 209). In *Austerlitz* Sebald's use of photographs (with a few deliberate exceptions) is highly suggestive, gesturing to what is absent rather than what is captured in the frame of the photograph. If they are traces to the past they remain heterogeneous rather than stable in their signification.

In order to understand the links between memory, trauma[66] and photography it is worth briefly considering the argument made by Ulrich Baer in *Spectral Evidence: the Photography of Trauma* (2002). Central to Baer's thesis is the argument that photographs institute a new conception of temporality, unlike ideologies that conceive of history as an unstoppable linear trajectory, photographs suggest an experience of temporality that privilege the event[67] (2002: 5). As Cadava explains, "the photographic event interrupts the present; it occurs *between* the present and itself, between the movement of time and itself" (emphasis author's own) (Cadava 1997: 61). The photograph thus enacts a radical temporality. By considering photographs from the perspective of temporality Baer is able to link photography to the experience of

[66] Furthermore it seems worth noting that the structure of trauma is itself both uncanny and spectral. The traumatic flashback experienced by a sufferer of trauma is itself a revenant. It is experienced as the visceral repetition, or return of an event the patient often cannot remember, these flashbacks are intrusive, like a haunting.

[67] Interestingly John Berger suggests that photographs of agony and violence have the effect of "[b]ring[ing] us up short. The most literal adjective that could be applied to them is *arresting*. We are seized by them" (1980:42).

trauma which he argues also institutes a new experience of temporality from the perspective of the individual subject. This is a link repeated in the text, where the photograph's intrusion into the trajectory of the text is similar to the temporal disruption resulting from trauma.

Baer, whose reliance on the work of Cathy Caruth is clear, is referring to the fact that the experience of trauma (as described by Caruth) cannot be apprehended in the moment of its occurrence, and has a latent belatedness. Baer argues that the most striking element of a photograph is its "testimony about time" where a moment in the present is captured forever in its pastness (2002: 7). Baer links the working of the camera to the structure of trauma, as defined by Caruth, by arguing that the startling effect of many photographs comes from the camera's ability to capture a moment that was not "necessarily registered by the subject's own consciousness" (2007: 8). As we have mentioned in the previous chapters, photographs stage a particular crisis of reference: "photographs present their referents as peculiarly severed from the time in which they were shot" (Baer 2002: 11). Trauma, as defined by Caruth, produces a similar crisis of reference:

> Traumatic experience . . . suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, that immediacy, paradoxically may take the form of belatedness (1997: 208).

Further, Caruth contends that "Freud shows how the traumatic accident – the confrontation with death – takes place too soon, too suddenly, too unexpectedly to be fully grasped by consciousness" (Caruth 1997: 215). A traumatic event can, therefore, be viewed as an event in excess of conscious comprehension and is unassimilatable within the linear trajectory of a biography.

Photographs often act to disrupt and challenge the linearity of the text's teleology, suggesting the link made by Baer between photography and its radical temporality:

> The other function [of photographs] that I see is possibly that of arresting time. Fiction is an art form that moves in time, that is inclined towards an end, that works on a negative gradient, and it is very, very difficult in that particular form in the narrative to arrest the passage of time. . . and photographs can do this – they act like barriers or weirs which stem the flow (as quoted in Wachtel 2007: 41- 42).

Thus, in part, photographs serve to disrupt the traditional linear temporality of the narrative form. By introducing photographs into the narrative and thus disrupting its trajectory a parallel experience to the temporal discontinuity of the experience of trauma, is created for the reader. The link drawn by Baer between trauma and photography seems to be highlighted in Sebald's use of photographs. As Long explains:

> The role of the visual within the constellation of repression, latency and return is also repeatedly addressed in Freud's work. Painfully exact and compulsively repeated visual recall that 'possesses' the individual against his or her will is . . . the dominant symptom of traumatic neurosis (Long 2003: 125).

Photographs in the text, in disrupting its temporality, mirror the experience of trauma which often takes the form of repetitive visual flash backs. Memory in Sebald's texts is often described by critics as visual rather than narrative (Long 2003:125; Berzilai 2006:209). This is clearly the case in *Austerlitz* where Austerlitz does not remember via language but by ghostly visions of the past (the past quite literally seems to haunt him). There is a clear link in the text between the repetitive images and memories of traumatic recall and the spectral temporality of return inherent to the text's structure. The emergence of photographic images break the narrative trajectory of *Austerlitz* and can be likened to intrusive, often visual, traumatic memories and flashbacks that interrupt the individual's experience of time as linear and that cannot be assimilated into the trajectory of their history.

As we have seen above questions of memory and photography are intimately linked in this text. As a result it is necessary to consider Austerlitz's process of recollection in order to understand this intersection. When Austerlitz finds his old nurse Věra, he reverts to speaking the language of his childhood. Austerlitz describes this near perfect recollection of his home tongue as being "like a deaf man whose hearing has been miraculously restored" (Sebald 2001: 219). This return of his mother tongue, and the language of his childhood, can partially be seen as an uncanny return of the repressed, quite literally a return of the familiar as unfamiliar. This would then destabilise any comforting suggestion of coherence or closure that this recuperation of language may initially seem to suggest.

While the text at times presents Austerlitz's recollection of the past as remarkably accurate, his ability to conjure up memories of Agáta, his mother, is very limited. After his first meeting with Věra Austerlitz visits the Estates Theatre where his mother once performed and makes the following statement regarding his experience:

> [B]efore me the proscenium arch of the stage on which Agáta had once stood was like a blind eye. And the harder I tried to conjure up at least some faint recollection of her appearance, the more the theatre seemed to be shrinking as if I myself had shrunk to the stature of a little Tom Thumb enclosed in a sort of velvet lined casket (Sebald 2001: 227).

The only memory Austerlitz manages to evoke is of a blue shoe embroidered with silver sequins (ibid: 228). The memory he has of the single shoe is a metonym representing the fragmentary nature of Austerlitz's memory as a whole. This single fragment represents as much the absence of his memory of his mother as its presence. The stage becomes a "blind eye" both unseeing (it cannot see or recognise him) and blank and unyielding (as blind eyes often appear). The more Austerlitz focuses on remembering the more difficult it becomes, until both Austerlitz and the theatre seem to shrink to almost minute proportions enclosed in the deathly claustrophobia of a velvet lined casket or coffin. Like the earlier description of the photographic

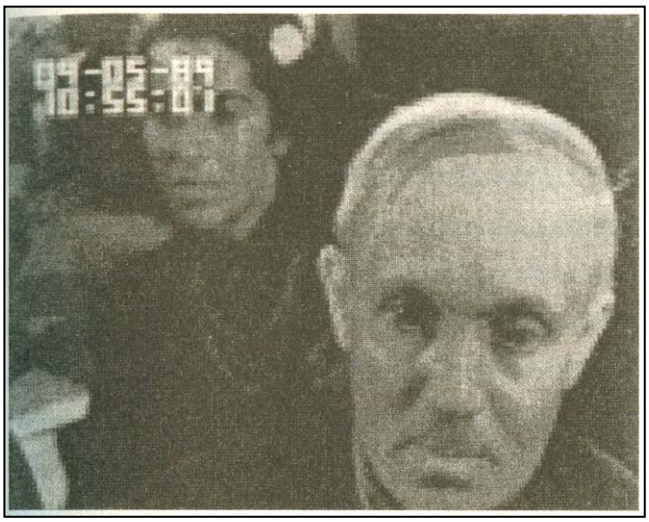


Figure 3.6: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, 351.

image that disappears if left in developing fluid, memory seems here to become increasingly elusive as Austerlitz endeavours to conjure it.

Perhaps some of the most interesting, and indeed the most ghostly, images included in the text are not only photographs but stills from a piece of German propaganda originally entitled "Der Führer schenkt der Juden eine Stadt." The film recorded the 'general improvement campaign' made in the Theresienstadt ghetto, where Austerlitz's mother was interned, in preparation for the visit of the Red Cross commission in 1944. Austerlitz gains access to a copy of this film in the attempt to gain some sense of proximity to his lost mother. He has a slowed down copy of the film made in an effort to glimpse his mother, who he imagines may be in the film. In creating this slow motion copy, Austerlitz explains that he had created "a different sort of film all together" (Sebald 2001: 345). He explains this as follows:

> The men and women employed in the workshops now looked as if they were toiling in their sleep. . .[t]hey seemed to be hovering rather than walking, as if their feet no longer quite touched the ground. The contours of their bodies were blurred and, particularly in the scenes shot in broad daylight, had dissolved at the edges (Sebald 2001: 345-348).

This film that once served as propaganda for the National Socialists is refigured in Austerlitz's hands: in this *new* film a "merry polka" becomes a funeral march and the commentator's voice becomes a growl (Sebald 2001:348). The film once used to assure the Red Cross of the safety and happiness of the ghetto's inhabitants now becomes a somnambulist funeral march and in the reproduction of these stills a return of the dead. By slowing the film down, Austerlitz seems to reveal what the film had previously sought to conceal.

In among the people in the slowed down video, Austerlitz sees a woman in the corner of a frame that he believes to be his mother (see figure 3.6). He describes his reaction on seeing the woman as follows: "[s]he looks, so I tell myself as I watch, just as I imagined the singer Agáta from my faint memories and the few other clues to her appearance that I now have, and I gaze and gaze again at that face, which seems to me both strange and familiar" (Sebald 2001: 351). His recognition of the woman is clearly a result of a process of imaginative investment ("so I tell myself"), where he invests the image with his vague recollections of the past, and is thus an example of Austerlitz's postmemory. Věra however when shown the image cannot recognise the woman in it as her former employer and friend. She does however agree that an image Austerlitz finds of a young actress is in fact a photograph of Agáta. Unlike the hazy and blurred still from



Figure 3.7: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, pp.353

the film, where the woman's face is partially obscured, this photograph (as can be seen in figure 3.7) shows a face emerging from a sea of darkness. Although this image seems to initially signify the emergence of memory from the darkness of repression, the face in the photograph remains partially obscured in darkness. The woman's face, especially her eyes, is deeply shadowed, and the entire left side of the picture is black. Thus the image could equally signify the retreat of the woman into darkness. These images therefore do not represent comforting recall, but signal the provisionality of Austerlitz's attempts to access his past.

The provisionality of the relationship between photographs and recall is re-emphasised in the text when Austerlitz is shown an image of himself as a child (as can be seen in figure 3.8). He responds to this image of himself as follows:

> [Y]et hard as I tried both that evening and later, I could not recollect myself in the part. I did recognise the unusual hairline running at a slat over the forehead, but otherwise all memory was extinguished in me by an overwhelming sense of the long years that had passed (Sebald 2001: 259).

Austerlitz is thus shown to be unable to incorporate this image of his past self into his history and by default any narrative of self. No continuity can be formed between the child in the image and the adult viewing it. In fact his response is to feel "speechless and uncomprehending, incapable of any lucid thought" (Sebald 2001: 260). Sebald depicts the failure of memory as simultaneously a failure of language and thought. Rather than being a moment of recall it is a moment of rupture signified by this linguistic collapse. Furthermore, when encountering this image of his past self as a child, Austerlitz encounters the disconcerting feeling of encountering himself as other. The encounter with the double is



Figure 3.8: Sebald, W. G. [trans Anthea Bell] 2001. *Austerlitz.* London: Penguin Books, pp. 258

not only a harbinger of death, but is also a threat to the illusion of the self's singular unity, its oneness, and as such offers a threat to subjectivity as singular and bounded. This younger double of himself that is both identical to his childhood self, and absolutely other, results in the threat of a dissolution of self, and as a result of language. These conflicting versions of self cannot be integrated. Austerlitz's discomfort when faced with this image of his younger self suggests the text's preoccupation with the frailty of memory and in so doing highlights the provisionality of any attempt to gain access to the past.

A further example of the provisionality of memory in the text can be seen in the following extract, where Austerlitz waiting for a train to leave for Holland actively attempts to "think [his] way back through the decades" (Sebald 2001: 308):

> But neither Agáta nor Věra nor I myself emerged from the past. Sometimes it seems as if the veil would part; I thought for one fleeting instant, that I could feel the touch of Agáta's shoulder or see the picture on the front of the Charlie Chaplin comic which Věra bought me for the journey, but as soon as I tried to hold one of these fragments fast, or get it into better focus, as it were it disappeared into the emptiness revolving over my head (Sebald 2001: 308).

His memory is described not as recollections but rather as emanations that pass through the veil separating the past and the present. The mention of the veil also recalls the veil mentioned earlier by Austerlitz that separates the living from the dead. Spectral presences which can be briefly seen just as quickly disappear. The minute he tries to capture one of these fragments, to solidify it into memory, it vanishes. Paradoxically, immediately after Austerlitz makes this statement he seems to experience a moment of clarity and absolute recall:

> It was all the more surprising and indeed alarming a little later, said Austerlitz, when I looked out of the corridor window of my carriage just before the train left at seven-thirteen, to find it dawning upon me with perfect certainty that I had seen the pattern of the glass and steel roof above the platforms before (*ibid*).

As is so often the case in this text, in the above extract memory is shown to be linked to place, to the uncanny return of the familiar in the unfamiliar (of the homely in the unhomely).The tension between absolute amnesia, an "emptiness revolving over [his] head", and total recall is a theme returned to throughout the text.

Austerlitz's collection of photography acts as an attempt to archive memory. As we have noted in previous chapters Hirsch sees the photograph as a privileged site for the transmission of memory across generations. For Austerlitz photographs become a site of his postmemorial relationship to his own past and of the narrator's postmemorial investment in Austerlitz's narrative. The character Austerlitz takes numerous photographs in an attempt to archive his memory, however, as has been shown, these photographs serve as much to obscure memory as to reveal it. Following Linda Hutcheon's comments on photography in *The*

Politics of Postmodernism, the photographs in *Austerlitz* can also be seen as paratextual references that suggest a world outside the fiction being told (1989). Long links photography to archiving in the text by arguing: "[t]he name 'Jacques Austerlitz' has no extra-textual referent, whereas photographs do, in a double sense: they are indexical traces of both the objects they depict and the hand or apparatus that took them" (Long 2007: 149 – 150). While the text's use of photographs suggests a material world outside the text, its use of photographs often seems simultaneously to suggest absence rather than presence. The photographs can be seen to contribute to a "profound ontological confusion" despite Austerlitz's almost novelistic structure (Long 2007: 150). The photographs thus allow the text to resist the closure implied by the structure of a traditional novel, and the photographs intra- and extra- textual references allow for a non-verbal excess that resists a singular interpretation or closure. The images that are included are included without captions and are only occasionally directly discussed in the body of the text as a result they retain resonances in excess of the text they accompany.

Photography and photographs in *Austerlitz* are significant for a number of reasons. The photographs included in the text initially seem to maintain the 'referential illusion' or 'reality effect' associated with photography, yet it becomes evident almost immediately that their role as illustrations that seemingly reinforce the texts veracity is highly provisional. This is made clear by the photographs themselves, their grainy quality and limited frames, as well as the considerations of photography included in the text. The photographs retain radical and heterogeneous resonances that extend beyond the narrative presented. The photographs are also linked to trauma and the spectre, and as a result disrupt the linear trajectory of the text and suggest a specific relation to temporality, which in the case of both trauma and the spectre suggests not only temporal disruption but also return and repetition. Furthermore, photography is linked to memory and its other, the threat of amnesia, forgetting and absence, in the text and each serves to reinforce the provisional nature of the text's link to the past. Increasingly it becomes clear that the photographs disrupt the text's novelistic structure and are heterogeneous in their potential signification.

Memory and Oblivion: the Role of the Archive in *Austerlitz*

Our discussion of the archive, and its role in *Austerlitz,* cannot be separated from the thematic concern inherent to the text namely: the tension between memory and amnesia. The narrative itself is preoccupied with archives, institutions and memorials, and the manner in which the text addresses these provides insight into its own archival practices. The role of the archive in *Austerlitz,* yet again reinforces the text's complex engagement with the past, and like many of the other elements of this text, suggests both the past's intrusion on and affect in the present, and our inability to access the past directly. As we shall see both the text and its

protagonist exhibit an archival impulse, but neither are immune to the pressure toward erasure implied by archivolithic violence.

In *Archive Fever* (as discussed in my introduction) by introducing psychoanalytic theory into a discussion of the archive Derrida is able to consider the archive in relation to the death or destruction drive. The death drive for Derrida destroys its own traces, is secret and silent; it destroys its own archive (Derrida 1996: 10). The following quote from Derrida is particularly illustrative of his interpretation of the working of the death drive and its relationship to the archive:

> As the death drive is also, according to the most striking words of Freud himself, an aggression and destruction drive, it not only incites forgetfulness, amnesia and the annihilation of memory . . . but also commands the radical effacement, in truth the eradication, of that which can never be reduced to *mnēmē* or to *anamnēsis,* that is, the archive . . . because the archive, if this word or figure can be stabilised so as to take on a signification, will never be either memory and anamenesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory (1996: 11).

Derrida reminds us that there is no archive without the possibility of repetition and reproduction of its materials. He also reminds us that Freud saw repetition as inherently linked to the death drive as a result the archive always works against itself, in its own destruction. As Derrida explains, at the heart of the monument or the substrate of the archive is forgetfulness (1996: 12). Crownshaw argues that:

> The destruction on which the archive is predicated cannot be undone, that which is past cannot be resurrected, the dead cannot be brought to life. However, in the absence of a law of consignation, which is devowered as the archive consumes itself, a haunting presence of the past remains, no longer exorcised by consignation (2004: 222).

As we will recall, the archive houses an internal paradox, although it seeks to collect in order to recollect, it is also the death of memory as alive or immediate. However, as Crownshaw seems to imply, the archive in its destruction leaves a remainder, or ghostly supplement, that is no longer implicated in the violence of consignation and as a result open up toward the heterogeneity of the archival trace.

The Nazi's system of internment was predicated on an extreme zeal for rational documentation; for taxonomising people into a dehumanising racial hierarchy. As such it can (to a certain degree) be read as an attempt to document while simultaneously archiving the corpses (not humans, or individuals, not mothers, children or lovers) of those it housed in ghettos, concentration camps and death camps, for the sole purpose of their extermination. This is made clear in the following quote:

> [T]his comprehensive system of internment and forced labour which, in Therénstadt as elsewhere, was ultimately directed . . . solely at the extinction of life and was built on an organisational plan regulating all functions and responsibilities . . . with a crazed administrative

> zeal . . . this system had to be constantly supervised and statistically accounted for, particularly with respect to the total number of inmates in the ghetto (Sebald 2001: 337).

Thus according to this description, the Nazi's "crazed administrative zeal" is intimately connected to their purpose which was the annihilation of the ghetto's occupants. This is a point Sebald reiterates in the following extract:

> [T]he entire population of the ghetto. . .was marched out after assembling in the barracks yards at dawn to be drawn up in block formation behind numbered boards, and there, throughout the cold and damp day . . . they were forced to wait . . . for the SS men to arrive, as they eventually did at three o'clock, to carry out the count of heads and then repeat it twice before they could feel convinced of the final result . . . whereupon they rode away again in some haste, entirely forgetting to give any orders for the inmates' return (Sebald 2001: 338)

This chilling description suggests the extreme dehumanisation of the Nazi organisational zeal. In this extract the inhabitants of the ghetto are repeatedly counted only to be forgotten once the intended survey had been completed. If one considers that the archive simultaneously destroys as it preserves, the archive in this instance takes on a particularly sinister hue; not only regarding the bodies erased but the memory of those bodies erased in their recording. These documentations do not preserve the individual but erase them from memory.

The tension between memory and its erasure inherent to both the archive and the monument is most evident in the text during Austerlitz's trip to the Terezin Ghetto (where it is likely that his mother was detained). Austerlitz comments that he "felt blinded by the documentation recording the population policy of the National Socialists, by the evidence of their mania for order and purity, which was put into practice on a vast scale through measures partly improvised, partly devised with obsessive organisational zeal" (Sebald 2001: 278). A play emerges in the above between insight and blindness, both literal and figurative. The excessive archival documentation initially causes blindness, blocks the very possibility of insight or understanding, as can be further illustrated in the following excerpt:

> I understood it all now, yet I did not understand it, for every detail that was revealed to me as I went through the museum from room to room and back again, ignorant as I feared I had been through my own fault, far exceeded my comprehension (Sebald 2001: 279).

Austerlitz thus suggests that the knowledge presented to him is simultaneously blinding (preventing insight) and in excess of his ability to understand. In part this quote yet again speaks to the fact that the events of the Holocaust to a certain degree exceed all attempts to understand them. However, I also think these comments extend to a consideration of the means in which the information is presented. Austerlitz feels blinded not only by the information, but by the documentation itself. The information presented in the ghetto's memorial, which is intended to enlighten, is blinding. Austerlitz goes on to describe the methods of documentation utilised by the Nazis: "I saw balance sheets, registers of the dead, lists of every imaginable kind, and endless rows of numbers and figures, which must have served to reassure the administrators that

nothing escaped their notice" (Sebald 2001: 279–280). The text seems to suggest that the extreme organisational zeal that lead the Nazis to carefully document and archive their process was intimately linked to their extreme violence (the memory of the inhabitants is erased not in the absence of documentation but its excess).

For Long the archive is a symptom of modernity and is evidence of its drive toward "rationalisation, bureaucratisation and documentation across a large and expanding range of human activity" (2007: 10). Long argues that in this context the archival apparatus and bureaucratisation have expanded to a point where they exceed the capacity of a single individual to comprehend them (2007: 10). This is evident in the descriptions of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* included in the text. The following extract is particularly telling:

> Sitting at my place in the reading-room, I thought at length about the way in which such unforeseen accidents . . . [such as] the recurrent symptoms of paralysis affecting the electronic data retrieval system, relate to the Cartesian overall plan of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and I came to the conclusion that in any project we design and develop, the size and degree of complexity of the information and control systems inscribed in it are the crucial factors, so that the all-embracing and absolute perfection of the concept can in practice coincide, indeed ultimately must coincide, with its chronic dysfunction and constitutional instability (Sebald 2001: 392 – 393).

Thus the ultimate outcome of the *Bibliothèque Nationale's* attempts to perfectly control information is ultimately dysfunction and instability. It no longer serves its purpose as the information cannot be easily accessed. Thus despite the attempt to create a perfect archive for knowledge in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* the ultimate result is the inaccessibility of knowledge.

Interestingly Long argues that Austerlitz's past is figured in the text as an "archival lack" (2007: 152), as all directly available material to illuminate his past had been destroyed. Shortly after Elias's hospitalisation in the Denbigh asylum Austerlitz learns that his name is not Dafydd Elias (the name given to Austerlitz by his adopted parents) but Jacques Austerlitz, and what Austerlitz[68] initially finds most concerning is that he "could connect no ideas at all with the word Austerlitz" (Sebald 2007: 94). The absence that his name comes to signify also comes to represent his absent memory and past. As has been mentioned, the text's action centres around the tension between memory and forgetting. Long states: "Austerlitz's project . . . and the subjectivity that it subtends, are structured around a temporal lacuna in which the truth of Austerlitz's life is assumed to reside" (2007: 154). As will be elaborated, his scholarship itself is defined by a key absence, the history of Nazism and Fascism in Europe, toward which it nonetheless seems to point. As Long argues, this

[68] The name Austerlitz remains a rather elusive element of the text and can perhaps be read as a palimpsest (in itself an archive of references). Firstly its phonetic similarity to the word Auschwitz cannot be overlooked. Furthermore the text itself suggests the name's link to the Napoleonic battle of Austerlitz, which is another example of an attempt to conquer Europe and in yet another set of doublings may intern refer to the Nazi's expansionist ideology.

lacuna generates the "narrative desire that motivates both the telling and the reading of the tale" (2007: 154). The text's momentum is focussed toward an infinitely deferred moment of revelation; when the truth of Austerlitz's past will be revealed and the lacunae filled. Therefore the reader, like Austerlitz, searches for a totalising knowledge in the reading of the text. The past, however, is never revealed in its entirety. This desire to fill the absences and lacuna is never fulfilled. While we learn of Austerlitz's origins, we can never learn of the final fate of his parents. For Austerlitz, the narrator and the reader, "the epistemological promise of the archive is repeatedly shown to be illusory" (Long 2007: 159). Thus, all attempts toward totalising knowledge are thwarted.

Not only is the text concerned with archives and archival practices, but the characters themselves are archival in their practices, specifically in their approach to knowledge. Long claims that Austerlitz's knowledge is archival in several respects: firstly, to a certain degree it can be seen as an effort in consignation as "it is motivated by a desire for totality and complete systemisation" (2007: 153), a desire to produce a single body or corpus of knowledge. This can be seen in the following extract from the text:

> His investigations, so Austerlitz once told me, had long outstripped their original purpose as a project for a dissertation, proliferating in his hands into endless preliminary sketches for a study, based entirely on his own views, of the family likeness between all these buildings [law courts, penal institutions, railway stations, stock exchanges, opera houses, and lunatic asylums] (Sebald 2001: 44).

Long explains Austerlitz's archival desire as follows: "while it is driven by a desire for totality and comprehensiveness . . . the archive becomes a self generating, self referential system that entails a perpetual deferral of the moment of completion" (2007: 154). The act of *consignation* inherent to Derrida's conception of the archive suggests the compulsion of any archivist as the gathering together of signs, not only attempting to taxonimise information but to gather it together in a single bounded body of knowledge. This compulsion can be seen in Austerlitz's attempts to seek the "family" resemblances between numerous different buildings.

Crownshaw sees in Austerlitz's research toward his book an example of *archive fever*: "[i]n effect, the archive of architectural material and knowledge Austerlitz had collected over a life time, has both consumed itself and him – both archive and archivist are threatened with oblivion" (2004: 219). As Crownshaw explains, for Derrida the archival project is simultaneously and paradoxically fuelled by the desire to preserve and to destroy (ibid), or as I have phrased it elsewhere to remember and forget. It is in this way that Austerlitz's concern with monuments and monumental architecture is linked to his desire to archive that knowledge. Some critics argue that "rather that embodying memory, the monument displaces it altogether, supplanting a communities' memory-work with its own material form" (Young 1993: 5). Furthermore, "the

more memory comes to rest in its exteriorised forms, the less it is experienced internally" (ibid). Monuments come to signify a single version of events, thus replacing the multiplicity and heterogeneity of an individual's or communities' lived memory with a single memorialised version of the past. Thus these two concepts, the monument and the archive are linked (incidentally Derrida points out that the archive cannot be separated from its 'substrate' (often a monument itself)) to one of the key thematic concerns of the text: the simultaneous and paradoxical pressure toward both memory and amnesia. As Crownshaw further explains:

> Having hallucinated his origins and remembered who he is, Austerlitz becomes aware of how he had up to this point screened those origins with a monumental archive and how that archivization of the past had worked toward forgetting, but doing so left, against its best intentions, not a material trace to the past but a spectral residue (2004: 222).

Austerlitz repeatedly states that he has replaced one type of knowledge with another: scholastic knowledge replacing his repressed knowledge of the past. As can be seen in the following:

> As far as I was concerned the world ended in the late 19th century. I dared go no further than that, although in fact the whole history of the architecture and civilization of the bourgeois age, the subject of my research, pointed in the direction of the catastrophic events already casting their shadows before them at the time (Sebald 2001; 197).

This "self-censorship of . . . mind" (Sebald 2001: 198) as Austerlitz calls it, demands increasingly great efforts from his mental and physical faculties to maintain, to the point where his very linguistic abilities are paralysed, and he destroys his notes (and in so doing his life's work).

Importantly Austerlitz eventually destroys his archive, but this only occurs after his archival impulse almost dissolves his subjectivity. After retiring with the intention of completing his "investigations into the history of architecture and civilisation" (Sebald 2002: 170)[69], Austerlitz begins to experience an increasing disillusionment with his past work:

> It was as if an illness that had been latent in me for a long time were now threatening to erupt, as if some soul-destroying and inexorable force had fastened upon me and would gradually paralyse my entire system. I already felt in my head the dreadful torpor that heralds disintegration of the personality, I sensed in truth I had neither memory nor power of thought, nor even existence, that all of my life had been a constant process of obliteration (Sebald 2002: 173-174).

Here we see that Austerlitz's attempt to create a totalising understanding of European architecture increasingly begins to erase itself, not only itself but it threatens to destroy his personality. Both his memory and his thoughts are effaced by his archival compulsion: his *archive fever*. Further as has occurred at a number of instances in the text his very ability to use language is threatened:

[69] Long sees Austerlitz's preoccupation with museums as a means for addressing "distinctly modern questions of power, knowledge, and subject-formation" (2007: 32)

> I could see no connections anymore, the sentences resolved themselves into a series of separate words, the words into random letters, the letters into disjointed signs, and those signs into a blue grey trail gleaming silver here and there excreted and left behind by some crawling creature, and the sight of it increasingly filled me with feelings of horror and shame (Sebald 2002: 176)

Importantly, the above passage places the agency not in Austerlitz but in his archive which dissolves and erases itself, it loses its ability to signify. Thus while Austerlitz throws his research, his entire archive, into a compost heap covering it with layers of earth he is compelled to do so as meaning increasingly breaks down within him, thus suggesting that his very subjectivity is threatened. The text suggests that it is only as a result of this destruction of both archive and archivist that allows for the spectral return of his repressed memories.

Crownshaw convincingly argues that Austerlitz (like Derrida's archivist) cannot put an end to his archival impulse and as a result cannot stop archiving. The text is itself an archival project, made up of fragments of information, images and narrative. As a result, concern emerges as to whether it is also subject to a similar archival violence. Crownshaw responds to this concern and seems to find promise in Derrida's messianic vision of the future archive: "[a] spectral messianicity is at work in the concept of the archive" (Derrida 1995: 36). Derrida describes this "spectral messianicty" as follows: "[a]t bottom, the spectre is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which would come or comeback; in the future" (1994: 48). Crownshaw suggests that this future archive can be found in Austerlitz's use of photographs. This use of photographs, he suggests, implies a specific sense of temporality:

> Although a screen for inevitably subjective memory work, photographs at least map out Austerlitz's new-found sense of time – a sense that is realised in the act of looking at photographs . . . [i]n the belated return of the past, found in the photograph, and in the consequent generation of shocking affectiveness, is a way of thinking about the convolution of time (Crownshaw 2004: 233).

In *Austerlitz* a new sense of temporality is suggested, not only by the use of photographs, but in the spectral revenants of the past that haunt Austerlitz's present. The boundary between the past and the present is shown to be permeable, and events of the past retain affect in the present. Thus it is not only the text's use of photography, as Crownshaw implies, that highlights the text's provisionality, but also its uncanny and spectral structure that shows the boundary between the past and the present to be permeable.

As we have repeatedly seen throughout our discussion of the text, any promises the text might imply concerning our ability to gain access to the past, remain highly provisional. The photograph simultaneously implies the preservation of a past present for the future and the impossibility of this. As Crownshaw explains:

> The future of Austerlitz's archive would seem photographic, but due to the traumatic temporality of his photographs, which means their contents (referents) disappears as soon as they emerge, this is a future that holds no promises beyond its own coming (2004: 234).

As we have seen in the previous section the photographs included in this text seem to obscure as much as they reveal. Furthermore the text's provisionality and resistance to closure is reinforced by its use of photographs. Crownshaw (to whom much of my argument is indebted) links Sebald's work to the archive and to Derrida's *Archive Fever* however I believe this link is only plausible when considered alongside Foster's elaboration of the archival impulse in literature and art. Crownshaw has argued that it is through Sebald's use of photographs that Austerlitz's future archive emerges, as well as preventing co-option and appropriation that Crownshaw suggests are the inherent threats of postmemory. He explains this as follows:

> At the heart of Austerlitz's archive lies the shocking but ascribed temporality of his photographs, in which the traumatic loss of the past, irreplaceable by its photographic representation (or supplement) intrudes upon the present (Crownshaw 2004: 233).

Like the intrusion of deep memory into common memory in the final sentences of *Maus* (as will be discussed in full in the final section), photographs in Austerlitz also represent the intrusion of the past into the present, they intrude into and disrupt the text's narrative, and they suggest an excess beyond their frames. Like spectres they are a return of the dead, or of a past that cannot be put to rest. The provisionality of these photographs which appear only to disappear opens the text to heterogeneity, preventing the reader from making single and stable interpretations, and opening up to the heterogeneity of the archival trace. The text's radical provisionality is not only highlighted by Sebald's use of photography, but also in the text's own uncanny structure of repetition and return. This structure allows the text to suggest the spectral residue of the Holocaust that is suggested through its absence rather than its presence. In referencing the Holocaust in its absence rather that its presence Sebald is able to avoid the violence of appropriation and co-option implied by the work of postmemory. Therefore, despite Crownshow's emphasis on the text's use of photography, the text's spectral structure also implies its spectral messianicity opening it up to the heterogeneity of the archival trace.

While in part the text provides a critique of the archive, it remains archival in its practices. In its treatment of the archive the text highlights the archives inherent tensions: between memory and oblivion, and preservation and erasure. *Austerlitz* can be considered to be an archival subject (as suggested by Long), and his archive destroys not only itself, but also threatens to destroy Austerlitz himself. The text's own archival practices, however, evade the destruction that threatens Austerlitz in their provisionality. The text in its use of photography and in its uncanny and spectral structure is able to suggest a new temporality and in so doing a new relation between the present and the past. Rather than a linear teleology, the boundaries between the past and the present (and the future) in the text are shown to be fragile. The events of the past re-emerge in the present only to disappear once again. The text's archival impulse thus suggests a new relation to the past

in which the present is always impacted by the spectral presences of the past (that may retain affect in the present)

4 A Trip Back to the Old Country: Negotiations with History and Memory in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*

Everything is Illuminated by Jonathan Safran Foer is a highly imaginative and at times hyperbolic treatment of history, memory and the Holocaust. This text shows an important attempt made by a third generation Jewish author to write himself into history and to reassert his bonds to a lost and inaccessible past. Like the previous texts I have considered, Foer's novel is concerned with the narrativisation of the Holocaust; his narrative is as much about the tale's construction and transmission as it is about the Holocaust itself. Foer's text self-consciously navigates the intricate interaction between questions of individual and collective memory, as well as of the Holocaust and its representation in literature. This is most successfully achieved through the dramatisation of silence and absence (gaps and lacunae) in the text. In addition, Foer uses and refigures a trope that has become a common ingredient in American Jewish post-Holocaust fiction and in the Jewish experience in the Diaspora: the trip back to the old country[70]. In so doing, Foer is able to critique and question Jewish interaction with the memory and history of the Holocaust from this temporal and spatial remove.

While Art Spiegelman's *Maus* is told from the perspective of its second generation Jewish narrator, and W. E. Sebald's *Austerlitz* is able to navigate a complex interaction between the second generation German narrator and a Jewish survivor, Foer is able to use his third generation perspective to allow his narrative to be told from two seemingly diametrically opposed perspectives; that of a third generation grandson of Jewish Holocaust survivors and that of a third generation grandchild of a Ukrainian bystander[71] (who is shown to be complicit in the murder of his Jewish best friend). By allowing a provisional dialogue between these two characters Foer is able to herald new opportunities for interaction and possibly forgiveness in the post-Holocaust context.

In its technical aspects Foer's novel is highly postmodern in form (examples of this are Foer's playful use of irony, parody, the fragmentation of narrative and the text's self conscious narrative) and highlights common postmodern concerns with the nature of truth, history and textuality. However Foer's perspective and subject matter result in the fact that although his text promblemitises and complicates the truth claims of history, this occurs within the limits of historical facts and the corporeal actuality of the Holocaust. In what follows I show how Foer's use of postmodern techniques

[70] For a further discussion of this phenomenon see: Kugelmass, J. 1996. "Missions to the Past: Poland in Contemporary Jewish Thought and Deed" in *Tense Past* (ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek). London: Routledge.

[71] Some critics have suggested that Alex's grandfather is in fact Jewish, and hid this fact from the Nazi death squads and his family. I find this view unconvincing and inadequately supported by textual evidence, and those sections of the text that might support this claim are highly ambiguous.

acts as a vehicle through which to engage with what the work of memory or postmemory may mean for the third generation. This focus allows me to evaluate what opportunities remain available for the author to archive history and memory when one's encounter with this history is experienced as an absence rather than a presence. Furthermore I think this text can be shown to perform an archival impulse, as defined by Hal Foster, specifically in its attempt to draw together disparate and seemingly unlinked fragments of narrative, and in its attempt to utilise postmodern techniques to invoke affect rather than (as has often been the case with postmodernism) the absence or erasure of affect.

Like the other texts I have considered, *Everything is Illuminated* resists traditional generic labelling. While it is evident that the text is fictional, the author's use of his own name for the text's protagonist at least momentarily complicates this assumption leaving a subtle trace within the text to the world external to it. Beyond this, while the text's structure clearly suggests a link to epistolary fiction, the boundaries between the letters and the remainder of the narrative are occasionally subverted or collapse. Furthermore, Alex's 'realist' account of the trip to Trachimbrod is not only in stark juxtaposition to Jonathan's magic realist and overtly fictionalised narrative, but is repeatedly undermined from within by Alex's own descriptions of the ways in which the narrative has been modified. Like the other texts included in this study the text's resistance to traditional generic labels prevents one from deriving stable or reassuring meaning and closure from it. By avoiding stable generic labelling, *Everything is Illuminated,* like the other text's included in this study, is able to maintain its provisional relation to the events it describes, further emphasising its mediated and constructed nature.

The very content and structure of *Everything is Illuminated* is concerned with questions of representation, silence, absence and illumination, these themes clearly intersect the text's attempts to narrativise a past that can no longer be accessed directly. As Katrin Amian explains, the text's three narrative strands exhibit a dynamic interaction between void and excess (2008: 161). The emphasis on silence, absence and darkness and in contrast, illumination allows the author to engage with a past to which he only has access though the highly mediated sources of history and narrative. If one begins by considering the text's title, *Everything is Illuminated*, the inherent tension within the text between illumination and darkness will become apparent. Furthermore, a brief discussion of the text's title will serve to highlight a number of the text's thematics. It is evident that the numerous connotations of the word illuminate are intended by the title*:* "to light up, to give light to*"*; to remove blindness or to shed light upon something (both commonly and in a religious sense); "to enlighten intellectually; to give knowledge or understanding to"; "to throw light upon (a subject); to make luminous or clear; to elucidate"; and (although a rare usage of the word) "to set alight, light, kindle" (Oxford English Dictionary: Second

Edition, 1989). Perhaps the most interesting example of the interaction between illumination and darkness in the text is Alex's Grandfather's blindness, which Alex describes as follows:

> My grandmother died two years yore of a cancer in her brain, and Grandfather became very melancholy, and also, he says, blind. Father does not believe him, but purchased Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior, for him nonetheless, because a Seeing Eye bitch is not only for blind people but for people who pine for the negative of loneliness (Foer 2002: 5).

Blindness in this case works on a number of levels: while the grandfather is not literally or physically blind he still needs a "Seeing Eye Bitch". Here Alex's clumsy use of language contains within it unintended meaning and renewed affect. Rather than remarking that his grandfather needs a dog in order to have some company, she is described as being "for people who pine for the negative of loneliness", thus refiguring the idea of companionship as the absence of loneliness rather than the presence of a person or love. The grandfather's self proclaimed blindness may be read figuratively, not only as a reaction to his wife's death, but also as blindness to the impact his silence about his past has had on his family. Furthermore, this 'blind' but not blind man becomes Jonathan and Alex's tour guide and driver, which in part suggests the futility of their endeavour.

A further striking example of the tension between light and darkness suggested by the title can be seen twice in the narrative of Trachimbrod, where the Shtetl literally lights up. The first of these is the "coital radiance" generated on Trachimday, which the text playfully suggests is the only day "when the copulative voltage generated" by the village is sufficient to be seen from space (Foer 2002: 96). As is suggested with the phrase "*We're here, and we're alive"* this "coital radiance", as with many of the instances of sexuality in the text, is representative of life (Foer 2002:96). The second is the Nazi bombing of Trachimbrod which is described as pouring from the sky in "bursts of light": on Trachimday Trachimbrod is literally set alight, this time not by coital passion but by imminent death and destruction (Foer 2002: 272). The bombing of Trachimbrod also signals the intrusion of the corporeal reality of the Holocaust into the mythic world of Trachimbrod. Thus the light of sexual enjoyment, and of life, produced on Trachimday, is mirrored when Trachimbrod is set on fire with the light of death, thus illustrating the two extremes so often simultaneously present in the text.

The title is, at times, intended ironically; that in fact nothing is illuminated. This is clearly the case when one considers the frame narrative: while Alex is "illuminated" and does gain knowledge of his family's past and Ukraine's history, the object of their journey is never fulfilled, Augustine is never found. The narrative of their journey ironically subverts our expectations. As Ribbat explains:

> The mission of Heritage touring was to guide American Jews on emotional journeys into the stories of their past. On this specific trip, however, the tour guides encounter their own heritage (2005: 215).

In this ironic inversion it is Alex, the guide and translator, has no privileged knowledge and gains as much knowledge from the expedition as Jonathan and is, in this manner, illuminated about the history of both his family and his national community. Furthermore, if anything is illuminated by their quest it is not understanding but the impossibility thereof and darkness. For Linda Hutcheon irony occurs "in the space between (and including) the said and the unsaid; it needs both to happen" (1994 12). Thus for Hutcheon ironic meaning is not only the unsaid or implied meaning and this unsaid meaning is not always derived from a simple inversion (1994: 12-13). Ironic meaning is "always different – other than and more than the said" (Hutcheon 1994: 13)[72]. Thus the intended or unintended irony of the title emerges in the simultaneous presence of its said and unsaid meanings, which rather than effacing each other exist simultaneously and interact productively. The title evokes the complex interaction between illumination and darkness, knowledge and the unknowable, and presence and absence, which is thematically extended throughout the novel in both the epistolary interactions between the characters and Alex's narrative of the journey in search of Augustine and the mythic rewriting of the past attributed to the fictional Jonathan. The connotations of the text's title, as discussed above, extend as thematic concerns throughout the body of the text. By considering the tension between the seemingly opposing concepts of darkness and illumination, knowledge and the unknowable, alongside the text's dramatisation of silence and absence, I believe one can begin to highlight the text's complex negotiations with history and memory.

The Epistolary Structure of *Everything is Illuminated*

The epistolary nature of the text's structure is important to any reading of its content. The text consists of three narrative strands: the first is compiled of letters written by the Ukrainian narrator, Alex, to Jonathan; the second is made up of a set of instalments, again narrated by Alex, that recount his journey with Jonathan in search of Augustine; and the third is the mythic narrative of Trachimbrod's history narrated by the fictional Jonathan. The function of the epistolary structure is twofold. First, it allows for the self reflexive nature of the text: Alex's letters comment on Jonathan's narrative as well as explicate the fictional process of the text's own construction. Second, by making the primary narrator a Ukrainian and by setting up (as we shall see a highly provisional) dialogue between the characters, Foer explores the new possibilities for interaction, dialogue and perhaps forgiveness available to the third generation.

To understand the workings of the text's epistolary structure and its impact on the text's content, it is worth briefly considering the nature of letter writing and the genre of epistolary fiction. Nicky Hallet suggests that

[72] Hutcheon's statement references the following sources: Amante, D. J. 1981. "The Theory of Ironic Speech Acts", in *Poetics Today* Vol.2, No. 2, pp. 77- 96; Burke, K. 1969. *A Grammar of Motives.* [1945], Berkeley: University of California Press; Eco, U. 1990. *The Limits of Interpretation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

both writing and receiving letters are marked by anxiety. She explains that "[pa]rt of the urgency of letters relates to the desire to be reached (literally and in meaning); and part of the agitation arises because letters, of all genres of writing, have the most capacity to be lost or misunderstood" (Hallet 2002: 108). Letters thus imply an internal desire to be understood and the fear that the letter will be lost (both figuratively in misunderstanding and literally). Furthermore this desire can never truly be fulfilled as the recipient can never understand all the meanings intended by the sender. Letter writing thus always implies the desire for inter-subjective exchange or communication, but it is simultaneously always circumscribed by the difficulty if not impossibility, of its own endeavour. One of Alex's first letters to Jonathan begins as follows: "I hanker for this letter to be good, I am not first rate with English. In Russian my ideas are asserted abnormally well, but my second tongue is not so premium" (Foer 2002: 23). Both Alex's wish that his letter will be good and his concern about his ability to express himself in English, show his desire to be liked and understood by Jonathan. Furthermore, his concern that he will not be able to express his idea adequately in English and as a result Jonathan will not receive their intended meanings, suggests his desire to successfully communicate with Jonathan. Alex's letters to Jonathan simultaneously show a desire to be liked by his correspondent and the fear and anxiety that he will not be.

Letter writing, as a genre and practice, implies a number of expectations and assumptions. Letters are traditionally non-fictional, and in the case of epistolary fiction provide the illusion of fact. However, while this may initially seem to be the case in *Everything is Illuminated* the letters increasingly work to destabilise the validity of the text by discussing its 'negotiations with the truth' and its process of construction. Furthermore, they commonly suggest a certain relationship between the sender and the recipient; a mode of trust. The illusion of intimacy created in letters is based on the fact that letters claim to "replicate, mirror, echo the true self" that sent them (Hallet 2002: 110). This, however, is an illusion: the 'I' that wrote the letter is not identical to the 'I' portrayed in the letter (ibid), as it is simultaneously mediated through the language of the letter and the perception of the reader. Furthermore, "[a]cts of transmission are also acts of transformation because a letter's original meaning and intention are never completely received" (Duyfhuizen 1985: 5). This is reinforced by the temporal distance between the time the letter was written and the time it was received, as Duyfhuizen explains: "[e]pistolary transmission is a temporal event" (1985: 5). Part of this temporality is the inherent belatedness of the correspondence received when writing letters, as Alex comments: "We have always communicated in this misplaced time" (Foer 2002: 218). The text's use of the epistolary form serves to complicate notions of correspondence and dialogue. As Hallet explains the "epistolary art is ever one of approximation": "[t]he immeasurable space between sender and recipient is only underlined by the expectation of intimacy, honesty" (2002: 111). Alex often uses language to foster an illusory sense of intimacy in his letters. In one of his first letters to Jonathan he makes the following comment in parenthesis: "[y]ou are the only person I have remarked this to. Please do not remark it to any

other person" (Foer 2002: 26). Similarly he elsewhere starts a confession by stating: "[d]o not inform one soul" (Foer 2002: 100). Alex's letters repeatedly use phrases that suggest the intimacy in sharing confidences or secrets, that Jonathan is the only person privy to this information and that he cannot share it with others. The absence of letters from Jonathan among those included in the text suggests the provisionality of their correspondence and dialogue. The intimacy of Alex's letters highlights the irreparable gap between receiver and sender which is not only temporal and spatial but circumscribed by the historical reality the text attempts to face.

The epistolary structure of the text not only suggests the desire for dialogue or communication (no matter how provisional) but also a certain engagement with subjectivity as it emerges in language. Katrin Amain suggests the following role of the epistolary genre in the text:

> The epistolary genre and the discourses of the subject formation that remain deeply ingrained in its tradition allow the novel to hold out the vision of an ethically meaningful intersubjective exchange, while at the same time exposing the discursive formations that go into the construction of such a vision (2008: 23).

In *Everything is Illuminated* we are never able to access Jonathan's letters to Alex directly: our only access to them is mediated through Alex's interpretation to and responses to them. Thus while the text's collaborative and epistolary structure suggests the possibility of meaningful intersubjective exchange, this is undermined by the manner in which Alex's letters show the text to be highly mediated and constructed. This is a key site of the text's self reflexivity, and as a result, through a series of unreliable narrators, highlights its own provisionality. As we have seen in the above discussion the promise of intimacy and intersubjective correspondence implied by the epistolary form is highly provisional and illusory: it implies the desire for correspondence and connection rather than the fulfilment of this desire. The epistolary exchange in the text and the seemingly collaborative nature of its construction, remain a promise of or desire for intersubjective exchange rather than the fulfilment of this possibility. This is made evident by the absence of Jonathan's letters, making the exchange decidedly one sided. The connection implied by letter writing remains a promise that is indefinitely deferred.

A crucial element of the (im)possibility of subject formation and intersubjective exchange implied by the epistolary form of the novel is Alex's use of language. In what initially seems simply a humorous narrative device, Alex's (mis)use of English serves to reforge the language: investing it with renewed meaning and affect. Furthermore, Alex's use of language allows Foer to defamiliarise language, providing new affective ways of approaching over determined topics (Lawson 2002). Rather than simply acting as a humorous or entertaining display of the author's ingenuity, Alex's language also acts as a destabilising device: creating a sense of confusion as the reader is forced to translate and decipher his narration (Amian 2008: 163 and

Lawson 2002). This installs yet another layer of mediation between the reader and the events being narrated, and further emphasises the constructed and mediated nature of the narrative being presented thus yet again showing the text to be provisional and limited, as Lawson contends, "Foer is transmitting linguistically . . . the unreliability of reconstructing foreign events" (2002). Thus, Alex's use of language further renders the concept of communication implied by the epistolary form provisional.

The text however does provide certain instances where Alex suggests that this promise of true intersubjective exchange has been fulfilled. In one of his final letters to Jonathan he makes the following comments:

> We are talking now, Jonathan, together, and not apart. We are with each other, working on the same story, and I am certain that you can also feel it. Do you know that I am the Gypsy girl and you are Safran, that I am Kolker and you are Brod, and that I am your grandmother and you are Grandfather, and that I am Alex and you are you, and that I am you and you are me? Do you not comprehend that we can bring each other safety and peace? (Foer 2002: 214).

It is important however that despite this suggestion that they are "together" and telling "the same story", this heightened inter-subjectivity is purely textual (imbedded in narrative and storytelling). The wording of the above quote suggests Alex's intense desire for intersubjective communication and for the possibility that through this communication they can bring each other "safety and peace", however, as we shall see, ultimately they can only continue separated from each other, so the promise implied by this statement is rendered provisional as the text progresses. The very textual nature of their interaction also makes this inhabiting of various subject positions possible. In the final pages of the novel we learn that Alex will never go to America and that their correspondence will cease. Thus the promise implied by this moment of extreme conjunction perceived by Alex remains textual and as such provisional.

To further understand the working of the novel's structure it is worth moving from the epistolary form in general to epistolary fiction in specific. "In most epistolary narratives," Duyfhuizen explains, "some intratextual commentary occurs" (1985: 5), and this is clearly the case with Alex's letters to Jonathan. Katrin Amian explains that the letters Alex writes to Jonathan ground the creative destabilisation in Jonathan's strand of the narrative "in a dynamic of textual exchange" (2008:171). In *Everything is Illuminated* Alex's letters provide intratextual commentary on Jonathan's section of the narrative (which provides a magical account of Jonathan's lost genealogy set in a shtetl called Trachimbrod, which they search for in Alex's strand of the narrative) as well as on the fictional construction of the text as a whole. In his first letter to Jonathan, Alex makes the following comment: "I have one small query about this section, which is do you know that many of the names your exploit are not truthful names for Ukraine? . . . Did you invent them? There were many mishaps like this, I will inform you. Are you being a humorous writer here, or an

uninformed one?" (Foer 2002: 25). Here Alex's response to Jonathan's story of Trachimbrod introduces some complexities which become important to the novel's thematics. We are required to question the validity and authenticity of the narrative we have just received. In addition we begin to question whether Alex's unfamiliarity with the names Jonathan uses is evidence of Jonathan's ignorance of Ukraine or Alex's ignorance of past Jewish society, to the extent that their very names have been erased. The text thus dramatises its own unreliability and highlights a number of its key concerns: the unreliability of memory, history and narrative, as well as the generative potential of storytelling and fiction. This unreliability of memory highlights the fact that all attempts to access the past are provisional at best, limited and circumscribed by the ways in which we have access to them in the present.

For Amian, while the text's structure "charts the process of its own making" it also suggests the unlimited creative potential of revision and rewriting (2008: 172). Furthermore, the effect of the text's metafictional subversion and critique is the undermining of "the ontological boundaries of the world of the text and the world of the reader" (Amian 2008: 172). The epistolary structure provides a commentary on the narrative and forces us to reconsider the sections of the text that we have just read, and as a result the nature of writing and storytelling. A striking example of this can be seen in the following:

> In understand what you write when you write that Brod does not love Yankel. It does not signify that she does not feel volumes for him, or that she will not be melancholy when he expires. It is something else. Love, in your writing is the immovability of truth. Brod is not truthful with anything. Not Yankel and not herself. Everything is one world in distance from the real world (Foer 2002: 103).

In the above Alex's letter provides an analysis of the part of Jonathan's section that the reader has just read. Alex shows the reader that Brod lives her life always mediated by Yankel. After reading this extract one is forced to reconsider the text in light of this interpretation and reconsider the interpretations we have made. Increasingly the events of the text show themselves to be defined and created textually, and the boundaries between fiction and reality, even within the text, become increasingly blurred. This can be seen in even the most simple of examples, in the author using his name to refer to a highly fictionalised character. This self reflexivity inherent to the text's structure further emphasises the text's provisionality and allows the novel to productively engage with events of the past while avoiding appropriation and co-option implicit in the work of postmemory.

By presenting the two narrators' alternate perspectives Foer allows these two subjects to confront each other and in so doing confront their past and history (Callado-Rodrigues 2008: 58). For both characters their work of postmemory is intimately connected to their communication (and the generic mode of their communication). Their fictional interaction occurs at the intersection of the public and the private essential

to most memory work, and the text suggests that it is only through their confrontation with each other that they are able to begin their work of postmemory. Alex's memory work cannot be separated from the intersection between his individual lack of knowledge of his grandfather's wartime experience and the national amnesia that hinders their attempts to find Trachimbrod. Similarly, Jonathan's work of postmemory is linked both to his familial history and to his identity as an American Jew (which frames his trip). It is clear furthermore that Alex can only break with the trajectory of violence that has haunted his family as a result of his encounter with his history, both individual and national, and as a result, learn that the roles that he once thought to be immovable can be changed. In specific the roles Alex sees as "immovable" are those represented within his abusive household. This is suggested in the following statement which describes Alex's response to his father having once been robbed by border guards on his way to Prague: "it is so queer to think of someone injuring Father. I more usually think of roles as unmovable" (Foer 2002:33). Thus initially Alex finds it difficult to imagine his father as the victim of any form of violence as he traditionally sees his father's role as being as the inflictor of violence.

The interaction and correspondence implied by the epistolary structure of the text, also suggests an evolving understanding of literature, language, history and narrative in the character of Alex. As Callado-Rodrigues explains:

> It is not till [Alex] starts to understand Jonathan's (mythical) literary perspective – a postmodernist perspective that openly sustains that the world of reported 'facts' also belongs to the same epistemological level as fiction. . .- that Alex is able to rebel against his difficult father (2008: 61).

Thus as Alex moves from a rather literal understanding of narrative and the distinction between fact and fiction and begins to embrace the possibilities of truth-value inherent to Jonathan's perception of fiction, he is able to see the power relations in his life as moveable. An important example of Alex's growing awareness of the value of writing and storytelling can be found in the following:

> I think this is why I relish writing for you so much. It makes it possible for me to be not like I am, but as I desire for little Igor to see me. I can be funny, and I can repair my mistakes when I perform mistakes, and I can be melancholy person in manners that are interesting, not only melancholy. With writing, we have second chances. (Foer 2002: 144).

In this passage Foer is able to highlight the value and importance of writing for Alex. Unlike in reality, Alex explains, fiction allows one to remedy mistakes, and give meaning to pain that otherwise would be meaningless. Alex's writing is thus fuelled by the desire for second chances, to redeem mistakes and insert meaning into events that without narrativisation would be devoid of meaning. Furthermore, the generative and redemptive capacity of fiction implied by Jonathan's use of narrative mirrors the text's own concerns. However, as shall be shown, the text suggests that there are certain mistakes in the past that cannot be erased or rewritten, thus showing the generative capacity of fiction to be provisional.

Like the other texts in this study, *Everything is Illuminated* complicates distinctions between fact and fiction. A rather striking example of this can be found in the uncanny mirroring of two instances in the text. Alex reads the following passage in Jonathan's notebook:

> He told his father that he could care for Mother and Little Igor. It took saying it to make it true. Finally he was ready. His father could not believe this thing. What? he asked. What? And Sasha told him again that he would take care of the family, that he would understand if his father had to leave and never return, and that it would not even make him less of a father. He told his father that he would forgive. Oh, his father became so angry, so full of wrath, and he told Sasha he would kill him, and Sasha told his father he would kill him, and they moved at each other with violence and his father said Say it to my face, not to the floor, and Sasha said, You are not my father. (Foer 2002: 160).

This instance is mirrored in the translation of Alex's grandfather's letter that Alex sends to Jonathan after his suicide:

> I do not know if Sasha will tell you what has happened here tonight, and what is about to happen. It is important that you know what kind of man he is. . . [t]his is what happened. He told his father that he could care for Mother and Little Igor. It took his saying it to make it true. Finally, he was ready. His father could not believe this thing. What? he asked. What? And Sasha told him again that he would take care of the family, that he would understand if his father had to leave and never return, and that it would not even make him less of a father. He told his father that he would forgive. Oh, his father became so angry, so full of wrath, and he told Sasha he would kill him, and Sasha told his father he would kill him, and they moved at each other with violence and his father said Say it to my face, not to the floor, and Sasha said, You are not my father. (Foer 2002: 274)

These two excerpts from the text are almost identical. The 'fictional' version written by Jonathan precedes Alex's eventual confrontation with his father, as a result the lines between the fictional and the real become blurred and porous. While both events occur within the fictional world of the novel, they question the relationship between the fictional and the real. The text seems to suggest that Jonathan's narration of the event in his note book makes Alex's separation from his father possible (Callado-Rodrigues 2008: 61). However this is not the only possibility suggested by the ontological instability created by the similarity between the two extracts quoted above, it also suggests that the event was *written into reality*, or acts as a reminder that Alex is merely a product of the real Jonathan's imagination. This slippage between the fictional and the real in the text serves to highlight the productivity of narrative and creativity that remain highly important in the text's engagement with our multiply mediated access to the events of the Holocaust from a great temporal remove. However, as we shall see, no matter the extent of their "negotiations with the truth", the narrative remains circumscribed by the very real effects of the Holocaust.

Storytelling, the novel seems to suggest, becomes a site for self-reflexivity for the third generation. Alex becomes an increasingly mature and self-conscious narrator, evolving from his initial naiveté. Initially Alex

takes Jonathan's writing literally, however during his collaboration with Jonathan his perspective on narrative matures and becomes more nuanced as can be seen in the following extract from a letter to Jonathan: "I would never command you to write a story that is as it occurred in the actual, but I would command you to make your story faithful" (Foer 2002: 240). This quote suggests a new hierarchy in Alex's perception of narrative: no longer does Alex prioritise a literal or factual truth, but rather favours a figurative faithfulness or truthfulness that can transcend a factual representation of events. The suggestion implicit in the text seems to be that this new understanding of narrative can only occur as a result of his encounter with his other (the Jew), as it is through reading Jonathan's writing and corresponding with Jonathan that Alex is able to refigure his perception of narrative. It is further important to note that Alex's new perception of narrative translates into action in his own life.

Feuer[73] argues that the text confronts the problems and possibilities of reconciliation between "Jews and non-Jews of the second and third generation post-holocaust" (2007: 24). Similarly to Sebald's *Austerlitz,* Foer's text is in part concerned with the interaction between the Jew and his or her other in the post-Holocaust context. However, Foer's third generation perspective which renders him doubly removed from the events of the Holocaust sheds new light on this interaction which in Sebald's text remained only indirectly articulated. Feuer argues that the novel is thematically concerned with writing and friendship, which become inextricably intertwined with the novel's narrative structure. The concern over writing, friendship and forgiveness can be seen in the following excerpt from the text:

> A bad person is someone who does not lament his bad actions. Grandfather is now dying because of his. I beseech you to forgive us, and to make us better than we are. Make us good. (Foer 2002: 145).

The beseeching tone of this plea that Jonathan will forgive Alex's grandfather and Alex for his grandfather's crimes, suggests not only a wish for inter-subjective exchange, but also the belief that he can only be freed from his past by Jonathan as a third generation Jew. The provisionality of this inter-subjective interaction is read by Feuer as evidence of Jonathan's refusal of Alex's friendship and the forgiveness an acceptance of this friendship might imply (2007: 25). It seems however more accurate to suggest that the novel's epistolary structure problematises the concepts of communication, friendship and forgiveness without supplying the closure that such a refusal would suggest.

Feuer seems correct in arguing that while fiction and writing are generative forces in the text, Jonathan and Alex's relationship remains circumscribed by the forces of history and memory (2007: 26). This does suggest that resulting from this burden of history and memory their friendship must remain only provisional,

[73] While Feuer makes, what I believe to be, some clear misreadings of the novel's plot, some of the insights his analysis provides still retain their value.

however their interaction and collaboration in the text's construction is hopeful and perhaps suggests the possibility of friendship and forgiveness for future generations. Alex ends his first letter to Jonathan as follows:

> I hope that you are happy, and that your family is healthful and prosperous. We became *like* friends while you were in Ukraine, yes? In a different world, we could have been *real* friends. (Emphasis my own) (Foer 2002: 26).

This statement suggests it is not unwillingness that prevents them from becoming "real friends", but rather their specific contexts, and the "world" they live in that has been defined by historical traumas that precede their births, but have real and lasting impact on their lives. Furthermore, if one considers the following passage from the Grandfather's letter to Jonathan, one can see that the promise implied by Alex's confrontation with his father can only be fulfilled if they remain separate: "They must begin again. They must cut all strings, yes? With you (Sasha told me you will not write to each other anymore), with their father (who is now gone forever), with everything they have known" (Foer 2002: 275). For both Alex and Jonathan to continue, unburdened by the past, they must end their communication. Further the text suggests that while the past should not be ignored, remain hidden or be forgotten (the text shows that the Grandfather's silence has damaging repercussions for both himself and his family), it should eventually be left behind.

The text involves a complex mediation on the possibility of narrative truths that exceed or transcend empirical reality, and in so doing emphasises the generative and productive capacity of narrative. For example, Alex makes the following statement in reply to alterations Jonathan made to his section of the narrative: "I have ruminated what you told me about making the part about my grandmother more protracted. Because you felt with so much gravity about this, I thought OK to include the parts that you posted me. I cannot say that I brooded these things, but I can say that I would covet to be the variety of person to have brooded those things. They were very beautiful, Jonathan, and I felt them as true" (Foer 2002: 24). Once again this excerpt from the text highlights the collaborative nature of the text's construction, shedding light on its highly mediated structure; furthermore it suggests the possibility of an affective truth emerging from fiction that is not necessarily grounded in actuality or a literal truth.

The text considers the relationship between narrative and history. Unlike the authoritative discourse of history described by Barthes (detailed in my introduction) that obscures its own 'writtenness', authorship and emplotment, *Everything is Illuminated* is a text that makes its narrativisation evident. This self-reflexivity is central to the ways in which this text emphasises its fictional and mediated nature, as well as its provisionality. This is highlighted by the epistolary arrangement of the text, which structures the novel as a

communicative dialogue. Alex's narrative acts as a commentary not only on Jonathan's narrative, but on the process of the text's construction. This can be seen in the following:

> We are being nomadic with the truth, yes? The both of us? Do you think this is acceptable when we are writing about things that occurred? If your answer is no, then why do you write about your grandfather and Trachimbrod in the manner that you do, and why do you command me to be untruthful? If your answer is yes, then this creates another question, which is if we are to be nomads with the truth, why do we not make the story more premium than life? (Foer 2002: 179).

The above passage highlights a number of the key thematic concerns of the text; the relationship between fiction and history; fiction and truth; as well as the nature of truth itself. The text engages repeatedly in a self-reflexive critique of the ethics of writing fictional accounts of the Holocaust which speak directly to the debates concerning the fictionalisation of the Holocaust in literature (that have been outlined in my introduction). Alex's statement not only draws our attention to the process of fictionalisation occurring in the text, but also questions the ethics involved. His final sentence also queries the possibility of making the story "more premium than life", however this reparative urge (this wish to heal the wounds of the past with fiction), which is repeated imploringly throughout the narrative, shows the limits of the process of fictionalisation. Jonathan shows a similar reparative urge in the Trachimbrod narrative:

> Their floats were marched along the brod's bank, adorned in red, brown, and purple butterflies, showing their carcasses like ugly truths. (And here it is becoming harder and harder not to yell: GO AWAY! RUN WHILE YOU CAN, FOOLS! RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!) The bands bellowed, trumpets and violins, pocket trumpets and violas, homemade wax paper Kazoos (Foer 2002: 269).

On the last Trachimday, the narrator cannot maintain his distance from the events being told. Unlike on previous Trachimdays when the animal carcasses were hidden and obscured, on this day the carcasses can be seen. The narrator's voice intrudes into the narrative, separated by parenthesis, where he berates the seemingly oblivious characters who are about to meet their deaths at the hands of the Nazis. It seems in this instance the narrator is as helpless as his characters, although he wants to warn them, to change history, he cannot. They remain oblivious, and the festivities continue. The corporeal reality of the Holocaust necessarily sets the limits of this narrative's imaginative excess.

As the narrative progresses the boundaries between the narrative strands and the letters become increasingly provisional, and thus the entire text becomes to a certain degree an epistolary exchange. Alex's (and occasionally Jonathan's) voice is inserted into the body of the two narrative strands, disrupting their progress and providing commentary on the narrative action. The slippage between the two narrative strands, Alex's letters and his narrative, becomes increasingly apparent as the narrative draws closer to its climax and the Grandfather's confession. Alex uses parenthesis initially to address Jonathan directly:

> (Here it is almost too forbidding to continue. I have written to this point many times, and I have corrected the parts you would have me correct, and made more funnies, and more inventions, and written as if I were you writing this, but every time I try to persevere, my hand shakes so that I can no longer hold my pen. Do it for me. Please. It is yours now.)
>
> Grandfather concealed his face behind the photograph.
>
> (And this does not seem to me like such a cowardly thing to do, Jonathan. We would also conceal our faces, yes? In truth, I am certain we would.)
>
> "The world is the smallest thing," he said.
>
> (He laughed at this moment, as you remember, but you cannot include that in the story). (Foer 2002: 226).

The function of this use of parenthesis is multiple. First it provides self-conscious commentary on the text and its construction and well as providing insight into Alex's emotions as the events unfold. Second, it allows Alex to directly address Jonathan, the editor and as we shall see archivist, suggesting what should be included and excluded. Third, this particular excerpt sheds doubt on who is actually narrating. Alex states that he cannot continue, and gives ownership of the narrative to Jonathan. We are left with the uncertainty as to whether Alex does in fact continue narrating or if Jonathan continues narrating as Alex, thus further blurring the lines between narrative strands and voices. Finally the parenthesis open up gaps in the narrative, fragmenting the events portrayed. Later there is a slippage, not only between the letters and the narrative, but between the content presented in the narrative and the content presented in the parenthesis, in which the Grandfather's voice emerges addressing Alex. This shows a further collapse and fragmentation of the narrative.

Importantly, epistolary fiction implies the presence of an editor, a character who has compiled the work, saved the letters in order to compile and reproduce them. In fact, Duyfhuizen suggests that this editor should be seen as a collector or archivist (1985: 10). This insight allows us to consider this text as a product of what Foster has called an archival impulse. In *Everything is Illuminated* it seems that the fictional Jonathan becomes this editor and thus acts both as narrator and archivist. The text is composed of a number of fragments of fiction including letters and sections of narrative. The manner in which the text is compiled mirrors the nature of our access to the Holocaust at this temporal remove, like the work of postmemory it requires one to piece together and sift through fragments of information. Furthermore, many of the fictional texts referenced in Jonathan's strand of the narrative seem to replicate this archival structure, for example "The Book of Recurrent Dreams" and "The Book of Antecedents".

> *The Book of Antecedents* began as a record of major events: battles and treaties, famines, seismic occurrences, the beginnings and ends of political regimes. But it wasn't long before lesser events were included and described at great length. . . Soon, upon the demand of the readership . . . *The Book of Antecedents* included a biennial census, with every name of every citizen and a brief chronicle of his or her life. . . *The Book of Antecedents*, once updated yearly,

> was now continually updated, and when there was nothing to report, the full-time committee would report its reporting, just to keep the book moving, expanding, becoming more like life. *We are writing . . .We are writing. . .We are writing.* (Foer 2002: 196).

While initially what is collected and archived within this book are items of public (or national) importance, for example battles and famines, it increasingly seeks to document every aspect of the community's life until the process of compiling becomes increasingly detailed and what is archived is archiving itself. The book therefore comes to represent the attempt to create an absolute archive which will ultimately record the life of the community in full. The work of the archive, or so this quote suggests, is never finished. This description of the "Book of Antecedents" and its production also seems to loosely articulate the link between the archive and literature, as well as the archival impulse of the novel itself. It suggests that the process of recording the past is never finished. Furthermore it seems to emphasise the futility of the attempt to create a perfect all encompassing archive, in the attempt to archive everything, the villagers archive nothing but the process itself.

To conclude, the text's epistolary structure serves a number of important roles. It firstly illustrates the desire for and momentary achievement of inter-subjective communication between Jonathan and Alex, as well as the simultaneously highlighting the provisionality of this. By highlighting the provisionality of these communications Foer is able to suggest that despite their "negotiations with the truth" these two young men are never free from the events of the past that circumscribe their relationship in the present. The letters, further, serve to destabilise the validity of the text's content, highlighting its fictional and constructed nature. In this vein, the letters become a mediation on the nature of fiction and storytelling and its role in the novel. The epistolary structure is a key tool in the novel's self-reflexivity, which in turn highlights its mediated distance from the events it describes. The text shows itself to be a fictional construction, always provisional, and as a result always emphasising the limitations as well as the generative capacities of fiction. Additionally, Alex's use of language becomes a strikingly effective mechanism through which language is defamiliarised and invested with new meaning. The intrusion of both Alex and Jonathan's voices into the body of the narrative reinforces the remaining impact of the events of the past on these two young men in the present. Yet, as we will discuss in further detail, the text's conclusion implies the ability, if not necessity, to move on from the past (without ignoring or forgetting its impact on the present).

Writing the Third Generation: History, Memory and Identity in *Everything is Illuminated*

Writing from the perspective of the third generation after the Holocaust[74], Foer is even more concerned than the second generation authors we have discussed, with questions of transmission and reception of narratives of the Holocaust. Foer's text attempts to engage with the problem of writing about a history to which he has only mediated access, and this does not only include the history of the Holocaust, but also the history of Jewish life in the Ukraine prior to the Second World War. The Trachimbrod strand of Foer's novel uses magic, mythic and folkloric narrative techniques in order to narrate the history of a people whose way of life has been erased. In order to do so, he draws reference from Jewish folklore, especially the image of the shtetl, in order to articulate an imagined past.

The third generation is the last generation likely to have had any direct contact with survivors. Hoffman explains the significance of this fact as follows:

> The deep effects of catastrophe, the kind that are passed on from psyche to psyche and mind to mind, continue to reverberate into the third generation. But after the third . . . the thread of direct memory will be lost (2004: 185).

Thus for Hoffman the third generation exists at an interesting apex of history, while they may still experience the generational effects of the Holocaust, they are likely the last generation to have direct contact with those who have first person experience of the events of the Holocaust. Accordingly one can argue that they become particularly important in suggesting new ways to engage with these events in the future. As a third generation author, Foer's work is framed by its mediated access to the past; suggests how this history impacts the present; and considers what it might mean for the future.

Furthermore, Foer's position as an author is not only defined by his position as a third generation Jew, but also as an American, which suggests a geographic and cultural remove from the 'old country'. As Behlman explains, Jewish American authors concerned with the Holocaust have encountered a number of aesthetic difficulties:

> Among these are the seemingly unbridgeable historical divide between a relatively comfortable American Jewish present and the dark European past and the inadequacy of any attempt, fictive or not, to 'capture' the scope and the intensity of such massive collective experience (2004: 56).

[74] Ribbat coins the term "post-postmemory" (2005: 213) in order to describe Foer's position. However new terminology seems unnecessary. Postmemory in Hirsch's definition does not necessarily only apply to the children of survivors of cultural trauma, but also their descendants.

For Behlman the relative economic and social security of contemporary American Jews, makes the threatened social and economic position of their Eastern European predecessors even more remote, thus further separating these authors from the events with which their fiction is concerned. Furthermore as Amian explains:

> "[T]he novel . . .negotiates the creative and social spaces delineated by the simultaneous absence and presence of a remote yet proximal past, challenging conventional notions of referentiality while exploring the grounds on which the past can or must remain 'meaningful' for today's generation of Jewish Americans and Eastern Europeans (Amian 2008: 157).

This awareness of the extreme and unbridgeable temporal and geographical discontinuity between contemporary Jewish experience and that of the past is highlighted by Foer's extreme fictionalisation of the past in the Trachimbrod section of the narrative. Furthermore, Foer by problematising ideas of authorship, reference and history, highlights the mediated nature of our access to the events of the past.

The characterisation of Jonathan in *Everything is Illuminated* points us towards a specific trend in the post-Holocaust American Jewish imagination. The Holocaust, however problematically, has become key to American Jewish self-knowledge, as James Young explains bellow:

> For as has become painfully apparent, a part of the generation of Jews growing up in Europe and America after the Holocaust was forced by events to identify as Jews only in relation to Holocaust suffering (1988:109).

James Young thus implies that this process of identification with the Holocaust occurred out of necessity. Peter Novick makes a similar point in his introduction to *The Holocaust in American Life* (1999). Novick identifies a resurgence in interest in the Holocaust in recent generations of North American Jews which he argues cannot be explained by the Freudian paradigm of "the return of the repressed" (1999:1-3), but rather Halbwach's consideration of collective memory. Novick argues that collective memory of this kind simplifies events, viewing them from a single perspective, and as a result bypasses ambiguities of any kind and reduces events to "mythic archetypes" (Novick 1999:4). He argues, therefore, that there is a danger in this incorporation of the Holocaust as central to Jewish identity as it threatens to simplify the complexity of the reality that was the Holocaust. Novick argues that the now central place the Holocaust has assumed in American Jewish identity emerges out of a specific context in American history, one of the most important elements of which has been "the decline in America of an integrationist ethos . . . and its replacement by a particularist ethos" (1999:6-7)[75]. The symbol of the Holocaust, according to Novick, provides a key common factor for a now largely diverse American Jewish community providing a point around which Jewish identity comes to coalesce (1999:7). While renewed interest in the Holocaust among Jews in North America is an attempt to reinforce a sense of Jewishness through a shared history of trauma it is also an

[75] For a similar perspective see Kugelmass, Jack. 1996. "Missions to the Past: Poland in Contemporary Jewish Thought and Deed" in *Tense Past* (ed. P. Antze and M. Lambek). London: Routledge. pp.203-207.

attempt to “heal what they have increasingly come to realise is a radical rupture in the memory fabric of their culture” (Kugelmass 1996:200). Novick's argument is useful in so far as it emphasises that the resurgence of interest in the Holocaust among American Jews emerges out of a specific social and historical context and because it implies the threat that the complex events of the Holocaust will be simplified in order to remain a sight of collective identification. However, he fails to take into account the communal necessity to restore a linkage to a history that has lost its direct referent, or the individual necessity to recover a connection to a lost family history. Foer is able to successfully negotiate this complex problematic: exploring both the necessary attempt to restore links to an ultimately inaccessible past and to critique and avoid simplistic identification with a unitary narrative of this past.

As mentioned in the previous section the text’s construction is collaborative and is concerned with the possibilities for communication available to the third generation. Similarly to Novick, Ribbat contends that the Holocaust is increasingly becoming an “Americanized imaginary space” (2005: 205). American authors’ responses to this have been to create narratives “that explore representations of the Holocaust rather than its reality” (Ribbat 2005: 205). Ribbat explains that:

> The world *Everything is Illuminated* investigates is not America. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to read the novel as a story of a hero’s quest to find his roots and perhaps succeed in connecting his American self to his European past. Rather, the novel switches perspectives. The American becomes Other, as a stranger who has come to explore events that are ignored in post-communist Eastern Europe (2005: 212 – 213).

There are, however, a number of problems with this position. First, it is clear that in rewriting Trachimbrod’s history and his familial genealogy, Jonathan is attempting to reconnect with an erased past, however the excessive fictionalisation of this narrative suggests that the only access to this past is via the imaginative investment and engagement of postmemory, and remains provisional at best, circumscribed by absence and silence. Furthermore although Jonathan is an American and thus comes to signify the centre rather than the margin, his wealth and nationality placing him in a position of power, as a Jew in Eastern Europe (irrespective of the changed economic and social position of American Jewry) is still Other. This is often emphasised by the use of humour in the text. As can be seen in the following example:

> I will be truthful again and mention that before the voyage I had the opinion that Jewish people were having shit between their brains. This is because all I knew of Jewish people was that they paid father very much currency in order to make vacations *from* America *to* Ukraine (emphasis the author’s own) (Foer 2002: 3)

This example reinforces the very different subject position epitomised by Jonathan and Alex. Alex, who has never met a Jew (this also suggests the stark absence of Jews from Ukraine) assumes that Jews are foolish because they wish to visit Ukraine even though they live in America, which he idealises. The confusion that this humorous confession suggests in based on Alex’s absence of any knowledge of Ukraine’s involvement

in World War II or the part his Grandfather played in this. Furthermore the concept of "Heritage Tours" where Alex and his Father work, suggests an entire industry based around the relationship between the Holocaust and modern Jewish identity. Foer's text does emphasise the shifted power relations between American Jews and the citizens of Eastern Europe. However he also provisionally suggests that the Jew's impossible desire to regain connection to this lost past remains a legitimate if unachievable impulse.

Foer's postmemorial engagement is primarily (and necessarily) imaginative and fictional. One of the key sites of postmemorial investment in the text, the photograph of Augustine, is a fictive description, or "prose picture" (Hirsch 1997:8), rather than an actual photograph as was provided in both *Maus* and *Austerlitz*. Our vision of this central site of postmemorial investment in the text is thus mediated by numerous layers of textuality. The fictional descriptions of these photographs provide an additional layer of mediation which suggests the additional temporal remove from the events of the Holocaust implied by a third generation perspective. Our access to the image is always mediated through its description, which is again circumscribed by the narrative reading and investment applied to it by its fictional viewers. This can be seen in the following description of the photograph made by Alex in the text:

> He [Jonathan] moved his finger along the face of the girl in the photograph as he mentioned her. She was standing down and right to his grandfather in the picture. A man who I am certain was her father was next to her, and a woman who I am certain was her mother was behind her. Her parents appeared very Russian, but she did not. She appeared American. She was a youthful girl, perhaps fifteen. But it is possible that she had more age. She could have been so old as the hero and me, as could have been the hero's grandfather. I looked at the girl for many minutes. She was so so beautiful. Her hair was brown, and rested only on her shoulders. Her eyes appeared sad, and full of intelligence. (Foer 2002: 59).

Alex's reading of this photograph is based on a number of assumptions that he makes about the relationships between the figures in the image, namely that: the woman in the photograph is Augustine's mother and the man her father. Her age is also uncertain; while Alex assumes that she is about fifteen he also acknowledges that she may in fact be much older. He provides us with interpretations not only of the age of the girl or her relationship to the man and the woman in the photograph but also about her character: "[h]er eyes appeared sad, and full of intelligence" (Foer 2002: 59). Yet, we are reminded throughout this excerpt that these assumptions are only interpretations by the numerous words and phrases used that denote uncertainty: "appeared"; "I am certain"; "could have been"; and "it is possible". The text thus emphasises our mediated access to the image.

Furthermore, this description suggests the problematic inherent to reading photographs, that despite the reality effect they produce, they remain limited by their two dimensionality and circumscribed frames. Later we are given the following speculative dialogue about the photograph:

> "And how do you know that her name is Augustine?" "I guess I don't, really. On the back, see, here, are written a few words in Yiddish. It says: 'This is me with Augustine, February 21, 1943.". . . "Why do you think he remarks only about Augustine and not the other two in the photograph?" "I don't know." It is queer, yes? It is queer that he remarks only her. Do you think he loved her? "What?" "Because he remarks only her." "So?" "So perhaps he loved her." "It's funny that you should think that. We must think alike" (Foer 2002: 60).

Alex continues as follows:

> "But isn't there something strange about the picture, the closeness between them, even though they're not looking at each other? The *way* they aren't looking at each other. The distance, It's very powerful don't you think?" (Foer 2002: 61).

The name and image of the girl Augustine become a key area of imaginative investment for many of the characters in the text. The very object of their journey is to find her. However as the above excerpts make clear, it is perfectly possible that the name on the back of the photograph does not refer to the girl in question at all. Furthermore both Jonathan and Alex attempt to narrativise the interactions they perceive in the photograph and in so doing invest them with meaning. Both Jonathan and Alex, in their interpretation of the photograph choose to see a romantic relationship between the couple. This reading beyond the flat two dimensionality of the photographic surface requires both a process of imaginative investment and of interpretation, in which the reader is included. This however is undercut by the earlier uncertainty of the reading of the photograph. If we cannot be certain that the girl's name is Augustine, how can we be sure that she was in love with Jonathan's grandfather? Thus the process of postmemorial investment in the photograph is shown to be provisional at best.

Photographs are an important site of memory and postmemory for the characters in Foer's novel and represent the tenuous links between the present and the past. This is also true of Alex's grandfather's reaction to the photograph of Augustine:

> The first night I witnessed him crying he was investigating an aged leather bag, brimmed with many photographs and pieces of paper, like one of Augustine's boxes. The photographs were yellow, and so were the papers. I am certain that he was having memories from when he was only a boy, and not an old man. The second night he was crying he had the photograph of Augustine in his hands . . . "Augustine," I could hear him say. "Augustine." The third night he was crying he had a photograph of you in his hands. . . Again he was saying "Augustine," although I do not understand why (Foer 2002: 102).

The three instances where Alex observes his grandfather all involve photographs. In the first, Alex sees his grandfather looking at a box of photographs and interprets his actions as suggesting he was remembering himself as a youth. With little evidence Alex assumes that viewing photographs suggests a specific relation

to memory and the events of the past. The latter two instances are even more suggestive, especially if we consider them in conjunction. For the grandfather, or so it seems, the photograph of Augustine comes to represent the failure of their quest to find Augustine, but it can also be seen to represent his own personal failure. Unlike Augustine, who saved Jonathan's grandfather, thus making Jonathan's life possible, Alex's grandfather did not save or protect his best friend, as a result when he looks at the photograph of Jonathan he says "Augustine". Thus the photographs come to represent these dual moments of failure for the Grandfather. For us they suggest the process in which photographs are narrativised and invested with meaning in postmemory and the relationship between memory and photography in the text.

Like his reference to photography, Foer's use of elements from magic realism suggests a highly provisional relationship to the events of the past. Furthermore, his use of the generic tropes of magical realism[76] and elements from Jewish folklore and myth, can be seen as a response to the disparity between his own position as an American Jew and the experience of his Eastern European ancestors. Belhman's claim that "[o]ne [of the] major response[s] to the problem of representation by young American writers has been the use of fantasy, folklore, and magical-realist devices"[77] (2004: 56). I am hesitant to position Foer's work within a single genre, as it so clearly evades generic labels. I think it would be more accurate to argue that Foer's work certain attributes of magical realism and of Jewish folklore in order to suggest a specific engagement with history and memory in his Trachimbrod strand of the narrative. Foer's hyperbolic fictionalisation of the narrative of Trachimbrod both signals the generative and magical capacities of fiction while using this narrative mode to signal a fundamental absence in history and discontinuity with the past. Foer's narrative excess highlights it own provisionality. Moreover, the magic instances in the text are critiqued through Alex's letters, which highlight the impossibility or improbability of certain of the events that the characters in the Trachimbrod strand of the narrative take for granted (examples of this include Brod's absence of an umbilical cord when born, the light that accompanied copulation on Trachimday, and Brod's premonition of the village's destruction).

[76] A useful and concise definition of Magical realism is provided by Faris as follows: "[m]agical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the realism portrayed" (1995:163). In defining the generic attributes of magical realism, Zamor and Faris make the comment that in magic realist texts "the supernatural is not a simple or obvious matter, but it *is* an ordinary matter, an everyday occurance" (1995: 3)

[77] Conversely Amian argues that the magical occurrences that take place in Jonathan's narrative are not examples of magical realism as they "do not function as 'ordinary events in a 'realist story' . . . but only widen the gaps and deepen the ambiguities in staging a world that is endlessly (re)created in the act of its belated fictional (re)construction" (2008: 166 – 167). Rather than entering into the debate as to whether *Everything is Illuminated* can be considered an example of magical realism, I believe it is more useful to discuss the purpose of the magic, mythic and carnivalesque elements of the text in Foer's engagement with a remote past.

Foer's hyperbolic representation of Trachimbrod's past exhibits a specific and rather complex engagement with history. The ideological programme of magical realism "creates space for interactions of diversity" and in the case of the text under discussion, multivocality and heterogeneity (*ibid*). The magical in Foer's text works to create an ontological uncertainty[78] in the reader, often allowing a plurality of positions to exist simultaneously. The examples of magical realism evident in *Everything is Illuminated* often provide multiple and contradictory versions and interpretations of events (Farris 1995: 171), which in turn imply a specific understanding of history and our access to it in the present. The first segment of the Trachimbrod narrative begins as follows: "It was March 18, 1791, when Trachim B's double axel wagon either did or did not pin him against the bottom of the Brod River" (Foer 2002: 8). The seeming historical certainty of giving a specific date is juxtaposed against the uncertainty of whether the event occurred at all - neither of these perspectives is ever verified and they exist simultaneously. The problem of reference and of narrating a history when encountered with a multiply removed past, are highlighted by the multivocality of this section of the narrative. An example of this can be seen in the numerous accounts of Trachimbrod's founding narrative. The witness to Trachimbrod's founding narrative is Sofiowka who is purported to be mad and this sheds light on his reliability as a narrator. He describes the event as follows:

> *I have seen everything that happened,* he said hysterically. *I witnessed it all. The wagon was moving too fast for this dirt road . . . and it suddenly flipped itself, and if that's not exactly the truth, then the wagon didn't flip itself, but was itself flipped by a wind from Kiev or Odessa or wherever; and if that doesn't seem quite correct, then what happened was – I swear my lily-white name on this – an angel with grave-stone feathered wings descended from heaven to take Trachim back with him, for Trachim was too good for this world* (Foer 2002: 9).

Sofiowka's account is filled with conflicting versions of events and numerous disclaimers, such as: "if that is not exactly the truth" and "if that doesn't seem correct" (Foer 2002: 9). Furthermore, as the narrative progresses we are given more contradictory interpretations of this event. Harry V, for example, the "shtetl's master logician and resident pervert" argued that Trachim's wife was pregnant and went into labour in the wagon, and in order to rush her to the doctor Trachim drove the wagon at dangerous speeds, and flipped it (Foer 2002: 16). In this version of events Trachim's wife gave birth to her child in the river, thus explaining Brod's birth, but the "absence of an umbilical cord" remains beyond explanation (as magical) (*ibid*). Arguably, by undermining the basic structures of reason, rationalism and empiricism, magic realist texts are subversive because in undermining and unsettling empiricist assumptions they often invoke unsettling doubts (Zamora and Faris 1995: 6 and Farris 1995 :171). Foer's use of certain elements of magic realism serves a similar purpose. In the event described above, the reader is given numerous explanations of the events, all of which may be rational, but which are undermined by the possibility that Trachim was carried off by angels and/or the inexplicable absence of an umbilical cord in Brod's birth. This prevents the reader from drawing reassuring singular conclusions from the events described. The text's multivocality and

[78] A number of critics have explained that an ontological disruption is brought about by the magical intervention into realism in the genre of magic realism (Zamora and Faris 1995: 3).

heterogeneity also serves to self-consciously undermine its own authority and highlight not only its own provisionality, but the provisionality of narrative as a means to access the past. Furthermore, by emphasising the numerous accounts of what comes to be the founding narrative of Trachimbrod, Foer is also able to highlight the frailty of memory and critique the illusion provided by history of providing unmediated access to the past which is shown by these numerous accounts to be impossible.

Like many imagined communities, Trachimbrod has a founding narrative. However, as has been shown above, this founding myth does not provide a single or stable site of identification for the community as the validity of the myth is questioned by the numerous interpretations of the event, as well as the uncertainty as to whether it occurred at all. Trachimbrod's myth of origin also seems to become an allegory for the writing process. This narrative describes Brod's (Jonathan's ancestor's) birth from the debris of her parent's death. The descriptions of this found in the text are revealing:

> In the middle of the string and feathers, surrounded by candles and soaked matches, prawns, pawns, and silk tassels that curtsied like jellyfish, was a baby girl, still mucus-glazed, still pink as the inside of a plum (Foer 2002: 13).

The baby Brod literally emerges from the river surrounded by debris and fragments of her parents' death and these fragments are testament to a past that she can never recover. As Feuer explains "[t]he first allegory deals with what I will call the allegory of origin – the construction of meaning out of fragments or the gathering together of fragments" (2007: 37). Feuer goes on to argue:

> This allegory no doubt denotes a beginning born of trauma, wherein the subject of trauma is floating in fragments. And if we look at this reflection of its author, it could simply imply that not just his lineage, but his task as a writer begins after the disaster: his role is to take fragments, in the form of words, representations, and memories of the past and bring them together into a narrative (2007: 38).

Brod, the first of Jonathan's imagined genealogy, emerges from the fragments and in this instance signifies the numerous roles of Jonathan the writer: as a gatherer of fragments, an editor and an archivist. Furthermore this founding narrative suggests a beginning born of a trauma, the death of Brod's parents. This allegory is important in its commentary on the role of a third generation author who emerging from trauma becomes a gatherer of fragments of a past that can never fully be recuperated.

Following Langer and Vice, Behlam has argued that the historical facts of the Holocaust draw the limits of the fictional texts that are concerned with the Holocaust[79], she argues that Foer addresses these limits or the

[79] After the Holocaust the last remnants of an already dwindling shtetle society were lost, and access to this world is only available through history and narrative (Miron 1995: 8). Foer's hyperbolic description of shtetl society dramatises this fact (highlighting the distance between real shtetle life as it was, and as it has been recreated in

problem of these limits "by making fictions that announce their fictiveness, fictions that intimately surround historical experience but do not present that experience directly. Instead they suggest its shape through . . . ironic contrasts between folkloric Jews and the real Jews whose culture produced their stories, and . . . through a set of voices that always distance and mediate experience" (2004: 60). The Trachimbrod strand of the narrative highlights its own fictiveness through its hyperbolic narrative mode, and this is further emphasised in Alex's responses to Jonathan's strands of the narrative. The impact of this is to suggest the absent, 'real' narrative, that is not and cannot be told. As I have mentioned earlier (in quoting Amian), the fictive excess of Jonathan's strand of the narrative signals a gap, both (as Behlam has suggested) between the hyperbolic descriptions of folkloric shtetl life and what that reality must have entailed, and between the events that are related and those that go without description that form a lack that haunts the text. As Behlman explains:

> In Foer's novel the magical-realist and folklore-based material is a self-conscious device for imagining the past, but one which always announces the gap between itself and the past *as it was experienced*. It is this experience that is ultimately privileged but never quite accessed directly in the novel (emphasis author's own) (2004: 60).

The account of Trachimbrod's history intersects and coexists with the realist narrative portrayed by Alex, the factual reality of the Holocaust, and the destruction of the fictional shtetl of Trachimbrod and its inhabitants. The excess of Jonathan's narrative is circumscribed and limited by the real events of the Holocaust which, despite Alex's pleas, he cannot change.

In *Everything is Illuminated*, the magical and multi-vocal narrative of shtetl life is circumscribed by the historical reality of the Holocaust. In Behlman's analysis he describes young Jewish American writing as writing of "disruption and unease" [80](2004: 57). By this Behlman means fiction that resists closure, is riddled with linguistic and narrative uncertainty and disrupts any easy or comforting identification as provided by traditional realist fiction (2004: 57). Furthermore Behlman suggests that:

> The reader's sense of shock or surprise in these works derives from the apparent clash between the familiar characters, conventions, and storylines of Jewish folklore and the dreadful events that would destroy the culture that produced them (2004: 58).

This shock is caused by the limits of history that are eventually imposed on this highly fictive context. Thus, despite the heterogeneity implied by the magical narrative of Trachimbrod, it cannot escape the momentum of history and its eventual destruction. Further, this fictional hyperbole suggests the absence of those narratives that may realistically represent these events. The Holocaust is an event that resulted in a

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literature and fiction). The shtetle in literature is an ideological construct informed by the "ideologies of [the] time and shaped to fit the idiosyncratic visions of individual writers" (Miron 1995: 9).

[80] Here Behlman is drawing on Langer, L. 1995. *Admitting the Holocaust.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press and Vice, S. 2000. *Holocaust Fiction.* London and New York: Routledge.

fundamental crisis of reference. The obliterated bodies of Auschwitz, the spatial remove from the 'old country' and the destruction or loss of photographs and possessions by much of the European Jewry during the Holocaust often implies a collective history that has lost a direct referential connection to the past. In writing a clearly fictionalised and mythic account of the history of Trachimbrod, Foer in fact highlights this distinct absence of a direct historical referent, as well as being an attempt (however provisional) to write into this void.

The shtetl becomes a key image in the American Jewish imaginary to represent this obliterated past, and more importantly, to provide a connection to a lost Eastern European Jewish past and way of life. Jonathan's narrative strand shows a negotiation with the image of the shtetl in Jewish folklore and literature. As in many Modern Hebrew and Yiddish narratives, the shtetl in *Everything is Illuminated* is depicted as ahistorical (or relatively static within time), self enclosed and divorced from the pressures of history (Miron 1995: 4). In Foer's depiction, however, the inevitable progression of historical time intrudes on the world of the shtetl in the form of the Holocaust, this intersection between historical reality and this folkloric trope serve to highlight the reader's mediated distance from the past. While shtetle in literature are often represented as ahistorical, shtetl narratives did often used metaphors and themes (such as that of fire) to signal the shtetl's vulnerability and their proximity to danger and disaster (Miron 1995: 16). Threatening images do serve to foreshadow the eventual calamity that will befall the Jews of Trachimbrod. This is most clearly shown in *Everything is Illuminated* when we consider the description of parade floats used on Trachim Day: "[the float from Kolki] was adorned with thousands of orange and red butterflies, which flocked to the float because of the specific combination of animal carcasses strapped to its underside" (Foer 2002: 93). Beneath the beautiful veneer of butterflies is a harbinger of death in the form of animal carcasses, which also serves as a reminder of the frailty of shtetl life behind the festivities of Trachimday. Foer's narrative of Trachimbrod's past highlights the simultaneous presence of light and dark, life and death, in the shtetl. The floats which are covered in butterflies are simultaneously beautiful and life affirming and carry with them (in the form of animal carcases) a disturbing reminder of death. Similarly the coital radiance of the first Trachimday, which is clearly life affirming, is juxtaposed against Brod's rape and Yankel's death, as well as the eventual bombing of Trachimbrod on Trachimday and burning of Jews in Trachimbrod's synagogue. This juxtaposition of life and death in the Trachimbrod narrative highlights the fragile and threatened nature of the lives of the shtetl's Jewish inhabitants.

The image of the shtetl is also an image of a lost and idealised past, in representing it Foer is concerned with the way this inaccessible past has been represented in the present, by highlighting the fictional and hyperbolic nature of his narrative of the shtetl he also suggests an extreme and mediated distance from this

inaccessible European past. *Everything is Illuminated* is, therefore, concerned with the unreliability of both memory and narrative. As a narrative it dramatises its own unreliability by introducing us to its process of construction and signalling when it has been "nomadic with the truth". Memory, often our only link to the past, is also shown to be fragile and unreliable. An evocative example of this can be seen in the following excerpt from the text:

> Of course there are those who pointed to Sofiowka's madness. . . how he was once found on the Well-Regarded Rabbi's front lawn, bound in white string, and said he had tied one around his index finger to remember something terribly important, and fearing he would forget the index finger, he tied a string around his pinky, and then tied one from his waist to his neck, . . . and used his body to remember his body, but in the end could remember only the string (Foer 2002: 15)

In his frantic attempts to remember something important Sofiowka finally can only recall something trivial, the string. The unreliability of Sofiowka's memory thus highlights his unreliability as a source of information and as a narrator. Hence as he is the witness to the shtetl's founding narrative, this narrative is shown to be unreliable. A similar account of the frailty of memory can be found in the parts of the narrative that describe Yankel (Brod's adoptive father):

> Fearing his frequent deficiencies of memory, he [Yankel] began writing fragments of his life story on his bedroom ceiling with one of Brod's lipsticks that he found wrapped in a sock in a drawer. This way, his life would be the first thing he would see when he woke each morning, and the last thing before going to sleep at night (Foer 2002: 83).

Yankel realises the intangible and fragile nature of memory, and in response seeks to write down his entire life, his life story, in order to prevent an absolute loss of memory. Both Yankel and Sofiokwa seem aware of the fragility of memory and attempt to remember through means external to themselves. Foer's text can be seen as another such attempt to stave off the oblivion of amnesia that both these characters seek to avoid.

Importantly, the above excerpt highlighting the unreliability of Sofiowka's memory is mirrored later in the text. In this second instance, however, the entire population of Trachimbrod becomes forgetful or overwhelmed by memory.

> Trachimbrod itself was overcome by a kind or inertness. . . [e]verything reminded everyone of something. . . [m]emory begat memory begat memory. Villagers became embodiments of that legend told so many times, of mad Sofiowka, swaddled in white string, using memory to remember memory, bound in an order of remembrance, struggling in vain to remember a beginning or end (Foer 2002: 258).

A crucial difference between these two instances in the text is that in the first Sofiokwa uses his tangible and corporeal body to remember itself, however the villagers use the intangible, memory, to remember the intangible, and because of the mirroring between the two instances we must assume that the ultimate result is not memory but forgetfulness. While we never find out what Sofiokwa forgets, what the citizens of

Trachimbrod forget (or avoid remembering) is the imminent arrival of the Nazis and as a result they forgo their agency and await their death swaddled in memory, and forgetfulness. The question of memory in the text, is always intimately linked to that of forgetting: in this case by being overwhelmed by an excess of memory the inhabitants of Trachimbrod forget the important fact of the Nazis' approach. Furthermore, this instance suggests the threat inherent to all memory work, especially as our connection to the event becomes more abstract (memories of memories), that memory itself can become a type of forgetting.

The following passage, which continues from the excerpt discussed above, provides a striking metaphor for the second and third generation problematic. Taken from near the conclusion of the text this quote emerges from a larger discussion of the obsession with memory experienced by the inhabitants of Trachimbrod that precedes the bombing of Trachimbrod:

> But children had it worst of all, for although it would seem that they had fewer memories to haunt them, they still had the itch of memory as strong as the elders of the shtetl. Their strings were not even their own but tied around them by parents and grandparents – strings not fastened to anything, but hanging loosely from the darkness (Foer 2002: 260).

For the children the strings that represent their memories are not their own, they belong to their predecessors. In fact, these strings of memory are tied to them by their parents and grandparents and as a result the children are bound (literally and figuratively) by memories that are not their own, but that their predecessors wish them to remember. Furthermore they are not tied to anything material, or linked to any memories of their own, their strings hang loosely from the darkness, leading not to memory but its absence. Like the members of the second and third generation these children are tied (by those that came before them) to events they have no direct recollection of.

The novel is able to distance itself from the events of the Holocaust by presenting itself as hyper mediated, and as a result avoids the danger of appropriation inherent to the work of postmemory. As Behlman explains:

> The novel foregrounds, through a set of untrustworthy narrators, the impossibility of any unmediated, wholly accurate access to the past, while at the same time the novel's conclusion leaves no doubt as to the very real effect of the Holocaust on both Alex's and Jonathan's families (2004: 59 – 60).

It is evident that the novel foregrounds its own unreliability and constructedness and reflects a highly mediated engagement with the past. However the impact of the Holocaust in the text is also described as generational and transferable. This text addresses a past that can never truly be put to rest, and whose effects have very real resonances in the present. This becomes evident in the following statement made by the Grandfather:

> I did not want him [Alex's father] to know of it, and live with it. This is why I never informed him of what occurred. I wanted so much for him to live a good life, without death and without choices and without shame. But I was not a good father. . . I was the worst father. I desired to remove him from everything that was bad, but instead I gave him badness upon badness (Foer 2002: 247).

In *Everything is Illuminated,* it is suggested that the Grandfather's history, once repressed, is the starting point for a trajectory of violence which is seen most clearly in his son's abuse of his children, in which all the following generations of his family have been implicated. The text further implies that it is only once Alex has access to knowledge of his past that he can put an end to this trajectory of violence. Foer shows the continued impact actions of the past have in the present. However Alex's intervention into his own history, and his inheritance of a history of violence, can be read as an attempt to change the trajectory of this history and take responsibility for his family. His actions are figured as both an act of individual agency and a literary or textual intervention which gain corporeal affect thus blurring the lines between fiction and reality.

The Trachimbrod strand of the narrative, narrated by Jonathan, cannot be separated from the text's complex engagement with our access to the past through history and memory. Foer's use of elements of magic realism and references to Jewish folklore both serve to highlight the text's highly fictional nature and suggests an absence of any 'real' historical account of Trachimbrod. As such it serves a number of functions. First, it provides Jonathan with an imagined and postmemorial link to his past. And second it simultaneously suggests the past's absolute distance and the provisionality of any attempt to narrate it in the present. However, this highly fictionalised narrative is never free from the limitations implied by the corporeal actuality of the Holocaust.

Silence and Absence: the Archive of Postmemory in *Everything is Illuminated*

Everything is Illuminated depicts our engagement with the history and memory of the Holocaust as a confrontation with silence, absence, gaps and lacunae. Unlike the previous texts I have considered which seek to archive scraps and fragments of the past, Foer's text encounters an archival lack which the text illustrates and responds to by highlighting the generative capacity of fiction and storytelling while simultaneously dramatising the silence, absence, gaps and lacunae in the narrative. In so doing, Foer is able to stress the provisionality of his own project. In what follows I will discuss the dramatisation of silence and absence in *Everything is Illuminated.*

Lyotard's discussion of the philosophical repercussions of Auschwitz in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1988) provides a necessary point of departure for this analysis. Lyotard's account of the silence imposed on

language by Auschwitz and the nature of the negative phrase, will allow me to illustrate the nature of the silence Foer's text attempts to highlight. I am most concerned with Lyotard's discussion of the impasse Auschwitz poses for language (as mentioned in my introduction), which can be explained as follows: even if one has seen with one's own eyes a gas chamber, one would need to witness it being used to kill at the time it was seen, however the only manner to witness this occurrence would be to die in a gas chamber, and if one is dead one cannot testify to the existence of a gas chamber (Lyotard 1988:3). Thus, for Lyotard, Auschwitz becomes an event without a witness. Lyotard's argument suggests a structural gap at the heart of all testimony and of all narratives of the Holocaust.

Lyotard revises his definition of the Differend[81] as follows: "I would like to call a *differend* [*différend*] the case where the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and for that reason becomes a victim" (1988:9). A victim, in Lyotard's terms, is an individual reduced to silence and who has been divested of the means to "prove that one has been done a wrong" (1988:8).

> The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be put into phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible (Lyotard 1988:13).

Thus the 'negative phrase' is a silence that refers to phrases that are in principle possible, while simultaneously structurally impossible[82]. Lyotard goes on to state the following:

> The silence that surrounds the phrase, *Auschwitz was the extermination camp* is not a state of mind..., it is the sign that something remains to be phrased which is not, something which is not determined (emphasis author's own) (1988:57).

The nature of Auschwitz as an extermination camp, that divests one of the means to prove the crime or its quantity, imposes silence on knowledge (Lyotard 1988: 56). The implementation of the "Final Solution", the destruction of documentation and the incineration of bodies involved an extermination of that which would allow the nature or quantity of crime to be determined (ibid,:56-57). While knowledge can be silenced in this manner, silence cannot efface what is known and can be remembered, however this knowledge is divested of the means to be articulated in language, emerging as the negative phrase. In addition one may conclude that silence itself can be a presence, absence can be a site from which meaning can emerge. This is particularly useful for my argument as it is my opinion that Foer, in his dramatisation of silence and absence,

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[81] The Differend, as described by Lyotard in the Preface to his primary text, "would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments" (1988: xi).

[82] However, for Lyotard the silence of Auschwitz goes beyond that of the differend, because as he explains: "Between the SS and the Jew there is not even a differend, because there is not even a common idiom . . . in which even damages could be formulated, be they in place of a wrong . . . [t]he Jewish phrase has not taken place" (1988:106). The victim's silence in the differend is that which "must be put into phrases [but] cannot yet be" (Lyotard 1988: 106). However, in the case of Auschwitz the possibility of a future phrase implied by the "yet" does not exist, the silence is absolute, there is no possibility of future phrasing.

is able to imply the presence of the negative phrase and as a result silence and absence become sites in the text where latent meaning, which cannot be addressed directly, is expressed.

In *Everything is Illuminated* absence first takes a literal form in the absence of Trachimbrod from the Ukranian landscape, which mirrors, and reinforces the absence of Trachimbrod from the Ukrainian national imaginary[83]. The silence that Jonathan and Alex encounter in their search for Trachimbrod can be understood as analogous to the silence regarding Auschwitz that Lyotard described in *The Differend.* As Jonathan, Alex, Alex's Grandfather and Sammy Davis jr jr navigate the landscape in search of Trachimbrod and Augustine, they encounter the literal absence of Jewish people and knowledge about Jewish people. Furthermore, they are also faced with the absence of Trachimbrod, not only from the landscape, but from maps and the memories of the people they encounter. Not only has Trachimbrod been obliterated from the landscape but it has been obliterated from language; it has become a negative phrase. When they eventually find Trachimbrod they experience it as an absence.

The absence of local knowledge, not only of the location of Trachimbrod but of the events of the Holocaust marks Jonathan's trip to the Ukraine. In the following excerpt Alex describes the response of Ukrainians when questioned regarding the location of Trachibrod:

> "Go away," an old man uttered. "Why now?" a woman in a yellow dress enquired. Not one of them knew where Trachimbrod was, and not one of them had ever heard of it, but all of them became angry or silent when I inquired. (Foer 2002: 114)

The angry responses of the Ukranians to Alex's queries implies some knowledge of Trachimbrod and perhaps what happened to it, and their silence could suggest an unwillingness to remember or even a willing amnesia. They seem angry to be asked to remember this place. Later he describes this startling erasure of memory as follows: "It was seeming as if we were in the wrong country, or the wrong century, or as if Trachimbrod had disappeared, and so had the memory of it" (Foer 2002: 115). In this description the utter absence of information on Trachimbrod is so absolute as to suggest they are looking in the wrong time and the wrong place. Jonathan's reaction to this silence and amnesia is as follows: "The less he saw, the more he wrote" (Foer 2002: 115). This quote seems to suggest that Jonathan's hyperbolic narration comes to signal a marked absence, both of the people of Trachimbrod and of the evidence of their past and their existence, while simultaneously suggesting the generative capacity of narrative. As Amian contends "[m]uch of the

[83] The nation should by no means be considered a natural entity, but is rather one that is constructed. Benedict Anderson in his seminal work *Imagined Communities* defines the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson 1983:15). Anderson explains that the nation is imaginary in the sense that its members will never, even within the smallest nation, come into contact with all their fellow members, however each member imagines themselves as connected (1983:15). The nation is limited in the sense that it has finite boundaries beyond which lie other nations (Anderson 1983:15).

text's destabilising force is grounded in the historical convergence of a double void: the irreversible loss of Jewish history and culture that the destruction of Eastern European Jewry involved and the loss of memory that the [imminent death] of its last witnesses entails (2008: 160). As I have explained, while Jonathans's narrative of Trachimbrod's past is hyperbolic in its imaginative inventiveness and excess, Alex's narrative is punctuated by silence and absence and dramatises the difficulty of narrating events at the very limit of language. This silence is the result of the structural silence imposed by the utter erasure of Trachimbrod from individual and national memory and the individual difficulty in describing an event in language that exceeds comprehension. The absences and silences in Alex's narrative serve as a foil for the generative fictive power of Jonathan's narrative, reinforcing the limits of language when faced with the events of the Holocaust.

In an interview with Erica Wagner, Foer explains that after his second year in university he took a trip to the Ukraine, and while his trip was utterly different from the events recounted in his novel, it does shed some light on his project (2002). Foer explains that he found nothing on his trip to the Ukraine, he describes this as follows:

> It wasn't like a literary, interesting kind of nothing. It's not like anything else I've ever experienced in my life. In a certain sense the book wasn't an act of creation as it was an act of replacement. I encountered a hole that I found was in myself, and one I tried to fill up (as quoted in Wagner 2002).

Foer therefore describes his experience not only as an experience of absence external to himself, but as the experience of an absence internal to himself, and he describes his project as an attempt to fill both these absences. Further, he argues that the text was not an "act of creation", thus not an attempt to bring about something new, but that of "replacement", thus his project can be seen as an attempt to replace the "nothing" he experienced (which had no meaning), with a piece of fiction. This idea of 'replacement' is most evident in Jonathan's strand of the narrative where he creates a mythical geneology for his family as well as a mythical history of Trachimbrod, both of which seek to fill the profound archival lack that the text illustrates (it is important to note that this attempt remains provisional). I think one can argue that by including his own name into the text and attributing it to a fictional character, Foer is subtly referencing his actual trip to the Ukraine and the absences it made him aware of. Jonathan becomes Foer's double, referring to both the corporeality of the author himself and to the real events outside the highly fictionalised space of the narrative. The concern with silence and absence highlighted in the above quote is mirrored in the following excerpt from the text, however this absence is anything but empty:

> I implore myself to paint Trachimbrod, so you will know why we were so overawed. There was nothing. When I utter 'nothing' I do not mean there was nothing except for two houses, and some wood on the ground, and pieces of glass, and children's toys, and photographs. When I

> utter that there was nothing, what I intend is that there was not any of these things, or any other things (Foer 2002: 184).

The nothing that Jonathan and Alex encounter in Trachimbrod is so extreme as to warrant description. Alex first describes how the word 'nothing' is usually used, often to denote the absence of anything note worthy or of importance, however Alex explains that the 'nothing' he encounters in Trachimbrod is absolute, thus differentiated from the ordinary 'nothing'. Thus unlike the 'empty' absence Foer experienced during his trip to the Ukraine, this absence implies meaning: by dramatising this nothingness Foer is able to convey the absolute erasure of Trachimbrod, which is juxtaposed chillingly against the hyperbolic vitality of the strand of the narrative that gives the story of Trachimbrod's history.

Through his repeated use of silence and absence as thematic concerns in the text Foer is able to dramatise the difficulty of understanding and narrating the events of the Holocaust from this temporal remove. As we have seen this is particularly evident in Alex's experience when confronted with the utter effacement of Trachimbrod:

> "She says we are here," I told the hero. "What?" "I informed you that there would be nothing,: she said. "It was all destroyed." What do you mean we're here?" the hero asked. "Tell him it is because it is dark," Grandfather said to me, "and that we could see more if it was not dark." "It is so dark," I told him. "No," she said, "this is all that you would see. It is always like this, always dark." (Foer 2002: 184)

Lista explains that Trachimbrod is always dark, she therefore resists the Grandfather's attempt to illuminate this site of trauma in either a literal or figurative sense. Lista's insistence on this absolute darkness is also a resistance to any attempt to make meaning from this utter absence, or to provide it with narrative. Furthermore this emphasis on absence and nothingness that suggests that our experience and knowledge of the past in the present is riddled with gaps and silences, also comes to signify the difficulty of coming to understand the Holocaust from this temporal remove, or at all, as well as the provisionality of any attempt to write about it in the present. Amain seems to recognise this point:

> In the conspicuous absence of 'things' that would provide traces of and referents to the destroyed shtetl and its murdered inhabitants 'place' loses its significance as an intergenerational memory site, shifting the grounds of memory work instead to the frail generative realm of language, storytelling and the productive powers of the imagination (2008:156).

I think here Amain states her point in too absolute terms. Although it is clear that for Jonathan memory work shifts to "the frail generative realm of language", the absence of things described in Trachimbrod is significant as it is so absolute as to constitute a negative phrase. Not only does it suggest the absolute destruction of knowledge of the European Jewry that Jonathan seeks, but also circumscribes Jonathan's hyperbolic narrative and renders the generative powers of language provisional when faced with the events

of the Holocaust. Furthermore, this emphasis on provisionality also highlights the text's resistance to co-opting or appropriating voices that have been lost or obliterated.

Jonathan and Alex's encounter with Lista (the sole survivor of Trachimbrod), is one of the text's climactic moments and its articulation points towards a number of the text's thematics. Firstly, from it we can draw a number of conclusions regarding Jonathan's subject position in the text and his role as storyteller and narrator. As Lista tells Jonathan about Safran (his grandfather) Alex makes the following observation about Jonathan's response and demeanour:

> I gave the hero each picture as she gave it to me, and he could only with difficulty hold it in his hands that were doing so much shaking. It appeared that a part of him wanted to write everything, every word of what occurred, into his diary. And a part of him refused to write even one word. He opened the diary and closed it, opened it and closed it, and it looked as if it wanted to fly away from his hands (Foer 2002: 154).

This observation of Jonathan's internal conflict, his wish to record everything and nothing, also suggests a conflict inherent to writing from his subject position. The text itself highlights its own internal conflict between narrative excess and the generative power of narrative, and its provisionality if not futility when faced with the violent and terrifying events of the Holocaust. Jonathan's character mirrors the text's own concern with attempting to record the past, and the impossibility of doing so from this particular temporal remove.

Although Foer's account of the Holocaust in *Everything is Illuminated* remains circumscribed by silence and absence, it presents a complex and multi-vocal narrative. As a result it resists the creation of a single, unambiguous perspective of the past that may provide a comforting site of identification. This is initially seen when Lista mistakes Alex for a Jewish descendent of someone who died in Trachimbrod, and similarly when Alex assumes that she addresses her story to him rather than to Jonathan. Furthermore, the end of Alex's (or is it Jonathan's) account of his grandfather's testimony (which in is entirely told in parenthesis), which details how he identified his closest friend as a Jew to Nazi death squads, reads as follows:

> Jonathan where do we go now what do we do with what we know Grandfather said that I am I but this could not be true the truth is that I also pointedatHerschel and I also said heisaJew and I will tell you that you also pointedatHerschel and you also said heisaJew and more than that Grandfather also pointedatme and said heisaJew and you also pointedathim and said heisaJew and your grandmother and Little Igor and we all pointedateachother so what is it he should have done hewouldhavebeenafooltodoanythingelse but is it forgivble what he did canheeverbeforgiven for his finger for whathisfingerdid for whathepointedto and didnotpointto for whathetouchedinhislife and whathedidnottouch he is stillguilty I am I am Iam IamI? (Foer 2002:252).

This invites the reader to consider and inhabit various subject positions without judgment. The multi-vocality suggested by this approach is central to the ethics presented by the text, which repeatedly (as can be seen in Jonathan's strand of the narrative) highlights its own heterogeneity and multi-vocality.

The account of the grandfather's testimony (as quoted above) is interesting for a number of reasons. First, it is told in parenthesis, and as such is narrated externally to the body of the text. Traditionally information given in parenthesis is additional, an aside, not necessarily relevant to the key concepts of the text. In contrast, the climactic moment and, as one could argue, one of the key passages in the text occurs within parenthesis. The parentheses up to this point have implied that Alex is directly addressing Jonathan exterior to the events he is narrating. To some extent this can be understood as Alex directly communicating with Jonathan, outside of the body of the narrative (as readers we have become eavesdroppers on a private conversation). By separating the testimony from the text with parentheses Foer also alienates the reader from the testimony, thus adding a further layer of mediation. We, as readers, are not invited to share a vicarious catharsis by associating fully with the grandfather.

Alex's account of his grandfather's testimony dramatises the fragmentation and breakdown of language which results from such a moment of trauma, and can be seen as an example of the rupture of self and language often associated with the resurgence of deep memory. As can be seen in the extract quoted above the grammatical and linear structure of Alex's narrative is ruptured by the resurgence of the grandfather's testimony which appears in parenthesis and as such is simultaneously part of and external to the narrative. In the resulting rupture in language, the laws and conventions of language and grammar fall away. Words run into each other, dramatised through the use of enjambment (like "kissedheronthemouth") which serves to emphasise certain phrases as well as signifying the collapse of language and the linguistic self in the resurgence of deep memory. This linguistic collapse comes to signify the unassimilatable excess implied by deep memory.

The impression this use of language gives the reader is not only of the breakdown and fragmentation of language brought about by both the grandfather's and Alex's trauma, but also of an unstoppable rush of narration, spoken quickly, without a single breath. Similarly in Alex's account of Lista's testimony, where she describes in graphic detail the murders of the inhabitants of Trachimbrod, Alex describes her narrative as an unstoppable, rapid flow of words, a torrent of narration. Alex states that: "I will tell you what made this story most scary was how rapid it was moving. I do not mean what happened in the story, but how the story was told. I felt that it could not be stopped" (Foer 2002:186). This suggests also that her telling her

story is a necessity, an inevitability that cannot be prevented. This is yet another example that the characters in this text are unable to evade the events of the past. Further, this feeling that the story was moving too fast and could not be stopped also suggests its effect on Alex, whose ancestors are implicated in the violence and who as a result has to refigure his understanding of nation and self in light of the new information Lista's testimony provides.

The following conversation between Alex, his Grandfather and Lista, regarding the behaviour of gentiles during the massacre of Trachimbrod's Jewish residents and the possibilities of forgiveness, again highlights the text's concern not only with the possibilities of narrativising the Holocaust, but also of redemption and forgiveness:

> "Can you forgive them?" Grandfather asked Augustine. She closed her eyes to say No, I cannot forgive them. "I would desire someone to help me," I said. "But," Grandfather said, "you would not help somebody if it signified that you would be murdered and your family would be murdered." (I thought about this for many moments, and I understood that he was correct. I only had to think about Little Igor to be certain that I would also have turned away and hid my face) . . . 'You would forgive them?" I asked. "Yes," Grandfather said. "Yes. I would try to." "You can only say that because you cannot imagine what it is like," Augustine said. "I can" "It is not a thing you can imagine. It only is. After that there can be no imagining." (Foer 2002: 188)

Firstly this section of the text is very important as it serves to highlight a number of irreconcilable subject positions: the survivor, the bystander and his descendent. While the text suggests that the bystander's actions are understandable, it also highlights the extreme distance between his experience and Lista's which she argues is unimaginable. It is only Alex who can attempt to understand both positions: "I would desire someone to help me" and "I only had to think about Little Igor to be certain that I would also have turned away". Lista's comments also highlight the provisionality, if not the inadequacy of this text's attempt to narrate the Holocaust. Her statement that "[i]t is not a thing you can imagine. . . [a]fter that there can be no imagining" not only echoes Adorno's dictum that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, but also warns readers of the limits of the text they are reading. It suggests the provisionality of the text which attempts to imaginatively narrate an event which it simultaneously suggests cannot be imagined.

In *Everything is Illuminated* the search for Augustine, the woman who hid Jonathan's grandfather from the Nazis and in so doing saved his life, is not only a search for an individual but for a connection to a lost past. The character Lista comes to signify this connection. Lista lives alone, we begin to see she has had no life other than that of custodian of this mass of cultural material; Lista loses all purpose other than as a link to those who are no longer able to speak. She feels obligated to collect evidence and to remain in Trachimbrod in order to bear witness to its destruction and to the lives of the many who died there: she comes to represent

a cultural archive. When Lista returns to Trachimbrod after the war she gathers all the items she had hidden, the gold fillings, the hair, the books, the clothing, and finds the house closest to Trachimbrod, promising to live in Trachimbrod until she dies. As a survivor Lista becomes subsumed in her responsibility to the collective, to those who had died, and in so doing her individual concerns are effaced. As Feuer explains: "[t]heir reception and questions to [Lista] show she has become a different ideal to each of them" (2007: 30). The characters repeatedly call Lista Augustine, the name of the woman whom they set out on their journey to find, which seems to suggest that Lista herself is erased. For the Grandfather it becomes important for Lista to be Augustine because, in helping a Jew find the woman who saved Safran and the woman who in so doing achieved what he had failed to accomplish when he pointed at Hershel, may have allowed him redemption from the crimes of his own past. However it becomes clear that such redemption remains unavailable for him and will only be achieved in future generations. Lista, therefore, becomes a figure who is, to a certain degree, subsumed and erased by her own archival impulse; in becoming the custodian of this mass of archival material she is also erased as an individual.

The text explores the possibilities for inter-subjective exchanges that are circumscribed by the violent events of the past. In its description of the interactions between the grandfather and Lista, the text illustrates the complex interaction between a survivor and a bystander. Feuer claims that the Grandfather's initial reactions to Lista "no doubt demonstrate that he is denying the corrupt nature of the Ukrainians in Trachimbrod" (2007: 33). The Grandfather's reactions to Lista's narrative seem, at least at first, to suggest the conflict between two opposing historical perspectives and subject positions. However this can also be seen to demonstrate the grandfather's own internal conflict; his inability to reconcile conflicting versions of both self and nation. This conflict can be seen in the following:

> "What do you signify?" I asked because I just did not know. "They were all killed," she said, and here I commenced to translate to the hero what she was saying, "except for the one or two who were able to escape." "You were the lucky ones," I told her. "We were not the lucky ones," she said. "It is not true," Grandfather said, although I do not know what part he was saying was not true. "It is. You should never be the one remaining." "You should have died with the others," he said. (I will never allow that to remain in the story.) (Foer 2002: 153).

The grandfather not only attempts to question the validity of Lista's narrative (this is not the only instance in which he calls her a liar) but tells her that she should have died with the rest of Trachimbrod's Jews. It is this second statement that Alex finds particularly troubling, which he claims he will not allow to remain in the final narrative. Like the Grandfather's initial statement which Alex thinks is unclear as to what part of Lista's story is untrue, the reasons for his statement that she should also have died remain ambiguous. The statement suggests that either she should have died because, as she claims, the burden of surviving is too great, or more sinisterly if she had died there would have been no one to tell the story of Trachimbrod and it would have been forgotten.

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Like Austerlitz, Lista is depicted as an archival subject in the text. Amian argues that : "Lista's house comes to embody the fantasy of complete documentation and collective survival that contemporary memory culture holds out as it seeks to memorialize history in ever increasing numbers of museum and exhibits" (2008: 163-164). This reading however underestimates the complexity of Foer's project. As I have pointed out previously in my argument, the act of memorialisation may put an end to memory work by stabilising diffuse and heterogeneous meaning into a singular narrative and by housing memory in a physical monument can relinquish the individual of responsibility to remember (Young 1993: 3-13). Lista's archive seems to avoid the dangers of consignment and commandment (as defined in my introduction), which imply simultaneously the attempt to preserve memory and its erasure. Consignment refers to the taxonomising impulse of the archive, however while Lista's archive attempts to taxonomise the items it houses, the titles in her odd taxonomy suggest an excess of meaning rather than stabilizing or closing down meaning, thus suggesting the heterogeneity of the archival trace. As can be seen in the following:

> "Augustine," Grandfather said, "we can save you from all this." He pointed to her house again, and pointed to all of the boxes: HAIR/HANDMIRRORS, POETRY/NAILS/PISCES, CHESS/RELICS/BLACK MAGIC, STARS/MUSIC BOXES, SLEEP/SLEEP/SLEEP, STOCKINGS/KIDDUSH CUPS/ WATER INTO BLOOD (Foer 2002: 150).

The title juxtaposes the most mundane of objects, hand mirrors for example, with items that are ineffable and seemingly impossible to archive, like sleep, black magic or stars. The sheer excess of objects accumulated by Lista, Amian argues, creates an odd sense of lack: "What is lacking is 'meaning' or 'context', something that would 'explain' the massive collection of boxes, photographs and ordinary objects and would 'illuminate' the strange categories under which they have been filed" (2008 :164). I would argue, however, that the seeming strangeness of the categories into which Lista has placed her collection destabilises any attempt to categorise the physical remnants of Trachimbrod's past. The labels suggest an attempt to archive that which cannot be archived, for example human emotion, and thus implicitly suggesting the limits of any attempts to archive such events. The labels do however suggest an excess of affective meaning (in many cases what is archived is not objects, but emotion which is in turn impossible to archive) thus suggesting that traditional taxonomy of these objects would be always already inadequate. Reneé Green makes the following comment on the archive: "[n]egation in abundance can be read as the cancelling-out effect which is possible when confronted with more than is comprehensible" (2006: 49). What Green means by a "cancelling-out effect can also be thought of in relation to the absences, lacuna, holes which occur in the midst of densities of information" (ibid). Thus paradoxically, it can be precisely the excess of information that creates an archival lack. This is particularly true of museum exhibits of the Holocaust that present piles of objects that once belonged to the victims of the Holocaust. Lista's archive however seems to highlight its own impossibility, by attempting to archive those elements of the past that

cannot be archived. Foer is able to highlight the limits of any attempts to archive the events of the Holocaust, as well as critique those archives that negate rather than preserve memory.

Written from the position of the third generation after the Holocaust *Everything is Illuminated* articulates a relation to the past that is even further removed and thus mediated, than either *Maus* or *Austerlitz*. Foer is able to create a narrative in which access to the past is hyper-mediated, and circumscribed by absence and silence. In his use of an epistolary narrative structure, Foer is able not only to self consciously highlight the text's unreliability, but also consider the highly provisional intersubjective exchange between the grandson of a survivor and the grandson of a collaborator (or at the very least a bystander). Alex's narration, in its halting use of English, defamiliarises language and instils it with surprising affect. The epistolary structure is, furthermore a tool of the text's self-reflexivity and as a result is an important means in which the novel dramatises its provisionality. The strand of the narrative set in Trachimbrod forms an attempt to write into a profound archival lack created by the destruction of the Jewish community in the Ukraine during the Second World War. However, it remains highly fictionalised in its narrative form thus suggesting that access to a non fictional history of Trachimbrod (or a real shtetl like it) remains impossible. Furthermore the narrative is riddled with gaps and lacunae. The text itself however emerges from absence. Meaning in the text emerges from within the absences and silences that the text dramatises, even if this meaning is our inability to gain direct access to a past society that has been obliterated.

5 The Archival Impulse: Postmemory, Fiction and the Text as an Archive

Some Notes on Endings:

The texts included in this study avoid narrative closure in their endings. In so doing each text not only dramatises its own provisionality, but gestures toward a future that remains undefined. In what follows I will briefly consider each text's ending, and the impact of this refusal of narrative closure. Primarily this refusal of narrative closure acts, yet again, to highlight these texts' provisionality, thus avoiding the mastery implied by narrative closure.

For the purposes of this research I have considered the archive as a concept concerned with the past, but for Derrida it is also a thing of the future and implies a spectral messainicity[84]. As Derrida explains: "the word and the notion of the archive seem at first, admittedly, to point toward the past, to refer to the signs of consigned memory, to recall truthfulness to tradition" (1995: 33). Thus, as I have often stated, the archive points towards the beginning of knowledge, and the attempt to gather together the fragments of the past into a single corpus that implies unity and singularity, signalling the end of memory as alive and spontaneous and giving way to consigned memory. Yet, as Derrida contends:

> In an enigmatic sense, which will clarify itself *perhaps* . . . the question of the archive is not . . . a question of the past. It is not a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal, *an archivable concept of the archive.* It is a question of response, of a promise of a responsibility for tomorrow. (emphasis author's own) (1995: 36).

A number of elements emerge from this brief quote that bear relevance to our argument here: the archive in this sense is also a question of the future, or rather a promise of the future, a responsibility for the future, like the spectre always returning and always to come, where consigned memory, destroyed by the death or destruction drive, gives way to the heterogeneity of the archival trace. In talking about endings here, I am also talking about the future or perhaps more accurately the possibilities for and the responsibilities for the future, the opening out toward the future that these texts' provisionality implies. If, as I argue, each text expresses an archival impulse, then their archival nature suggests as much their link to the future as to the fragments of the past, or at least what the fragments of the past mean for the present and the future.

To return to the first text examined in this thesis, the conclusion of *Maus* initially seems to suggest the possibility of resolution. The tomb stone that is the final image on the last page of *Maus* reads: "Spiegelman/Vladek/Oct. 11. 1906/ Aug 18. 1982./Anja/ Mar. 15. 1912/ May 21, 1968" (Spiegelman 1996:

[84] This is most simply described in Derrida's own formulation: "[a]t bottom, the spectre is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back; in the future" (1994: 48).

296). The image of the shared grave stone initially suggests that the dead have been buried and put to rest, both figuratively and literally. This ending initially seems to imply closure. However in the frame preceding this final image the closure of this ending is at least problematised if not undermined. The final two frames on the page show Artie sitting on Vladek's hospital bed where Vladek says the following: "[l]et's stop, please your tape recorder" and turning over to sleep says "I'm tired from talking, Richieu, and it's *enough* stories for now" (emphasis author's own) (Spiegelman 1996: 296). Friedlander refers to this passage from *Maus* to illustrate the possibility that deep memory can survive and intrude into the present even beyond the death of survivors. He argues this point as follows:

> Any attempts at building a coherent self flounders on the intractable return of . . . deep memory . . . in the very last line of the second book of *Maus*: the dying father is addressing his son Artie with the name of [his older] brother, Richieu, who died in the Holocaust some forty years before. Deep memory. (Friedlander 1993: 119).

In this instance two layers of memory express themselves. The father's traumatic deep memory, that threatens his ability to create a coherent self, emerges. Vladek is briefly unable to differentiate between the past and the present. For a moment Artie is effaced by the return of the memory of the dead son, Richieu. However, as expressed in *Maus* and as such in the highly mediated context of this graphic novel, this deep memory emerges not only as an example of individual trauma, but also expresses a certain excess that disrupts the closure implied at the end of the novel. While this deep memory is not individual and traumatic, but rather textual and postmemorial, it prevents a closure of the text that suggests the past, unlike the bodies of his parents, cannot be put to rest. In the return of deep memory in this instance, we see the haunting presence of the past that still effects the present. If we recall the question paraphrased from Friedlander in my introduction: Can deep memory of the Holocaust remain after all the survivors have died (Friedlander 1993: 119)? It is now possible to suggest that if deep memory emerges at this temporal remove from the events of the Holocaust, is not as the traumatic repetition implied by deep memory as experienced by the individual survivor, but rather as a revenant, a return, as a haunting. As the return of an excess that still evades phrasing, but that cannot easily be put to rest.

Similarly, *Austerlitz's* ending provides the possibility of closure that remains unfulfilled. Austerlitz's personal narrative ends with Austerlitz embarking on a search for his father and perhaps happiness signified in the figure of Marie. This is the narrator's last contact with Austerlitz and as a result we are never to know the outcome of this search and thus it remains a promise of closure which is never fulfilled. Further the novel itself does not end on this note, the narrator's own journey continues. *Austerlitz's* final pages are devoted to the narrator's return to Breendonk after his final meeting with Austerlitz (bringing the uncanny structure of repetition and return full circle), where he reads a book Austerlitz had given to him, *Hershel's Kingdom.* The intertext for these final pages is a firsthand account of Dan Jacobson's search for his grandfather, which provides us with another of the many mirroring and echoes that are to be found in this

text, providing a double for Austerlitz's own journey of discovery and search for his family. The narrator explains *Hershel's Kingdom* recounts the obliteration of the text's author's Lithuanian forebears at the hands of the Nazis. The narrator describes the following account to the text's author, Dan Jacobson's, experience of the empty mines in Kimberly where he grew up:

> The chasm into which no ray of light could penetrate was Jacobson's image of the vanished past of his family and his people which, as he knows, can never be brought up from those depth's again (Sebald 2001: 414).

The image for a vanished family becomes a chasm or abyss into which no light can intrude: an image of perpetual darkness. While the text itself shows Austerlitz's attempt to shed light on his past, this is problematised by this intertext which suggests that any and all attempts to shed light on the events of the Holocaust are as futile as shining light into a chasm of darkness. In the final pages of the novel we are given yet another image for our relation to the events of the past, this time mediated through the impressions of this intertext. The past here is absolutely inaccessible. Thus rather than being left with the hope of closure implied by Austerlitz's search for his father we are left with the abyss and a return to Breendonk. The text ends with one of its few direct references to the Holocaust, but this only occurs in the highly mediated form of recounting the contents of a secondary text.

Everything is Illuminated, to a certain degree ends twice. The first of these endings is represented as a supplement to the text, as an extract from "the Book of Recurrent Dreams" (that survived the book itself being burnt by the Nazis). The extract presumably recounts Brod's dream which is a premonition of Trachimbrod's destruction. Like in Trachimbrod's founding narrative, this dream tells the story of a baby being born in Brod River. Yet unlike Brod who is born without an umbilical cord and thus survives her birth in the river, this baby remains attached by the umbilical cord to her mother's body and thus is drowned with her. Unlike the promise of rebirth and regeneration implied initially in the shtetl's founding narrative and Brod's birth, no such comfort is available to counter the effect of this nameless baby's death. The extract ends as follows, spoken by Brod who speaks as the river:

> [T]he frightened the desperate mass of babies children teenagers adults elderly all pulled each other into me drowning each other killing each other the bodies began to rise one at a time until I couldn't be seen through all of the bodies blue skin open white eyes I was invisible under them I was the carcass they were the butterflies white eyes blue skin this is what we've done we've killed our own babies to save them (Foer 2002: 273).

The dead bodies floating in the river become a mirror image for the butterflies on the floats on Trachimday and the river, who is also Brod, becomes the carcass underneath. This once beautiful image that suggested both the affirmation of life and the presence of death is now inverted and no promise of life remains, the butterflies become corpses and the river a carcass. Further, this instance resonates back to suggest that the sinister implications of the image when used earlier in the text, foreshadowed the shtetl's eventual

destruction. The extract is told without punctuation, as in many other instances in this text, most notably the grandfather's testimony, when faced with the horror and violence of the shtetl's destruction language and punctuation collapse. The text itself ends with a letter presumably written by the Grandfather and translated by Alex, the content of which has been discussed in greater detail in my chapter on the text. Like the extract quoted above this letter is appended to the text, itself a supplement, neither a part of nor external to the text. Suffice it to say that in the form of this letter the text not only ends with the death of Trachimbrod's population but also with an opening up towards the future in the Grandfather's hope that his death will allow his grandchildren to live "without violence" in peace (Foer 2002: 275).

In both *Austerlitz* and *Everything is Illuminated* the promise implied by the interaction between the Jew and the ancestor of either a German or a Ukrainian remains unfulfilled. Both end with the parting of the two characters. However in *Everything is Illuminated* constructed as a collaborative narrative, and both this collaboration and the text's emphasis on the importance or narrativity and storytelling are shown to be generative sites that produce a creative excess and heterogeneity. *Everything is Illuminated* opens up the possibility of multiple and heterogeneous sites of meaning and identification for both Jonathan and Alex, while remaining circumscribed by the historical reality of the Holocaust.

Despite their differences each text's ending highlights its own provisionality and constructedness and in so doing the texts do not provide closure or coherence but open up toward heterogeneity. The texts open up gaps and absences, which can never truly be filled, suggesting both the desire to know the past and the impossibility of the fulfilment of this desire. These texts describe a past whose relation to the present is one of spectral return, and as a result remains both present and absent, always coming back. Rather than producing reality effects or suggesting totalising meaning, the fulfilment of their projects is disrupted, as is the case with *Maus*, infinitely deferred, as in *Austerlitz*, or suggests new possibilities and futures, as is the case with *Everything is Illuminated.*

Conclusion:

In my discussion of *Maus, Austerlitz* and *Everything is Illuminated,* I have shown that the engagement undertaken by certain post-Holocaust texts with the events of the past can be understood as the product of what Hirsch has called postmemory. In Hirsch's definition postmemory is the memory of an event of mass atrocity that is "delayed, indirect [and] secondary" (1997: 13): that cannot be defined as history because of the deep personal affiliation it suggests, but cannot be defined as memory because of the generational distance from the event itself (1997: 22). Hirsch explains that postmemory is "a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch 1997: 22). The negotiation with the events of the Holocaust seen in these works of fiction can be understood as the result of an imaginative process of investment in events of the past that precede these authors' or their characters' births, but which remain integral to their protagonists' selfhood. As texts of postmemory they are situated at the intersection of the public and the private, between history and fiction and suggest a highly complex and mediated affiliation with the events of the past. Furthermore, I contend that Foster's concept of an 'archival impulse' which he argues is exhibited in certain forms of postmodern art becomes a useful tool in understanding the engagement with the past exhibited in these texts. This metaphor suggests an approach to narrating the events of the past as a gathering together of fragments and traces rather than as the creation of a singular and coherent narrative. This metaphor remains useful as long as we acknowledge that the archive itself is always threatened by the pressure toward a single origin and/or the death drive (of erasure or forgetting) as implied by Derrida's vision of archivolithic violence and archive fever. As a result I focused on each text's attempt to dramatise its own provisionality through such techniques as generic blurring and self-conscious narration. This allowed me to both consider the texts' archival projects and their implicit limitations.

The interaction with history and memory evident in the texts discusses is complicated, not only by the authors' spatial and temporal remove from the events with which their fiction is concerned, but because the events in question are the events of the Holocaust whose representation in literature and art has been the subject of much debate. While I maintain that the Holocaust is in fact representable, I suggest that, following Lawrence Langer, it carries an 'excess' that is often beyond the capacity of language to represent. I am interested in how this excess, what some have called the traumatic residue of deep memory, can be represented in literature even in a time when those who have direct experience of the Holocaust are increasingly scarce. *Austerlitz* in its use of uncanny mirroring and doubles was able to represent the Holocaust only indirectly, allowing it to become a spectral presence that haunts the text and suggesting that which is beyond the capacity of language to directly represent. Similarly, in *Maus* and *Everything is Illuminated*, through their avoidance of narrative closure and singularity, were able to suggest that which was beyond their capacity to directly represent.

While the term postmemory, as coined by Hirsch, has proved useful in describing the interaction with the events of the past from the temporal and spatial remove with which I am concerned, it does not fully account for the fiction produced by these authors. By introducing Foster's concept of an 'archival impulse' alongside Hirsch's concept of postmemory to the analysis of this literature, I believe I was able to more fully address the attempt to engage with the events of the past expressed by these texts. Although this needs to be further theorised, the metaphor of the archive does provide a fertile lens through which to analyse these texts and their engagement with history as well as their consideration of the continuing impact the past has on the present. Foster suggests that this archival impulse results in works of art that, while using postmodern devices, seek to produce rather than undermine affect. This is evident in the texts discussed, whose reference to other texts and past events does not serve to erase the original, but to suggest the ways in which the present is still effected and circumscribed by the events of the past.

I sought to prove that the archive may become a useful metaphor to describe these authors' attempts to engage with a past to which they ultimately have no direct access. For Derrida the notion of the archive is inseparable from repetition and the death drive, the very notion of the archive destroys itself, leaving no trace except a haunting spectral presence. The archivist's attempt to archive, catalogue and conserve is as much an act of forgetting and of amnesia as it is an attempt to recall and remember. The pressure of consignation, of creating a single body of knowledge, suggested in Derrida's definition of the archive, is not far from a threat inherent to the work of postmemory which is often restorative and diasporic in its aims, which in seeking to create a connection with a lost past, may impose on the fragments of the past a single coherent narrative. For Foster, however, the archival impulse which is enacted in the work of various artists (and now in my usage, authors) is not absolutely constrained by the *archivolithic violence* that Derrida sees at the very heart of the archive. For Foster archival art is "concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps "anarchival impulse" is the more appropriate phrase), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings and incomplete projects – in art and in history alike – that might offer points of departure again" (2004: 5). This is not to say however that these works of arts are not still threatened by archivolithic violence but rather that these private and individual archives can work against and destabilise public archives. Rather than erasing or destroying memory, the 'archival impulse' can also suggest a work's heterogeneity and emphasise the affect the past retains in the present.

These texts in their generic blurring, intertextuality and self-reflexivity highlight their own provisionality and thus find productive ways to engage with the past without co-opting it. Hirsch herself highlights the key problematic of postmemory as the threat that the process of imaginative investment implied by the term may

result in the appropriation and co-option of the experiences of another as one's own (Hirsch 2002: 76). Each text, by highlighting its mediated distance from the fictional or historical events it recounts, often emphasising its own fictional and constructed nature, avoids annihilating the distance between the author or narrator and his subject. Thus, as suggested by Young's term vicarious memory, emphasising the mediation and transmission of the events narrated as much as the events themselves. In so doing each text highlights its own distance from the Holocaust and as the inherent limitations of its own project.

Much of my argument is concerned with the manner in which each author attempts to narrate the Holocaust from his specific spatial and temporal remove. Each text approaches the Holocaust from a different subject position and perspective, and as a result each text required a new theoretical framework and approach. This provided my study with a number of different perspectives and approaches to two similar concerns: (1) how to relate the events of the past from an extreme geographic and temporal remove in narrative, (2) the effect events of the past have on our experience in the present.

In each chapter I considered how the discussed texts articulated their engagement with the events of the Holocaust. While each text required a different theoretical approach it became evident that each text (in its own manner) sought to gather together fragments of the past, both public and private, to create fictive hybrids that refused simple definitions and narrative closure. For all three texts their provisionality hinges on their indeterminate genre, or what I have elsewhere called their generic blurring. *Maus* is in part an autobiography or perhaps an oral history, but our perception of it as such is problematised by Speigelman's use of the graphic novel format and his representation of his characters as cats, mice, pigs and dogs (among others), as well as his emphasis on the narrative's own construction and fictionalisation. Similarly, *Austerlitz* seems to straddle the boundary between fiction and history, its use of photographs within the body of the text, its detailed and scholarly descriptions of architecture, its near rejection of any discernable plot, all assist in its resistance to any attempt to situate it within a particular genre. Finally, in *Everything is Illuminated* the use of the author's name as the name for the fictional protagonist of the text blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality. Furthermore, Alex's realist account of events forms a sharp counterpoint to Jonathan's hyperbolic and mythic description of Trachimbrod's past, and the textual play which the text consistently enacts allows it to avoid any stable definition. By refusing and destabilising traditional generic boundaries these texts are also able to resist stable definitions, not only of genre but also of fact or fiction. As a result they resist attempts to derive singular or stable meaning from their narratives, refusing claims to authority and suggesting, through their provisionality, that which remains absent from their texts.

Maus is written from the first person perspective of a child of survivors, and tells the story of the narrator's father's life as a Jew in Nazi Germany. The text's complex visual vocabulary required an analysis that highlighted the diverse intertextual traces, public and private, implicit in Spiegelman's visual palimpsest. By highlighting the numerous sources that made up Spiegelman's visual archive I was able to illuminate the complex interaction with the past that this text implied. Furthermore, the text also navigated the often difficult relationship between the narrator and his father, and this relationship was important in understanding the narrative's transmission from father to son and its translation into graphic novel format. The father-son relationship is always haunted by the absent voices and narratives of Anja, Arties's dead mother, which serve to foreground the inherent limitations of Spiegelman's project. By highlighting the father-son relationship in the text I was also able to consider its self-conscious narration and highlight the text's engagement with the events of the past which suggests their remaining affect in the present.

Conversely, the relation to the event's of the past suggested in *Austerlitz* is far more indirect. This is, in part, as a result of the author and narrator's subject positions as second generation Germans. This is further complicated by the fact that although the narrator is a second generation German, the narrative recounts the story of a Jewish man who as a child escaped death at the hands of the Nazis. The text manages to navigate these problematics and avoid the threat of appropriation implied by postmemory by highlighting the mediated nature of the narrative being told and leaving the Holocaust itself at the very periphery of the text as a spectral presence. The text's repetitive structure, its use of photography and its reference to spectral presences, hysteria and madness, all required a reading of the text through the paradigms of the uncanny and the spectre. Both these allowed me to consider how the absent events of the past remained present, intrusive and haunting, throughout the text and often without their direct mention. Finally, the photographs included in the text not only suggest the traumatic temporality of Austerlitz's experience, but also the temporality of return associated with the spectre. They often came to be seen as spectral supplements whose radical reference exceeded a merely illustrative function. Austerlitz and the narrator are both shown to be engaged in archival projects. The text itself is made up of fragments of information and photographs which, the text suggests, are compiled in retrospect as part of the narrator's own work of postmemory. The text however also shows the archive to continually be threatened by erasure.

Finally, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* required yet another approach. This text was written from the perspectives of two seemingly diametrically opposed subject positions: that of a third generation grandchild of a Holocaust survivor, and that of a third generation grandchild of a Ukrainian collaborator. The text's epistolary structure presents the text as collaborative and as the product of the unfulfilled desire for intersubjective exchange between the two narrators. The text emphasises the generative

power of narrative and provides a highly complex mediation on the relation between fiction and history, as well as the problematic of narrativising the Holocaust from this temporal remove. The only trace to the real world provided in the text is the author's use of his own name as the name of one of his narrators. Any sense that this is a work of anything other than fiction is however immediately undermined by the extremely fictionalised narrative of Trachimbrod's past and the text's highly playful commentary on its own process of construction. Through the dramatisation of silence and absence, the text also highlights the limits of fiction and its generative powers. The text's hyperbolic narrative is circumscribed by the reality of the events of the Holocaust that cannot be reformed by fiction. The text explores a complex relationship to the past that is highly mediated and neigh on impossible to access directly. By dramatising its extreme remove from the events of the Holocaust, it suggests that very little remains to archive in fiction other than absence and silence. The testimony of both survivor and perpetrator remain privileged sites where history and memory are conveyed and are juxtaposed against Jonathan's highly fictionalised re-creation of the past that is figured as being written into a profound archival lack. For the first time in this study, this text attempts to navigate the complex relation to the past experienced not only by the grandchildren of victims, but also of collaborators and bystanders, and through its epistolary structure the text suggests new, but highly provisional, possibilities for interaction and perhaps forgiveness.

All three texts are extremely cautious and self reflexive in their engagement with the Holocaust. In Spiegelman's text, despite its resemblance to an autobiography, Artie is highly self conscious about his own motivations for undertaking to write about his father's time in Auschwitz, especially in the form of a comic book. This self conscious narration also highlights the text's own constructedness, thus never providing the illusion that the narrative presented is a direct representation of reality. While Sebald's text is not as overtly self conscious as either *Maus* or *Everything is Illuminated*, by highlighting the mediated nature of the narratives being told Sebald is able to suggest that the novel itself is subject to similar layers of mediation. Foer uses the epistolary structure of *Everything is Illuminated* to make evident and critique the process of the text's construction, and the constructed nature of narrative in general, as well as to highlight the narrative's unreliability. The self-conscious nature of these texts allows each author to emphasise his distance from the events of the Holocaust. It also allows these authors to highlight the provisionality of any attempt to narrate a past to which one has only mediated access.

The archive's relationship to art and literature, as well as the concept of art and literature as an archive, remains a rather elusive connection to envision. However the archive, in part, can be regarded as comprised of inscriptions, traces and images of the past: fragments without narrative from which history and knowledge is formed. The examples of second and third generation Holocaust literature I have considered

are concerned with how we know the fragments of the past in the present and how these traces effect our present and our future. The texts I have considered can be seen to exhibit an archival impulse in their artistic endeavours. They attempt to archive and collect traces of the past while reinforcing their status as spectral fragments circumscribed by absence. As a result these authors resist the totalising knowledge implied by the *commandment* and *consignation* of the archive proper. The completion or even the achievement of their projects is infinitely deferred, like the spectre it remains always already to come. However if each text considered expresses an archival impulse, then equally each text is threatened by *archivolithic violence*; often in the form of the Diasporic urge inherent to postmemory that seeks connection to an origin. The texts in question seem able to evade this threat, with varying degrees of success, by reinforcing the provisionality of their projects, which leaves them disrupted, or unresolved, their resolution or fulfilment infinitely deferred and always opening out to heterogeneity.

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