

Surviving Images:
Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory

I. Rupture

“One’s first encounter with the photographic inventory of ultimate horror is a kind of revelation, the prototypically modern revelation: a negative epiphany. For me, it was photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau that I came across by chance in a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945. Nothing I have seen—in photographs or in real life—ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about. What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs—of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead, something is still crying.”¹

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“I made a thorough search of my father’s desk. I opened every pad and every box in every drawer. . . . In the right bottom drawer I found gray cardboard boxes. There were black and white photographs of dead bodies in them. In several photographs hundreds of bony corpses were piled on top of one another in bony heaps. I had never seen a dead body, not even in a photograph. . . . This is what death looked like.

Not every body in the photographs was dead. People were standing up, but they didn’t look human. Their bones stuck out too much. You could see the sockets where one bone connected to the next. Some were naked, some wore striped pajamas that fell off their bones. One man tried to smile. His face was more frightening than the expressionless faces—he was reaching for life, but it was too late. . . . ‘U.S. army’ and a series of numbers was stamped on the back of each photograph.

My mother told me that the photographs were taken by Mr. Newman. He was a photographer for the Army when they liberated the

concentration camps at the end of the war. His photographs were evidence at Nuremberg for what the Nazis did.

I took the photos to class to show the other third-graders what had happened in the camps. My mother had gone through the photos to remove the ones she thought were too upsetting, but I wanted to take all of them, especially the upsetting ones. . . . I believed my friends had no right to live without knowing about these pictures, how could they look so pleased when they were so ignorant. None of them knew what I know, I thought. I hated them for it.”²

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Two encounters, one described by Susan Sontag in 1973 in *On Photography*, the other by Alice Kaplan in *French Lessons* in 1993, twenty years later. Sontag was twelve in 1945 when she first saw those pictures, Kaplan was in third grade, eight or nine, in 1962 when she found them, in the desk of her father who had been a prosecutor at Nuremberg and who had recently died of heart failure.

Both of these encounters with what Sontag calls “the photographic inventory of ultimate horror” occurred in childhood. Although one of these writers is a contemporary of the Holocaust and the other a member of the second generation, both encounters are marked by the same rupture, the same child realization of death, inconceivable violence, incomprehensible evil. The same sense that the world will never again be whole; that “something broke.” In both texts, the descriptions of these encounters are carefully dated and situated: they serve to position the authorial subject in a generational space defined by its visual culture, one in which images such as those found in the privacy of the desk drawer or even the public space of the bookstore are the mark of a limit of what can and should be seen. Although these two generations share the same visual landscape and live in it with the same sense of shock, that shock has different effects for witnesses and survivors than it does for their children and grandchildren.

Thus, if Sontag describes this radical interruption through seeing, it is only to show how easily we can become inured to its visual impact: “Photographs shock insofar as they show something novel. . . . Once one has seen such images, one has started down the road of seeing more—and more. Images transfix. Images anesthetize. . . . At the time of the first photographs of the Nazi camps, there was nothing banal about these images. After thirty years, a saturation point may have been reached” (21).

We do not have to look at the images Sontag and Kaplan describe. Now, after fifty years, they have become all too familiar. The saturation point that “may have been reached” for Sontag 25 years ago has certainly been surpassed by now, causing many commentators on the representation and memorialization of the Holocaust to express seri-

ous concerns and warnings. “Is our capacity for sympathy finite and soon exhausted?” worries Geoffrey Hartman in *The Longest Shadow*. The surfeit of violent imagery that constitutes our present visual landscape, he insists, has desensitized us to horror, evacuating the capacity for the shocked child vision of Sontag or Kaplan. Hartman fears that we will try to go ever further, surpassing all representational limits, to “seek to ‘cut’ ourselves, like psychotics who ascertain in this way that they exist.”³ And in a recent extensive study of Holocaust atrocity photos taken by the liberating armies, Barbie Zelizer worries that through this surfeit of imagery we are, as her title indicates, “remembering to forget,” that the photographs have become no more than decontextualized memory cues, energized by an already coded memory, no longer the vehicles that can themselves energize memory.⁴

Hartman and Zelizer voice a fear that that has become pervasive among scholars and writers concerned about the transmission of Holocaust memory. And yet what we find in the contemporary scholarly and popular representation and memorialization of the Holocaust is not the multiplication and escalation of imagery that Hartman’s fear might lead us to expect, but a striking repetition of the same very few images, used over and over again iconically and emblematically to signal this event.

This despite the fact that the Holocaust is one of the visually best-documented events in the history of an era marked by a plenitude of visual documentation. The Nazis were masterful at recording visually their own rise to power as well as the atrocities they committed, immortalizing both victims and perpetrators.⁵ Guards often officially photographed inmates at the time of their imprisonment and recorded their destruction. Even individual soldiers frequently traveled with cameras and documented the ghettos and camps in which they served. At the liberation, the Allies photographed and filmed the opening of the camps; postwar interrogations and trials were meticulously filmed as well. It is ironic that although the Nazis intended to exterminate not only all Jews but also their entire culture, down to the very records and documents of their existence, they should themselves have been so anxious to add images to those that would, nevertheless, survive the death of their subjects.

Very few of these images were taken by victims: the astounding clandestine photographs Mendel Grossman succeeded in taking in the Lodz ghetto, hiding the negatives which were found after his death, are a rare exception, as are the blurred, virtually unrecognizable, photos of burnings and executions taken by members of the resistance in Auschwitz, and also the images of the Warsaw ghetto taken at his own risk by the German anti-Nazi photographer Joe Heydecker. The images of perpetrators, resisters, and victims together yield an enormous archive of diverse representations, many of which appeared frequently

in the two decades after the war, in Alain Resnais' important 1956 film *Night and Fog* which is largely composed of this gruesome archival material, and in Gerhard Schönberger's 1960 volume *The Yellow Star*.⁶ As new archives and museums open, more imagery has become available, and yet, as the historian Sybil Milton has written: "Although more than two million photos exist in the public archives of more than twenty nations, the quality, scope and content of the images reproduced in scholarly and popular literature has been very repetitive."⁷ The repetition of the same few images has disturbingly brought with it their radical decontextualization from their original context of production and reception.⁸ Why, with so much imagery available from the time, has the visual landscape of the Holocaust and thus our opportunity for historical understanding been so radically delimited?

In what follows I try to understand this repetition from the vantage point of a historical and generational moment that is fully cognizant of the mediated and media-driven scene of representation that shapes both knowledge and memory of the Holocaust. If these images, in their obsessive repetition, delimit our available archive of trauma, can they enable a responsible and ethical discourse in its aftermath? How can we read them? Do they act like clichés, empty signifiers that distance and protect us from the event?⁹ Or, on the contrary, does their repetition in itself retraumatize, making distant viewers into surrogate victims who, having seen the images so often, have adopted them into their own narratives and memories, and have thus become all the more vulnerable to their effects? If they cut and wound, do they enable memory, mourning, and working through?¹⁰ Or is their repetition an effect of melancholic replay, appropriative identification?

In my study and teaching of Holocaust representation, I have found this repetition puzzling and disturbing. Yet, I have also found that in different contexts the effects of this repetition are different, ranging across all of the possibilities I have just named. It is certainly important to study the specific contextual use of these images. What I attempt here, however, is a more general reading that locates repetition itself in a specifically generational response to memory and trauma, in what I call *postmemory*—the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first. Postmemory offers us a model for reading both the striking fact of repetition, and the particular canonized images themselves. I will argue that for us in the second generation, cognizant that our memory consists not of events but of representations, repetition does not have the effect of desensitizing us to horror, or shielding us from shock, thus demanding an endless escalation of disturbing imagery, as the first generation might fear. On the contrary, compulsive and traumatic repetition connects the second generation to the first, *producing* rather than *screening* the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly *as compulsive repetition* by survivors and contem-

porary witnesses. Thus, I would suggest that while the reduction of the archive of images and their endless repetition might seem problematic in the abstract, the postmemorial generation—in displacing and recontextualizing these well-known images in their artistic work—has been able to make repetition not an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatization (as it often is for survivors of trauma), but a *mostly* helpful vehicle of working through a traumatic past.¹¹

II. Postmemory

Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences 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. I first came to this notion in reading Art Spiegelman’s representations of his parents’ story of survival in *Maus*.¹² The original three-page “Maus,” published in *Funny Animals* in 1972, begins with a cartoon redrawing of the famous Margaret Bourke-White photograph of liberated prisoners in Buchenwald. The photo corners at the edges clearly indicate not only the double mediation of this image but also its inscription into the family photo album. The small arrow marked “Poppa” pointing to one of the prisoners in the back row shows, moreover, the son’s inability to imagine his own father’s past other than by way of repeatedly circulated and already iconic cultural images, images that have become part of his own consciousness and his family album.¹³ (See figures 1 and 2.)

The term “postmemory” is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness. Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through representation, projection, and creation—often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible. That is not, of course, to say that survivor memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly—chronologically—connected to the past.

The work of postmemory defines the familial inheritance and transmission of cultural trauma. The children of victims, survivors, witnesses, or perpetrators have different experiences of postmemory, even though they share the familial ties that facilitate intergenerational identification. Still, this form of remembrance need not be restricted to the family, or even to a group that shares an ethnic or national identity marking: through particular forms of identification, adoption, and



Figure 1. Buchenwald, April 1945. Margaret Bourke-White, *Life Magazine* c. Time, Inc.

projection, it can be more broadly available. When Art Spiegelman represents the young Artie as identifying the prisoner in the photograph as “Poppa,” he sees the anonymous image through the lens of his own familial drama. But the young Alice, the child of a witness, needs to show the images to her class so that others will know what she knows and so that they can reconstitute their identities accordingly: “my friends had no right to live without knowing about these pictures, how could they look so pleased when they were so ignorant.” Thus, although familial inheritance offers the clearest model for it, postmemory need not be *strictly* an identity position. Instead, I prefer to see it as an intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, linked specifically to cultural or collective trauma. It is defined through an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by the unbridgeable distance that separates the participant from the one born after. Geoffrey Hartman has written about “witnesses by adoption” and I like the connection to and enlargement of family that this term implies. Postmemory thus would be *retrospective witnessing by adoption*. It is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the memories—of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and of inscribing them into one’s own life story. It is a question, more specifically, of an *ethical* relation to the oppressed or persecuted other for which postmemory can serve as a model: as I can “remember” my parents’ memories, I can also “remember” the suffering



Figure 2. The First Maus, courtesy of Art Spiegelman

of others. These lines of relation and identification need to be theorized more closely, however—how the familial and intergenerational identification with one's parents can extend to the identification among individuals of different generations and circumstances and also perhaps to other, less proximate groups. And how, more important, identification can resist appropriation and incorporation, resist annihilating the distance between self and other, the otherness of the other.¹⁴

Nor do I want to restrict the notion of postmemory to the remembrance of the Holocaust, or to privilege the Holocaust as a unique or limit experience beyond all others: the Holocaust is the space where I am drawn into the discussion. Although it might be generalizable to other contexts, however, the specificity of the Holocaust as an exemplary site of postmemory deserves notice and comment; it is due to more than my own autobiographical connection to it. I am speaking of a historical, generational moment—hence postmemory's connection to the postmodern with its many posts—a cul-

tural and intellectual moment that is shaped by the traumas of the first half of the twentieth century and that understands its own fundamentally mediated relationship to this painful history, even while considering it as absolutely determinative.¹⁵

Thus postmemory characterizes the experience of those who, like me, have grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the powerful stories of the previous generation, shaped by monumental traumatic events that resist understanding and integration. It describes as well the relationship of the second generation to the experiences of the first—their curiosity and desire, as well as their ambivalences about wanting to own their parents' knowledge. Alice Kaplan's relentless search through her father's desk drawers, her exposure of the images he carefully saved, and her insistence that her classmates must join her in the act of looking at what her father saw, illustrate the act of postmemory. Her description clarifies the textual nature of postmemory—its reliance on images, stories, and documents passed down from one generation to the next.

The notion of postmemory derives from the recognition of the belated nature of traumatic memory itself. If indeed one of the signs of trauma is its delayed recognition, if trauma is recognizable only through its after-effects, then it is not surprising that it is transmitted across generations. Perhaps it is *only* in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation. Cathy Caruth suggests that trauma is an encounter with another, an act of telling and listening, a listening to another's wound, recognizable in its intersubjective relation.¹⁶ Trauma may also be a way of seeing through another's eyes, of remembering another's memories through the experience of their effects. Caruth makes space for this elaboration when she cites, as an epigraph, the following quote from Michael Herr's *Dispatches*: "It took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes" (cited in *Unclaimed Experience*, 10). My reading of Holocaust images attempts to explore the implications of Herr's notion of visual response and responsibility as it is reconceived by the artists and writers of the postmemorial generation.

The repeated images of the Holocaust need to be read from within the discourse of trauma, not for what they reveal but for how they reveal it, or fail to do so: thus they can be seen as *figures* for memory and forgetting. They are part of an intergenerational effort at reconstitution and repair that Robert Jay Lifton describes on an individual level:

“In the case of severe trauma we can say that there has been an important break in the lifeline that can leave one permanently engaged in either repair or the acquisition of new twine. And here we come to the survivor’s overall task, that of formulation, evolving new inner forms that include the traumatic event.”¹⁷ As much as for the generations following the Shoah, as for survivors, the work of postmemory is such a work of “formulation” and attempted repair. The repetitive visual landscape we construct and reconstruct in our postmemorial generation is a central aspect of that work. To understand it, we must begin by reading the images themselves.¹⁸

III. *Traces*

Ida Fink’s short story “Traces,” from her 1987 collection *A Scrap of Time*, stages a conversation between a survivor and some unnamed “they” who use a photograph to ask her questions about the liquidation of the ghetto in which she was interned.¹⁹

Yes, of course she recognizes it. Why shouldn’t she? That was their last ghetto.

The photograph, a copy of a clumsy amateur snapshot, is blurred. There’s a lot of white in it, that’s snow. The picture was taken in February. The snow is high, piled up in deep drifts. In the foreground are traces of footprints, along the edges, two rows of wooden stalls. That is all.

As the woman tries to tell what she remembers, her narrative is arrested, time and again, by the details she can make out in the photo:

“That’s the ghetto,” she says again, bending over the photograph. Her voice sounds amazed.

. . . she reaches for the photograph, raises it to her nearsighted eyes, looks at it for a long time, and says, “You can still see traces of footprints.” And a moment later, “That’s very strange.” . . .

“I wonder who photographed it? And when? Probably right afterwards: the footprints are clear here, but when they shot them in the afternoon it was snowing again.”

The people are gone—their footprints remain. Very strange.

This image in Fink’s story is a kind of metapicture illustrating the complicated issues that are raised in the seemingly simple attempt to use a photograph as an instrument of historical evidence, or even, simply, as a memory cue for the witness. I’d like to use this fictional photograph to explore *the privileged status of photography as a medium of post-memory*. What does Fink gain for her story by adding this fictional photograph to the witness’s narrative?

Art historians and semioticians have discussed the photograph as a *trace*. The notion of trace, or index, describes a material, physical, and thus extremely potent connection between image and referent. In Charles Sanders Peirce’s tripartite definition of the sign—symbol, icon and index—the photograph is defined as an index based on a rela-

tionship of contiguity, of cause and effect, like a *footprint*. Thus a photograph of footprints in the snow is a trace of a trace. At the same time, it is also an icon, based on physical resemblance or similarity between the sign and the referent. In his *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes goes beyond Peirce when he insists that photography holds a *uniquely* referential relation to the real, defined not through the discourse of artistic representation, but that of magic, alchemy, indexicality:

I call “photographic referent” not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph . . . The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; . . . A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.²⁰

The woman in Fink’s story underscores what Barthes calls the photograph’s “*ça-a-été*” with her first repeated spoken statement: “‘That’s the ghetto,’ she says again, bending over the photo. Her voice sounds amazed.” She points to the trace (the photo)—which is in itself of a trace (the footprints)—and, amazed, she finds there an unequivocal presence (“that’s the ghetto”).

Oral or written testimony, like photography, leaves a trace, but, unlike writing, the photograph of the footprint is the *index par excellence*, pointing to the presence, the *having-been-there*, of the past—here is why Fink needed the description of the photograph to underscore the material connection between past and present that is embodied in the photograph and underscored by the witness who recognizes it. The photo—even the fictional photo—has, as Barthes would say, evidential force. It thus illustrates the integral link photographs provide for the second generation, those who in their desire for memory and knowledge, are left to track the traces of what has been there and no longer is. Pictures, as Barbie Zelizer argues, “materialize” memory.

“The photograph . . . is blurred. There’s a lot of white in it.” In spite of their evidential force and their material connection to an event that was there before the lens, photographs can be extremely frustrating, as fleeting in their certainty as footprints in the snow. They affirm the past’s existence, its “*having-been-there*”; yet, in their flat two-dimensionality, in the frustrating limitation of their frames, they also signal its insurmountable distance and unreality. What ultimately can we read as we read an image? Does it not, like the white picture of footprints in the snow, conceal as much as it reveals?

When was the picture taken, the witness wonders, and concludes that it was “probably right afterwards: the footprints are clear here, but when they shot them . . . it was snowing again.” The still picture cap-

tures, refers to, an instant in time which, when we look at the picture, is over, irrecoverable. Yet the photograph testifies to that past instant's reality. If the photograph has evidential force, Barthes argues, it testifies not as much to the object as to time, but because time is stopped in the photograph, one might say it gives us only a partial, and thus perhaps a misleading, knowledge about the past. Even as it freezes time, however, the image shows that time cannot be frozen: in the case of Holocaust photos such as this one, the impossibility of stopping time, or of averting death, is already announced by the shrinking of the ghetto, the roundup, the footprints pointing toward the site of execution. In this case, these footprints in the snow are the visible evidence not of the inevitable, non-negotiable march of time, but of its murderous interruption.

Those who question the witness have only representations such as this photograph and the woman's halting narrative to go on. The story does not tell of their response, cites only one of their questions. But it describes the picture they are looking at; and images such as this one, art historian Jill Bennett has argued, do more than *represent* scenes and experiences of the past: they can communicate an emotional or bodily experience by evoking the viewer's own emotional and bodily memories.²¹ They *produce* affect in the viewer, speaking *from* the body's sensations, rather than speaking *of*, or *representing* the past. These post-memorial viewers do more than listen to the witness; they gaze at the image with her and thus they can reenact, recall in the very sensations of the body, that fateful walk in the snow. This connection between photography and bodily or sense memory can perhaps account for the power of photographs to connect first- and second-generation subjects in an unsettling mutuality that crosses the gap of genocidal destruction.

On the one hand, a blurred picture with a lot of white in it, depicting footprints and some wooden stalls in the snow. On the other, a narrative about the massacre of the children and their parents, the last in their ghetto. The two are incommensurable, illustrating the incommensurability of the crime and the instruments of representation and even conceptualization available to us—the absolute limits of representation. If the photograph is a trace, then it cannot ultimately refer to its incomprehensible, inconceivable referent that is the extermination of European Jewry, or even just the murder of the last 80 Jews in the town. “The people are gone—their footprints remain. Very strange.” Equally strange that the photo, a “copy of a clumsy amateur snapshot,” should remain. As horrific as any Holocaust photograph may be, it cannot in any way claim to represent, in the sense of being commensurate with, the crime it purportedly depicts.

More than just evocative and representational power, images also quickly assume symbolic power—the *trace* in the story becomes not

just a footprint in the snow but a *trace* of the children who were killed. “But suddenly she changes her mind and asks that what she is going to say be written down and preserved forever, because she wants a trace to remain.” And thus she tells the story of the hidden children who were brought out by the SS to identify their parents but who refused to move or to speak. “So I wanted some trace of them to be left behind.” She alone can connect the two presents of the photograph because she alone survived. But the photograph she uses to tell her story moves her testimony to a figurative level. Zelizer discusses the symbolic and interpretive power of images, arguing that “the photo’s significance . . . evolved from the ability not only to depict a real-life event but to position that depiction within a broader interpretive framework.” Photos are “markers of both truth-value and symbolism.”²²

IV. Figures

As a figure for the relationship between photography, memory and postmemory, Fink’s photo enables us to read some of the emblematic images used in Holocaust representation and memorialization, images repeated in textbooks and museums, on book covers and in films: (1). the entrance to Auschwitz I with its ironic “*Arbeit macht frei*” sign, its massive iron gate in whose center is the small sign “*Halt! Ausweise vorzeigen*” (“show documents!”) (see fig. 3); (2). the main guard house to Auschwitz II—Birkenau depicted from a slight distance with three train lines leading into it and with snow-covered pots, pans and other belongings in the foreground (see fig. 4); (3). the camp watchtowers connected by electric barbed wire fences, poles and spotlights [in some images the signs saying “*Halt/ Stop*” or “*Halt/ Lebensgefahr*” are visible]; and (4). the bulldozers moving corpses into enormous mass graves—clearly one of the images that so struck Sontag and Kaplan (see fig. 5).²³

The specific context of these images has certainly been lost in their incessant reproduction. The gate of Auschwitz I and the tower could be either perpetrator or liberator images; the liberator’s signature can clearly be found in the objects in front of the Birkenau gate, and the bulldozer image reveals its production most explicitly at the moment of liberation, although its provenance from Bergen-Belsen is immaterial to the uses to which the image has been put. I would like to suggest, not without some hesitation, that more than simply “icons of destruction,” these images have come to function as tropes for Holocaust memory itself. And they are also tropes for photography, referring to the act of looking itself. It is as such tropes, and not only for their informational value about the Holocaust, whether denotative or connotative, that they are incorporated into the visual discourse of postmemory as pervasively as they are. And, at the same time, the repetition also underscores their metaphoric role.²⁴



Figure 3. Gate to Auschwitz I, Główna Komisja Badania Zbrodni Preciwko Narodowi Polkiemu, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

The two gates are the thresholds that represent the difficult access to the narratives of dehumanization and extermination. As Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt say of the gate of Auschwitz I, “For the post-Auschwitz generation, that gate symbolizes the threshold that separates the *oikomene* (the human community) from the planet Auschwitz. It is a fixed point in our collective memory, and therefore the canonical beginning of the tour through the camp. . . . In fact, however, the inscribed arch did not have a central position in the history of Auschwitz.” Most Jewish prisoners, they show, never went through the gate since they were taken by truck directly to Birkenau to be gassed. The expansion of the camp in 1942, moreover, placed the gate in the interior of the camp, not at its threshold.²⁵

In the pictures, the gate of Auschwitz I is always closed; its warning “*halt*” further signals the dangers of opening the door on memory. For the victims, “*Arbeit macht frei*” remains perhaps the greatest trick of National Socialism, enabling the killers to lure their victims willingly and cooperatively into the camp and later into the gas chamber. It is a lie, but also a diabolical truth: freedom is both the very small possibility of survival though work, and the freedom of death. It is only in retrospect, knowing what lies beyond the closed gate, that one fully appreciates the extent of the trick.

But could “*Arbeit macht frei*” not also be read, by and for us, in the second generation, as a reference to the tricks played by memory it-



Figure 4. The main rail entrance of Auschwitz -Birkenau just after the liberation of the camp, Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

self, the illusory promise that one could become free if one could only do the work of memory and mourning that would open the gate, allow one to enter back into the past and then, through work, out again into a new freedom? The closed gate would thus be the figure for the ambivalences, the risks of memory and postmemory themselves—“*Halt/ Lebensgefahr*.” The obsessively repeated encounter with this picture thus would seem to repeat the lure of remembrance and its deadly dangers—the promise of freedom and its impossibility. At the same time, its emblematic status has made the gate into a screen memory. For instance, Art Spiegelman in *Maus* draws Vladek’s arrival and departure from Auschwitz through the main gate in 1944/45 when the gate was no longer used as threshold. (See fig. 6 and 7.) For Spiegelman, as for all of us in his 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 for his postmemorial readers.²⁶

The same could be said of the “Gate of Death” to Birkenau with the multiple tracks leading into it. Those who read and study about the Holocaust, encounter this image obsessively, in every book, on every poster. Like the gate of Auschwitz I, it is the threshold of remembrance, an invitation to enter and, at the same time, a foreclosure. The electric fences, towers and lights, the forbidding warning signs, repeat cultural defenses against recollection, and, especially, against



Figure 5. A British soldier clearing corpses at Bergen-Belsen, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

looking beyond the fence, inside the gate of death, at death itself. The postmemorial generation, largely limited to these images, replays, obsessively, this oscillation between opening and closing the door to the memory and the experiences of the victims and survivors.²⁷ The closed gates and the bright lights are also figures for photography, however—for its frustrating flatness, the inability to transcend the limit of its frame, the partial and superficial view, the lack of illumination it offers, leaving the viewer always at a threshold and withholding entrance.

But when we confront—as we repeatedly do in the texts of Holocaust remembrance—the liberators' pictures of the innumerable bodies being buried or cleared by bulldozers, we come as close as we can in an image to looking into the pits of destruction. On the one hand, these images are the epitome of dehumanization, the inability, even after the liberation to give victims an individual human burial. They show, perhaps better than any statistics can, the extent of the destruction, the multiplication of victims that transforms corpses into what the Nazis called "*Stücke*" ("pieces") even by the liberating armies. They lead us back to the prewar images of individuals, families, and groups, such as the ones in the Tower of Faces in the U. S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (figure 8), and as we project these two kinds of images unto each other, seeing them as mutually implying each other,



Figure 6. *Maus I*, courtesy of Art Spiegelman

we come to appreciate the extremity of the outrage and the incomprehension with which they leave anyone who looks.²⁸

But, on the other hand, can we not see in the pictures of mass graves too a figuration of memory and forgetting that might also be involved in their canonization? The earth is open, the wound is open, we stare at the picture in the shock, amazement and disbelief that Sontag and Kaplan express. This is the image that ruptures all viewing relations. But, at the same time, the opposite is also taking place: the bodies are being buried, the traces are being concealed, forgetting has begun. Every time we look at this image, we repeat the encounter between memory and forgetting, between shock and self-protection. We look into the pit of death but we know that it is in the process of being covered, just as, in Fink's story, the afternoon snow covered the traces of the crime. The work of postmemory, in fact, is to uncover the pits again, to unearth the layers of forgetting, to go beneath the screen surfaces that disguise the crimes and try to see what these images—the family pictures and the images of destruction—both expose and foreclose.

But the bulldozer image disturbs in a different way as well. It inscribes another confrontation, that between the camera and the bull-



Figure 7. Maus II, courtesy of Art Spiegelman

dozer, perhaps mirror images of one another. In this specific context, one could say that these two machines, worked by humans, do a similar job of burial that represents forgetting; that they recall, however obliquely, another machine—the weapon. And that, when it comes to images of genocidal murder, the postmemorial act of looking performs this unwanted and discomforting mutual implication.

V. A Double Dying

The bulldozer image, like the photo in Ida Fink's story, records a fleeting moment, just after, and just before—in this case, after killing and before burial. Theorists of photography have often pointed out the simultaneous presence of death and life in the photograph: "Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all photos of people," says Susan Sontag in *On Photography* (70). The indexical nature of the photo intensifies its status as harbinger of death and, at the same time, its capacity to signify life. Life is the presence of the object before the camera; death is the "having-been-there" of the object—the radical break, the finality introduced by the past tense. The "ça-a-été" of the photograph creates the retrospective scene of looking shared by those who survive.

In its relation to loss and death, photography does not mediate the process of individual and collective memory but brings the past back in the form of a ghostly *revenant*, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability. The encounter with the photograph is the encounter between two presents, one of which, already past, can be reanimated in the act of looking.



Figure 8. Hashomer Hatzair youth group, Czernowitz/Cernauti, Rumania, 1920s, Hirsch-Spitzer family collection

In order to elaborate on what she calls the photograph's "posthumous irony," Sontag describes Roman Vishniac's pictures of the vanished world of Eastern European Jewish life which are particularly affecting, she argues, because as we look at them we know how soon these people are going to die (70). "Strictly speaking," writes Christian Metz, "the person *who has been photographed*— . . . is dead. . . . The snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time . . . The photographic *take* is immediate and definitive, like death. . . . Not by chance, the photographic art . . . has been frequently compared with shooting, and the camera with a gun."²⁹ In the years since Sontag's 1973 book and Metz's 1985 essay, the equation between the camera and the gun, and the concomitant view of the photographic gaze as monolithic and potentially lethal has been significantly qualified as theorists have stressed the multiplicity of looks structuring a photographic image.

For example, the giant opening image that faces the visitor who enters the permanent exhibition at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum places the viewer in the position of the unbelieving on-looker or retrospective witness, who confronts the contemporary



Figure 9. U.S. forces at Ohrdruf Concentration Camp, Harold Royall, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archive

witnesses and sees *both* them in the act of looking *and* what they saw. (See fig. 9.) These multiple and fractured lines of sight among the dead victims, the liberating U.S. army, and the retrospective witness, confirm some recent work that complicates the assumption that a monocular perspective represented by the camera rules the field of vision, as Metz suggests.³⁰

In my own work on the distinction between the familial gaze and look in *Family Frames*, I have tried to extricate us from the monocular seeing that conflates the camera with a weapon. Thus I have argued that while the *gaze* is external to human subjects situating them authoritatively in ideology, constituting them in their subjectivity, the *look* is located at a specific point; it is local and contingent, mutual and reversible, traversed by desire and defined by lack. While the look is returned, the gaze turns the subject into a spectacle. “In the scopic field,” Lacan says, “the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am a picture. . . . What determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside.” But looking and being looked at are interrelated processes; when you look you are also seen; when you are the object of the look you return it, even if only to reflect

light back to its source: “things look at me and yet I see them,” Lacan says. These looks are exchanged through the *screen* that filters vision through the mediations of cultural conventions and codes that make the seen visible. The gaze is mediated by the screen, contested and interrupted by the look. Vision is multiple and power is shared. I believe that we can use photographs to study these complex visual relations. Interpellated by the photograph, its viewers become part of the network of looks exchanged within the image and beyond it. The viewer both participates in and observes the photograph’s inscription in the gazes and the looks that structure it.

But is this multiplicity of vision sustained in the images of total death that have survived the destruction of the Holocaust, like the image of the bodies in the mass grave? In the images of burial and execution, the bulldozer burying the innumerable bodies repeats the act of the gun that has shot those bodies before they are buried, or the gas that has choked them. And the camera recording this violent destruction for posterity cannot stand outside this complication. In its staggering multiplication, the triple act of shooting overwhelms all viewing relations.³¹

Several images that have been frequently reproduced in recent exhibits make this troubling equation uncompromisingly clear. These reverse the temporal sequence of the mass grave picture. They are images from the mass executions in Russia, Latvia, and Lithuania that depict victims facing the camera moments before they are to be put to death. I am thinking in particular of an image of four women, in their undergarments. In the brutally frontal image, the camera is in the exact same position as the gun and the photographer in the place of the executioner who remains unseen. The victims are already undressed; the graves have been dug. Displayed in their full vulnerability and humiliation they are doubly exposed in their nakedness and their powerlessness. They are shot before they are shot.³²

How are postmemorial viewers to look at this picture and others like it? Where are the lines of transgenerational identification and empathy? Unbearably, the viewer is positioned in the place identical with the weapon of destruction: our look, like the photographer’s, is in the place of the executioner. Steven Spielberg makes that utterly plain when he photographs Amon Goeth’s random executions through the viewfinder of his gun in *Schindler’s List*. Is it possible to escape the touch of death and the implication in murder that these images perform? To regain a form of witnessing that is not so radically tainted?

Perhaps the most haunting, arresting moment in Ida Fink’s “Traces” is the witness’s question, “I wonder who photographed it?” Fink’s story reminds us that every image also represents, more or less visibly or readably, the context of its production and a very specific embodied gaze of a photographer. And, she reminds us as well, that for pho-



Figure 10. German soldiers examine photographs after executing a group of Jews and Serbs in a reprisal action, Serbia 1941, courtesy of ECPA (*Photo Cinema Vidéo des Armées*)

tographs associated with the Holocaust in particular, the very fact of their existence may be the most astounding, disturbing, incriminating thing about them. Perpetrator images, in particular, are taken by perpetrators for their own consumption. Recently I have come across a set of 38 images that bring this home with shocking force. (See fig. 10.) These are pictures of a reprisal action against Jewish and non-

Jewish partisans in Serbia, gruesomely detailing a roundup, confiscation of valuables, a lineup, the digging of graves, the shootings, and, also, the soldiers' act of looking intently at images. The pictures they are holding are clearly too large to be images confiscated from the prisoners; they must be images of this or of other *Aktionen* they or others have performed. Or they could be images of German victims, and thus supposed justifications for reprisal actions. It is not clear whether the soldiers are looking at these pictures before or after the execution depicted. How is the act of looking connected to the act of shooting: Is it a form of justification, indoctrination, and instruction, or a retrospective debriefing?³³ No matter. These images illustrate the quality of the perpetrator's look as well as its connection to the perpetrator's deed. When we confront perpetrator images, we cannot look independently of the look of the perpetrator.³⁴

The images of executions and burials are ruled by what we might term a murderous National Socialist gaze that violates the viewing relations under which we normally operate. The lethal power of the gaze that acts through the machine gun and the gas chamber, that reduces humans to "pieces" and ashes, creates a visual field in which the look can no longer be returned, multiplied, or displaced. All is touched by the death that is the precondition of the image. When looking and photographing have become coextensive with mechanized mass death, and the subject looking at the camera is also the victim looking at the executioner, those of us left to look at the picture are deeply touched by that death.³⁵

The Nazi gaze is so all-encompassing that even for those in the postmemorial generation, available screens seem to falter, and any potential resistance of the look is severely impaired. The retrospective irony that Sontag identifies with photography has ceased being ironic as we feel ourselves in the position of both killer and victim, inextricably entwined in a circle from which, even for those of us analyzing the images in the postmemorial generation, it is difficult to find an escape through ironic insight. Too late to help, utterly impotent, we nevertheless search for ways to take responsibility for what we are seeing, as Michael Herr suggested, to experience, from a distance, even as we try to redefine, if not repair, these ruptures. This is the difficult work of postmemory.³⁶

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes discusses the picture of the young Lewis Payne who is waiting to be hanged. "The *punctum* is," Barthes says,

he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose . . . , the photograph tells me death in the future. What pricks me is the discovery of this equivalence. In front of the photograph of my mother as a child I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder . . . over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe. (96)



Figure 11. Rose Spitzer, J-Pass, Vienna 1939, Hirsch-Spitzer family collection

The images from the Holocaust, whether pictures of executions of even prewar images, are different. It is not that these women, or these men, were alive when the photo was taken and that we know that they were killed after. Barthes' retrospective irony works in such a way that, as viewers, we reanimate the subjects—his mother or Lewis Payne—trying to give them life again, to protect them from the death we know must occur, has already occurred. Here is the pathos, the *punctum* of the picture. But the victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* were already killed by the murderous Nazi gaze that condemned them without even looking at them. This lethal gaze reflects back on images of European Jews that precede the war, removing from them the loss and nostalgia, the irony and longing that structure such photographs from a bygone era. It is the determining force of the identity pictures Jews had to place on the identification cards the Nazis issued and which were marked with an enormous J in gothic script. (See fig. 11.) Those pictures had to show the full face and uncover the left ear as a tell-tale identity marker. In these documents, identity is identification, visibility, and surveillance, not for life but for the death machine that had already condemned all of those thus marked.

The notion of the pervasive, murderous gaze of National Socialism brings me to another obsessively repeated set of images, those of survivors at liberation, like the famous picture of Elie Wiesel in the bunks in Buchenwald, or the liberation pictures of Margaret Bourke-White

(see fig. 1). For some, these photographs of survivors looking at the liberating photographers might not seem to be so radically different from the images of executions. As Alice Kaplan observes, “People were standing up, but they didn’t look human. . . . he was reaching for life, but it was too late.” For her they elicit the same broken look and the same sense of belatedness. They are marked by a lack of recognition and mutuality, a sense of disbelief, a decided disidentification.³⁷ But Artie, in *The First Maus*, reanimates the image as he tries to find his father among those who “didn’t look human.” His indexical gesture “Poppa” is also the resistant one of the child who is alive because survival was indeed possible.

These photos—even the images of survivors, even the prewar images—are not about death but about genocidal murder. They resist the work of mourning. They make it difficult to go back to a moment before death, or to recognize survival. They cannot be redeemed by irony, insight, or understanding. They can only be confronted again and again, with the same pain, the same incomprehension, the same distortion of the look, the same mortification. And thus, in their repetition, they no longer *represent* Nazi genocide, but they *provoke* the traumatic effect that this history has had on all those who grew up under its shadow.

VI. Screens

Those who have grown up in the generation of postmemory have had to live with these broken, forestalled, viewing relations. The break preceded us, but each of us relives it when, like Alice Kaplan, we first find those images in a desk drawer or in a book. Through repetition, displacement and recontextualization, postmemorial viewers attempt to live with, and at the same time to reenvision and redirect, the mortifying gaze of these surviving images.

In her extensive interviews with children of Holocaust survivors, Nadine Fresco describes the silences that separate them from their parents. The stories never get told; instead they are expressed symptomatically, acted out between parents and children: “the forbidden memory of death manifested itself only in the form of incomprehensible attacks of pain. . . . The silence was all the more implacable in that it was often concealed behind a screen of words, again, always the same words, an unchanging story, a tale repeated over and over again, made up of selections from the war.”³⁸ When Fresco describes what she calls the “black hole” of silence, she insists on the repetition of the words that shield us from that silence, “again, always the same, unchanging, repeated over and over.” The images that are used to memorialize the Holocaust by the postmemorial generation, in their obsessive repetition, constitute a similar shield of unchanging trauma

fragments, congealed in a memory with unchanging content. They can thus approximate the shape of narrative testimonies, *producing* rather than *shielding* the effect of trauma. Rather than desensitizing us to the “cut” of recollection they have the effect of cutting and shocking in the ways that fragmented and congealed traumatic memory reenacts the traumatic encounter. The repeated images make us relive the broken looking relations occasioned by the murderous gaze of National Socialism.

Their repetition in books and exhibitions can be seen as a form of protection and a refusal to confront the trauma of the past. In Eric Santner’s terms, they would thus function as a kind of “*Reizschutz*”—“a protective shield or psychic skin that normally regulates the flow of stimuli and information across the boundaries of self” (151). In his reading of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Santner insists that the “shield” that allows individual and collective identities to reconstitute themselves in the wake of trauma has a textual quality. This quality facilitates a certain “homeopathic procedure,” illustrated by the “*fort/da*” game through which Freud’s grandson masters loss. “In a homeopathic procedure the controlled introduction of a negative element—a symbolic, or in medical contexts, real poison—helps to heal a system infected by a similar poisonous substance” (146). But if the “*fort/da*” game is about integrating trauma and about healing, the repetitions of these images do not have the same effect.

In my reading, repetition is not a homeopathic protective shield that screens out the black hole; it is not an anesthetic, but a traumatic fixation. Hal Foster defines this paradox in his analysis of Andy Warhol’s repetitions which, he argues, are neither restorative nor anesthetizing: “the Warhols not only reproduce traumatic effects, they also *produce* them. Somehow, in these repetitions, several contradictory things occur at the same time: a warding away of traumatic significance *and* an opening out to it, a defending against traumatic affect *and* a producing of it.”³⁹ This is how we can see the closed gates of Auschwitz: the gate is closed, acting as a screen, but it is in itself so real as to disable the screen’s protective power.

The repeated Holocaust photographs connect past and present through the “having-been-there” of the photographic image. They are messengers from a horrific time that is not distant enough. In repeatedly exposing themselves to the same pictures, postmemorial viewers can produce in themselves the effects of traumatic repetition that plague the victims of trauma. Even as the images repeat the trauma of looking, they disable, in themselves, any restorative attempts. It is only when they are redeployed, in new texts and new contexts, that they regain a capacity to enable a postmemorial working through. The aesthetic strategies of postmemory are specifically about such an attempted, and yet an always postponed, repositioning and reintegration.

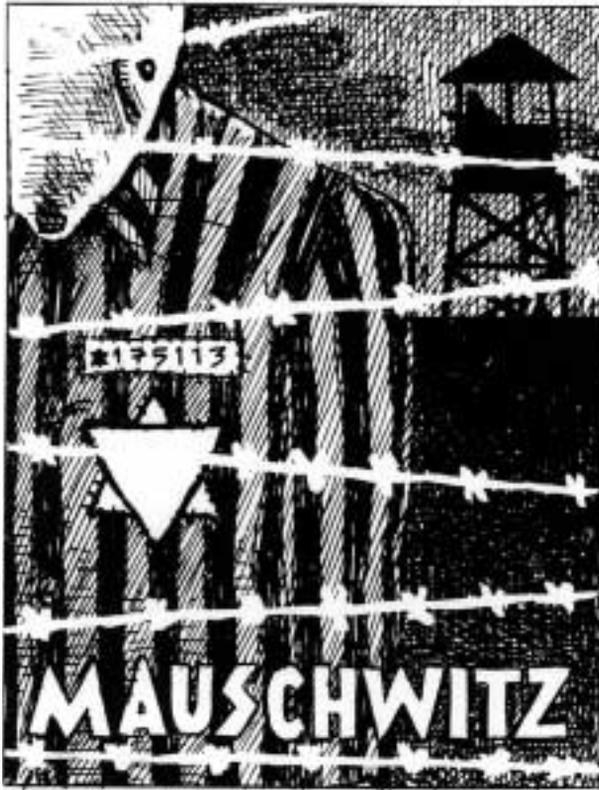


Figure 12. *Maus II*, courtesy of Art Spiegelman

VII. Night and Fog

I would like to conclude these reflections with two postmemorial texts that illustrate the more enabling functions of repetition. The first, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, has already constituted a theme in these pages. Almost all of the frequently repeated images of the Holocaust have found their way into this work: the two gates of Auschwitz, the guard towers, the liberator images, the mass graves. Often several of these are on the same page. (See fig. 12.) Spiegelman's use of these repeated images reminds us how much we may need and rely on canonization and repetition in our postmemorial discourse. In his text they have the function of memory itself. His graphic versions recall the photographs we have all seen, reinforcing a common canon of shared images that will extend into the next generations. In participating in the repetition, Spiegelman reminds us that memory also depends on forgetting, that reduction and canonization, and also figuration, are indeed crucial to the work of postmemory. And in translating the photographs



Figure 13. *Maus II*, Courtesy of Art Spiegelman

into a new graphic idiom he unhinges them from the effects of traumatic repetition, without entirely disabling the functions of sense memory that they contain.

But *Maus* contains a contrary impulse, as well. Based on extensive and meticulous visual research, *Maus* also reproduces an number of less available images, calling our attention to the enormous archive of photographs, drawings, documents, and maps both by basing his drawings on them and by reproducing them in the CD-Rom edition of *Maus*. Readers of the CD-Rom can click on a frame to make different archival images appear, showing how numerous less visible images are actually hiding behind the more visible ones. The technology of the CD-Rom is well suited to this revelation. (See figs. 13 and 14.) In figure 12, for example, Spiegelman highlights the astounding clandestine images taken by resistance members in Auschwitz. Spiegelman's multiplication is a necessary corrective which counteracts the canonization of a small number of images.

The second text, Lorie Novak's photograph "Night and Fog" also resituates archival images in a new frame. (See fig. 15.) The title refers to Alain Resnais' film—the source of this generation's encounter with the documentary images of the Holocaust. The image itself is a composite projection onto a nighttime scene: on the right there is a fragment of Margaret Bourke-White's famous picture of the Buchenwald survivors behind the barbed wire fence. On the left we can just barely see a hand holding an old torn photograph. This is a found image from the New York Public Library of someone's relative lost in the concentration camps. The two pictures are projected onto trees: the ghosts have become part of our landscape, they have reconfigured our



Figure 14. Clandestine image of Sonderkommando forced to burn bodies in Birkenau, *Archiwum Państwowego w Oswiecimiu-Brzezince*, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives

domestic and public spaces. Projecting photographs onto trees enables us to see memory as constructed, as cultural rather than natural.

Novak's is a stunning, haunting picture that contains but is not dominated by the repeated trauma fragments of Holocaust imagery. Their appearance illustrates Michael Rothberg's notion of "traumatic realism," which is based on Hal Foster's argument: "a realism in which



Figure 15. “Night and Fog,” courtesy of Lorie Novak

the scars that mark the relationship of discourse to the real are not fetishistically denied, but exposed; a realism in which claims to reference live on, but so does the traumatic extremity that disables realist representation as usual.”⁴⁰ The hand in Novak’s image introduces a viewer, someone who holds, listens, and responds. That postmemorial artist/viewer can intervene and connect the public and private images that have survived the Shoah, introducing them into a landscape in which they have an afterlife. And although her powerful projectors and her title “Night and Fog” recall the most fearful moments of the Nazi death machinery, her multiple images, taken at different moments and brought together here, can, like Spiegelman’s, succeed in disconnecting the camera from the weapon of mass destruction and thus in refocusing our look.

Looking at this image of a projection is very different from looking at the documentary images from the Holocaust. If we recognize its content, however, it is because we have seen those other pictures during all our lives. But in these projections, as in Spiegelman’s drawings, we can begin to move beyond the shock of seeing them for the first time, again and again. We can also move out of their obsessive repetition, for they are both familiar and estranged. And thus they reconstitute a viewing relation that cannot be repaired, but that can perhaps be reenvisioned in ways that do not negate the rupture at its source.

Notes

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- 1 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1989), pp. 19, 20.
- 2 Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 29, 30.
- 3 Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 152.
- 4 Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Lens* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 5 See, for example, the photographs collected in the controversial exhibition and catalogue *The German Army and Genocide: Crimes Against War Prisoners, Jews and Other Civilians, 1939–1944* (New York: The New Press, 1999), which documents not only the atrocities committed but the passion for documenting atrocities photographically.
- 6 See Mendel Grossman, *With a Camera in the Ghetto [Lodz]*, trans. Mendel Kohansky (Hakibutz Hameuchad: Ghetto Fighters' House, Lohame HaGetaot, 1970); Peter Hellman, ed., *The Auschwitz Album: A Book Based on an Album Discovered by a Concentration Camp Survivor, Lili Meier* (New York: Random House, 1981); Joe Julius Heydecker, *Where Is Thy Brother Abel?: Documentary Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto* (Sao Paolo: Atlantis Livros, 1981); Ulrich Keller, ed., *The Warsaw Ghetto in Photographs: 206 Views Made in 1941* (New York: Dover Publications, 1984); Jürgen Stroop, *The Stroop Report: The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw Is No More!*, trans. Sybil Milton (New York: Pantheon, 1979); Gerhard Schönberger, *Der gelbe Stern: Die Judenverfolgung in Europa 1933–1945*, 2nd rev. ed. (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1993); Teresa Swiebicka, ed., *Auschwitz: A History in Photographs* (Oswiecim, Bloomington, Warsaw: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Indiana University Press, 1990).
- 7 Sybil Milton, "Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 3 (1986), 307. Milton's judgment has recently been repeated by two scholars who have attempted to historicize and thus to demystify the "atrocities photos" taken by the liberators in 1945. In her rich *Remembering to Forget*, Zelizer says: "Certain atrocity photos resurfaced time and again, reducing what was known about the camps to familiar visual cues that would become overused with time" (158). See also Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung: Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998): "The number of images that spontaneously come to mind when one speaks of concentration and death camps is limited, and the impression imposes itself that since 1945 the very same images have repeatedly been reproduced" (my translation), p. 9.
- 8 In *Remembering to Forget*, Zelizer traces in detail how certain liberator images, some of which were originally associated with specific dates and individual camps, have eventually been mislabeled and associated with other camps, or have come to signal more and more general and abstract images of "death camps," or "the Holocaust," or have become unspecified "signifiers of horror." Even at the time of their production, most of these images were not carefully labeled or situated, but now the credits identify neither the photographers nor the original photo agencies for which they worked, but merely the contemporary ownership of the images. Attribution and content are even more difficult to determine when it comes to perpetrator images. The controversy that temporarily closed the Wehrmacht exhibition concerned eight or nine photographs that depicted German soldiers standing next to civilian victims: what is not readable from the images themselves is whether the corpses were the victims of documented Wehrmacht and SS killings or of the Soviet NKVD massacres that preceded those killings. See *The German Army and Genocide:*

- Crimes Against War Prisoners, Jews and Other Civilians, 1939–1945*, ed. The Hamburg Institute for Social Research, trans. Scott Abbott (New York: The New Press, 1999), pp. 82–3.
- 9 See Eric Santner's useful notion of "narrative fetishism" in "History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 144.
 - 10 See Dominick LaCapra's useful notions of "muted trauma" and "empathic unsettlement" as well as his distinction between "acting out" and "working through" in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).
 - 11 It is important to note that, as my initial quotations from Sontag and Kaplan indicate, my inquiry is restricted to the memory and postmemory of victims and bystanders, not of perpetrators. For an appreciation of the different issues raised by German encounters with Holocaust photographs, see Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung*, and Dagmar Barnouw, *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). Both focus specifically on liberator images and their use in Germany in 1945 and after. The Alice Kaplan passage illustrates what happens when images migrate from one context to another, in this case, from their juridical use at Nuremberg to the childhood drama of a third-grader in Ohio. See also Bernd Hüppauf, "Emptying the Gaze: Framing Violence through the Viewfinder," *New German Critique* 72 (Fall, 1997), 19: "There is no simultaneity and hardly any exchange of ideas between the U.S. discourse on representations of the Holocaust and the German discourse on the subject."
- For a discussion of the redeployment of Holocaust photographs in the representations of contemporary artists, see Andrea Liss, *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: University Press of Minnesota, 1998) and some of the chapters in James Young's *At Memory's Edge: After-images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). See also my own forthcoming article, "Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art."
- 12 See my "Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory," *Discourse* 15.2 (Winter 1992–93): 3–29, and *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. chap. 1 and 8.
 - 13 Appendix, *The Complete Maus* on CD-ROM (New York: Voyager, 1994).
 - 14 For a companion essay to this one, which examines the relationship between postmemory and identification more closely, see my "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999) and also *Public Fantasy*, ed. Lee Edelman and Joe Roach (New York: Routledge, forthcoming). There I discuss postmemory in relation to Kaja Silverman's notion of "heteropathic" memory and identification in her *Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
 - 15 We cannot understand the workings of Holocaust postmemory without also considering the particularities of a Jewish memorial tradition that is based on identification and ritual reenactment, the sense that "we are all as slaves coming out of Egypt." Yet the experiences of the Holocaust also pose particular challenges to this tradition, since the identification of Holocaust postmemory, I believe, must be marked by the distance that characterizes the second generation's incapacity ultimately to comprehend and thus to internalize the extremity of parental trauma. It can never be even a ritual reenactment like that of the Passover seder, for example.
 - 16 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
 - 17 Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 176; cited in Santner, p. 152.
 - 18 Hüppauf stresses the necessity of just such a reading: "Theories of perception and visuality have hardly made an inroad into discourse on the Holocaust, and, in more general terms, the violent practices of the Third Reich" ("Emptying the Gaze," 14).
 - 19 Ida Fink, "Traces," in *A Scrap of Time*, trans. Madeline Levine and Francine Prose (New York: Schocken, 1987), pp. 135–37.

- 20 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 76, 77, 80, 81.
- 21 Jill Bennet, "Within Living Memory," in *Telling Tales* (Exhibition Catalogue) (Sydney, Australia: Ivan Dougherty Gallery and Graz, Austria: Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, 1998), pp. 10–11.
- 22 Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, pp. 9, 10.
- 23 I discuss several other emblematic images, particularly those of children—the little boy with raised hands raised from the Warsaw ghetto and Anne Frank's face—in "Projected Memory."
- 24 Patricia Yaeger's "Consuming Trauma; or, the Pleasures of Merely Circulating," *Journal X* 2 (1997): 225–51, serves as the most powerful cautionary note against textualizing and theorizing on the basis of the dead bodies of others. I am painfully aware of the risks I take in discussing as figures images that are as uncompromisingly literal, present, and pervasive as these. And yet, I am also convinced that their power need not be undermined by a discussion of the metaphoric roles that they have come to play.
- As arresting as they are, these emblematic images have undoubtedly reduced our ability to understand or envision the multifaceted reality of concentration camps. As Dan Stone argues: "ever since the first photos of Auschwitz, the meaning imputed to it has been encompassed in the symbolic framework of the barbed wire, the ramp, or the famous entrance gate. These things are of course important parts of the camp, yet they are not the camp *but only how we wish to keep seeing it*" (emphasis added). From "Chaos and Continuity: Representations of Auschwitz," in *Representations of Auschwitz: Fifty Years of Photographs, Paintings and Graphics*, ed. Yasmin Doosry (Oswiecim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 1995), p. 27.
- 25 Dwork and van Pelt even suggest that the part of Auschwitz I that was preserved as a museum was determined by the place of the gate. See "Reclaiming Auschwitz," in *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1994), pp. 236–37.
- 26 The centrality of this image in *Maus* is underscored by the introduction to the CD-Rom edition in which Spiegelman uses it to illustrate his construction of a page: "The size of the panel gives weight, gives importance," he says. "This is the largest panel in the book, too big to be contained by the book—the entrance into Auschwitz."
- 27 Jacques Lacan's discussion of the simultaneously literal and figurative functioning of doors and gates might be useful in explaining the importance these two images have assumed in Holocaust representation: see "Psychoanalysis and Cybernetics, or on the Nature of Language," *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988). Just in the way that doors can only be opened because they can also be closed, things can be remembered only because they can also be forgotten. In the cultural remembrance of the Holocaust, the gate is both memory and a defense against memory.
- 28 See my discussion of the co-implication of these two kinds of Holocaust photographs in *Family Frames*, pp. 20, 21. See also Cornelia Brink's response and elaboration of my argument in "'How to Bridge the Gap': Überlegungen zu einer fotografischen Sprache des Gedenkens," in *Die Sprache des Gedenkens: Zur Geschichte der Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück*, ed. Insa Eshebach, Sigrid Jacobeit, and Susanne Lanwerd (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1999). Gerhard Schönberger implicitly makes a similar point in *The Yellow Star* when he juxtaposes, on facing pages (280 and 281) the bulldozer image from Bergen-Belsen with a poster that Louis Lazar (of Nyons, France) made of images of his lost relatives.
- 29 Christian Metz, "Photography and Fetish," in *The Critical Image: Essays on Contemporary Photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990), p. 158.
- 30 See especially Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), and Kaja Silverman's *Threshold of the Visible World*.
- 31 Interestingly, some contemporary German theories of visuality, especially feminist theories, continue to stress the violence of photographic technology and thus of the photographic act. See, for example, the work of Christina von Braun and Silke Wenk.

- 32 The recent controversy in Israel's Yad Vashem illustrates the particular issues facing Jewish viewers of these images. Citing the taboo against female nudity, Orthodox Jews argued against the display of images of nude or scantily dressed women in the photographic exhibitions of the destruction of European Jews. For them the issue is the potential arousal of male viewers by the exposed female bodies. Although, in contrast to the Orthodox line, one might well argue that pedagogy demands that the worst be shown, one might also worry about the violation inherent in such displays: these women are doomed in perpetuity to be displayed in the most humiliating, demeaning, dehumanizing position. Given the invisibility many European Jews worked so hard to enjoy, perpetrator images are also fundamentally troubling in their hyperbolic identification of Jews as Jews and as victims. The act of looking, in these cases, is marked in complicated ways by power, religion, and gender.
- 33 I am grateful to James Young for bringing these images to my attention and to Alex Rossino for discussing them with me at length. These are clearly images of professional quality, indicating that they were taken by an official propaganda corps. Bernd Hüppauf explains this work: "Photos and descriptions inform us about groups of soldiers positioned at the edge of the killing sites, often in elevated positions that provided an unrestrained field of vision. . . . There they watched for an hour or more and sometimes took photographs" ("Emptying the Gaze," 27). The angle of vision in this group of images does indeed indicate the photographers' elevated position.
- 34 For a suggestive discussion of perpetrator representations, see Gertrud Koch's analysis of some perpetrator images from the Lodz ghetto in the context of Nazi aesthetic in *Die Einstellung ist die Einstellung: Visuelle Konstruktionen des Judentums* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 170–184. Koch looks specifically at devices like lighting and framing that clearly identify the subjects of the images as "Jews" and as "other," contrasting them distinctly from similar images of German subjects.
- 35 Bernd Hüppauf, in "Emptying the Gaze," traces his own analysis of the alienated decorporalized technological gaze characterizing the Nazi regime back to Ernst Jünger's extensive writings on the photography of World War I in "Über den Schmerz," *Essays I, Werke 5* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1963): "A photograph then is 'outside of the zone of sensibility. . . . It captures the flying bullet as well as the human being at the moment when he is torn to pieces by an explosion. And this has become our characteristic way of seeing; photography is nothing else but an instrument of this, our own character'" (Jünger in Hüppauf, p. 25). Hüppauf describes the images of perpetrators as embodying an "empty gaze from no-where." For a dissenting interpretation of soldiers' photographs, see Alexander B. Rossino, "Eastern Europe through German Eyes: Soldiers' Photographs 1939–42," *History of Photography* 23. 4 (Winter 1999): 313–21.
- 36 See, for example, Kaja Silverman's discussion of the picture of a woman arriving in Auschwitz that is included in Haroum Farocki's film *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges*. Silverman and Farocki perceive in the woman's look at the camera a resistant posture: it is a look one might use on the boulevard rather than in the concentration camp, she says. "The critical problem faced by the Auschwitz inmate is how to be 'photographed' differently—how to motivate the mobilization of another screen" (*Threshold*, 153). There are moments when this seems like an impossible task.
- 37 Zelizer comments on the frequency with which survivors are depicted from a straight frontal perspective, staring directly into the camera, as though "to signify frankness" (*Remembering to Forget*, p. 114). As other types of images, such as those of witnesses or images of perpetrators, have disappeared from view, these frontal shots of survivors have become more common. Interestingly, this particular image by Margaret Bourke-White was not published at the time of the camps' liberation, leading Zelizer to conclude that "images can work better in memory . . . than as a tool of news relay" (183).
- 38 Nadine Fresco, "Remembering the Unknown," *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 11 (1984): 417–27.
- 39 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 132.
- 40 Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). See also Saul Friedlander's notion of "allusive or distanced realism" in *Probing the Limits*, p. 17.