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Author(s): Marianne Hirsch
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Past Lives:
Postmemories in Exile

Marianne Hirsch
Comparative Literature, Dartmouth

I neither emigrated nor was deported.
The world that was destroyed was
not mine. I never knew it.
Henri Raczymow, "Memory Shot through with Holes"

Abstract   For Holocaust survivors who have been separated and exiled from a rav-
aged world, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall but also of mourning,
mourning often inflected by anger, rage, and despair. Children of survivors live at
a further temporal and spatial remove from the decimated world of their parents.
Still, the power of mourning and memory, and the depth of the rift dividing their
parents' lives, impart to them something that is akin to memory. I have chosen to
call this secondary, or second-generation, memory "postmemory."
   Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its
object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative in-
vestment and creation. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow
up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are
evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that
can be neither fully understood nor re-created.
   Much of contemporary European and American philosophy, literature, and art is
influenced by Holocaust postmemory. This article examines the discourses of post-
memory in the work of several artists who have attempted to find the aesthetic
shapes that convey the mixture of ambivalence and desire, mourning and recollec-
tion, presence and absence that characterize postmemory. Because photographs are

often read as traces, material connections to a lost past, and because many photographic images have survived even though their subjects did not, photography provides a particularly powerful medium of postmemory.

The "Tower of Faces" in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is such a postmemorial form created for future generations who, through the ordinary domestic photograph and the affiliative gazes it constructs, are included among the children and grandchildren of the people depicted in the images. The artists Christian Boltanski (French) and Shimon Attie (American) both use archival photographs — of Jewish schoolchildren and of the Jewish quarter in Berlin, respectively — as the basis for a new composite memorial aesthetic. All three texts represent the perspective of children of survivors: they need both to rebuild and to mourn the lost world of their parents.

In the summer of 1991, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, I was very moved by the Israeli writer Yoram Kaniuk's article in the German newspaper *Die Zeit* (Kaniuk 1991). The article, titled "Three and a Half Hours and Fifty Years with Günter Grass in Berlin," reported on an open discussion in Berlin a few months earlier between the two writers, and addressed German intellectuals' opposition to the war in view of Germany's massive sales of arms and poison gas to Iraq during the preceding years. Kaniuk, up until that moment an active member of Peace Now, tried to explain how different things looked to him in Tel Aviv from how they looked to German intellectuals in Munich, Frankfurt, or Berlin. Kaniuk invited Grass, an outspoken opponent of the war, to contemplate the enormous distance separating them, who were otherwise friendly and of very similar yet fatally different backgrounds. For as they were sitting on stage in March 1991, talking about Israel and Germany, Kaniuk said he could feel the spiritual presence of their two fathers and their four grandfathers.

In the article, Kaniuk claimed his right to speak out and to address Grass so aggressively as a birthright. Conceived in Germany, like Grass, yet born in his parents' exile in Palestine in 1939, Kaniuk grew up in Tel Aviv. But, he explained, walking down Ben Yehuda Street as a child, he experienced as more real and more present the streets of his parents' prewar German world named in the German children's book *Emil and the Detectives*. His parents' German reality, transmitted through daily stories and references yet, as a Jewish culture, irrevocably destroyed, nevertheless had the power to displace and de-realize his own immediate childhood world in the Middle East. "Ich entscheide hiermit, dass wir hier in einem kleinen Berlin gewohnt haben, das wir Tel Aviv nannten und aus dem wir am liebsten wieder zurückkehren oder uns untermischen würden" [I hereby decide that we lived here in a small Berlin that we called Tel Aviv, and from which we would have wanted to return again or blend in] (ibid.: 18;

all translations are mine unless otherwise noted). This "memory" of a Germany in which he had never lived, on whose streets he had never walked, whose air he had never breathed, and whose language he eventually abandoned, remained, until the day of his dispute with Grass fifty years later, the place of identity, however ambivalent. Through words and images, it acquired a materiality in his memory that determined his adult discourse and self-definition as an Israeli writer.

My reading of Kaniuk's article was so overwhelmingly autobiographical that it filters many of my recollections of the Gulf War. Unlike Kaniuk, I was not conceived in my parents' native Czernowitz, but was born in Rumania four years after their exile. (Czernowitz, capital of the formerly Austrian Bukowina, was annexed first by Rumania in 1918 and then by the USSR in 1945.) Still, the streets, buildings, and natural surroundings—the theater, restaurants, parks, rivers, and domestic settings of Czernowitz— none of which had I ever seen, heard, or smelled myself, occupy a monumental place in my childhood memories. All the while, as I was growing up hearing my parents' stories of life in Czernowitz before the war and of the events during the wartime Russian and German occupations that culminated in their exile in 1945, I knew that I would never see that place, and that my parents would never return there. I knew it not only because Czernowitz now belonged to the USSR and travel between there and Rumania was difficult; I knew it also from my parents' voice and demeanor, from the sense they projected that this world, their world, had been destroyed. That left a rift in their lives, and in mine, similar to the rift between Günter Grass and Yoram Kaniuk, one writer living at home, one forever homeless. In our familial discourse, Czernowitz embodied the idea of home, of place, but to me it was, and would remain, out of reach. Kaniuk and I share with many European Jews of our generation this sense of exile from a world we have never seen and never will see, because it was irreparably changed or destroyed by the sudden violence of the Holocaust.

None of us ever knows the world of our parents. We can say that the motor of the fictional imagination is fueled in great part by the desire to know the world as it looked and felt before our birth. How much more ambivalent is this curiosity for children of Holocaust survivors, exiled from a world that has ceased to exist, that has been violently erased. Theirs is a different desire, at once more powerful and more conflicted: the need not just to feel and to know, but also to re-member, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace and to repair. For survivors who have been separated and exiled from a ravaged world, memory is necessarily an act not only of recall, but also of mourning, a mourning often inflected by anger, rage, and despair. As Nadine Fresco (1981: 209) writes: "La destruction avait été telle que pas

une image ne subsistait de la vie juive d'avant la guerre qui ne fut désor-
mais grevée, entachée, marquée par la mort" [The destruction was such
that not an image was left from the Jewish life before the war that was not
in some way encumbered, tainted, marked by death]. Children of survivors
live at a further temporal and spatial remove from that decimated world.
The distance separating them from the locus of origin is the radical break
of unknowable and incomprehensible persecution; for those born after, it
is a break impossible to bridge. Still, the power of mourning and memory,
and the depth of the rift dividing their parents' lives, impart to them some-
thing that is akin to memory. Searching for a term that would convey its
temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, I have chosen
to call this secondary, or second-generation, memory "postmemory."[1]

Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connec-
tion to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through
an imaginative investment and creation. That is not to say that memory
itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past.
Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up domi-
nated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories
are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by trau-
matic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created. I have
developed this notion in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, but I
think it may usefully describe the second-generation memory of other cul-
tural or collective traumatic events and experiences.

Holocaust postmemory, however, attempts to bridge more than just a
temporal divide. The children of exiled survivors, although they have not
themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and the destruction of
home, remain always marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora. "Home"
is always elsewhere, even for those who return to Vienna, Berlin, Paris, or
Cracow, because the cities to which they can return are no longer those
in which their parents had lived as Jews before the genocide, but are in-
stead the cities where the genocide *happened* and from which they and their
memory have been expelled. As Fresco (ibid.: 211) suggests, "Nés après la
guerre, parfois pour remplacer un enfant mort de la guerre, les juifs dont
je parle ici ressentent leur existence comme une sorte d'exil, non d'un lieu
présent ou à venir, mais d'un temps revolu qui aurait été celui de l'identité
même" [Born after the war, sometimes in place of a child killed in the war,
the Jews I am describing here experience their lives as a sort of exile, not
from a present or future place, but from a completed time which would
have been that of identity itself]. This condition of exile from the space of
identity, this diasporic experience, is characteristic of postmemory.

1. My discussion of postmemory draws on a previous article (Hirsch 1992–93).

Postmemory—even that of a circumscribed population like the children of exiled Holocaust survivors—can take many forms. Based on a series of interviews with others of her generation whose parents never spoke of their abandoned world or their wartime experiences and who thus had virtually no access to the repressed stories that shaped them, Nadine Fresco speaks of an *absent memory*. In her terms, the postwar generation's diasporic life is a *diaspora des cendres*—the place of origin has been reduced to ashes. There is no return.[2] Her contemporary, the French writer Henri Raczymow, insists that this absence, this void, is the condition that must be preserved and should never be bridged. The memory he describes is a *mémoire trouée*, a "memory shot through with holes": "Dans mon travail, un tel vide est rendu possible par cette mémoire absente dont je parlais. Elle est chez moi le moteur de l'écriture. Et mes livres ne cherchent pas à compler cette mémoire absente—je n'écris pas, banalement, pout lutter contre l'oubli—mais à la présenter, justement, comme absente" [In my work, such a void is created by the empty memory I spoke of, which propels my writing forward. My books do not attempt to fill in empty memory. They are not simply part of the struggle against forgetfulness. Rather, I try to present memory *as* empty. I try to restore a non-memory, which by definition cannot be filled in or recovered] (Raczymow 1986: 181; 1994: 104). In his evocation of the absent memory that serves for him as the "motor" for writing, Raczymow adopts Kafka's spatial conception of time, articulated in the 1920s: "Si la terre tourne à droite . . . , je dois tourner à gauche pour rattraper le passé" [If the earth is turning to the right . . . , I must turn left in order to catch up with the past] (1986: 181; 1994: 104). European Jews of the postwar generation are forever turning left, but we can never catch up with the past; inasmuch as we remember, we remain in perpetual temporal and spatial exile. Our past is literally a foreign country we can never hope to visit. And our postmemory is shaped, Raczymow suggests, by our sense of belatedness and disconnection: "Et je ne suis ni émigré ni déporté, le monde qui fut détruit n'etait pas le mien puisque je ne l'ai pas connu. Pourtant je suis, nous sommes nombreux à être en position d'orphelins" [I neither emigrated nor was deported. The world that was destroyed was not mine. I never knew it. But I am, so many of us are, the orphans of that world] (1986: 180; 1994: 103).[3]

2. For a discussion of Jewish identity as inherently diasporic, see Boyarin and Boyarin 1993.
3. Fresco's and Raczymow's reflections echo Alain Finkielkraut's definitions of postwar Jewish identity as a form of absence in *Le Juif imaginaire* (1980: 138): "Ce qui fait de moi un Juif, c'est la conscience aiguë d'un manque, une absence entretenue, l'exil où je vis par rapport à une civilisation dont, 'pour mon bien' et parce qu'il y avait eu Auschwiz, mes parents n'ont pas voulu que je sois dépositaire" [What makes me a Jew is the acute consciousness of a lack, of a continuous absence: my exile from a civilization which, 'for my own good,' my parents didn't wish me to keep in trust] (1980: 138; 1994: 114).

Nadine Fresco's "absent memory" does not correspond to my own ex-
perience as a child of survivors. For me, having grown up with daily ac-
counts of a lost world, the links between past and present, between the
prewar world of origin and the postwar space of destination, are more than
visible. The Czernowitz of my postmemory is an imaginary city, but that
makes it no less present, no less vivid, and perhaps because of the con-
structed and deeply invested nature of memory itself, no less accurate. The
deep sense of displacement suffered by the children of exile, the elegaic
aura of the memory of a place to which one cannot return, creates, in my
experience, a strange sense of plenitude rather than a feeling of absence:
I've sometimes felt that there were too many stories, too much affect, even
as at other times I've been unable to fill in the gaps and absences. The
fullness of postmemory is no easier a form of connection than the absence
it also generates. Full or empty, postmemory seeks connection. It creates
where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall. It mourns a
loss that cannot be repaired. And, because even the act of mourning is sec-
ondary, the lost object can never be incorporated and mourning can never
be overcome. "Nous n'avons même pas *faillis* d'être déportés" [We cannot
even say that we were *almost* deported], says Raczymow (1986: 181; 1994:
104). In perpetual exile, this/my generation's practice of mourning is as
determinative as it is interminable and ultimately impossible.

In what follows, I would like to look at this practice of mourning and
postmemory among European Jewish children of exiled survivors and at
the aesthetic forms it shapes. I would like to suggest that the aesthetics
of postmemory is a diasporic aesthetics of temporal and spatial exile that
needs simultaneously to rebuild and to mourn. In the terms of Nadine
Fresco, it is "comme si ceux qui étaient nés après ne pouvaient pas qu'errer,
en proie d'une nostalgie qui n'a pas de droit de cité" [as though those who
were born after could do nothing but wander, prey to a longing forever
disenfranchised] (1981: 211). What forms does their wandering take? What
strategies do they invent to relocate themselves? What are the aesthetic
shapes of postmemory?

During the first waves of refugee emigrations from Eastern Europe to
the West, following the pogroms in the early part of this century, a Jew-
ish memorial tradition developed among diasporic communities, based
on ancient and medieval Jewish practices of commemoration that could
serve as a resource and a model to children of survivors. The *yizker bikher*,
or memorial books, prepared in exile by survivors of the pogroms, were
meant to preserve the memory of their destroyed cultures. The survivors
of Nazi genocide built on this memorial tradition and prepared for subse-

quent generations similar memorial books devoted to the memory of their individual destroyed communities. (Over four hundred memorial books have been written by survivors of Polish communities alone.)[4] They contain historical accounts of community life before the destruction and detailed records of the genocide that annihilated the communities, as well as photographs, individual and group portraits, that evoke life as it was *before*. The books also contain accounts of survivors' efforts to locate the remains of their family members in order to give them a proper burial, and they detail the acts of commemoration devoted to the dead.

The memorial books are acts of witness and sites of memory. Because they evoke and try to re-create the life that existed, and not only its destruction, they are acts of public mourning, forms of a collective Kaddish. But they are also sites where subsequent generations can find a lost origin, where they can learn about the time and place they will never see. In the words of Jonathan Boyarin and Jack Kugelmass, who collected translated selections from Polish memorial books: "The memorial books are the fruit of the impulse to write a testament for future generations. They constitute an unprecedented, truly popular labor to record in writing as much as possible of a destroyed world" (1983: 6). Yizker books, with their stories and images, are documents to be invested with life: they are spaces of connection between memory and postmemory. Many communal organizations think of them as their memorials or monuments or, as Raczymow says, "tiennent lieu de sepultures pour ceux qui sont morts sans sepulture" [they take the place of graves for those who had no graves] (1986: 179; 1994: 101). As such they can serve as models and inspirations for other acts of remembrance by children of exiled survivors. They provide the paradigms for a diasporic aesthetics of postmemory.

Raczymow's *Tales of Exile and Forgetting* [Contes d'exil et d'oubli] (1979) is a kind of memorial book, but its radically different form illustrates the difference between memory and postmemory. While the yizker books contain testimonies and reminiscences, Raczymow's tales are reconstructions that do not disguise their exploratory and probing relation to the unknown past. "Je ne sais rien de Konsk" [I know nothing about Konsk], insists the protagonist and historian Matthieu Schriftlich (1979: 19) "Qui peut me parler de Konsk, ombre d'ombre et sans tombe?" [Who can speak to me about Konsk, shadow of shadows and without a grave?] (ibid.: 37). Why does he want to know? He is intrigued by a few names and a few stories he heard, particularly by Matl Oksenberg, a grandmother who frequently ap-

4. See Boyarin and Kugelmass 1983 for an account, excerpts, and a list of these Polish memorial books.

pears in the tales of his sometimes reluctant informant, Simon Gorbatch: "C'est moi qui suis le vieillard, et c'est vous qui scrutez le passé" [I am the old man and you are the one who questions the past] (ibid.: 51). But can Matthieu ever know Matl Oksenberg and her world? He insists that he can't and that, in fact, a certain distance must be maintained. Even as he writes the stories of Konsk, Schriftlich must inscribe the impossibility of knowing or understanding them. He must preserve the shadows surrounding Konsk and his grandmother, even as he tries to lift the veil of mystery that attracts him in the first place.

His point of access is a network of names; the narrative emerges from the names, slowly becoming coextensive with them. As Simon tells the stories, Matthieu abandons himself to the absence of memory. The names are available and they are richly interrelated. As one name evokes another, we come to find ourselves in an intricately woven social fabric of words that no longer refer to specific people but become separated from their content, generalized and interchangeable, empty vehicles of an absent memory. "Le nom des morts n'est-il pas disponible à nos fantaisies, Simon?" [The names of the dead, aren't they available to our fantaisies, Simon?] (ibid.: 103). Matthieu, with the help of the ever more tentative Simon, reinvests them with a narrative, but in the process he loses his individuality: he becomes indistinguishable from his function as scribe and historian, as "Schriftlich."

Just as the authors of the yizker books are agents of memory, so Matthieu Schriftlich is the agent of postmemory, someone who gives narrative shape to the surviving fragments of an irretrievable past. But the stories do not add up; the names continue to resist Matthieu's curiosity, and Konsk never emerges from the fog that surrounds it. This resistance is necessary to the practice of postmemory, as is the elegiac tone of Raczymow's tales. But the mourning Matthieu practices is anything but sentimental: as Raczymow plays on the double meaning of the French word *larme* (both tear and drop), the tear (larme) with which the last tale ends is not a tear at all but a *drop* of vodka, "une *larme*." Nostalgia and sentimentality are always undercut by the knowledge of what occurred in Konsk and by the impossibility, finally, of understanding it. With his *Contes d'exil et d'oubli*, Raczymow has developed an aesthetic that emerges from the absences of his earlier *nouveaux romans* and from his personal need to re-member the forgotten places of his ancestors' exile. His book becomes itself a site of postmemory, a reconstructed village in which, however, no one can live. Too many questions remain. Raczymow's tales evoke not so much Konsk as its absence—the condition of exile from Konsk.

Yizker books contain texts and images, but the book of Matthieu Schriftlich is limited to oral and written stories. There are no pictures of Matl or

Noïoch Oksenberg, no photographs of Szlama Davidowicz or the streets of Konsk. Do pictures provide the second- and third-generation questioner with a more concrete, a better, access to the abandoned parental world than stories can? Or, as indexical traces, do they perhaps provide too direct and material a connection to the past?[5] How do photographic images shape the work of postmemory?

When I visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, I thought a great deal about these questions, for the museum, I realized, is also dedicated to bridging the distance between memory and postmemory. The museum was created not primarily for survivors and the deeply engaged children of survivors like me, but for an American public with little knowledge of the event. At its best, I would argue, the museum would elicit in its visitors the desire to know and to feel, the curiosity and passion that shapes the postmemory of survivor children. At its best, it would include all of its visitors in the generation of postmemory. The museum's architecture and exhibits aim at just that effect: to get us close to the affect of the event, to convey knowledge and information without, however, attempting any facile sense of re-creation or reenactment.

How could the museum give some small sense of the world that was destroyed, beyond concentrating on the destruction alone? Is it possible to show visitors passing through its edifice that Jewish experience was more than only that of victims, to convey the richness and diversity of Jewish cultures before? How could the museum re-create those cultures?

As with most of its exhibits, the museum has chosen to attempt that representation of life "before" through photographic images, allowing us to consider specifically the role of images in the work of postmemory. Thus, there are a number of portraits of famous Jewish artists and intellectuals banned by the Nazis, killed or forced into exile. There are portraits of the writers whose books are being burned in the films of the book burnings. There is a small room devoted to a few of Roman Vishniac's images of the lost world of the Polish shtetl: some faces, some lonely street scenes, a dance. And, in its photographic archive, the museum collects as many photo albums of survivors as it can get, carefully cataloging and dating the prewar birthdays, anniversaries, family outings, and school pictures of random Jewish families. Filling the shelves of the photographic archives, along with notebooks full of images of horror—ghetto scenes, shootings by *Einsatztruppen*, arrivals at concentration camps, selections, bodies, per-

5. Raczymow speaks of Roman Vishniac's photographs of the world of the shtetl: "Comment peut-on avoir la nostalgie de ce que representent ces photos, c'est-à-dire saleté, tristesse, pauvreté?" [How could they be nostalgic for the filth, the wretchedness, the poverty shown in those pictures?] (Raczymow 1994: 101; 1986: 179).

sonal belongings surviving the destruction of their owners—these conventional family pictures testify to the full range of Holocaust photography. They attempt to reverse, as well, the Nazi destruction not only of people and their communities but of the very records—pictures and documents— that might have testified to their former existence. Many survivors, in fact, have no photographs that precede the war years:[6] it is as though the museum collection were trying to repair this irreparable loss.

In my work, I have included in the category of "Holocaust photograph" all of those pictures which are connected to total death and to public mourning—both pictures of horror and ordinary snapshots or portraits, family pictures defined by their context as much as by their content.[7] I recognize, of course, that there are differences between the pictures of a birthday celebration or outing and the documentary images of mass graves, especially in the work of reading that goes into them. Confronted with the latter image, we respond with horror, even before looking at the caption or knowing the context of the image. Knowing that context increases the horror, as we add to the bodies, or the hair or the shoes depicted, all those others we know about but that are not in the picture or are unrecognizable. Confronted with the former image—the portrait or family picture—we need to know its context, but once we do, I would argue, we respond with a similar sense of disbelief. These two kinds of photographs are complementary: it is precisely the displacement of the bodies depicted in the pictures of horror from their domestic settings, and their disfiguration, that brings home (as it were) the enormity of Holocaust destruction. And it is precisely the utter conventionality and generality of the domestic family picture that makes it impossible for us to comprehend how the person in the picture was exterminated. In both cases, the viewer fills in what the picture leaves out: the horror of looking is not necessarily in the image itself but in the story we bring to it. But, the family and community pictures have another function: they provide a part of a record or narrative about the Jewish world lost in the Holocaust and thus place the images of destruction into a needed contextual framework. More than that, they recreate something of what has been destroyed, even as they elicit and facilitate the viewer's mourning of the destruction. The conventionality of the family photo provides a space of identification for any viewer participating in the conventions of familial representation; thus they bridge the gap between viewers who are personally connected to the event and those who are not. They expand the postmemorial circle.

6. I am grateful to Lori Lefkowitz for continuing to remind me of this sad fact.
7. This discussion of the Holocaust photograph draws on my earlier article (Hirsch 1992–93).

The photos are both icons and indexical traces, or material connections to the people who did not survive. In Roland Barthes's controversial reading, "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" (1981: 80). Photography, then, is precisely the medium connecting memory and postmemory. As traces, photographs record both life (the rays connecting body to eye) and death (the moment they record becomes fixed with the very act of recording). Photographs of the world lost to the Holocaust can thus contain, perhaps more obviously than the names and narrative fragments handed down to Matthieu Schriftlich, the particular mixture of mourning and re-creation that characterizes the work of postmemory.

This is nowhere more visible than in the "Tower of Faces," situated at the very center of the Holocaust Memorial Museum (Figure 1). Chronological in conception, the museum's permanent exhibition begins on the fourth floor with the rise of Nazism, leading to the prewar "terror in Poland" and the Nazi euthanasia program. Next we pass over a glass bridge whose walls are inscribed with hundreds of names, each representing a town or community destroyed in the genocide. In a radical break in chronology, we then enter a room shaped like a tower and constructed entirely of sepia-toned photographic images that hover all around us. An introductory panel explains that what we are seeing are several hundred photographs of the Lithuanian shtetl of Ejszyzski collected by a child survivor of the town, Yaffa Eliach, the granddaughter of the town's Jewish photographers, Yitzak Uri Katz and Alte Katz.

Some of the photos are at eye level, while others are out of reach and difficult to see (Figure 2). We are separated from them by the bridge on which we are standing, which keeps us in the middle of the room, removed from direct contact with the images. The Ejszyzski photographs are ordinary portraits of individuals and groups, of family and group rituals, of candid moments. They are, as the museum's director Michael Berenbaum (1994) insists, the pictures by which we mark life's transitions, the pictures we would send to friends and relatives abroad. In the context of the museum, they are meant to "personalize the story of the Holocaust."

If the Ejszyszki photographs represent the typical Jewish prewar life of the town, they prove the diversity and range of that life. These pictures do not emerge from a narrow historical moment, but span what must be a thirty-year period. We see observant as well as assimilated Jews. We see young and old. We see a great range of class and economic backgrounds — laborers and scholars, farmers and professionals. We see an even greater range of activities: bicycling, eating, boating, mourning, reading, walking,

Figure 1   Yaffa Eliach Collection; Photograph by Alan Gilbert, Courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Figure 2   Courtesy of the Yaffa Eliach Shtetl Collection.

posing with friends or alone. Many types of work and many types of leisure appear.

My first reaction, similar to that of many others, was to marvel at how rich and varied a life was destroyed. The pictures gain by their diversity and their multiplicity: after looking at them for a while, it becomes less important to see individual images than to take in a sense of the whole, and of its relation to one's own family albums. "Look, look, look," I hear people saying all around me, "we have a picture just like this one in our album." Or, "Look, that looks just like grandma!" Interestingly, in the minutes I spend in the room, I find that this identification easily transcends ethnic identity and family history.

The conventional nature of family photography allows for this identification, this erasure of time and space. We might leaf through any of our own family albums and find similar photos. But if the tower is a family album, then we are situated right inside it. Like all family albums, the tower preserves and creates memory: it is a site of commemoration and rememoration. The people depicted diverge from one another in historical moment, occupation, class, and style, and they are separated from us as viewers by at least fifty years and by the radical break the Holocaust introduced into this century. Nevertheless, the conventional and familial

nature of the images themselves manages to transcend these distances, fig-
ured spatially by the bridge that separates us from the pictures, and to fos-
ter an affiliative look that binds the photographs to one another and us to
them. Most of the photographs remain anonymous, but some have names
and dates inscribed on them; some have arrows leading from a name to a
face. Even these names, however, serve less to individualize than to gener-
alize: in the photographs' multiplicity, the names become anonymous and
generic, like Raczymow's *Matl*, *Simon*, *Schlomo*, and *Chaim*. When we enter
the Tower of Faces, we leave the historical account of the museum and
enter the domestic space of a family album that shapes a different form of
looking and knowing, a different style of recognition, one that is available
to any viewer and that can connect viewers of different backgrounds to
one another. This is a collective and not an individual story, yet the pro-
cess of affiliative familial looking fosters and shapes the individual viewer's
relationship to this collective memory. The tower provides for visitors a
space in which they can become a community: descendants of those killed
in a small shtetl thousands of miles away.

Visitors descending through the museum encounter the Tower of Faces
twice, first on the fourth floor, at the end of the exhibits pertaining to the
rise of Nazism, and again on the third floor, as a culmination of the ex-
hibits detailing the final solution. After walking through a railroad car used
in the Polish deportations, seeing a model of the gas chambers and cre-
matoria in Auschwitz, walking by a pile of shoes brought from Auschwitz,
and seeing an actual oven from Mauthausen, we walk across another glass
bridge, right below the one that listed the names of lost communities. This
bridge is covered with hundreds of first names—I find mine, my mother's
and father's, that of each of my grandparents, those of my sons. After a few
other memorial exhibits, this bridge leads to the Tower of Faces on a level
below the bridge on which we initially stood. Here a panel narrates the
town of Ejszyski's destruction by a mobile killing unit in September, 1941.
We are told that there were virtually no survivors of that action, though
we assume that some people, like Yaffa Eliach and her parents, had gone
into hiding beforehand.

This is a radically different encounter with the images (Figure 3). The
lower room is much darker since the light comes in from a distant sky-
light obscured by the opaque glass bridge above on which other visitors
are standing. This lower room is square and we can go right up to the
images—we are no longer separated from them. We see the faces more
closely, we look into the eyes of people who were alive, full of joy, confi-
dence, and hope. The images are at once more accessible, because we are
closer to them, and less so because there is so little light. I notice, for the

Figure 3   Courtesy of the Yaffa Eliach Shtetl Collection.

first time, the black borders surrounding the sepia images and I wonder now whether the intent is aesthetic or funereal. And, as I look up toward the next floor and the distant light source way above that, as I see the images rush down toward me, so many much too distant to recognize, I realize, with a shudder, that this tower is in fact a chimney, that this album

is also a tomb, that commemoration is also mourning. I am reminded of Paul Celan's famous evocation of the "grave in the air" in his "Todesfuge."

The Tower of Faces brings out most forcefully photography's connection to death, and thus the power of photographs as media of mourning. The "having-been-there" of the object, what Roland Barthes calls the "ça a été," creates the scene of mourning shared by those who are left to look at the picture. This is what Barthes means when he identifies time itself as a sort of *punctum*: "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 (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this equivalence" (1981: 96). The pictures in the Tower of Faces tell us the immediacy of life at the moment photographed, transformed in the instant of this recognition into the death that we know soon followed. They evoke both the anger and the disbelief accompanying this temporal jolt. With death as the photographs' latent content, commemoration becomes rememoration—a collective act of resistance against forgetting.[8]

By using the most conventional of photographic genres, family pictures, with its characteristically affiliative gaze, the tower preserves power of commemoration into the generations of postmemory. The architecture itself figures the nature of postmemory. As Andrea Liss has said, the double encounter with the tower "functions more in harmony with the layered way in which memories overlap and cross the mental time zones of the past and the present, especially involving circumstances of extreme traumatic dislocation" (1993: 126). Standing in the tower we stand, literally, both inside a photo album and inside a tomb in the shape of a chimney. We reanimate the pictures with our own knowledge of daily life, and we experience, emotionally, the death that took those lives so violently. The Tower of Faces has forged a form to contain the contradictory shapes of postmemories of exile and survival.

Yaffa Eliach and her family were able to escape the town's extermination and to survive in hiding. Yet in 1944, when they returned to Ejszyszki, they were subjected to a local pogrom in which many of the twenty-nine surviving Jews, including Yaffa's mother, were killed. Yaffa escaped with photos hidden in her shoes and strapped to her brother's body. Later, she assembled the six-thousand picture archive from which the tower is composed by collecting the pictures that her compatriots had sent to relatives around the world or had saved in numerous unbelievable ways.[9] Yaffa

8. Kristine Stiles (1994) usefully defines this notion of rememoration.
9. Linenthal (1995: 171–86) gives the background to this installation.

Eliach is a child survivor with memories of Ejszyszki; the Tower of Faces is her memorial book addressed to the subsequent generations that will visit the museum. With the help of the architect, she has constructed a site of postmemory and mourning that is at the same time a reconstruction of the town itself.

The tower's memorial form reflects specifically the investment of a survivor and her effort to create and to reach as inclusive a postmemorial generation as possible. I would like to compare this form of memorialization to the postmemorial work of the French artist Christian Boltanski.

Unlike Eliach, Boltanski, whose middle name is "Liberté," grew up after the Holocaust; he was born on the very day that Paris was liberated from Nazi occupation. Boltanski's father was born a Polish Jew and, though he had converted to Catholicism, he spent the years of the Occupation hiding under the floorboards of his home in Paris. Although his mother was Catholic, and although he repeatedly speaks of his "Jewish culture, non-culture," Boltanski's paternal history has no doubt shaped his avant-garde photographic career. But the aesthetic of postmemory that emerges in Boltanski's work differs from that of Eliach's "Tower of Faces"; it comes closer to the opaque distance claimed by Raczymow, to Fresco's and Finkielkraut's absence. Also attempting both to re-create and to mourn a lost world of parental origin, Boltanski signals more clearly the gap between memory and postmemory, the difficult access to that world and the complex suspicion that surrounds photography's documentary claims in a postmodern and post-Holocaust world.

Boltanski's early work, marked by this suspicion, is devoted to un-coupling any uncomplicated connection between photography and truth. Most of his work consists of images that are rephotographed, altered, and replaced with others, thus losing their purported credibility. Boltanski uses this myth of credibility, in fact, to establish as "true" situations he invents, such as an elaborate "record" of a bicycle accident he never had, or the use of images of anonymous children to "document" his own childhood. In Boltanski's work the indexical nature of the photograph is in itself a trace as he succeeds in disguising the arbitrary connection between image and referent. Many of his images are, in fact, icons masquerading as indices or, more radically, symbols masquerading as icons and indices.

The detective function of photography runs through Boltanski's many images of objects through which he traces the lives of individuals and families, images reminiscent both of the cases full of objects in traditional ethnographic museums and of the belongings collected by the Nazis before they gassed their victims—the so-called Canada storehouses. Each of his works aims not toward particularity but toward anonymity, not toward

an individual but toward a collective identity. He often speaks of the effort
to erase himself, so as to be able to reach a communal memorial layer,
an amalgam of unconscious reminiscences and archetypes through which
viewers can supply their own stories as they look at his images.

But that deeper layer is not just psychological: it invites historical and
political readings as well. The critic Lynn Gumpert, for example, has situ-
ated installations such as "The Clothes of François C.," "The Inventory
of Objects Belonging to a Woman in Bois-Colombe," and the rearranged
photo album of the D. family, 1939–64, within the history of France and
Europe during these years (Boltanski 1988: 59). Boltanski uses objects as
clues to a communal history: what did the D. family or the woman from
Bois-Colombe do during the Occupation? What world did they construct
for themselves? Is it a normal everyday world that disguises the presence
of the war or do their objects allow us to confront the problematic history
of French collaboration and resistance?

Not until the mid-1980s, when he undertook a series of installations
grouped under the general title "Lessons of Darkness," did Boltanski
confront directly his own postmemory of Holocaust, exile, and survival.
"There were all sorts of things about my own childhood that I suppressed
in my work because they were too special. For example, in my first works I
never mention that I was from a Jewish family, I described it as a normal
French family" (quoted in Gumpert 1994: 97). His new series of instal-
lations begins with "Monuments: The Children of Dijon" and "Odessa
Monument" (1985ff.) — large structures built out of numerous rephoto-
graphed faces of his own school picture and a school picture from Dijon,
mounted on walls with individual lights or sitting on tin boxes within tin
frames, connected by electrical cords that provide the lighting (Figure 4).
Boltanski did a number of these installations in Paris, Dijon, Venice, New
York, and elsewhere. Although the actual children depicted may well still
be alive, their images form altarpieces, reminiscent of Byzantine icons
commemorating the dead. Through iconic and symbolic, but not directly
indexical, implication, Boltanski connects these images of children to the
mass murders of the Holocaust: the pictures themselves evoke and repre-
sent the actual victims, but neither we nor the artist have a way of knowing
whether the individuals in the photos are Holocaust victims or random
schoolchildren. Through their lack of specificity, they represent even more
forcefully Boltanski's search for a post-Holocaust aesthetic that would con-
tain his generation's absent memory shaped by loss and mourning. "I have
never used images from the camps," Boltanski says in an interview. "My
work is not about, it is after" (Marsh 1990: 10).
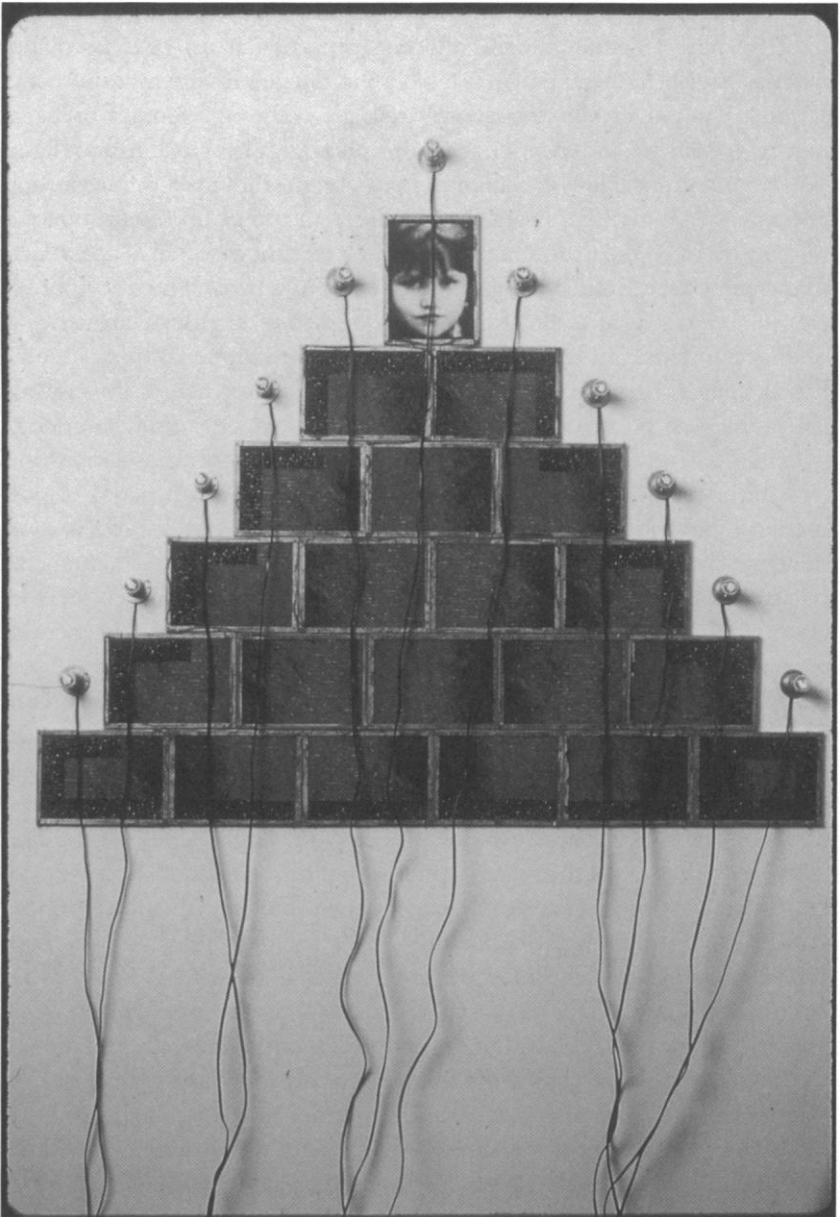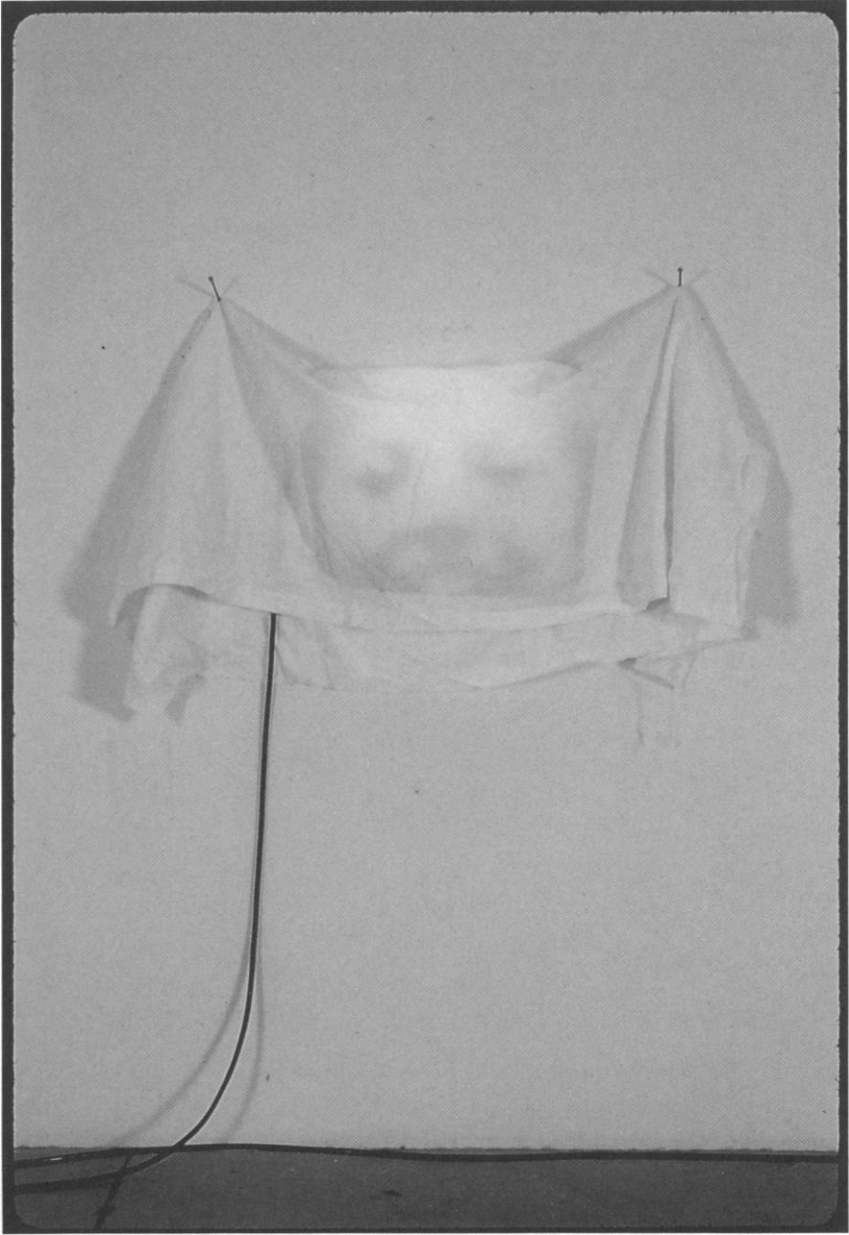
Figure 4   Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.

"Lessons of Darkness" culminates in a series of installations that use photographs of actual Jewish children, in particular a 1931 class picture from a Jewish high school in Vienna, the Chajes Realgymnasium, that Boltanski found in *Die Mazzesinsel* (1984), a book on Vienna's predominantly Jewish second district, and the photograph of a Purim celebration from a French Jewish school in 1939. Again, Boltanski rephotographs and enlarges individual faces, installs them on top of tin biscuit boxes or mounts them on the wall, illuminating each picture with a black desk lamp that creates a large circle of light at the center (Figure 5). The biscuit boxes, empty containers of a life story and of individual memory, are stripped of their contents, just as the faces themselves are stripped of individuality. Even though their indexical, referential function reemerges through the use of the class photo of a group the majority of which certainly ended up in Hitler's death camps, the images, blown up to enormous proportions and thus depersonalized, become icons of untimely death, icons of post-memory and mourning. Stripped of their connection to an actual abandoned and destroyed community, stripped of the narrative the actual class picture tells, the faces from the Chajes school, like the children of Dijon (and the "Monuments" made of Christian's own elementary class picture), echo a collective act of destruction and evoke the post-Holocaust viewer's fears and sorrows, without conveying any specific informational content. The sculptural installations allow Boltanski to rebuild a lost world, but one that looks anonymous, requiring both a certain contextualization (the fact that the high school was Jewish) and a certain investment by the viewer— of his or her own memories and fears—to carry any meaning and power. This is equally true of the subsequent installation, "Canada": here we don't know the identity of the faces depicted or the source of the objects on the floor; we know only the title, "Canada," which evokes, for those who *know*, Hitler's storehouses. The gaze that connects us to these images and installations is affiliative only in the most general sense: we recognize not the people or the world rebuilt, but the forms of memorialization and mourning, the technological shapes of Holocaust persecution and extermination, the names of a destroyed world and of the means of its destruction. "For me it's very important to start with a real image," Boltanski insists. "Then I blow it up to make it universal" (Boltanski 1995). In these new installations, using ghostly sheets and black mesh, the artist impairs visibility severely. This new work highlights, more and more forcefully and brutally, the violence of photographic exposure and revelation. The pictures suggest a truth, but they remain blurry, unforgiving and unyielding (Figure 6).

Like Raczymow's, Boltanski's connection to the world he reconstructs is shaped primarily by his own need to remember and to know, and by a
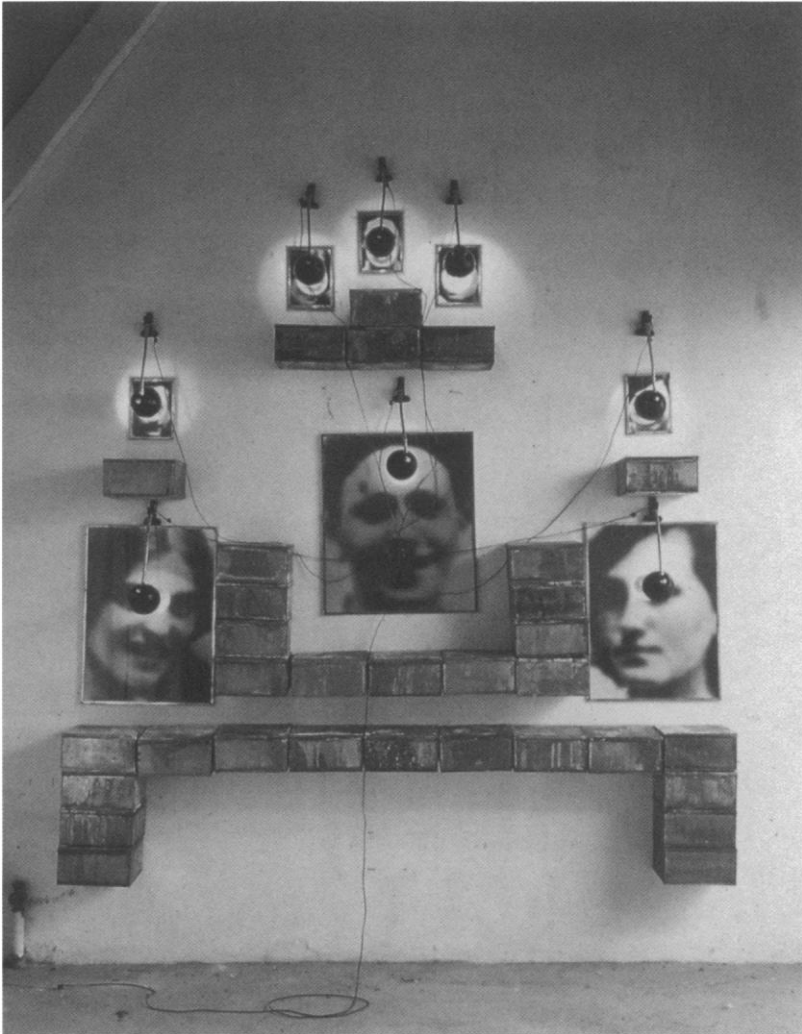
Figure 5 Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.

profound ambivalence about that need. "I think," he says in an interview, "that my work is bound to a certain world that is bordered by the White Sea and the Black, a mythic world that doesn't exist, that I never knew, a sort of great plain where armies clashed and where Jews of my culture lived" (Marsh 1990: 5). "Anyway, this is all very fuzzy in my own mind; I have no Jewish culture. I am like the Indians who, in westerns, serve as guides to the soldiers: they forgot everything, but when they drank, the Indian dances came back to them" (quoted in Gumpert 1994: 96).

Figure 6   Courtesy of the Marian Goodman Gallery.

For Boltanski postmemory is indeed empty, shaped by deep and residual cultural knowledges, overlaid with more present practices. Thus the lessons of darkness bring together Jewish and Christian modes of memorialization (the Jahrzeit or Chanukah candle with the altarpiece and the icon), made more poignant by the transcendently painful figure of the dead child. The objectification inherent in the still photographic image is reinforced by the fact that the faces on the walls are children's faces, looking forward to a life they were never to have, faces reproduced and rephotographed to the point of third- and fourth-generation fuzziness, made hollow and empty by enlargement. Darkness is death, absence of light, the darkroom: photography can recreate this darkness, dependent as it is on light. Family and school photography have lost all sense of comfort and safety, revealing an irreparable darkness and a danger from which our familiar social institutions cannot shield us.

As an aesthetic of postmemory, Boltanski's works reach an extreme. The empty content of the boxes and the generality of the pictures allow us both to believe and to suspect the documentary aspect of the photograph. But to call the truth of pictures into question in view of current Holocaust denial is risky indeed. At the same time, reconstructing a destroyed world in the shape of a memorial and a site of mourning extends the need to remember even as it acknowledges the loss of knowledge and specificity. Boltanski's "Lessons" are not history lessons: they are lessons about mass destruction and the need to recall an irrecoverable past in the absence of precise, totalizing knowledge. They are lessons about a form of disconnection and loss that is the condition of exile without the hope of return. And, with their unforgiving electric lights, they are lessons about the violence of knowledge, the brutality of exposure, the incapacities of our technologies of revelation.

Boltanski's images are thus particularly compelling at a moment when survivors of the Holocaust are rapidly disappearing from our midst, taking with them the possibility of direct memorial access to the event, however already mediated by the process of recollection. Although they are broadly accessible and disturbingly evocative, I wonder whether the "Lessons of Darkness" nevertheless risk too radical a disconnection from their source and thus the possibility of further manipulation and appropriation, whether they encourage a form of looking too decontextualized and ungrounded. If we look at the original image of the Chajes school graduating class, we recognize a historical moment, with its distinctive clothing, body language, and representational styles. Boltanski's re-creations leave only eerily empty faces and enormous eye sockets waiting to be filled with the viewer's own affective responses. But as a third generation grows to matu-

Figure 7   Courtesy of Shimon Attie.

rity and postmemory becomes dissociated from memory, we are left to speculate how these images can communicate on their own.

A different form of remembrance and perhaps one possible response to Boltanski's dilemma is exemplified in the work of the young American photographer Shimon Attie. By fully exploiting photography's capacity to evoke absence as well as presence, Attie may provide Yoram Kaniuk with a more satisfying way to return to the Berlin into which he might have been born. Visiting Berlin in 1991, Attie began to ask: "Where are all the missing people? What has become of the Jewish culture and community which had once been at home here?" (Attie 1994: 9). A concerted search led him to a number of historical photographs of Berlin's Scheunenviertel, its Jewish quarter during the 1920s and 1930s. Making slides of them and using several powerful projectors, Attie projected these old images onto the precise locations where they were originally taken, thus "rebuilding" the ruined world on the very site of its ruin. Then rephotographing the projections, he created layered images that have become movable memorial sites, which each of us can invest with our own nostalgic and elegiac needs (Figures 7–

Figure 8   Courtesy of Shimon Attie.

8). In his work, the site of destruction has been reconnected to the site of commemoration, icon merged with index, context and content restored. But is it? Attie admits that he "made every effort to project the image onto its original site" (ibid.: 11), but it was only possible in about 25 percent of the installations. Sometimes he had to use an adjacent building, sometimes another site altogether. In five of the seventy installations, moreover, he used images from other Jewish quarters and ghettos in Eastern Europe. "When it was necessary to choose between being a good historian and—hopefully—a good artist,' I always chose the latter," he confessed (ibid.).

I can identify with Attie's impulse to rebuild Jewish Berlin through this shadow play. The ghosts in his images and Boltanski's also haunt my imagination. Looking at the children's faces in Boltanski's installations, at the shadow figures haunting Attie's projections, I see the children in my mother's and father's classes who did not survive, I see the buildings of Czernowitz now inhabited by young people who don't remember their parents' neighbors. I see the child I could have been and the child I was in my own early nightmares. As postmodern subjects are we not constructed, collectively, in relation to these ghosts and shadows? Are we not shaped

by their loss and by our own ambivalence about mourning them? As we look at them, they look back at us, constituting, as Dominick LaCapra has recently argued, the return of the repressed that identifies the postmodern with the post-Holocaust (1994: 188). Postmodern subjectivity is shaped in this temporal/spatial diaspora, as Fran Bartkowski suggests, "in relation to an elsewhere" (1995: 3). Photographs can suggest what that elsewhere is or was; they can provide a visual content for our ambivalent longings. And they can also remind us of the distance, the absence, the unbridgeable gap that, in the postmodern, makes us who we are.

For years I thought I would never be able to go to Czernowitz and I shared my parents' sense that their world is simply gone, surviving only in their stories, memories, and friendships. But after 1989, at the same time that East Berlin became available to Attie, Czernowitz, now in the Ukraine, began to admit some visitors from the West. Several German television, radio, and newspaper stories were produced there to capture some of the flavor of the city of Paul Celan, and some tours were organized in Israel so that former residents might return for a few days. I read some of these stories and suggested to my parents that we take a trip to Czernowitz in the summer of 1994. After some research I knew the travel conditions would be harsh whether we chose to go by car or train, and was a bit discouraged by a photo exhibit on the Bukowina which showed a dismal landscape. But I thought that as experienced travelers we could all handle it and that the visit would be well worth the trouble.

My fantasy was that we would spend several days walking around the city, whose prewar buildings are still standing. We would visit my father's cousin Rosa, one of the very few remaining Jews of the prewar population, and we would meet her son Felix who grew up in the Russian Czernowitz. We would have our still camera and our video camera along, and we would record our walks and talks. "Remember, so and so used to live here," I imagined my parents saying to each other; "No, you're wrong, it was over there." Somewhat like Christa Wolf and her family in *Patterns of Childhood* (1976), we would discuss our impressions and share our reminiscences. My parents would show me their old apartments, the schools they attended, the houses of many friends and neighbors. They would retrace their steps, tell me where they met and where they used to spend time together. They would relive the prewar and also the war and they would relive their departure. Together, we would try to make the place come alive, investing it with memories of old, and memories created in the present, memories transmitted across generations.

The trip never happened. Every time I called about making reservations, or to discuss our itinerary, my mother asked was I really so interested in going, and why? It dawned on me that my desire, not theirs, was driv-

ing this plan. They were ambivalent and finally dissuaded by the practical difficulties of the trip and, I'm sure, by the fear of seeing, like Attie, only ghosts. The summer passed and we have not mentioned it again. Will I ever go there without them, like many friends who have gone to trace their roots in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary during the last five years? I doubt it. Instead I will have to search for other, less direct means of access to this lost world, means that inscribe its unbridgeable distance as well as my own curiosity and desire. This search will be inspired by Kaniuk's rage and by the aesthetics of Spiegelman, Raczymow, Boltanski, and Attie. And it will certainly include the numerous old pictures of people and places, the albums and shoe boxes, building blocks of the work of my postmemory.

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