"We Would Not Have Come Without You": Generations of Nostalgia

Marianne Hirsch, Leo Spitzer

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MARIANNE HIRSCH & LEO SPITZER

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> "Czernovitz expelled its Jews, and so did Vienna, Prague, Budapest, and Lemberg. Now these cities live without Jews, and their few descendants, scattered through the world, carry memory like a wonderful gift and a relentless curse. For me, too, the childhood home is that 'black milk'—to use the expression of Paul Celan—which nourishes me morning and evening while at the same time it drugs me."
>
> —Aharon Appelfeld, "Buried Homeland"

> "*In der Luft da bleibt deine Wurzel, da in der Luft*"
> ("In the air your root remains, there in the air.")
>
> —Paul Celan, "The No-One's Rose"

We dedicate this paper to the memory of Rosa Roth Zuckermann, whose lessons about courage and survival have deeply enriched our lives. Her hospitality, along with that of Felix and Marina Zuckermann and Matthias Zwilling, during our 1998 visit to Chernivtsi embodied its continuity with the lost Czernowitz. We would also like to thank Lotte, Carl, and Lilly Hirsch for their helpful and intense conversations about a painful past.

Resistant Nostalgia: "Where Are You From?"

On our first walk through the city once called Czernowitz, a woman stopped us on the street. In a mixture of Russian and Yiddish, she asked Marianne's mother, Lotte: "Where are you from?" With our cameras and maps, we were obvious tourists, and she no doubt wondered whether we were coming from Germany, Israel, or the United States. In response, Lotte pointed, emphatically, to the ground: "From here, Czernowitzer." It was the first time in our memory that this

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simple question, "Where are you from?" evoked such a brief, clear-cut response. Three words. "From here, Czernowitzer." Usually, it has required a long-winded, complicated narrative, if not an entire history and geography lesson.

At the present time, of course, Czernowitz is nowhere—a place that cannot be found in any contemporary atlas. It ceased to exist as a political entity long ago, in 1918 (the year Lotte Hirsch was born), with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire. Nowadays, its name is Chernivtsi, and it is located in the southwestern region of Ukraine, on the river Prut, some fifty kilometers north of the Romanian border. After the First World War, when it fell under the rule of Greater Romania, it was called Cernăuţi; and subsequently, under Soviet rule after the Second World War, Chernovtsy.

For Lotte and Carl Hirsch, however, and for all the surviving Jews of their generation who were born there but who are now dispersed throughout the world, the place has forever remained Czernowitz—the "Vienna of the East" and capital of Bukowina, an outlying province of the Habsburg Empire. It is a city in which (in the words of its most famous poet, Paul Celan) "human beings and books used to live" (2001, 395).[1] The long imperial connection of Czernowitz with Vienna and their own whole-hearted embrace of the German language, its literature, and the social and cultural standards of the Austro-Germanic world are for the Hirschs and their fellow refugees intimately intertwined—a core constituent of their identity. They, like their parents and grandparents, had accepted the premise inherent in the century-long process of Jewish emancipation and acculturation to Germanic culture that had taken place in lands once ruled by the Habsburgs. Its basis was that one could remain a Jew in religious belief while also becoming culturally, economically, and politically integrated within the dominant social order. Karl-Emil Franzos, Bukowina's first internationally famed German-language writer, best characterizes the complicated cultural identity of most assimilated Czernowitz Jews at the end of the nineteenth century: "I wasn't yet three feet tall when my father told me: 'Your nationality is neither Polish, nor Ruthenian [i.e., Ukrainian], nor Jewish—you are German.' But equally

often he said, even then: 'According to your faith you are a Jew'" (cited in Wichner and Wiesner 1993, 3). Indeed, even after the annexation of Bukowina by greater Romania in 1918 and the institution of a policy of "Romanianization," a predominant segment of the Jewish population of the city and region remained devoted to the German language and its culture. Czernowitz, the city, with its Viennese-inspired architecture, avenues, parks, and cafes, remained a physical manifestation of this persistent allegiance to a bygone Austrian imperial past.

The continuing vitality of this identification is not surprising. It attests to the positive connection many of Czernowitz's Jews had drawn between Jewish emancipation and assimilation into the imperial Habsburg realm, and to the significant social, political, and cultural rewards that this process had yielded. For the majority of Jews in Bukowina, Romanian rule closed the doors to rights and opportunities that they had enjoyed for decades under the Austrians. Despite antisemitic eruptions and the rise of Nazism in German-speaking Central Europe, it was after all in Romania, not Austria or Germany, where antisemitic legal restrictions were imposed and discrimination flourished after the end of the First World War (Ioanid 2000, ch. 1). For several years after Romania gained control of the area—until 1924—Jews in Bukowina were denied the full citizenship rights they had long enjoyed under Austrian rule, and their legal definition and exclusion as "foreigners" greatly inhibited, if it did not prevent, their cultural integration and social advancement. In this context, the German language with which they communicated with each other, and the Austro-German-Jewish cultural background they shared, provided Jewish people with an alternative basis of continuing group identity. "In spirit," the poet Rose Ausländer maintains, "we remained Austrians; our capital was Vienna and not Bucharest" (cited in Gottzmann 1991, 209).

It is perhaps this point that is most startling and in need of emphasis: even when political reality indicated otherwise, the Jews of Bukowina *kept alive an idea* of a pre-First World War city and culture in which German literature, music, art and philosophy flourished among its intelligentsia. Instead of the

Cernăuţi in which they now lived, they continued to nourish and perpetuate the notion of "Czernowitz" as it had been transmitted to them physically and in cultural memory. The world in which Lotte and Carl Hirsch and their contemporaries grew up was thus already shaped by "postmemory"—that is, a mediated relation to (in Stefan Zweig's phrase) a lost "world of yesterday" that they themselves had inherited from parents and grandparents who had enjoyed the benefits of Jewish life under the Habsburgs.[2] If, in their youth, they held on to that world nostalgically, it was not simply to mourn or to reconstitute what they believed to have been a "better" imperial past. It was also one of the ways in which they resisted Romanianization and its increasing social, political, and intellectual restrictions.[3] In this sense, their "resistant nostalgia" reflected what Svetlana Boym has characterized as the longing inherent in all nostalgic constructions "for a home that no longer exists or *has never existed*" (2001, xiii).

At the same time, however, Czernowitz/Cernăuţi was also that place in which Carl and Lotte, like their contemporaries, had suffered antisemitic persecution, Soviet occupation, internment in a Nazi ghetto, the yellow "Jew" star—and where the two of them, managing to escape deportation, had survived the Holocaust. Of the more than 120,000 Jews who had inhabited Bukowina at the start of World War II, fewer than 40,000 were alive at its conclusion. When Lotte and Carl moved away in 1945 from what had become Soviet-ruled Chernovtsy, they thought it was forever. They also knew that the place they had considered their homeland had definitively been taken from them. Czernowitz and Bukowina, now twice lost, came to persist only as a cultural landscape, deterritorialized, diasporic—an idea of a city and place less and less connected to its geographical location and ever more tenuously dependent on the vicissitudes of personal, familial, and cultural memory.

And yet, in September 1998, Lotte and Carl Hirsch and the two of us—parents accompanied by their daughter and son-in-law—made a "return" journey to the place itself. But why return? Why go at all to this place that for Carl and Lotte had been, in Eva Hoffman's words, "home in a way, but . . . also

hostile territory?" (1989, 84). Survivors of the Holocaust transmit to their children layered memories of "home" made up of nostalgic longing as well as negative and critical recollections. "My feelings about returning to Czernowitz are ambivalent," Carl (1998) said to us shortly before setting off on our journey. "Is Czernowitz our *Heimat*? The events that took place there—that we lived through especially in the war years—call that into question. . . . The truth of the matter is, we would not have decided to go back there now if it were not for Marianne. Marianne doesn't have a home, so we want to show her ours, because ours is also in some ways hers. We didn't have money there, but we had a very happy childhood. . . . The friendships we made were powerful. They stayed strong through life. We shared experiences and culture. We were like brothers, my Czernowitz friends and I. . . . There are probably not many places in the world that have produced such close fellow feelings among its émigrés. I am curious to see what has become of all of this."

Recorded in Frankfurt on the eve of return—at the moment of anticipation—these remarks suggest some of the complex factors that motivate the exile-refugee's return to the place that was once home. They blend affirmation, sorrow, and curiosity with the desire to pass on a sense of *Heimat* to a daughter born and raised elsewhere, in emigration. But what happens during the return journey itself, at the site? What narratives are generated when the present intrudes upon the past? What can these narratives tell us about the persistent and shifting shapes of nostalgia in the face of trauma? And what of the children of exiles-refugees who "return" to a "home" where they have never been before? How do they receive and in turn transmit the conflicting memories generated through their own act of witnessing?

Ambivalent Nostalgia/Negative Memory

Nowadays it may strike us as no more than curious that nostalgia (from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia*, a painful feeling) was considered a debilitating, sometimes fatal,

medical affliction for almost two centuries after first being named and described in a 1688 thesis by the Swiss physician Johannes Hofer. Initially identified in exiles and displaced soldiers languishing for home, symptoms of nostalgia were understood to be triggered in its victims through sights, sounds, smells, tastes—any of a number of associations that might influence them to recall the homes and environments they had unwillingly left behind. Returning the "homesick," the "nostalgic," to their origins, it was believed, was the potential cure for the "disease"—its restorative ending.[4]

Although interest in nostalgia as a medical problem waned considerably by the mid-nineteenth century, its link with absence or removal from one's home or homeland has remained one of its defining components. But the meaning of nostalgia also broadened over the years to encompass "loss" of a more general and abstract type, including the yearning for a "lost childhood," for "irretrievable youth," for a vanished "world of yesterday." Since no literal return in time is possible, nostalgia became an incurable state of mind, a signifier of "absence" and "loss" that could never be made "presence" and "gain" except through memory and the creativity of reconstruction (Spitzer 1998, 144; Boym 2001, 13–14).

In much of the literature on nostalgia, however, the feelings associated with looking back to a place or time in the past generally reflect a bitter-sweet, affectionate, positive relationship to what has been lost. They express a contrast between "there" and "here," "then" and "now," in which the absent is valued as somehow better, simpler, less fragmented, and more comprehensible than its alternative in the present. Indeed, it is this indiscriminate idealization of past time and lost place that has angered the critics of nostalgia and engendered vitriolic denunciations of nostalgic memory as "reactionary," "sentimental," "elitist," "escapist," and "inauthentic"—as a "retrospective mirage" that "greatly simplifies, if not falsifies, the past" (Spitzer 1998, 145; see also Lowenthal 1989, 20; Williams 1974; Vromen 1986). But nostalgic memory has also been seen more positively, as a resistant relationship to the present, a "critical utopianism" that imagines a better future. A past reconstructed through the animating vision of nostalgia can

serve as a creative inspiration and "called upon to provide what the present lacks" (Bal 1999, 72; see also Spitzer 1998, 145–46). This is precisely the role it played in the Romanian Cernăuţi of the interwar years.

It would no doubt be correct to assert that Lotte and Carl Hirsch, and other survivors of deportation or displacement from Czernowitz, were and are to some degree afflicted by affectionate longings for earlier stages and scenes in their own lives, as well as for pleasurable experiences in familiar places and settings in this city of their birth. The disappointment that Carl and Lotte expressed during our first walk in the city after our arrival simply because things had changed—"Yes, this is the Rathaus, or the Jewish high school for girls, or the Herrengasse, or the Café Europa," but each was also "different," renamed (in Cyrillic script), no longer as beautiful or elegant as it had once been, and certainly not as animated—attested to the fact that their memories of the past had been replete with positive images that present-day viewing challenged. Certainly, a prime motivation for Carl and Lotte's return visit to Czernowitz was their desire to reconnect an idea of the city that they had continued to keep alive in their minds to the sites they had once held dear: to view and touch them again in a material sense, even though they were also aware that, after more than fifty years and the intervention of fascism and communism, the past would have become a foreign country. Life experience had taught them what Czernowitz's best-known non-Jewish German author, Gregor von Rezzori, had expressed so insightfully in an autobiographical work: "You must never undertake the search for time lost in the spirit of nostalgic tourism" (1989, 290).

But the positively tinged nostalgia for the Czernowitz of the past was only one aspect of their recollections. Like others displaced from their homes and native lands who had become refugees, Carl and Lotte Hirsch also carried very negative and bitter memories with them—traumatic memories of times when they had suffered virulent discrimination and oppression. Our walks through "old" Czernowitz reflected the centrality of these negative and traumatic recollections—the emphasis that Carl and Lotte placed on the late 1930s and on the

war years in their on-site narratives to us, and their (at times frustrated) determination to find, revisit, and show us the different apartments and houses where they had found refuge during their confinement in Czernowitz's Jewish ghetto in October of 1941. Negative and traumatic memories such as these were certainly the complicating other side of nostalgia.

This ambivalent desire to recall negative experiences at the places where they happened, and to transmit them to sympathetic listeners and co-witnesses, is a significant motivation for return journeys such as the one we took to Czernowitz. In the act of recollection, traumatic events are inevitably linked to their points of origin, and a physical return can thus facilitate the process of working through. Associated both with the largely positive recollections of their childhood and youth and with the traumatic events that precipitated their departure, these sites, and the city itself, survive in Carl and Lotte's ambivalent remembrance through a psychic mechanism of splitting. Like the small child who endows parental imagos alternately with good and bad qualities, the survivor needs to split off nostalgic memory from traumatic memory in order to sustain the positive aspects of nostalgia. Geographical and temporal distance, and the disruption of exile or expulsion, makes it difficult to develop an integrated memory of a lost home. Conflicting memories thus coexist without being reconciled: the place called "*Heimat*" contains both the "experiences and culture" that Carl so fondly recalled on the eve of our journey and "what we lived through, especially in the war years." The fragments of memory are shaded with clashing emotional tones. Traumatic dissociation—the process by which painful portions of experience survive and remain vividly present without being integrated or mastered by the subject—is an extreme form of the splitting that characterizes ambivalent nostalgia.[5]

In reconnecting with what is both *positive* and *negative* in the past at the site, journeys of return require a renegotiation of the conflicting memories that constitute the returnees' ideas of "home." Once they make the journey back to the places they had left, their recognition of change generates corrective anecdotes and narratives. "Let me tell you *how it was*

. . . " Svetlana Boym calls this narrative type of nostalgia "reflective" rather than "restorative": "Reflective nostalgics are aware of the gap between identity and resemblance. . . . This defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present, and future." She continues: "If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space" (2001, 49–50).

But, for returnees to the sites that had contained Jewish life in Nazi-occupied Europe, the useful notion of "reflective nostalgia" requires some further elaboration. For them, the recognition of change—of the inevitable disappointments and ironic incongruities in all attempts at homecoming—is not the only disturbing factor. At each moment of their journeys, the "past-positive" is overlaid by the "past-negative." Nostalgic memory clashes with negative and traumatic memory, and this produces ambivalence. In the act of return, that ambivalence does not generate corrective narrative so much as a kind of performance, a scenario that can hold both sides of the past simultaneously in view without necessarily reconciling them, or "healing" the rift.

Rootless Nostalgia/Negative Postmemory

In a profound sense, nostalgic yearning in combination with negative and traumatic memory—pleasure and affection layered with bitterness, anger, and aversion—are internalized by the children of the exiles and refugees, members of the "second generation." We of that generation have very peculiar relationships to the places from which our families originated and from which they had been removed or displaced. For Marianne and her contemporaries, children of exiled "Czernowitzers," Czernowitz has always been a primordial site of origin. Although none of them had ever been there or seen it (or even thought they might be *able* to see it), it was the source of their "native" German linguistic and cultural back-

ground, with which—although they now live in the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel, France, Germany, Austria—they still identify. For Marianne, the streets, buildings, and natural surroundings of Czernowitz—its theaters, restaurants, parks, rivers, and domestic settings, none of which she herself had ever seen, heard, or smelled—figured more strongly in her childhood memories and imagination than the sites and scenes of Timişoara in Romania, where she was born, or Bucharest, where she had spent her childhood. Some of these same places, however, were also the sites of her childhood nightmares of persecution, deportation, fear, and terror. Her memory of Czernowitz (like Leo's of Vienna, from which his parents had fled to South America where he was born) is a postmemory, a secondary, belated memory mediated by stories, images, and behaviors among which she grew up, but which never added up to a complete picture or linear tale. Its power derives precisely from the layers—both positive and negative—that have been passed down to her, unintegrated, conflicting, fragmented, dispersed. As Eva Hoffman writes: "I come from the war, it is my true origin. But as with all our origins, I cannot grasp it. Perhaps we never know where we come from; in a way we are all created *ex nihilo*" (1989, 23)

Marianne's desire to visit Czernowitz was not exactly a nostalgic longing for a lost or abandoned home. How could a place she had never been to, and which her parents left under extreme duress, really be "home"? Nor was it a yearning to recall some better past time in that city, for she had experienced no time there at all. Children of survivors who "return" to former homes need to soften overwhelmingly negative postmemories of coming "from the war" by making a material connection with a "before"—a time (and a place) in which their parents had not yet suffered the threat of annihilation. They need to bring to the surface what the trauma of expulsion has submerged, to witness the sites of resistance and survival, and thus to construct a deeper and more nuanced understanding of history and of memory.

In a complex way, Marianne's nostalgia for Czernowitz fused the ambivalence of her parents' generation with a need to repair the ruptured fabric of a painfully discontinuous,

fragmentary history. Unlike that of her parents, however, her nostalgia was *rootless*—a longing driven by the layered postmemories she carried and the conflict between "home" and "hostile territory" that they, in turn, generated. Carl's notion of "not [being] from anywhere" brings out a dynamic element motivating the rootless nostalgia of the children of exiles and refugees. "Our roots are 'diasporic,'" writes the French-Polish writer Henri Raczymow. "They do not go underground. They are not attached to any particular land or soil. . . . Rather they creep up along the many roads of dispersion that the Jewish writer explores, or discovers, as he puts his lines down on paper. Such roads are endless" (1986, 103–04).

Citing Kafka, Raczymow goes on to say that, like Moses, the Jewish writer will never reach Canaan. If our parents hoped to find at least some traces of their past by returning to Czernowitz, for us, in the postmemorial generation, "returning to the place" could not serve as a means of reparation or recovery. Having inherited shards of memory, positive and negative, we could not hope to reunite the fragments. Instead, our journey remained a process of searching—a creative vehicle of contact and transmission enabling an encounter between nostalgic and negative memory. Its force derived precisely from its lack of resolution, the simultaneity of promise and disappointment. Returning to the site *with* our parents enabled us to bear witness to and participate in their transitory acts of memory, acts that allowed—for some moments, at least—conflicting recollections to coalesce.

The Crossroads

If there is one story from Carl and Lotte's wartime experiences that would illuminate these negotiations between nostalgia and negative memory, thus staging the workings of ambivalence, it is the story of the fateful moment in which they evaded deportation to Transnistria, the region where two thirds of the Jews of Czernowitz were forcibly relocated and where more than half of those met their death. We had both heard that story repeatedly, and Marianne had always seen that

place—where they turned right instead of left—as the life source from which she sprang. It led directly to her parents' marriage in the Czernowitz ghetto, to their survival during the years of war, and eventually to their emigration to Romania where she was born. For us, it was a story of survival and hope in the face of extreme persecution, suffering, and fear. It thus promised to offer us what we most wanted from the trip itself: a thicker version of the past, modulating expulsion and humiliation with resistance, defiance, and hope. Carl and Lotte had always described it as located at a corner, a corner where they turned back (into the ghetto) instead of following deportees towards the train station. As soon as our trip to Czernowitz was in the works, we knew we had to see that corner.

* * *

We began our walk in front of Lotte's family apartment on what used to be Dreifaltigkeitsgasse—only one block from where Carl had lived with his mother, brother, and sisters. We had visited Lotte's apartment yesterday, but now we were back, facing the entrance to the house, and it seemed the appropriate place to start the story of October 11, 1941, the day that the ghetto was formed in Czernowitz, and of the first few days of their internment.

"In those days I worked at the railroad administration office from eight to one and from four to seven," Carl began. "Before work, on that Saturday the 11th of October, I stopped at Lotte's house to say hello. As I was walking along, a neighbor stopped me and said, 'Read this,' and showed me an ordinance that was posted on a nearby building. It said: 'Anyone who harbors Jews or other undesirables, anyone who owns firearms, etc., will immediately be put to death.' I told her I didn't think that that concerns us, and I went to work. What was I supposed to do? At one o'clock when I come home, I see that everyone is carrying knapsacks and bundles. What's that, I thought? When I came home to my mother's, they were all packed to go. Lotte's family had arranged for us all to go to their cousin Blanka Engler's apartment in the Steingasse within the newly established ghetto. We were eleven—my

mother, two sisters, my brother, Lotte and I, her father and mother, her sister, her sister's fiancé, and his mother."

We were still in front of the house in Dreifaltigkeitsgasse, the home where Lotte had spent her first twenty-seven years. Lotte gestured, "The ghetto was formed, and our street was not a part of it; and we had to be inside the area that would be closed off as the ghetto by six in the afternoon."

We were standing there, trying to understand, to remember other tellings of this story, to imagine it at the very site where it happened. The tree-lined street looked peaceful, a little run-down, though the houses have maintained their turn-of-the century elegance. Leo was videotaping; some passers-by stared. A few trucks drove by and we worried about the noise on the tape. "How did you know to go? Was there any order in writing, any ordinance?" Marianne asked.

"The members of the Jewish Council went from house to house and said, 'By 6:00 pm you have to be within this perimeter.' Nothing was posted. I said, 'We're leaving—we must set the house on fire.' Do you remember, Lotte?"

"My father said, 'This could not be true!'" Lotte had quoted this on many occasions, always with a smile that indicated her pleasurable memories of her father's incongruous sense of justice. "'This violates the European rights of man.' He was a lawyer."

We had been walking a few blocks now. "Marianne, Leo! Come here, look!" Carl called us, pointing. "*Here* they made a fence and soldiers stood here. *Here* was the edge of the ghetto. And *here*, now we are inside the ghetto." He stepped inside the boundary he had drawn for us in the air. "And *here* we moved into Blanka's apartment, *there* on the second floor. The next morning we went out to talk to everyone. We could move around freely inside the ghetto; everyone was dressed casually, for the trip. And we knew, now start the 'Forty Days of Musa Dagh.' (You know that novel by Franz Werfel about the Armenians chased out of their homes and into the desert by the Turks in World War I.) We're on a Sunday. We're here Monday, Tuesday. On Wednesday everyone living here on this and the surrounding streets was supposed to go to the train station for deportation. We went outside and saw a lot of

peasants with horse-drawn carts waiting for customers to transport to the depot, and Lotte's father said, 'It's a sunny day, a good day for traveling.' So we loaded all our things, for eleven people, on one of these carts and waited our turn to go."

Lotte was gesturing; she wanted to say something. "May I add something here? This is something, Carl, which you don't totally admit. They said, now the Steingasse is on, and we put everything on that wagon. Everything. We had pillows, bedding, pots, all our sick relatives on foot, everyone carrying something. What you won't admit is that a soldier came to our door and said, 'Okay, now you have to go.'"

Carl was impatient. "There's no point. Everyone was already outside, we all knew. We have to tell the same story. The soldier is beside the point. The Jewish council said, 'Get ready.'"

"Yes, the Jewish council worked with them; they hoped perhaps to save at least a few people." She was ready to agree. "Yes, we knew we had to leave."

We were on the very street where they stood with hundreds of others, with carts and belongings. Did a soldier come to the door, or were they resigned to leave? Does it matter? These are the things we would have to sort out later. But this detail, about the soldier, and the discrepancy between the two versions of the story, emerged there on site. We had never heard it before.

There was barely time for some of these thoughts, as Carl continued his narrative. "As we were standing there on the street, a neighbor came by and said, 'I hear that some professionals will be allowed to stay in Czernowitz.' About a half hour later—we were still on that street, there were lots of carts ahead of us and everything was moving really slowly—a Romanian major walked by and I said to him, 'Sir, I hear that professionals will be allowed to stay. I am an engineer.' He said to me, 'Stay.' That's all. Imagine, I was on my way to the station with eleven people: my old mother, Lotte's old parents, her sick sister, the old mother of my brother-in-law. All were scared. Lotte and I had to act. So we took the carriage and . . . "

Leo spoke from behind the camera. "But wait, you had nothing in writing, and that Romanian major was gone. How could you . . . ?"

"He had said only three words." Lotte pointed to the ground. "'*Rămâi pe loc*! Stay right here!'"

As we left the former Steingasse, we came to a small memorial plaque mounted on a building, which, we were told, commemorates the Czernowitz ghetto. It was illegible, only a menorah could be made out on it with any clarity. But across the street a new, more legible commemorative plaque had recently been installed. In Ukrainian and Yiddish, it read: "*Here, in this place in 1941, was the Czernowitz ghetto where 50,000 Jews were incarcerated.*" That plaque was on a wall of a building on a busy crossing of five streets; two led down a steep hill toward the railroad station, and three were on level ground going in the opposite direction.

Here was the corner we had heard so much about. But it was not at all as we had imagined it. It was not merely a corner, the intersection of two streets: it was a major crossroads, one of the city's largest hubs, the former Springbrunnenplatz on the site of the city's ancient well.

It was noisy and hard to talk there. But we stopped, and Carl's narrative continued. There was now a small crowd of onlookers as Carl and Lotte pointed in different directions. "*Here* were the carriages in a row on their way to the train. *Here* there was a chain of soldiers, and here, on this side, was only a single soldier. So I brought the carriage over here to the single soldier, and I gave him 100 lei. I said nothing."

Although we had heard all this before, it seemed more difficult to believe now. "You went this way while everyone else was going that way, and he let you through?"

Carl nodded. "Yes. On the Schulgasse, only two blocks from here, lived the Lehr family, distant cousins, and we knew that their street had not yet been evacuated."

Leo handed over the camera and started pointing himself. "That way is to the train station?"

"Yes, and this way was back inside the ghetto. We thought, where to go? Maybe the Lehrs will take us in?"

"You paid to get back *inside* the ghetto?"

"We went on to the Lehrs. There were already about thirty to thirty-five people there, but they took us in, eleven more. My siblings slept in the laundry room behind the house, and for the rest of us they found some floor space somewhere. This was on a Wednesday. On that evening, in the Jewish Hospital, which was the seat of the Jewish Council, the Romanian mayor came and said . . . "

Lotte added an explanation, "The mayor was Traian Popovici, and he was very friendly to the Jews."

"He spoke in Yiddish," Carl added. "He said, 'I have good news for you. You are staying here.' You see, he had to arrange for professionals with technical skills to stay. He couldn't run the city otherwise. Only later, he changed it to say that only part of the Jewish population will be able to stay."

"So Lehr, the man we were staying with, said, 'Mazel Tov,' and he went to the basement and got out some champagne and we all drank champagne and celebrated." They had recalled these details in previous tellings, but now we were there. We turned into the street that was the Schulgasse and we were looking at the house that had belonged to the Lehrs.

"That was on a Wednesday." Carl continued. "On Thursday morning, another piece of news. The ghetto will be expanded. Some streets had already been evacuated and were closed down, but new streets were opened for this purpose. In that new part on the Wojnarowiczgasse, an uncle of Lotte's lived in a new villa, so on that Thursday the eleven of us moved again to that uncle Rubel."

"We were also over sixty people there. We slept all over the house. You can imagine the long lines for the bathroom." Lotte started laughing. "One day, my aunt really had to go, so she pushed to the front and announced: 'I am still the owner of this house!'"

"We all settled in. We played cards and we waited. Traian Popovici had promised, but we began to have some doubts and worries. So it was Thursday. On Friday I said to Lotte, 'Whatever happens, whether we stay or go, let's get married.' So around 2:00 pm on Friday, I look out the window and there's a rabbi standing outside. So I say to him, can you marry us? And he says that after 2:00 pm on a Friday it's too late to get

married under Jewish law, because of the Sabbath. On Saturday morning, the 18th of October, we go to the commander of the ghetto, a Romanian major, and we say, 'Sir, we want to get married.'

"This was complicated because by law you have to post an official 'intention' for two weeks preceding a civil wedding, so we had to get a dispensation from the court."

Carl continued: "But the major gave us a soldier to escort us, and we went to the courthouse to get the dispensation."

Lotte was eager to clarify. "That major actually called the soldier aside and told him to walk on the other side of the street so it wouldn't be so obvious. But when we got to the courthouse and told the official what we wanted, he said, curtly, 'But how did you leave the ghetto?' So I opened the door and pointed to the soldier, and I said, 'Under military escort.'

"We got the dispensation and went back to the ghetto. At five we were supposed to be back at the registry in the city hall. So we got the soldier at three.

"My sister and her fiancé were allowed to come with us as witnesses," Lotte added.

Carl continued, more animated. **"**We had an extra hour, so first we went right to the railway administration where I worked. I went in and they said, 'We have your official authorization to stay here.' When we went to city hall, the registrar, who was a professor, received us very warmly and he said to me, '*Domnule inginer*, I hope that we will be able to celebrate many other happy occasions with your people here in Romania.'"

The irony in this statement became apparent to us as we listened. Marriage might have been one of the last acts they could undertake as legal subjects of the Romanian state, their last link to citizenship. Yet their military escort—even if outside the door—served as the clear indicator of their status as prisoners of the very state that consented to marry them at the same time as it was in the process of expelling them. From their narrative, it seems that the registrar was equally uncomfortable with his role, trying to find an unofficial and thereby resistant connection to them at this moment. Calling Carl

"*Domnule inginer*" was a mark of respect, and a gesture of continuity with saner social conventions.

"Well, we celebrated as best we could under the circumstances. We stayed there a few more days and then we got our authorizations and were able to return home," Lotte added. "Many thousands had been deported by this time. And many more were deported before they dissolved the ghetto in mid-November.

"My brother had his authorization, and my sisters and mother could be added to mine, and each one of the others got one somehow. And I never forgot this, even more than fifty years later. The next day I went back to work, and the boss—not the real boss but my immediate supervisor, a Romanian—kissed me. Some of them were very nice to us."

Lotte contributed an important final detail. "We were lucky to have the official authorizations, because Popovici, the mayor, also gave out some other so-called 'Popovici authorizations,' and later, when the mayor was fired, those were declared invalid and most of those people were deported in the next wave of deportations."

Memory and Place

As Lotte and Carl retraced their walk of that day, and as we walked along with them from the houses they had to evacuate, to the house to which they first moved, to the crossroads where they turned back into the ghetto instead of going to the train station and deportation, they propelled themselves back into that moment in 1941 when their future was so uncertain. They relived the days of waiting, their wedding at the city hall under military escort, their relief at obtaining authorization to remain in Czernowitz, the frightening insecurities of the subsequent months. But, owing to our presence perhaps, and through the experience of telling the story to us in all its details and nuances, they could also gain a retrospective distance from that past. They could look back on it with the child who might not have been born had they taken a different turn.

On site, their memories gained relief, dimensionality, texture and color. We had visited Terezín, Lviv, and other Nazi-created ghettos; we had seen films and photos, and maps of the ghettos in Warsaw, Lodz, Cracow. But walking through Czernowitz with our parents, seeing the houses in which they had been children and grown into adulthood, and having them identify the houses where their various friends and acquaintances lived, we finally internalized, in a way we never could before, the reality of what we now euphemistically refer to as "ethnic cleansing": the brutality involved in forcing people to abandon their homes, gathering them into one small area, and then, systematically, clearing the city of their presence. We could sense the strange resignation, the compliance with which they must have packed their belongings and lined up for the train station, but also the anger and bitterness that would make Carl want to set the house on fire as he left. We could more than visualize their journey: we could smell and touch that crisp October day, hear the commotion on the street, the rumors that were flying, participate in the split-second decision that they reenacted at the crossroads with their bodies as they pointed and turned in the one direction over the other. Suddenly, as we talked and listened, the barricades and rows of soldiers became visible. And as we walked about this landscape of memory, the streets became animated with the presence of people from that past: long-lost relatives, friends, neighbors, Lotte and Carl, young, in their twenties—ghosts emerging from the shadows between the buildings, conjured up by recollection and narration, by our being there, by our presence and witnessing.

When Toni Morrison describes the aura that attaches itself to a place in *Beloved*, she uses the language of traumatic reenactment: "'Some things you forget. Other things you never do. . . . Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place—the picture of it—stays, and not just in my rememory but out there, in the world. . . . If you go there—you who never was there—if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you'" (1987, 36).

This was indeed the risk of our journey. The location authenticates the narrative, embodies it, makes it real, to the

point where it threatens to re-engulf those who come to tell and to listen. Our presence there, together, gave a substance and concreteness to that October day in 1941 that no stone plaque memorial could possibly evoke. And yet, at the same time, the traffic noises and the people around us, many of them watching as we videotaped our parents' testimony, propelled us back into the present. Here we found the retrospective vantage point that powerfully confirmed their spur-of-the-moment decision to "turn a corner and change direction." But, looking back, we could also see something else that Lotte and Carl had not until that moment conveyed to us: that this "corner," as they had characterized it, was also a "crossing" of *many* roads that symbolically reflected the many different turns that their lives *could have* taken—and that the lives of others among their contemporaries actually took. Emigration . . . exile . . . flight into the Soviet Union . . . deportation . . Transnistria . . . Bucharest . . . Paris . . . Vienna . . . Tel Aviv . . . New York. . . . As literal as that intersection was, it acquired additional symbolic significance through our contemplation and interpretation—the meaning we were able to find in our parents' narrative. And through this insight, which took our journey out of the past and into a symbolic—timeless—realm of significance, retrospective witnessing became prospective.

"No one / witnesses / for the witness," wrote Paul Celan (2001, 260) in the late 1960s, shortly before he committed suicide in Paris, feeling isolated, displaced, and misunderstood. The "listening" that he yearned for he describes in another poem, "The Shofar Place," as the kind in which you "hear deep in / with your mouth" ("hör dich ein / mit dem Mund") (2001, 361). For Carl and Lotte, our interest confirmed something about their past, its importance, its narrative and dramatic quality, the need to pass it on. Our challenge was to receive the story from them, and to receive it as active, collaborative listeners who could encourage the emergence of the more painful, the more tentative, the more fragmentary, ambiguous, and vulnerable aspects of that past experience, alongside the more positive reminiscences of good fortune and community.[6]

This is how we tried to listen, and our retelling, here, is the measure of that effort. But there was so much that we still

don't know and did not get. We never found the Wojnarowiczgasse where they took refuge in a villa in the ghetto. Although we walked and searched, no street corresponded to the old map and, surprisingly, neither Lotte nor Carl was able to identify the house in the general neighborhood. We never went back to the courthouse where Lotte and Carl received their dispensation, permitting them to marry. At the last minute we were too tired to make one more detour. And, during the next week, when we visited Carl's sister Lilly in Germany and went over the same moments with her, she remembered them somewhat differently, again qualifying the solidity that the narrative had acquired during our visit.

Mostly, we wonder, given our presence as an audience, how much was the narrative ruled by the desire for sequence, drama, and closure, the elements that make a good story? We became sensitive to its multiple happy endings: Carl and Lotte were able to marry, they received their authorizations, the boss was very nice, their authorizations were not rescinded. To what degree were the loose ends tied up, the *i*'s dotted, for our benefit? We found that, on site, their previously more triumphalist narrative of courage, ingenuity, and survival was interrupted by other conflicting memories—a soldier standing by the door, the burden of having to care for eleven people, their fear and ill health. And yet, there were also community, humor, small moments of celebration. The scene of narration allowed the enactment of contradiction and the emergence of disagreement in ways that we had not witnessed before.

Generations of Memory

We have come to see this intersection in Czernowitz, and the vicissitudes of telling and listening we enacted there, as a figure describing the different dimensions of nostalgia that we have been evoking in this paper. For Lotte and Carl—the first generation—the crossroads is a site of nostalgic return because it confirms their good fortune while highlighting their decisiveness and agency. It grounds the enabling moment that set a direction for their subsequent lives in a physical space. It

enables them to hold on to their positive memories of Czernowitz. Simultaneously, it also concretizes traumatic memory—memorializing (in the very physical sense of that concept) their immeasurable loss and their mourning for those thousands of others who were forced to take the other turn. And for us, in the postmemorial generation, this crossroads is—paradoxically—an index for our ambivalent and rootless nostalgia. It is less a location than a transitional space where the encounter between generations, between past and present, between nostalgic and traumatic memory, can momentarily, effervescently, be staged. The crossroads is what we have come to think of as a "point of memory"—a point of intersection between time and space, personal and cultural recollection. Puncturing layers of erasure and oblivion, it opens a portal of discovery for those who return to find vestiges of a vanished past.

Children of refugees inherit their parents' knowledge of the fragility of place, their suspicion of the notion of home. The site of our encounter, where the fracture between eras was briefly closed, could not provide the soil where roots of belonging could ever again take hold. Still, at the crossroads in Czernowitz, telling and listening became a collaborative endeavor. "It would not have made sense to return except in this constellation," Lotte and Carl repeated again and again. "We would not have come without you."

Comparative Literature Program (MH)
Department of History (LS)
Dartmouth College
Hanover, NH 03755
Marianne.G.Hirsch@dartmouth.edu
Leo.Spitzer@dartmouth.edu

Notes

1. For historical and cultural background on Czernowitz, see Corbea-Hoisie (1998), Gold (1962), and Sternberg (1962).
2. On the concept of postmemory, see Hirsch (1997; 1998). For a somewhat different use of "post-memories," see Liss (1998).
3. The flourishing socialist and Zionist movements and the revival of Yiddish culture constituted other utopian alternatives to a political culture that discriminated against Jews.

4. In addition to Hofer's 1688 treatise, see Starobinski (1966), Lowenthal (1975), Davis (1979), Vromen (1993), Spitzer (1998, ch. 5), and Boym (2001, introduction and ch. 1).
5. On splitting, see Freud (1940) and Klein (1946). Lifton (1986) discusses the mechanism of "doubling" in perpetrators. On traumatic dissociation, see van der Kolk and van der Hart (1995), Caruth (1996), and Bal (1998). The notion of traumatic dissociation has recently been critiqued by Leys (2000) and Brison (2002).
6. On "active listening," see Barthes (1976). See also Laub (1992) on the listener's act of witnessing.

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