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**Finding the Holocaust in Metaphor.  
Renegotiations of Trauma in  
Contemporary German- and Austrian-  
Jewish Literature**

**By**

**Maria Roca Lizarazu**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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I dedicate this thesis to my family: to my mother, Barbara, who has always encouraged me to be brave and follow my own intellectual path, to my sister Anna, and to Jochanan who supported this project from the start, but was very sadly not able to see me finish it.

**Declaration**

I, Maria Roca Lizarazu, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates representations of the Holocaust and the Second World War across a range of German- and Austrian-Jewish writers who belong to the second or third generation born after the Holocaust. These writers relate to the events from the position of the “nonwitness” (Weissman 2004), and in the face of major shifts in Holocaust memory since the millennium: the disappearance of the survivor and eyewitness generation entails a transition from first-hand memories of the war period to an increasingly ritualised cultural memory of the events. This transformation intersects with larger changes in Holocaust memory in the last 15 years, such as the re- and hypermediation of Holocaust memory and the emergence of a globalised *Erinnerungskultur*. The Holocaust has therefore emerged as a highly discursivised “floating signifier” (Huysen 2003), which travels transgenerationally, transmedially and transnationally.

Engaging with these shifts, I argue that Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” (Hirsch 1997) and recent trauma theory remain embedded in a biologising framework of analysis that views cultural transmission in terms of contagious inheritance. Drawing on cultural and literary theories and transnational memory studies, I develop a new approach that focuses on the Holocaust as a form of “travelling trauma” (Tomskey 2011), tracing its remediation and recycling across geographical, cultural, medial, and representational boundaries. My readings of texts by Benjamin Stein, Maxim Biller, Vladimir Vertlib, and Eva Menasse explore how these authors (re-)negotiate the various travels of Holocaust memory in the age of remediation.

By initiating a dialogue between the realms of theory and contemporary fiction, this thesis engages with a broad body of recent German- and Austrian-Jewish Holocaust fiction, while at the same time critically investigating key paradigms in the field of memory and trauma studies.

## 1. Introduction: Holocaust Memory in the New Millennium

In 2012, the *University of Southern California (USC) Shoah Foundation* embarked on a project entitled “New Dimensions in Testimony”.<sup>1</sup> In collaboration with the *USC Institute for Creative Technologies* the foundation is developing Holocaust survivor holograms which are meant to preserve their testimonies for the future. These holograms respond to the fact that many of the video testimonies that were collected throughout the 1980s and 1990s – for example by the *Yale Fortunoff Video Archive* or Steven Spielberg’s *Shoah Foundation* (now the *USC Shoah Foundation*) – will not stand the test of time, as the videotape as a medium is deteriorating.<sup>2</sup> The holograms also reflect a new era of Holocaust remembrance in which the internet, digital technology and archives, as well as social media, increasingly determine the formation and transmission of knowledge and memories of the event. While the holograms are indicative of a shift in contemporary Holocaust memory and the impact of new technologies, they also reveal the persistence of old desires: their three-dimensional and interactive qualities promise to preserve and revive the embodied experience of the survivor and the authenticity of the face-to-face encounter long after the eyewitness generation has perished. The hologram-project therefore points to a fundamental tension between the increasing mediatisation and institutionalisation of Holocaust memory, on the one hand, and a sustained longing for authenticity and immediacy, on the other.

The holograms are one example of how rapidly Holocaust remembrance has been changing in the new millennium. These changes are determined by major demographical and generational shifts: in the first instance, the disappearance of the survivor and eyewitness generation marks the transition from communicative forms of Holocaust remembrance, based on first-hand accounts and intrafamilial transmission, to an increasingly mediatised and globalised cultural memory of the events.<sup>3</sup> As Kirstin

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<sup>1</sup> See <<http://ict.usc.edu/prototypes/new-dimensions-in-testimony/>> [accessed: 3 February 2016].

<sup>2</sup> This is a problem addressed by Anthony Rowland in a recent volume on *The Future of Memory*, see Anthony Rowland, ‘The Future of Testimony: Introduction’, in: Rick Crownshaw, Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland (eds.), *The Future of Memory* (New York, NY and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 113-121, pp. 119f.

<sup>3</sup> Aspects of this transition, particularly pertaining to the issues of mediatisation and globalisation, have been debated by Aleida Assmann, ‘The Holocaust – a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community’, in: Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds.), *Memory in a Global Age. Discourses, Practices, Trajectories* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 97-117; Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust. Mediale Transformationen des Gedächtnisparadigmas* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014); Geoffrey Hartman and Aleida Assmann, *Die*

Frieden has pointed out, the media and other institutions of cultural memory play a crucial role in this process: “Durch den Wegfall von persönlichen, familiären Tradierungen und einer zugleich nicht unwesentlichen zeitlichen und emotionalen Distanz zu den historischen Ereignissen werden die kulturellen Medien und ihre Deutungen diskursbestimmend”.<sup>4</sup> The transformation of personal into cultural memories depends on various media, whose purpose increasingly transcends mere conservation. As the hologram-project demonstrates, cultural media are also meant to keep alive, connect and transmit these memories to future generations, thus replacing the memorial framework of the family while fulfilling the specific ethical obligations that Holocaust memories still involve. By adding an experiential dimension and a (simulated) personal connection to the act of testifying and witnessing, the holograms do not simply pass on historical knowledge but create an affective connection to the past, intended to foster a continued ethical engagement.

While the holograms bring to light certain tendencies in contemporary Holocaust discourse and pedagogy (the stress on affect and embodied experience, the strong ethical agenda underpinning it), they also demonstrate the influence of new medial environments, shaped by the internet and the ubiquity of digital media. As recent criticism in the field of media studies has shown,<sup>5</sup> these developments force us to reconsider common conceptions of experience, memory, and collective identity, since they give rise to a new set of cultural paradigms, governed by the “connective” turn, the cult(ure) of immediacy or the dynamics of “remediation”. In his book *The Culture of Speed*,<sup>6</sup> sociologist John Tomlinson traces the emergence of a new condition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which differs fundamentally from the machine speed of classical and late modernity. This new culture of “immediacy” is essentially marked by “the apparent ‘closure of the gap’ separating human desire from its attainment”.<sup>7</sup> With the

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*Zukunft der Erinnerung und der Holocaust* (Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2012); Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory. The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2004); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter. Der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001); Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (eds.), *Save as ... Digital Memories* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg (eds.), *On Media Memory. Collective Memory in a New Media Age* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> John Tomlinson, *The Culture of Speed. The Coming of Immediacy* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

disappearance of this gap, the spaces and temporalities that shape our experiences, subjectivities, and agency will change, along with our ways of thinking about them. Andrew Hoskins calls for a similar recalibration in the realm of collective memory, as a concept that is still too closely modelled on the communicative and distributive patterns of mass media and “broadcast-age thinking”.<sup>8</sup> Against this institutionalised idea of collective remembrance, Hoskins proposes a more diffused, “connective” notion of memory,<sup>9</sup> based on the functioning principles of digital media. For Hoskins, the connective turn in the Western world is governed by the incessant production and stream of data as well as the permanent accessibility of internet-capable devices. “Connective” memory is inherently more fluid than its mass-mediated predecessor, and so are the collectives shaped by it. The steady production, tracking, and storage of data produces memory traces that are tied not so much to the agency of individuals or communities but to “the flux of contacts between people and digital technologies and media”,<sup>10</sup> thus calling into question established notions of a collective identity. Hoskins also remarks that the “connective” turn fuels specific “‘inter-medial’ and ‘trans-medial’ [...] dynamics of old and new media”,<sup>11</sup> which Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have termed “remediation”.<sup>12</sup> Astrid Erll usefully reformulated “remediation” in terms of literature and cultural studies research:

With the term ‘remediation’ I refer to the fact that memorable events are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media [...]. What is known about a war, a revolution, or any other event which has been turned into a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what one might cautiously call the ‘actual events,’ but instead to a canon of existent medial constructions, to the narratives and images circulating in a media culture.<sup>13</sup>

These cross-medial dynamics shaping a “canon of existent medial constructions” are particularly apparent in recent Holocaust discourse. Holocaust representations have entered a new, hypermediated stage, marked by an overabundance of mediatised

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Hoskins, ‘Anachronisms of Media, Anachronisms of Memory: From Collective Memory to a New Memory Ecology’, in: Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers and Eyal Zandberg (eds.), *On Media Memory*, pp. 278-288, p. 281.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Hoskins, ‘7/7 and Connective Memory: Interactional Trajectories of Remembering in post-scarcity Culture’, *Memory Studies* 4.3 (2011), pp. 269-280.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Hoskins, ‘Anachronisms of Media’, p. 279.

<sup>12</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory’, in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (Berlin and New York, NY: de Gruyter, 2010), pp. 389-398, p. 392

accounts, which have become entangled in an ever more complicated and globalised web of mutual referencing. The interplay of old and new media has fostered a proliferation of icons, images and signifiers, whose circulation has become increasingly accelerated, decontextualised, fluid and uncontrollable.

The dynamics of remediation thus contribute to a culture of medial and memorial overabundance, which is the flipside of the longing for authenticity and immediacy. These developments suggest that many of the arguments which dominated Holocaust discourse in the late 1990s and early 2000s, i.e. the post-unification phase,<sup>14</sup> have been supplanted (or at least supplemented) by new concerns: the prominent catchphrases of “normalisation” and “historisation” now appear as a mere prelude to the current issues of representational and memorial routinisation and oversaturation. Hence, the fluidity of cross-medial travel seems to correspond to an ossification of the images and modes of expression that are available. This routinisation pertains to medial depictions of the event, which have become increasingly clichéd in their reliance on an established iconography of destruction, but it also concerns the broader memorial culture. Arguably, the memory of the Holocaust has become normalised, historicised and canonised to the extent that the event as such has disappeared in the thicket of representations, routines, and rules. The shift from normalisation to (over-)ritualisation has various consequences: what Frieden calls the “Übermacht sprachlich ‘dogmatischer’ Diskurse und ‘festgezurrtter’ Holocaust-Narrative” provokes feelings of frustration and fatigue – what can we still say about the event that is truly new?<sup>15</sup> Why do we have to learn and talk about the past yet again – can we not simply move on? These sentiments are linked to a crisis of empathy, which was diagnosed in a similar fashion in the late 1970s by Susan Sontag. In *On Photography*, she argues that the proliferation of atrocity pictures in the mass media leads to anaesthetisation.<sup>16</sup> The ongoing remediation and ritualisation of Holocaust memories seem to have (had) a similar effect. The process of overrepresentation and overregulation can also have a different outcome, however, sparking a renewed search for and commitment to

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<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the debates that shaped this phase see Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove and George Grote (eds.), *Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film and Discourse since 1990* (New York, NY and Rochester: Camden House, 2006); Bill Niven, *Facing the Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002); Helmut Schmitz, *On Their Own Terms. The Legacy of National Socialism in Post-1990 German Fiction* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004); Stuart Taberner, *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond. Normalization and the Berlin Republic* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978).

authenticity and immediacy. This longing pervades the holograms-project and – in a more controversial way – Shahak Shapira’s recent *Yolocaust*-project, which employed shock tactics to violently shake off people’s apathy.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, the increased mobility and decontextualisation of (re-)mediated memories has fed into a globalised culture of Holocaust remembrance, which has further restructured the debates. Memories of the Nazi past and the Holocaust are no longer discussed within an exclusively national framework but on a “transnational” or “transcultural” scale.<sup>18</sup> While some scholars look at the ways in which memories of the German past intersect with the memories and histories of various minority groups,<sup>19</sup> the majority of the so-called transnational or transcultural approaches investigate the transformation of the Holocaust into a universalised and travelling memory emblem that interacts with other, for example (post-)colonial, histories and memories of violence.<sup>20</sup> Whereas some adopt a descriptive approach, the majority of scholars in the field evaluate the shift towards transnationalism/-culturalism, albeit with differing results. Early (pre-9/11) accounts of globalised and transnational Holocaust memory, for example by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider,<sup>21</sup> were staunchly optimistic and celebratory, but recent research has adopted a more sceptical tone. Rather than prematurely ringing in a new and cosmopolitan memory culture, these theorists emphasise that a comparative approach to Holocaust memory also entails issues such as the instrumentalisation of Holocaust memory, the possibility of memorial competition, and the obstructions caused by the ubiquity of Holocaust references and analogies.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Philip Oltermann, “‘Yolocaust’ artist provokes debate over commemorating Germany’s past’, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/19/yolocaust-artist-shahak-shapira-provokes-debate-over-commemorating-germanys-past>> [accessed: 6 February 2017].

<sup>18</sup> Examples of this “transnational” or “transcultural” shift in Holocaust (and trauma) discourse include Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, ‘Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory’, *Criticism* 53.4 (2011), pp. 517-521; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing. Trauma out of Bounds* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory. The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> This is for example the topic of Michael Rothberg’s latest project and planned book, entitled *Citizens of Memory. Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany*; for further information see <<http://michaelrothberg.weebly.com/work-in-progress.html>> [accessed: 4 February 2017].

<sup>20</sup> This is the focus of Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* and Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*.

<sup>22</sup> More balanced and critical evaluations of the recent trend towards transnationalism and transculturalism in Holocaust discourse are provided by Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, ‘A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory’, in: Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds.), *The*

*Beyond the Family, beyond Postmemory?*

Taking these paradigm shifts in Holocaust memory and representation as a starting point, this study poses various interconnected questions: how is the shift from living, eyewitness memory to increasingly mediated forms of Holocaust remembrance reflected in contemporary, German- and Austrian-Jewish literature? How are issues of hypermediation, globalisation and ritualisation (re-)negotiated in those texts? How, if at all, do the novels under consideration explore their own implication in these dynamics? And how does contemporary literature recalibrate the prevailing frameworks in Holocaust and memory studies research? The project therefore taps into current research on (German-language) Holocaust literature by the so-called “third generation”, that is by authors who were born with no first-hand knowledge of the events. Situated at the end of the three-generation chain, they relate to these events under the conditions of increased mediation. As the third generation is only beginning to make itself heard, this is a relatively new field of study with few publications to date. A recent volume by Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer examines responses to the Nazi past and the Holocaust in contemporary German literature, and includes – but is not limited to – third-generation examples.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Kirstin Frieden’s study engages with recent shifts in Holocaust memory and culture, as manifested in literature, performance art and digital technologies.<sup>24</sup> Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein and David Slucki have published a collection that is dedicated exclusively to the third generation,<sup>25</sup> as has Victoria Aarons.<sup>26</sup> Neither collection, however, considers the German-language context. While Jilovsky, Silverstein and Slucki look at the third generation from an autobiographical, psychological, and sociological perspective, Aarons’ edited volume is (mostly) dedicated to literary

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*Transcultural Turn. Interrogating Memory between and beyond Borders* (Berlin and Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 29-38; Michael Rothberg, ‘From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory’, *Criticism* 53.4 (2011), pp. 523-548; Dirk Moses engages critically with comparative Holocaust memory in his work, see for example Dirk Moses, ‘Genocide and the Terror of History’, *Parallax* 17.4 (2011), pp. 90-108; Dirk Moses, ‘Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Other Genocides? The Canadian Museum for Human Rights and Grievable Suffering’, in: Alexander Laban Hinton, Thomas La Pointe and Douglas Irvin-Erickson (eds.), *Hidden Genocides. Power, Knowledge, Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), pp. 21-51.

<sup>23</sup> Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer (eds.), *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*.

<sup>25</sup> Esther Jilovsky, Jordana Silverstein and David Slucki (eds.), *In the Shadow of Memory. The Holocaust and the Third Generation* (London and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Victoria Aarons (ed.), *Third-Generation Holocaust Narratives. Memory in Memoir and Fiction* (Lanham, MD et al.: Lexington Books, 2016).

responses by the third generation and therefore closer to the outline of this study.<sup>27</sup>

While this study therefore charts a relatively new field of enquiry, it is inspired by existing research, particularly on the genre of the family and multigenerational novel as well as postmemorial discourse more generally.<sup>28</sup> The genre of the family or multigenerational novel fully took off in the early 2000s. There has been a steady stream of novels since then which explore family memories of the Nazi past through the lens of the children and, more often, grandchildren of victims and perpetrators alike. Instead of a straightforward re-narration of family history and memory, these texts offer investigations into memorial and genealogical gaps alongside the fictions they produce, putting issues of mediation and imagination – and hence the process of remembering and writing itself – at the centre. This self-reflexive potential of some (though not all) family novels, emphasised by many scholars in the field,<sup>29</sup> often manifests itself in complex explorations of the relationship between fact and fiction. These often involve – but are not limited to – the strong autobiographical impulses marking the genre. In addition, many of these narratives focus on the overlaps and clashes between the private realm of family memory and the public field of institutionalised historiography, supplementing official discourse with alternative accounts of the past.

Although family narratives continue to shape recent discourse on the Nazi past and

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<sup>27</sup> Aarons' volume adheres to a familial-biological understanding of the "third generation", which is not shared by this study; in my view, the "third generation" encompasses both the actual grandchildren of survivors and those who, due to their date of birth and Jewish identity, could (have) be(en) the grandchildren of survivors. I therefore prefer the more open-ended term "generation after", coined by Efraim Sicher, which highlights historical distance, and encompasses both the "second" and the "third" generation as well as those with and without biological-familial ties to the survivors, see Efraim Sicher, "'Tancred's Wound': From repression to symbolization of the Holocaust in second-generation narratives", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 5.2 (2006), pp. 189-201.

<sup>28</sup> Seminal studies and articles on the family or multigenerational novel and the concepts underlying it have been published by Simone Costagli and Matteo Galli (eds.), *Deutsche Familienromane. Literarische Genealogien und internationaler Kontext* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2010); Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2005); Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse. The Politics of Memory* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Meike Herrmann, *Vergangenheit. Erzählen vom Nationalsozialismus in der deutschen Literatur seit den neunziger Jahren* (Würzburg: Königshausen&Neumann, 2010); Silke Horstkotte, *Nachbilder. Fotografie und Gedächtnis in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009); Sigrid Weigel, 'Familienbande, Phantome und die Vergangenheitspolitik des Generationendiskurses. Abwehr von und Sehnsucht nach Herkunft', in: Ulrike Jureit and Michael Wildt (eds.), *Generationen. Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), pp. 108-126; Sigrid Weigel, *Genea-Logik. Generation, Tradition und Evolution zwischen Kultur- und Naturwissenschaften* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> This potential is particularly stressed by Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte* and Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*.

the Holocaust, as demonstrated by the success of Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014),<sup>30</sup> my project seeks to initiate a new phase in the research on contemporary Holocaust literature. Picking up from Kirstin Frieden's question "Was kommt nach dem Familienroman?",<sup>31</sup> I explore how texts by Maxim Biller, Eva Menasse, Benjamin Stein and Vladimir Vertlib engage with the Holocaust in ways that attempt to go beyond the family frame. I argue that these writers focus less (exclusively) on the psychology of (transgenerational) Holocaust trauma and memory, which is a prominent preoccupation of the family or multigenerational novel. Instead they highlight processes of cultural hypermediation and discursivation. They therefore explore modes of transgenerational transfer that go beyond living generations or family bonds: they construct intertextual, literary genealogies, while also exploring affiliative modes of transmission and remembrance. In so doing they represent the Holocaust predominantly as a "Diskursfiguration and Signifikationsmaschine".<sup>32</sup> These texts thus supplement and/or replace the investigation of intrafamilial dynamics with an examination of broader cultural and discursive processes. These observations are supported by the findings of Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer who detect "eine Ausdifferenzierung der Erinnerungsliteratur hin zu Formen metahistoriographischen und metafiktionalen, vielleicht sogar 'meta-erinnerungskulturellen' Erzählens" in recent discourse about the German past.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that contemporary Holocaust literature increasingly leaves behind familial-psychological configurations calls into question the broader methodological frameworks that are usually applied in this context. This study therefore intervenes in current debates in the fields of memory and trauma studies, particularly in the realm of postmemory scholarship. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory underpins much of the academic engagement with belated, indirect, and non-experiential responses to trauma.<sup>34</sup> Hirsch initially coined the term postmemory to describe the

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<sup>30</sup> Katja Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2014).

<sup>31</sup> Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*, p. 66.

<sup>32</sup> Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer, 'Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des ersten Jahrzehnts. Zur Einführung', in: Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer (eds.), *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, pp. 9-25, p. 16.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. Their assessment is echoed by Dora Osborne who, in connection with Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*, speaks of an "archival turn" in recent memory culture, understood as a meta-critical and meta-discursive investigation of the dynamics that shape private and public archives, see Dora Osborne, 'Encountering the Archive in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*', *Seminar* 52.3 (2016), pp. 255-272.

<sup>34</sup> Hirsch's output on the issue of postmemory is considerable and spans a period of almost 15 years; some of her most important works include Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames. Photography, Narrative,*

ways in which the children of Holocaust survivors relate to and are shaped by their parents' past. She defines postmemory as "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 understood nor recreated".<sup>35</sup> The children (and grandchildren) of Holocaust survivors have not personally experienced the powerful events of the past, which is why they cannot remember them in the literal sense; instead, they have a "postmemory", which is "mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation".<sup>36</sup> What the subsequent generations cannot possibly remember, they must imagine or invent, which puts fiction, in the broadest sense, at the centre of Hirsch's work. In recent years, Hirsch has gradually expanded the circle of those who can have a postmemorial response to a traumatic past. Apart from including the second as well as the third generation of Holocaust survivors, a postmemorial relation can also be formed by those who are not biologically related to the survivor generation, but connect to the Holocaust via "affiliative", i.e. culturally mediated, channels. This has led to an expansion (and some would say depletion) of the term in Hirsch's own work and other scholarship on the matter. Postmemory now encompasses a range of belated responses to all sorts of traumas that are no longer restricted to the Holocaust.

Hirsch's introduction of the term "affiliative" postmemory is arguably a response to shifts in Holocaust discourse. With the dying out of the survivor generation, the three-generation-paradigm, and the prevalence of biological modes of transmission, are coming to an end. The idea (and foregrounding) of affiliation was thus meant to ensure the survival of the family-centred idea of postmemory in a changed landscape of Holocaust remembrance. However, as I will demonstrate throughout this study, the idea of "affiliative" postmemory is fraught with problems, which extend to the concept of postmemory as such. These issues stem from Hirsch's intellectual commitment to post-structuralist trauma theory, which promotes the idea that traumatic experiences are principally beyond representation: they are intrinsically unspeakable and make

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*and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997); Marianne Hirsch, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today* 29.1 (2008), pp. 103-128; Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

themselves felt through contagious symptoms. Trauma and postmemory discourse thus clashes with the above-mentioned shifts in Holocaust remembrance and representation which, for various reasons, challenge the paradigms of contagion and unspeakability. It would therefore seem necessary to go beyond postmemory when trying to capture recent artistic, cultural, and theoretical engagements with the Nazi past and the Holocaust.

While cultural and historical contexts are significant for my readings, this study reflects recent methodological shifts in the field of trauma and memory studies, as evident in the emerging field of “critical trauma studies”.<sup>37</sup> Some of these approaches challenge the Euro-centric bias of traditional trauma theory,<sup>38</sup> alongside its negligence of mundane or everyday manifestations of trauma,<sup>39</sup> and its focus on pathology.<sup>40</sup> My research is especially indebted to important criticisms of post-structuralist trauma theory, namely by Amy Hungerford, Dominick LaCapra, Ruth Leys, Naomi Mandel and Susannah Radstone.<sup>41</sup> Their work challenges the ethical, political and theoretical implications of the unspeakability paradigm. However, it is less useful for (re-)formulating a concept of trauma that takes account of the multiple pathways of re- and hypermediation. The prevailing focus on the unspeakability and psychology of trauma captures neither the increasingly hypermediated nature of Holocaust memory and representation, nor the cultural, material, medial and socio-political contexts in which Holocaust memory, and trauma more generally, are implicated. Drawing on and

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<sup>37</sup> Antonio Traverso and Mick Broderick, ‘Interrogating trauma: Towards a critical trauma studies’, in: Antonio Traverso and Mick Broderick (eds.), *Interrogating Trauma. Collective Suffering in Global Arts and Media* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3-15.

<sup>38</sup> For a criticism of trauma theory’s Euro-centric underpinnings see Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Stef Craps, ‘Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age’, in: Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory. Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 45-61 and Antonio Traverso and Mick Broderick, ‘Interrogating trauma’.

<sup>39</sup> The stress on event-based notions of trauma which overlook the more structural and mundane aspects of traumatic experience is problematised by Michael Rothberg, ‘Preface: beyond Tancred and Clorinda – trauma studies for implicated subjects’, in: Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory*, pp. xi-xviii and Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*.

<sup>40</sup> Michelle Balaev for example highlights the creative potential of trauma in a recent volume on contemporary literary trauma theory, see Michelle Balaev, ‘Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered’, in: Michelle Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.1-14.

<sup>41</sup> See Amy Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts. Genocide, Literature, and Personification* (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Ruth Leys, *Trauma. A Genealogy* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable. Complicity, the Holocaust and Slavery in America* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University of Virginia Press, 2006) and Susannah Radstone ‘Trauma Theory: Contexts, Ethics, Politics’, *Paraglyph* 30.1 (2007), pp. 9-29.

expanding the notion of “cultural” trauma,<sup>42</sup> I will re-conceptualise the Holocaust as a “floating” or “travelling” signifier/trauma,<sup>43</sup> which is caught up in various discursive and representational networks that cross cultural, generational, medial, and national boundaries. Such an approach responds to recent trends in media and memory studies, which increasingly conceive of memory as socially embedded, dynamic, procedural, remediated, “travelling” or “unbound”.<sup>44</sup>

My readings of contemporary German-language Holocaust texts aim to initiate a dialogue between the realms of fiction and theory that produces new insights into both. Such a research agenda considerably broadens the scope of German studies and literary research, as it encompasses recent findings from various disciplinary backgrounds (cultural studies, literary studies, memory studies, media studies, and trauma studies) and academic cultures (US-American, British, German).

### *Scope and Organisation*

This study analyses a range of texts by renowned German-language Jewish writers who all engage with the memory and cultural afterlives of the Holocaust outside the framework of the family and/or under the conditions of hypermediation and globalisation. These concerns bind together a group of writers from biographically, culturally, and stylistically diverse backgrounds, although they all belong to the so-called “generation after”.<sup>45</sup> They thus approach Holocaust memory from the

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<sup>42</sup> See Jeffrey Alexander et al. (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), see also Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> The term “floating signifier” is used by Andreas Huyssen in his seminal study on the interplay between cityscapes, monumentalisation and historical traumas (specifically the Holocaust), see Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 99. The term “travelling trauma” has been coined by Terri Tomsy and will be introduced in more detail in Chapter One, see Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11: Travelling Memory and the Trauma Economy’, *Parallax* 17.4 (2011), pp. 49-60.

<sup>44</sup> See for example Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, *Parallax* 17.4 (2011), pp. 4-18; Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin and New York, NY: de Gruyter, 2009); Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen, ‘Introduction: Memory on the Move’, in: Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Memory Unbound. Tracing the Dynamics of Memory Studies* (New York, NY and Oxford: Berghahn, 2017), pp. 1-26.

<sup>45</sup> Efraim Sicher employs the term to describe the generation of those who did not witness the Holocaust directly. He still relates the term to familial memories of the Holocaust, see Efraim Sicher, “‘Tancred’s Wound’”. By contrast, I use the term more broadly as a description of those who did not experience the events first-hand and can only access them in a mediated and mediatised fashion. This encompasses both members of the so-called “second” and “third” generations as well as familial and non-familial connections to the Holocaust and the Nazi period. My understanding of “generation after” therefore applies equally to authors such as Maxim Biller and Vladimir Vertlib, who are situated somewhere between the “second” and the “third” generation, and who have no or very loose familial ties to the

perspective of the secondary or “nonwitness”,<sup>46</sup> although the degree of their personal and cultural distance to the event varies. Maxim Biller was born in 1960 and is thus one of the oldest authors in the group: he is situated at the threshold between the second and the third generation. Vladimir Vertlib (\*1966), Benjamin Stein (\*1970) and Eva Menasse (\*1970) were all born between the mid-1960s and 1970s, and therefore belong to a younger cohort. Biller and Vertlib share their Eastern European origins – in the Czech Republic in Biller’s and in Russia in Vertlib’s case. This not only affects their historical and literary frameworks (both of their texts are set in Eastern Europe), but also determines their relationship to the memory of the Holocaust and their understanding of Jewish identity. Benjamin Stein and Eva Menasse, by contrast, come from Germany and Austria respectively. The extent to which the Holocaust is part of the authors’ familial and personal history differs in each case: Menasse comes from a family of Austrian-Jewish Holocaust survivors and writes from an autobiographical perspective – although this is more evident in her debut novel *Vienna* (2005) than in *Quasikristalle* (2013). While Vertlib also shares a family history that was marked by the Holocaust, he was more directly exposed to Soviet and post-Soviet traditions of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism which are at the centre of his novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* (2000). Biller’s and Stein’s family histories do not involve the Holocaust at all: Stein was not born Jewish, but rather converted to Judaism as an adult. However, since my use of the term “generation after” is meant to indicate non-experience, historical distance and a reliance on mediation, a biological connection to the survivor generation is less important for my choice of texts than a concern with post-Holocaust Jewishness. With the exception of Stein, all of the authors included in this study have engaged with questions of Jewishness across a range of medial and discursive formats. Maxim Biller’s work as a journalist, writer and media personality has built his reputation as a Jewish *enfant terrible*. Menasse and Vertlib are far less scandalous, but they too have positioned themselves as public Jewish intellectuals. Benjamin Stein, by contrast, has concentrated fairly exclusively on his literary career.

These differences result in aesthetically and thematically diverse approaches to the Holocaust and its memory: Benjamin Stein’s *Die Leinwand* and Eva Menasse’s

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Holocaust, and a writer like Eva Menasse who clearly belongs to the “third generation” and a family of survivors.

<sup>46</sup> Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing. Postwar Efforts to Experience the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 5.

*Quasikristalle* experiment with narrative techniques, while Biller's *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* (2013) and Vladimir Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* appear rather conventional. Menasse's and Vertlib's writing relies, at least in part, on autobiographical, familial and female-centred narrative frameworks, while Stein's text explicitly blanks out familial memories of the Holocaust. Biller's novella goes back in time to tell a pre-Holocaust story that nonetheless expresses a post-Holocaust consciousness. Despite these differences, the novels under consideration share recurring themes and concerns. These relate to the transmission of Holocaust memories in a culture of hypermediation and beyond the family framework; they engage with questions of authenticity, empathy, and representational oversaturation; they address the (un-)availability of certain traditions alongside post-Holocaust Jewish and gender identities. What also brings these texts together is their publication date in or after 2000, which makes them part of the growing body of Holocaust literature in the new millennium. According to Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer, this literature offers qualitatively new approaches and fields of enquiry: "Dabei hat die Literatur, so unsere These, gerade in den letzten Jahren noch einmal Zugänge eröffnet, die sich von jenen der siebziger und achtziger, aber zum Teil auch von denen der neunziger Jahre unterscheiden".<sup>47</sup> This study aims to investigate the nature of these pioneering perspectives in recent Jewish, German-language Holocaust literature, both on an aesthetic and on a thematic level. It also seeks to relate them to ongoing methodological shifts in the realms of trauma and memory studies.

Chapter One critically engages with the genealogy of the unspeakability paradigm in Holocaust discourse and contemporary trauma theory (Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Marianne Hirsch). This discussion paves the way for a critique of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory: I will concentrate on the idea of unspeakability and her problematic understanding of mediality, while also challenging the biologising implications of her concept. The chapter makes the case for a different methodological approach to recent German- and Austrian-Jewish Holocaust texts, which provides the basis for my reading of the primary literature.

Chapter Two offers an analysis of Benjamin Stein's *Die Leinwand* (2010),<sup>48</sup> focusing on the fictionalisation and remediation of the infamous Wilkomirski affair in

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<sup>47</sup> Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer, 'Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des ersten Jahrzehnts', p. 22.

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin Stein, *Die Leinwand* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010); henceforth cited in the text as *DL*.

the text. I will show that Stein's novel is caught up in various cycles of remediation, which complicate notions of authenticity and witnessing in post-Holocaust discourse. Stein's text is highly self- and meta-reflexive – it engages with the remediation of Holocaust memory and its own entrapment therein. The text therefore rejects fixed notions of (Jewish) identity, particularly those that are rooted in trauma and victimisation. However, the (self-)reflexive potential of the novel is undermined by its gender politics and its folklorisation of post-Holocaust Jewish identity.

The topics of masculinity and post-Holocaust Jewish identity link Stein's writing to Maxim Biller's novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* which I discuss in Chapter Three.<sup>49</sup> I examine the ways in which Biller's text negotiates post-Holocaust Jewish male identity, demonstrating that he pitches Eastern European (Jewish) literature against German literary traditions. Applying Harold Bloom's concept of "influence" to Biller's latest novella and the autobiographically inspired self-portrait *Der gebrauchte Jude* (2009),<sup>50</sup> I then illustrate how *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* uses intertextual references to Bruno Schulz and Thomas Mann in order to stage violent and oedipal conflicts of belonging and dissociation. By appropriating specifically Eastern European (Jewish) literary traditions and authors, the text tries to construct an untainted, anti-assimilationist Jewish genealogy and heritage which is pitted against German culture and what I call 'perpetrator poetics'.

Chapter Four remains within the Eastern European context: I analyse Vladimir Vertlib's novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* with reference to recent debates about the transnationalisation of (Holocaust) memory, and explore how his text contributes towards a criticism of this trend.<sup>51</sup> Engaging with the allegedly "cosmopolitan" nature of transnational memory discourse, the chapter illuminates how Vertlib's novel stages a clash between Germany's culture of guilt-ridden and redemptory *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, on the one hand, and Russia's narrative of heroism and triumph, on the other. The chapter also shows how the particular life and memory of an individual can never find expression in the type of narrative templates that have shaped the collective national memory of the Second World War and

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<sup>49</sup> Maxim Biller, *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 2013); henceforth cited in the text as *IKvBS*.

<sup>50</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence. A Theory of Poetry* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Maxim Biller, *Der gebrauchte Jude* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2001); henceforth cited in the text as *DgJ*.

<sup>51</sup> Vladimir Vertlib, *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Munich: dtv, 2007); henceforth cited in the text as *DbG*.

Holocaust. Inspired by Bakhtin's work on polyphony and dialogism,<sup>52</sup> I argue that, for Vertlib, a discourse that pays tribute to the complexities of history, memory and individual experience can only ever be instigated in the realm of literature.

The final chapter examines Eva Menasse's *Quasikristalle* within the context of recent debates about the family or multigenerational novel, arguing that Menasse's latest text works towards a multi-vocal and possibly post-familial aesthetics.<sup>53</sup> I furthermore read *Quasikristalle* as a meta-discursive engagement with various stages of Holocaust remembrance, that brings together many of the concerns raised in the other novels and throughout the study. The novel addresses the issue of empathy and apathy in the face of Holocaust hypermediation, while also scrutinising the transformation of the Holocaust into a hypermobile, "floating" and ubiquitous signifier. Menasse's text is wary of the universalisation of the Holocaust signifier, due to its interference with various socio-political discourses in a manner that is moralising and ethically unproductive.

Focusing on a range of literary devices, such as intertextuality, remediation, irony, and polyphony, this study pays special attention to the production and obstruction of self- and meta-reflexivity in contemporary German- and Austrian-Jewish Holocaust texts. The literary analysis will be linked to broader discussions about the relationship between authenticity, experience, memory, hypermediation, trauma, and transmission in the new millennium.

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<sup>52</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and transl. by Caryl Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel. Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel', in: Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-40; Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in: Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 259-422.

<sup>53</sup> Eva Menasse, *Quasikristalle* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 2013); henceforth cited in the text as *Q*.

## 2. Finding the Holocaust in Metaphor: Renegotiations of Trauma in Contemporary Literature and Theory

### 2.1. A “Taxonomy of Unspeakables”<sup>54</sup>

In their introduction to a recent volume on *Trauma in Contemporary Literature*, the editors Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo emphasise that “trauma constitutes the realm of the unspeakable and the unrepresentable”,<sup>55</sup> and that its representation necessarily “entails inadequacy or incompleteness”.<sup>56</sup> What emerges here – and elsewhere in the book – is a commitment to Cathy Caruth’s idea of trauma as an event which can never be adequately captured by representation and referential signification. This is somewhat surprising, as Caruth, and post-structuralist trauma theory more generally, have been widely criticised – and in many cases dismissed – in contemporary trauma research.<sup>57</sup> Ruth Leys and Dominick LaCapra have emerged as particularly prominent critics: in her seminal study *Trauma. A Genealogy*,<sup>58</sup> Leys situates Caruth’s theory in the context of the history of trauma theory, drawing on Foucault’s notion of genealogy. She shows that Freud’s (and all subsequent) conceptions of trauma oscillate between two incompatible poles: according to the mimetic theory, trauma victims experience trauma through imitation or ‘mimetic’ immersion in the Other which erases the distinction between the traumatised victim and the aggressor.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, the anti-mimetic theory conceives of trauma as a purely external assault. Leys shows how Caruth’s theory, with its espousal of “literalness” and traumatic immediacy, is implicated in this conflict. She also accuses Caruth of re-interpreting Freud in a manner that eclipses the crucial ambiguity of his trauma concept. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra takes issue with the “compulsively repetitive turn to aporia, paradox, or impasse” in post-structuralist trauma theory which he deems to be ethically

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<sup>54</sup> Barry Stampfl, ‘Parsing the Unspeakable in the Context of Trauma’, in: Michelle Balaev (ed.), *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, pp. 15-41, p. 36.

<sup>55</sup> Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo, ‘Trauma and Literary Representation: An Introduction’, in: Marita Nadal and Mónica Calvo (eds.), *Trauma in Contemporary Literature. Narrative and Representation* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1-13, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> A recent volume on future directions in trauma theory clearly emphasises that the field has moved on, see Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (eds.), *The Future of Trauma Theory. Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*.

<sup>58</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35ff.

unproductive.<sup>60</sup> This is so not least because Caruth's theory allows for a problematic universalisation of victimhood in which trauma becomes a form of "symbolic capital".<sup>61</sup> A detailed critique of the notion of unspeakability has been produced by Naomi Mandel in *Against the Unspeakable*.<sup>62</sup> In the spirit of LaCapra and Leys, she offers a harsh assessment of the "rhetoric of the unspeakable" in Caruth's work which enables Caruth to turn trauma into a site for ethical engagement and take the moral high-ground. Despite such criticism, the post-structuralist unspeakability paradigm still exerts a powerful influence, as demonstrated by Nadal and Calvo. This is particularly the case in the realm of Holocaust discourse, in which references to the limits of speech and representation are still widespread. As Barry Stampfl has pointed out, the notion of the unspeakable is an "ancient, highly serviceable rhetorical device classically associated with romantic love, the sacred, and the sublime",<sup>63</sup> and as such not limited to the Holocaust. However, ever since Adorno's essay on 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft',<sup>64</sup> discussions about the Holocaust and its representations cannot circumvent the issue of (un-)representability. Adorno famously claimed: "[N]ach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben".<sup>65</sup> While this statement has generally been read as a ban on all representations of the Nazi genocide, Adorno's broader argument in 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' is much more complex.<sup>66</sup> It is necessary to differentiate between the particular problem discussed by Adorno, on the one hand, and later invocations of the trope of non-representability, on the other.

Adorno problematises "Kulturkritik" after the Holocaust because of its dangerous "Komplizität [...] mit der Kultur".<sup>67</sup> For Adorno, culture is implicated in capitalist exchange and consumption, and therefore in its commodifying logic. The notion of complicity is central for Adorno, who addresses the vexed question of how Auschwitz

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<sup>60</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 47.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable*; see also Naomi Mandel, 'Rethinking "After Auschwitz": Against a Rhetoric of the Unspeakable in Holocaust Writing', *boundary 2* 28.2 (2001), pp. 203-228.

<sup>63</sup> Barry Stampfl, 'Parsing the Unspeakable', p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', in: *Theodor W. Adorno. Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 10.1. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I. Prismen. Ohne Leitbild*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 11-30.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>66</sup> For a more detailed overview over the debates sparked by Adorno's statement and his own changing stance, see Petra Kiedasch (ed.), *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995).

<sup>67</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', p. 15.

could have happened in the German *Kulturnation*. Adorno's essay articulates a critique of the bourgeois notions of 'Kunstautonomie' or, as he calls it, "Geistkult",<sup>68</sup> ideas which catapult art and culture outside the broader political and social sphere, thereby supposedly shielding 'high art' from the dangers of instrumentalisation and complicity. However, Adorno does not simply embrace the opposite position, which denies the possibility of transcending the *status quo* via art. Instead he argues for a dialectical approach, based on the insight that the notions of culture and criticism cannot possibly be separated from the processes of objectification ("Verdinglichung") which penetrate capitalist society as a whole.<sup>69</sup> Culture and criticism are thus bound to replicate and perpetuate the societal structures in which they emerge, meaning that there is no superior and innocent position from which one can speak. This also explains why it is not only barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz but even impossible to say so – every word uttered about the event necessarily reproduces the logic and crime of objectification. The second part of Adorno's dictum gives expression to this aporia, which tends to be ignored in the debates surrounding it. The lasting echo of Adorno's statement is certainly not due to its clarity: Adorno himself commented repeatedly on his half-sentence and eventually revised it as follows:

Das perennierende Leiden hat soviel Recht auf Ausdruck wie der Gemarterte zu brüllen; darum mag falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz ließe kein Gedicht mehr sich schreiben. Nicht falsch aber ist die minder kulturelle Frage, ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse, ob vollends es dürfe, wer zufällig entrann und rechtens hätte umgebracht werden müssen.<sup>70</sup>

It should be noted that Adorno makes a political (and ethical) point, which sets him apart from later proponents of the unspeakable: he debates the obscenity of the *Kulturindustrie* and its popularised and affirmative representations of a limit event, while also arguing that the boundless reification and commodification in capitalist societies threatens to turn everything, including the catastrophe of the Holocaust, into "Geschwätz".<sup>71</sup> These concerns influenced James E. Young who problematises issues of emplotment, narrativisation, sense-making and trivialisation in the face of utter catastrophe. As a response, Young promotes counterintuitive, avantgarde-inspired depictions of the Holocaust that defy established conventions, easy understanding, and

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>70</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 355.

<sup>71</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', p. 30.

artistic closure.<sup>72</sup>

Adorno's philosophical analysis of complicity and commodification differs from Saul Friedlander's historiographical approach to the question of Holocaust representation. In his edited volume *Probing The Limits of Representation*,<sup>73</sup> Friedlander is predominantly concerned with issues of historical accuracy and representational appropriateness. Friedlander does not claim that the Nazi genocide is unrepresentable; he argues rather that, as an "event at the limits", it challenges "our traditional conceptual and representational categories".<sup>74</sup> His volume is therefore driven by questions such as: can the Holocaust be represented within the framework of conventional historiography? What other options does the historian have? How can these facts be presented objectively, i.e. with the minimum authorial manipulation? How can the historian deal with the problem of authorial manipulation in the face of the Holocaust? These questions imply the possibility of factually as well as morally 'wrong' forms of representation, meaning that the Holocaust historian is faced with a strong ethical responsibility. Adorno, Young and Friedlander thus share a concern with the (in-)appropriateness of certain kinds of representations which are either complicit in the surrounding power structures or transgressive of representational and ethical limits. Their positions have been influential in cementing what Naomi Mandel calls a "rhetoric of the unspeakable", which still dominates contemporary Holocaust discourse:

Auschwitz, in particular, and the Holocaust, in general, are commonly referred to as unspeakable, unthinkable, inconceivable, incomprehensible, and challenging (or forcing us to reestablish, or to rethink, or to acknowledge, or to probe) the 'limits of representation.' The more we speak about Auschwitz, it seems, the more prevalent and compelling our gestures toward the limits of our speech, our knowledge, and our world.<sup>75</sup>

Mandel differentiates this rhetoric from "the rhetoric of trauma",<sup>76</sup> as it shapes the work of Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Cathy Caruth and, importantly, Marianne

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<sup>72</sup> Young's idea of the "countermonument" points in the direction outlined above, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1993) and James E. Young, *At Memory's Edge. After Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> Saul Friedlander, 'Introduction', in: Saul Friedlander (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation*, pp. 1-21, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Naomi Mandel, 'Rethinking "After Auschwitz"', p. 204.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 214.

Hirsch. This differentiation is significant, because the reasons for unspeakability and/or unrepresentability differ: Adorno's notion of unrepresentability refers to the realm of collective, cultural, and mass-mediated representations, alongside the obscenity and commodification inherent in any product of the *Kulturindustrie*; under capitalism, all forms of representation are compromised and thus inadequate. Friedlander, meanwhile, believes that the Holocaust is a historical rupture of such enormous proportions that the parameters of (historiographical) representation need to be re-adjusted; established forms of representation do not do justice to the event and are therefore inadequate. The idea of unspeakability in the works of Felman, Laub and Caruth, by contrast, is based on early trauma theory, and the individual (railway) accident as the archetype of traumatic experience.<sup>77</sup> In these post-structuralist theories, trauma is not necessarily understood as the trauma of the Holocaust: it is conceptualised as a violently disruptive, external event that shatters the ego's coherency and cognitive abilities, making the experience categorically unavailable for conscious processing and representation. Because every conscious representation of this experience is necessarily and irrevocably inadequate, the event can only be 'represented' obliquely, through the failure of representation. Felman, Laub and Caruth read the Holocaust in a deconstructivist fashion, as an extreme example of the necessary failure of all modes of referential representation. While critical theory debates the *appropriateness of certain kinds of representation*, the deconstructivists use the Holocaust to problematise and query *the very notion of representability and referentiality as such*.

Mandel is more concerned with the "rhetoric of trauma", which really only constitutes *one* possible example of the unspeakability paradigm.<sup>78</sup> For Mandel, the "rhetoric of trauma" serves a (political) purpose in the "construction of a collective identity".<sup>79</sup> She puts forward the following harsh critique: "Through an alchemy of trauma theory's problematization of agency",<sup>80</sup> these theorists transmute aporia and silence into an ethical practice, so that "access to the ability to be traumatized becomes

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<sup>77</sup> For a more detailed description of the genesis of psychoanalytical trauma theory and its connection to "railway spine", see Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), pp. 20ff.

<sup>78</sup> For the purposes of this chapter, I concentrate on post-structuralist configurations of unspeakability; for an in-depth account of other examples of the unspeakability paradigm see Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable*, pp. 1-70.

<sup>79</sup> Naomi Mandel, 'Rethinking "After Auschwitz"', p. 214.

<sup>80</sup> Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable*, p. 60.

an index of ethical commitment”.<sup>81</sup> At the same time, Mandel claims that their ethics bypasses the crucial issue of complicity which is central to both Mandel’s book and Adorno’s argument. The particular ethics of post-structuralist trauma theorists rests on the concept of witnessing as it has been developed by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, which I will outline in the next sub-section of this chapter.

The rhetoric of (traumatic) unspeakability also clashes with recent developments in Holocaust discourse. As mentioned in the introduction, the Holocaust can be said to have entered the age of “remediation”,<sup>82</sup> and this substantially affects the paradigms and politics of representation. The concept of “remediation” captures the complex exchange processes that take place when new media – like film, television, or the world wide web – emerge, focusing on “the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media”.<sup>83</sup> Bolter and Grusin show that these processes of recycling and adaptation can take place on the level of “techniques, forms, and social significance”,<sup>84</sup> and they often aim to offer “a more immediate or authentic experience”.<sup>85</sup> The authors repeatedly emphasise that “remediation did not begin with the introduction of digital media”,<sup>86</sup> although the all-encompassing scope of “remediation” in a culture of connectivity is a new phenomenon: “No medium, it seems, can now function independently and establish its own separate and purified space of cultural meaning”.<sup>87</sup> This means that we cannot conceive of media and mediatisation without automatically invoking the media technologies and representations that came before, which is why today “*all* mediation is remediation [*italics in the original text*]”.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>82</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 55. This last statement also highlights that the concept of remediation responds not only to certain technological developments, but to the postmodern age more generally, which stresses the culturally-constructed, mediated nature of “reality”, and consequently bids farewell to the notions of authenticity and originality. It replaces these with a focus on the ways in which cultural constructs reshape, remix and recycle each other. It is therefore no coincidence that Bolter’s and Grusin’s claim that “there is nothing prior to mediation” is in itself a variation of Jacques Derrida’s famous dictum that “there is nothing outside of the text”, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, transl. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 158. Bolter and Grusin write about their indebtedness to Derrida and Frederic Jameson, another icon of postmodern thought, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 56.

Remediation as hypermediation involves an endless, impenetrable, and constantly multiplying circuit of representations, and is applicable to the current state of Holocaust discourse. The seemingly endless repetition and revision of medial depictions is a phenomenon that appears all too familiar when dealing with an event as highly mediated as the Nazi period and genocide of the Jews: icons of destruction such as the gate of Auschwitz I, the railway tracks leading into Auschwitz-Birkenau and the sight of barbed wire derive much of their emblematic quality from their repetition in and travel across various media. These images constitute what Astrid Erll describes as “a canon of existent medial constructions”.<sup>89</sup> Films like Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and Roberto Benigni’s *La vita è bella* (1997) rely on their audience’s familiarity with these icons to evoke the horror of the Nazi period. Meanwhile, Quentin Tarantino’s *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) provocatively infuses the established imagery of destruction with an aesthetics derived, amongst other things, from the splatter film. The process of Holocaust (hyper-)mediation can be traced back to the 1978 TV-Mini-Series *Holocaust*; later, it was reinforced by the aforementioned films directed by Spielberg and Benigni, Benjamin Wilkomirski’s pseudo-autobiography *Bruchstücke* (1995) and Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *MAUS* (1991), to name a few milestones. Ironically, the powerful discourse on the unrepresentability of the Holocaust is therefore surrounded by a plethora of images and icons, which migrate through countless filmic narratives, fictional re-imaginings of and artistic engagements with the event. This irony at the core of the ban on representation is also stressed by Mandel: “In addressing a rhetoric of the unspeakable in relation to the Holocaust, I assume that it is not merely an ironic paradox that the most thoroughly documented atrocity in human history is figured as the emblem of this history’s incomprehensibility”.<sup>90</sup>

Exploring alternative conceptualisations of the relationship between (Holocaust) trauma, transgenerational transmission, (re-)mediation and mediatisation, the following sub-chapter focuses on Marianne Hirsch’s influential concept of postmemory. I will demonstrate how traumatic unspeakability infiltrates an idea which reflects the inevitable transformation of Holocaust memory after the death of the generation of eyewitnesses. My critical dialogue with Hirsch prepares the ground for the ensuing analysis of a range of contemporary German- and Austrian-Jewish novels

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<sup>89</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory’, p. 392.

<sup>90</sup> Naomi Mandel, ‘Rethinking “After Auschwitz”’, p. 205.

that negotiate the memory of the Holocaust in light of these changed conditions.

## 2.2. Postmemory and Its Discontents

Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory is an indispensable reference point for scholars working on the transgenerational transmission and media(tisa)tion of Holocaust trauma.<sup>91</sup> Hirsch initially coined the term postmemory to describe the ways in which the children of Holocaust survivors relate to and are shaped by their parents' past. As such, postmemory is defined as "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 understood nor recreated".<sup>92</sup> As the children (and grandchildren) of Holocaust survivors have not personally experienced the powerful events of the past, they cannot remember them in the literal sense. Instead, they fashion a "postmemory", which relies on mediation (in the form of family stories, photographs, heirlooms, trinkets, as well as archival sources and broader historical knowledge), on the one hand, and on fantasy and fictionalisation, on the other. Thus, what the second and third generation cannot possibly know, they have to imagine. Hirsch claims that the generation of postmemory therefore has a different relationship with authenticity, compared to the eyewitness generation who lived and suffered through the events. As this aura of authenticity is unattainable for the postmemorial latecomers, they instead focus self-reflexively on their fantasies and fictions, alongside the broader mediation of Holocaust memories. Hirsch's original research provided a theoretical framework for the transgenerational transmission of trauma within survivor families. Her more recent work broadens the scope of enquiry by analysing the cultural as well as the familial transference of traumatic memories.

While postmemory has been embraced enthusiastically by many scholars, it has not gone entirely uncriticised.<sup>93</sup> Jonathan Long, for instance, takes issue with Hirsch's assumption that the postmemorial generation necessarily embraces a reflexive, ethical

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<sup>91</sup> See Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames* and Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*.

<sup>92</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> For a detailed criticism of Hirsch's concept see Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*; Jonathan Long, 'Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*. Photography, Narrative, and the Claims of Postmemory', in: Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove and Georg Grote (eds.), *German Memory Contests*, pp. 147-165; Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*.

and non-appropriative position vis-à-vis their ancestors' past. These concerns are echoed by Anne Fuchs who furthermore problematises the privileging of “feeling-structures” in Hirsch’s work.<sup>94</sup> Gary Weissman refutes the concept of *postmemory* altogether, as “remembering” or “witnessing” a past that one has not personally experienced is simply impossible – postmemory is not an act but a “fantasy” of witnessing.<sup>95</sup> While I draw on these criticisms, the focus of my engagement with Hirsch’s theory is slightly different. Tracing the genesis and evolution of Hirsch’s concept, I intend to show how many of the core assumptions underpinning her work derive from and play into the rhetoric of unspeakability. Offering a critical account of Hirsch’s central ideas, I will demonstrate that they operate within the broader discursive framework which has defined trauma studies since the late 1980s. Because Hirsch’s work is tied to this larger framework, we need to step beyond postmemory in order to adequately analyse the current, remediated state of Holocaust remembrance and representation.

### 2.2.1. *Unassimilability, Literalness and the Problem of Nachträglichkeit*

In her latest publication on postmemory, Hirsch reflects on her own intellectual genealogy: “Had one of us been asked to tell an origin story, [...] we would have named Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein; Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust and Toni Morrison; Hanna Arendt, Shoshana Felman, and Cathy Caruth”.<sup>96</sup> Although this is the only explicit reference to Cathy Caruth, Hirsch’s notion of postmemory builds on Caruth’s conceptualisation of the traumatic, which in itself draws on the psychoanalytic work of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub as well as Freud’s thoughts on trauma.<sup>97</sup> Caruth argued that trauma originates in a catastrophic event which, due to its overwhelming nature, the traumatised self cannot process cognitively or emotionally.<sup>98</sup> As a result, trauma finds expression belatedly, via a language of symptoms: “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming

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<sup>94</sup> See Jonathan Long, ‘Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* and Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 149.

<sup>95</sup> Gary Weissman, *Fantasies of Witnessing*.

<sup>96</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 16.

<sup>97</sup> In the following, I will concentrate on Caruth’s seminal text *Unclaimed Experience*, see Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>98</sup> A similar notion of trauma informs the *American Psychiatric Association’s* definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), see Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, and Rick Crownshaw, ‘The Limits of Transference. Theories of Memory and Photography in W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*’, in: Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, pp. 67-90.

experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena”.<sup>99</sup> The “sudden or catastrophic events” Caruth refers to are modelled on the railway accident which figured prominently in early trauma theory. For Caruth, the railway accident is “the exemplary scene of trauma *par excellence*”.<sup>100</sup> Caruth’s stress on suddenness and disruptiveness, alongside a punctual, event-based conception of trauma, results in two claims. Her first conclusion is that because the ego is overwhelmed by the radically unexpected violence of the event, its cognitive and psychic abilities are shattered. It is for this reason that the traumatic experience cannot be directly assimilated or experienced. Traumatic events are always experienced belatedly, as the subject is not ready for them when they happen: “The shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known”.<sup>101</sup> Trauma, for Caruth, is not primarily about the sheer force of the event, but about a certain relationship with time, described by her as a “temporal unlocatability”,<sup>102</sup> which Freud had captured in the notion of *Nachträglichkeit*. However, as Ruth Leys has argued, Caruth promotes a very specific understanding of Freud’s concept: concentrating on the ideas of deferral and latency, she approximates it to the “incubation period” of a disease.<sup>103</sup> This focus blocks out the other, retroactive, dimension of Freud’s concept, i.e. the idea that an event which was not experienced as traumatic at the time can become so through its interaction with a later, unrelated event, a point to which I will return shortly.<sup>104</sup>

The constitutive unassimilability of the traumatic experience leads Caruth to her second important conclusion: if the experience cannot be integrated into the subject’s

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<sup>99</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>101</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 62. With this, Caruth refers to Freud’s understanding of the origins of trauma as outlined in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*: in his essay, Freud famously argues that it is the event’s suddenness and the accompanying lack of “Angstbereitschaft” that causes what we would today call the main symptoms of PTSD, specifically the flashbacks and recurring nightmares. Freud sees these repetitions as attempts of the psyche to belatedly master the unexpected overflow of stimuli, which is supposed to restore the libidinal equilibrium, see Freud, Sigmund, ‘Jenseits des Lustprinzips’, in: *Sigmund Freud. Gesammelte Werke, Vol. XII: Werke aus den Jahren 1920-1924*, ed. by Anna Freud et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), pp. 3-69.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, Footnote 8, p. 133.

<sup>103</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 271.

<sup>104</sup> For an introduction to the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* see Friedrich-Wilhelm Eickhoff, ‘On *Nachträglichkeit*: The Modernity of an Old Concept’, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 87. 6 (2008), pp. 1453-1469.

experience, it is also not available for representation. Caruth argues that it can only be accessed through traumatic *repetition* which she understands as “the literal return of the past”.<sup>105</sup> Because it is forever split from the subject, the traumatic experience cannot be distorted by the self’s wishes, projections, and desires. And so it is that the traumatic event returns in a pristine, unaltered, and thus *unmediated* form: “In trauma, that is, the outside has gone inside without any mediation”.<sup>106</sup> Caruth derives this literal understanding of traumatic memory from Freud’s account of the traumatic nightmare in ‘Jenseits des Lustprinzips’. Freud was puzzled by this phenomenon mainly because the oneiric repetition of highly painful events clashes with what he identified as the “wunscherfüllende [...] Funktion des Traums”.<sup>107</sup> While Freud’s argument is tentative at this point, Caruth turns it into a definitive statement that proves her point: “The returning traumatic dream perplexes Freud because it cannot be understood in terms of any wish or unconscious meaning, but is, purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits”.<sup>108</sup> Freud, however, does not mention the notion of a literal return of trauma anywhere in his essay.

Caruth’s three central ideas are: firstly, trauma cannot be assimilated; secondly, it is always belated; and, thirdly, it can only find expression in a literal return. These ideas need careful examination if one wants to understand their appeal for later generations of trauma theorists. Caruth’s conceptualisation of trauma as an unrepresentable and literal event feeds into the rhetoric of the unspeakable and its epistemological concerns. In the course of her book, her affiliation to DeManian deconstructivism becomes ever more apparent: she uses the idea of trauma to suggest a general crisis of representation, which in her view necessitates a “rethinking reference in non-representational terms (or more accurately in terms of an interruption of a representational mode)”.<sup>109</sup> The Caruthian notion of trauma as an unspeakable event also introduces a particular idea of immediacy and authenticity, which is

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<sup>105</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 59.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>107</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Jenseits des Lustprinzips’, p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 59.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, Footnote 6, p. 115. Paul de Man’s thinking was situated in the context of US-American deconstructivism which centered around the so-called Yale School and featured theorists such as Geoffrey Hartman, Harold Bloom, and Shoshana Felman. In his works de Man was particularly concerned with the issue of linguistic referentiality. The general thrust of de Man’s theories can be described as follows: “In the gap between reference and representation at least some of what we intended to mean was always open to misinterpretation or error; literature in particular seemed to foreground the slippages inherent in the act of representation, and often came to be *about* this erring [italics in the original text]”, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, p. 6. It is quite obvious how this line of thinking has influenced Caruth’s conception of trauma.

(perhaps) what makes her model so attractive: the fact that the subject cannot lay claim to its own experience also guarantees that it cannot tamper with it. As Ruth Leys has pointed out, Caruth categorically denies the link between trauma and the power of the unconscious which would make the experience and expression of trauma susceptible to the subject's subconscious wishes and desires. Caruth's position can be situated within a broader framework that shaped the genesis of the trauma concept in the West, as demonstrated by Leys. According to Leys, our current understanding of trauma, as it evolved during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, is defined by a tension between "mimetic" and "anti-mimetic" conceptions that first arose in a discernible manner in Freud's writings. Simply put, this conflict involves the subject's contribution to the creation – and fabrication – of the traumatic experience. While proponents of the mimetic idea claim that the traumatic experience is ultimately a form of hypnotic imitation – and thus open to manipulation – anti-mimetic conceptions frame trauma as a purely external event that has nothing to do with the subject's psychological make-up (and interference!). The conflict between mimetic and anti-mimetic theories thus concerns issues of authenticity and manipulation.<sup>110</sup> The main point of Leys' argument is, however, that Freud's evolving work on trauma continuously oscillates between the two poles without a possibility of resolution. This also affects Caruth's own writing: although she pursues an anti-mimetic reading of Freud, the ambivalence inherent in Freud's notion of trauma comes back to haunt her own thinking. While the idea that trauma is the result of a violent external event which shatters the subject draws on the anti-mimetic line of argument, the idea of traumatic contagion – which I will turn to shortly – (re-)introduces the very notions of hypnotic suggestibility and imitation which Caruth tries so hard to suppress.

Contradicting Caruth, Leys shows that, for Freud, trauma is never unmediated; indeed, the notion is unthinkable without the subject's memories, fantasies, and desires. As Leys demonstrates, Caruth's reading of Freud as an advocate of the literal is based on a limited understanding of Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* which only highlights the issue of temporal belatedness. This ignores the causal dimension of

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<sup>110</sup> Roger Luckhurst furthermore points out that the question of manipulation or imitation also poses "medico-legal" problems – the question of whether or not traumatic experiences can be traced back to purely external sources is tied to issues of legal responsibility and compensation, see Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, pp. 24ff.

Freud's concept and the notion of retroactivity,<sup>111</sup> i.e. the idea that an event can gain a meaning it did not have when it happened. For Freud,

[...] trauma was constituted by a relationship between two events or experiences – a first event that was not necessarily traumatic because it came too early in the child's development to be understood and assimilated, and a second event that also was not inherently traumatic but that triggered a memory of the first event that only then was given traumatic meaning and hence repressed. For Freud, trauma was thus constituted by a dialectic between two events, neither of which was intrinsically traumatic, and a temporal delay or latency through which the past was available only by a deferred act of understanding and interpretation.<sup>112</sup>

The "original" event and its return can therefore not be detached from the ways in which they resonate with the psychic organisation of the subject. Freud's thoughts about the genesis of trauma are marked by an irresolvable tension between external cause and internal effect that, due to the paradoxical causality of *Nachträglichkeit*, makes it impossible to read him as a proponent of literal trauma.

### 2.2.2. *Transmission as Contagion*

The promise of authenticity and the idea of trauma as one of the last bastions of the "real" in a hypermediated world is a powerful one. One might even argue that such a conception of trauma arose as a response to the hypermediation of the Holocaust and other violent events. Yet, the exceptional popularity of Caruth's work cannot be separated from the ethical possibilities her concept entails. As I have tried to demonstrate, Caruth's ideas of belatedness and literalness are indebted to Freud's notion of the repetition-compulsion phenomenon as discussed in connection with the traumatic nightmare in 'Jenseits des Lustprinzips'.<sup>113</sup> Drawing on Freud's essay, Caruth defines trauma as that which cannot be represented (linguistically) but instead needs to be enacted, embodied, and *performed*. Caruth then fuses this "performative theory of traumatic repetition" with Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's ethics of

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<sup>111</sup> In their definition of Freud's term, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis also stress the importance of retroactivity: "In actuality Freud had pointed out from the beginning that the subject revises past events at a later date (*nachträglich*). And that it is this revision which invests them with significance and even with efficacy or pathogenic force". They also argue against a position that could be aligned with Caruth's understanding of the term: "As these texts show, the Freudian conception of *nachträglich* cannot be understood in terms of a variable time-lapse, due to some kind of storing procedure, between stimuli and response", see Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, transl. by Donald Nicholson-Smith; with an introduction by Daniel Lagache (London: W.W. Norton, 1988), p. 112; p.114.

<sup>112</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 20.

<sup>113</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Jenseits des Lustprinzips'.

witnessing,<sup>114</sup> which, according to Ruth Leys, leads her to the idea of *transmission as a process of infection or contagion*:

The transmission of the unrepresentable – a transmission imagined by Caruth simultaneously as an ineluctable process of infection and as involving an ethical obligation on the part of the listener – therefore implicates those of us who were not there by making us, as Dori Laub has put it, participants and coowners of the traumatic event [...].<sup>115</sup>

Leys' statement brings us back to the criticism conveyed by Mandel: how can notions of traumatic unassimilability and the passive process of contagion be conceptualised as ethical? Here, it is important to note that, for Felman, Laub and Caruth, the ethical response is not so much linked to an active (political) engagement but rather to the act of listening. Listening involves an openness to the enigmatic and abysmal address of the Other and a willingness to let oneself be overwhelmed and hurt by this fundamental alterity. Paradoxically, the destructive experience of trauma is thus turned into the site for an encounter and a non-essentialist type of community, which is rooted in "the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound".<sup>116</sup> This transformation is criticised by Mandel who objects to the ways in which "access to the ability to be traumatized [via contagion] becomes an index of ethical commitment".<sup>117</sup>

Mandel's critique points to various problems caused by the contagion paradigm in Caruth's trauma-ethics, which haunt Hirsch's work in particular: first of all, the process of contagion does not pass on representable knowledge but rather affect and the experience of trauma, both of which collide with a cognitive-reflexive approach towards the past. The concept of transmission as contagion thus fosters a problematic privileging of "feeling-structures", as Anne Fuchs has argued.<sup>118</sup> Caruth's stress on the unknowable leads her to frame the transmission of history as a perpetual acting out, as that which "remains ungrasped and endlessly returning".<sup>119</sup> This take on history as "interminable aporia" is pitted against approaches that stress the necessity of working through the past, alongside the importance of the process of mourning.<sup>120</sup> Drawing on

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<sup>114</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 252; see Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimonies. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>115</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 269.

<sup>116</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8.

<sup>117</sup> Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable*, p. 58.

<sup>118</sup> Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 49.

<sup>119</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 69.

<sup>120</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 46.

Freud's essay 'Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten',<sup>121</sup> Dominick LaCapra therefore contrasts (and assesses) these two positions:

In acting out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed. Mourning involves a different inflection of performativity: a relation to the past which involves recognizing its difference from the present – simultaneously remembering and taking leave of or actively forgetting it, thereby allowing for critical judgement and a reinvestment in life [...].<sup>122</sup>

While for Caruth it is inherently ethical to become infected by the trauma of others, LaCapra is critical of this performative hauntology, precisely because it denies the difference between the self and the Other, the past and the present.

As already mentioned, Caruth posits that trauma cannot ever be experienced directly by the subject, either in the moment of its occurrence or at a later point. It can only be (re-)enacted in a displaced fashion, by spreading contagiously through a community of witnesses and suffering. This also means that the victim and survivor is no longer in a position of "epistemological authority" when it comes to his or her own experience.<sup>123</sup> In fact s/he relies on later generations to articulate it: "[P]erhaps it is not possible for the witnessing of the trauma to occur within the individual at all, [...] it may only be in future generations that 'cure' or at least witnessing can take place".<sup>124</sup> Caruth's rather tentative statement points to an epistemological and, up to a point, ethical privileging of later generations, who not only have the ability to witness but also to (potentially) heal the traumatic affliction. Similar assumptions are made by Hirsch: "Perhaps it is *only* in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation [*italics in the original text*]"<sup>125</sup> Hirsch underlines even more strongly than Caruth that the process of working through depends on and is limited to later generations; for her, the traumatised subject can neither experience nor work through the event, but is

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<sup>121</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten', in: *Sigmund Freud. Gesammelte Werke, Vol. X: Werke aus den Jahren 1913-1917*, ed. by Anna Freud et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), pp. 126-136.

<sup>122</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 70. The first two chapters in LaCapra's book – 'Writing History, Writing Trauma' and 'Trauma, Absence, Loss' – are dedicated to the tensions and problems arising from these two contrasting positions.

<sup>123</sup> Jonathan Long, 'Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*', p. 149.

<sup>124</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, Footnote 21, p. 136.

<sup>125</sup> Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory', *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001), pp. 5-37, p. 12.

plagued by it. In this way, Hirsch endows later generations with greater agency, reflexivity, and ethical awareness in relation to the past.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, Caruth's contagion paradigm also prepares the ground for a problematic universalisation of the trauma and victimisation experience. As mentioned earlier, her idea of trauma as a site of encounter implies a non-essentialist definition of community: everyone, regardless of their personal background, can, through the act of listening, be(come) a witness and a part of the community of suffering. If this were to be the case, then trauma would lose its subjective anchorage as well as its historical specificity, thereby turning into a universally accessible experience – "individuals or groups who never experienced the trauma directly themselves are imagined as 'inheriting' the traumatic memories of those who died long ago".<sup>127</sup> As Leys, LaCapra and others have pointed out,<sup>128</sup> this amounts to an extremely problematic universalisation not only of trauma but also of victimhood. It is problematic because it blurs the lines between victims and perpetrators, while simultaneously making the Holocaust part of "a movement of identity formation which makes invidious and ideological use of traumatic series of events in foundational ways or as symbolic capital".<sup>129</sup> This consequence of Caruth's argument is highly ironic, given that her deconstructivist framework and anti-essentialist notion of (post-)traumatic community are meant to avoid the pitfalls of identity politics.

### 2.2.3. *The Logic of Transparent Immediacy*

Hirsch builds on Caruth's notions of authenticity, immediacy, and community, combining them with her personal interest in photography and the process of intergenerational transmission. Her indebtedness to Caruth leads to a certain disregard for the medial-material dimension of photography (and any other medium) in her work, which also concerns the cultural-symbolic contexts of its production. The contagious transference of traumatic affect and viscosity are the central components of her media theory, which once again links unspeakability to fantasies of authenticity. Allen Meek critically refers to such ideas as the "transmission model" of trauma,

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<sup>126</sup> The epistemological privileging of later generations is a central point of criticism for Jonathan Long, 'Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*'; a similar point is made by Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*.

<sup>127</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 284.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. and Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; similar points have also been made by Rick Crownshaw, 'The Limits of Transference'.

<sup>129</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 65.

“which understands visual media as able to directly convey a traumatic experience to a viewer, and thereby potentially to traumatize him/her”.<sup>130</sup> This link between trauma, transmission and the (photographic) medium ultimately rests on the common misconception that both traumatic experiences and visual media are somehow realms of the immediate and non-representational because they are not accessed verbally in the first place. As Ruth Leys points out, such literalisation of trauma is based on the alignment of the traumatic with the visual which is perceived as “inherently nonsymbolic”.<sup>131</sup> As such, the visual image and the experience of trauma are essentialised and naturalised as something that stands outside the dynamics of cultural configuration and symbolic representation.

Hirsch conceptualises photographs as transparent carriers of (traumatic) affect across time, space, and subjective boundaries. Referring to photographs as “window[s] to the past”,<sup>132</sup> she employs one of the prime metaphors of transparency. The supposed immediacy of photographic images establishes their connection to the realm of the affective (as another alleged residuum of immediacy), which qualifies them as a prime carrier of trauma. As so-called “points of memory” they “produce touching, piercing insights that traverse temporal, spatial and experiential divides”.<sup>133</sup> Through a process of transmission that is first and foremost conceptualised as a sensory experience (“touching, piercing insights”), photographs have the ability to contagiously transmit wounding traumatic experiences from one generation to another: “In repeatedly exposing themselves to the same pictures, postmemorial viewers can produce in themselves the effects of traumatic repetition that plague the victims of trauma, even as they attempt to mobilize the protective power of the homoeopathic shield”.<sup>134</sup> While it is certainly true that atrocity photographs can move, shock and deeply affect viewers, it is debatable whether they have the capacity to traumatise the recipient. The implied universalism of Hirsch’s claim is also problematic: she simply supposes that atrocity pictures automatically and universally “traumatise” their viewers, completely ignoring that such a reaction is anything but automatic. Rather, the response to atrocity pictures can be regarded as the result of a complex interaction between cultural framing, or

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<sup>130</sup> Allen Meek, *Trauma and Media. Theories, Histories, and Images* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2010), p. 195.

<sup>131</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma*, p. 249.

<sup>132</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 38.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

even conditioning, and psychological identification. The notion of a visually (and vicariously) acquired trauma thus reproduces a problematic universalisation of trauma and victimhood that already characterised Caruth's writing.

The idea of "touching, piercing insights" produced by photographs reveals another crux of Hirsch's argument: while the adjectives "touching" and "piercing" clearly refer to the realm of the sensory, the bodily, and the visceral, the noun "insight" refers to the sphere of the cognitive. This tension between emotional and cognitive modes of knowing permeates Hirsch's elaborations on postmemory from the beginning.<sup>135</sup> Although she repeatedly stresses the link between postmemory and reflexivity, her writing is imbued with notions of the affective, the visceral and the bodily which seem to constitute privileged modes of approaching historical documents and events. Photographs are not appreciated for their evidentiary or informative value but primarily as carriers of emotion and as projection screens for personal desires and fantasies. Hirsch claims that "the index of postmemory (as opposed to memory) is the performative index, shaped more and more by affect, need, and desire as time and distance attenuate the links to authenticity and 'truth'".<sup>136</sup> In other words, all we can gather from photographs is either the affective immediacy of vicarious traumatisation or insights into our own fantasies and desires. In this reading, photographs do not (and are not meant to) aid intellectual reflection or critical engagement with the past.

The idea of a "performative index" of photography points back to Caruth who presents a similar media theory, this time applied to the realm of literature. The vehicle for Caruth's idea of transmission as contagion is literary language, which becomes a carrier medium via a "shift from language as representation to language as performance".<sup>137</sup> The same shift can be detected in Hirsch's idea of the photographic medium, which is also conceptualised as a (literal) repetition: "And thus, they [Holocaust photographs] *no longer represent* Nazi genocide but, in their very *repetition*, they provoke the traumatic effect that this history has had on all who grew up under its shadow [emphases are mine]".<sup>138</sup>

Both Caruth and Hirsch thus turn language and visual media into transparent

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<sup>135</sup> Arguably, this recurring tension in Hirsch might be explained with reference to the mimetic/ anti-mimetic dichotomy. Hirsch's notion of postmemory embraces a mimetic notion of trauma, implying an incorporative, appropriative type of identification, alongside the anti-mimetic impulse to make transgenerational trauma appear external and intrusive.

<sup>136</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 48.

<sup>137</sup> Rick Crownshaw, 'The Limits of Transference', p. 73.

<sup>138</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 120.

carriers of trauma without adequately reflecting the issue of mediality. The Caruthian perception of literary texts as “unmediated reflections of traumatic memory” has been incredibly influential in recent research on so-called trauma fiction.<sup>139</sup> This has resulted in a one-dimensional equation of the structure of traumatic experiences and their literary depictions: “An experience that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge, so the logic goes, will best be represented by a failure of narrative. Hence, what is called for is the disruption of conventional modes of representation, such as can be found in modernist art”.<sup>140</sup> Apart from limiting trauma literature to a rather small, high-brow and, as Stef Craps and others have noted, Eurocentric canon,<sup>141</sup> this simplistic concept of mimesis also denies the agency of the literary text (and media more generally) in shaping our understanding of particular instances and the broader concept of trauma. Instead of reading literary texts (or photographs) as unmediated expressions of trauma, it therefore seems more productive to focus on the tropes, narratives, genre conventions, intertexts and iconographies through which trauma is (re-)framed, (re-)constructed and (re-)produced. From the vantage point of the age of remediation, media like photography and literature are not transparent and negligible containers of literal trauma, but rather essential incubators, transformers, and enablers of the construction and transmission of historical traumas. This does not mean that trauma-centred texts (or images) cannot elicit affect and emotion. However, these emotions are not caused by contagious effects but by specific rhetorical, narrative, and visual framing strategies. Bolter’s and Grusin’s concept of remediation also helps shed light on the fantasy of medial transparency. According to Bolter and Grusin, the quest for ever greater immediacy, authenticity, and transparency, as well as the resulting attempt to efface the medium, has a genealogy that dates back to the invention of the linear perspective:

A painting by the seventeenth-century artist Pieter Seanredam, a photograph by Edward Weston, and a computer system for virtual reality are different in many important ways, but they are all attempts to achieve immediacy by ignoring or denying the presence of

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<sup>139</sup> Rick Crownshaw, ‘The Limits of Transference’, p. 88.

<sup>140</sup> Stef Craps, ‘Beyond Eurocentrism’, p. 50. One example of this is Robert Eaglestone’s book on *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*, in which the author defines certain characteristics of so-called “trauma fiction” which are all centered on fragmentariness, openness and anti-identificatory textual strategies, see Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>141</sup> Stef Craps, ‘Beyond Eurocentrism’; for a more in-depth critique of the Eurocentric bias that shapes trauma theory as a whole see also Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*.

the medium and the act of mediation.<sup>142</sup>

Bolter and Grusin argue that this “logic of transparent immediacy” is one of the driving forces behind all processes of remediation.<sup>143</sup> Each new medium tends to promote and distinguish itself by offering a more immediate and authentic experience of the ‘real’, thus diverting attention from its very nature as an intermediary. As Bolter and Grusin emphasise, the quest for immediacy is inevitably bound up in a dialectical operation, manifesting itself in “the double logic of remediation”,<sup>144</sup> which inevitably ties the desire for transparency to a heightened dependence on media and, consequently, an increased awareness of the act of mediation. With these ideas in mind, it is possible to locate the Caruthian version of trauma within the genealogy of remediation, where it figures as yet another manifestation of the “desire to get beyond mediation” which,<sup>145</sup> in the eyes of Bolter and Grusin, drives the engagement with media (be it in art or in theory) in the West. More specifically, the desire for traumatic immediacy in Caruth’s and Hirsch’s thinking might be best understood as a reaction to the re- and hypermediation of the Holocaust and other traumas since the 1970s, fuelled by TV-series such as *Holocaust* or the broader televisation of atrocity in the wake of the Vietnam War.

#### 2.2.4. *Trauma between Psychological Affliction and Cultural Adoption*

The Caruthian melange of literalness and immediacy lives on in Hirsch’s conceptualisation of the photographic image as a transparent carrier of affect, imbued with universally infectious powers that unfold regardless of subjective or historical positionality. The contagion paradigm also informs Hirsch’s model of transgenerational transmission which, in her writings, is steeped in images of invasion, evacuation, affliction, and contamination:

To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension.<sup>146</sup>

Praising the artist Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger, Hirsch remarks that she “allows all

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<sup>142</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 11.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 5.

these images to invade, inhabit, and haunt her”.<sup>147</sup> The influence of Caruth is blatantly obvious in these statements: transmission is imagined as a contagious, overpowering, and exclusively psychological process, in which the subject is implanted with a ‘knowledge’ that remains forever inaccessible. The only possible response requires a paralytic openness to this aporetic, incommensurable knowledge, which underpins an ethics of “listening to another’s wound”.<sup>148</sup> However, this concept of transmission is complicated when considering that Hirsch actually works with *two* notions of transgenerational transfer. The one mentioned above involves the transgenerational transmission of trauma in survivor families and is closely tied to the notion of *affliction*. Subsequent generations are regarded as passive receivers of their ancestors’ traumas which befall them through “nonverbal and precognitive acts of transfer”.<sup>149</sup> The second notion refers to the cultural transmission of trauma and is linked to the concept of *adoption*. This means that later generations actively identify with a trauma that is not connected to their own experience or familial-biological background. They gain from adoption a heightened sense of historical responsibility. Hirsch hence uses the same term “postmemory” for two completely different phenomena: while the first designates a psychological process involving survivor families and their offspring, the other can be described as a cultural (and maybe ethical) practice. She tries to solve this problem by differentiating between “familial” (i.e. biological) and “affiliative” (i.e. cultural) postmemory:

To delineate the border between these respective structures of transmission – between what I would like to refer to as *familial* and as “*affiliative*” postmemory – we would have to account for the difference between an intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family and the intra-generational horizontal identification that makes that child’s position more broadly available to other contemporaries. Affiliative postmemory would thus be the result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation combined with structures of mediation that would be broadly appropriable, available, and indeed, compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission [italics in the original text].<sup>150</sup>

While this quotation appears to provide some clarification, Hirsch, in the course of her writing, repeatedly conflates “affiliative” postmemory with the notion of affliction by troping it in terms of contagion, evacuation, and infestation. This tendency becomes

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>148</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>150</sup> Marianne Hirsch, ‘The Generation of Postmemory’, pp. 114f.

all too evident in her analysis of American-Jewish photo-artist Lorie Novak, herself not a descendant of Holocaust survivors. Although Hirsch reads her work as “a cultural act of identification and affiliation”,<sup>151</sup> and thus as an example of “affiliative” postmemory, her description of Novak’s photographs uses words such as “crowded out”, “haunts” and “bleeds into”,<sup>152</sup> all of which belong to the vocabulary of “familial” postmemory she has established earlier on. Hirsch claims that Novak “represents herself as branded by the harrowing memory of the Nazi genocide”.<sup>153</sup> While it is certainly possible for audiences not directly and biologically linked to the victims of the Holocaust to feel emotionally touched and overwhelmed by their suffering, the vocabulary of trauma-induced affliction and scarring applied here makes little sense for those with no familial-biological connection to the events (unless we are dealing with a case of pathological over-identification).<sup>154</sup> Hirsch thus constantly psychologises and biologises a process which, in the case of Novak, is first and foremost a cultural one, partly because, in the wake of Caruth, such emotional over-identification can be passed off as an ethical practice. And so it is that the very concept of postmemory is inherently biologising and psychologising. It might therefore be helpful to limit the use of the term postmemory to the context of the intrafamilial transmission of trauma, while using a different set of terms when dealing with trauma in the realm of cultural representation. The task of the next sub-section will therefore consist in formulating such a “cultural” approach to trauma, while also discussing the possibility of an (aesthetic and ethical) evaluation of Holocaust representation that embraces the issues of re- and hypermediation instead of condemning them.

### 2.3. Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma

The first two parts of this chapter introduced the unspeakability paradigm and the ways in which it has informed Caruth’s and Hirsch’s respective notions of trauma and transgenerational transmission. The post-structuralist approach gives rise to a number

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<sup>151</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 159.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 158f.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>154</sup> One could argue that, as a Jewish artist, Novak is somehow scarred by the fate of the Jewish community. I, however, find such a universalisation of trauma and victimhood problematic. I am not denying that Lorie Novak, as a present-day Jew, may still be deeply affected by the Holocaust and its after-effects, but I object to the use of the vocabulary of (transgenerational) traumatisation in this context.

of methodological problems in our era of re- and hypermediation. The idea that Holocaust trauma is unspeakable results in fantasies of authenticity, unmediated witnessing, and transmission through contagion. In Hirsch's work, this is particularly prominent in her handling of the photographic medium: she ignores its mediality, claiming that it engenders unmediated traumatic affect in the postmemorial viewer. Similarly, Caruth's understanding of literary language as a transparent carrier of trauma has contributed to the formation of a Eurocentric canon of trauma literature and a dismissal of the cultural agency of artistic representations. Finally, I emphasised the psychologising and biologising qualities of Hirsch's conception of transgenerational transmission. These are particularly problematic in an age in which, with the exception of the few remaining survivors and their families, the Holocaust is not so much an experiential and psychological issue as a question of cultural memory and politics.

It therefore seems necessary to give the debate a cultural turn, by regarding the dynamics of transmission, mediatisation, and mediality not as mutually exclusive, but as interdependent. What is particularly needed is an approach that tackles the interplay between trauma and media(tisation), as this is a prominent theme in contemporary German- and Austrian-Jewish literature which is written by the so-called "generation after". Drawing on Astrid Erll's concept of "Literatur als Medium der Gedächtnisbildung und der Gedächtnisreflexion",<sup>155</sup> I will demonstrate how these novels reflect on *and* shape the current discourse about trauma, transgenerational transmission, authenticity and remediation. While addressing the issues of trauma, transmission, and mediation from a theoretical perspective, I will also formulate a specific set of questions for the novels under consideration, while identifying common themes. This will enable me to complement and perhaps also challenge the prevalent and one-sided focus on traumatic unrepresentability, psychology and "familial" postmemory in much of the current research. Inspired by James E. Young, my project is thus invested in finding the Holocaust in metaphor:

Rather than looking for the Holocaust outside of metaphor, therefore, I would suggest that we find it in metaphor, in the countless ways it has been figured, colored, distorted, and ultimately cast as a figure for other events – all for the ways that each figure brings

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<sup>155</sup> Astrid Erll, 'Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses', in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven* (Berlin and New York, NY: de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 249-276, p. 265.

further understanding to both the events and to ourselves in light of events.<sup>156</sup>

### 2.3.1. *Cultural Trauma as “Travelling Trauma”*

Jeffrey Alexander’s work on trauma provides a productive springboard for the idea of cultural trauma.<sup>157</sup> Alexander approaches the concept of trauma from a sociological and extremely constructivist angle, claiming that, on a collective level, there are no events that are naturally or inherently traumatic. Instead, he argues, traumas are fundamentally and solely social constructs: “First and foremost, I maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution”.<sup>158</sup> He goes on to write that “[t]raumatic status is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity”.<sup>159</sup> To a certain extent, Alexander’s position marks the extreme opposite of Caruth’s argument: while for Caruth, trauma stands outside of the realm of symbolic representation, Alexander claims that trauma can only ever be grasped on a socio-cultural level, implying that there are no objective qualities to any traumatic event. Alexander’s assumption of a total constructedness might appear as a seductive antidote to Caruth’s notion of a total literalness. However, his approach is no less problematic – if only because it risks promoting relativism: if there really is nothing that sets traumatic events apart from other historical occurrences, why does Alexander employ the term “trauma” at all, especially since it tends to psychologise cultural, historical, and socio-political processes? What makes these “traumatic” events and their interpretation different from other historical occurrences if it is not some kind of intrinsic quality? The question arises whether, hypothetically speaking, any event could be conceptualised and constructed as “traumatic”. Considering his rather bold hypothesis, it is surprising that Alexander’s understanding of “traumatic” events turns out to be quite conventional – he lists events such as the Holocaust, the Nanking Massacre, and the Indian Partition. Furthermore, although he strongly distinguishes himself from Caruth and what he calls

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<sup>156</sup> James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust. Narrative and the Consequence of Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 89.

<sup>157</sup> See Jeffrey Alexander et al. (eds.), *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*; see also Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma*.

<sup>158</sup> Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma*, p. 13.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

“psychoanalytic versions” of trauma,<sup>160</sup> he still operates with a similar, event-based notion of trauma, centred on abruptness and a “sense of shock and fear”.<sup>161</sup> This particular understanding of trauma has come under attack in recent years, as it does not capture traumatic phenomena that result from other more sustained forms of violence (such as racism, sexualised violence, capitalist exploitation or systematic abuse), or occur without direct human intervention (such as natural disasters).<sup>162</sup> Finally and most importantly, I find the adjective “cultural” in Alexander’s concept rather misleading. He is not really interested in the dynamics that shape cultural mediations of trauma – as they are provided by works of art, the media, or politics – but rather in the ways in which trauma, as an initially individualised psychological phenomenon, is collectivised. Alexander’s interest lies squarely in “collective” trauma, whereas a theory of “cultural” trauma, such as the one I am interested in, takes into account the ways in which trauma travels through and is shaped by various media.<sup>163</sup> While Alexander’s concept is therefore helpful to shift the focus away from trauma as a purely psychological phenomenon, it reaches a limit where the relationship between trauma, media and hyper- or remediation is concerned.

A bridge between Alexander’s approach and the questions driving my work is provided by what Anne Fuchs, in her seminal study on the Dresden bombing, describes as “impact” events and narratives.<sup>164</sup> These events – which need not be but often are traumatic – are marked by a particular dynamic which Fuchs describes as follows:

Impact narratives make visible what one might call ‘the excess of the Real’ at the level of historical occurrence. By referencing the original impact event as an excessive rupture, they summon new re-imaginings and representations that, however, always communicate their own inadequacy. This ineluctable dialectic between the overabundance of images and their simultaneous inadequacy is thus the driving engine, propelling the generation of further impact narratives.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>162</sup> The need to adapt trauma theory to other, non-punctual forms of violence is stressed by Michael Rothberg, ‘Preface. Beyond Tancred and Clorinda’ and by Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, pp. 20–37.

<sup>163</sup> The distinction between “collective” and “cultural” trauma suggested here functions in analogy to the theory of “collective” and “cultural” memory, as it was first introduced by Jan Assmann. Whereas collective memory, broadly speaking, encompasses the ways in which memories are socially mediated and transferred within groups, “cultural” memory looks at their transmission and institutionalisation in various media and across large temporal distances, see Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 7th ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2013).

<sup>164</sup> Anne Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing. Pathways of Memory, 1945 to the Present* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>165</sup> Anne Fuchs, *After the Dresden Bombing*, pp. 12f.

I find the notion of the “impact event” or narrative useful for two reasons. Firstly, it helps to tackle the problem brought up by my summary of Alexander, i.e. the question of what sets traumatic events apart from other historical occurrences. With reference to Fuchs, one can say that these events are marked by a certain “historical excess” that provokes continuous representations and remediations which, however, never manage to truly capture the event – this then initiates a new cycle of representation and so on. Secondly, and this is crucial, the concept of “impact narratives” stresses the inextricable connection between powerful events and their medial representations in a way that Alexander’s concept does not. Media and the dynamics of remediation are *integral* to the production of “impact events”, as they make the original experience historically and geographically mobile as well as accessible to those who were not directly involved, thus creating the conditions for a possible lasting impact. It is here that I would like to introduce a third important concept, which not only perceives of trauma as a culturally (re-)mediated and media-dependent phenomenon, but also enables an enquiry into the politics of its representation and circulation, thus bringing together many of the issues raised in this chapter. In an article entitled ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11: Travelling Memory and the Trauma Economy’,<sup>166</sup> Terri Tomsy introduces the term “travelling trauma”.<sup>167</sup> Coined in analogy to Astrid Erll’s influential concept of “travelling memory”,<sup>168</sup> it is used by Tomsy to capture the darker aspects of a globalised Holocaust memory. She asserts that the transformation of the Holocaust into a mobile and border-crossing memory emblem cannot be separated from the establishment and dynamics of a larger “trauma economy”,<sup>169</sup> in which some experiences of trauma are valued highly, while others “fail to evoke recognition and subsequently, compassion and aid”.<sup>170</sup> Tomsy’s approach is helpful as it zooms in on the “economic, cultural, discursive and political structures” in which traumas are represented and in which they travel,<sup>171</sup> i.e. their material, medial and mediated dimension. Impact events and narratives are by nature a form of “travelling” memory (and, in some instances, trauma); while the notion of the impact event therefore allows us to foreground media(tisa)tion, the idea of “travelling trauma” enables us to capture

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<sup>166</sup> Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11’.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50ff.

<sup>168</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’.

<sup>169</sup> Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11’, p. 49.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

the routes and rules which shape the mobility of these mediatisations. Tomsky's concept can be extended beyond the scope of her research: in the context of Holocaust discourse, "travelling trauma" would then designate an approach which focuses not so much on the problem of trauma's (un-)representability – for its (over-)representation is simply a given in a global media culture – as on the *aesthetics, dynamics, and politics* of its representation. In the context of the Holocaust, it brings into focus the event's quality as a culturally mediated impact event and "floating" or,<sup>172</sup> as Mandel puts it, "master signifier",<sup>173</sup> which travels transgenerationally, transmedially and/or transnationally. As such, the concept of "travelling trauma" complicates the notions of sacralisation, unspeakability and incompatibility, because it understands the Holocaust as fundamentally implicated in representational and discursive networks and puts these entanglements at the centre.

This stance differs substantially from Caruth's and Hirsch's position, although they too are concerned with issues of mediation and travel. However, their notion of travel involves contagious immediacy and thus a disregard for the material, cultural and political conditions of trauma's mobility. This is also reflected in their conceptualisation of media as transparent carriers of a pristine and unalterable meaning. The idea of "travelling trauma" instead stresses that, during its travels, the meaning of the event is not simply passed on from one medium to the next, but actually shaped and (re-)created via these media(tisa)tions. This is due to the frames, tropes, and narratives that medial depictions at the same time apply and rely on, which, in turn, depend on the ways in which they are received by their audiences.

In the following section I will demonstrate how the notion of "travelling trauma" connects to a number of issues that are negotiated in the texts under consideration. These are tied to transmedial, transgenerational and transnational forms of travel and the ways in which they intersect. I will moreover introduce a range of key concepts and terms which will guide my readings of the primary literature.

### *Transgenerational Travel: Adoption, Affiliation, Appropriation*

The forms of transgenerational travel that I am interested in do not involve the Holocaust as part of a fragmented family history, as is usually the case in postmemory-related research. The texts under discussion here focus on the transmission of this

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<sup>172</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, p. 99.

<sup>173</sup> Naomi Mandel, *Against the Unspeakable*, p. 35.

history via routes that, in some way or other, point beyond the biological family and rely heavily on media and mediatisation. When looking at Holocaust memory as *adopted* rather than *inherited*, two issues spring to mind: strategies of affiliation on the one hand and the problem of appropriation on the other. These are, in many respects, two sides of the same coin, for the same processes that enable Holocaust memories to travel and be embraced transgenerationally – thus potentially securing their future – also open up the possibility of unregulated circulation and appropriation.

As mentioned above, Marianne Hirsch introduces the term “affiliative” postmemory to capture culturally mediated forms of Holocaust commemoration that involve those who do not have a familial connection to the events. The issue of affiliation thus raises questions about the ways in which those not personally related to a history connect to it and why. The realms of popular culture and institutionalised Holocaust remembrance have seen a surge in affiliative strategies of remembrance, which are, of course, a logical consequence of the dying out of the survivor generation. They often draw on new media, for example in the case of the very recent World Jewish Congress Campaign “#WeRemember”,<sup>174</sup> which urges people from all over the world to embrace memories of the Holocaust via a hashtag. The campaign attempts to engage new, and specifically younger, audiences and generations. *Yad Vashem* went a step further on the occasion of the 2017 Holocaust Memorial Day by creating a Facebook page which allowed users to randomly link up to and “remember” a Holocaust victim from its records.<sup>175</sup> A future without survivors calls for new ways of transmitting the memory of the Holocaust to increasingly distanced generations. At the same time, these new pathways of remembrance also raise some uncomfortable questions, not least of all what exactly is supposed to be passed on in the process – historical knowledge of the events or some form of (simulated) emotional and experiential connection? *Yad Vashem*’s campaign and the afore-mentioned survivor holograms seem to point to the latter, but, as Amy Hungerford has noted, such emotional-experiential approaches are not unproblematic:

Memory (the knowledge of what we have experienced) is privileged over learning; in much public discourse on the subject of the Holocaust, for example, it has become more important to ‘remember’ the Holocaust than simply to learn about it. And the emerging discipline we are calling Holocaust Studies has become beholden to statements of personal connection, to the need to explain one’s connection to one’s subject in a way

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<sup>174</sup> See <<http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/weremember>> [accessed: 25 January 2017].

<sup>175</sup> See <<https://www.facebook.com/yadvashem/app/110931902322534>> [accessed: 25 January 2017].

that is not required by other kinds of scholarly work.<sup>176</sup>

Moreover, it is worth investigating why the act of remembering is so ethically charged in Holocaust discourse. Why is it more urgent to remember the Holocaust than any other historical event and why should everyone, even those with no personal connection to the event, remember it? Standard responses usually point to ongoing instances of Holocaust denial and of anti-Semitism, alongside the vague suggestion that remembrance ensures that such atrocities will “never again” repeat themselves. However, it is debatable whether more remembrance will really help solve these issues or whether, as some theorists in the field of transnational Holocaust memory have argued, the omnipresence of Holocaust memories and analogies is (ethically) unproductive.<sup>177</sup> Remembering alone does not ensure an ethical engagement with the past, as the next sub-chapter will demonstrate.

The texts considered in this study all deal with the various and intersecting aspects of “travelling trauma”. Maxim Biller’s novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* considers the transgenerational travel of Holocaust memory, alongside issues of post-Holocaust Jewish identity which are negotiated in relation to the works of Bruno Schulz. Eva Menasse’s *Quasikristalle* and Benjamin Stein’s *Die Leinwand* also interrogate the transgenerational mobility of the Holocaust signifier, focusing on the ways in which this mobility relates to the processes of hyper- and remediation. Finally, Vladimir Vertlib’s *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* addresses the transnational migration of traumatic memories, alongside the problems that arise when these memories are meant to be translated from one culture into another.

My reading of Eva Menasse’s novel *Quasikristalle* seeks to complicate the above-mentioned notion of “affiliative” postmemory, by showing that affiliative conceptualisations of memory, while pointing beyond the biological family, still operate within the realm of what Marianne Hirsch herself calls the “idiom of family”.<sup>178</sup> They might thus destabilise the biological family as a carrier of memories, but preserve, and indeed extend, the power of the family as a symbolic resource in memory discourse. Menasse’s text also helps to problematise a claim that is often made in connection with affiliative forms of Holocaust commemoration, as they underpin,

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<sup>176</sup> Amy Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts*, p. 155.

<sup>177</sup> This is for example the stance adopted by Dirk Moses, see Dirk Moses, ‘Genocide and the Terror of History’ and Dirk Moses, ‘Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Other Genocides?’.

<sup>178</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 39.

for example, Alison Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory",<sup>179</sup> or Michael Rothberg's idea of "multidirectional memory".<sup>180</sup> They both posit that there is an added ethical value attached to these forms of memory, because they give rise to non-essentialist forms of community. In contrast to other forms of instrumentalizable and inherently nationalistic collective memory, "prosthetic" memories allegedly function independently from any pre-existing bonds: "As a result, these technologies [Landsberg is referring to the mass media here] can structure 'imagined communities' that are not necessarily geographically or nationally bounded and that do not presume any kind of affinity among community members".<sup>181</sup> However, Menasse's text shows that the non-familial bonds explored in *Quasikristalle* rest either on the firm basis of ethnicity (as a Jew her protagonist relates to other Jewish characters) or a shared legacy of trauma (as the daughter of a Holocaust survivor she relates to other victims of trauma). What Landsberg and others thus present as the result of the affiliative process – identification – is thus actually its starting point and basis.

The issue of identity politics therefore still plays a major role in an age of remediated Holocaust memory. This is not surprising, when considering that the dying out of the survivor generation creates an identarian vacuum: younger generations of Jews may find it increasingly difficult to construct their Jewish identities based on the experience of trauma and thus need to find new ways of approaching the topic. At the same time, the death of the survivors marks a transition from their embodied experiences and memories towards a culture of disembodied, highly mobile "prosthetic" memories which can be easily appropriated, for example for the construction of victim identities. Both of these problems – the question of post-Holocaust Jewish identity and the issue of appropriation – are negotiated, albeit in very different ways, in the texts by Maxim Biller and Benjamin Stein. Maxim Biller's novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* remediates and appropriates a range of traditions from Eastern European (Jewish) culture, such as "ghetto writing", the sadomasochistic constellation and Eastern European heritages of surrealism, to create a Jewish identity that is no longer bound up with German writing traditions and what I call 'perpetrator poetics'. However, this very move points to the fact that Biller's writing is still deeply

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<sup>179</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.

<sup>180</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

<sup>181</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 8.

caught up in the dynamics of what Dan Diner has called the “negative Symbiose”,<sup>182</sup> i.e. the inability to conceive German-Jewish relations without recourse to the Holocaust and the victim-perpetrator binary. Biller’s novella appropriates the works of the Galician-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz, himself a victim of the Holocaust, to illustrate this negative take on German-Jewish relations.

The issues taken up in Biller’s work are different from those that shape Benjamin Stein’s novel *Die Leinwand*, which offers a fictionalisation of the infamous Wilkomirski affair. The text emphasises the hypermediation of Holocaust memory in the age of remediation and the boundless mobility this engenders: once personal memories are externalised with the help of the media, they become transportable and, particularly after the death of the survivor generation, appropriable. Stein’s novel shifts the focus away from the issue of unspeakability to the problems generated by unregulated, mass-mediated circulation and appropriation. The issue of *representational appropriateness* so intimately connected to the unspeakability paradigm is hence superseded by *questions of ownership* in Stein’s novel: who can lay claim to the memory of the Holocaust after the death of the survivor generation? And who can guarantee the rights of ownership? Stein’s novel highlights that the transgenerational travel of trauma in the age of remediation is not so much linked to the psychology of trauma, but to what Oren Baruch Stier calls “memorial propriety”, i.e. issues that concern “the symbolic ownership of Holocaust property”.<sup>183</sup>

#### *Transmedial Travel: Authenticity and Remediation – Empathy and Oversaturation*

Holocaust representation as remediation, i.e. the notion of the Holocaust as a heavily mediatised, “travelling” or “floating” signifier, does not only affect the transgenerational transfer of memories, it also remaps the territory of unrepresentability. Contemporary discourse seems to be less fixated on the questions of representational accuracy or appropriateness, but rather struggles with the problem of representational oversaturation, caused by the speed and boundlessness of trauma’s travels. One might therefore assume that the notion of authenticity – an integral component of the unspeakability discourse – becomes somewhat irrelevant in an age

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<sup>182</sup> Dan Diner, ‘Negative Symbiose. Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz’, in: Dan Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987), pp. 185-197.

<sup>183</sup> Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory. Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), p. 120.

of remediation. However, the problem is more complicated: as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, certain implementations of the unspeakability paradigm tend to conceptualise the relationship between (traumatic) events and their mediatisation or remediation in terms of an ineluctable distortion or manipulation of the event and a loss of authenticity. In contrast to this, and quite paradoxically, theorists such as Caruth use the notion of traumatic unspeakability to gain or, at least, secure spaces of authenticity and immediacy in a postmodern, hypermediated world.

This issue of authenticity also affects the concept of remediation. Bolter and Grusin argue that remediation is a complex process which cannot be reduced to a simple dichotomy between immediacy, authenticity, unmediatedness on the one hand, and hypermediacy, artificiality and mediatisation on the other. Authenticity is at the very heart of what they call “the double logic of remediation”. The constant replacement and evolution of media technologies has one overriding aim: “experience without mediation”.<sup>184</sup> This ultimately means that media are expected to transmit not a representation of the thing but the thing itself, for which they need to be as transparent as possible, virtually non-existent: “In all these cases, the logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the things presented [...]”.<sup>185</sup> However, Bolter and Grusin illustrate that this passion for immediacy actually leads to the reverse effect. For in order to achieve ever greater immediacy, a growing number of increasingly refined and interactive media technologies is necessary, a phenomenon that Bolter and Grusin refer to as “hypermediacy”,<sup>186</sup> which run the risk of pointing to their own mediality, thus revealing their status as manufacturers of immediacy. Bolter and Grusin conceptualise authenticity and remediation not as opposites, but as parts of a “double logic” or dialectics, pointing to the fact that, in our remediated age, authenticity can actually and paradoxically be a media effect.<sup>187</sup> As Allen Meek, Ann Kaplan and Slavoj Žižek have

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<sup>184</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, pp. 22f.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>187</sup> It should be noted here that the concept of authenticity has always been inextricably and inconveniently linked to issues of mediation and mediatisation. Julia Straub points to this by quoting Jonathan Culler: “The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as such it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself, and hence lacks the authenticity of what is truly unspoiled, untouched by mediating cultural codes (Jonathan Culler, *FRAMING THE SIGN*)”, see Julia Straub, ‘Introduction. The Paradoxes of Authenticity’, in: Julia Straub (ed.), *Paradoxes of Authenticity. Studies on a Critical Concept* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), pp. 9-29, p. 9.

shown in relation to 9/11 or Abu Ghraib,<sup>188</sup> the emotional impact of these events was essentially generated and maintained through repetition in and across different media formats. It was only through the cycle of remediation that these events achieved iconicity and thereby the familiarity necessary for fostering the illusion of immediacy as well as affect and identification. In a culture of hypermediation, the ‘reality’ of events increasingly depends on the fact they meet media-generated expectations and fantasies, as Žižek has demonstrated.<sup>189</sup>

How then does the notion of manufactured authenticity change the perspective? A more dialectical approach to the question of authenticity and mediatisation in Holocaust discourse shifts the focus away from the normative approach which posits that media depictions always distort and manipulate the event. Instead, one should look at the question of how the adherence to a certain iconography in Holocaust literature or film paradoxically produces authenticating and emotional effects. This is exactly the issue at stake in Stein’s novel which remediates the Wilkomirski affair. I introduce the notion of the “authenticity effect” to suggest a shift away from the dominant perspective: instead of partaking in the morally charged discussion about whether or not Wilkomirski was a fraud, my analysis considers how he managed to fake a Holocaust memoir so convincingly and successfully. What tropes, conventions and templates did he play on to achieve credibility? And why were people so willing to go along with his act? The notion of remediated authenticity – that is, the idea that authenticity is a media effect and can be manufactured – also pervades Benjamin Stein’s *Die Leinwand* which, as a result, dissociates itself radically from the concept of the authentic Holocaust witness, as Silke Horstkotte has argued.<sup>190</sup> However, while authenticity can no longer be generated via a trauma-based victim identity in Stein’s novel, this does not mean that his protagonists abandon it altogether. My analysis therefore investigates both the dismantling and the affirmation of notions of authenticity in post-Holocaust discourse, as they are negotiated in Stein’s text.

The proliferation of Holocaust representations not only complicates the very idea of authenticity, it also contributes to a crisis of empathy. In a recent article entitled

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<sup>188</sup> Allen Meek, *Trauma and Media*; Ann E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture. The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick et al.: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2002).

<sup>189</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*.

<sup>190</sup> Silke Horstkotte, “‘Ich bin, woran ich mich erinnere’”. Benjamin Steins *Die Leinwand* und der Fall Wilkomirski’, in: Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer (eds.), *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, pp. 115-132.

‘Leichenberge, bäm!’ the German-Jewish journalist and writer Mirna Funk takes issue with the afore-mentioned *Yolocaust*-project, designed by Israeli satirist Shahak Shapira.<sup>191</sup> On a website entitled *yolocaust.de* (a play on words with “YOLO” = “You only live once”, a contemporary reformulation of the old “Carpe Diem”), Shapira collected images from social media accounts, where people featured in all sorts of ‘inappropriate’ activities (posing for selfies, performing acrobatics, jumping around) during a visit to Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial. Movement by the cursor revealed a second photo-shopped image that transplanted the same visitors in the same poses inside a concentration camp. Shapira’s project was meant to expose and shame the lack of respect and empathy among the general public. While Funk agrees that Shapira’s project tackles a crisis in contemporary memorial culture, she does not condone his methods, as guilt and shame are in her view no basis for positive change. The underlying issue concerns the effectiveness of hypermediation and pedagogy:

Und ich denke: Aber haben wir denn nicht alle diese Leichenberge längst gesehen? 70 Jahre Leichenberge, und die Leute machen trotzdem Selfies am Mahnmal. 70 Jahre KZ-Besuche, und Björn Höcke nennt das Mahnmal ‘Denkmal der Schande’.<sup>192</sup> 70 Jahre abrasierte Haare, Goldzähne und Schuhe, und man beschimpft sich auf dem Schulhof mit ‘Ey, du Jude!’.<sup>193</sup>

The questions implied in this paragraph are pressing ones: why does the proliferation of images and knowledge about the Nazi death camp machinery not create a surplus of empathy? How can factual knowledge of the event be translated into empathetic and ethical engagement? And why do we put such a premium on emotional(ised) access to the past? Are shock and emotion really the best methods for counteracting the numbness many people seem to experience when confronted with the Holocaust? With recourse to the work of Susan Sontag, one could argue that these images have lost their affective power precisely because of their proliferation. In her seminal work on atrocity photographs and empathy, Sontag explored the problem of representational oversaturation: “The same law holds for evil as for pornography. The shock of

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<sup>191</sup> Mirna Funk, ‘Leichenberge, bäm!’, *DIE ZEIT Online*, 21 January 2017 <<http://www.zeit.de/freitext/2017/01/21/yolocaust-shahak-shapira-erinnerungskultur/>> [accessed: 26 January 2017].

<sup>192</sup> Funk here evokes another controversy involving the *AfD*-politician and suspected member of Germany’s extreme right-wing movement Björn Höcke who caused an outrage in January 2017 when he referred to Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial as “Denkmal der Schande”, see Karsten Polke-Majewski, ‘Björn Höcke greift unsere Identität an’, *DIE ZEIT Online*, 18 January 2017 <<http://www.zeit.de/amp/politik/deutschland/2017-01/afd-bjoern-hoecke-rede-holocaust-mahnmal-berlin>> [accessed: 21 April 2017].

<sup>193</sup> Mirna Funk, ‘Leichenberge, bäm!’.

photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewings, just as the surprise and bemusement felt the first time one sees a pornographic movie wear off after one sees a few more”.<sup>194</sup> Sontag’s argument on oversaturation, numbness and anaesthetisation, which she later revised in *Regarding the Pain of Others*,<sup>195</sup> provides the basis for my reading of Eva Menasse’s novel *Quasikristalle*. Menasse’s text addresses the problems of memorial and representational excess, alongside the corresponding feeling of Holocaust fatigue. Her text exposes not only the numbing effects of medial over-representation, but also the ossification of memorial culture and pedagogy, which are caught up in conventions, rules, and routines. The novel furthermore critically engages with the universalisation of the Holocaust as a moral benchmark and the emergence of what Menasse herself, in an interview with Ulrich Wickert, denounced as the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall”.<sup>196</sup> While her text raises vexing questions about how – and for how much longer – we can still meaningfully relate to the Holocaust in an age of hypermediation and memorial routinisation, Stein’s novel largely bypasses these broader issues, focusing instead on relational and hyper-subjective approaches to ‘truth’ and ‘reality’.

#### *Transnational Travel: Templates and the Politics of Trauma*

Menasse’s criticism of the universalisation of Holocaust memory as part of the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall” points to a third and final facet of “travelling trauma”, namely the fact that the Holocaust has increasingly turned into a “global icon” which not only crosses generational and medial borders, but also national ones.<sup>197</sup> Recent research therefore highlights the ways in which the history and memory of the Holocaust intersect with other histories of violence and oppression.<sup>198</sup> I engage more thoroughly with the so-called transnationalisation of Holocaust memory in my chapter on Vladimir Vertlib’s novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*. While I read Vertlib’s writing in the context of recent debates surrounding transnational and – as a

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<sup>194</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 20.

<sup>195</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London et al.: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 93ff.

<sup>196</sup> Ulrich Wickert, ‘Auschwitz ist zu oft Bezugspunkt’, *Die Welt*, 9 February 2012 <[http://www.welt.de/print/die\\_welt/literatur/article113501207/Auschwitz-ist-zu-oft-Bezugspunkt.html](http://www.welt.de/print/die_welt/literatur/article113501207/Auschwitz-ist-zu-oft-Bezugspunkt.html)> [accessed: 21 April 2016].

<sup>197</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘The Holocaust – a Global Memory?’, p. 109.

<sup>198</sup> Pivotal examples of this “transnational” or “transcultural” turn in Holocaust discourse include Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, ‘Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory?’, Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, and Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*.

sub-category – Eastern European memories of the Holocaust, I also stress that his text urges us to question some of the underlying assumptions shaping this discourse. My analysis of Vertlib’s text owes much to the notion of the “template”, as it has been developed in social psychology research. According to James V. Wertsch, “narrative templates” can be described as “generalized schematic structures”:

They are cookie cutter plots or storylines that can be used to generate multiple specific narratives. As such, they function in the role of the underlying codes suggested by DNA metaphors. The notion of a template suggests that this sort of storyline is used repeatedly by a mnemonic community to interpret multiple specific events by fitting them into a schematic plot line.<sup>199</sup>

The idea of the template works on at least three levels: it first of all points to the implicit formulas, scripts, and tropes through which we collectively construct our understanding and memory of an event like the Holocaust. Vertlib’s novel shows how the creation of a transnational – in the sense of border-crossing, cosmopolitan – Holocaust memory is obstructed by the conflicts between certain templates, such as those ingrained in Germany’s memorial culture, or those which the protagonist Rosa has internalised as part of her Soviet socialisation. Further to this, Rosa’s particular, individualised, and idiosyncratic memory repeatedly clashes with the templates of both German and Soviet memorial culture. I therefore argue that Rosa’s particular and literary memory cultivates what I call ‘ironic’ transnationalism. This is a self-reflexive term that stresses the specific ability of the literary text or work of art to keep open spaces of ambiguity. ‘Ironic’ transnationalism is therefore diametrically opposed to the workings of the template, as an exceptionally fixed schema aimed at reducing ambiguity. Vertlib’s text depicts the problems associated with templates in a meta-reflexive manner, and in so doing, he also emphasises the inherently dialogic dimension of the literary text which disrupts the schematic representations of templates. The notion of the template is furthermore useful for adding a political dimension to (literary) trauma discourse. Wertsch’s term “cookie cutter plots” implies that templates tend to simplify, decontextualise and instrumentalise collective memory. They can be activated to construct, stabilise or reform notions of community, identity or even subjectivity. This political dimension is particularly obvious in the

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<sup>199</sup> James V. Wertsch, ‘Deep Memory and Narrative Templates: Conservative Forces and Collective Memory’, in: Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (eds.), *Memory and Political Change* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 173-185, p. 175.

case of the Holocaust, which has itself turned into a “global narrative template”.<sup>200</sup> What Allen Meek has termed the “Holocaust code” has come to determine the ways in which we perceive catastrophic events all over the world,<sup>201</sup> ranging from slavery to nuclear threats and genocidal attacks. While some, like Daniel Levy, Natan Sznajder and Michael Rothberg saw this as a positive and enabling process in their earlier works,<sup>202</sup> others have increasingly criticised the global influence of a universalised and canonised Holocaust memory.<sup>203</sup> Eva Menasse’s text explores the dangers of templates by critically investigating the influence that the legal legacies of the Holocaust have had on our perception and processing of other large-scale atrocities. The notion of the template thus offers an alternative to the psychological concept of trauma: as a travelling and necessarily mediated form of remembrance, it is caught up in cultural, identarian, and political memory contests or debates. In this way, Hirsch’s interest in the *psychology of trauma* is complemented by the *politics of trauma* in an age of remediation, i.e. the ways in which memories of the Holocaust (are made to) intersect with other histories and memories of violence and to what effect. The relationship between the psychology and the politics of trauma is not necessarily exclusive, as the texts by Menasse and Vertlib demonstrate. Both writers engage with the clashes between various traumatic templates, alongside the experience and marginalisation of individual trauma in a culture of hypermediation.

### 2.3.2. A New Ethics and Aesthetics of Representation?

The idea of “travelling trauma” is meant to solve some of the methodological problems inherent in the notion of traumatic unspeakability which also affect the concept of postmemory. The dogmatic claim that the Holocaust is unrepresentable and can only be transmitted contagiously, via a language of symptoms, hinders engagement with its global hyper-representation. One therefore needs to look at the specific ways in which the existing representations function, i.e. the conventions, tropes, and narratives to which they resort, the routes on which they circulate in a media culture, and the effects

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<sup>200</sup> Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, p. 75.

<sup>201</sup> Allen Meek, *Trauma and Media*, p. 26.

<sup>202</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

<sup>203</sup> I have already mentioned the work of Dirk Moses, see Dirk Moses, ‘Genocide and the Terror of History’, and Dirk Moses, ‘Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Other Genocides?’. Stef Craps offers a good summary of the recent debates surrounding transnational and -cultural Holocaust memory, see Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*, pp. 72ff.

these framings and movements have on interpretations of the event. Arguably, the over-representation of the Holocaust is in itself an ethical and political issue. The notion of “travelling trauma” offers a fresh perspective that overcomes the impasse of unspeakability, while also leaving behind the biological and psychological baggage of Hirsch’s concept. It enables us to see the Holocaust as a culturally mobile signifier which travels transgenerationally, transmedially and transnationally. In the preceding paragraphs, I have sketched the new horizons that such an approach opens up, along with the new sets of issues that arise when the focus shifts from unspeakability to ‘hyperspeakability’.

Does the idea that the Holocaust is caught up in various networks of medial, transnational, and transgenerational exchange also imply that we have to abandon the strong ethical agenda that motivated a lot of trauma research? Does the fact that the Holocaust is omnipresent and hypermediated mean that its circulations and representations can be traced, but no longer critically evaluated? The pluralisation of Holocaust memories and representations has indeed resulted in an abandonment of key components of “Holocaust etiquette”,<sup>204</sup> such as the event’s allegedly sacred nature, its singularity and unrepresentability. At the same time, new ethical and political issues have arisen, and the need for discussion and evaluation persists. It is therefore indispensable to continue a critical and ethical evaluation of Holocaust representations, even (or maybe especially) in the age of remediation. However, these value-judgements can no longer rest on the pillars of accuracy, authenticity, transgression, or veracity. Instead we need to consider how and to what extent these representations engage with the issue of hypermediation. Meta- and self-reflexivity are key features of a possible ethics of representation in the age of Holocaust hypermediation. My readings therefore focus on the ways in which the texts under consideration meta-discursively negotiate the routinisation and commodification of Holocaust memory, while also questioning the extent to which they consider their own contribution to these developments. On the most basic level, all of these texts contribute to this phenomenon because, as representations of representations, they inevitably add yet another layer to the ongoing hypermediation of Holocaust memory. We must therefore ask: are these texts critical or affirmative of recent developments in Holocaust discourse? Do they

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<sup>204</sup> The term “Holocaust etiquette” has been coined by Terrence des Pres, ‘Holocaust Laughter?’, in: Berel Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York, NY and London: Holmes&Meier Publishers, 1988), pp. 216-233, p. 217.

simply observe contemporary shifts or do they try to intervene in current debates, by for example stressing repressed or marginalised aspects? How do they deal with earlier representations of the Holocaust? How do they employ established tropes and narrative conventions, such as the genre of the family novel?

While all of the texts under consideration resort to meta-discursive and self-reflexive strategies, these work differently in the various texts. Although Stein's *Die Leinwand* and Biller's *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* are (self-)reflexive up to a point, they also demonstrate significant blind spots. Stein's text dissects remediated Holocaust remembrance, but he replaces it with a rather unsophisticated and folkloristic notion of post-Holocaust Jewishness. Biller's writing is self-reflexive in its recourse to certain traditions, such as the literary heritage of "ghetto writing", but this does not prevent him from appropriating the figure and works of Bruno Schulz. In contrast to this, the novels by Menasse and Vertlib are steeped in thoroughly meta-discursive irony. Yet, what sets them apart is Vertlib's interventionist and Menasse's detached approach. We will see that there are significant differences in genre and style. Stein's and Menasse's novels boldly experiment with multiperspectivity and the subjectivity of viewpoints, presenting the reader with a dozen different perspectives (Menasse), and two strongly contradictory outlooks and narrators (Stein). Vertlib's work, meanwhile, appears as rather conventional in terms of narration and formal arrangement, as is also the case for Biller's novella. While a new, unified genre of "meta-erinnerungskulturelle" novels does therefore not yet exist,<sup>205</sup> these narrative approaches undeniably complicate or explode the framework of the conventional multigenerational or family novel and postmemorial discourse more generally. They thus prompt an exploration of the new and exciting pathways in recent Holocaust literature and discourse, which is at the heart of this study.

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<sup>205</sup> Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer, 'Der Nationalzialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des ersten Jahrzehnts', p. 16.

### 3. “Erinnerung an die Erinnerung” – Memory, Authenticity, and Post-Holocaust Jewish Identity in Benjamin Stein’s *Die Leinwand*

#### 3.1. Introduction: Revisiting the Wilkomirski Affair

Holocaust remembrance in the new millennium oscillates between the acknowledgment and even espousal of hypermediation, on the one hand, and a continuing and increasing desire for authenticity, on the other. This tension is reflected in contemporary German- and Austrian-Jewish Holocaust fiction, which has seen a rise of metafictional, meta-historiographical and semi-autobiographical genres that, by definition, focus on the interplay between (historical) reality and its representation. Benjamin Stein’s 2010 novel *Die Leinwand* is a case in point: the entanglement of authenticity, (re-)mediation and the appropriation of memories is at the heart of both the novel’s content and formal arrangement.<sup>206</sup> By offering a fictional reconsideration of the Wilkomirski affair, Stein’s *Die Leinwand* is bound to touch on the very questions and problems that have shaped contemporary scholarly and artistic Holocaust discourse: how is the issue of authenticity re-negotiated after the disappearance of the eyewitness generation? How do concepts of authenticity change in the age of remediation? Who does the Holocaust “belong to” after the dying out of the survivor generation? Who is allowed to speak and write about it and in what form? What happens to the genres of memoir and testimony when memories become increasingly mobile and appropriable? What happens to the concept and status of the (eye-)witness in Holocaust discourse?

I will tackle these questions by reading Stein’s novel, which is caught up in various and interlocking “cycles of remediation”,<sup>207</sup> through the framework of Bolter’s and

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<sup>206</sup> Most research on *Die Leinwand* concentrates on the prominent issues of autobiographical memory and (Jewish) identity in the text, while somewhat bypassing the novel’s engagement with the re- and hypermediation of Holocaust memory. Silke Horstkotte, however, examines the novel’s take on the issues of authenticity and witnessing and the broader implications for Holocaust discourse in the new millennium, see Silke Horstkotte, “Ich bin, woran ich mich erinnere”. Other contributions include Alessandro Costazza, ‘Benjamin Steins *Die Leinwand* oder über die (Un-)Möglichkeit (auto-)biographischen Schreibens’, in: Astrid Arndt, Christoph Deupmann and Lars Korten (eds.), *Logik der Prosa. Zur Poetizität ungebundener Rede* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012), pp. 301-332; Georg Langenhorst, “Die erzählte Geschichte ist, was am Ende zählt”. Postmoderne Spiegelungen jüdischen Lebens im literarischen Werk Benjamin Steins’, *Communicatio Socialis* 46.2 (2013), pp. 164-182 and Kathrin Schuchmann, “Unser Gedächtnis ist der wahre Sitz unseres Ichs”. Erinnerung und Geschichte(n) in Benjamin Steins *Die Leinwand*’, *Zagreber Germanistische Beiträge* 21 (2012), pp. 201-220.

<sup>207</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 55.

Grusin's theory. I will demonstrate how Wilkomirski's *Bruchstücke* was in itself already a product of complicated circuits of mediatisation and remediation. This reading shifts the focus away from Wilkomirski's breach of the autobiographical pact, highlighting instead his (over)compliance with a certain set of literary conventions. My analysis of *Bruchstücke* provides the basis for a close reading of Stein's novel, which was published 15 years after the Wilkomirski scandal. The text's fictionalisation of the affair expresses generational distance, which enables a radically changed perspective on the key issues of authenticity, "memorial propriety",<sup>208</sup> and witnessing in Holocaust discourse.

### 3.1.1. *The Realness of the Fake*

In 1995, the *Jüdischer Verlag*, a sub-division of the renowned German *Suhrkamp Verlag*, published a book with the title *Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* by Benjamin Wilkomirski.<sup>209</sup> The book was marketed and widely regarded as the autobiographical account of how Wilkomirski suffered through and survived several extermination camps as a child, before being adopted by a Swiss couple after the war. The idyllic post-war existence in Switzerland turns out to be treacherous, as Wilkomirski's life is disrupted by traumatic memories and his inability to play by the rules of a society that is largely ignorant of his past. The book finishes with a personal note in which the author explains that, because as a child his original Jewish identity had been suppressed, he was one of the many "Kinder ohne Identität" (*BS*, 142) who managed to survive the Holocaust in often miraculous ways. The note was apparently added because there were doubts concerning the book's authenticity as early as 1994.<sup>210</sup> *Suhrkamp* decided to publish the book regardless, and it became an immediate and international media success. Wilkomirski's fame as an 'authentic' writer of Holocaust memoirs lasted until 1998, when the Swiss journalist Daniel Ganzfried published an article in *Die Weltwoche*, uncovering Wilkomirski's real identity as that of Bruno Grosjean, a Swiss foster child, who was taken in by a couple named Dössekker during the 1940s. As Ganzfried stated, Bruno Grosjean knew Auschwitz

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<sup>208</sup> Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory*, p. 120.

<sup>209</sup> Benjamin Wilkomirski, *Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997); henceforth cited in the text as *BS*.

<sup>210</sup> This is asserted by Stefan Maechler who conducted extensive historical research on the case, which provides the basis for my short account of the affair, see Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair. A Study in Biographical Truth* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2001), pp. 93ff.

and Majdanek “only as a tourist”.<sup>211</sup> Suhrkamp subsequently had to withdraw the publication. Ganzfried’s article sparked heated discussions in both the media and academia, resulting in the by now widely accepted view that Wilkomirski’s memoir is a fake, although Wilkomirski/Grosjean/Dössekker never admitted as much. The questions raised by the Wilkomirski affair concern not so much Wilkomirski’s/Grosjean’s/Dössekker’s possible psycho-pathology, but rather the reasons why so many people willingly believed in the authenticity of his memoir. Wilkomirski’s perception as a Holocaust survivor (and *Bruchstücke*’s reception as testimony) resulted from a complex interplay between intratextual strategies and extra-textual performance, which also fooled experts like Sander Gilman: “Ich habe es wirklich geglaubt, und zwar deshalb, weil dieser Text tatsächlich meiner Vorstellung eines Textes von Kindheitserinnerungen entsprach”.<sup>212</sup> Wilkomirski’s text thus achieved what I would call an ‘authenticity effect’ by skilfully deploying some of the tropes and narrative conventions that, at the time, marked the Holocaust memoir and testimonial discourse more generally. Wilkomirski’s text thereby – unwittingly – revealed the increasingly “generic nature of testimony”,<sup>213</sup> forcing us to reconsider the authenticity imperative that defines the genre of autobiography in general and the survivor memoir in particular.<sup>214</sup>

A fake always points to an original whose form it tries to imitate and reproduce as accurately as possible. (Literary) fakes are only possible “in relation to a form with a clearly established genre”, which carries “sufficient cultural prestige and value”,<sup>215</sup> so that the act of faking promises to increase symbolic capital. By the 1990s, the genre of the Holocaust memoir had undergone a process of canonisation that relied on certain conventions and *topoi*, which Wilkomirski – purposefully or not – appropriated and remediated to create a highly successful work of literature. At the same time, his audience was so acquainted with the genre’s rules that Wilkomirski’s text immediately triggered a specific mode of reception: the reading public received his text as an

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<sup>211</sup> Quoted from: Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, p. 129.

<sup>212</sup> Quoted from David Oels, “‘A real-life Grimm’s fairy tale’. Korrekturen, Nachträge, Ergänzungen zum Fall Wilkomirski”, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 14.2 (2004), pp. 373-390, p. 381.

<sup>213</sup> Anthony Rowland, ‘The Future of Testimony: Introduction’, p. 114.

<sup>214</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between fact and fiction in the genre of autobiography see Gabriele Schabacher, *Topik der Referenz. Theorie der Autobiographie, die Funktion ‘Gattung’ und Roland Barthes’ Über Mich Selbst* (Würzburg: Königshausen&Neumann, 2007); for a discussion of these issues in relation to the Holocaust memoir see Susanne Düwell, “*Fiktion aus dem Wirklichen*”. *Strategien autobiographischen Erzählens im Kontext der Shoah* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2004).

<sup>215</sup> Anne Whitehead, ‘Telling Tales: Trauma and Testimony in Benjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments*’, *Discourse* 25.1&2 (2003), pp. 119-137, p. 122.

autobiographical testimony, treating the author as a survivor and witness. Susanne Düwell has pointed out that Wilkomirski's memoir belonged to a specific sub-category of the genre, which is visually-oriented and aimed at creating immediacy, rather than reflecting its own constructedness:

In Wilkomirskis Text werden die mit dem Genre der Shoah-Literatur verbundenen Rezeptionserwartungen übererfüllt: Der Text weist zahlreiche versteckte intertextuelle Bezüge zu Büchern und Filmen über die Shoah auf und bedient sich – teilweise sehr überzeugend – gängiger Topoi der Shoah-Literatur und des Diskurses über sie. In einigen Passagen präsentiert sich der Text als literarische Umsetzung einer Konzeption des Traumas, das vergangene Erfahrung in photographisch exakten Bildern und Körpererinnerungen aufspeichert: Verwendet werden Unsagbarkeitstopi, antirhetorische Figuren und die literarische Inszenierung einer kindlichen Perspektive, die deshalb unverfälscht erscheint, weil die kulturelle Kontextualisierung von Wahrnehmung zu fehlen scheint.<sup>216</sup>

Düwell emphasises that the emergence of this type of Holocaust memoir, which is clearly linked to the canonisation and remediation of certain *topoi*, was reinforced by a specific, namely the post-structuralist, notion of trauma.<sup>217</sup> Similarly, Amy Hungerford contends that “[...] we might also note that the holocaust memoir has become a genre – with all the conventionality that term implies – because trauma theorists in the academy have been working to elaborate, explain and theorize about the things such memories have in common”.<sup>218</sup> And so it is that the stress on fragmentation, painful openness and a quintessential unintelligibility, the emphasis on visual perception and flashback structures, and even the notion of literal trauma – all of which I have identified as key features in Caruth's writing – can all be found in Wilkomirski's text.

The ‘authenticity effect’ of *Bruchstücke* thus relies on a two-fold remediation: Wilkomirski's text embraced the literary conventions of the Holocaust memoir, while also emulating a specific type of traumatic memory that had been popularised by testimonial and post-structuralist trauma discourse in the early 1990s. However, here the conventions and tropes of the Holocaust memoir involve their own circuits of recycling. The process of canonisation – and thus the emergence of conventions, genres, *topoi* and tropes – is inextricably tied to the dynamics of remediation. As Aleida Assmann has remarked, canonical artefacts “are destined to be repeatedly re-

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<sup>216</sup> Susanne Düwell, “*Fiktion aus dem Wirklichen*”, pp. 13f.

<sup>217</sup> See Amy Hungerford, ‘Memorizing Memory’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001), pp. 67-92; Anne Whitehead, ‘Telling Tales’ and David Oels, “‘A real-life Grimm’s fairy tale’”.

<sup>218</sup> Amy Hungerford, ‘Memorizing Memory’, p. 68.

read, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented”;<sup>219</sup> and it is only through these various acts of reproduction that they achieve the fixity and the status that makes them available for copying. The re- and hypermediated state of Holocaust discourse therefore emerges as one of the central preconditions for both the formation and the success of Wilkomirski’s text. Such a perspective shifts the focus away from a moralising or pathologising interpretation, highlighting instead the pervasiveness of certain cultural patterns, even in the case of a “limit event” like the Holocaust. By the 1990s, the Holocaust memoir and testimonial discourse had been mediated to such an extent that they had become blueprints for copying and faking.

I argued in the previous chapter that the entanglement in various cycles of remediation does not preclude the production of authenticity. Wilkomirski’s book was praised for its raw authenticity which was linked to its makeshift, fragmentary or even clichéd form.<sup>220</sup> This paradox can be explained with reference to the afore-mentioned ‘authenticity effect’. In the age of remediation, authenticity must be understood as a quintessentially performative category: “[R]ecent engagements with authenticity highlight that it is necessarily the result of careful aesthetic construction that depends on the use of identifiable techniques with the aim of achieving certain effects for certain reasons [...]”.<sup>221</sup> Bolter and Grusin highlight that, in an environment of hypermediation, the achievement of immediacy and transparency is premised on a growing number of increasingly refined and interactive media technologies. While these are necessary for upholding the illusion of immediacy and authenticity, they also threaten to destroy it. If one thus understands authenticity predominantly as an effect, which is produced by specific media techniques, then this suggests that the employment of these strategies, which fulfil an audience’s expectations, can paradoxically have an authenticating force. In the context of *Bruchstücke*, this means that Wilkomirski was, consciously as well as subconsciously, drawing on a number of conventions that had come to define the discourse on Holocaust memoir and traumatic

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<sup>219</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, pp. 97-108, p. 99.

<sup>220</sup> For a detailed account of the reception of Wilkomirski’s *Bruchstücke* see Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, pp. 111ff.

<sup>221</sup> Wolfgang Funk, Florian Gross and Irmtraud Huber, ‘Exploring the Empty Plinth. The Aesthetics of Authenticity’, in: Wolfgang Funk, Florian Gross and Irmtraud Huber (eds.), *The Aesthetics of Authenticity. Medial Constructions of the Real* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012), pp. 9-21, p. 10. However, Julia Straub rightly remarks that the idea of authenticity as performance is not limited to the postmodern age: “It is the double bind of the authentic – that it sends off signals both of immediacy and mediation, genuineness and performance, spontaneity and staging – [...]”, see Julia Straub, ‘Introduction. The Paradoxes of Authenticity’, p. 10.

memory. Oddly enough, the strict adherence to these conventions made his text seem authentic, because it conformed with (and confirmed) audience expectations. If one approaches the Wilkomirski affair from the vantage point of remediation and the ‘authenticity effect’, the perspective on the matter inevitably changes: what is scandalous about it then, is not so much the fact that Wilkomirski’s text performed an act of transgression (i.e. the breach of the autobiographical pact), but, on the contrary, that it actually (over-)complied with certain rules. Wilkomirski’s text thus, unwittingly, exposes the existence and efficacy of discursive guidelines that influence the realm of the incompatible, unspeakable and unintelligible.<sup>222</sup> I therefore agree with Barbara Staff’s assessment that fakes harbour a certain reflexive potential, if they are understood as “sensible Seismographen des literarischen Marktes, die in perfekter Simulation von Authentizität den Bedürfnissen und Erwartungen des Publikums vollkommen entsprechen. Damit sind sie paradoxerweise echt und unecht zugleich; echt als Diskursphänomene ihrer Zeit; unecht als Fälschungen”.<sup>223</sup>

### 3.1.2. *Generating Authenticity Effects in Bruchstücke*

In what follows, I will highlight some practical examples of how exactly Wilkomirski’s text achieved an authenticity effect. This detour via Wilkomirski’s text prepares the central questions guiding my reading of Stein’s novel: how does *Die Leinwand* deal with the issue of Holocaust hypermediation? How does the text reflect on its own implication in the cycles of remediation? What implications does the remediated state of Holocaust remembrance have for the novel’s take on the concepts of authenticity and witnessing?

By applying a clear temporal framework, the subtitle of Wilkomirski’s book – “Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948” – already suggests that we are confronted with a historical account and not a work of fiction. In the afore-mentioned afterword a certain “B.W.” – who can easily be identified as the author of *Bruchstücke* – tells us that what we have just read are indeed his authentic “Bruchstücke des Erinnerns” (BS, 143). This implies that the book’s author, narrator and protagonist are identical. *Bruchstücke* is thus

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<sup>222</sup> This has also been noted by Gabriele Schabacher: “So gesehen beruhen Skandal und Empörung, die der Fall Wilkomirski impliziert, vor allem darin, die grundlegenden Zuschreibungsmechanismen sichtbar werden zu lassen, derer sich ein diskursives System bedient”, see Gabriele Schabacher, *Topik der Referenz*, p. 178.

<sup>223</sup> Barbara Schaff, ‘Der Autor als Simulant authentischer Erfahrung. Vier Fallbeispiele fingierter Autorschaft’, in: Heinrich Detering (ed.), *Autorschaft. Positionen und Revisionen* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2002), pp. 426-443, p. 438.

“paratextuell deutlich autobiographisch markiert”,<sup>224</sup> which contradicts Wilkomirski’s claims that the reader was free to read his text either autobiographically or as fiction.<sup>225</sup> The book’s first couple of pages – which, unlike the rest of the text, do not have a chapter heading – appear as some kind of foreword, guiding our reception:

Meine frühen Kindheitserinnerungen gründen in erster Linie auf den exakten Bildern meines fotografischen Gedächtnisses und den dazu bewahrten Gefühlen – auch denen des Körpers. Dann kommt die Erinnerung des Gehörs und an Gehörtes, auch an Gedachtes, und erst zuletzt die Erinnerung an Selbstgesagtes (*BS*, 7).

Traumatic memories are presented here as exact replicas of an original event, which is stored away in a photographic archive. Wilkomirski’s statement also implies a hierarchy of sensual and bodily experiences above and beyond language and reflection. He posits that the visual images are the primary and seemingly ‘natural’ sense of memory. This version of traumatic memory concurs with the post-structuralist branch of trauma theory as put forward by Caruth, Felman and Laub.

This idea of traumatic memory as an undistorted copy of the event is combined with a specific staging of the authorial subject: “Ich bin kein Dichter, kein Schriftsteller. Ich kann nur versuchen, mit Worten das Erlebte, das Geschehene so exakt wie möglich abzuzeichnen – so genau, wie es eben mein Kindergedächtnis aufbewahrt hat: noch ohne Kenntnis von Perspektive und Fluchtpunkt” (*BS*, 8). Wilkomirski creates here what Roland Barthes has defined as the “referential illusion”.<sup>226</sup> According to Barthes, 19<sup>th</sup>-century realism deployed this strategy, which originated in historiographical discourse, in order to create the impression that the reader is faced with “the advantage of the referent alone” – the thing itself and not a representation.<sup>227</sup> Wilkomirski too constructs language as a transparent window to the traumatic past, which fosters a sense of utmost immediacy.<sup>228</sup> He reinforces the “referential illusion” with statements such as “Ich bin kein Dichter, kein Schriftsteller” (*BS*, 8), and makes us believe that

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<sup>224</sup> David Oels, “‘A real-life Grimm’s fairy tale’”, pp. 373f. Reto Sorg and Michael Angele also point out that the afterword “garantiert die autobiographische Lesart des Textes”, see Reto Sorg and Michael Angele, ‘Selbsterfindung und Autobiographie. Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne am Beispiel von Benjamin Wilkomirskis *Bruchstücke. Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948*’, in: Henriette Herwig, Irmgard Wirtz and Stefan B. Würffel (eds.), *Lese-Zeichen. Semiotik und Hermeneutik in Raum und Zeit. Festschrift für Peter Rusterholz* (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 1999), pp. 325-345, pp. 328f.

<sup>225</sup> Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, p. 131.

<sup>226</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘The Reality Effect’, in: Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, transl. by Richard Howards (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 141-148, p. 148.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>228</sup> Reto Sorg and Michael Angele therefore speak of a “Rhetorik der Anti-Rhetorik” or “Sprache der Wahrhaftigkeit”, both of which are necessary to generate the “referential illusion”, see Reto Sorg and Michael Angele, ‘Selbsterfindung und Autobiographie’, p. 331.

we encounter pure traumatic experience untouched by the hands of the authorial subject, the cultural canon or his grown-up self. This strategy also defines Caruth's performative notion of literary language: language does not represent but rather embodies trauma. Caruth's and Wilkomirski's recourse to the "referential illusion" can thus be read as an expression of the "desire to get beyond mediation" which,<sup>229</sup> according to Bolter and Grusin, defines the broader logic of transparent immediacy.

The phenomenon of the "referential illusion" and the broader discourse of transparent immediacy is key to understanding why the chaotic, anti-linear, vague and at times contradictory style of Wilkomirski's book only enhanced its authenticity effect. Wilkomirski develops and performs an aesthetics and poetics of fragmentation, which is implied by the memoir's title *Bruchstücke*:

Meine frühesten Erinnerungen gleichen einem Trümmerfeld einzelner Bilder und Abläufe. Brocken des Erinnerns mit harten, messerscharfen Konturen, die noch heute kaum ohne Verletzung zu berühren sind. Oft chaotisch Verstreutes, chronologisch nur selten zu gliedern; Brocken, die sich immer wieder beharrlich dem Ordnungswillen des erwachsen Gewordenen widersetzen und den Gesetzen der Logik entgleiten (*BS*, 7).

Throughout the text, the reader is confronted with an assemblage of fairly short, episodic, and often unconnected chapters, set either on the way to or in one of the extermination camps, in an orphanage in Krakow or in post-war Switzerland. The resulting overall impression of a "Trümmerfeld" (*BS*, 7) is enhanced by the internal structure of the Switzerland-based chapters, in which the everyday life of the protagonist – and thus the narrative – is repeatedly disrupted by traumatic nightmares or flashbacks that are usually triggered by minor details such as the smell of bread (quite Proustian) or a ski lift. Although the narrative progresses more or less chronologically from the flight from Riga to the camps, to the orphanage in Krakow and then onto life in Switzerland, the reader is under the impression that time is at a standstill, leaving the protagonist trapped in a past that simply will not pass. This atmosphere of fragmentation and disorientation is further increased by various *topoi* of uncertainty, expressed frequently via the statement "ich weiß es nicht mehr" (*BS*, 15). This interplay between fragmentation and vagueness has an authenticating effect for two reasons. Firstly, it mimics the child's perspective, the child being unable to comprehend or logically arrange the experiences. This gives the reader the impression that s/he has immediate access to Wilkomirski's authentic "Kindergedächtnis", which

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<sup>229</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 3.

merely recorded the events, “noch ohne Kenntnis von Perspektive und Fluchtpunkt” (*BS*, 8), i.e. without a sense of interpretation or formal arrangement. Secondly, the structure of fragmentation and incomprehension correlates with central assumptions of post-structuralist trauma theory.<sup>230</sup> I have demonstrated how Caruth conceptualises trauma as a sudden or catastrophic event that shatters the subject’s cognitive and psychic abilities, which is why the experience can be accessed only belatedly. Since the traumatic experience is therefore categorically split off from the subject, it is not available for representation, but rather finds expression in traumatic repetition, understood as “the literal return of the past”.<sup>231</sup>

Both traumatic dissociation and the literalness of trauma can be found in Wilkomirski’s account. The dissociative nature of trauma is expressed at the level of form through fragmentation, whereas the literalness of trauma is explicitly mentioned in the text itself: “Ein Alptraum zerstörte die friedliche Ruhe des ersten Schlafes im neuen Kinderheim. Ein Alptraum, der sich in den folgenden Jahren unerbittlich wiederholte, in allen Bildern, in jeder Einzelheit, gleichsam als unaufhörlich aufeinander folgende *Kopie* [my emphasis], Nacht für Nacht” (*BS*, 38). Dissociation and literalness come together in the flashback structure, which defines the book’s narrative style and plotline: Benjamin is frequently overpowered by his traumatic recollections, which catapult him back into a past that is edged in his mind in a pristine, unaltered fashion. The frequent use of the present tense suggests that the past events have not lost any of their immediacy; they are not remembered, which would imply an element of temporal distance and distortion, but rather recorded, so that they can be repeated in a literal fashion. Furthermore, both Wilkomirski and Caruth conceptualise traumatic memory as quintessentially visual and as categorically removed from the subject’s cognitive abilities: “Die ersten Bilder tauchen auf, vereinzelt nur, als Auftakt quasi, Blitzlichtern gleich, ohne sicheren Zusammenhang, aber scharf und deutlich. Bilder nur, noch kaum begleitet von eigenem Denken” (*BS*, 8). The convergence of Wilkomirski’s account and Caruth’s theories indicates that Wilkomirski, consciously as well as subconsciously, drew on a number of conventions that, by the 1990s, had evolved into a veritable discourse on trauma and the testimonial form. The strict adherence to these conventions paradoxically made his text seem authentic, because it

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<sup>230</sup> Amy Hungerford therefore reads *Bruchstücke* as “the epitome of the very assumptions that underline trauma theory’s analytic discourse”, see Amy Hungerford, ‘Memorizing Memory’, p. 69.

<sup>231</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 59.

fulfilled the audience's expectations. Both Caruth's theory and Wilkomirski's writings are indebted to the "logic of transparent immediacy", which also underpins what Barthes describes as the "referential illusion"; these strategies attempt to efface the medium so that we feel like we encounter the thing itself rather than its representation.<sup>232</sup>

Wilkomirski's text not only fulfilled the formal conventions of the Holocaust memoir but it also employed a familiar iconography: "[...] das schwere Trampeln von Stiefeln, eine Faust, die mich aus meinem Versteck unter der Decke am Fußende des Bettes hervorreißt und in der Mitte eines sonst leeren Zimmerchens auf den Boden fallen lässt" (BS, 9); "Männergebrüll und Stiefelgepolter" (BS, 94), "Berge von Koffern und Kleidern" (BS, 39); "braunschwarze[...] Hunde" (BS, 40); "Rauch in der Luft, der in den Augen brennt und sich ölig auf das Gesicht legt" (BS, 79), "Ratten" (BS, 79) and "Ungeziefer" (BS, 41). These descriptions feed on and contribute to the hypermediation of Holocaust memory; they recycle an established imagery and, via this repetition, strengthen its canonical status. As Stefan Maechler aptly points out, the fact that "all this came very close to a cliché [...] only made it more plausible",<sup>233</sup> which once again highlights the paradoxical mechanism of the authenticity effect.<sup>234</sup>

### 3.1.3. Remediating the Wilkomirski Affair in Benjamin Stein's *Die Leinwand*

Benjamin Stein's novel *Die Leinwand* further weaves the web of (re-)mediations, as it recycles the Wilkomirski affair. The following questions emerge: how exactly is the Wilkomirski affair remediated in *Die Leinwand*? Which aspects, sources and perspectives are emphasised, and which are left out? What, according to the novel, are the central issues raised by the Wilkomirski affair? What judgements and revaluations does the text engender? What can *Die Leinwand*, as a *fictional* account of the affair, contribute to our understanding of it?

Stein's text is formally and thematically complex: the novel comes with two front covers, which mark the starting point for two independent storylines that converge in

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<sup>232</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation*, p. 21; Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect'.

<sup>233</sup> Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, p. 283.

<sup>234</sup> These textual authenticity effects were accompanied by extra-textual measures that contributed to the authenticity illusion, such as Wilkomirski's body and verbal language, his public appearances and lectures in schools and at conferences, the support he got from other actual survivors and the fact that his case was taken up twice in the form of a documentary. Stefan Maechler offers a comprehensive account of these additional aspects of Wilkomirski's performance, see Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*.

the middle of the book. The colour red is associated with the first-person narrative of Jan Wechsler, a former writer-journalist turned publisher, whose Jewish-orthodox family life is disrupted by the arrival of a mysterious suitcase. Upon closer inspection, he finds a number of enigmatic artefacts in the suitcase, such as a book entitled *Maskeraden* by someone who is also named Jan Wechsler. In this “Enthüllungsbuch” (DL, W.44),<sup>235</sup> the other Wechsler (which from hereon I will name Wechsler 2) reports on a literary scandal from the past, involving a certain Minsky and his book *Aschentage*. In 1995, Minsky published an autobiographical account describing his fate as a child survivor of the Holocaust. However, the memoir was eventually exposed as a “Maskerade”, “ein erfundenes Rührstück, mit dem er wie ein gewöhnlicher Hochstapler Kasse machte” (DL, W.49) by none other than Wechsler 2, the author of *Maskeraden*. Stein’s novel thus offers a fictionalisation of the Wilkomirski affair, with Wechsler 2 acting as a literary double of Daniel Ganzfried who wrote ...*alias Wilkomirski – Die Holocaust-Travestie*,<sup>236</sup> and Minsky as the fictional embodiment of Wilkomirski. After having read *Maskeraden*, Wechsler suspects a case of mistaken identity; he therefore gets in touch with Wechsler 2 via his publishing house. However, Wechsler 2’s publisher, Franz v. Dennen, only adds to the confusion with the following reply: “*Du schreibst dir also über den Verlag einen Brief. Es gibt kürzere und weniger komplizierte Wege, Dir selbst etwas mitzuteilen [italics in the original text]*” (DL, W.53). This response launches a criminal investigation by Wechsler, which gradually confirms the reader’s suspicion that the recipient of the suitcase and the author of *Maskeraden* are identical. The suitcase comes from Wechsler’s own past as the author of *Maskeraden*, the memory of which he has suppressed and replaced with an elaborate fiction:

Ich bin also Jan Wechsler, Schweizer Autor und Journalist mit schillernder Vergangenheit an den Rändern des politischen Spektrums. Nach meinem Enthüllungscoup bin ich aus meinem Leben geflüchtet. Die Biographie, an die ich mich heute erinnere, ist die Legende, die ich selbst aufgebaut habe [...]. Ich lebe in einem Film, den ich selbst inszeniert habe (DL, W.137).

The search for his real identity takes Wechsler to Israel, where he is confronted with another spectre from the past: the psychiatrist Amnon Zichroni, who was last seen

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<sup>235</sup> I am following the paging style suggested by the novel, which uses a W. to indicate the pages in the Wechsler narration and a Z. to mark those in the Zichroni plotline.

<sup>236</sup> Daniel Ganzfried (ed.), ... *alias Wilkomirski – Die Holocaust-Travestie: Enthüllung und Dokumentation eines literarischen Skandals* (Berlin: Jüdische Verlagsanstalt, 2002).

alive by Wechsler before disappearing without a trace. Locked up in an Israeli prison cell, the memories finally return to Wechsler: he remembers that he has indeed been to Israel before where he stayed as a guest at Zichroni's house. Their somewhat tense encounter ended with a showdown at a mikveh in Moza; the book remains inconclusive as to whether or not Wechsler had killed Zichroni.

This open ending serves as a passage into the book's other, blue narrative strand, which is told by Amnon Zichroni. Zichroni tells a rather conventional autobiographical story that spans his ultra-orthodox upbringing in Mea Shearim, his youth in his uncle's house in Switzerland, his psychiatric training and occupation in the USA, and his reluctant return to Israel. Zichroni's life is marked by the discovery of his "Erinnerungssinn" (DL, Z.8), which enables him to experience other people's memories by looking into their eyes or touching them with his bare hands. While at first he struggles to accept his supernatural ability, his friend Eli Rothstein encourages him to see it as a gift sent from God which should be used to help people. In the spirit of the kabbalistic concept of *tikkun olam*, i.e. the idea of healing or repairing God's creation,<sup>237</sup> Zichroni decides to use his ability for therapeutic purposes. He eventually moves back to Switzerland after the sudden death of his uncle, and it is here that his personal and professional equilibrium disintegrates. He meets the Swiss violin maker Minsky with whom he quickly establishes a close bond. This is why Minsky lets Zichroni in on the 'secret' of his horrible life story:

Den ganzen Tag über, den ich bei ihm verbrachte, rauchte er ununterbrochen und erzählte mit vielen, langen Pausen von Auschwitz und Majdanek, vom Bild seines Vaters, der in einem kleinen Ort bei Minsk, wo er geboren sei, vor seinen und den Augen seiner Mutter von weißrussischen Milizen ermordet wurde. Er erzählte von den Baracken des Lagers, vom allgegenwärtigen Tod und den Ratten, von seiner Rettung und den Jahren im Kinderheim in Polen und schließlich in der Schweiz, in die man ihn, wie er es ausdrückte, verschleppt hatte, um ihn seiner Vergangenheit zu berauben (DL, Z.172f.).

Zichroni unhesitatingly believes Minsky's claims, but "der Wunsch, Minsky und sein Leid wirklich zu verstehen" (DL, Z.174) provokes him to use his "Erinnerungssinn" nonetheless. He sees a decontextualised scene of terror and violence, which is only afterwards specified as a Holocaust memory by Minsky himself, an observation that will be of some importance. Convinced of the authenticity of Minsky's pain and

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<sup>237</sup> The glossary that comes with *Die Leinwand* gives the following definition: "*Tikkun* (hebr.) Verbesserung, Reparieren; häufig mit Bezug auf Tikkun Olam, als die 'Verbesserung der Welt' durch Menschenhand, ein Konzept, das in der Kabbala eine zentrale Rolle spielt" (DL, G.8).

suffering, Zichroni, in the spirit of *tikkun olam*, decides to support him in regaining his memories – a process that results in the book *Aschentage* which is later exposed as a fake by Jan Wechsler. Zichroni is based on Wilkomirski's therapist Elitsur Bernstein.<sup>238</sup> Zichroni describes Wechsler's campaign as a "Hatz" (*DL*, Z.182) that causes the complete disintegration of Minsky's life and psychic health, while also destroying Zichroni's career as a psychiatrist. Leaving his old life behind and returning to Israel, he finds work as a hypnotherapist. According to Zichroni, years after the affair, Wechsler turns up at his doorstep, determined to pretend the whole affair had not happened (the reader of the Wechsler-segment knows that Wechsler in fact has no recollection of the affair). Wechsler's attitude gradually unleashes all the pent-up anger that Zichroni had harboured ever since Minsky's and his own downfall. During a showdown at the mikveh in Moza, Zichroni finally loses control and seemingly tries to drown Wechsler: "Als er wieder auftauchte und zitternd prustete, sah ich ihm direkt in die Augen und griff nach seinem Kopf. Ich hielt ihn wie einen Ball zwischen meinen Händen und drückte ihn langsam, doch so fest wie ich nur konnte, zurück ins Wasser" (*DL*, Z.193). Zichroni takes off the white gloves that normally protect him from the influx of other people's memories right before he pushes Wechsler into the water. This should give him access to Wechsler's memories, thus directing the reader (back) to the red segment of the book. The Zichroni-narration thus merges into the Wechsler plotline, with the mikveh as an entry point, and vice versa, which gives the book a loop-like structure.<sup>239</sup> The Zichroni ending appears to be more conclusive than the finale of the Wechsler narration, but this impression changes when one considers the period during which Zichroni's report was written: in the book it says "*Sh'vat – Av 5768* [italics in the original text]" (*DL*, Z.193) which roughly translates as January – August 2008. However, the production period of Wechsler's narrative is identified as "Februar – Oktober 2008" (*DL*, W.204), which means that he was still alive after Zichroni allegedly killed him. The ending of the Zichroni plotline thus inevitably leads (back) to Wechsler's narration and into the afore-mentioned loop.

The novel makes it clear that there is no single pathway through the thicket of its

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<sup>238</sup> For details on the role which Bernstein played during the affair see Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, pp. 86ff.

<sup>239</sup> The structure of Stein's book is reminiscent of David Lynch's movie *Mulholland Drive* (2001). It might be worth considering whether Stein's book is also structured like a Möbius strip, which is how the narrative construction of Lynch's film has been described by for example Jennifer A. Hudson, "No Hay Banda, and yet We Hear a Band": David Lynch's Reversal of Coherence in *Mulholland Drive*, *Journal of Film and Video* 56.1 (2004), pp. 17-24, p. 18.

narrations and perspectives – it is entirely up to the reader where and when they start:

Zwei Hauptwege und verschlungene Nebenpfade führen durch diesen Roman. Hinter jedem Umschlag befindet sich je ein möglicher Ausgangspunkt für das Geschehen. Es ist Ihnen oder auch dem Zufall überlassen, wo Sie zu lesen beginnen. Sie können der Erzählung bis zur Mitte des Buches folgen, es dann wenden und am anderen Ausgangspunkt weiterlesen. Um einem der Nebenpfade zu folgen, wenden Sie einfach nach jedem Kapitel das Buch und lesen Sie im anderen Strang weiter, wo Sie zuvor unterbrochen haben. Sie können sich jedoch auch Ihren ganz eigenen Weg suchen (*DL*, 5).

The reader's decision, however, is not without consequences: depending on where and how we start approaching *Die Leinwand*, the Wilkomirski/Minsky affair will present itself in two differing – maybe even dissenting – ways. The narrators use different narrative styles (chaotic and anti-linear in Wechsler's case, chrono- and teleological in Zichroni's), and interpret the Minsky-affair in diverging ways. By the time the reader becomes aware of the crux of this matter, it is actually too late: s/he will never be able to reverse the first decision that was taken more or less unwittingly ("es ist Ihnen oder auch dem Zufall überlassen"), and which unavoidably colours his/her perception of the affair. Hence, the book's form teaches the reader the lesson that there is no Archimedean point from which one can gain an objective, impartial view of (historical) reality or the truth. Just as the readership is implicated in the creation of Stein's novel – their choices determine the story that they are reading which does not exist independently from them – so the 'truth' is always a fabrication, based on subjective perspectives, needs and desires. The novel hence issues a warning against taking the moral high-ground, since the reader's interpretation of the affair is necessarily just as biased as the characters' approaches.<sup>240</sup>

The creative role ascribed to the reader also helps to explain the novel's title *Die Leinwand*. The canvas metaphor is central for the text, and has various meanings. Generally, the image of the canvas relates to the text's central topics of autobiographical remembering and writing. It also refers to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is a key intertext for Stein's novel. Some of the motifs in Wilde's text reappear in Stein's novel, such as the *doppelgänger* motif, and the theme of swapped identities or a double life. More importantly, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* deals extensively with the relationship between art and life, and the question of what happens when this relationship is reversed. While, in the case of Dorian Gray, it is the

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<sup>240</sup> The issues raised here extend to my own interpretation of the text, of course, as my decision on how to read Stein's *Die Leinwand* has also coloured my interpretation of it.

picture that gives expression to the protagonist's life as it unfolds, Wechsler replaces the life that he wants to forget with his own fictions (*DL*, W.137). In both cases, art becomes an extension of or even a substitute for life, and this reversal does not end well for the respective protagonists: Dorian accidentally kills himself when trying to destroy his picture, and Wechsler, at the end of the novel, is confronted with an absolute emptiness that might signify death.

Derived from the realm of painting, the canvas metaphor furthermore stresses the procedural and creative aspect of identity formation and remembrance, which Zichroni understands as constantly shifting and deeply transformative:

In der Analyse konnte man ihnen die Zügel wieder in die Hand geben – oder vielmehr die Palette und den Pinsel, mit dem sie auf der Leinwand ihrer Erinnerungen neue Akzente setzten. Dabei konnte man selbst ganz zur Leinwand werden, zu einer Projektionsfläche, auf der die Patienten mögliche Gegenentwürfe skizzierten und neue Möglichkeiten erprobten, [...]. Dabei wanderten sie ebenso durch Tausende möglicher Welten wie beim Eintauchen in Bücher oder in Musik (*DL*, Z.152).

Whereas the idea of the canvas points to – and, at least in Zichroni's case, celebrates – the fictional character of remembrance and identity formation, the motif of the mikveh is tied to the personal transformation and the idea of a *tabula rasa*. Both images therefore reflect the process of autobiographical self-(re-)construction, albeit from different angles. The Zichroni quote also points to the interrelation between the canvas and the projection screen, which implies the powers of the psyche – such as desire, fantasy, imagination – to shape our perception of other people and of reality. This aspect of the metaphor also involves the reader, as the novel itself can be seen as a canvas for the reader's projections and desires. The reader 'creates' the novel in the same way as the artist creates a painting, by adding perspective, highlights, light, and shadow. Finally, the image of the veiled or painted-over canvas, associated with Minsky, highlights the similarity between (autobiographical) memory and the notion of the palimpsest: "Sein [Minsky's] Leben, so beschrieb er es mir gegenüber, [...] kam ihm vor wie eine Leinwand, wie ein überdimensionales verfälschtes Gemälde. Er trug die Farben ab, um die Grundierung freizulegen, [...]. Er versuchte, die Konturen zu finden und zu schärfen" (*DL*, Z.176). However, the central point made in the novel is that the actual "Grundierung" – the original, pristine experience – can never be excavated and might never have existed in the first place.

### *Wechsler's account*

In the Wechsler segment, Minsky's/Wilkomirski's story is presented at a very early point in the narration as a literary scandal from the past, which has already gone through various cycles of remediation. Wechsler and the reader are thus confronted solely with mediated and mediatised, second-hand depictions of the affair, since Wechsler has forgotten about his personal involvement in the scandal (and the reader never finds out whether what he remembers later on is actually authentic). The first of these depictions is Jan Wechsler's *Maskeraden*, which is in itself a remediation of Daniel Ganzfried's book ...*alias Wilkomirski*. Wechsler's story is thus marked by the complicated interplay between various levels of observation and (re-)mediation: the original book, *Bruchstücke*, remediates the genre of the Holocaust memoir, which is then remediated in Daniel Ganzfried's book which, in Stein's novel, becomes the model for Wechsler's *Maskeraden*. *Maskeraden* focuses on the literary success and scandal that emerged after Minsky's book *Aschentage* was published. It thus centres on the reception of the book, not the text itself (which is never explicitly quoted in Stein's novel). Furthermore, the content of *Maskeraden* is paraphrased for the reader by the narrator Jan Wechsler (the recipient of the suitcase), which adds a final layer of remediation. The remediation of Ganzfried's text via *Maskeraden* concentrates on a critique of the so-called Holocaust industry ("[d]as Geschäft mit dem Holocaust" (*DL*, W.46)) and the "Kult ums Erinnern" (*DL*, W.46), which provides the backdrop for Wechsler 2's harsh judgement of the Minsky case: he offers a brief outline of Minsky's supposed (auto-)biography as it is presented in *Aschentage*, and of the success story that initially followed the book's publication. Wechsler 2 claims that he immediately knew that Minsky was jumping on the bandwagon of the so-called 'Shoah business', making money from a biography that was not his own:

Für Wechsler stand fest: Minsky war kein Überlebender des Holocaust. Die Lager in Polen hatte er lediglich als Tourist gesehen, Jahrzehnte später, als erwachsener Mann. Als Kind hingegen war er nie dort gewesen, ja hatte die von Krieg und Massenmord verschonte Schweiz, wo er geboren worden war, nicht einmal verlassen. Minsky musste das Handwerk gelegt werden. Man musste ihn entlarven und gemeinsam mit ihm die gesamte Bagage, die mit dem Holocaust, mit Entschädigungsforderungen, Büchern, Filmen und sonstigem Schauerkrum Geschäfte machte (*DL*, W.49).

Wechsler's summary of *Maskeraden* ends with the downfall of Minsky and the sudden end of his literary success after exposure by Wechsler 2. Wechsler clearly does not agree with the harsh opinions expressed by Wechsler 2 ("Ich wurde das Gefühl nicht

los, es mit einem Demagogen zu tun zu haben” (*DL*, W.46)), which, as I will argue, holds true for the novel as a whole. The remediation of Ganzfried’s book and the affair itself concentrates on the issue of the so-called ‘Shoah business’ for three reasons. Firstly, the Wechsler narration of *Die Leinwand* presents the Holocaust as part of an industry, or, to put it less provocatively, as firmly entrapped in a (memorial) routine or a highly discursivised framework.<sup>241</sup> The Holocaust is depicted as the object of literary scandals and socio-political debates, and not as a matter of authentic memories or personal traumas. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the actual text of *Bruchstücke/Aschentage* is never quoted in the Wechsler-narration; it is only the scandal, i.e. *the reception* of the book, that is debated extensively. Additionally, Minsky/Wilkomirski himself only appears very briefly in the narration, as seen through the eyes of Wechsler.<sup>242</sup> Any access to authentic Holocaust memories therefore appears firmly blocked by these circuits of remediation. Secondly, the rhetoric of the Holocaust industry highlights the problem with authenticity: the whole affair surrounding Minsky can only escalate in the way it does, because the Holocaust has indeed become a commodity, a cultural and identarian building block, which can be easily appropriated and (ab-)used, as is made apparent by Wechsler 2: “Die Schilderungen der Lagergräuel wirkten auf Wechsler wie Kolportagen, Verschnitte dokumentarischer Quellen aus verschiedenen Händen, vermischt mit dem Kitsch des Grauens und legitimiert einzig durch die Tatsache, dass man einem Überlebenden nicht widersprechen durfte [...]” (*DL*, W.48). Wechsler 2’s assessment introduces a tension between the clichéd nature of the “Verschnitte” and the aura of authenticity that surrounds the survivor: it was this aura that legitimised Minsky’s otherwise badly written text. Minsky’s transgression concerns the appropriation of this aura and the discursive authority that comes with it. Thirdly, Wechsler’s account paraphrases the Minsky affair and Wechsler 2’s polemic from a moral and historical distance (intradiegetically, the affair lies in the past). Wechsler is wary of Wechsler 2’s criticism, not only because it strikes him as unnecessarily harsh, but also because it

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<sup>241</sup> Norbert Otto Eke has coined the term “Diskursfiguration” to describe this phenomenon, see Norbert Otto Eke, “Was wollen sie? Die Absolution?” Opfer- und Täterprojektionen bei Maxim Biller’, in: Sander Gilman and Hartmut Steinecke (eds.), *Deutsch-jüdische Literatur der neunziger Jahre. Die Generation nach der Shoah* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2002), pp. 89-107, p. 90.

<sup>242</sup> Actually, Wechsler meets Minsky twice, but he can only remember the second encounter, which takes place long after the affair. The first time he meets Minsky is in 1995, during a joint reading at the *Leipziger Buchmesse*. Both Wechsler’s own and Zichroni’s narration hint to the fact that Wechsler was envious of Minsky’s success and that this was the primary motive for his involvement in the case.

appears to him as polemical and outdated. *Die Leinwand* therefore reflects meta-discursively on the hypermediation of Holocaust memories in the context of the Wilkomirski/Minsky-affair, while considering the criticism of this hypermediation via the rhetoric of the ‘Shoah business’. The novel itself adopts a third position, by highlighting that hypermediation is inevitable, meaning that all we can achieve are hypersubjective and partial truths.

After having received the unsettling letter from von Dennen, Wechsler makes another discovery that calls into question his sense of identity. Reading Wechsler 2’s debut novel (which is not *Maskeraden*), he realises that Wechsler’s fictions are actually rooted in his personal biography.<sup>243</sup> Whereas he is initially convinced that Wechsler 2 has somehow managed to steal his biography and identity, he ultimately has to admit that the opposite might also be true: “Ich selbst könnte der Dieb sein und irgendwann in den letzten zehn Jahren die Regensburgers, Hillers und Markovás [i.e. the characters from Wechsler’s debut novel] adoptiert und ihre Familiensaga zur Geschichte *meiner* Familie gemacht haben [italics in the original text]” (*DL*, W.82). This insight is deeply ironic, of course, for if Wechsler’s suspicions are true (and we will find out that they are), he actually committed the same crime he originally accused Minsky of: he appropriated someone else’s identity in order to escape from an unbearable reality. The harsh judgement he passed on Wechsler 2 thus applies equally to himself: “Er hatte *mich* erzählt, ohne mich um Erlaubnis gefragt, ja überhaupt nur mit mir gesprochen zu haben. Dass er es noch weiter treiben würde, daran zweifelte ich nicht. Wer anderen die Identität stiehlt, schreckt auch vor Mord nicht zurück [italics in the original text]” (*DL*, W.81). Apart from adding an ironic twist to the story, Wechsler’s misrecognition of himself could be read as an instance of poetic justice: he is made to live through the same things Minsky had to go through.

Increasingly confused, Wechsler consults another book on the matter in search for answers, this time written by a certain Hans Macht and entitled *Die Akte Minsky*. As this is a remediation of Stefan Maechler’s afore-mentioned study, we need to ask what exactly gets recycled: *Die Leinwand* concentrates on those sections of Macht’s/Maechler’s text that give an account of Minsky’s/Wilkomirski’s childhood and posit that the “Urtrauma” (*DL*, W.88) of his exceptionally harsh upbringing led to

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<sup>243</sup> The whole matter becomes even more complicated when the reader finds out that the biography that might or might not have been stolen from Wechsler belongs to the author Benjamin Stein who then fictionalised it in his first novel *Das Alphabet des Juda Liva*, see Benjamin Stein, *Das Alphabet des Juda Liva* (Munich: dtv, 1998).

“Minskys spätere[m] Rollenspiel als Holocaust-Überlebender” (*DL*, W.89) – an interpretation that does not convince Wechsler. Wechsler’s summary turns to the aftermath of the affair, stressing the overall devastating turn of events for Minsky. The strong emphasis on the hard life that Minsky/Wilkomirski led before and after the affair creates a rather sympathetic outlook, although Wechsler (and Macht) is convinced that he was a fraud: “Es bestand kein Zweifel mehr darüber, wer seine leiblichen Eltern waren” (*DL*, W.90). Macht’s work is depicted as the more objective and fact-based counterpart to Wechsler 2’s diatribe, which makes both Wechsler and the reader more inclined to adopt Macht’s view than the perspective of the “Demagoge” Wechsler 2.

Wechsler’s story is an attempt to somehow rip apart the web of multiple (re-) mediations and to get to the core of what really happened between him and Minsky. However, he remains unsuccessful: his own, seemingly authentic memories resurface eventually, but only in a fragmentary form. We also find out that he has gone through various identity changes, which casts doubt on the true content of his seemingly authentic memories: is he really remembering his *own* past or is he, once again, reproducing someone else’s memories?

#### *Zichroni’s account*

Zichroni’s perspective on the Minsky/Wilkomirski affair is entirely different. Minsky is introduced quite late in the story, on page Z.161 (out of a total of 193 pages). The Minsky the reader meets in this narration is not the epicentre of a major literary scandal but one of Zichroni’s friends and patients; he is an actual person and not a media phenomenon. It is only after establishing this personal context that the narration proceeds to Minsky’s background story, which is told in fragmentary form. The reader who has read the Wechsler segment first is likely to be biased against Minsky’s ‘memories’ and Zichroni’s sympathetic account. Zichroni traces how Minsky’s private story and plight turns into the Minsky affair, underlining the brutality with which Wechsler and the press hunted Minsky down as part of their “Feldzug” (*DL*, Z.184). He draws an extremely negative picture of Wechsler, whose wounded pride seems to have motivated his involvement in the case. Although Zichroni is thus generally on Minsky’s side, portraying him as the main casualty in a media war, he also notices the strong performance element of Minsky’s behaviour, which walks the line between traumatic authenticity and media spectacle:

Wie immer las Minsky nicht selbst. Ihm hätte die Stimme versagt. Er brauchte jemanden, der für ihn aufs Podium ging, um aus dem Buch zu lesen. Meist spielte er, bevor er den Vortrag begann, ein oder zwei kurze Stücke auf der Violine. Während der Lesung selbst saß er jeweils abseits und hörte mit geschlossenen Augen zu, als ginge er noch einmal alle Orte seiner Erinnerung ab (*DL*, Z.184).<sup>244</sup>

While this exaggerated behaviour does not seem suspicious to Zichroni at the time – he believes in the authenticity of Minsky’s trauma – it is retrospectively constructed as a hint at Minsky’s disingenuousness and a possible explanation for his actions: he has a craving for attention.

The narration gains momentum when Zichroni finally uses his “Erinnerungssinn” on Minsky. As mentioned, he does this only to gain a deeper understanding of Minsky’s suffering, not because he distrusts him at the time. What he sees is a historically unspecified scene of fear and menace:

Es war das erste und einzige Mal, dass ich Minsky berührte. Als ich meine Hand auf seine Stirn legte, wurde ich von panischer Angst erfasst. Ich hockte zusammengekauert auf einem grob gezimmerten Dielenboden unter einem niedrigen Tisch. Es war dämmerig, und eine Frau stapfte brüllend durch den Raum. Ich sah von ihr nur die Beine, in großen Gummistiefeln, wie Bauern sie tragen. Sie brüllte fortwährend, dass sie mich zerreißen würde, wenn sie mich fände. Dabei schlug sie mit einem Stock oder einer Rute auf den Tisch und gegen die Wände. Die Angst, entdeckt zu werden, war so übermächtig, dass ich aufhörte zu atmen und die Hände auf meine Augen presste, weil ich hoffte zu verschwinden (*DL*, Z.174f.).

Significantly, the context of the Holocaust is only added to this scene *afterwards*, by Minsky himself: “Lederstiefel, sagte Minsky, als hätte ich ihn danach gefragt. Die Blockowa trug blank gewichste Lederstiefel, und der Stock war eine Gerte, die bei jedem Schlag wie ein Brenneisen in die Haut fuhr” (*DL*, Z.175). The vagueness of Zichroni’s experience could be explained by the fact that he is confronted with Minsky’s childhood memories. Without Minsky’s explications, the scene that Zichroni witnesses could have taken place either in the camps or in Minsky’s hiding place in Poland or in his foster home. Zichroni’s act of witnessing therefore neither proves nor disproves Minsky’s claim that he is a Holocaust victim. This is significant, because the “Erinnerungssinn” does not manage to provide the reader with certainty about the (in-)authenticity of Minsky’s memories.<sup>245</sup> The fact that this does not happen in *Die Leinwand* implies that there is no authority that could rightfully judge the historical

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<sup>244</sup> This is in fact a fairly accurate description of the actual Wilkomirski readings, with the difference that the real Wilkomirski played the clarinet, not the violin, see Stefan Maechler, *The Wilkomirski Affair*, p. 116.

<sup>245</sup> This point is also stressed by Alessandro Costazza, ‘Benjamin Steins *Die Leinwand*’.

accuracy of Minsky's memories. It furthermore suggests that their historical accuracy is not the main point, as the novel puts forward a "funktionale[s] Wahrheitskonzept [...]"<sup>246</sup> as Silke Horstkotte has noted: "Was [...] ist eine Wahrheit, die tötet, wert gegenüber einer Wahrheit, die jemanden leben lässt?" (*DL*, Z.179).

In contrast, the Wechsler segment presents the Holocaust as an object of literary and societal debates, and not as a matter of authentic memories or personal traumas. A highly ritualised and discursivised framework of Holocaust hypermediation forms the backdrop for Wechsler's account. At the same time, it remains unclear whether Wechsler actually manages to regain his authentic memories, and, owing to the loop-like structure of the novel, the characters and the reader endlessly slip from one circuit of representations into the other. And so it is that in the age of remediation, Holocaust memory is depicted not so much as an issue of family traumas or personal 'Betroffenheit' (i.e. familial postmemory) but rather as a problem of mediatisation, adoption, and appropriation. It should be noted that Wechsler actually has a family history that involves the Holocaust (that applies to both his identities – the real as well as the appropriated one), which he uncovers during a trip to the registration office. However, instead of digging deeper into this history, as would probably be the case in the genre of the conventional family novel, he remains focused on his adopted identity. Whereas Wechsler does have a personal connection to the Holocaust, both Zichroni and Minsky are not at all genealogically tied to the event. While Minsky longs to establish this connection by fabricating a victim identity, Zichroni does not ground his Jewish identity in the experience of trauma: "In meine Familie hatte die Vernichtung keine Lücke gerissen. Meine Großeltern und Eltern kamen aus der Schweiz. Ich war [...] zuvor noch nie in Yad Vashem gewesen und hatte es immer vermieden, mir Dokumentationen über den Holocaust anzusehen" (*DL*, Z.174).

Stein's protagonists can no longer generate the same aura of authenticity as the survivor generation, since they do not have any personal experiences of the event. They furthermore – apart from Minsky – no longer aim for a Jewish identity based on trauma and victimisation. By downplaying the role of historical accuracy and authenticity from the perspective of a later generation, Stein's text adopts a different, much more sympathetic outlook on the Minsky/Wilkomirski affair, as is also stressed by Silke Horstkotte:

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<sup>246</sup> Silke Horstkotte, "Ich bin, woran ich mich erinnere", p. 130.

Damit löst sich der Roman radikal vom Konzept des authentischen Holocaust-Zeugen wie auch vom Anspruch der historischen Forschung, Erinnerungen mithilfe von Dokumenten beweisen oder widerlegen zu können. Subjektive Erinnerung und Imagination schlagen im Roman ganz klar den Fakten- und Beweiszugang. Wenn man diesen Standpunkt akzeptiert, dann resultiert die Problematik des Falls Wilkomirski aus nichts als lauter falsch gestellten Fragen.<sup>247</sup>

Although Wechsler and Zichroni pursue radically different approaches to the Minsky case, they also overlap: in both cases Minsky is assigned the role of the victim who gets punished far too harshly for a crime that he – in all probability – committed unwittingly; and in both cases Wechsler features as the perpetrator who went after Minsky mainly because his own artistic ambitions remained unsatisfied. In the Wechsler narration, this harsh assessment is supported by a clever authorial move: because of his psychic dissociation, Wechsler judges his former self and publications from an outside perspective, which makes his criticism of himself appear all the more objective. *Die Leinwand* thus propagates the radical and ineluctable subjectivity of memory, along with the inescapability of hypermediation. In this way, the novel bypasses the larger philosophical, ethical and political issues involved. This is why Hans-Peter Kunisch denounced Stein's novel as "viel zu unkritisch".<sup>248</sup> It is certainly true that Stein's novel does not consider in any detail the clash between its postmodern truisms – identities are fluid, reality is a construct – and the core assumptions governing Holocaust discourse. Furthermore, the fact that memories and identities are mobile, fluid and open to appropriation in the age of remediation, does not necessarily imply that "the issues surrounding the propriety of memory" are no longer important – in fact, the opposite is true.<sup>249</sup> However, in my view the central insight produced by *Die Leinwand* is that, once these memories have entered the cultural archive, there is no institution that can guarantee the rights of ownership. The novel is therefore not so much "unkritisch" (although I also find the exculpation of Minsky's character highly problematic), as wary of a definitive criticism and judgement. Due to its form, *Die Leinwand* does not offer its characters or readers a point from which they could safely (in the sense of 'objectively') evaluate the Minsky case.

Such openness might well be limited to the medium of literature with its ability to

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>248</sup> Hans-Peter Kunisch, 'Fernduell', *Die Weltwoche* 11 (2010) <<http://www.weltwoche.ch/ausgaben/2010-11/artikel-2010-11-literatur-fernduell.html>> [accessed: 30 August 2014].

<sup>249</sup> Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory*, p. 18.

carry out first- and second-order observations, as Niklas Luhmann has noted.<sup>250</sup> This means that Stein's novel is able to participate in and reflect on the "cycles of remediation", alongside its own entanglements in them: it is self- and meta-reflexive. As a literary text, *Die Leinwand* can accommodate a multiplicity of conflicting perspectives. Since Stein's novel is not a historical study, it can embrace ambiguity. Finally, as a novel, Stein's text is able to draw the reader into its world, by making him/her a – maybe even *the* producer – of the text. Drawing on Roland Barthes' distinction between "the readerly" and the "writerly" text, i.e. a text that sees the reader either as a passive recipient or as an active producer, we can thus say that the particular strength of Stein's novel lies in its "writerly" mode.<sup>251</sup> The reader of Stein's novel is "no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text",<sup>252</sup> and it is this quality that forces him/her to also reflect upon his/her own implication in the dynamics of Holocaust hypermediation.

### 3.2. The Holocaust as Travelling Trauma – Between Prosthesis, Contagion, and Personification

Issues of memorial adoption and appropriation are central to the depiction of the Wilkomirski affair in *Die Leinwand*. Stein's novel stages the mobility of (Holocaust) memories in a hypermediated world as the main problem arising from the scandal: once personal memories are externalised with the help of the media, they become mobile and open to appropriation. Wechsler and Minsky can only construct their fake identities because they have a broad knowledge of and access to the cultural archive, in the form of literary texts, historical studies, documentary films, feature films and numerous photographic images. These travelling memories move not only between the past and present and different individuals (i.e. interpersonally and transgenerationally), but also between national borders: Wechsler was born as an Israeli Jew who then adopts the identity of a GDR-convert, and Minsky (as well as Wilkomirski/Grosjean/Dössekker) originally came from Switzerland, but adopts the identity of a Latvian-born Holocaust survivor. Whereas the transgenerational, transmedial and transnational migration of mediated memories is not a new

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<sup>250</sup> Niklas Luhmann, 'Weltkunst', in: Niklas Luhmann, Frederick D. Bunsen and Dirk Baecker (eds.), *Unbeobachtbare Welt. Über Kunst und Architektur* (Bielefeld: Haux, 1990), pp. 7-45.

<sup>251</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z. An Essay*, transl. by Richard Miller (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1987).

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

phenomenon as such, their mobility is increased and accelerated in the age of remediation: their proliferation in the mass media gives rise to what Alison Landsberg has termed “prosthetic memory”.<sup>253</sup> This is a “portable, fluid, and non-essentialist form of memory”,<sup>254</sup> generated and transmitted by “an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum”.<sup>255</sup> Through the interaction with these “experiential sites”, a specific connection to the past arises: “[T]he person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics”.<sup>256</sup> Landsberg’s theory is situated within a wider political and ethical framework, dedicated to constructing non-essentialist “political alliances that transcend race, class and gender”.<sup>257</sup>

However, Holocaust remembrance in *Die Leinwand* challenges Landsberg’s claim that “prosthetic” memory is inherently more ethical; in fact, the novel shows that the opposite may also be true. Furthermore, Landsberg’s claim about the novelty value of “prosthetic memory” needs some qualification: memories have been mobile and transportable ever since the invention of notation systems, and media such as film are not inherently more “experiential” than, for example, literature, although this is of course what the aesthetics of Hollywood cinema try to suggest: “Although all aesthetic experience has an affective component, the sensuous in the cinema – the experiential nature of the spectator’s engagement with the image – is different from other aesthetic experiences such as reading”.<sup>258</sup> By highlighting the particularly sensuous quality of the cinematic experience, she also suggests that the body, and the visceral in particular, is a realm of the authentic and that it can provide more direct access to the past. This is why Landsberg assumes that movie-goers will automatically and inevitably identify and empathise with a media image. Like Caruth and Hirsch, she conceptualises media (in her case, films and museums) as transparent carriers of affect, which function universally – she fails to culturally contextualise the production and reception of these media and “strips them of mediation” (and, I would add, their materiality), as Rick

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<sup>253</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Crownshaw has pointed out.<sup>259</sup> This emphasis on transparent affect and identification actually thwarts Landsberg's broader political agenda: while, in her view, identification is a strong enough incentive for political engagement, excessive identification can also prevent the recipient from taking any action because s/he is too caught up in sentiment. Landsberg's writing lacks concrete suggestions on how precisely identification "creates the conditions for ethical thinking" and instigates political action.<sup>260</sup> Furthermore, the use of the term "memory" in Landsberg's work is somewhat debatable. Her writing is not so much concerned with actual memories or the experience of remembering, but with strategies of identification and the production of empathy in the context of mass mediatisation. However, Landsberg still thinks the term "memory" is justified, as these prosthetic experiences shape the recipient's subjectivity in the same way as a memory would. She sidelines the fact that, unlike embodied experiences, these "prosthetic memories" remain media representations and thus separate from the subject, unless we are dealing with a case of pathological overidentification. They can thus never function as a memory, even if they might deeply influence a subject's identity.

Landsberg believes that "[c]ommodification enables memories and images of the past to circulate on a grand scale; it makes these memories available to all who are able to pay".<sup>261</sup> The community of those "who are able to pay" is, however, a capitalist concept which replaces one mechanism of exclusion, such as nationalism or ethnocentrism, with money and class. My analysis of Adorno's notion of "Kultur" after Auschwitz has shown that the form of the commodity influences, even determines, the content of what is passed on. While commodified "memories" might become more broadly available, their "Warencharakter" therefore hinders ethical engagement or political action.

In spite of these reservations, the term "prosthetic memory" can be usefully applied to *Die Leinwand*, precisely because it fuses the idea of travelling memory with the issues of hypermediation, appropriation, identification, and empathy. Landsberg abandons the distinction between reality and prosthesis altogether: "Any distinction between 'real' memories and prosthetic memories – memories that might be technologically disseminated as commodities by the mass media and worn by their

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<sup>259</sup> Rick Crownshaw, 'The Future of Memory: Introduction', in: Rick Crownshaw, Jane Kilby and Anthony Rowland (eds.), *The Future of Memory*, pp. 3-15, p. 7.

<sup>260</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 9.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

consumers – might ultimately be unimportant”.<sup>262</sup> Stein’s text also suggests that fabrication and truth are categorically and inextricably intertwined in the realm of memory, which is why traditional notions of truth and authenticity need to be abandoned: “Aber es gibt diese Wahrheit nicht. Sie ist niemandes Besitz. Wir alle halten nur Bruchstücke davon in den Händen. Und weil wir nicht wissen, was wahr ist, müssen wir uns entscheiden, was für uns zählt” (*DL*, Z.61). Terri Tomsky’s concerns about the ethical ramifications of “travelling trauma”, its commodification and the establishment of a “trauma economy” are not shared by either Landsberg or Stein in their respective texts.<sup>263</sup> The novel demonstrates that, on a personal level, travelling traumas might well be appropriated to gain symbolic capital (this is Wechsler 2’s interpretation of the Wilkomirski affair) or to cover up a traumatic past (this is Hans Macht’s interpretation and what Wechsler himself has done). However, *Die Leinwand* ultimately suggests that this is an unavoidable consequence of hypermediation. The novel therefore establishes a middle ground between Landsberg’s and Tomsky’s positions, by neither celebrating nor denigrating the dynamics of travelling trauma.

### 3.2.1. Zichroni’s “Erinnerungssinn”

At the same time, the novel contrasts the hypermediated mobility of “prosthetic” memories with the phenomenon of Zichroni’s so-called “Erinnerungssinn”. As a fantasy of immediacy, Zichroni’s gift seemingly enables a transmission of (traumatic) memories and histories without any mediation: “Ich konnte Zeuge längst zurückliegender Ereignisse werden. Ich konnte sie sogar *ganz authentisch* im Körper des anderen und mit all seinen Sinnen so erleben, wie sie im Gedächtnis aufbewahrt worden waren [my emphasis]” (*DL*, Z.134). The transmission of memories via the “Erinnerungssinn” is depicted as a form of contagion that overwhelms and overburdens the subject. Whenever he touches someone else’s skin, Zichroni is completely incapacitated by the violent influx of memories. Zichroni’s descriptions of his ‘gift’ are therefore peppered with images of flooding, drowning or going blind: “Wieder, wie schon die beiden Male zuvor, war ich von den Bildern überrannt worden. Ich war dem Geschehen ausgeliefert gewesen, ohne auch nur den Hauch einer Möglichkeit, den Verlauf zu kontrollieren” (*DL*, Z.98). He decides to protect himself

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>263</sup> Terri Tomsky, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11’.

from the contagiousness of other people's memories by wearing a set of white gloves (*DL*, Z.124f.). As I have shown in the previous chapter, the contagion paradigm evoked here is a central feature of Caruth's and Hirsch's respective trauma theory. Zichroni's "Erinnerungssinn" implies a similar (over-)identification with other people's experiences, memories, and traumas. He absorbs these in an act of amalgamation which is not without erotic undertones: he repeatedly speaks of the experience of becoming one with the other. Because this is a form of transmission that functions non-verbally and literally (in the Caruthian sense), it seemingly offers immediacy. And so it is that Zichroni cannot contextualise or understand the visual impressions and intense bodily sensations that he experiences randomly, which creates an interesting parallel with Wilkomirski's memory in *Bruchstücke*. This contagious form of transmission is able to transcend intersubjective boundaries through infectious contact.

Zichroni's gift thus appears as a literary exemplification of Caruth's theory, which raises the question whether the reader is faced with an affirmation or a problematisation of the contagion paradigm. The text gradually deconstructs this fantasy of immediacy by introducing various layers of (re-)mediation. At the start of his narration, Zichroni strongly emphasises the inherent malleability of memories:

Erinnerung aber ist unbeständig, stets bereit, sich zu wandeln. Mit jedem Erinnern formen wir um, filtern, trennen und verbinden, fügen hinzu, sparen aus und ersetzen so im Laufe der Zeit das Ursprüngliche nach und nach durch die Erinnerung an die Erinnerung. Wer sollte da noch sagen, was einmal wirklich geschehen ist? (*DL*, Z.7f.)

Zichroni's occupation as a psychoanalyst is evident here, as this passage alludes to Freud's famous 1899 essay 'Über Deckerinnerungen'.<sup>264</sup> In this essay, Freud argues that the childhood memories that appear the most authentic have undergone multiple processes of displacement and "Umgestaltung",<sup>265</sup> breaking down the boundaries between memory and fantasy, while also upsetting the temporal and causal logic that links an "original" event to the memory of it. Marked by *Nachträglichkeit*, an event that happened later in time can change the perception and significance of an earlier event. Freud concludes: "Vielleicht ist es überhaupt zweifelhaft, ob wir bewußte Erinnerungen *aus* der Kindheit haben, oder nicht vielmehr bloß *an* die Kindheit. Unsere Kindheitserinnerungen zeigen uns die ersten Lebensjahre, nicht wie sie waren, sondern wie sie späteren Erweckungszeiten erschienen sind [*italics in the original*]

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<sup>264</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Über Deckerinnerungen', in: *Sigmund Freud. Gesammelte Werke, Vol. I: Werke aus den Jahren 1892-1899*, ed. by Anna Freud et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), pp. 531-554.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 548.

text]”.<sup>266</sup> Dismissing the idea that our childhood memories are based on “getreue Wiederholung des damals empfundenen Eindrucks”,<sup>267</sup> Freud highlights the power of retrospective construction: we see our childhood in accordance with later needs and impressions, and not how it actually was. Similarly, the Zichroni passage denies the possibility of ever reaching the original event that was at the heart of the various layers of memorial transformation and mediation. He even questions whether “das Ursprüngliche” has actually ever happened: “Wer sollte da noch sagen, was einmal wirklich geschehen ist?”.<sup>268</sup> Contrary to his claims, Zichroni is therefore not a “Zeuge längst zurückliegender Ereignisse” (*DL*, Z.134): what he experiences are other people’s memories of events, which in Freudian fashion are “stets bereit, sich zu wandeln”.

Zichroni faces the added problem that his visions remain “vage Collage[n] aus eigenem und Fremdem” (*DL*, Z.99). This is why his friend Eli advises him to work on the “Verringerung des eigenen Egos” (*DL*, Z.99) through the practice of *Bitul Azmo*, a form of gradual ego depletion. However, his reaction to (and maybe even murder of) Wechsler as recounted in the final pages of his narration highlights the persistence of his ego, as his personal feelings of anger and resentment stop him from achieving forgiveness and reconciliation. His visions thus remain a mashup right until the end, which also calls into question the authenticity of his earlier experiences, particularly with Minsky: to what extent was his vision coloured by his sympathy for Minsky? Zichroni’s gift therefore fails him on two decisive occasions, as Alessandro Costazza has argued: firstly, he is unable to determine the truth content of Minsky’s claims and, secondly, he is unable to establish the accuracy of Wechsler’s statements.<sup>269</sup> Before attempting to drown Wechsler, he takes off his gloves: within the symbolism of the novel, this means that he should be able to tell the reader which of Wechsler’s memories were really his and which ones were appropriated. However, when writing

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 553.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 552.

<sup>268</sup> Although Zichroni’s and Freud’s assessments are thus remarkably similar, there is one crucial difference: Zichroni conceptualises memory as a palimpsestic accumulation of several layers that could theoretically be peeled off to reach “das Ursprüngliche”. This logic is also implied in the metaphor of the canvas and the various coatings of paint which need to be removed by Minsky. By contrast, Freud’s screen memory and the logic of *Nachträglichkeit* call into question this archaeological trajectory: “Zu diesen Zeiten der Erweckung sind die Kindheitserinnerungen nicht, wie man zu sagen gewohnt ist, *aufgetaucht*, sondern sie sind damals *gebildet* worden, [...] [italics in the original text]”. For Freud, there is no “Ursprung”, as the notion of the origin always implies retroactive construction, see Sigmund Freud, ‘Über Deckerinnerungen’, pp. 553f.

<sup>269</sup> Alessandro Costazza, ‘Benjamin Steins *Die Leinwand*’, pp. 313f.

down his version of events after the confrontation with Wechsler, he remains silent on the issue. Zichroni's "Erinnerungssinn" does therefore not provide him (or the reader) with access to the 'truth', as it is tainted by the distortions of (other people's) memory and Zichroni's own ego. The "Erinnerungssinn" does not therefore point beyond the circuits of (re-)mediation, meaning that the desire for authenticity and immediacy remains unfulfilled in Stein's novel.

### 3.2.2. *The Text as Embodied Experience*

While Zichroni uses his "Erinnerungssinn" to connect with other people's memories, Wechsler adopts and appropriates them through the act of reading and writing. It eventually becomes clear that Wechsler has appropriated an identity that comes from his own debut novel, which is in itself based on the biography of the extra-textual author Benjamin Stein: "Die Biographie, an die ich mich heute erinnere, ist die Legende, die ich selbst aufgebaut habe. In meinem ersten Buch habe ich sie als Geschichtenbilderbogen aufgefächert und später für mich selbst adoptiert" (*DL*, W.137).<sup>270</sup> Like Minsky (and Wilkomirski), Wechsler makes use of the cultural archive to construct a convincing (auto-)biography.

However, not everyone who reads a book or watches a film identifies with the text to the extent that the line between fact and fiction, self and other becomes blurred. Earlier on, I rejected Landsberg's claim that audiences, overwhelmed by the immersive experience of films, are categorically unable (or unwilling) to draw the line between reality and representation. Stein's text, in my opinion, points to a central flaw in Landsberg's argument: in *Die Leinwand*, identification is not so much the *result of* but rather the *basis for* the adoptive strategies that underpin the phenomenon and practice of "prosthetic memory". Wechsler's problems spring from his specific approach to literature, not from the immersiveness of the medium: "Es dauerte nicht lange, und ich lebte nur noch mit, in und um die Bücher" (*DL*, W.33); "Kaum eines der Bücher, die ich Buchstabe für Buchstabe *verschlank*, mir *einverleibte*, ganz und gar *aufnahm*, kaum eines dieser Bücher hat mir je gehört [my emphasis]" (*DL*, W.37). These images of consumption highlight Wechsler's highly identificatory reading

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<sup>270</sup> In his blog, Stein has published two articles that deal with his own biography which is similar to Wechsler's, see Benjamin Stein, 'Der Autor als Seelenstripper', *turmsegler.net*, 3 June 2010 <<http://turmsegler.net/20100603/der-autor-als-seelenstripper/>> [accessed: 7 October 2014] and Benjamin Stein, 'Familiengeschichte', *turmsegler.net*, 14 June 2010 <<http://turmsegler.net/20100614/familiengeschichte/>> [accessed: 7 October 2014].

practice: literature is something that he devours in order to compensate for a life that, in the context of the oppressive GDR system, he could not live himself. This attitude paves the way for the later adoption of his own fictions, which allow him to escape from a life and self that he cannot accept. In her essay ‘Memorizing Memory’,<sup>271</sup> Amy Hungerford argues that post-structuralist trauma theory “conflate[s] reading and experience” by way of the “personification” of the text,<sup>272</sup> which attributes to written words the characteristics of a person. As a result of this conflation, writing is imagined as “the embodiment (rather than the representation) of the kind of experience – of ‘life’ – that only persons can be said to have”.<sup>273</sup> For Hungerford, Dössekker is a case in point:

And this is precisely what I take Bruno Dössekker also to have done. He absorbed the accounts of camp life, the stories of extreme violence, the testimonies and histories and photographs, and they finally became him, finally made him Binjamin Wilkomirski. I want to suggest that [...] in the case of Bruno Dössekker, memorizing and memory have become the same thing.<sup>274</sup>

Hungerford thus interprets Wilkomirski’s text as symptomatic of larger developments in Holocaust discourse, which can also be found in *Die Leinwand*. Both Wechsler and Minsky obliterate the ontological difference between reality and fiction by transferring literary representations into their personal experiential repertoire. Therefore, it is not so much the mobility and possible appropriation of “prosthetic memory” that poses a problem, but rather the identificatory and appropriative attitude towards representations of other people’s experiences and traumas. The hypermediation of Holocaust memories as such does not necessarily lead to appropriation and over-identification; these are a consequence of the personification of the mediated accounts, which deny their mediality and cast them as embodiments of experience. Returning to the discussion of the previous chapter, we can now say that contemporary remediations of the Holocaust should not only be judged on the basis of their self- and meta-reflexivity, but also with reference to the issue of mediality. As a text that, by virtue of its construction, repeatedly foregrounds its own fictionality, *Die Leinwand* is able to depict and critically reflect upon the issues of Holocaust hypermediation and

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<sup>271</sup> Amy Hungerford, ‘Memorizing Memory’. The issue of “personification” marks a broad range of texts in post-war American culture, as Hungerford shows in her more extensive study on *The Holocaust of Texts*, see Amy Hungerford, *The Holocaust of Texts*.

<sup>272</sup> Amy Hungerford, ‘Memorizing Memory’, p. 88.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

personification, alongside its own implication in it.

### 3.3. Performing Jewishness in a Post-Holocaust World

Stein's novel problematises notions of Jewish identity that are based on the (appropriated) experience of trauma and victimisation. While the survivor and eyewitness generation can still draw on an aura of authenticity that comes from having lived and suffered through the wartime period, this is no longer the case for present and future generations of Jews whose personal and familial ties to the events are about to (or have already) dissolve(d). *Die Leinwand* highlights how, for these generations, the Holocaust has turned into a "travelling trauma", increasingly mobile, free-floating, and adoptable. Wechsler's background story is particularly interesting in this context: he chooses to ignore the connection between his own family history and the Holocaust, which is only brought to him via the clerk at the registration office. This scene demonstrates that the family and familial postmemory cease to be the primary media of memory transfer and identity formation in Stein's novel. The discovery of a hidden traumatic past, which was at the heart of the multi- and intergenerational family novel, play no role in Stein's novel: the Holocaust no longer defines the narrator-protagonists' sense of Jewishness. In contrast to both Wechsler and Zichroni, Minsky builds his (fake) Jewish identity on appropriated Holocaust trauma. An extreme example of "affiliative" postmemory and/or "prosthetic" memory, his case challenges both Hirsch's and Landsberg's claim that the postmemorial position is always ethical. Both narrator-protagonists judge Minsky, albeit for different reasons: while Wechsler criticises him for profiting from his alleged victim status, Zichroni has reservations about his lack of religion. If Jewish self-understanding no longer resides in the Holocaust, then this raises the question what other forms of Jewish identity the text explores in a post-Holocaust world.

#### 3.3.1. Religious Identity and the (Im-)Possibility of Transcendence

Stein's novel offers a detailed depiction of Jewish orthodox life: as both protagonists are orthodox Jews, the text introduces the non-Jewish reader to various religious objects and customs, such as the mikveh, tsitsit binding, the learning routines at the kheder and the yeshivah, or festive and everyday religious rituals. While Jewish religious life serves as a possible anchor point for Jewish identity in a post-Holocaust

world, the novel's promotion of religious Jewish identity is not as unequivocal as one might think. When starting with the Zichroni-narration, the reader is plunged into a rich religious world, in which the main character gains considerable stability from his religious attachments. Although Zichroni is critical of his ultra-orthodox upbringing in Mea Shearim, he never questions his uncle's modern orthodox lifestyle, which is based on the conviction that godly wisdom and worldly knowledge need to coalesce in order to attain perfection – a philosophy that, for Nathan Bollag, is exemplified by his favourite gemstone, the demantoid, famous for its inclusion of impurities (*DL*, Z.28f.). This positive evaluation of Jewish religiousness is further strengthened when Zichroni comes across his patient Lauren who suffers from a traumatic family history, linked to her Christian fundamentalist upbringing. While Christian belief is portrayed as a disturbing melange of unatoneable sins, eternal guilt, and punishment, Zichroni stresses his “nahezu familiär anmutenden Umgang mit dem Ewigen” (*DL*, Z.137). The juxtaposition of Jewish orthodoxy and Christian fundamentalism creates the impression that the Jewish faith is more forgiving and humane:

Was unser Verständnis des Ewigen anging, kamen wir wie von entgegengesetzten Enden des Universums. Nicht einen einzigen Tag in meinem Leben hatte ich Gott als Scharfrichter empfunden. Er mochte mitunter grausam sein, aber wenn ich einmal das Gefühl gehabt hatte, er hätte sich von mir abgewandt, folgte auch wieder eine Erfahrung, die mich ganz davon überzeugte, von ihm angenommen und fürsorglich, wenn nicht sogar liebevoll geleitet zu werden (*DL*, Z.135).

The text thus employs a strategy of Othering Christianity to promote a positive sense of Jewish religious identity. However, while Zichroni never doubts his religious convictions on a personal level, his overall concept of the divine is called into question throughout the text, as I will demonstrate shortly. The ambiguity of the Zichroni-narration blossoms more fully in the Wechsler-segment. We get the impression that Wechsler's belief in the orthodox lifestyle is less firm than Zichroni's when he concedes that his turn to orthodoxy might just be another episode in a rather long line of life changes: “Ich habe Erfahrung darin, ein Leben für ein anderes aufzugeben” (*DL*, W.149). This suggests that his observant life is a further manifestation of his many identity crises and “Maskeraden”. Wechsler's character therefore highlights the performative dimension of a religious Jewish identity, which is underlined by metaphors of dressing up and masquerading that permeate his narration. Religious identity thus appears as something that one can slip in and out of, that can be changed at will, which is further accentuated by Wechsler's name. Ironically, this aligns

Wechsler with Minsky whose Jewish identity is also created and established through a performance. Through the Wechsler narration the text thus questions the stability and authenticity of a religious Jewish identity.

Nevertheless, the protagonists' turn to orthodox Judaism still responds to the disappearance of the eyewitness generation and the increasing hypermediation of Holocaust memory. Both protagonists are drawn to the religious domain because it offers experiences of deep connectedness, authenticity and transcendence which feature in both parts of the novel. In the Wechsler segment the motif of the mikveh articulates this idea of transcendence as transformation. While in Zichroni's narration the mikveh is connected to the idea of healing, repairing and cleansing, Wechsler links it to absolute renewal and rupture: "Nichts würde mehr gelten von dem, was gewesen war. Aus dem Wasser steige man auf als ein neuer Mensch" (*DL*, W.148). The transformation in the mikveh cuts established (generational) links and thus promises to fulfil the protagonist's desire for an experience of authenticity outside the circuits of mediation.

While the Wechsler narration stresses the desire for violent self-transformation, Zichroni links transcendence to the concept of "das Unermessliche", which can only be glimpsed in the transformation of everyday reality. Art and literature play an important role in this respect:

Doch wenn ich an Phantastisches dachte, dann an Bilder, die anstelle der Porträtierten altern [i.e. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*] oder an verschüttetes Sonnenblumenöl [i.e. *Der Meister und Margarita*] – kurz: an Dichtung, an Magisches, das womöglich der menschlichen Phantasie entsprungen ist, vielleicht aber auch nicht (*DL*, Z.63).

The Zichroni segment stages a clash between the values of a rationalised and 'entzauberte' modernity and the magical powers of "das Unermessliche", which is personified in Zichroni's uncle Nathan Bollag. This conflict relates back to the issues of truth and objectivity, and hence to the Minsky/Wilkomirski affair. For Bollag, the seemingly objective truths of a rationalised modernity that is marked by "Messbarkeit und Kategorisierung" (*DL*, Z.61), are nothing but "ausschnittshafte[...] Vermessungen" (*DL*, Z.60). They are far from objective, as they are bound to overlook "das Vage, in keine gängige Theorie Passende, [...] das der Messbarkeit und Kategorisierung Verschlossene" (*DL*, Z.61). This "Unermessliche" is out of the subject's reach and can only be glimpsed in rare moments of transcendence. Zichroni too critically comments on "die Wahrheit der Wissenschaftler" which attempted to destroy Minsky's

Holocaust identity: “Was [...] ist eine Wahrheit, die tötet, wert gegenüber einer Wahrheit, die jemanden leben lässt?” (DL, Z. 179). A similar tension is at work in the Wechsler-narration, which focuses less on the clash between the everyday and the transcendent than on the opposition between the truth of official documents and a subjective notion of what is historically accurate. While Wechsler, in the guise of Wechsler 2, advocates “die Wahrheit der Wissenschaftler”, the confusing discoveries he makes about his own identity (unknowingly) sway him towards a more subjective concept of truth as it is promoted by Zichroni.

Although both characters thus strive for transcendence to break free from the entanglements of the ego and a rationalised and hypermediated (post-)modernity, they do not succeed: Wechsler remains caught up in the entrapments of his ego and does not manage to transcend his old life. His attempted transformation in the mikveh of Moza is a failure, since the past comes back to haunt him in the form of the suitcase. At the end of his narration he is confronted with an absolute emptiness: “Gleich werde ich in das eiskalte Wasser sinken, und alles wird sein, wie es einmal war. Aber ich sinke nicht. Ich falle. Das Becken, in das ich stürze, ist leer” (DL, W.204). Zichroni is equally unable to catch a glimpse of “das Unermessliche” or to transcend his selfish anger towards Wechsler: although he believes that there is a “tiefe Poesie im göttlichen Lenken unserer Geschicke” (DL, Z.145), he seems unable to decipher God’s plan, as he becomes bitter and resentful towards the end of his story. The reader is also denied an experience of transcendence, as s/he is forced to remain within the loop-like structure of the novel. The only character who seems to have reached a level of transcendence in *Die Leinwand* is Zichroni’s friend Eli Rothstein, who manages to miraculously heal himself from cancer by performing a *tevilah*, i.e. a ritual cleansing in a mikveh. However, the book leaves it open whether he really experienced a godly influence or just took the right medicine: “Natürlich wusste niemand, ob Eli Rothstein wirklich geheilt war. Und wer hätte, wenn es so war, sagen können, ob er die Heilung den diversen Therapien der Ärzte zu verdanken hatte oder tatsächlich seiner Tevila in den Wassern von Moza?” (DL, Z. 75).

### 3.3.2. Jewish Identity as Masculine Identity

*Die Leinwand* does not feature any significant female characters. Wechsler has a wife who in the main remains invisible and speechless, and the young Zichroni falls in love with Rivka who is snatched away from him by his best friend Eli. Later on, Zichroni

meets Lauren, one of his first patients. Women are thus portrayed as the objects of love and care, which play no role at all for the characters' development of a Jewish identity. Minsky, Wechsler and Zichroni are all initiated into their Jewish identities by strong male mentors. This is most obvious in the case of Zichroni who maintains a close relationship with his (adoptive) uncle Nathan Bollag who acts as a substitute father and shapes Zichroni's world view. A similar function is fulfilled by Eli Rothstein, Zichroni's university friend, who is the second important influence in his life. Eli teaches Zichroni to accept his "Erinnerungssinn" as a gift from God and to perfect his abilities by practicing ego depletion. Wechsler's conversion to orthodox Judaism is also aided by a male companion, the Mashgiakh Ariel, supervisor of the religious dietary laws. Wechsler's relationship with Ariel resembles Zichroni's and Eli's: the religiously more experienced Ariel teaches Wechsler during the time of his conversion, which is sealed with a *tevilah*, i.e. a cleansing ritual in a mikveh. Finally, Minsky's Jewish identity too is shaped by his encounter with a male mentor figure. Zichroni does not only help Minsky to deal with his (supposedly) traumatic memories but he also encourages and supports him on a practical level, by accompanying him on archival trips or by talking to him about the manuscript for *Aschentage*. The narrative itself is also shaped by the competition between two males, Jan Wechsler and Amnon Zichroni who are both conceptualised as *alter egos* of a third male, the author Benjamin Stein.

Jewish identities are thus constructed as exclusively male in *Die Leinwand*. They depend on the construction of homosocial and non-familial genealogies and thus cut out women as a (re-)productive factor. One could argue that the dominance of male perspectives is a result of the patriarchal, Jewish orthodox milieu that both narratives, Wechsler's and Zichroni's, are set in. While their accounts do not categorically exclude female protagonists, they ascribe little or no importance to them. These observations point to Maxim Biller, who also constructs Jewish identity as exclusively masculine. Biller's writing establishes alternative – in this case literary – genealogies to stage violent and oedipal conflicts of belonging and dissociation. The texts by Biller and Stein therefore differ remarkably from the works of Menasse and Vertlib, who foreground the perspectives of female Jewish narrators and/or protagonists. It is noteworthy that while Menasse and Vertlib draw on family memories and the genre of the family novel, Biller and Stein do not. This raises the question of whether there is indeed a correlation between gender constructions in the narrative and the overall

genre of certain texts in contemporary German- and Austrian Jewish literature.

### 3.3.3. Jewish Identity as (Trans-)national and/or Diasporic Identity

The exploration of Jewish identity in *Die Leinwand* takes place within various national settings, particularly those of the GDR and Israel.<sup>275</sup> Wechler's character provides a rather bleak assessment of Jewish identity in the GDR: "Anders zu sein als die Mehrheit, ist in jeder Diktatur ein Problem. Jüdisch zu sein, war im Kleinen Land eine Variante des ultimativen Andersseins" (*DL*, W.128). This sense of radical otherness, however, does not weld together the few who are Jewish. On the contrary, it corrodes their sense of community, as they live in fear of one another: "Die jüdische Gemeinde war vermutlich die am besten ausgekundschaftete Religionsgemeinschaft des Landes, und jeder beargwöhnte jeden, zu den Informanten zu zählen" (*DL*, W.129). While the Holocaust caused a violent breach of Jewish traditions in Eastern *and* Western Germany,<sup>276</sup> Jews in the GDR found it particularly hard to re-establish a solid base for their identities, as Wechsler points out:

Ein befreundeter Autor hat mir Jahre später anvertraut, dass seine jüdische Identität auch in Westdeutschland nur zwei Anker hatte: Israel und Auschwitz. Beides fiel im Kleinen Land aus. In den KZs und Gefängnissen hatten Kommunisten gelitten. Das lernte man an den Schulen. Darüber las man in Romanen, und man sah es in Filmen. Juden waren wohl auch gestorben. Aber die Kommunisten hatten gekämpft. Im Staat der Widerstandskämpfer konnte man sich schwerlich auf Auschwitz berufen, um dreißig oder vierzig Jahre nach Kriegsende das eigene Selbstbild zu schärfen. Und Israel kam schon gar nicht in Frage. Die 'Zionisten' waren imperialistische Barbaren, die unseren proletarischen Brüdern in Palästina mit Waffengewalt alles nahmen, was ihnen rechtmäßig gehörte (*DL*, W.130).

This polemical passage touches on Holocaust memory and Jewish identity in the GDR: the marginalisation of Jewish victims of the Holocaust in favour of the anti-fascist, communist heroes, alongside the strong anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist stance, and the ways in which this, in some cases, gave rise to – or maybe even sustained – anti-Semitism.<sup>277</sup> In co-existence with and in contrast to the official memorial politics of the GDR, there also existed a private and familial memory of the Holocaust, which,

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<sup>275</sup> Although parts of the novel are set in three additional countries – re-unified Germany, Switzerland, and the USA – I would argue that only the GDR and Israel play a major role for the characters' development and Jewish self-understanding.

<sup>276</sup> The breach in tradition after the Holocaust is stressed by Thomas Nolden in his attempt to define contemporary German-Jewish literature, see Thomas Nolden, *Junge jüdische Literatur. Konzentrisches Schreiben in der Gegenwart* (Würzburg: Königshausen&Neumann, 1999).

<sup>277</sup> For a detailed comparison of FRG and GDR memory politics see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1997).

however, is not accessible to Wechsler: “Meine Großeltern waren eingefleischte Kommunisten. Nach der Rückkehr aus dem Exil hatten sie bedeutende Positionen im Staatsapparat inne. Eine Synagoge haben sie nie betreten” (*DL*, W.128). The breach in tradition is thus doubled for him, since he has neither a cultural nor a personal Jewish heritage that he can relate to in his search for a post-Holocaust Jewish identity.

Israel appears to be a better homeland for both Wechsler and Zichroni. It is depicted as a place of return which both characters are strongly attracted to, either in search of inner peace (Zichroni) or of a solution to their problems (Wechsler). However, neither character finds what he is looking for, which, in Wechsler’s case, considerably complicates his relationship with Israel. He initially entertains a fantasy shared by many German Jews, who hoped to find a sense of belonging and identity in *Erez Israel*: “Dennoch glaubte ich, nur in Israel wirklich herausfinden zu können, wer ich war, wie es um mein religiöses Empfinden stand und welchen Weg ich nehmen sollte” (*DL*, W.151). These hopes are disappointed, however, as Wechsler’s dream gradually turns into a nightmare:

Es muss etwas mit diesem Land zu tun haben. Bei meiner ersten Ankunft hat es mich um meine Hoffnungen als Autor gebracht. Bei meinem zweiten Aufenthalt ist mir die Erinnerung abhandengekommen, und ich weiß nicht mehr, wer ich bin. Was mich erwartet, wenn ich zum dritten Mal in der Empfangshalle des Ben-Gurion-Airports stehe, wage ich mir nicht einmal auszumalen (*DL*, W.159).

The reader knows that Wechsler’s third visit to Israel could have ended with his death: the process of self-discovery and personal fulfilment turns out to be a story of losses. These disappointments stem, at least in part, from Wechsler’s unrealistic image of Israel. His view of Israel is composed of the cliché of “bunte[s] Gedränge” (*DL*, W.182) in the Arabian bazaar as well as his experience of the West Bank as “Kriegsgebiete” (*DL*, W.192): “Als wir die Mauer passierten, die seit einigen Jahren die Westbank vom Kernland trennt, fühlte ich mich in die Zeit des Kalten Krieges zurück versetzt” (*DL*, W.194). Wechsler perceives of Israel as either the exotic, orientalisised Other (the bazaar) or as an eternal war zone (the West Bank). This perception gives rise to a tension between Wechsler as the ignorant ‘Jecke’ and Zichroni as the slightly condescending ‘sabrá’ for whom living in a war zone is nothing out of the ordinary: “Ob es denn wirklich so sei, dass man damit rechnen müsste, als Jehudi dort [in the Arab settlements] auf offener Straße erschossen zu werden. Ja, beschied Amnon mir knapp. Die Mauer und der hohe Zaun um die Siedlung seien keine Zierde” (*DL*, W.196). This contrast is weakened and ironised by the fact that

Wechsler was actually born in Israel himself, but has forgotten his original identity.

It is debatable whether the stereotypical view of Israel is attributable to the characters (or at least one of them) or a position encouraged by the text itself. *Die Leinwand* offers its readers an impression of Israel that is dominated by the (ultra-) orthodox quarters of Mea Shearim and Geula, the Israeli policeman Ben-Or who grills Wechsler for several hours, the zealots of Masada and the West Bank, thus marked by extremes rather than drawing a nuanced picture. Based on the characters' negative depiction of Israel and the GDR, one can say *Die Leinwand* constructs Jewish identity as quintessentially diasporic, disconnected from any specific national identity. Neither the GDR nor Israel (nor indeed any of the other countries that feature in the novel) can provide the characters with a sense of belonging and integration. In Stein's novel, Jewish identity can therefore not be separated from the experience of exile: "Das hat der Ewige geschickt eingefädelt: Beim Essen und am Shabbes merkt man, dass man unter Fremden lebt, im Exil" (*DL*, W.7).

#### 3.4. Conclusion: "... eine Variante des ultimativen Andersseins" – Othering, Folklore and the Commodification of Jewishness

This diasporic conception of Jewishness fosters a sense of otherness and isolation in Stein's novel, which is addressed at the start of the Wechsler-narration: the peace and quiet of the Schabbes is disrupted by the arrival of a delivery man, which poses problems for the narrator-protagonist; as an observant Jew, he is not allowed to open the door, let alone accept the parcel. The vocabulary used by Wechsler evokes an atmosphere of war and conflict: "Will man hierzulande Shabbes halten, muss man sich eine Trutzburg bauen. Setzt man den Fuß vor die Tür, betritt man bereits ein religiöses Minenfeld, und nicht weniger gefährlich ist es, wenn jemand von außen hereintritt – indem er klingelt, am Shabbes, an unserer Tür" (*DL*, W.8). Any exchange between the (Jewish) inside and the (non-Jewish) outside is described as "gefährlich". The non-Jewish environment is portrayed as unfriendly and uncomprehending, except for laudable "Ausnahmen" (*DL*, W.7), like the neighbour José Molina who gladly acts as the Wechsler family's "Shabbes-Goy" (*DL*, W.8). However, Molina is a foreigner and gay, as we find out, and thus is himself a manifestation of the Other. Whereas the Wechsler segment stages repeated clashes between the Jewish-orthodox and the non-Jewish world, in Zichroni's narrative there is no exchange at all between the two

spheres. Zichroni's story unfolds within hermetically sealed, exclusively Jewish environments – such as Mea Shearim, the yeshivah and, later on, his hermitage in Ofra – which adds a claustrophobic quality to his narrative. When for short periods he steps out of his familiar surroundings, he is overcome by a sense of alienation, feeling like an “Abgesandter aus einer anderen Welt” (*DL*, Z.107). This is especially the case when he goes to New York for the first time: “Obwohl ich nie in einem Ghetto gelebt hatte, fühlte es sich nun so an, als käme ich aus einem” (*DL*, Z.106). This assessment is not without irony, as New York harbours one of the world's largest Jewish communities. Still, Zichroni perceives the urban environment as shrill, godless and hostile by tendency:

Immerhin gab es Inseln, einzelne Quartiere in dieser fremdartigen Welt [...]. Aber ich fragte mich täglich unwillkürlich, wie lange der Moloch diese Inseln noch dulden würde. Ich war davon überzeugt, dass sie überhaupt nur geduldet wurden, eben weil es sich um Inseln handelte, die man ja umschiffen konnte und von denen gelegentlich auch mal eine im Meer des Mainstreams untergehen mochte (*DL*, Z.107).

The fear of disappearance, of being swallowed up by the “Moloch” is even more pronounced in Zichroni's uncle Nathan Bollag, who warns his nephew against the “Gefahren der *yevonnischen* Sitten dort draußen [italics in the original text]” (*DL*, Z.62). Bollag fears the “Zerstörung des Volkes durch Assimilation” (*DL*, Z.62), a tactic that, according to him, has been employed by goyim ever since the times of the Ancient Greeks. Against the backdrop of assimilationist discourse, the performance of religiosity in *Die Leinwand* could therefore be read as a strategy that protects the protagonists' sense of identity and community against a world that is disenchanted. The radical otherness of Jewish orthodox life would then be a form of resistance, as it confronts the contemporary world with something that it cannot easily absorb or consume. The density of religious rituals and customs in the text would thus be a means of protecting a heritage that is continuously under threat.

Evaluating the strategies of Othering in Stein's text is not an easy task, as the assessment hinges on the question of whether or not *Die Leinwand* embraces the oppositions, clichés and stereotypes it employs. This also concerns the question of whether the novel's binaries – between the self/the (exotic) other, inside/outside, religious/non-religious Jewish existence, Jews/'goyim' etc. – are complicated or affirmed, and what role exclusion plays as a mechanism for constructing a sense of self. These issues also implicate the reader in a specific way: by depicting religious Jewishness as something radically alien and inaccessible, the text forces the reader into

a difficult outside position which encompasses various levels: the reader is ultimately conceptualised as the Other of the Jew, and, as a consequence, as that which turns the Jew into the Other. This suggestion is supported by the start of the Wechsler narration which forces the reader into a voyeuristic and intrusive position: “Für gewöhnlich öffnen wir am Schabbes nicht die Tür, wenn es läutet. Familie und Freunde würden nicht klingeln” (*DL*, W.7). Through the act of reading, the recipient – who is not part of the “we” that denotes the inner circle of family and friends – performs an act of transgression. The reader is staged as an intruder in Wechsler’s life and story. A similar scenario is created in the Zichroni segment, which introduces the reader to the ultra-orthodox quarters of Mea Shearim. Although Zichroni’s family eventually leaves this particularly restrictive setting, the narration continues in an orthodox milieu which, in all likelihood, is foreign to the majority of readers. Once again, the reader is in the position of either ethnographer or his evil twin, the voyeur, who tries to catch a glimpse of a (Jewish) world that is totally different and not accessible under normal circumstances. This position is reinforced by the glossary which is situated at the end of each narration, and which provides short explanations of the many religious customs and terms. The glossary tries to make (religious) Jewishness accessible by presenting and constructing it from an external perspective, inviting the reader to adopt an ethnographic gaze,<sup>278</sup> which, according to Clifford Geertz, starts from “a state of general bewilderment as to what the devil is going on”.<sup>279</sup> However, Geertz stresses that this “puzzlement” is only the first step,<sup>280</sup> what must follow is an “[u]nderstanding [of] a people’s culture [which] exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity”,<sup>281</sup> so that one can ultimately “converse with them”.<sup>282</sup> Stein’s novel, in my view, fails to achieve this balance between “normalness” and “particularity”. Instead, it resorts to what Geertz conceptualises as the opposite of dialogic thick description, that is “turning culture into folklore and collecting it”.<sup>283</sup>

The overly detailed descriptions of orthodox life and customs in Stein’s text are

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<sup>278</sup> The issue of the glossary is also discussed in Stein’s web blog – apparently, the author himself was against the idea of a glossary and it was the publisher’s idea to include one. However, Stein – and some of his readers – reject the glossary mainly because it disrupts the reading experience, see Benjamin Stein, ‘Glossar’, *turmsegler.net*, 15 July 2009 <<http://turmsegler.net/20090715/glossar/>> [accessed: 8 January 2015].

<sup>279</sup> Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, in: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Fontana Press, 1993), pp. 3-30, p. 27.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29

often verging on cliché and folklore. One example of this is the lengthy excursion into the practice of Tsitsit-binding, which stretches across an impressive six pages (*DL*, Z.44ff.). Although there is a point to this passage – the fact that Zichroni’s father binds the Tsitsit differently from the family tradition implies a moment of genealogical rupture – the extremely detailed account has a bewildering effect, to employ Geertz’s terminology. This also holds true for the novel’s discourse on the mikveh. Although it is a central metaphor in both stories, it is a fairly self-explanatory image, which does not require in-depth introductions into Talmudic tractates or the history and geography of various mikvot (all of which the novel provides). In their extreme elaborateness, these excursions do not add anything to the story’s or characters’ development. Instead, they create a folkloristic and exoticising image of Jewishness. Such Othering and folklorising of Jewish identity thus implicate the reader, who is invited to adopt an ethnographic gaze vis-à-vis the novel’s Jewish worlds. This can be interpreted as part of a broader marketing strategy which advertises the author as “[d]ie neue Stimme der jüdisch-deutschen Literatur”.<sup>284</sup> Apart from the book’s novelty value, such marketing commodifies the author’s (German-)Jewishness as a major selling point, feeding on the persistent German “fascination for all things Jewish”.<sup>285</sup>

The folklorisation and commodification of the Jewish experience in Stein’s novel ultimately undermines the reflexive potential of *Die Leinwand*. Whereas the book opts for a radical undecidability in relation to the topics of authenticity, identity and subjectivity, its folkloristic tendency supports the opposing logic of reification. Folklorisation also clashes with the performativity of identity because it produces essentialism. If used in an exaggerated or ironic manner, folklorisation, cliché and stereotype can have the opposite effect. However, in Stein’s novel these processes are not ironised or reflected, as they are for example in Vladimir Vertlib’s *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*. Vertlib’s protagonist skilfully plays with the expectations of her audience and thereby exposes the unspoken rules and assumptions of Germany’s discourse on the (Eastern European) Jew. The text furthermore meta-reflexively engages with the transformation of experiences of trauma and suffering into

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<sup>284</sup> This is how Stein’s book was advertised by the *C.H. Beck Verlag*, its German publisher, see <<http://www.chbeck.de/Stein-Leinwand/productview.aspx?product=29815>> [accessed: 9 January 2015].

<sup>285</sup> Jack Zipes, ‘The Contemporary German Fascination for Things Jewish: Toward a Minor Jewish Culture’, in: Sander Gilman and Karen Remmler (eds.), *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany. Life and Literature since 1989* (New York, NY and London: NYU Press, 1994), pp. 15-45, p. 15.

marketable goods.

Stein's novel fails to question the hyper-religious, Othered and folklorised notion of Jewish identity. Ironically, the notion of folklore thus re-introduces a sense of immediacy and authenticity into the hypermediated scenarios of *Die Leinwand*. A similar dynamic can be detected in Biller's novella which resorts to Eastern European (Jewish) traditions, alongside the works of Bruno Schulz, to generate a specific form of non-traumatic authenticity in a post-Holocaust world. Stein's and Biller's texts thereby tie in with larger, transnational trends that shape, for example, the writing of American-Jewish authors like Jonathan Safran Foer and Nicole Krauss. Both of these authors use the Eastern European *shtetl* setting and, interestingly enough, Bruno Schulz, to stage a different, seemingly authentic – but always lost – Jewishness.<sup>286</sup> It is also worth noting that Foer has recently published a re-edition of the *Haggadah*, together with his Jewish writer-colleague Nathan Englander.<sup>287</sup> This points to a broader return towards religion, and suggests that third-generation Jewish authors appropriate religion and/or certain cultural traditions in order to generate authenticity in a post-Holocaust, hypermediated age. These remediations walk the thin line between a reflexive recourse to tradition and the type of folklorisation that occurs in and through Stein's text.

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<sup>286</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer's critically acclaimed debut novel *Everything is Illuminated* tells the story of a third-generation American-Jewish writer who travels to the *shtetl* where his grandfather grew up to recover a lost history; the travel narrative is interwoven with a fantastical account of life in the *shtetl* before the destruction of the Holocaust, see Jonathan Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated* (London et al.: Penguin, 2002). Foer's book experiment *Tree of Codes* is a cut-and-paste re-arrangement of Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles*, see Jonathan Safran Foer, *Tree of Codes* (London: Visual Editions, 2010). Krauss's novel *The History of Love* is also partly set in a pre-war *shtetl* and alludes to Schulzian traditions of surrealism, see Nicole Krauss, *The History of Love* (London et al.: Penguin, 2006). On the popularity of Schulz amongst contemporary Jewish writers see David Goldfarb, 'Appropriations of Bruno Schulz', *Jewish Quarterly*, 16 June 2011 <<http://jewishquarterly.org/2011/06/appropriations-of-bruno-schulz/>> [accessed: 23 February 2017].

<sup>287</sup> See Jonathan Safran Foer, *New American Haggadah*, transl. by Nathan Englander (New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Company, 2012).

#### 4. “Im Land der Väter und Verräter” – Intertextuality, Influence and the Question of Tradition in Maxim Biller’s Writing

“Die Erinnerung, daß man nicht allein auf der Welt, immer unangenehm”

(Thomas Mann)

##### 4.1. Introduction: Biller’s Patriarchal Poetics

Maxim Biller undeniably made a comeback in 2013, when his novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* earned him the praise of influential critics such as Michael Krüger and Ijoma Mangold.<sup>288</sup> In the wake of his success, Biller kicked off a debate about the state of German *Gegenwartsliteratur* in early 2014,<sup>289</sup> and the ensuing discussions consolidated his position as a controversial literary commentator. These developments certainly influenced the decision to appoint him as Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s successor for the 2015 revival of the legendary *Literarisches Quartett*. Given the long and well-documented struggle that tied Biller to Reich-Ranicki,<sup>290</sup> his appointment equalled an “Oedipal coup”,<sup>291</sup> which finally allowed the son to mount the father’s throne. Biller already announced his decision to leave the *Literarisches Quartett* in early 2017, shortly after the publication of a monumental, 900-page novel entitled *Biografie* which has received mixed reviews.<sup>292</sup>

While Biller’s work shows a general concern for questions of tradition, legacy, genealogy and post-Holocaust Jewish identity, his latest work foregrounds the perspective of the writer – “*Judesein* [ist] *Schriftstellersein* [italics in the original text]” (*DgJ*, 170) – so that intertextuality plays a central role. His latest novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* continues on a path that started with Biller’s 2009 “Selbstportät” *Der gebrauchte Jude*: both texts engage extensively with seminal writers and cultural figures – such as Thomas Mann, Marcel Reich-Ranicki and Bruno Schulz – who are

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<sup>288</sup> Michael Krüger, ‘In jeder Ecke ein dicker Klumpen Angst’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 8 November 2013 <<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/maxim-biller-im-kopf-von-bruno-schulz-in-jeder-ecke-ein-dicker-klumpen-angst-12651360.html>> [accessed: 6 August 2015]; Ijoma Mangold, ‘Grotesk wie der Tod’, *DIE ZEIT Online*, 16 November 2013 <<http://www.zeit.de/2013/46/maxim-biller-im-kopf-von-bruno-schulz>> [accessed: 6 August 2015].

<sup>289</sup> Maxim Biller, ‘Letzte Ausfahrt Uckermark’, *DIE ZEIT Online*, 20 February 2014 <<http://www.zeit.de/2014/09/deutsche-gegenwartsliteratur-maxim-biller>> [accessed: 6 August 2015].

<sup>290</sup> Biller’s long and profound engagement with Reich-Ranicki as a literary father figure is one of the central topics in his “Selbstportät” *Der gebrauchte Jude*.

<sup>291</sup> Bettina A. Codrai, ‘Lost in Third Space? Narrating German-Jewish identity in Maxim Biller’s Autobiography *Der gebrauchte Jude* (2009)’, *Jewish Culture and History* 14.2-3 (2013), pp. 126-139, p. 130.

<sup>292</sup> Maxim Biller, *Biografie* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 2016).

cast as literary (anti-)fathers. The following chapter will thus analyse how Biller's recent publications relate to these three authors via the oedipal dispositive, by investigating strategies of connection and distinction, of belonging and dissociation which Biller employs to stage intertextual feuds with his precursors. Focusing on Biller's textual relationship with the works of Bruno Schulz, I will show that *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* has to be read in connection with the figures of Thomas Mann and Marcel Reich-Ranicki who feature prominently in Biller's writing. Intertextual references to these three writers connect to the central topics of Holocaust (post-) memory, German-Jewish identity and the German-Jewish (negative) symbiosis and engage with two key questions: which traditions are still available for the (male) Jewish writer in post-Holocaust Germany? And under what conditions can he relate to them? Biller and Stein share an interest in the issue of post-Holocaust Jewish identity, but arrive at different conclusions: Stein's writing breaks free from the negative symbiosis, by propagating a sense of Jewishness that is no longer tied to the Holocaust and instead relies on folklorisation and commodification. Biller's work, by contrast, continues to articulate a Jewish self-understanding that is based on the experience of victimisation. As a consequence, the Jewish writer is trapped in the "Land der Väter und Verräter",<sup>293</sup> without any positive role models or traditions to relate to.

My analysis of the intertextual relationships in Biller's work draws on Gérard Genette's definition of intertextuality "as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another".<sup>294</sup> While intertextuality in this sense captures Biller's textual relationship with Bruno Schulz's *Die Zimtläden*, the term intermediality refers to Biller's engagement with Schulz's graphic oeuvre. Biller's intermediality involves the insertion of Schulz's drawing into the novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*, alongside the translation of the visual medium into textual form by way of ekphrasis. The term remediation will be used to describe Biller's repurposing of entire writing traditions (such as "ghetto writing") or specific literary configurations (such as the artistic representations of sadomasochism), which assemble various literary texts and medial formats.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> Maxim Biller, *Im Land der Väter und Verräter* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2010).

<sup>294</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 1f.

<sup>295</sup> Both intertextuality and intermediality can be understood as sub-categories of remediation, which is a term that I have used in the preceding chapters. Broadly speaking, remediation includes any form of

When reading intertextuality in terms of (oedipal) conflict, one cannot ignore Harold Bloom's seminal study *The Anxiety of Influence*.<sup>296</sup> Bloom famously construes literary history and intra-poetic relationships as a (narcissistic) struggle between the "ephebe" and his precursor (i.e. between father and son), centred on the issues of priority and originality: all poets will eventually realise that their work is influenced by other poets that came before them, and their inability to create something truly original endangers their creativity. While mere imitators might be able to accept that they did not come first, the so-called "strong poets" cannot,<sup>297</sup> which is why they seek to fend off the influence of preceding writers by misreading them:

*Poetic Influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets, – always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist [italics in the original text].*<sup>298</sup>

This "poetic misprision" has to be understood as a form of blindness or delusion that is necessary for the creative process,<sup>299</sup> "for poems arise out of the illusion of freedom, out of a sense of priority being possible".<sup>300</sup> The strong poet therefore *only thinks* that he wrote something genuinely new, when he is merely repeating what someone else has already said. However, Bloom understands influence as fundamentally dialectic: the poet's act of repetition is at the same time a form of innovation, as the successor's misinterpretation forever changes the way we read the precursor.<sup>301</sup> These processes take place on an unconscious level: the struggle between the ephebe and the precursor is rarely an explicit one – in the sense of an explicit intertextuality – and the poet does not even have to know the precursor's work in order to be influenced by it. Bloom's broad understanding of intertextuality is based on the assumption that there is no pre-linguistic access to 'reality', so that every verbal expression is necessarily a quote: "The meaning of a poem can only be another poem".<sup>302</sup> For creativity to emerge, this

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medial recycling, repurposing or revision. However, such an inflationary use of the term remediation entails the risk of hollowing it out, which is why it seems advisable to stick to the media-specific and well-established terminology when dealing with concrete cases of intertextuality/intermediality.

<sup>296</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>301</sup> It is therefore not only the father who creates the son, but "the father will not be born until he finds his own central ephebe", see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 61.

<sup>302</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 94.

all-encompassing influence or intertextuality needs to be warded off, and Bloom dedicates most of his book to the ways in which this is done in literature, described by him as the six “revisionary ratios”.<sup>303</sup>

Praised as a “colossus” by some, while considered an “outdated oddity” by others,<sup>304</sup> Bloom has repeatedly sparked controversy, and so did *The Anxiety of Influence*. Apart from Bloom’s endorsement of the Romantic ideal of the poetic genius, the question of gender agitated feminist critics in particular – the “strong poet” is cast as a male poet and his connection to tradition is shaped by patriarchal models. This led Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar to formulate a different theory of authorship in their seminal book *The Madwoman in the Attic*.<sup>305</sup> For them, Bloom’s understanding of authorship and literary tradition was simply inapplicable to the experience of female authors (and critics): “Bloom’s model of literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal. For this reason it has seemed, and no doubt will continue to seem, offensively sexist to some feminist critics”.<sup>306</sup> Gilbert and Gubar situate Bloom’s theory within a century-old Western genealogy of “patriarchal poetics”, which welds together authority, creativity and paternity:

In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen’s power, like his penis’s power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim [...].<sup>307</sup>

And so it is that female authors are constantly crowded out by patriarchal metaphors and male writing practices, which cause an “anxiety of authorship”, i.e. “a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a ‘precursor’ the act of writing will isolate and or destroy her”.<sup>308</sup> Gilbert’s and Gubar’s book focuses on the strategies of 19<sup>th</sup>-century female writers who attempted to revitalise and establish a distinctively female writing tradition.

In the light of this valid critique the question arises whether and to what extent the

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<sup>303</sup> Bloom explains each of these ratios in great detail and offers a “synopsis” at the beginning of his study, see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, pp. 14ff.

<sup>304</sup> Adam Begley, ‘Review: Colossus Among Critics: Harold Bloom’, *The New York Times*, 24 September 1994 <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/11/01/specials/bloom-colossus.html>> [accessed: 10 November 2015].

<sup>305</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

application of Bloom's framework can be useful. Bloom's theory feeds on (Romantic) lyric poetry as the primary genre of influence. This is not surprising, as lyric poetry is the genre that gives expression to the poet's individual voice. However, Bloom's overt struggles with Freud and Nietzsche and his exploration of Thomas Mann's anxieties of influence suggest that his concept is adaptable to genres other than poetry. While Bloom's theory does not focus on the explicit, conscious struggle between a writer and his precursors as it is carried out in Biller's text, his theory helps to illuminate Biller's writing practices.<sup>309</sup> Bloom frames intertextuality as a question of how authors relate to literary traditions, and this is exactly what my analysis of Biller's texts will centre on. His theory shows that the ideas of influence and tradition are not intrinsically positive, but that they can be a form of contagion that needs to be warded off: "Influence is *Influenza* – an astral disease. If influence were health, who could write a poem?"<sup>310</sup> The idea of influence as influenza adds another facet to the notion of the contagion paradigm, which I have tried to trace and criticise throughout this study. Biller's writing has replaced the contagiousness of trauma and affect with the infectiousness of German culture in the guise of Thomas Mann. The idea of influence as a disease that needs to be fought off provides an excellent angle for scrutinising how Biller's work negotiates the triangle Schulz-Mann-Reich-Ranicki and German-Jewish relations more broadly. Finally, Bloom's paradigm helps to account for the strong patricidal elements in Biller's writing,<sup>311</sup> which make his postmemorial relationship with Schulz appear as a form of *Vatermord* that is (compulsively) repeated in the case of Reich-Ranicki. This double "Oedipal coup" exemplifies once more that postmemory and the postmemorial response to the work of another author is not necessarily as ethical as Hirsch presupposes. Biller's homage to Schulz, perceived as a humble elegy by most critics,<sup>312</sup> will emerge as the expression of anxiety and the assertion of Biller's writerly ego.<sup>313</sup>

Biller's work establishes a clear connection between writing, authority, and

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<sup>309</sup> Manuel Gogos also applies a Bloomian framework to his analysis of Biller's writing in *Philip Roth & Söhne*, see Manuel Gogos, *Philip Roth & Söhne. Zum jüdischen Familienroman* (Hamburg: Philo, 2005).

<sup>310</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 95.

<sup>311</sup> Similarly, Manuel Gogos speaks of a "versuchten *Vatermord*" in the relationship between Biller and Philip Roth, see Manuel Gogos, *Philip Roth & Söhne*, p. 23.

<sup>312</sup> Ijoma Mangold for example speaks of a "Kaddisch", see Ijoma Mangold, 'Grotesk wie der Tod'.

<sup>313</sup> The connection between elegy and anxiety is also noted by Bloom: "The great pastoral elegies, indeed all major elegies for poets, do not express grief but centre upon their composer's own creative anxieties", see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 151.

paternity, thereby endorsing what Gilbert and Gubar criticise as “patriarchal poetics”. The question of literary tradition and German-Jewish relations is negotiated in terms of a father-son-conflict, so that Bloom’s model can be applied “not as a recommendation for but an analysis of [...] patriarchal poetics”, as suggested by Gilbert and Gubar.<sup>314</sup> At the same time, his position as a Jew in post-Holocaust Germany paradoxically brings Biller close to Gilbert’s and Gubar’s understanding of the female writer. As a Jewish author “[i]m Land der Väter und Verräter”, he is forced to write within a literary tradition that he cannot identify with. This results in the creation of alternative textual (all male) genealogies in his writing, which, however, do not question their own patriarchal bias.

## 4.2. Depictions of the Holocaust – From Polemics to the Apocalyptic Mode

### 4.2.1. *The Holocaust and Polemics in Harlem Holocaust*

*DIE ZEIT*-critic Ijoma Mangold noted that, due to its fantastical content and elegiac tone, Biller’s 2013 novella differs from his earlier work: “Dies ist ein Buch, wie man es nicht unbedingt aus der Feder von Maxim Biller, dem Gegenwartsrealisten, erwarten würde”.<sup>315</sup> However, it still engages with themes that are central to Biller’s oeuvre, such as the Holocaust and its aftermath and the problematic German-Jewish symbiosis. In what follows, I will explore Biller’s preferred literary modes by comparing his short story *Harlem Holocaust* with *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*. I will focus on the issues of exaggeration and polemics in Biller’s writing, as these will emerge as key concerns throughout this chapter.

Biller’s writing style is generally marked by polemics, exaggeration, and his inclination towards the tasteless, pornographic, and obscene. This is nowhere more obvious than in his 1998 short story *Harlem Holocaust*,<sup>316</sup> which applies these narrative modes to criticise the ritualisation and commodification of Holocaust discourse in post-unification Germany, alongside the impossibility of a German-Jewish symbiosis. The story examines the problematic triangular relationship between Efraim Rosenhain, a German son of perpetrators, his German (ex-)girlfriend Ina Polarker and the American-Jewish linguistics professor turned writer Gerhard “Gary”

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<sup>314</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 48.

<sup>315</sup> Ijoma Mangold, ‘Grotesk wie der Tod’.

<sup>316</sup> Maxim Biller, *Harlem Holocaust* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 1998); henceforth cited in the text as *HH*.

Warszawski. The first-person narrator Rosenhain delivers a deeply unsympathetic portrayal of Warszawski, who, as a “Zerrbild deutscher Schuldprojektionen”,<sup>317</sup> has come to haunt Germany and destroy everything Rosenhain holds dear. Warszawski’s oeuvre retells a stolen story of survival, while his public career and personal relationships are built on the masochistic German “Gier nach Schuld und Entsöhnung” (HH, 9). According to Rosenhain, this is the only reason why Warszawski is successful in Germany. He is unable to sell his gruesome account in the USA, but the German public greets him with an enthusiasm that is fuelled by the “Atem historischer Anteilnahme und reumütiger Erlösungsbegeisterung” (HH, 41). Because of his “Auschwitz-Bonus” (HH, 52), Warszawski has managed to turn his mediocre writing into a literary success. Rosenhain explains this as follows:

Das war in Deutschland ganz anders, seine Stimme bekam hier schnell Gewicht, man lud ihn viel ins Fernsehen ein und machte mit ihm lange Interviews, denn er sorgte mit seiner Exaltiertheit und seinem Durchblick für jene Sorte anspruchsvoller Unterhaltung, die wir uns anderweitig immer nur bei Zadek, Gysi, Reich-Ranicki und den anderen Kerlen holen mußten. Ich nenne es das Alfred-Kerr-Syndrom (HH, 41).

The “Alfred-Kerr-Syndrom” designates a form of confrontational and polemical Jewishness, which appeals to a German audience that receives a masochistic pleasure from being scolded by the Jew. Rosenhain accuses Warszawski of willingly contributing to this German-Jewish farce by playing the role of the raging and outrageous Jew: “Ich bin euer Dybbuk! Ein aschkenasischer Zombie! Die sprechende Seife! Der schreiende, schreibende Lampenschirm!” (HH, 48). Warszawski’s success exploits a deeply ritualised German *Vergangenheitsindustrie* which uncritically celebrates all things Jewish. Anti-Semitic discrimination has turned into a philosemitic espousal of Jewish otherness, leaving the underlying patterns of exclusion intact. Biller’s short story also engages polemically with the hypermediated and commodified state of Holocaust commemoration in post-unified Germany, which has eroded any real sense of empathy with the victims.<sup>318</sup> The Holocaust is presented either as a media cliché – the TV-Series *Holocaust*, Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, and Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* feature prominently in the text – or as a commodity. As Norbert Otto Eke has pointed

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<sup>317</sup> Barbara Beßlich, ‘Unzuverlässiges Erzählen im Dienst der Erinnerung. Perspektiven auf den Nationalsozialismus bei Maxim Biller, Marcel Beyer und Martin Walser’, in: Barbara Beßlich, Katharina Grätz and Olaf Hildebrand (eds.), *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2006), pp. 35-52, p. 43.

<sup>318</sup> On the commodification and hypermediation of Holocaust memory in *Harlem Holocaust* see Jefferson Chase, ‘Shoah Business. Maxim Biller and the Problem of Contemporary German-Jewish Literature’, *The German Quarterly* 74.2 (2001), pp. 111-131.

out, Biller's narrative thus problematises the transformation of the Holocaust into a "Diskursfiguration".<sup>319</sup> The historical events and traumatic experiences have become inseparable from their representation and deformation in the media or in cultural and political discourse. Biller's text exposes the – often implicit – norms, clichés, and regulations that structure these discourses in German society, which are revealed as a "Vexierspiel mit Klischees und Projektionen".<sup>320</sup>

The intentionally shrill tone of Biller's novella is enhanced by its scathing portrayal of German-Jewish (love) relationships. The bond between Rosenhain, his (ex-) girlfriend Ina Polarker and their Jewish counterpart is depicted as a sadomasochistic *ménage à trois*, in which the Germans submit to the Jewish monster Warszawski. While Rosenhain, who embarks on a desperate search for the long lost "Seelenverwandtschaft" (*HH*, 49) between Germans and Jews, is in equal parts attracted and repelled by Warszawski's demeanour and physique, Ina has become totally enslaved by Warszawski's irresistible air of "'Angst' und 'Reue' und 'Todeserotik'" (*HH*, 24). Warszawski wields power over the two Germans by physically and mentally abusing and demeaning them (especially Ina, who is repeatedly coerced into humiliating sex acts). Because he draws sadistic joy from these various acts of degradation, the reader cannot help but sympathise with the victimised Germans. Throughout most of the story the reader therefore willingly embraces Rosenhain's anti-Semitic portrait of Warszawski as the sex-hungry, money-grubbing Jew. However, the reader's sentiment is radically called into question by the story's ending: *Harlem Holocaust* finishes with a note written by a man called Hermann Warschauer, which uncovers the entire narrative as the posthumously released manuscript of a certain Friedrich (not Efraim) Rosenhain who he claims was mentally ill. It remains unclear whether Friedrich imagined the entire story (along with his hyper-Jewish name) or whether Warszawski/Warschauer, in a final masterstroke, added this note to permanently discredit the (by then dead) Rosenhain. In any case, this ending makes the reader question the accuracy of the picture painted by the first-person narrator Rosenhain – was his portrayal of Warszawski rooted in his paranoid, anti-Semitic fantasies? And why did the reader embrace it so willingly?

Biller's literary sleight-of-hand thus forces the reader into a critical self-examination as to why s/he took the parodic image of Warszawski as the "jüdische[s]

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<sup>319</sup> Norbert Otto Eke, "'Was wollen sie? Die Absolution?'" p. 90.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Ungeheuer” at face value,<sup>321</sup> especially since Rosenhain is presented as an unreliable narrator.<sup>322</sup> The disturbing relationship between Rosenhain and Warszawski (and the reader’s reaction to it) can then be seen as an illustration of what Dan Diner has identified as the “negative Symbiose” between Germans and Jews after the Holocaust – an unsolvable, unintended and mostly undesirable bond between perpetrators and victims:

Seit Auschwitz – Welch traurige List – kann tatsächlich von einer ‘deutsch-jüdischen Symbiose’ gesprochen werden – freilich einer negativen: für beide, für Deutsche wie für Juden, ist das Ergebnis der Massenvernichtung zum Ausgangspunkt ihres Selbstverständnisses geworden; eine Art gegensätzlicher Gemeinsamkeit – ob sie es wollen oder nicht. Denn Deutsche wie Juden sind durch dieses Ereignis neu aufeinander bezogen worden. Solch negative Symbiose, von den Nazis konstituiert, wird auf Generationen hinaus das Verhältnis beider zu sich selbst, vor allem aber zueinander, prägen.<sup>323</sup>

The short story demonstrates exactly this “gegensätzliche Gemeinsamkeit”, albeit in a grotesquely exaggerated manner. It shows that neither Rosenhain nor Ina can free themselves of their obsession with Warszawski and their feeling of perpetrator guilt, while Warszawski – at least according to Rosenhain’s portrayal – cannot stop tormenting them (and the German public). In both cases, the characters are unable to construct an identity that does not take the Holocaust as its “Ausgangspunkt”, which gridlocks them (and the Other) in the roles of either perpetrator or victim. This results in a situation where Germans and Jews are perpetually “aufeinander bezogen”, without, however, being able to meaningfully relate to one another. *Harlem Holocaust* shows that neither Germans nor Jews manage to perceive one another beyond the level of clichés, projections, and stereotypes. The perverted and darkly grotesque depiction of German-Jewish (love) relationships in *Harlem Holocaust* – and in most of Biller’s other stories – is thus the “Wiedergabe einer Situation, in der Deutsche und Juden alle Unmittelbarkeit im Umgang miteinander eingebüßt haben und nur noch in Rollen und Masken miteinander reden und so verkappt sogar miteinander ins Bett gehen”.<sup>324</sup> From the vantage point of Biller’s short story, however, a *loss* of “Unmittelbarkeit” is not

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<sup>321</sup> Manuel Gogos, *Philip Roth & Söhne*, p. 45.

<sup>322</sup> It is stressed throughout the novella that Rosenhain suffers from repeated bouts of dizziness and has a propensity for hallucinations and wild fantasies: “Dabei machte das mir ja auch Spaß, es war eine verzweifelte Spielerei, die mich mitunter dazu antrieb, mir mein Leben anders und besser vorzustellen, was immer funktionierte und manchmal sogar so weit ging, dass ich mir, zum Zeitvertreib nur, etwa auf der Straße die Gesichter der Passanten in surrealistischer Manier zurechtbog” (*HH*, 10).

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>324</sup> Gustav Seibt, ‘Der letzte Augenblick der Unschuld. Ein Nachwort von Gustav Seibt’, in: Maxim Biller, *Harlem Holocaust*, pp. 63-69, p. 65.

the central concern, as this would presuppose the existence of a harmonious symbiosis. By contrast, the text suggests that any notion of a German-Jewish “Seelenverwandtschaft”

[...] war, im kleinen, genauso eine Illusion und ein eskapistischer, verzweifelter Rettungsanker gewesen wie, im großen, die von so vielen propagierte deutsch-jüdische Symbiose, der historische Schulterschuß zweier Völker, der mal Genies, mal Leichen produzierte. Ja, und wir Idioten glaubten immer noch daran, an die einträchtige Kraft von George, Musil und Kisch, an die Einsichten von Freud und Schopenhauer, an die gemeinsamen Visionen von Rilke, Fritz Lang und Billy Wilder, an diese ganze romantische, germanisch-hebräische Mitteleuropa-Idee also, an die Metapher von Kultur und Kaffeehaus (*HH*, 50).

The illusory character of the German-Jewish symbiosis is also central to *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*: the novella explores German-Jewish relations through the sadomasochistic relationship between the Polish-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz and the cultural icon Thomas Mann. In *Harlem Holocaust*, the sadomasochistic configuration is produced by Rosenhain’s paranoid obsession, which, following German anti-Semitic traditions, imagines the omnipotent Jew as a threat to himself and his culture. In *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* it is Bruno Schulz, the Jew, who uses sadomasochistic imagery to illustrate the dominance of German cultural and literary traditions. While, in *Harlem Holocaust*, references to the sadomasochistic constellation feed into a polemic against the persistence of certain discursive patterns in German culture, their function in Biller’s latest novella is less easy to decode. Before analysing this configuration in more detail, I will return to the topic of Holocaust representation in Biller’s writing.

#### 4.2.2. *The Holocaust as Apocalypse in Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*

Whereas *Harlem Holocaust* depicts the Holocaust as a hypermediated “Diskursfiguration” to criticise the ritualisation and commodification of Holocaust memory in post-unification Germany, *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* resorts to a different historical framework: the novella is set in 1938 and focuses on a letter, written by the Polish-Jewish writer and art teacher Bruno Schulz to the world-famous German author Thomas Mann.<sup>325</sup> Schulz uses the letter to inform the iconic German writer that a

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<sup>325</sup> According to Schulz’s German translator, Doreen Daume, the actual Bruno Schulz did really write a letter to Thomas Mann, which also contained a copy of Schulz’s first German-language text *Die Heimkehr*. Both the letter and the manuscript have been lost, which makes it impossible to verify this claim, see Doreen Daume, ‘Nachwort’, in: Bruno Schulz, *Die Zimtläden*, transl. by Doreen Daume, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Munich: dtv, 2014), pp. 181-195, p. 189; henceforth cited in the text as *DZ*.

*doppelgänger* of his is on the rampage in Schulz's (then) Polish hometown of Drohobycz. His detailed account of the fake Mann's grotesque and atrocious behaviour is frequently interrupted by a frame narrative in which a third-person narrator provides further insights into Schulz's mind. The contents of Schulz's letter become increasingly surreal as the novella progresses: eventually it is revealed that the fake Thomas Mann is a secret agent who was sent to investigate and eventually eliminate Drohobycz's Jewish community. This announcement also sheds light on the real motives behind Schulz's letter: in all likelihood, the fake Thomas Mann is Schulz's invention, created to attract his famous colleague's attention in the hope that he may save the Jewish writer from the advancing German troops. However, Schulz's endeavours are hopeless, and the novella's ending alludes to the Holocaust.

Set in a fictional universe where the Holocaust has not yet happened, the novella can of course not represent it as a historical reality. The Holocaust therefore pervades the novella in the form of visions that plague the protagonist and some of the other characters. Schulz in particular is overwhelmed by an inexplicable sense of fear and dread, which, from the retrospective angle of the reader, appears as a premonition of what is to come:

Er [Bruno Schulz] rechnete seit vielen Jahren damit, dass es passieren würde, aber doch nicht jetzt, sondern erst viel später – in einer unendlich fernen Zukunft, die bevölkert wäre mit seinen riesigen Wandechsen, Schlangen und Urvögeln, die ihre eigenen Schwänze aßen, mit grauuniformierten Menschenarmeen, deren lange, unordentliche Züge bis zum Horizont reichten, mit Millionen nackter Männer, Frauen und Kinder, die sich nur noch auf allen Vieren fortbewegen konnten. Und überall im Land brannten große und kleine Feuer, und wer durch den Rauch und die um sich schlagenden Flammen etwas erkennen konnte, betete, er möge nicht wie sie von einer unsichtbaren Hand auf seine Knie und Hände gezwungen und auch in diese Feuer getrieben werden (*IKvBS*, 30f.).

His fears are shared by his sister Hania:

Sie streichelte seinen Kopf und flüsterte, beim nächsten Krieg würde nicht bloß ihr Haus brennen, das sei so sicher wie die Zerstörung des zweiten Tempels, und sie hoffte, es bleibe von ihr und ihm und den Kindern und Jankel mehr übrig als ein bisschen Asche und das, was Bruno über sie in seinen beiden Büchern geschrieben hatte (*IKvBS*, 23).

In these passages, Biller's text remediates biblical templates and apocalyptic literature to bring into view a catastrophe which has not happened yet on the level of the narrative. Apocalyptic literature often expresses future-oriented dystopian visions and

prophecies through a specific imagery that involves for example apocalyptic beasts.<sup>326</sup> The pre-historic reptiles and birds in Schulz's imagination are reminiscent of these beasts, and of biblical monsters such as Leviathan and the terrifying bird Ziz.<sup>327</sup> The depiction of masses of naked people, the collapse of the human/animal-divide, and the images of smoke and fire in this passage evoke Christian depictions of the apocalypse, such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Triumph of Death*, or Hieronymus Bosch's nightmarish visions of hell in *The Last Judgement*. Bosch's work might indeed be the primary source of Schulz's visions, as it often features reptile-like creatures and human-animal-hybrids. These visual allusions are fused with the iconography of the Holocaust (grey uniforms, fire, smoke, ashes, masses of naked people) which suggests that Schulz does anticipate the extermination of the Jews. Schulz's visions of the inter-textual future are thus glances into the historical past that frame the Holocaust as an apocalypse: from the perspective of the characters, they remediate apocalyptic templates that can be found in the Bible and in Early and Late Netherlandish Renaissance painting to voice fears of a nameless future, while, from the vantage point of the reader, they recycle key images in Holocaust discourse.

The representation of the Holocaust as an apocalypse has deeper implications that call for a closer examination. Whereas biblical references, for example to the destruction of the First and the Second Temple, are common in Holocaust discourse,<sup>328</sup> the apocalyptic template is unusual and problematic: both Judaism and Christianity convey the 'end of days', which imagines an apocalyptic ending of the world as part of God's creation. This event is also seen as a turning point, an end-time-scenario which is also the beginning of something new, either the Second Coming or the coming of the Messiah. The apocalypse brings forth a crucial moment of revelation in which things that have been hidden become visible. While, in the Christian tradition, this is

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<sup>326</sup> For a concise introduction to the literary genre of the apocalypse see Charles C. Torrey, 'Apocalypse', *jewishencyclopedia.com* <<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1642-apocalypse>> [accessed: 28 February 2017].

<sup>327</sup> Monstrous, reptile-like birds are also mentioned briefly in Schulz's *Die Zimtläden*: "Unmöglich, in diesen Monstern mit ihren riesigen phantastischen Schnäbeln, die sie gleich nach ihrer Geburt, gefräßig aus dem Schlund ihrer Kehlen zischend, weit aufsperrten, in diesen Echsen mit ihren schwächlichen nackten, buckligen Körpern künftige Pfauen, Fasane, Auerhähne und Kondore zu erkennen. In Körben auf Watte lagernd, hoben diese drachenhaften Subjekte auf ihren dürren Hälsen die blinden, mit trüber Haut überzogenen Köpfe und quakten lautlos aus stummen Rachen" (DZ, 36).

<sup>328</sup> In fact, the Hebrew term "churban", which refers to the destruction of the Second Temple, is used as an alternative term for the Holocaust. I thank Hanna Schumacher for pointing this out to me, who in this context made me aware of the so-called Yiddish "khurbn-literatur". On the topic of "khurbn-literatur" see also David Roskies and Naomi Diamant, *Holocaust Literature. A History and a Guide* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012), pp. 105ff.

connected to the idea of the Last Judgement, in Jewish eschatology the outlook on the “world to come” is more important. However, the application of this template to the Holocaust may be seen to imply a certain logic and teleology as the unavoidable part of a larger eschatological process. The allusion to the Last Judgment would be even more problematic because it connotes the idea of ‘just’ punishment.

And so it is that the reader is faced with a difficult set of questions: is the apocalypse a powerful metaphor through which the characters in the novella read an event that they cannot possibly fathom? Or does the text really encode the Holocaust as an apocalypse? When considering the novella’s ending, the second interpretation seems more accurate. Apocalyptic visions anticipate a future catastrophe that will take place, regardless of human agency. The same holds true for Schulz’s premonitions which become a reality when the German troops approach Drohobycz at the end of the novella:

Doch nach einigen Hundert Metern erblickte Bruno plötzlich einen großen, roten Feuerschein über der nächtlichen Stadt, er hörte Motorengeräusche und laute Befehle, und wenn er nach links oder rechts schaute, sah er immer wieder am Ende einer Gasse ein riesiges, schwarzes, prähistorisches Insekt vorbeirennen, dessen Füße wie Panzerketten klirrten [...]. Er war, obwohl seit fast einer Stunde unterwegs, gerade erst beim Portikus des Stadtparks angekommen, er atmete schwer, seine Knie waren wund und blutig, und die Tauben im Himmel über Drohobycz flogen eine nach der anderen in den roten Feuerschein hinein, wo sie wie Zunder verbrannten (*IKvBS*, 68f.).

The passage accentuates that the visions that have plagued Schulz throughout the story were anticipations of his actual future (i.e. the German invasion). The ending of the novella coincides with the end of days: the apocalypse has come in the form of the German troops and the prophetic protagonist turns into a dog: “Er schob sich den dicken Briefumschlag zwischen die Zähne, knurrte ungeduldig, löschte die Lampe und fiel auf die Knie” (*IKvBS*, 67). Schulz only expected this to happen in the hellish “unendlich fernen Zukunft” (*IKvBS*, 30) that his visions depict. When he turns into a dog at the end of the novella this future and the end of days have come. Biller’s representation of the Holocaust as an apocalypse can be regarded as an extreme form of polemics. However, the apocalyptic narrative makes the Holocaust part of a larger religious trajectory. The highly problematic suggestion that the Holocaust is somehow part of an eschatological pathway – and even a form of ‘just’ punishment – is taken up at a later point in the novella when a different biblical template is introduced, as I will demonstrate shortly.

### 4.3. Face(t)s of the Father

#### 4.3.1. Adoptions, Adaptations, and Appropriations of Bruno Schulz

The life and works of Bruno Schulz are a central point of reference for Biller's novella. The text is dotted with countless allusions to Schulz's writing and graphic work, especially Schulz's anthology of short stories *Die Zimtläden*. Schulz's main characters – the father, the mother, Adele/a – and motifs, ranging from the birds, the so-called cinnamon shops to the dog Nimrod, resurface throughout Biller's narrative, along with explicit references to the "Traktat über die Schneiderpuppen". Biller's intertextual engagement concerns mostly Schulz's characters and motifs. Although *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* is inspired by Schulz's surreal aesthetics, there are few stylistic allusions. The novella draws on two aspects of Schulz's writing in particular: Eastern-Jewish traditions of so-called "ghetto writing" on the one hand,<sup>329</sup> and sadomasochism in Schulz's work on the other.<sup>330</sup> Further to this, Biller's text draws inspiration from a recent edition of Bruno Schulz's drawings,<sup>331</sup> some of which are explicitly reproduced in the text while others are implicitly remediated by way of ekphrasis.

The recourse to Bruno Schulz in Biller's novella can be read as an attempt to (re-) connect with traditions of Eastern European Jewish literature. As I have pointed out in the preceding chapter on Benjamin Stein, the remediation of earlier writing traditions can point to a desire to construct a different, seemingly authentic sense of Jewishness in an environment of Holocaust hypermediation. The focus on Schulz's Polish hometown of Drohobycz conjures up the lost world of Austrian Galicia (which Drohobycz used to belong to) and thus the issue of the "ghetto" and "ghetto writing". In my examination of how Biller deals with this specific literary *locus* and tradition, I draw on Anne Fuchs' and Florian Krobb's definition of the "ghetto" as "broadly [...] any location of traditional Jewish life. In our context, the ghetto is a real or imagined space where polarised conceptions of German-Jewish identities such as openness and

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<sup>329</sup> On the topic of "ghetto writing" see Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (eds.), *Ghetto Writing. Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999) and Gabriele von Glasenapp, 'Deutsch-jüdische Ghettoliteratur', in: Hans-Otto Horch (ed.), *Handbuch der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur* (Berlin and Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 407-421.

<sup>330</sup> On the theme of sadomasochism in Schulz's work see S.D. Chrostowska, "'Masochistic Art of Fantasy': The Literary Works of Bruno Schulz in the Context of Modern Masochism", *Russian Literature LV* (2004), pp. 469-501.

<sup>331</sup> See *Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk 1892-1942* (Munich: dtv, 2000). I thank Ulrike Henneke from *Kiepenheuer&Witsch* for her generous help with tracking down this source.

closure, assimilation and orthodoxy, are constructed, negotiated, and evaluated”.<sup>332</sup> Fuchs and Krobb differentiate between Yiddish ghetto stories, on the one hand, and stories by German-Jewish writers, on the other. While the first, ‘authentic’ strand of stories was based on first-hand experience, written in Yiddish, and addressed towards a Jewish audience, the stories produced by German-Jewish writers targeted an assimilated audience, which was out of touch with the ghetto as a lived reality. As Florian Krobb points out in his examination of Leopold Kompert’s ghetto stories, this second strand served a “compensatory function”: as “imagined location[s]”, these literary ghettos were meant to satisfy nostalgic urges, by providing a sense of identity and connection, which had been lost or never existed in the first place.<sup>333</sup> This nostalgic ghetto fiction was “clearly an attempt to narrate this lost identity, and hence, within the logic of fiction, to overcome the sense of estrangement”.<sup>334</sup> Schulz’s and Biller’s texts can be situated within the nostalgic tradition of “ghetto writing”: while Schulz still experienced the ghetto as a geographical space, the traditional structures of ghetto life no longer existed when he wrote *Die Zimtläden*. Biller’s writing is even further removed from the ghetto as a lived reality, which ended, both as a geographical space and a form of community, with the German destruction campaigns in the East. Both authors therefore encounter the ghetto “primarily as a poetic space recollected through distance”,<sup>335</sup> although the degrees of this distance vary. The ghetto, as a literary *topos*, thus connects to the issues of identity, authenticity, and nostalgia in Biller’s writing.

Since *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* draws on depictions of the ghetto in *Die Zimtläden*, it is necessary to examine these before turning to Biller’s novella. Drohobycz and its Jewish surroundings were still a lived reality for Schulz, although Austrian Galicia had undergone significant transformations by the time he published his stories. Depictions of the Jewish life and customs are not the central themes of *Die Zimtläden*, which concentrates on the topography of a nameless and dull town with only a few landmarks, such as the “Marktplatz”, the “Krokodilstraße” and the eponymous “Zimtläden”. The majority of the stories featured in *Die Zimtläden* focus on the first-person narrator’s family life (and thus the domestic realm), portraying the tribulations

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<sup>332</sup> Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, ‘Writing the Ghetto – An Introduction’, in: Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (eds.), *Ghetto Writing*, pp. 1-8, p. 3.

<sup>333</sup> Florian Krobb, ‘Reclaiming the Location. Leopold Kompert’s Ghetto Fiction in Post-Colonial Perspective’, in: Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (eds.), *Ghetto Writing*, pp. 41-53, p. 51.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>335</sup> See Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, ‘Writing the Ghetto’, p. 5.

and eventual breakdown of the Oedipal family and of the father in particular. The absence of central *topoi* of “ghetto writing” (such as the depiction of religious rituals) highlights the distance that separates Schulz’s modernist account of the ghetto from more traditional examples of ghetto fiction. The nameless town is steeped in an atmosphere of phantasmagoria:

Im Inneren der Stadt tun sich gewissermaßen Zweifachstraßen auf, Doppelgängerstraßen, Lug- und Trugstraßen. Die bezauberte und irreführende Phantasie erzeugt illusorische, vermeintlich längst und wohl bekannte Stadtpläne, auf denen diese Straßen zwar ihren Platz und ihren Namen haben, doch die Nacht in ihrer unerschöpflichen Produktivität hat nichts Besseres zu tun, als fortwährend neue und imaginierte Konfigurationen zu liefern (*DZ*, 87).

Passages like these highlight that Schulz’s writing remediates Eastern European Jewish traditions through the lens of a Kafkaesque and modernist surrealism. Removed from any concrete historical time and geography, the town is a fantastical place, characterised by general inertia – “[...] jede angefangene Bewegung bleibt in der Luft hängen, alle Gesten erschöpfen sich vorzeitig und können den toten Punkt nicht überwinden” (*DZ*, 112). This atmosphere of degeneration turns the town into a backward space, which is continuously threatened by the developments of capitalist modernity, and therefore about to perish. This fear of disappearance reflects the actual dissolution of the *shtetl*, which was already well under way by the time Schulz wrote and published his stories in the early 1930s. The nostalgia of Schulz’s writing does not so much reimagine “a place of wholeness, of Jewish solidarity and community spirit, a metaphorical refuge”,<sup>336</sup> but rather mourns a lost world. Faced with its gradual disappearance, the town puts on the mask of flamboyant urbanity: “Die Krokodilstraße war eine Konzession unserer Stadt an großstädtische Modernität und Verderbtheit. Wir konnten uns sichtlich nichts anderes leisten als eine Imitation aus Papier, eine Photomontage aus Schnipseln der stockigen Zeitungen vom Vorjahr” (*DZ*, 114). Schulz’s text thus conforms with a certain strand of “ghetto writing”, which sees the ghetto as an underdeveloped space.<sup>337</sup> However, *Die Zimtläden* lacks the enlightened impulse that usually drives this form of “ghetto writing”: the stories are characterised by a fascination for decay and the moribund. Here the ghetto appears as a doomed and dying space without vigour, liveliness, and authenticity.

*Die Zimtläden* features only one scene that explicitly depicts traditional Jewish life:

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<sup>336</sup> Florian Krobb, ‘Reclaiming the Location’, p. 46.

<sup>337</sup> See Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, ‘Writing the Ghetto’.

Anderswo hatten sich Juden in farbigen Kaftanen und mit breitrempigen Pelzhüten auf dem Kopf um die hohen Wasserfälle der hellen Stoffe gruppiert. Dies waren die Männer des Hohen Rates, würdige und überaus salbungsvolle Herren, die ihre langen, gepflegten Bärte glattstrichen und zurückhaltende, diplomatische Gespräche führten. Doch auch in dieser förmlichen Konversation, in den Blicken, die sie tauschten, blitzte feixende Ironie (DZ, 139f.).

Although the narrator is sympathetic towards the Jews, he depicts them as somewhat outdated, formal, and stiff. With their colourful clothing and unusual headdress, they come from another time and space, although they are still in a position of authority in the town's community. It is noteworthy that Schulz's drawings from the same time feature several variations of exactly this scene.<sup>338</sup> The drawings depict gatherings of Chassidic men in traditional attire (kaftan, schtreimel, kippah, pajes), who are in conversation and display signs of physical closeness and affection. These images invoke a sense of lively community which is absent from Schulz's writing. However, with their focus on orthodox Jewish figures, these drawings are in themselves remediations of a certain ghetto or *shtetl* iconography rather than representations of actual life. Arguably, they serve the purpose of creating the illusion of community and authenticity at a time when the underlying structures of ghetto life had ceased to exist. *Die Zimtläden* is not part of the 'authentic' tradition of "ghetto writing" but a surrealist re-imagination that redeploys existing literary traditions and iconographies.

Many elements of Schulz's stories are recycled in Biller's text. For example, the "chaotischen Läden hinter dem Marktplatz, die immer nur am späten Abend für einige Stunden öffneten und manchmal auch das nicht" (*IKvBS*, 13), and the "Marktplatz" itself, refer to Schulz's written and graphic works. The ghetto in Biller's novella is thus a space that exists solely in the literary imagination or as a literary quote. While Schulz was still able to draw inspiration from personal experience and actual topographies, this is obviously not the case for Biller: as a third-generation, German-Jewish author, his approach "is characterised by intellectual, historical and physical distance towards the ghetto as a lived reality".<sup>339</sup> He employs an imagery that was already the result of multiple acts of remediation in Schulz's work, while echoing the elegiac tone of Schulz's writing by depicting the ghetto as a precarious space that is under threat: Drohobycz is doomed, not only by the impending danger of the German invasion, but also by its own backwardness. It offers little or no resistance against the

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<sup>338</sup> See Bruno Schulz. *Das graphische Werk*, pp. 69-76.

<sup>339</sup> Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, 'Writing the Ghetto', p. 5.

tidal waves of (fascist) modernity:

Zu lange schon leben sie [the people of Drohobycz] ohne Kontakt zur Welt, das Provinzdasein macht sie ängstlich, verrückt und neugierig. Einen Tagesausflug nach Stryj planen sie Monate vorher, und bevor einer von ihnen in die Hauptstadt fährt, regelt er bei Notar Reynisz seine Geschäfte (*IKvBS*, 32).

The feeling of doom in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* reveals the influence of Schulz's depiction of the ghetto, while fuelling a sense of nostalgia. Svetlana Boym defines nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy".<sup>340</sup> In Biller's story, home is a place "that no longer exists" and that "has never existed": after the Holocaust Drohobycz is a lost world that cannot be restored. At the same time, this lost world is staged as a literary intertext, remediating Schulz's writing which assimilated ghetto reality into a surrealist tale. The ghetto in Biller's novella is thus a multiply mediated phenomenon: it is a home that indeed "has never existed" outside the realm of literature and the writerly imagination. Nostalgia in Biller's novella is thus a manifestation of "reflective nostalgia", which "is more concerned with historical and individual time, with the irrevocability of the past and human finitude [...]. The focus here is not on recovery of what is perceived [sic] to be an absolute truth but on the mediation of history and passage of time".<sup>341</sup>

Distance and mediation are at the heart of reflective nostalgia which accentuates the irreversibility of loss. However, while Biller's novella does not try to restore the lost world of Eastern Jewry, the text serves an *authenticating purpose* by drawing on traditions of "ghetto writing". Biller uses Schulz's writing to insert himself into a specifically Eastern European-Jewish tradition, thereby establishing a literary genealogy. This genealogy is extended by an epigraph of the Nobel prize-winning Galician writer Shmuel Josef Agnon who was a prime exponent of the literary tradition of "ghetto writing". Biller's textual engagement with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's writing further strengthens these affiliations, as Sacher-Masoch was renowned for his interest in Galician folklore and the local Jewish communities. As mentioned before, the recourse to Schulz's work and Eastern European traditions more generally, connects Biller's novella to the writing of authors such as David Grossman, Nicole

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<sup>340</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Krauss, and Jonathan Safran Foer.<sup>342</sup> Paradoxically, these second- and third-generation Jewish authors try to achieve an authenticating effect by relying on an author whose “ghetto writing” was steeped in intertextuality. This tension also characterises Biller’s story, which fuses an awareness of (re-)mediation with a desire for authenticity in a manner that is characteristic of “reflective nostalgia”.

The Agnon quote, “Gelobt sei, der seltsame Wesen schafft” (*IKvBS*, 6) may furthermore be seen to refer to Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* and surrealist traditions more generally: Biller’s novella features a protagonist who is trapped in a basement and undergoing a gradual transformation from human to animal, while obsessing about the relationship with a father. This obvious reference to Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* is reinforced by the fact that Schulz and Biller repeatedly destabilise the human-animal divide; their writing examines the bond between humans and animals alongside the transformation of humans into animals. In Biller’s novella, human-animal-relationships, especially man/dog- and man/bird-relations, function as intertextual re-workings of Schulz’s writing, which also allude to Kafka. This creates a second, specifically Jewish genealogy and creative alliance between Kafka, Schulz and Biller.

These inscriptions into Eastern European and Jewish traditions function as conscious demonstrations of belonging, which are pitted against the German tradition as represented by Thomas Mann. One should note that in Biller’s earlier text *Der gebrauchte Jude* Marcel Reich-Ranicki was shown to reject Kafka in favour of Mann: “Und Thomas Mann sei ihm lieber als Kafka [...]. Kafka, sagte er, habe nur ein geniales Buch geschrieben, den *Prozess*, Mann dagegen sei an sich genial gewesen” (*DgJ*, 106). Biller’s assertion of a Jewish literary genealogy is therefore also an act of defiance, intended to ward off the influence of German tradition. At the same time, this genealogy is steeped in a “patriarchal poetics”, as is illustrated by the Agnon-quote which fuses the act of writing with paternity and literary genealogy, casting the male writer as a creative, god-like force. By using the quote as an epigraph, Biller’s text endorses the “paternity/creativity metaphor” that is at the heart of “patriarchal poetics”.<sup>343</sup> This intimate connection between masculinity and creativity also informs *Die Zimtläden*, which, in the famous “Traktat über die Schneiderpuppen”, stages a conflict between the male creator-genius (the “Demiurg” (*DZ*, 51)) and matter which is “formbar wie ein Weib” (*DZ*, 51). However, Schulz’s text ironises the nexus

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<sup>342</sup> David Goldfarb, ‘Appropriations of Bruno Schulz’.

<sup>343</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 6.

between father/god/creator by portraying the narrator's actual father as a weak figure, dominated by the housekeeper Adela. While Schulz's *Zimtläden* thus unsettles the notion of "patriarchal poetics" up to a point, *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* fully embraces "the metaphor of literary paternity" in an attempt to create an alternative sense of Jewishness.

#### 4.3.2. *From Venus in Furs to Thomas Mann in Furs – Remediations of Sadomasochism*

Apart from Eastern European writing traditions, Biller's novella also reworks the sadomasochistic constellation in Schulz's oeuvre. While this is in line with the graphic nature of sex in Biller's writing, the representation of sadomasochism in this story draws attention to other neuralgic points in Biller's oeuvre, which warrant a closer examination. Although there is some continuity on the level of imagery, Schulz and Biller depict sadomasochism very differently. Schulz's narrative alludes to sadomasochism: there are no explicit scenarios of physical punishment. In *Die Zimtläden*, the first-person narrator's father and the young housekeeper Adela entertain a sadomasochistic relationship: acutely aware of her powers, Adela rules the household (and the *pater familias*) with an iron fist. She represents matter, the body, sensuality, and the (socially and spatially) lower regions of the house, and uses her powers to control the narrator's father, who represents the mind and occupies the upper realms of the house. Sometimes Adela playfully teases him, at other times she openly challenges his patriarchal power. When the father explains the conflict between the (male) demiurge and the (female) material world in his speech on the "Schneiderpuppen", Adela repeatedly disrupts his deliberations by tantalising him with her foot.<sup>344</sup> The father reacts "wie ein Automat" (DZ, 56), and falls onto his knees. Ironically, this turns him into the type of mannequin which is the topic of his treatise – he is thus himself transformed from a (wannabe) active, male creator into a lifeless, passive automaton. However, in Schulz's text any scenes of explicit sadomasochistic punishment are deliberately erased:

Adela erhob sich vom Stuhl und bat uns, die Augen zu schließen vor dem, was nun gleich geschehen würde. Sie ging auf meinen Vater zu und verlangte, die Hände in die Hüften gestemmt, was den Anschein betonter Entschlossenheit verstärkte, mit aller Deutlichkeit ... ----- [ellipses in the original text]" (DZ, 60).

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<sup>344</sup> The subversive potential of Adela's actions is also stressed by Chrostowska, along with the irony resulting from the role reversal she provokes – the formless, passive female ultimately dominates the active, male (wannabe) demiurge, see S.D. Chrostowska, "Masochistic Art of Fantasy", pp. 475ff.

Billier's text makes these allusions and omissions in Schulz's writing explicit: he transforms the multi-layered sadomasochistic discourse in *Die Zimtläden* into a rather clichéd scenario of dominance, submission, and frequent physical punishment. The complex dependency and roleplay between the father and Adela is translated here into the openly sadomasochistic and violent relationship between the protagonist Bruno Schulz and Helena Jakubowicz, one of his fellow teachers. Schulz's masochistic urge is presented as a form of compulsive acting out that was caused by the frequent physical abuse he suffered from the housekeeper Adele as a child. While being locked up in a wardrobe by Helena, Schulz begins to fantasise about other forms of punishment:

Vielleicht, fügte sie hinzu, würde sie selbst kurz mit ihm in die Kammer kommen, sie könne, wenn er es wolle, in einem der chaotischen Läden hinter dem Marktplatz, [...], einige Dinge kaufen, die sie schon lange mit ihm ausprobieren wollte. Er konnte sich denken, was sie meinte! Nein, hatte er geantwortet, lieber nicht, obwohl er sich beim Gedanken an diese Dinge – venezianische Colombina-Masken aus schwarzem Leder, mit Sägemehl ausgestopfte, penisgroße Pierrots, aus Weidenruten geflochtene und mit dünnen Stahlketten durchwirkte Osterpeitschen, silberne Nippelklemmen und japanische Schungakerzen, deren tropfendes Wachs keine Brandblasen hinterließ – sofort sehr sicher und wohl fühlte [...] (*IKvBS*, 13f.).

Billier's representation of Schulz's deepest desire is more reminiscent of pop-cultural depictions of sadomasochism à la *Fifty Shades of Grey* than of Schulz or Sacher-Masoch.<sup>345</sup> In their depiction of the sadomasochistic figuration, both Sacher-Masoch and Schulz rely on allusion, omission and – as Gilles Deleuze has argued – deferral and suspension.<sup>346</sup> Imagination and fantasy are generally more important than execution. Moreover, the dominant/submissive relationship is used to reflect on a whole range of topics, such as the relationship between the sexes, power, performativity or, in Schulz's case, the connection between mind and matter and the nature of creation and creativity. Despite these similarities, Schulz's stories already transform Sacher-Masoch's model in significant ways: In *Die Zimtläden*, Sacher-Masoch's cruel mistress loses her opulent gowns and furs and re-emerges as the housekeeper Adela. The sadomasochistic constellation is thus translocated from the aristocratic to the bourgeois milieu, while also being oedipalised via *Die Zimtläden*'s

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<sup>345</sup> See Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Venus im Pelz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2013). *Fifty Shades of Grey* is a hugely successful erotic novel that uses sadomasochistic imagery to depict what has been widely criticised as an abusive relationship between a woman and an older man, see E.L. James, *Fifty Shades of Grey* (London: Arrow Books, 2012).

<sup>346</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism. Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, transl. by Jean McNeil (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991).

focus on the nuclear family. In Schulz's graphic work in particular, sadomasochism is supplemented by a foot fetish which is not overly relevant for Sacher-Masoch's narrative. By going through yet another cycle of remediation, in Biller's writing, sadomasochism turns into a cliché, reduced to a few potent images – such as the whip or the genuflection – which are invoked mainly, albeit not solely, for the purposes of provocation.

Before turning to the role of sadomasochistic imagery in negotiating the problematic German-Jewish symbiosis in Biller's text, it is necessary to explore in more detail the role of Schulz's drawings. They are arguably the main source of sadomasochistic imagery in Biller's novella, which makes repeated reference to a German edition entitled *Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk*.<sup>347</sup> *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* includes six drawings by Schulz, which are inserted into the novella. They do not illustrate any specific scenes in the text, but rather function as an illustration of the broader theme of dominance and submission. Five of the drawings show scenes of social or sexual domination: the female's position of power and superiority is expressed either in the form of a spatial elevation (*IKvBS*, 25) or by way of the upward movement of her head (*IKvBS*, 64). Schulz's graphic works were allegedly intended as illustrations of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz*,<sup>348</sup> and as such they reiterate scenes of physical domination by a cold and aloof female. Biller's novella, however, downplays certain crucial aspects of Sacher-Masoch's influence on Schulz while highlighting others: *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* does not concentrate on the central figure of the unattainable, cruel woman and its complementary image of a man lying at the feet of his cold mistress. Instead, Biller foregrounds scenes of violent punishment, especially the practice of whipping or flagellation. While Schulz's drawings in Biller's text give expression to the male adoration for a cold female, this theme is downplayed on the level of narration. The male/female sadomasochistic relationship which is present in Biller's narrative (Schulz/Adele, Schulz/Helena) is of secondary importance. Biller's text transfers the sadomasochistic scenario onto the

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<sup>347</sup> *Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk* reveals, that, apart from the six drawings that are explicitly remediated in the novella, several more of Schulz's drawings have been implicitly remediated in the text, which draws on Schulz's works as an inspiration for central scenes, motifs, and constellations. This for example concerns Schulz's transformation into a dog (*Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk*, p. 118), or the human cart horses that draw the fake Mann's carriage (*Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk*, p. 61) as well as the scenes of mass adoration and submission that make up the bathroom sequence (*Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk*, pp. 57-59; p. 113).

<sup>348</sup> See S.D. Chrostowska, "Masochistic Art of Fantasy", Footnote 13, p. 497.

relationship between Schulz/the town's Jews and Thomas Mann. While, on the visual level, sadomasochism is represented as an exclusively male/female scenario, on the level of narration it is coded as predominantly German-Jewish. Biller's novella thus transposes the sadomasochistic complex from the realm of gender onto the domain of ethnicity and culture. However, this transposition only works with the help of a gendered strategy, which feminises Thomas Mann, aligning him, in various ways, with the figure of the cruel and dominating female which is central to the sadomasochistic constellation. Hence, Sacher-Masoch's and Schulz's cruel mistresses re-emerge in the guise of Thomas Mann's character: Venus in furs becomes Thomas Mann in furs. This alignment becomes even clearer when considering the collection of Schulz's drawings that served as an inspiration for Biller's novella. The drawings demonstrate that one of the central scenes of degradations in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*, in which the fake Thomas Mann uses the Jews as cart horses, redeploys an existing Schulz drawing, in which a female does the exact same thing to a group of naked men.<sup>349</sup> It is noteworthy that the drawing is entitled "Auf Kythera", which in Greek mythology is the island belonging to Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and seduction. By implicitly remediating this drawing, Biller's novella aligns the fake Thomas Mann (and German culture as a whole which he epitomises) with traditions of the seductive *femme fatale* whose presence proves to be fatal for the Jews.<sup>350</sup> This interaction between Biller's novella and Schulz's drawings shows that remediation is indeed a form of "travelling memory".<sup>351</sup> The theme of sadomasochism migrates from Sacher-Masoch into Schulz's written and graphic oeuvre, and from there to Biller's novella. Along the way, certain aspects of the sadomasochistic complex are highlighted while others are suppressed, and the issues attached to it change accordingly. Schulz's collection of stories reinterprets the gendered constellation that defined Sacher-Masoch's writing in terms of class and as a conflict between (male) mind and (female) matter. Biller's text seemingly abandons the gender aspect by conceptualising sadomasochism as an illustration of the (failed) German-Jewish symbiosis. At the same time, *Im Kopf von*

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<sup>349</sup> See *Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk*, p. 61.

<sup>350</sup> Another drawing by Schulz, which also shows a female in a position of power, is entitled "Mademoiselle Circe und ihre Truppe", evoking yet another dangerously seductive female from the realm of Greek mythology, see *Bruno Schulz. Das graphische Werk*, p. 63.

<sup>351</sup> Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory'.

*Bruno Schulz* reinforces the misogynistic tendencies in Schulz's oeuvre,<sup>352</sup> by revitalising the *topos* of the *femme fatale*.

*Excursion I: Faces of the (M)Other – Feminisation as/and Abjection in Biller's text*

The representation of Thomas Mann as a female dominatrix feeds on and fuels a broader demonisation of the female in Biller's novella. *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* enhances certain features of Schulz's oeuvre, by depicting female characters as violent, physically monstrous, sexually depraved, or mentally disturbed. The female thus represents the ultimate Other, which hinders the establishment of a positive relationship – the male-female relationship is dominated by “Angstlust” (Adele, Helena, the mother) or by total disconnectedness, as is the case with Schulz's sister Hania. Adele, Helena, and the mother are openly and excessively violent towards the Schulz of the novella who, however, is shown to masochistically enjoy pain. It is therefore not so much their propensity for violence that denigrates the female characters but their monstrous and/or abject physicality. Both categories, the monstrous and the abject, cross and unsettle binaries and boundaries; in the case of the monster, this results in hybrid beings that disrupt existing systems of classification. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva emphasises the destabilising quality of the abject: “It is thus not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”.<sup>353</sup> Her theory centres on the establishment of the subject-/object-divide and the continuous threat of its breakdown. Abjection designates an early stage in the infant's development where the separation between self and (m)Other and hence signification do not yet exist: “The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archaeology, with our earliest attempts to release hold of the maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language”.<sup>354</sup> For a subject to emerge, the infant needs to separate itself from the (m)Other, which happens when the (not yet) subject enters the mirror stage as a prerequisite for the integration into the symbolic order. This integration enables the

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<sup>352</sup> Chrostowska also points to “misogynistic impulses” in Schulz's writing. Moreover, visual references to the *topos* of the *femme fatale* can be frequently found in Schulz's graphic works, see S.D Chrostowska, “Masochistic Art of Fantasy”, p. 489.

<sup>353</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

subject to clearly separate between him-/herself and the Other. However, the act of subject formation comes at the price of repressing the pre-lingual state, termed “chora” by Kristeva.<sup>355</sup> Certain bodily processes and substances, which destabilise the borders separating inside from outside – such as filth, vomit, excrement, (menstrual) blood, decay – indicate a return of this repressed “chora”, which is perceived as abject and causes absolute horror. Abjection can thus be understood as a violent gesture of separation, aimed at the primordial (m)Other. Kristeva examines a range of religious, cultural, and literary techniques which are meant to keep the powers of the abject – and thus the motherly – at bay.

Biller represents Helena exactly as such a hybrid, border-crossing creature, situated at the dividing line between male/female and human/animal: “Helena Jakobowicz – klein, athletisch und im Gesicht behaart wie eine kluge Bonobo-Dame [...]” (*IKvBS*, 10). While Schulz’s transformation into an animal accentuates the dehumanisation brought about by the Holocaust, Helena’s animal-like qualities serve the purpose of making her physically repulsive: the comparison with a Bonobo achieves the abjection of the female, who is furthermore associated with filth and excrement: “Helena [...], deren dichtes, blondes, oft schlecht gekämmtes Haar den Geruch von Urin und feuchtem, durchgelegenen Heu eines Tierkäfigs verbreitete” (*IKvBS*, 13); her hair is also full of “übel riechende[r] Sägespäne” and “stinkend[...], struppig[...]” (*IKvBS*, 54). As a “Sport- und Philosophielehrerin” (*IKvBS*, 10), she is furthermore positioned at the threshold between mind and body. Schulz’s sister Hania, who is also dirty and generally unkempt, incorporates the social aspect of abjection: she is depicted as mentally unstable and as a bad mother. Schulz’s attitude towards Helena oscillates between pleasure and pain, attraction, and repulsion; as such it exemplifies the subject’s confrontation with the abject which is always situated in-between those two poles.

By casting the female as violent, monstrous, and mad, Biller’s novella reinforces some of the negative attitudes towards femininity that are already present in Schulz’s writing. The violence of Adele’s/Adela’s character for example features in Schulz’s

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<sup>355</sup> Kristeva puts it this way: “The sign represses the chora and its eternal return”, meaning that the subject’s integration into the symbolic order (“the sign”) can only be achieved at the cost of repressing/abjecting the maternal, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 14; a similar point is made by Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety. Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 4ff.

*Zimtläden* and *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*. Schulz's stories furthermore employ extremely derogatory expressions, such as "die liederliche weibische Üppigkeit des August" (DZ, 13), "hemmungslose, krankhaft ausufernde Weiblichkeit" (DZ, 17) or "[d]er bis zur Effemination weichliche und verdorbene Jüngling" (DZ, 105). The "Traktat über die Schneiderpuppen" stages a conflict between male activity and female passivity, exemplified by the conflicted relationship between the "Demiurg" and "Materie":

Ohne jegliche eigene Initiative, wollüstig nachgiebig, formbar wie ein Weib, allen Impulsen folgend, bildet die Materie ein dem Gesetz entzogenes, für Scharlatanerie und Dilettantismus aller Art offenes Terrain [...]. Sie ist das passivste und wehrloseste Wesen im Kosmos. Jeder kann sie kneten und formen, sie fügt sich jedem (DZ, 51).

This alignment of the female with charlatanism, the sensual and the seductive resurfaces in Biller's novella with reference to the fake Thomas Mann. The denigration of the female in Biller's writing therefore serves as a strategy for defaming the (fake) Mann and vice versa. The feminisation of the (fake) Mann alludes rather crudely to Mann's alleged homosexuality,<sup>356</sup> while also aligning him with the sphere of the abject in the text. Biller's writing thus accentuates the misogynistic undercurrent in Schulz's prose to construct abject femininities. By representing the fake Mann in the text in terms of these abject femininities, Biller wards off the influence of the towering figure of Thomas Mann outside the text.

#### 4.3.3. *The Seductiveness of German Culture*

I have demonstrated how Biller employs various aspects of Schulz's writing in order to *inscribe* himself into a specifically Eastern European Jewish tradition. In what follows, I will explore how his novella uses intertextual references to *ward off* a certain heritage: Biller's engagement with Thomas Mann in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* and in *Der gebrauchte Jude* demonstrates a visible anxiety of influence, which relates to Mann as a literary forefather and rival, and as a symbol for German culture in its entirety. Biller's representation of the sadomasochistic German-Jewish relationship can be read as a polemical demonstration of the dangerous seductiveness of German culture. According to Biller's narrative, Thomas Mann lured Jews like Bruno Schulz

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<sup>356</sup> Feminising Thomas Mann could also be read as an ironic reversal of the anti-Semitic stereotype of the effeminate Jew, or as a reference to Gustav von Aschenbach's character in *Der Tod in Venedig* and thus yet another allusion to Mann's alleged homosexuality. The fact that the fake Mann is described as wearing make-up in the novella (*IKvBS*, 50) points to the latter explanation.

and Marcel Reich-Ranicki into a submissive state, sustained by the illusion that an untainted love for German culture and a German-Jewish symbiosis are possible.

In order to better understand this argument, it is important to consider the portrayal of Thomas Mann in Biller's novella, which encompasses three facets: firstly, there is the Thomas Mann that Schulz's fictional letter is addressed to. Known to Schulz only "von Fotografien und aus Zeitungen" (*IKvBS*, 7), this noble gentleman remains silent and absent throughout the text.<sup>357</sup> This idealised Thomas Mann is gradually overwritten by, secondly, the fake Thomas Mann, a "bösaartiges Abbild" (*IKvBS*, 33), who roams the streets of Drohobycz, and is physically and morally repulsive. Not only is he dirty, a slovenly dresser and generally unkempt, he also abuses the town's Jews in increasingly sadistic ways and turns out to be an agent of Germany's secret police. Thirdly, there is the author Thomas Mann, who is supposed to help Schulz. It eventually becomes clear that both the ideal and its grotesque reversal spring solely from Schulz's imagination. There is no fake Thomas Mann in Drohobycz; Schulz has made him up to gain the actual Mann's attention and protection. The split Mann therefore exists exclusively in Schulz's mind, as an expression of the writer's ambivalent love-hate relationship with the idol. The sadomasochistic relationship between the fake Mann, Schulz and the town's Jews is thus uncovered as a fantasy entertained by the book's protagonist. However, the separation between the protagonist's fantasies and the author's opinions is complicated when considering Biller's autobiographically inspired "Selbstporträt" *Der gebrauchte Jude*.<sup>358</sup> The text circles obsessively around Thomas Mann – there are at least 10 episodes or dialogues that involve him – and Biller's personal love-hate-relationship with the idol,<sup>359</sup> so that

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<sup>357</sup> Interestingly, the real Mann's silence reproduces the coldness and cruelty of the female in the sadomasochistic constellation; this would support the interpretation that Schulz's imaginary sadomasochistic relationship with the fake Mann is an expression of his actual relationship with the real Mann.

<sup>358</sup> It should be noted that *Der gebrauchte Jude* is a heavily fictionalised autobiography, in which the narrator repeatedly stresses the unreliability and fragmentariness of his account. The reader is thus urged not to take the text at face value, which gives rise to the question of whether or not Biller's hateful relationship with Thomas Mann should be taken seriously. I would argue that, while some of the encounters Biller describes in his "Selbstporträt" are heavily edited – including those with Reich-Ranicki – the issues that are being negotiated via the triangle Biller-Mann-Reich-Ranicki remain unaffected by the ontological status of these events. The question of whether or not Biller 'really' hates Mann is not as important as the ways in which Biller uses Thomas Mann to express an extremely negative view on the issue of pre- and post-Holocaust German-Jewish symbiosis.

<sup>359</sup> Biller's negative obsession with Mann has unfolded across various genres: apart from prose (*Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*) and autofiction (*Der gebrauchte Jude*), he also voiced his hatred in several interviews, see Alan Posener, 'Maxim Biller will Thomas Mann zerstören', *Die Welt*, 28 September 2009 <<https://www.welt.de/kultur/article4654102/Maxim-Biller-will-Thomas-Mann-zerstoeren.html>> [accessed: 16 August 2015]; Christine Käppeler, "Mit Angst kenne ich mich aus", *der Freitag*, 11

Schulz's fantasies can be said to convey Biller's own negative sentiments towards the precursor:

Thomas Mann ist der neue Goethe, und den Deutschen ist egal, dass fast alle seine Bücher einen dunklen Hinterausgang haben, durch den man direkt in die schmutzige Phantasiewelt der Rassentheoretiker des 19. Jahrhunderts gelangt. Die Juden bei Mann sind schnell, schmierig, gewissenlos und Demokraten. Sie haben platte Nasen und wulstige Lippen, und wenn sie wie Sieglinde und Siegmund in *Wälsungenblut* Geschwister sind, schlafen sie miteinander (*DgJ*, 42).

Biller's novella thus uses an allegedly "real" historical event – Schulz writing a letter to Mann – to continue his own dialogue with Thomas Mann and to cope with the anxiety of influence. The novella's *doppelgänger*-theme therefore extends to the relationship between Biller and Schulz, in the sense that Schulz represents Biller's alter ego or, more accurately, his mouthpiece.<sup>360</sup> This makes both Thomas Mann and Bruno Schulz into victims of Biller's anxiety: the last of Bloom's "revisionary ratios", termed *Apophrades or The Return of the Dead*, involves "the triumph of having so stationed the precursor, in one's own work, that particular passages in his work seem to be not presages of one's own advent, but rather to be indebted to one's own achievement".<sup>361</sup> Although Bloom refers to the level of style which is not the focal point of Biller's intertextual engagement, Biller's novella attempts to achieve this triumph on the level of plot. The project of getting inside the head of Bruno Schulz is an attempt to raise the dead on certain conditions: "The mighty dead return, but they return in our colours, and speaking in our voices".<sup>362</sup> The necromancy practiced in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* is thus a form of ventriloquy: through the hand and head of Bruno Schulz, Biller expresses his own issues and anxieties as an author. This demonstrates that the postmemorial affiliation performed in Biller's novella is not an exclusively ethical one – it is both, an act of homage and an act of appropriation, a continuation of tradition and a form of patricide. The nostalgic longing for a lost tradition that runs through the novella is thus the flipside of anxiety. The self- and meta-reflexivity of Biller's engagement with the tradition of "ghetto writing" in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* and

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November 2013 <<https://www.freitag.de/autoren/christine-kaeppler/mit-angst-kenne-ich-mich-aus>> [accessed: 16 August 2015].

<sup>360</sup> This has also been noted by some of the more critical reviews of the novella, see especially Katharina Granzin, 'Janusköpfiger Kollege aus Deutschland', *die tageszeitung*, 21 December 2013 <<http://www.taz.de/!418016/>> [accessed: 16 August 2015]; Bettina Hartz, 'Im Kopf von Maxim Biller', *Fixpoetry.com*, 12 December 2013 <<http://www.fixpoetry.com/feuilleton/kritiken/maxim-biller/im-kopf-von-bruno-schulz>> [accessed: 16 August 2015].

<sup>361</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*, p. 141.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

his lucid criticism of Holocaust hypermediation in *Harlem Holocaust* are thus counteracted by a highly appropriative reading of Bruno Schulz which blurs the lines between the literary forefather and Biller's authorial self.

While expressing the anxiety of influence, the sadomasochistic relationship between Mann and Schulz/the town's Jews also connects to the larger issue of the Jew in German culture and the (im-)possibility of a German-Jewish symbiosis. Framed within the sadomasochistic constellation, Thomas Mann and German culture are imagined as feminine and highly seductive. *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* features various scenes in which the people in the town are inexplicably drawn to the fake Mann, and this is so in spite of his repugnant physical appearance and atrocious behaviour:

Die vielen wichtigen Leute aus unserer Stadt, die ihn seit seiner Ankunft wie der Bienenstaat die Königin umschwirren, ducken sich kurz, und danach tauchen sie – die Mundwinkel zum unterwürfigen Lächeln hochgezogen, die Augen vor Schrecken gerötet und glasig – wieder auf und bitten ihn, ihnen weiter seine aufregenden Geschichten zu erzählen (*IKvBS*, 17).

The comparison of the town's community to a "Bienenstaat" puts the fake Mann in the position of the proverbial queen bee. Schulz's choice of words is revealing when he mentions that the fake writer has come to the town to make everyone's head spin (*IKvBS*, 32): "Und so habe ich mich neulich auch, sehr verehrter Dr. Mann, wie jeder andere von Ihrem Doppelgänger einwickeln lassen (*IKvBS*, 32)". Such images of seduction, ensnarement and manipulation are usually associated with the figure of the *femme fatale*.<sup>363</sup> Schulz seems to distance himself from this senseless admiration, but he is not immune to Mann's charms and finds himself trapped in his love of the German language and German culture as a whole:

Die biegsamen Regeln der Mischna, die fast beschwingte Schwermut des Predigers, die sanfte Klarheit des Schulchan Aruch? Nein, das war nie etwas für mich. Ich sehne mich eher mit Malte Laurids Brigge und Gustav von Aschenbach nach einem Ende, das uns alle ohnehin erwartet, dessen Schönheit und Zeitpunkt wir aber selbst bestimmen sollten [...] (*IKvBS*, 62).

Schulz's admission that he would rather choose Mann and Rilke over his own Jewish traditions is of course reminiscent of Reich-Ranicki's rejection of Kafka in favour of Mann. This once again suggests that Biller uses Schulz and Reich-Ranicki as literary father figures to negotiate similar issues.

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<sup>363</sup> The fake Mann is not only connected to the *femme fatale*. By continually stressing his fakeness and status of a mere "Abbild" (*IKvBS*, 33), the text also casts him as a "false idol", which links him to the practice of idolatry, one of the worst transgressions in Judaism.

Flirting with the *femme fatale* usually does not end well for the male characters. This is not any different for the Jews who have fallen prey to the temptations of Thomas Mann and German culture. The fake Mann lures them into a profoundly sadomasochistic constellation of dominance and submission which eventually leads to their death. This is epitomised in the bathroom scene, which is at the centre of the narrative arc and forms the climax of Biller's text (and Schulz's fantasy). The scene relies on the provocative image of the *doppelgänger* giving the town's Jews a whipping inside a bathroom that evokes the iconography of the gas chamber:

Sie hatten ihre Kleider an die Haken gehängt, sie saßen stumm oder übertrieben leise miteinander sprechend auf den beiden Bänken und warteten. Als der Meister mit dem Direktor und mir reinkam, erhoben sie sich fast gleichzeitig, sie verdeckten mit den Händen ihre nackten Brüste und Genitalien, und auch die letzte, allerleiseste Unterhaltung brach ab (*IKvBS*, 34ff.).

References to the gas chambers are of course anachronistic from the viewpoint of the novella, which is set in 1938. However, they also suggest that Schulz's fantasies are *a form of premonition*, as mentioned earlier. The superimposition of the iconographies of sadomasochism, the Holocaust and anti-Semitic violence in the bathroom scene indicates that the blind and masochistic Jewish love of German culture makes Jews follow Germans like lambs to the slaughter, which anticipates future historical events. The violence is sparked when the Jews start to beleaguer the fake Mann in response to his announcement that he is leaving Europe for America, to escape the advent of German fascism. The physical contact made by the Jews is thus a cry for help, but their actions could also be interpreted as the culmination of their desire for symbiosis and amalgamation, which, however, provokes fear and violence in the German. What begins as a sadomasochistic orgy eventually turns into a pogrom, an act of anti-Semitic destruction. Schulz's narrative positions the fake Mann within a genealogy of anti-Semitic excess, which logically leads to the Holocaust as the endpoint, making him part of the perpetrator collective:

Doch allmählich wurden die Hiebe des Deutschen schwächer, seine Stimme auch, in der silbernen Rauchwolke formten sich für einen Moment die wabernden Konturen des traurigen Kindergesichts von Leutnant Alfred Dreyfus, aus dem französischen Offizier wurde die weinende und blutende Jagienka Łomska, dann schaute ich mich selbst aus dem Rauchscheiter an, und schließlich drehte sich die Wolke, sie zog sich zusammen und stieg zur Decke auf, wo sie mit einem lauten Zischen in den Düsen der Duschen verschwand – und gab so den Blick frei auf einen großen Haufen nackter Körper, die leblos um den vor Erschöpfung knienden, falschen Thomas Mann herumlagen (*IKvBS*, 40f.).

The recourse to the image of the gas chamber is undeniable in this passage. The fake Thomas Mann, suddenly addressed solely as the German, is represented as a Nazi perpetrator, executing anti-Semitic violence, while the townspeople are integrated into a community of eternal victims, with the prophetic Schulz as their latest addition. This scene suggests that German-Jewish relations can only ever result in anti-Semitic excess because, sooner or later, all Germans will turn into perpetrators. According to this scenario, German-Jewish relations function as a one-sided dependency, based on an act of delusional submission on the side of the Jews, which inevitably entails their destruction. The introduction of Mann as “Meister” at the beginning of the scene thus carries multiple meanings: he is not only a master commanding words and slaves but also the “Meister aus Deutschland” that haunts Celan’s *Todesfuge*, and thus an emblem of Nazi extermination policies.<sup>364</sup> The Schulz in Biller’s story aims to exploit the difference between his grotesque invention and the actual Thomas Mann, who he hopes will save him. However, the fact that Mann remains silent and Schulz’s fantasies eventually become real – Drohobycz is overrun and destroyed by Nazi troops at the end of the novella – implies that the difference between the fake and the real Mann is not that big, and that Schulz himself fell prey to a delusional belief in German culture as the opposite of and antidote to Nazi barbarism. The novella hence employs Schulz’s *pre-Holocaust interpretation* of German-Jewish relationships as a masochistic dependency on the side of the Jews to express a *post-Holocaust consciousness*. In contrast to Schulz’s illusions, the logic of the story corroborates the conviction that, after the attempted extermination of an entire people, Jews and Germans are “für immer geschiedene Leute” (*DgJ*, 107).

#### *Excursion II: A Return to Polemics?*

This interpretation of German-Jewish relations once again raises the question of the representational mode: is the depiction of the German-Jewish symbiosis as a sadomasochistic death trap a grotesque exaggeration, or does it represent a radical post-Holocaust Jewish stance on the matter? There are arguments for both readings.

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<sup>364</sup> I am referring to the iconic stanza from Celan’s *Todesfuge*: “Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts/wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus/ Deutschland/wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken/der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau/er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau/ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete/er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab in der/ Luft/er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein/ Meister aus Deutschland“, see Paul Celan, ‘Todesfuge’, in: Paul Celan, *Ausgewählte Gedichte. Zwei Reden*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), pp. 18-19.

Although *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* is not as openly polemical and grotesque as for example *Harlem Holocaust*, it still taps into the surrealist legacy of Schulz's written and graphic work, so that the reader is made to question the factual accuracy of what is described to him/her (by both Schulz and the third-person narrator). The town of Drohobycz is presented as a topsy-turvy world, in which the most fantastical things are happening: "Sehen Sie, Dr. Mann, was für ein Irrenhaus dieses Drohobycz ist? Keiner hier denkt und benimmt sich, wie er sollte!" (*IKvBS*, 27). The events happening in the "Irrenhaus" of Drohobycz could be described as carnivalesque in Bakhtin's sense,<sup>365</sup> pointing to a temporary suspension of the existing order:

We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the 'inside out' (*à l'envers*), of the 'turnabout', of the continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings [...]. [I]t is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a 'world inside out'.<sup>366</sup>

The notion of the grotesque, which is intimately connected to the "carnival spirit" in Bakhtin's work,<sup>367</sup> would also account for the hybrid bodies (mostly Helena's border-crossing physicality, but also the repeated destabilisation of the human-animal-divide) and the strong emphasis on sexuality. However, reading the novella through the lens of Bakhtinian carnival and the grotesque also poses problems: a carnivalisation of German-Jewish relations would entail a reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator, oppressor and oppressed. This is ultimately not the case in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*: the application of the sadomasochistic configuration reinforces the existing power structures instead of inverting them. Bakhtin showed that the carnivalesque suspension of hierarchies and rules is a temporarily limited phenomenon, which is followed by the reinstatement (and possible reinforcement) of the existing order. If the arrival of the German troops towards the end of the novella can be interpreted as the violent intrusion of historical reality into the surreal fantasy world of Drohobycz, then this would suggest that fascism is the 'correct' order which is reinstated after the carnival period. Finally, the carnivalesque grotesque in Biller's novella does not carry any of the positive connotations associated with the grotesque; as it merely signifies the monstrous and the abject, death, demise, and decay, it is lacking the crucial aspects of renewal, comic laughter, and rebirth. The grotesque in Biller's novella therefore

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<sup>365</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

conforms with the negative grotesque, which, following Bakhtin, is the main manifestation of the grotesque in European culture ever since Romanticism.<sup>368</sup> The novella's employment of the grotesque thus highlights the negative aspects of the German-Jewish relationship, without challenging the underlying power structures in a carnivalesque manner.

Although Schulz uses the metaphor of the "Irrenhaus" to describe Drohobycz, the fact remains that the madness is in the end translated into historical reality – Schulz thus turns from a lunatic into a prophet, and this turnaround makes the carnivalesque strategy even less plausible. I would like to introduce another important intertext here, namely the rather obscure biblical story of King Abimelech and the town of Sichem. It is brought up more than halfway through the book, when Schulz starts wondering whether he might be taking things a little too far: "[I]ch meine, dass sich jemand als er ausgibt, könnte zwar sein, aber dass er so brutal und überheblich ist, gerade zu denen, die ihn achten und rühmen, klingt ziemlich unwahrscheinlich, oder?" (*IKvBS*, 47). The personification of his fear replies as follows: "Kennst du die Geschichte der Bewohner von Sichem, sagte die Angst, weißt du, wie es ihnen erging, nachdem sie Abimelech zum Herrscher der Philister gewählt hatten?" (*IKvBS*, 47). Section 9 of the *Book of Judges* centres on Abimelech, a judge who desires to become the new ruler over the town of Sichem, and secretly plots to kill his seventy brothers, who would have been a competition to the throne. This is backed by the people of Sichem, who have become ensnared by Abimelech and his lust for power. He succeeds in murdering all of his brothers, except for one, named Jotam. Jotam retreats to the mountain of Garizim where he curses the people of Sichem for their act of betrayal and asks God to deliver a just punishment:

16 Habt ihr nun recht und redlich getan, dass ihr Abimelech zum König gemacht habt? Und habt ihr wohlgetan an Jerubbaal und an seinem Hause, und habt ihr ihm getan, wie er's um euch verdient hat?

[...]

19 Habt ihr nun heute recht und redlich gehandelt an Jerubbaal und an seinem Hause, so seid fröhlich über Abimelech und er sei fröhlich über euch.

20 Wenn nicht, so gehe Feuer aus von Abimelech und verzehre die Männer von Sichem und die Bewohner des Millo, und gehe auch Feuer aus von den Männern von Sichem

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., pp. 36ff.

und von den Bewohnern des Millo und verzehre Abimelech.<sup>369</sup>

Abimelech rules in peace for a time, but after three years God sends an evil spirit to divide Abimelech and the people of Sichem, who subsequently try to overthrow him. Abimelech hires an army of mercenaries to destroy Sichem as a punishment for this insurgency. He is successful, but cannot escape divine judgement indefinitely: during the siege of Tebez, a woman throws a mill stone on his head and he has to beg his armour bearer to kill him so as to avoid the disgrace of having been slain by a woman. The end of Sichem and the death of Abimelech are presented as the result of a divine intervention:

56 So vergalt Gott dem Abimelech das Böse, das er seinem Vater angetan hatte, als er seine siebenzig Brüder tötete.

57 Desgleichen alle bösen Taten der Männer von Sichem vergalt ihnen Gott auf ihren Kopf, und es kam über sie der Fluch Jotams, des Sohnes Jerubbaals.<sup>370</sup>

Given its position in the text, the reader is encouraged to establish a direct connection between Abimelech/Thomas Mann and Sichem/Drohobycz. The story is introduced as a warning against false and dangerous allegiances. The people of Sichem decide to support Abimelech because his uncles convince them that he is one of them, their brother (Richter, 9, 3). In a similar vein, Jews like Bruno Schulz succumb to Mann (and German culture in general) because they think a German-Jewish symbiosis is possible, that Germans and Jews can (or even have) achieve(d) “ewige Brüderlichkeit” (*DgJ*, 117). Schulz believes that the idealised Mann is not capable of the atrocities committed by the fake Thomas Mann. The story of Abimelech demonstrates that the difference between the two is not that great: a king/an idol can turn into a slaughterer and vice versa. As such, the story of Abimelech is not meant to denigrate the fake Mann but highlight the dangers of misjudging the original.

The story is taken up again on the last pages of the novella, when Schulz tries to make sense of what is happening to him and his town:

Was ist das?, dachte er.

Keine Antwort.

Was ist das?!

Das ist die Armee von Abimelech, sagte schließlich die Angst, sie ist gekommen, um all die zu vernichten, die ihn zuerst zum König machten und sich später daran erinnerten,

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<sup>369</sup> Richter, 9, 16-20, *Luther-Bibel. 1984 Edition* <<https://www.die-bibel.de/online-bibeln/luther-bibel-1984/bibeltext/>> [accessed: 19 August 2015].

<sup>370</sup> Richter, 9, 56-57.

dass er siebzig ihrer Brüder ermordet hatte (*IKvBS*, 68).

By the end of the novella, the fire unleashed upon Sichem by Jotam's curse has reached Drohobycz; its destruction therefore appears as a just punishment for an act of betrayal. Altering the biblical narrative, Fear tells Schulz that Sichem/Drohobycz's is being punished for the betrayal of its seventy brothers in the service of a foreign king. However, the biblical original states that it is not Sichem's but Abimelech's seventy brothers that are murdered. What appears as a minor change in fact has big consequences: the misreading of the biblical original suggests that Drohobycz's Jews have betrayed their brothers (i.e. their Jewishness) in their blind devotion to a foreign king (i.e. Thomas Mann) and are now paying the price. The implications of this are extremely problematic, if not downright unacceptable, since the Holocaust is made to appear as a just punishment for the blind belief in the possibility of a German-Jewish symbiosis. My sense of unease about the equation of Abimelech/Sichem with Mann/Drohobycz increases further in the light of the representation of the relationship between Thomas Mann and Marcel Reich-Ranicki in *Der gebrauchte Jude*. Here, Biller does not resort to the ploy of a fictionalised Bruno Schulz and a fake Thomas Mann, but he attacks the actual historical figure, along with all the problems that Thomas Mann, in the eyes of Biller, stands for.

#### 4.3.4. "Er war, wie ich werden würde" – Marcel Reich-Ranicki

Biller's fixation on Thomas Mann is complemented by his obsession with Marcel Reich-Ranicki, and both are brought together in the space of his autobiographically inspired *Der gebrauchte Jude*. The text stages repeated, violent attacks against Thomas Mann, in an attempt to ward off the influence of the German *Übervater*, while seeking to gain the attention of the Jewish father figure Reich-Ranicki. What is at stake in this love-hate-triangle between Biller, Mann and Reich-Ranicki is a specific understanding of German-Jewish relations and the status of the Jew in German (post-war-) culture, which provides the nexus between Biller's 2009 text and his later novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*. In *Der gebrauchte Jude* Reich-Ranicki acts as Biller's "literarischer Ersatzvater" (*DgJ*, 80). Tensions arise from a generational difference between the wild pop-journalist Biller and the established, bourgeois critic Reich-Ranicki, but they go beyond a clichéd clash between the young rebel and the establishment. What truly separates Biller from Reich-Ranicki is their different understanding of Jewish identity in present-day Germany and the relationship between Jews and German culture. The

key issues that Biller addresses in his fictionalised encounters with Reich-Ranicki thus converge with the central themes in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*: what does it mean to be Jewish in the land and culture of the perpetrators? What traditions can the Jewish writer still relate to after the Holocaust? What is the role of literature and writing in negotiating these issues? In the search for answers, Reich-Ranicki acts as a role model for Biller – after all, he was one of the most visible Jewish public intellectuals in post-war German culture. Biller stages their relationship as an antagonistic struggle over Thomas Mann: he introduces a constellation that is similar to *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*, in which a Jew falls prey to the seductiveness of Thomas Mann and German culture more generally. However, Biller’s verdict on Reich-Ranicki is even harsher, since, unlike the turn-of-the century Galician writer Schulz, Reich-Ranicki has experienced the Holocaust first-hand and should know about the futility of the German-Jewish symbiosis. Thomas Mann is a particularly unacceptable role model for Biller, who accuses the German writer of having been an incorrigible anti-Semite: “Thomas Mann hasste die Juden!” (*DgJ*, 42). Mann’s bigotry extends to his German audience which chooses to ignore the blatant anti-Semitism to protect their cultural heritage. However, Biller sees Reich-Ranicki’s admiration of Mann as a betrayal of his Jewish heritage:

‘Er schrieb *Tonio Kröger*! Hier war der Konflikt, den ich seit meiner Kindheit kannte. Konnte ich Künstler sein? Hatte ich den Mut, das Talent, die Geduld?’ Und Gregor Samsa waren Sie nicht? ‘Damit hab ich nichts zu tun, das ist jüdische Schizophrenie. Jüdischer Selbsthass!’ (*DgJ*, 106).

The resemblance between this passage and the one about Gustav von Aschenbach in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* further corroborates my claim that Biller’s texts uses Bruno Schulz’s and Marcel Reich-Ranicki’s (fictional) relationship with Thomas Mann to deal with similar issues. Biller’s scathing critique is aimed at both the German-Jewish literary critic and the more or less forgotten Polish-Jewish writer, since, in his eyes, they both fell in love with the wrong person and culture:

Nicht Kafka, sondern Thomas Mann. Nicht der Jude, der das schönste Deutsch des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts schrieb, weil er den tadelnden Blicken der Nichtjuden standhalten wollte – sondern der Deutsche, der sich bis zu seinem Tod in der jüdischen Moderne so wohlfühlte wie ein niedersächsischer Pastor auf dem Geburtstagsfest des Zaddiks von Przemysl (*DgJ*, 107).

Biller calls the belief that German culture can be isolated from the atrocities of German fascism the “Reich-Ranicki-Syndrom” (*DgJ*, 117). Part of this syndrome is the

unshakeable investment in the possibility of a German-Jewish symbiosis: “Seit zwei Jahrhunderten glaubten die Deutsch sprechenden Juden Mitteleuropas, deutsche Worte und deutsche Melodien seien eine einzige große Hymne auf die ewige Brüderlichkeit” (*DgJ*, 117). Jews like Reich-Ranicki cannot let go of this belief and their love of German culture, even in the face of the Holocaust:

Wie gern wäre er [Marcel Reich-Ranicki] Deutscher gewesen – [...] –, aber das ging wirklich nicht mehr. Und wenn doch? Also subtrahierte er sich seine Lebenswahrheit zurecht, wie so viele Davongekommene: Deutschland minus Hitler, Goebbels und Auschwitz gleich Heine, Rilke und Thomas Mann (*DgJ*, 82f.).

Biller claims that this delusional desire for a German-Jewish symbiosis, which ignores the Holocaust, is a phenomenon associated mainly with the “Deutsch sprechenden Juden Mitteleuropas”. This suggests that Biller’s conflict with Reich-Ranicki is also marked by an East-/West-divide (although they share their Eastern European origins), which centres on the question of assimilation. And so it is that Biller transforms the generationally coded rivalry between Reich-Ranicki and himself into the opposition between an assimilationist and radically anti-assimilationist notion of Jewish identity. The combination Thomas Mann/Reich-Ranicki stands for a bourgeois, central European and assimilated form of Jewishness, from which Biller sets himself apart. In *Der gebrauchte Jude* he mobilised an American-Jewish genealogy of writers (Bellow, Malamud, Roth) to achieve this separation effect; a few years later, he rediscovered Eastern European Jewish traditions to reach the same goal. Biller is, however, faced with the conundrum that he also occupies a prominent position in mainstream German culture, as his nomination for the *Literarisches Quartett* exemplifies. His attacks on Reich-Ranicki are thus fuelled by his own fear of assimilation: “Er war, wie ich werden würde, ob ich es wollte oder nicht [...]” (*DgJ*, 81). In this context, Thomas Mann is an overdetermined signifier, evoking oedipal rivalry, anxieties of influence, the lures of German culture, alongside the fear of assimilation and annihilation. Biller’s critical engagement with Mann in *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* therefore also addresses Reich-Ranicki, warning him that the unconditional love of German culture and the abandonment of Jewish tradition can only lead to two things – assimilation or extermination.

#### 4.4. Conclusion: From Patriarchal Poetics to ‘Perpetrator Poetics’

Harold Bloom's theory of influence is driven by the question of how authors relate to literary heritages. While Bloom demonstrates that the inscription into tradition usually involves severe conflict, aggression, and murderous impulses, he still supposes that all male writers eventually join the patriarchal family that is the canon of Western literature. Bloom focuses on the question of *how* authors adopt and transform their precursors, and not on the problem *if* they (are able to) do so in the first place. Gilbert's and Gubar's criticism of Bloom posits that such an understanding of literary tradition reinforces patriarchal dominance, while also challenging the feasibility of Bloom's model for all those who are not part of that canon. The "anxiety" of the woman writer results from her inability to relate to masculinist traditions, as they do not provide any potential for a positive identification. The woman writer's literary orphan status fuels a fear of being creative/a creator which obstructs her artistic potential. Curiously enough, Maxim Biller is faced with a similar problem as a German-Jewish writer in post-Holocaust Germany: certain traditions are not available to him, either because they have been violently destroyed or because they are part of a culture from which the Holocaust emerged. This leads to a recurring engagement with literary paternity and the integration into tradition in Biller's latest writing, which does not problematise the logic of "patriarchal poetics", but rather tackles what I would call 'perpetrator poetics'.

This term points to the central predicament Biller faces as a Jewish writer in Germany: he cannot positively identify with the influence of German "perpetrator" culture – epitomised by the writer-father Thomas Mann – while at the same time being cut off, historically and geographically, from vital Jewish writing traditions. However, while Biller cannot relate to German culture and writing traditions, he is still a part of them. Mann's aphorism that it is "unangenehm" to be reminded that we are not alone in this world,<sup>371</sup> means two things in Biller's case: it is "unangenehm" in the Bloomian sense, as it points to the impossibility of priority and the narcissistic insult this entails. Yet, the quote also points to the fact that all writing is 'infected' with the ideas of the precursors who, in Biller's case, belong to the perpetrator collective. This causes a profound sense of "dis-ease" in Biller's writing,<sup>372</sup> fuelled by the inability to escape the contagious influence of German culture and 'perpetrator poetics'. This "dis-ease"

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<sup>371</sup> "Die Erinnerung, daß man nicht allein auf der Welt, immer unangenehm", quoted after Sibylle Schulze-Berge, *Heiterkeit im Exil – Ein ästhetisches Prinzip bei Thomas Mann. Zur Poetik des Heiteren im mittleren und späten Werk Thomas Manns* (Würzburg: Königshausen&Neumann, 2006), p. 25.

<sup>372</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p. 51.

is the essence of Biller's hateful relationship with Mann who, as a pre-war author, is employed to express Biller's post-Holocaust consciousness, marked by the unavoidability of German cultural influence and the "negative Symbiose".

Gilbert and Gubar show that female writers perceive the infectiousness of a male-dominated tradition as "profoundly debilitating" and respond with images of sickness, deformity, and confinement.<sup>373</sup> Biller's texts, however, choose a more belligerent path: fending off the anxiety caused by the influence of 'perpetrator poetics', Biller's writing constructs 'positive' and 'negative' intertextual genealogies. A positive intertextual relationship is established with the works of Bruno Schulz, which inscribes Biller into a specifically Eastern European Jewish tradition. This heritage encompasses "ghetto writing" and sadomasochistic discourse (Sacher-Masoch, Agnon, Schulz), alongside a Kafkaesque surrealism, all of which intersect in Schulz's oeuvre. Biller's novella furthermore uses a fictionalised Schulz to act out the anxieties of creative obstruction and infection that is associated with Thomas Mann in Biller's work. The text's relationship with Schulz's oeuvre can thus be described as a form of appropriative postmemory, which diverges from the ethical trajectory suggested by Hirsch. *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* demonstrates that the postmemorial generation's relationship with the past and certain cultural traditions is characterised by ambivalent feelings, encompassing both, love and hate, commemoration and erasure, adoration and patricide. The relationship with Thomas Mann is less ambivalent and marked by hatred. Since Biller's texts do not engage with Thomas Mann's oeuvre as such, the German writer fulfils a synecdochical function, representing German cultural tradition as a whole. There is an obvious patricidal element to this relationship, since Biller's texts try to expose and degrade the idol in order to break free from its spell. In *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz*, this is achieved by imagining alternative yet masculine genealogies, while also associating Mann with the female which is constructed as a site of abjection. By contrast, the relationship with Reich-Ranicki is defined by identification – Biller sees himself in Reich-Ranicki and claims that the opposite is also true. Nonetheless, Biller's writing discredits Reich-Ranicki by merging him with Bruno Schulz's character, accusing both of a blind infatuation with German culture. The danger of this infatuation is highlighted in the sadomasochistic submission of the Jews by Thomas Mann, which can only end in assimilation or annihilation.

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

My analysis has thus concentrated on Biller's use of explicit intertextual references to deal with the (un-)relatability and (un-)availability of certain traditions after the Holocaust. In Biller's latest work, intertextuality becomes the battle ground on which conflicts of belonging and dissociation are staged and acted out, as his texts employ intertextual allusions to connect to some traditions, while aggressively warding off the influence of others. However, Biller's *Der gebrauchte Jude* introduces a different strategy for dealing with the contagiousness of German culture and the "Reich-Ranicki-Syndrom". This strategy is epitomised by the so-called Frankfurt Jews who respond with hatred and revenge to their status in post-war German culture:

Keiner konnte mir erzählen, dass es Baumbach und Bubis nur um das Geld ging. Sie, die polnischen Straßenkinder, die erst in den deutschen Gettos und Lagern Deutsch gelernt hatten, standen meistens daneben, als ihre Mütter wie Fliegen totgeklatscht wurden, und dies war ihre Stunde. Sie subtrahierten nicht wie Reich-Ranicki, Freund, Domin. Sie addierten: Deutschland, plus Hitler, Goebbels und Auschwitz ist gleich Rache, gleich Selbsthass, den man nur mit Hass vergelten kann (*DgJ*, 89).

*Der gebrauchte Jude* thus seems to endorse hatred as a counter-strategy to the threat of submission experienced by characters such as Schulz and Reich-Ranicki. While intertextuality thus provides the *method* through which Biller, as a writer, engages with questions of heritage, tradition, genealogy and belonging, hatred might well be the *mode* through which this engagement is carried out. Biller himself is well-aware of the problems this mode entails: although it is meant to violently terminate the "negative Symbiose", it achieves the opposite effect by consolidating stereotypes: "In Deutschland in einer Zeitung jemanden in tausend Stücke zu zerlegen, der zu Unrecht wichtig oder berühmt ist, war seit Heines melancholischen Amokläufen ein Job für Juden – oder solche, die man dafür hielt" (*DgJ*, 77). Although hatred might therefore signify a (male) counter-strategy to the "dis-ease" experienced by women writers, it still does not enable Biller to escape the clutches of 'perpetrator poetics'. On the contrary, Biller, Bubis and Baumbach are actually not that different from "Reich-Ranicki, Freund, Domin": they all suffer from the influenza of German influence, irrespective of whether they embrace or violently reject it.

## 5. Contrapuntal Memory and ‘Ironic’ Transnationalism in Vladimir Vertlib’s *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*

“All existing clothes are always too tight, and thus comical, on a man”

(Mikhail Bakhtin)

### 5.1. Introduction: Scrutinising the “Transnational Turn”

A brief survey of recent conference themes, publications and research clusters on the Holocaust shows the upsurge of so-called transnational or transcultural perspectives. This boom is indicative of a larger transnational or transcultural turn,<sup>374</sup> which, over the last 10 years, has reached disciplines as diverse as Sociology, History, the Modern Languages and, most importantly, memory studies.<sup>375</sup> Transcultural/-national memory can be understood as an intervention into the field of memory studies, which promotes the fundamental interrelatedness of cultural and mnemonic phenomena. It focuses on literal and metaphorical instances of border-crossing, intermingling, travel and translation, drawing attention to “the palimpsestic overlays, the hybrid assemblages, the non-linear interactions, and the fuzzy edges of group belonging”.<sup>376</sup> The idea of transnational memory is part of a broader dynamisation of memory studies, which entails a shift in focus away from (cultural) memory as a ‘product’ to the procedural character of memory formation, transportation, and translation.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Arguably, the “transnational turn” can be seen as part of a broader rise of the prefix “trans-” in the Humanities. The *Freie Universität Berlin* recently hosted a summer school entitled “Becoming TransGerman: Transnational, Transdisciplinary, Transgender, Transhuman”, which was indicative of this larger trend. This also raises the question whether “trans-” might have replaced “post-” as the defining prefix and condition of an entire age, see <<https://networks.h-net.org/node/35008/discussions/111744/cfp-5th-berlin-program-summer-workshop-due-february-2016>> [accessed: 18 February 2016].

<sup>375</sup> Some of the most recent and important contributions to the field of “transnational/transcultural memory studies” include: Dagmar Brunow, *Remediating Transcultural Memory. Documentary Filmmaking as Archival Intervention* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015); Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds.), *The Transcultural Turn*; Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory*; Rick Crownshaw (ed.), *Transcultural Memory* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), which is based on a 2011 edition of the journal *Parallax*. A pioneer in the field of transcultural studies is Wolfgang Welsch, ‘Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today’, in: Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (eds.), *Spaces of Culture. City, Nation, World* (London et al.: SAGE, 1999), pp. 194-213.

<sup>376</sup> Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, ‘A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory’, p. 32.

<sup>377</sup> Ann Rigney, ‘The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts between Monumentality and Morphing’, in: Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (Berlin and New York, NY: de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 345-353, Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen have dedicated an entire volume to the recent dynamisation of memory studies, examining memory’s transnational, transgenerational, transmedial and transdisciplinary movements, see Lucy Bond, Stef Craps and Pieter Vermeulen (eds.), *Memory Unbound*.

The increasing globalisation of almost all spheres of social life, coupled with a new sense of “connectivity” brought about by digital technologies,<sup>378</sup> has called into question many of the core assumptions guiding memory studies. This particularly pertains to what Astrid Erll and others have identified as the “methodological nationalism/culturalism” of memory studies,<sup>379</sup> i.e. the implicit understanding of cultures as separate and clearly delineated ‘spheres’ or ‘containers’, and the “assumption of an isomorphy between territory, social formation, mentalities, and memories”.<sup>380</sup> In response to this, cultures and memories have been increasingly conceptualised as dynamic, porous, and constituted through exchange – they are not discrete and uniform, but entangled and hybrid. In terms of research, this has brought about an increasing focus on phenomena that emerge at the intersection of nations and cultures or cut across them. This concentration on national, cultural, and mnemonic interlinkages also challenges traditional understandings of the nation or culture. Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson therefore regard transcultural memory

[...] as describing two disparate dynamics in contemporary commemorative practice: firstly, the travelling memory *within* and *between* national, ethnic and religious collectives; secondly, forums of remembrance that aim *beyond* the idea of political, ethnic, linguistic or religious borders as containers for our understanding of the past [italics in the original text].<sup>381</sup>

Transcultural memory brings into view the cross-fertilisation of various national and/or cultural memories while also promoting the transformation and eventual transcendence of the nation state. This shows that the transcultural or transnational is frequently “deployed not only as a descriptive tool but also as a prescriptive term that carries normative implications”.<sup>382</sup> Underpinning a lot of research in the field –

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<sup>378</sup> Andrew Hoskins, ‘7/7 and Connective Memory’.

<sup>379</sup> The term “methodological nationalism” is used by Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, ‘Introduction’, in: Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory*, pp. 1-25, p. 1; Astrid Erll uses the term “methodological culturalism” in a recent article, see Astrid Erll, ‘Transcultural Memory’, *Critical Encyclopedia of Testimony and Memory*, 21 April 2014 <<http://memories-testimony.com/en/notice/transcultural-memory/>> [accessed: 6 March 2017].

<sup>380</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 7. Erll derives this idea of cultures as ‘containers’ from Wolfgang Welsch’s essay on “transculturality”, who in turn traces it back to Johann Gottfried Herder, see Wolfgang Welsch, ‘Transculturality’, pp. 194f.

<sup>381</sup> Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, ‘Introduction’, in: Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds.), *The Transcultural Turn*, 1-26, p. 19.

<sup>382</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Transnational Memories’, *European Review* 22.4. (2014), pp. 546-556, pp. 546f. However, it is important to note that this utopian impetus is not shared by all scholars working on the “transcultural”, as Astrid Erll points out: “In addition to accentuating a specific optics and approach of memory research, the term ‘transcultural’ is also often deployed to highlight what is seen as ‘productive’ mnemonic processes. This is where the distinction between normative and descriptive, ‘hot’ and ‘cold’, empathic/activist and analytic research on transcultural memory comes into play”. Her own concept of

especially in the realm of cultural studies – is the ideal or fantasy of a borderless world, premised on transcultural/-national exchange and a cosmopolitan ethos or “transcultural empathy”.<sup>383</sup> More recent research in the field has adopted a critical stance towards these celebratory agendas, and scholars like Michael Rothberg have arrived at a more nuanced understanding of the ethics involved in acts of cross-cultural, multidirectional remembering.<sup>384</sup>

The shift towards a transnational and transcultural memory paradigm not only denotes a certain *subject matter* but also a specific *research perspective*, which unsettles established assumptions about what (cultural) memory is and does. Astrid Erll takes these two dimensions of transnational or transcultural memory as a starting point for initiating a more fundamental paradigm shift in memory studies, which she captures in the notion of “travelling memory”:

The term ‘travelling memory’ is a metaphorical shorthand, an abbreviation for the fact that in the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents, and practices are in constant, unceasing motion [...]. I claim that *all* cultural memory *must* ‘travel’, be kept in motion, in order to ‘stay alive’, to have an impact both on individual minds and social formations. Such travel consists only partly in movement across and beyond territorial and social boundaries. On a more fundamental level, it is the ongoing exchange of information between individuals and the motion between minds and media which first of all generates [...] collective memory. ‘Travel’ is therefore an expression of the principal logic of memory: its genesis and existence through movement [italics in the original text].<sup>385</sup>

Transculturality, fluidity and entanglement are thus the basic modes of memory formation – cultural memory is never stable and monolithic; it depends on travel and exchange in order to constitute itself and survive.<sup>386</sup>

The transnational and transcultural memory paradigm is thus perfectly in tune with the demands of a globalised world. However, upon closer inspection, a number of questions emerge on the terminological and conceptual level. In current discursive practice the adjectives “transnational” and “transcultural” are often conflated, although they are not synonymous. This problem is exacerbated by a host of buzzwords that

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“travelling memory” is clearly on the descriptive and analytic side, see Astrid Erll, ‘Transcultural Memory’ and Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’.

<sup>383</sup> Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, ‘Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory’, p. 518.

<sup>384</sup> Michael Rothberg, ‘From Gaza to Warsaw’.

<sup>385</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, p. 12.

<sup>386</sup> Astrid Erll remarks elsewhere that she considers the term “transcultural memory” to be tautological, since all memory is fundamentally in motion and crossing cultural borders. She therefore argues that “transcultural memory” might best be “replaced by (a reflected version of) the term ‘memory’”, see Astrid Erll, ‘Transcultural Memory’.

have evolved in competition with the emergence of the transnational and transcultural such as the inter-, multi-, and cross-cultural, the post-national, the global or the cosmopolitan, which makes it increasingly hard to distinguish between these terms.<sup>387</sup>

Still, in the case of the two terms under scrutiny here, this looks like a comparatively easy task – one term refers to the nation, whereas the other one implies the idea of culture. However, the advocates of transculturality and/or transnationalism have rightly pointed out that culture and the nation have often been imagined as congruent, making the task of neatly separating them difficult. Astrid Erll therefore suggests an understanding of transcultural memory as an umbrella term, encompassing – among other things – transnational memory as a sub-category.<sup>388</sup> Dagmar Brunow further broadens the term by proclaiming that transculturality should transgress “at best not only the notion of the nation-state, but also class or subcultural belonging”,<sup>389</sup> to include markers such as gender, sexual orientation, subcultural identification or regional and local attachments.<sup>390</sup> Erll and Brunow represent specific disciplinary backgrounds: their transcultural paradigm evolved in the context of postcolonial studies with its focus on border-crossing, non-essentialising forms of mixing and hybridity. The transnational paradigm emerged in the social and political sciences and captures globalisation, the impact of digital technologies, the movement of capital, goods, and people etc. Instead of simply constituting a sub-category of a broader turn towards the transcultural, the transnational therefore captures a research perspective that, according to critics such as Steven Vertovec, Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, is different from and preferable to the transcultural.<sup>391</sup> They argue that the idea of transcultural memory puts too strong an emphasis on the “study of mobility and flows”.<sup>392</sup> In contrast, the notion of transnational memory also considers the issue of borders, and hence the blockages and hindrances of flows and mobility:

In this way, ‘transnationalism’ proves better suited than more homogenizing cognates to highlight the frictions at play at the interfaces between different social formations and

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<sup>387</sup> This has been critically remarked by Dagmar Brunow, who differentiates quite strictly between the “transnational” and the “transcultural”, see Dagmar Brunow, *Remediating Transcultural Memory*, pp. 27ff.

<sup>388</sup> Astrid Erll, ‘Transcultural Memory’.

<sup>389</sup> Dagmar Brunow, *Remediating Transcultural Memory*, p. 28.

<sup>390</sup> I believe that Brunow’s extended understanding of “transculturality” entails a different problem though, as it leads to a depletion of the term which is then more or less congruent with what I would describe as “intersectionality”.

<sup>391</sup> Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, ‘Introduction’; Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>392</sup> Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

cultural imaginaries, and the varieties of currents and cross-currents at work in the exchange and appropriations of travelling narratives and mnemonic forms in a world that is not seamless.<sup>393</sup>

However, while the transcultural paradigm uncritically endorses mobility, flux and flows, the transnational is perhaps too Eurocentric. The very notion of the nation which spurs the scholarly desire to transcend, transform and translate, is modelled on the Western-European nation state as it evolved in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is therefore not applicable to constellations involving a different genesis of the nation state and nationality, in which the desire and need to transcend the nation can manifest itself in another manner. Eastern Europe, which is at the centre of this chapter, is particularly interesting in a transnational setting, as we are generally faced with a different evolution and understanding of the nation. The Eastern European states that play a role in Vertlib's novel (such as Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Estonia) have changed affiliation, shape, and political systems many times over the last centuries and decades, and are relatively new in their contemporary form as autonomous nation states. At the same time, and probably as a result of this, they share histories of fervent and at times violent nationalism. We thus have to investigate how the "Eastern European turn" relates to the broader transnational turn.<sup>394</sup>

The current chapter employs the idea of transnational memory and transnationalisation rather than the framework of the transcultural for analysing Vertlib's text. This decision seems justified, as the travels and writings of the author, text and characters in question span different countries – such as Germany, Belarus, the Ukraine, and Russia – but arguably still take place within a broader European memorial and cultural space. The postcolonial underpinnings of the transcultural turn, with its focus on counter-memory, hegemony and hybridity, are therefore not viable

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., pp. 4f. A recent volume on transnationalism in German-language literature stresses the dialectical dimension of the "transnational" which takes into account flows and stagnations, allowing us "to conceptualize the continued importance of the nation as the organizing unit of global affairs and the continued significance – indeed increased significance – of borders in a world in which the ease, or difficulty, of border crossing defines not only products but also people", see Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner, 'Introduction: Contemporary German-Language Literature and Transnationalism', in: Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner (eds.), *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), pp. 1-19, p. 5.

<sup>394</sup> This is also the thrust of a current volume on *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, which sets out to "examine how the theoretical approaches and academic practices of Memory Studies can be applied and transformed in this region [i.e. Eastern Europe]", see Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, 'Introduction', in: Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (eds.), *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-22, p. 2.

in the case of Vertlib's text.<sup>395</sup> Secondly, the term transnational seems to offer greater critical potential: it enables a dialectic approach, which probes the extent to which national, cultural and memorial borders are *criticised and/or affirmed, transcended and/or perpetuated* in the entanglements of German and Eastern European memories and topographies of the Holocaust and anti-Semitic violence. I will therefore use the transnational paradigm, but adopt Ann Rigney's and Chiara de Cesari's understanding of the term as a self-reflexive notion that, while paying attention to phenomena of border-crossing flows and entanglements, does not neglect the realities of boundaries and blockages. Drawing on their definition, my analysis "recognizes the significance of national frameworks alongside the potential of cultural production both to reinforce and to transcend them".<sup>396</sup>

A second terminological problem concerns the inherently paradoxical status of transnational or transcultural memory. As mentioned before, the prefix "trans" does not only point to a movement *across* different nations or cultures, but also encompasses the need to go *beyond* them. At the same time, the composites transnational- or transcultural still carry the nation or the notion of culture in their name; they are based on the very notions they are trying to abolish. While Wolfgang Welsch has reflected on the contradictoriness at the very heart of the concept of the transcultural,<sup>397</sup> Dagmar Brunow has accentuated that, despite their efforts to transcend the idea of a monolithic container culture, theories of the transcultural tend to work with essentialising and ethnicising concepts.<sup>398</sup> The issue of terminology involves broader conceptual frictions, which crystallise around the poles of universality and specificity. As Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson remark, research in the field is faced with the tension between an "increasing awareness of global issues" and "the necessity of maintaining contextual specificity".<sup>399</sup> Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney claim that, although we are faced with global and multidirectional flows of people, consumer goods, ideas, memories and data, these are produced, received and actualised in very specific, localised contexts – the various scales of the global and the

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<sup>395</sup> There are, however, attempts to read the (post-)Soviet states in post-colonial terms; this is for example the case for the editors of the above-mentioned volume, who claim that "[...] Eastern Europe can be broadly characterized as "postsocialist, postcatastrophic, and, as some of the chapters in this volume argue, postcolonial", see Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, 'Introduction', p. 2.

<sup>396</sup> Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction', p. 4.

<sup>397</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, 'Transculturality', Footnote 26, p. 208.

<sup>398</sup> Dagmar Brunow, *Remediating Transcultural Memory*, p. 26.

<sup>399</sup> Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, 'Introduction', p. 9.

local, the transnational and the nationally bounded, the distant and the intimate thus need to be regarded as interrelated.<sup>400</sup>

Arguably, the realm of fiction allows for a more productive handling of these tensions. The novel in particular is quintessentially dialogic; it is therefore able to accommodate conflicting viewpoints, while also analysing them from a meta-perspective.<sup>401</sup> Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* is permeated by multiple tensions and conflicts between the East and the West, national(istic) and transnational memory discourses, the particular and the universal, male and female acts of remembrance, and oral and written history. This raises the question of how the text deals with these concepts and whether or not it arrives at the dialectical position advocated by de Cesari and Rigney. The issues raised here involve a string of additional questions about the relationship between travelling memory or trauma and historical context that need to be addressed: can all memories be easily and seamlessly transplanted into any context? What happens to the socio-cultural specificity of locally produced memory (i.e. its personal, historical, material, local dimension) when it travels? Can it be completely stripped of this and turn into a transparent, entirely appropriable signifier, emblem, or template? If so, do we conceive of this as an ethical challenge or do we simply accept it as the way in which memory works? What is it that constitutes the seemingly universal appeal of some memories (such as the Holocaust)? How can we analyse the reception of travelling memories – are there some memories that cannot or do not travel? Instead of concentrating on the seamless exchange and flow of memories, what are the obstacles that hinder a memory's translation? What are the unexpected side-effects, unforeseeable constellations that come with memory's travels?

The last set of questions particularly benefits from the analysis of Eastern European memory narratives: whereas, from a Western perspective, the Holocaust has indeed turned into a free-floating, easily appropriable signifier, as I have demonstrated in my reading of Benjamin Stein, the Eastern European context is quite different in this

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<sup>400</sup> Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction'; the importance of locatedness is also stressed by Susannah Radstone, 'What Place is This? Transcultural Memory and the Locations of Memory Studies', *Parallax* 17.4 (2011), pp. 109-123.

<sup>401</sup> I follow Bakhtin's understanding of the novel as a quintessentially dialogic genre that is furthermore able to incorporate other literary forms and modes of discourse. I will come back to Bakhtin's theory of the novel in my conclusion, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*; Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel'; Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel'.

respect. In Vertlib's novel issues such as silence, denial, (forced) forgetting, repression and memorial competition play a far greater role than the boundless mobility and universal applicability of the Holocaust emblem. *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* thematises the clash between a culture of German Holocaust remembrance and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and an Eastern European setting in which Jewish suffering has been systematically blocked out for the most part. These different approaches to Holocaust discourse spring from diverging narratives about who was the primary victim of Nazi policies and warfare. Although Vertlib's text thus situates the Holocaust within a transnational framework, it shows how nationalist agendas challenge the idea of a universal (Holocaust) memory. This raises the question of how the text itself is implicated in these tensions, and whether or not it constructs alternative routes towards a transnational memory culture.

As Astrid Erll has remarked, "Holocaust memory, with its wide reach and its significance for a discussion of the ethics of memory, has proved the most important case of transcultural memory studies so far".<sup>402</sup> And indeed, ever since Daniel Levy's and Natan Sznaider's 2001 publication on *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*, there has been a growing interest in trans- or cross-cultural and -national perspectives on the Holocaust.<sup>403</sup> Their ground-breaking work on the Holocaust as a global "Erinnerungsemblem" has been considerably extended and advanced in recent years,<sup>404</sup> mainly by Stef Craps, Michael Rothberg or Max Silverman.<sup>405</sup> These authors are interested in how Holocaust discourse provides a cross-cultural framework for exploring the interrelatedness between diverse histories of violence and victimisation. Their research is driven by the quest for an ethically and socially productive form of transnational or transcultural remembrance, which should result in the emergence of a cosmopolitan ethics (Levy, Sznaider), "differentiated solidarity" (Rothberg) or "transcultural empathy" (Rothberg, Craps). Apart from merely describing the travels of Holocaust memory and trauma, these scholars are thus invested in exploring (and maybe even fostering) the conditions under which these movements can be non-competitive and enabling. Marked by a post-colonial perspective, the works by Craps,

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<sup>402</sup> Astrid Erll, 'Transcultural Memory'.

<sup>403</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>405</sup> See for example Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, 'Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory'; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*.

Rothberg and Silverman focus predominantly on the role of Holocaust memory in the context of colonialism and decolonisation, mainly in non-Western countries.

My exploration of Vertlib's writing will build on this work, while at the same time critically engaging with its strong ethical impetus. In the spirit of Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectionality, I will ask: what happens when the memory of the Holocaust is framed by or pitted against other histories of violence? I will pay close attention to *how exactly* several histories and topographies of violence are interlaced in Vertlib's book, and *what purpose* the comparative approach serves. As Michael Rothberg notes in his more recent work, multidirectionality is a description of the fundamental character of all memory, rather than an ethical programme:

If, as I argue, public memory is *structurally multidirectional* – that is, always marked by transcultural borrowing, exchange, and adaptation – that does not mean that the politics of multidirectional memory comes with any guarantees. Indeed, given the ubiquity of Nazi and Holocaust references and analogies in contemporary public spheres on a global scale, it is clear that the articulation of almost any political position may come in multidirectional form [italics in the original text].<sup>406</sup>

With a view to Vertlib, we therefore have to carefully investigate *what effects* the comparative approach towards the memory of the Holocaust and the history of anti-Semitic pogroms in Belarus, Russia and/or the siege of Leningrad engender. Does this approach foster competition, or does it support the illumination of the historical specificities of these events? What happens, for example, when Vertlib's text constructs its protagonist both as a Jewish victim of the Holocaust *and* a Russian woman desperately trying to survive the siege of Leningrad? The broader question at stake here relates to how the Eastern European approach to transnationalism challenges or affirms the notion of the Holocaust as a cosmopolitan memory emblem and a universal moral touchstone. Levy, Sznajder and Rothberg not only construct the Holocaust as the traumatic memory par excellence, they also implicitly champion the Western European way of collectively dealing with this memory – i.e. the ideas of working through and learning a lesson from the past – as the principal route towards coming to terms with legacies of violence and atrocity. However, as Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor have remarked, this model does not necessarily work for the post-Soviet condition:

These tortured, warped memory developments have been quite different from the public and consistent narrative of the Western memory boom, which centres on German

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<sup>406</sup> Michael Rothberg, 'From Gaza to Warsaw', p. 524.

contrition for the Holocaust and the Second World War. In this sense, East European countries are closer to West European Countries such as France and Spain, Israel, or to many postcolonial countries whose processes of memory and mourning have also been suppressed and convoluted.<sup>407</sup>

It therefore seems important to scrutinise the depictions and discourses of trauma in Vertlib's text, in order to establish whether or not it conforms to the dominant Western European model of working through and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. What forms of trauma do find expression in the text? What ways of dealing with these traumas are presented to us? How does the long legacy of actively enforced silence and repression in Eastern Europe influence the perception and treatment of personal and collective trauma?

So far, I have concentrated on how the mobility of memories in a transnational setting can either produce new memorial constellations or encounter certain blockages that hinder the mobility of the Holocaust as a free-floating signifier. While the Holocaust serves as a model for the transnational or transcultural mobility of memory, the idea of the Holocaust as a "travelling trauma" requires more detailed commentary.<sup>408</sup> As a travelling memory, the Holocaust can no longer be conceived as an unrepresentable trauma. While the chapters on Stein and Biller have concentrated on *transmedial and transgenerational travel*, this chapter therefore needs to address how the *geographical travel* that is involved in the transnationalisation of the Holocaust relates to the broader issue of unspeakability. Arguably, the associative networks highlighted and created by the transnational angle challenge the notion of unrepresentability: trauma is no longer beyond comparison or speech. The Holocaust can only serve as a model for other histories of violence because it has been discursivised and canonised. Regardless of whether Holocaust trauma travels in the form of a transnational memory emblem or in the guise of its evil twin, the commodity, it is part of a larger discursive framework and as such representable. And no matter whether this travel brings about a cosmopolitan memory culture or fuels a competitive "trauma economy",<sup>409</sup> in both cases it participates in circuits of representation, appropriation, adoption, and exchange. This chapter therefore aims to add an additional facet to the mobility of trauma in contemporary literature and theory, by highlighting its interaction with specific spaces and places and the political

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<sup>407</sup> Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind, 'Introduction', p. 5.

<sup>408</sup> Terri Tomsy, 'From Sarajevo to 9/11'.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

entanglements this produces.

## 5.2. Transnational Memory as Contrapuntal Memory in *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*

Vladimir Vertlib's oeuvre is part of a larger "Eastern European turn" which is currently remapping the space of German literature in general,<sup>410</sup> and German- and Austrian-Jewish literature in particular. Jewish writers from Russia and the so-called 'GUS-Staaten' (the CIS states in the Anglo-American context) include Alina Bronsky, Lena Gorelik, Olga Grjasnowa, Wladimir Kaminer, Katja Petrowskaja, Julya Rabinowich or Vladimir Vertlib. They stand for a new type of Jewish literature, which is inherently transnational and considerably broadens the spectrum of Jewish identities in present-day Germany and Austria. Some of these authors also offer a new stance on the Holocaust, either by downplaying its role in the formation of Jewish identity, or by placing it within the legacy of anti-Semitic violence and fervent nationalism in Eastern Europe.

Vladimir Vertlib can be regarded as an early exponent of these shifts, which are taken up in his 2001 novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*. The text centres on the recollections of Rosa Abramowa Masur, a Jewish woman born in a *shtetl* in Belarus, who, together with her son Kostik and his wife, makes her way to Germany at the old age of 92 as a so-called Jewish 'Kontingentflüchtling' from the former Soviet Union. The family's disillusionment with their fictional new home town of Gigricht leads to a growing sense of isolation and boredom. Rosa is therefore eager to partake in a book project commissioned by the municipality on the occasion of its 750<sup>th</sup> jubilee. Under the politically correct title *Fremde Heimat. Heimat in der Fremde*, the town intends to celebrate its diversity by assembling various life stories from its migrant community, and Rosa is supposed to act as a representative for the town's Russian Jews. This frame narrative provides the backdrop for Rosa's autobiographical, first-person narrative which spans almost 400 pages and several decades of Eastern European history, ranging from the Tsarist regime, to the Russian Revolution, the German invasion during the Second World War, and the era of Stalinism. Her story unfolds as part of an interviewing process and amid tensions between what the German

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<sup>410</sup> Brigid Haines, 'Introduction: The Eastern European Turn in Contemporary German-language Literature', *German Life and Letters* 68.2 (2015), pp. 145-153.

audience expects from Rosa as a representative of a certain community and the idiosyncrasies of her actual life and memory which are reflected in the novel's title.

My analysis of Vertlib's novel will focus on these and a series of other clashes which mark Rosa's transnational and particular memory as a contrapuntal memory. In classical music, the counterpoint is part of a compositional technique that is quintessentially polyphonic. As such, the counterpoint provides the so-called 'Gegenstimme' to a dominant melody, to which it connects while at the same time retaining a degree of autonomy. This recourse to musical imagery also refers to Mikhail Bakhtin, who famously developed a theory of the polyphonic novel in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.<sup>411</sup> Bakhtin's notion of polyphony – with its stress on dialogic interdependence – and the concept of the counterpoint help to analyse the construction and contestation of memories in the novel: Vertlib's text is characterised by a multiplicity of co-existing stories, perspectives, discourses, narrators, and voices. The counterpoint forms an integral part of this larger construction, which is defined by the *concertatio*, i.e. the tension and competition between various voices. In the same vein, Rosa's memory is inextricably interlaced with the developments of European history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while, by virtue of its particularity, often providing a 'Gegenstimme' to its dominant narratives. Rosa's memory therefore interacts with the various settings in which it is (re-)produced, which establishes its dynamic and dialogic quality – it is influenced by its surroundings while simultaneously (re-)shaping them, a process described by Bakhtin as "interillumination".<sup>412</sup> This is especially the case in relation to Rosa's German environment, German Holocaust memory and perceptions of Jewish identity, which will be at the centre of my analysis.

Vertlib himself has introduced the term "subversives Gedächtnis":

Neben dem subjektiven und dem kollektiven Gedächtnis gibt es noch ein interessanteres, wenn auch seltener zitiertes: nämlich das 'subversive' Gedächtnis. Es treibt mit dem sich Erinnernden allerlei Späße, bedient Erwartungen, macht halsbrecherische Kapriolen, vor allem aber lässt es sich nie festlegen und findet letztendlich doch einen Weg zur so genannten Wahrheit.<sup>413</sup>

However, the term is slightly misleading in Rosa's case, as it one-sidedly highlights

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<sup>411</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*.

<sup>412</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', p. 12.

<sup>413</sup> Quoted after Annette Teufel and Walter Schmitz, 'Wahrheit und "subversives Gedächtnis"'. Die Geschichte(n) von Vladimir Vertlib', in: Vladimir Vertlib, *Spiegel im fremden Wort. Die Erfindung des Lebens als Literatur. Dresdner Chamisso Poetikvorlesungen 2006* (Dresden: Thelem, 2007), pp. 201-253, p. 230.

obstruction, irritation, and protest. The dynamics of Rosa's memory rely on the *interplay* between subversion and affirmation, discord and harmony, particularity, and universality, with often uncontrollable and unpredictable results. The counterpoint and polyphony are therefore more productive metaphors when looking at the various manifestations of memory in Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*. These metaphors, and Vertlib's text more generally, also contribute to the above-mentioned debates about transnationalism: instead of trying to eclipse all sense of contestation and difference by endorsing a universalist, borderless and cosmopolitan utopia, Vertlib's novel presents the tensions between boundless mobility and insurmountable borders, fluidity, and stagnation, the universal and the particular as fundamental to the way in which these (and all) memories work. This echoes Bakhtin's core conviction that language, human beings, and the social world are constantly "filled with struggle", never stable, and always in dialogue.<sup>414</sup>

#### 5.2.1. A Modern-day Sheherazade? Rosa's Role as the Unreliable Narrator

*Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* comprises of 21 chapters, most of which are narrated by Rosa as a gifted first-person storyteller who recounts her life from her childhood in a *shtetl* in Belarus to roughly the end of the Stalinist era in Russia, mostly in chronological fashion. Rosa's style is witty, anecdotal and digressive, and presents the reader with a series of flashes, curious incidents, and vignettes rather than a coherent life story. Her inconsistent narrative is further broken up by frequent shifts in tense, combining past and present tense. While Rosa's use of the present tense usually points to dangerous situations and painful memories, signalling heightened emotional involvement and immersion, this is not always the case. The embedded, first-person narrative of Rosa's life is framed by four chapters, told by a highly ironic third-person narrator who alternates between internal and external focalisation. These chapters provide background information on why Rosa came to Germany, what motivated her to take part in the book project and what happens to her after the project ends prematurely. In the course of the novel, Rosa's first-person narrative is repeatedly broken up by additional third-person chapters or paragraphs, which provide the reader with a critical glimpse into her and other Russian Jewish immigrants' everyday lives in Germany. Chapter 16 comprises a letter from Rosa addressed to her dead friend

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<sup>414</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 32.

Mascha.

The intimacy and emotional transparency found in the letter to Mascha contrasts with the high degree of mediation and manipulation that characterise Rosa's other recollections. As mentioned before, Rosa remembers and narrates her life as part of an interview process, conducted by Dimitrij Silberman, a young man commissioned by the municipality to translate her Russian narrative into German. However, Dimitrij is by no means a neutral vessel, as Rosa points out:

Damit möchte ich nicht behaupten, seine Rolle sei eine rein passive. Er übersetzt alles, was ich ihm erzähle, in ein gepflegtes Deutsch. Er hat Wiederholungen gestrichen, zeitliche und inhaltliche Sprünge bereinigt und einzelne Episoden in Kapitel zusammengefasst. Ich habe diese deutsche Version gelesen. Der junge Mann hat sich bei der Übersetzung einige Freiheiten erlaubt (*DbG*, 312f.).

It never becomes entirely clear which version of Rosa's story we read as part of the novel: is it the recordings or transcripts of Rosa's narration or the edited translation by Dimitrij? However, Dimitrij's interventions are not the only instances of manipulation: in the third-person frame narrative we find out that Rosa is primarily interested in the book project because it will bring an overall reward of 5,000 DM which will enable her to pay for her son's coveted trip to Aix-en-Provence. As Kostik grows increasingly depressed in his new German environment, Rosa is under pressure to raise the money for a journey that she hopes will make her son happy.

When Rosa arrives at the building where the interview takes place, she realises that achieving her goals will be harder than she initially thought. The competition is tough, as several Russian-Jewish immigrants are waiting to undergo an absurd casting process. The project leader, Dr. Karolin Wepse, makes impossible demands on the applicants: "[S]ie müssen sowohl durch sogenannte typische Merkmale ihrer Gruppe als auch durch etwas Individuelles und über das gewöhnliche Maß Hinausgehendes beeindrucken" (*DbG*, 36). In Rosa's case the stakes are even higher because, as a Jewish survivor, she needs to exemplify a heightened degree of universality: "[G]erade in den jüdischen Biographien [sollen] die Tragik, die Umbrüche und Hoffnungen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts erkennbar werden [...]. Die Höhen und Tiefen der Zeit exemplifiziert am Beispiel einer persönlichen Erfahrung, wo sich in der Einzigartigkeit das Allgemeingültige widerspiegelt" (*DbG*, 37). This "Einzigartigkeit" should, however, not shatter people's preconceived ideas of the Holocaust and Eastern European Jewry. The participants' stories must therefore conform to the notion of critical openness which characterises German memory debates, while not seriously

threatening the overall intention to produce a “nettes Büchlein” (*DbG*, 36).

While others react to this catalogue of requirements with sheer exasperation, Rosa immediately understands that she must sell her story if she wants to be successful. She therefore spices her Eastern European Jewish narrative with a good mix of folklore, *shtetl* romance and suffering, while also playing into some of the stereotypes that Western Europeans harbour about Russia and the Eastern bloc. She garnishes this mix with an extraordinary “Trumpf” (*DbG*, 39), which comes in the form of an alleged personal encounter with Stalin. And it works: Rosa not only gets the job, she also positively enthralls her audience: “Frau Wepse ist so begeistert von ihrer Geschichte und auch der Doktor Sambs, unser Chef, vor allem aber der Kulturstadtrat und erst der Bürgermeister – der ist richtig drauf abgefahren!” (*DbG*, 313). Amongst her Russian friends Rosa is unashamedly open about her intentions and her calculating attitude: “Jeder Tag bringt 50 Mark und das nütze ich natürlich aus. Je mehr ich erzähle, umso besser” (*DbG*, 108). Rosa’s penchant for digressions and anecdotes is therefore not only an expression of her personal narrative style, but part of a larger scheme to extract as much money as possible from the project. She thus assumes the role of a Russian-Jewish Sheherazade, who tells intricate and captivating stories, not to save her life, but to be able to afford “eine hauchdünne Scheibe von dem, was man gemeinhin als Glück bezeichnet” (*DbG*, 40). To this end, she is also not afraid to bend the facts in a manner that benefits her story. And yet, Rosa’s approach towards her story and the interview process becomes more complex as the novel progresses. Her hard-nosed and calculating attitude eventually crumbles, as the recollection of painful events begins to take its toll, leaving her increasingly unable to ward off the ghosts from the past. Rosa begins to suffer from nightmares and a growing sense of temporal disorientation, while also becoming more and more dependent on a weekly routine that she anticipates and dreads: “Mit jedem Mal fürchtete sie sich mehr und konnte noch weniger darauf verzichten” (*DbG*, 402). When the 750<sup>th</sup> jubilee turns out to be based on a forged charter and all the festivities and projects are called off, Rosa is left with a sense of despair that exceeds the financial repercussions (she can keep what she has earned on a day-to-day basis, but will not get the reward of 5,000 DM).

Rosa’s scheme also reflects on her German environment in which the Other is stereotyped and in which Jewish stories of suffering have become a commodity. The

casting process situates her story within a larger “trauma economy”,<sup>415</sup> forcing her to compete against the other migrants and their hardship and suffering. She successfully highlights her unique selling points, presenting herself and her story in terms of a tradeable good. Her calculating attitude is thus the flipside of a German approach which also commodifies stories of hardship and suffering and distributes recognition and empathy accordingly. The novel demonstrates how this climate hinders the development of empathy, which requires a willingness to listen and a dialogic openness, which are not possible within the framework of the book project. Vertlib’s text criticises a broader German discourse in which the Other is perceived primarily as a victim or a folkloristic attachment to a politically prescribed “Fremdenliebe” (*DbG*, 416), which masks an ongoing culture of xenophobia, as I will demonstrate. As Brigid Haines has argued, even the title of the project, *Fremde Heimat. Heimat in der Fremde*, leaves the binary division between the Self and the Other and the politics of exclusion untouched,<sup>416</sup> despite the institutionalised displays of xenophilia. Rosa’s cool examination of the rules of this game and her decision to play along exposes these underlying scripts in a highly ironic and effective fashion.

The narrative presents Rosa as a fundamentally unreliable narrator on several levels.<sup>417</sup> Rosa’s narrative is predominantly based on her personal recollections; it is well-known that autobiographical memories are inherently malleable, prone to factual errors and geared towards and influenced by the contexts in which they are produced.<sup>418</sup> Further to this, the reader is also confronted with the broader framework of Rosa’s story, in which she acts as a modern-day Sheherazade intent to tell *and* sell her story. As a result, we can at no point in her narrative determine with any degree of certainty whether she is telling the truth or whether she is relaying what the audience wants to hear. Rosa’s narrative constantly walks the thin line between affirming and subverting stereotypes, between pandering to and deliberately disappointing her audience’s expectations. Brigid Haines is therefore correct in pointing out that “the

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<sup>415</sup> Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11’, p. 49.

<sup>416</sup> “The title of the volume in which Gigricht immigrants’ stories are to be published, *Fremde Heimat. Heimat in der Fremde*, while professing inclusivity, actually preserves the binary divide between those who belong in the town, and those who do not”, see Brigid Haines, ‘Poetics of the “Gruppenbild”’: The Fictions of Vladimir Vertlib’, *German Life and Letters* 62.2 (2009), pp. 233-243, p. 238.

<sup>417</sup> For an introduction to the issue of unreliability in narration see Dan Shen, ‘Unreliability’, *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 27 June 2011 <<http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/unreliability>> [accessed: 6 March 2017].

<sup>418</sup> For an in-depth exploration of autobiographical memory see Hans-Jürgen Markowitsch and Harald Welzer, *Das autobiographische Gedächtnis. Hirnorganische Grundlagen und biosoziale Entwicklung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005).

deceptively conventional formal composition” of this and other Vertlib novel(s) usually conceals a multifaceted and highly ambiguous narrative.<sup>419</sup> These observations also raise the issue of authenticity and, in relation to this, questions about trauma. Although Rosa, for the most part, delivers a carefully crafted narrative, tailored to the needs of her audience, this cannot hide the fact that her life is marked by various traumatic experiences: she witnessed a string of pogroms during the Russian Civil War, lost both her parents in the Holocaust and survived the blockade of Leningrad, only to witness the deaths of her best friend and her husband. However, Vertlib’s text suggests that Rosa has no space in which to articulate her personal pain. I therefore disagree with Sebastian Wogenstein’s assessment that Rosa masters her trauma through the process of narrativisation.<sup>420</sup> Such a therapeutic success would require an environment of empathetic listening and the possibility of some form of closure, both of which are not available to Rosa. Whereas the initiators of the book project are enthusiastically absorbing her stories of hardship and suffering, they leave her entirely alone with the side-effects produced by her descent into a painful past:

Aber daß der ganze Aufwand umsonst gewesen war! Die vielen Stunden am Institut und die Alpträume in den Nächten danach. Die Selbstüberwindung. Die Erschöpfung [...]. Sobald sie zu erzählen begann, verstärkten sich ihre Zweifel, kamen alte Selbstvorwürfe wieder hoch und der dumpfe Schmerz über versäumte Gelegenheiten. Ängste, die sie mehrmals durchlitten hatte, in der Realität des Augenblicks und danach immer wieder, unzählige Male in Erinnerungen und Träumen, packten sie, hoben Zeit und Raum auf [...]. Schon vor dem Eingang zum Institut hämmerte das Herz jedes Mal wild, etwas klopfte bedrohlich in den Schläfen (*DbG*, 402).

The unexpected cancellation of the book project long before Rosa has reached the end of her story deprives her of the possibility of narrative closure, which would certainly

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<sup>419</sup> See Brigid Haines, ‘Poetics of the “Gruppenbild”’, p. 234. This point is also stressed by Dieter Neidlinger and Silke Pasewalk in their exploration of Vertlib’s poetics: “Ja, es ist ein Grundzug von Vertlibs Erzählen, dass Eindeutigkeiten und eigene Vorstellungsmuster evoziert und sogleich ihrer Absurdität überführt werden, um Ambivalenz und Ambiguität der Wirklichkeit in den Geschichten (Situationen und Perspektiven) zur Sprache zu bringen”, see Dieter Neidlinger and Silke Pasewalk, ‘Die Redlichkeit des Betrugs – Literarische Erinnerung und Totalitarismus bei Herta Müller und Vladimir Vertlib’, *Interlitteraria* 18.2. (2013), pp. 476-492, pp. 484f.

<sup>420</sup> “Der bewußte Akt des Aussprechens wird zwar als schmerzhaft dargestellt, wirkt aber für Rosa befreiend, weil sie damit das internalisierte Trauma [...] wiederholen muß, in eine narrative Forms bringt und damit externalisiert. Das Trauma [...] wird von Rosa durch das Erzählen kathartisch überwunden”. I also take issue with the evidence that Wogenstein cites for his hypothesis, since it is based on a misreading. Wogenstein interprets Rosa’s dead friend Mascha, who talks to her from beyond the grave, as a symptom of Rosa’s trauma; according to Wogenstein, the fact that Mascha falls silent towards the end of the narrative symbolises Rosa’s mastery of this trauma. However, what Wogenstein reads as Mascha’s lapse into silence on p. 414 of the novel is only a temporary suspension of their conversation, which is revived on p. 428, see Sebastian Wogenstein, ‘Topographie des Dazwischen: Vladimir Vertlibs *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*, Maxim Billers *Esra* und Thomas Meineckes *Hellblau*’, *Gegenwartsliteratur. Ein germanistisches Jahrbuch* 3 (2004), pp. 71-96, p. 77.

be an essential component of her alleged “Selbst-Therapie durch das Erzählen”.<sup>421</sup> While she cannot fully articulate her trauma in the official, institutionalised context of the book project, the more personal space of the family is also blocked. Being symbiotically close to her son, Rosa is estranged from her daughter and her grandson; and so it is that the interview setting becomes a – flawed – surrogate for the lack of familial tradition and intergenerational transmission. Rosa’s relationship with her first-born son Kostik is marked by his dependency on her and Rosa’s inability to let go. His aggressive anti-social behaviour as a child and his life-long battle with physical illness can be read as symptoms of intergenerational traumatisation. When Rosa, who is struggling with her young son’s behaviour, consults the so-called ‘witch’, she explains in non-clinical words that Kostik has internalised his mother’s repressed traumatic experiences: instead of taking these experiences to heart – i.e. emotionally confronting them – his ancestors let them sink into their legs. Kostik has inherited their heavy legs which contain their unaddressed issues: “Er ist zwar noch ein kleines Kind, aber er trägt schon deren [his ancestors’] Bilder in sich” (*DbG*, 200). *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* stresses the lack of genuine acts of empathetic listening in Rosa’s life: while still living in Russia, she was confronted with the politically motivated suppression of Jewish suffering under Soviet rule that also shaped her intra-familial communication. Towards the end of her life, she comes across the very different German memorial culture, which, while centred on Jewish suffering, is unable to approach her personal trauma outside of the ritualised framework of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or as anything other than a marketable good in a broader “trauma economy”.<sup>422</sup>

### 5.2.2. A Different Optic – Challenging Collective Scripts and Templates

The following section focuses on Rosa’s inherently transnational narrative in the context of contemporary German Holocaust remembrance and (post-)Soviet narratives about the Second World War. I will argue that the issues of Holocaust remembrance and Jewish identity bring out the full force of Rosa’s contrapuntal memory, which serves to decentralise and destabilise core assumptions connected to these two issues. Rosa’s recollection contextualises the Holocaust within a transnational network, in which various instances of anti-Semitic violence intersect with major events of 20<sup>th</sup>-

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<sup>421</sup> Sebastian Wogenstein, ‘Topographie des Dazwischen’, p. 78.

<sup>422</sup> Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11’, p. 49.

century Russian and Eastern European history. Rosa's transnational narrative contributes to a decentring of the genocide of Europe's Jews as the pivotal experience of Jewish suffering in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It furthermore exposes the ritualised and exculpatory dynamics that underlie Germany's efforts to come to terms with the past, alongside the blindspots of (post-)Soviet memory discourses.

Rosa's birth coincides with a major pogrom, and this constellation foreshadows her life story, which is shaped by recurring experiences of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism: "Der Anfang? Die erste Erinnerung? Der Schrei eines Kleinkindes. Das Kleinkind bin ich. Das Klirren der Fensterscheiben in der Synagoge am anderen Ende der Stadt" (*DbG*, 41). The pogrom emerges as a key *topos* and event in her life story. Rosa is subjected to various forms of prejudice and persecution, ranging from everyday racism, verbal and physical abuse, and targeted discrimination to policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide. The Holocaust appears as the climax of a long and ongoing narrative, in which certain patterns of exclusion, persecution and violence seem to endlessly repeat themselves. Rosa's narrative perspective thus queries the status of the Holocaust as *the* traumatic core of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Jewish existence. Her perspective reflects the fact that she only experienced the Holocaust from a geographical distance – being trapped inside the Siege of Leningrad, she is not present when the German troops murder her parents and wipe out her birthplace. While Rosa is therefore not a first-hand witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust, she is directly and physically affected by the pogroms during the Russian Revolution and the Russian Civil War. These experiences constitute her indelible life trauma which is suppressed by herself and her husband Naum, and finds expression in physical symptoms, nightmares and behavioural patterns that are transmitted transgenerationally: "Jahrzehntelang habe ich mich bemüht, die Bilder jener Zeit aus meinem Gedächtnis zu bannen. In meinen Träumen suchen sie mich heute noch heim" (*DbG*, 85). On the rare occasions when Rosa remembers the pogroms, many of the scenes resemble the established iconography of the Holocaust: windows are shattered, Jews are shown hiding in the attic, they are rounded up in a synagogue before being burnt alive (*DbG*, 85ff.). One could argue that, by using these *topoi* in a different setting, Rosa's narrative places the Holocaust in a historical, visual, and narrative continuum that turns the anti-Semitic pogroms into premediations of the genocidal atrocities that followed.<sup>423</sup> The Holocaust

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<sup>423</sup> On the concept of premediation see Astrid Erll, 'Remembering across Time, Space, and Cultures: Premediation, Remediation and the "Indian Mutiny"', in: Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Mediation*,

is bound up in an exchange of images that reaches across time and space, and this entanglement questions both the event's unspeakability and its singularity.

However, Rosa's experiences of suffering are not exclusively tied to her Jewishness. The construction of her life-narrative is centred on the German invasion of Russia and the Siege of Leningrad, which make up a significant part of her story. This is noteworthy, since Rosa does not suffer as a Jew, but as a Russian in these sections of her narrative. Nonetheless, her Jewishness still plays into her experience of the war, as it makes her more vulnerable – for the Germans, she is not just an enemy, but also a possible target of extermination policies. However, Rosa's hatred of the Germans, and her refusal to speak German although she is a translator, is motivated by the cruel and inhumane behaviour of the German troops towards the Russian – not the Jewish – population:

Ich denke an die Deutschen, die wenige Kilometer entfernt in ihren Unterküften sitzen und warten, bis es *uns* nicht mehr gibt [my emphasis]. Sicherlich essen sie Sauerkraut und Würste, trinken Bier und lachen über die russischen Untermenschen, die lieber in ihrer alten Hauptstadt krepieren, anstatt sich zu ergeben. Ich gebe mir das Versprechen, keinen deutschen Satz mehr zu übersetzen. Kein deutsches Wort soll jemals wieder über meine Lippen kommen (*DbG*, 272).

Rosa's use of the personal pronoun "uns" demonstrates her strong identification with the plight of the Russians – she sees herself not as a Jewish Holocaust survivor but as a Russian survivor of the Siege of Leningrad: "Man sprach von mehr als sechshunderttausend Verhungerten und von über neunhunderttausend Gefallenen. Gefallenen an der Leningrader Front. *Für uns, die Überlebenden* [my emphasis], war jeder Morgen, an dem wir aufwachten, ein Sieg" (*DbG*, 283). Her memories of the German invasion and the siege of Leningrad unsettle the idea that Rosa's suffering is necessarily and exclusively tied to Jewishness,<sup>424</sup> further decentring the Holocaust as the most incisive experience of Rosa's Jewish life. This gains further importance in the context of Germany's culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, in which Rosa is repeatedly assigned the role of Jewish victim. Casting herself as a survivor of the siege allows her to destabilise the nexus between Jewishness and suffering, while also

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*Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*, pp. 109-138, and Astrid Erll, 'Literature, Film, and the Mediality of Cultural Memory'.

<sup>424</sup> Stuart Taberner arrives at a similar evaluation when he stresses that Rosa's "persecution as a Jew" is "emphatically not the only" element that constitutes her personal history, see Stuart Taberner, 'Vladimir Vertlib, *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*: Performing Jewishness in the New Germany', in: Stuart Taberner and Lyn Marven (eds.), *Emerging German-language Novelists of the Twenty-first Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 32-45, p. 39.

integrating her experience into a more heroic narrative: she reads her survival as a “Sieg” – she is a victor, not a victim. While the connection to Leningrad stabilises a heroic self-image, it also allows Rosa to distance herself from the provincial, backward and blatantly Jewish *shtetl* identity that she grew up with: “Ach, wie haßte ich diese Provinzjüdelein mit ihrer behäbigen Selbstgefälligkeit und dieser Städtlpanik, so als wäre die Zeit der Verfolgung nicht allemal vorbei” (*DbG*, 123). Rosa despises the *shtetl* Jews, who have not yet understood that a new era has dawned. For her, Leningrad embodies the utopia of a cosmopolitan socialism, which knows no Jews but only good Soviet citizens and promises to break the shackles of provenance, prejudice, and persecution. These hopes are crushed as the narrative progresses, but Rosa’s positive identification with Leningrad (not the Soviet Union!) remains unchanged. This underscores the importance of local attachment in Rosa’s otherwise transnational story, demonstrating the need for what Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney have called “multi-scalarity” in the context of transnationalism.<sup>425</sup> They promote an approach that assumes the “mutual construction of the local, national and global” instead of seeing them as separate entities.<sup>426</sup> Such a perspective is useful for Rosa’s narrative, which is defined by clashes between various memorial cultures and national outlooks, alongside strong localised tension between the periphery – as a space of tradition, backwardness and inescapable persecution – and the centre as a space of cosmopolitanism, Jewish emancipation, and an urban bourgeois culture that promises to level out all differences.

Finally, Rosa’s focus on Leningrad introduces her German listeners – and the reader – to a contrapuntal perspective on the Second World War. Brigid Haines points out that Rosa’s “different optic [...] illuminates one of German historiography’s blind spots: the genocidal Leningrad siege”.<sup>427</sup> While the image of the “blind spot” is exaggerated in the case of Leningrad,<sup>428</sup> it is true that Rosa’s interpretation of the war experience deviates from the German script. The Russian perspective is exemplified

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<sup>425</sup> Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney, ‘Introduction’, p. 5.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>427</sup> Brigid Haines, ‘Poetics of the “Gruppenbild”’, p. 237.

<sup>428</sup> The status of Leningrad within the broader framework of Hitler’s destruction campaign has been hotly debated among German historians, as the following article demonstrates: Gerhart Hass, ‘Die deutsche Historiografie und die Belagerung Leningrads (1941-1944)’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 54.2 (2006), pp. 139-162. A growing awareness of the genocidal strategy driving the siege has trickled down from the realm of academia into the broader cultural arena, as is shown by the following two articles in major German newspapers: Jörg Ganzenmüller, ‘Ein stiller Genozid’, *DIE ZEIT Online*, 15 January 2004 <[http://www.zeit.de/2004/04/A-Belagerung\\_L](http://www.zeit.de/2004/04/A-Belagerung_L)> [accessed: 23 June 2016]; Oliver das Gupta, ‘Als die Menschen Leim und Ratten aßen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Online*, 24 January 2014 <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/blockade-von-leningrad-im-zweiten-weltkrieg-als-die-menschen-leim-und-ratten-assen-1.1872865>> [accessed: 23 June 2016].

in Rosa's summary of a speech delivered by Stalin on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1941, shortly after the end of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact:

‘Wir müssen alle unsere Kräfte mobilisieren, um den bösartigen und hinterlistigen Feind aus unserem Land zu verjagen, wir müssen in zertreten wie eine Schlange, ihn vernichten wie unsere Vorfahren im Mittelalter die Armeen des Deutschritterordens vernichtet hatten, die Nowgorod bedrohten! So wie wir Napoleon 1812 verjagt haben. Seid standhaft, Brüder und Schwestern!’ So oder so ähnlich sprach der Diktator (*DbG*, 235).

Stalin's speech draws on a deep-seated “narrative template” in Russian collective memory which the sociologist James V. Wertsch calls the “Expulsion of Foreign Enemies”.<sup>429</sup> throughout history, Russia has been repeatedly and unlawfully attacked by various outsiders (including the *Deutschritterorden*, Napoleon and now the Germans) and brought to the brink of utter destruction. However, in the end, Russia always heroically prevailed, rising from the ashes as an even greater nation. We can clearly detect elements of this template in Stalin's speech and in Rosa's description of the siege, which also delivers a tale of heroic defiance and survival. As Aleida Assmann has pointed out, this template has led to a specific perspective on the Second World War in the Soviet context, which is diametrically opposed to the German way of dealing with the past:

We can distinguish today between two memory policies, a traditional and a new one. The traditional one is based on pride and the fortification of a positive and heroic self-image. The new one is more complex, as it includes also the responsibility for historical crimes, thereby acknowledging the victims of former state terror. In Germany the globally recovered memory of the unprecedented crime of the Holocaust has led to the historical novelty of adopting a ‘negative memory’ premised on guilt and responsibility.<sup>430</sup>

Although the Russian template has probably changed with the collapse of the so-called Iron Curtain, Rosa's narrative confronts her (intra- and extradiegetic) German audience with the problematic tale of “pride and the fortification of a positive and heroic self-image”. By bringing Rosa's Russian perspective together with the German approach, the novel stages a struggle between these two templates, which brings into focus their very existence. As the decentring counterpoint to the German discourse of guilt, responsibility and atonement, Rosa's Russian angle foregrounds the siege of

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<sup>429</sup> See James V. Wertsch, ‘Collective Memory and Narrative Templates’, *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 75.1 (2008), pp. 133-156, pp. 142f.

<sup>430</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Europe's Divided Memory’, in: Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (eds.), *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, pp. 25-41, p. 33.

Leningrad and tales of heroic survival. Her narrative demonstrates that the perception and memory of historical events is often mediated by powerful templates, which do not necessarily function on a conscious level.<sup>431</sup> Rosa's particular and "contrapuntal" memory therefore exposes the (unconscious) scripts that underlie personal and collective acts of remembrance, both in the Russian and the German case.

While challenging the German, guilt-centred script, Vertlib's novel is equally wary of the heroic Soviet narrative: whereas Germany's memory of the Second World War is dominated by an awareness of Jewish victimisation and German perpetration, the official post-war stance in the Soviet Union was for a long time premised on the suppression of Jewish suffering.<sup>432</sup> Rosa experiences this first-hand when she visits her home town of Witschi after the end of the war, whose Jewish community has been completely wiped out (except for one survivor). She decides to commission a commemorative plaque for the Jewish victims, among them her parents, and comes up with the following text: "*An dieser Stelle wurden im August 1941 alle Juden von Witschi von den faschistischen Unmenschen ermordet. Sie wurden Opfer des deutschen Hasses und Rassenwahns* [italics in the original text]" (DbG, 294). However, this dedication is unacceptable for the new director of the Witschi sovkhos who instead wants to commemorate "*die in den Jahren der deutschen Besatzung 1941-1944 in Witschi von den Faschisten ermordeten 1483 Sowjetbürger* [italics in the original text]" (DbG, 298). When Rosa insists on the particularity of the Nazi genocide of the Jews, the official reacts with anger and anti-Semitic prejudice, which creates a parallel between German and Soviet traditions of anti-Semitism: "Warum wollt ihr Juden immer etwas Besonderes sein? Selbst im Leid wollt ihr besser sein als wir!" (DbG, 305). This episode highlights the specific dynamics of the Soviet and, more broadly speaking, Eastern European post-war discourse, which was dominated by heroism and competitive victimhood. The general refusal to remember the genocide of the Jews also resulted from the population's complicity in some of the Nazi's

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<sup>431</sup> This point is also stressed by Wertsch who states that narrative templates "operate at a level that can be called 'deep collective memory'", and are thus not easily accessible on a conscious level and usually resistant to change, see James V. Wertsch, 'Collective Memory', in: James V. Wertsch and Pascal Boyer (eds.), *Memory in Mind and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 117-137, p. 130.

<sup>432</sup> For a concise introduction to Holocaust memory and historiography in the (post-)Soviet context see John Klier, 'The Holocaust and the Soviet Union', in: Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 276-295 and Thomas C. Fox, 'The Holocaust under Communism', in: Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, pp. 420-439.

genocidal atrocities. The sole Witschi survivor, Isaak Beigel, repeatedly points this out to Rosa, but she recoils from acknowledging the full extent of this collaboration, by refusing to listen to him. Yet, she cannot avoid the personal confrontation with this legacy of complicity, prejudice, and suppression, which effectively hinders any public or private acknowledgement of her losses. Unable to properly mourn the death of her parents, she is forced into melancholic isolation: “Ich war allein [...], weil ich das Denkmal nun immer in meinem Inneren tragen musste, bis an mein Lebensende” (*DbG*, 306).

It is therefore important to differentiate between various forms of decentring: on the one hand, Holocaust memory is being re-calibrated via Rosa’s narrative which serves a critical purpose in the context of German Holocaust remembrance; on the other hand, the marginalisation of the Holocaust is part of a larger politics of relativisation and suppression in the Soviet context, coupled with a fervent nationalism and continued anti-Semitism. These lines of continuity become apparent in Stalin’s ethnic cleansing campaigns which, for Rosa, conjure up painful memories and comparisons: “[D]ie judenfeindlichen Karikaturen in der *Prawda* unterschieden sich nur wenig von jenen in Naziblättern, der Antisemitismus auf den Straßen wurde kaum mehr geahndet” (*DbG*, 353). The Stalinist purges shake Rosa’s belief in a socialist utopia and open her eyes to the realities of totalitarianism. These various levels of comparison and re-calibration need to be disentangled more carefully, by comparing the German and the Soviet position towards Jewish Holocaust victims in the novel: whereas Rosa’s status as a Jewish victim of the Holocaust is not acknowledged in her Soviet environment, her new German surroundings cast Jews as the primary victims of National Socialism, to the extent that no other identity position is available to Rosa as a Jew: “Frau Masur, wie ist es eigentlich für einen russischen Juden, wenn er gerade nach Deutschland übersiedelt, ich meine, nach allem, was Deutsche den Juden angetan haben?” (*DbG*, 25). Whereas the Soviet discourse seeks to erase all traces of Jewish victimhood, German culture zooms in on Rosa’s Jewish suffering. Rosa is thus forced into a position as the victim *par excellence*, although the experience of victimisation is not defining for her.

Against this backdrop, Rosa’s unsettling Eastern European perspective has to be understood as an intervention into the dynamics of “a well-intentioned but unreflective

German culture of Holocaust remembrance” in the book,<sup>433</sup> centred on Jewish suffering, German guilt, and a longing for redemption. Many of the elements in Rosa’s story clash with the cornerstones of this culture – the Holocaust is not the single most awful event in Rosa’s Jewish life, Germans are not the only perpetrators and victimisation does not always and automatically connect to Jewishness – and it is only through these deviations from the official script that the latter’s underlying mechanisms become clear. Vertlib’s novel conceptualises Rosa’s transnational memory as a contrapuntal memory, in the sense that its messy entanglements and complications collide with the templates of a deeply ritualised and ossified German memorial culture. We can therefore distinguish between what I would call *monologic marginalisation* in the (post-)Soviet case – certain forms of suffering are blocked out in a competitive manner, shutting down the conversation – and the *dialogic decentring* that results from Rosa’s narrative. By irritating our conventional perspective and shifting the emphasis, Rosa’s narrative creates a space for communication and criticism, which calls into question the viability of *all* master narratives, be they German or Russian.

The German memorial template is questioned by showing that Germany’s guilt-centred script has given rise to an empty rhetoric. A ritualised display of sympathy with the Jew as the victim has replaced any actual empathy towards the Jew as the Other: Rosa’s friend Chawa also wants to come to Germany as a ‘Kontingentflüchtling’. To legally settle down, she needs to prove her Jewishness to a member of the German consulate back in Moscow. When confronted with her experiences in the ghetto of Minsk, the official reacts with what Chawa mockingly portrays as an automated and formulaic response:

Als er vom Ghetto und vom Schicksal meiner Familie hörte, senkte der Beamte die Augen. Er, als Deutscher, trage, wie übrigens alle Deutschen, eine große Schuld für das, was den Juden in deutschem Namen angetan worden sei, hat er gesagt. Seine Eltern seien allerdings Nazigegner gewesen (hätte mich schon gewundert, wenn das nicht gekommen wäre), und er sei froh darüber, diese Zeit nicht persönlich miterlebt zu haben (DbG, 225).

Chawa’s ironic comment reveals the mechanisms underpinning the ritualised German discourse on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – a formulaic admission of collective guilt, coupled with a repudiation of any personal responsibility. The official’s tone and

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<sup>433</sup> See Stuart Taberner, ‘Vladimir Vertlib’, p. 35.

behaviour changes when he finds out that, due to the destruction of the Holocaust, Chawa has lost all documents or relatives that could prove her Jewishness: “Da war er nicht mehr ganz so höflich wie zuvor, und der Tonfall seiner Stimme gab mir wieder einen Stich [...]” (*DbG*, 225). The consulate employee stubbornly insists on the necessity of documentary proof, and seems unaware both of the bitter irony at play – for the same documents that Chawa now desperately needs could have once killed her – and of the (re-)traumatising potential of the whole episode. It appears as if the ritualised acknowledgement of German collective guilt has freed the official from the ethical obligation to engage with the living Jewish Other. Chawa eventually manages to obtain the necessary documents in a rather unconventional fashion, but she pays a high price for this:

Ja. Nur die Stimmen, die mich verfolgen, habe ich nicht bedacht, die Alpträume und die Angst. Ständig glaube ich mich von Aufsehern, SS-Leuten oder Soldaten umgeben [...]. Am schlimmsten ist es, wenn ich auf Uniformierte treffe, ob Polizisten oder Briefträger, ist egal. Sogleich bekomme ich Schweißausbrüche, beginne zu zittern, kann kaum atmen und würde am liebsten so schnell wie möglich davonlaufen, wenn ich die Kraft dazu hätte (*DbG*, 230f.).

Apart from blocking any real sense of empathy, the guilt-focused German memorial script also fails to address the acts of typecasting, discrimination and racism that are still part of Germany’s everyday reality in the book. The prescribed, politically correct “Fremdenliebe” of a society that thinks it has learned its lessons from the past masks a problematic ambiguity towards the Other. The celebration of a double-faced ‘Multikulti’-ideology, epitomised by the book project, cannot distract from the fact that the non-German other can only be approached in a stereotypical manner. When the book project has to be cancelled, the town of Gigrich still goes ahead with an award ceremony. Although the interviewees are presented as guests of honour, they are still perceived as a manifestation of the Other by their German environment and thus grouped into three categories: the first one is that of *the victim*, which is how the Cameroonian and the two Jewish guests are introduced: “Wir begrüßen ganz herzlich Herrn Bubajamba. Nach schweren Mißhandlungen und zweijähriger Isolationshaft in seinem Heimatland Kamerun hat Herr Bubajamba in Deutschland Asyl und in Gigrich ein neues zu Hause gefunden” (*DbG*, 411f.); or: “Herr Adler, 1919 in Gigrich geboren und jüdischer Abstammung, hat den Holocaust in mehreren Konzentrationslagern überlebt [...]” (*DbG*, 412). The second category is that of *the exotic Other*, whose allure is emulated by the band that accompanies the event – its members are dressed up in an

absurd mix of folkloristic costumes, while performing “[e]in jiddisches Lied, das viel jiddischer klang als alle jiddischen Lieder, die Rosa in ihrem Leben gehört hatte” (*DbG*, 410). Finally, the Other can also be perceived as *socially abject* which happens when Rosa is mistaken for a toilet attendant by a well-off German woman, despite having turned up in her best attire. This typology is tied to a hierarchy: Rosa, who represents both the victim and the exotic Other, is rewarded for the way in which she performs her Jewish Otherness. In contrast, less desirable forms of Otherness are rejected by society: during the interview period, Rosa witnesses how two German policemen arrest and abuse a man from Ethiopia, who has entered the country as an illegal migrant. The man whose name is Tesfaye Ezana is the double of Rosa and all the other ‘desirable’ immigrants whose testimonials the town is chasing after. As such, the character of Tesfaye Ezana calls attention to the ambivalences of Germany’s *Willkommenskultur* whose approach towards the Other remains degrading and discriminatory, despite the country’s eager efforts to learn from the past.

In a unique mix of ironic mockery and social criticism *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* scrutinises a German culture in which the Other can ultimately not be embraced in a fashion that would break down binaries. This suggests that a border-crossing and hospitable transnationalism, as it is imagined (and wished for) in some of the current academic discussions, is not part of Vertlib’s novel, at least on the level of character interaction. The cross-cultural encounters in the narrative do not automatically produce understanding and solidarity, but instead bring out clashes, tensions, and the disingenuousness of a politically prescribed “Fremdenliebe”. Still, there are glimpses of what Michael Rothberg terms “differentiated solidarity”,<sup>434</sup> i.e. forms of collaboration and support that accept differences but still search for a common ground that enables us to take collective action. When Rosa becomes a witness to Tesfaye Ezana’s fate, she more or less unconsciously decides to intervene: “Es war für sie selbst überraschend, daß sie etwas sagte [...]. Jedenfalls machte sie einige Schritte auf den Verhafteten zu und fragte ihn auf russisch wie er heiße” (*DbG*, 100). Rosa’s gesture might be small, but it is significant nonetheless: she physically approaches the Other in a way that is non-threatening, addressing him directly and asking for his name. By concentrating on the Other’s name, she transcends the abstract and discriminating categories at play – such as ‘non-white’, ‘illegal migrant’,

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<sup>434</sup> Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, ‘A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory’, p. 33.

‘criminal’, ‘victim’ etc. – and brings the individual into focus. While Rosa cannot fully explain her behaviour to herself, her actions are influenced by her personal and historical experience of being a Jew: “‘Ich mußte ständig an die Bilder denken, die alten Photos die ich einmal gesehen habe’, erklärte sie. ‘Zwei SA-Leute verprügeln einen Juden. Rundherum stehen Menschen und lachen. Wohlgenährte, selbstzufriedene Gesichter’” (*DbG*, 98). Rosa draws a parallel between the way in which Tesfaye Ezana is treated by the German police and the Nazi persecution of the Jews. This connection is first and foremost a visual one: the scene she witnesses in the streets of present-day Germany reminds her of its past – for Rosa, history is repeating itself. However, this parallel alone would probably not produce the same (re-)action if it did not implicate Rosa on a personal level: she and her family have also suffered from (anti-Semitic) discrimination in the Soviet and post-Soviet era. This sudden, unexpected, and momentary intersection of three different histories and experiences of violence, and Rosa’s understanding of her own position within this constellation, give rise to a small act of solidarity, which humanises the Other. “Transcultural empathy” is depicted as a random act of kindness, situated at the micro-level of everyday, personal interaction. The question arises if and how such spontaneous manifestations of solidarity can be translated into a broader political and institutionalised framework.

### 5.3. “Ich bin nicht typisch” – (Female) Jewish Identity between Stereotype and “Unfinalisability”

Rosa’s Eastern European optic also re-calibrates notions of Jewish identity, as many of the attributes commonly associated with being Jewish do not apply to her. This has to do with her Russian-Jewish background, and with the essentialising logic behind the very concept of identity more generally. Rosa’s narrative is characterised by a conflict between what is expected of her as a Jew(ess) – either by a discriminatory (post-)Soviet system or by German society – and her personal biography.<sup>435</sup> What is at stake here is the complex relationship between *the universal*, i.e. Rosa’s role as the representative of a specific group, and *the particular*, understood as the singularity of a life story that does not conform with pre-defined categories. Oscillating between compliance, playfulness and subversion, Rosa’s narrative foregrounds the

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<sup>435</sup> This tension is also highlighted by Stuart Taberner and Sebastian Wogenstein, see Stuart Taberner, ‘Vladimir Vertlib’ und Sebastian Wogenstein, ‘Topographie des Dazwischen’.

performative quality of her Jewish identity. Her narrative therefore achieves a de-essentialising effect, by underlining that identities are non-stable and the result of continual negotiations between expectations from the outside and personal experiences and memories. *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* promotes an intersectional approach,<sup>436</sup> emphasising that identities consist of various interactive components whose relation to one another is not fixed – depending on her surroundings, Rosa might stress or repress the ethnic, the national, the local, the class or the gender aspects of her identity. Her identity emerges as something that can never be fully contained by pre-existing categories; it is “unfinalisable” in Bakhtin’s sense:

An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing sociohistorical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word [...], no form that he could fill to the very brim, and yet at the same time not splash over the brim. There always remains an unrealized surplus of humanness; there always remains a need for the future, and a place for this future must be found. All existing clothes are always too tight, and thus comical, on a man.<sup>437</sup>

Neither the status as a Holocaust victim nor the notion of the eternal Jewish suffering fully encapsulate Rosa’s sense of identity. Yet, like many Jews from Russia and the former Soviet states, Rosa is also not a religious Jew. The novel repeatedly highlights that the ‘Kontingentflüchtling’-community in Gigricht consists mainly of atheists:

In der Synagoge von Gigricht treffen sich Menschen, die sechzig Jahre alt sind und noch nie in ihrem Leben ein Gebet gesprochen haben. Es treffen sich dort Menschen, die schon vor Jahren Gott verflucht haben, die sich offen als Atheisten bezeichnen [...]. Der junge Rabbiner aus Israel hat seine Bekehrungsversuche schon vor langer Zeit aufgegeben. Gestört vom Geflüster der ‘Russen’ fühlen sich nur die wenigen alteingesessenen deutschen Juden. Sie sind die einzigen, die die Texte in den Gebetbüchern tatsächlich kennen (*DbG*, 221).

Vertlib’s text ironically pits the new Russian migrants against the “alteingesessenen deutschen Juden”, who actually define themselves in religious terms. These tensions within the Jewish community evoke a much older divide between *West-* and *Ostjudentum*, emphasising the fact that Germany’s Jews are by no means a homogenous group. However, these nuances are not recognised by the Gentile

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<sup>436</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the term “intersectionality” see Valerie Chepp and Patricia Hill Collins, ‘Intersectionality’, in: *Oxford Handbooks Online* <<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199751457.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199751457-e-2>> [accessed: 15 June 2016].

<sup>437</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Epic and Novel’, p. 37. The concept of “unfinalisability” is another central component of Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoyevsky’s work, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics*.

environment which assumes all Jews to be religious: during the boring and awkward award ceremony Rosa fantasises about the tasty ham sandwiches that are part of the subsequent buffet. She is clearly not following the orthodox dietary laws, although that is what her conscientious German hostess Sabine Lapka expects: “Frau Masur! Wir haben koschere Speisen. Extra für Sie und die anderen jüdischen Herrschaften” (*DbG*, 414). When Rosa instead asks for traditional German and Austrian foods such as ham, Schnitzel, potato salad and beer, this deviation from the expected norm is met with disappointment: ““Oh! Ich verstehe”, murmelte Lapka enttäuscht” (*DbG*, 414).

Similar presuppositions affect the Eastern European aspects of Rosa’s Jewish identity. Vertlib’s novel demonstrates that the German “fascination for things Jewish” has turned into a “fascination for things Eastern European Jewish”.<sup>438</sup> The Eastern European context adds exoticism to this discourse, coupled with the sentimental touch of a world that has been irretrievably lost. As mentioned, Rosa affirms many of these clichés, delivering a narrative full of *shtetl* romanticism, Jewish wit, and melancholy impressions of a lost world. When reading her stories about the *shtetls* of Witschi, Gomel and Gobył, we get the impression that Rosa has added a good deal of folkloristic exaggeration. These distortions are completely lost on her German listeners, however, who perceive Rosa’s stories to be particularly enthralling and authentic, precisely because they over-fulfil their expectations:

Ich nehme ja an diesem Projekt mit dem Jubiläumsbuch teil, wie Sie wissen, und je mehr ich ihnen vom alten Städtl, von Luftmenschen, verrückten Lehrern, Rabbinern und Pogromen erzähle, desto zufriedener ist Frau Wepse, die Leiterin des Projekts. Neulich wollte sie von mir wissen, ob ich chassidische Märchen kenne. Sie hätte gern so ein Märchen in ihrem Buch (*DbG*, 222).

Rosa thus cleverly remediates various set-pieces from the tradition of “ghetto writing”, which have been disseminated and popularised in mainstream culture via Broadway productions and films such as *Fiddler on the Roof* or *Yentl*. She plays into her listener’s romanticised and deeply uninformed ideas about Eastern European Jewry, which she ironically mocks when describing Karoline Wepse’s fascination with “chassidische Märchen”: Chasidism is a branch of Jewish Orthodoxy and thus a religious phenomenon, which has nothing to do with fairy tales as part of folklore, as Rosa’s dry comment points out: “Ich kenne viele Märchen von meinem Vater, [...]. Mit Chasidismus hat das allerdings nichts zu tun” (*DbG*, 222). The romanticisation of

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<sup>438</sup> Jack Zipes, ‘The Contemporary German Fascination for Things Jewish’, p. 15.

Chasidism and the Eastern Jew has historical roots: traces of this can already be found in certain traditions of so-called “ghetto writing” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which saw a revival of Chasidism and Chasidic tales as part of a folkloristic imagery.<sup>439</sup> The episode emphasises that this process has resulted in the complete conflation of Chasidism and folklore in contemporary culture. This was fuelled by the disappearance of the ghetto environment as a lived reality, on the one hand, and the mass-mediated popularisation of a romanticised and nostalgic Eastern European Jewishness, on the other. Throughout the novel, this simplified view of *shtetl* life is contrasted with Rosa’s perspective on her upbringing, which exposes the *shtetl* as a site of violence, in ethnic, cultural and in social terms. The *shtetl* Jew represents everything Rosa wants to shake off – victimisation, traditionalism, and the periphery; in short, the opposite of the assimilated, bourgeois Jewish identity she is striving for. This tension between the *shtetl*-periphery and the urban centre seems much more defining for Rosa’s identity than a legacy of Eastern European traditions which were already on the decline when she was a child.

Rosa’s actions and her narrative dislodge many of the expectations of what a Jew is supposed to be like. Since neither ethnicity nor victimisation, religion, tradition or national belonging define Rosa’s life, this leaves us with the question of what Rosa’s Jewish identity is actually based on. As demonstrated, Rosa’s sense of identity is defined by the complex interaction between various markers of Jewishness and other unrelated aspects of her life, which include gender, sexuality, class, and national backgrounds as well as local attachments. The ways in which Rosa expresses or suppresses her Jewishness are bound up with other factors, such as her identification with Leningrad as a city or the role she assumes in her German environment. There are crucial aspects of her identity which are not directly connected to her Jewishness, such as her strong self-identification as a mother, her sense of femininity, and her self-understanding as a survivor of the Leningrad siege. And so it is that Rosa’s identity is not fixed but a fluid, situational and relational phenomenon, which requires a strong performative element. It never fits the “existing clothes”, as Bakhtin puts it, because there is always an element that complicates, supersedes, or contradicts the expectations. By alternately affirming and subverting the expectations she is met with, Rosa approaches the issue of identity in a ludic manner, and this playfulness has a de-

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<sup>439</sup> On traditions of “ghetto writing” see Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb, *Ghetto Writing*.

essentialising effect.

The novel as a whole features various scenes that highlight the changeability and fictionality of identities: after the end of the Russian Revolution, Rosa takes on a job in a local communal office; she is responsible for the implementation of a new decree that orders every Soviet citizen to possess an identity card. One of the women requesting such a card introduces herself with a markedly Jewish name – “Rabinowitsch, Rivka Mowschewna” (*DbG*, 113) – but Rosa knows that she is a Ukrainian Gentile named Jewdokija Karaschtschuk. When Rosa calls her bluff, and asks her why she decided to adopt a Jewish identity, the Ukrainian woman claims that this charade is necessary “in einem Land, wo die Krummnasigen regieren” (*DbG*, 115). Her anti-Semitic argument alludes to the fact that, after the Russian Revolution, some Jews rose to power in the context of a larger flourishing of Jewish culture under the Bolsheviks. Rosa meets the woman again decades later, when the tide has turned and anti-Semitic discrimination has regained currency. The woman’s son, Jascha, has grown up to be a proud Jew, eager to migrate to Israel, who reprimands his mother for the supposed denial of her Jewishness: “Du musst endlich lernen, dazu zu stehen, was du bist. Zu lange hat man auf unserem Volk herumgetrampelt” (*DbG*, 117). While the episode reveals the interchangeability of identities and the unreliability of official documents (a recurring theme in the novel), it also demonstrates quite powerfully that identities are based on fictions. In Jascha’s case, these fictions have the ability to alter the physical world. In a witty reversal of the Marxist credo that the social and material conditions determine consciousness, Jascha not only acts hyper-Jewish, but also looks the part, as Rosa remarks: “In der Tat erinnerte Jaschas Nase an den Hauptkamm des Kaukasus. Seine Lippen sind rot wie die Fahnen bei den Aufmärschen am 1. Mai. Das schon etwas lichte Haar ist kraus und schwarz” (*DbG*, 117). The irony here results from the fact that the staunch anti-Semite Jewdokija Karaschtschuk, who appropriated a Jewish identity for purely strategic reasons, has ended up with a son who could not look and act more Jewish if he tried. We are thus left with the darkly comical suggestions that the anti-Semite produces the perfect Jew. The episode furthermore attacks the essentialising and naturalising logic at work in racist thinking, which is reduced to absurdity by Jascha’s example: his story suggests that our looks and identity are not determined by our genes, but by cultural influences and coincidences and our interpretations of these.

Vertlib’s text articulates repeated clashes between the complex, fluid and fictional

character of identities – their “unfinalisability” – and a reductive thinking intent on pinning Rosa (and others) down to (certain aspects of) her Jewishness, which are cast as ‘natural’.<sup>440</sup> While these clashes often serve a comical purpose, they nonetheless convey a serious message: the essentialising patterns employed by individuals and institutions can result in exoticisation, discriminatory stereotypes and clichés, which, in the worst case, give way to racist violence and persecution. The identity games played by Rosa thus have ethical implications, as they seek to dismantle naturalising notions of identity. This ethical impetus distinguishes Vertlib’s text from Stein’s novel: even through both writers emphasise the fluidity of identities, *Die Leinwand* does this as part of a broader postmodern agenda. In contrast, *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* urges us to embrace the non-typical, singular and unfinalisable as the basis of an ethical response towards the Other.

#### 5.4. Conclusion: The Role and Ethics of Fictional Discourse

My analysis has concentrated on how concepts of transnational memory inform Vertlib’s *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*. To conclude this chapter, I will ask how the medium of literature – and the novel in particular – shapes, or at least relates, to the issue of transnationalism and transnational memory discourse. Instead of asking how literature can be read through the lens of the transnational, the question is: what can fiction contribute to the transnational turn? In recent debates, the possible intersections between transnationality, literary discourse and aesthetics have not received a lot of attention. This is surprising, considering that key theorists of this turn – such as Stef Craps, Michael Rothberg, and Max Silverman – are themselves literary scholars. However, their work is generally centred on the various manifestations of transnational, transcultural and/or multidirectional memory constellations in/via certain texts/cultural artefacts, alongside their political and ethical implications. Nonetheless, both Rothberg and Silverman make tentative attempts to outline a possible multidirectional or palimpsestic aesthetic: in a recent article on W.G. Sebald and the contemporary South African artist William Kentridge, Michael Rothberg

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<sup>440</sup> The issue of essentialism is also addressed in Sebastian Wogenstein’s analysis of the novel, see Sebastian Wogenstein, ‘Topographie des Dazwischen’, pp. 75f.

compares their respective artistic strategies.<sup>441</sup> In the case of Sebald, he highlights “intertextuality and a metonymical narrative technique”,<sup>442</sup> coupled with “association”.<sup>443</sup> Kentridge’s work – consisting of drawings and animated films – is marked by a “dynamic aesthetic of juxtaposition and layered meaning”,<sup>444</sup> relying on techniques such as superimposition and montage. Rothberg does not reflect adequately upon the specific media these artists work with – a literary text is quintessentially different from a drawing or an animated film – and the techniques he identifies, such as intertextuality, montage, or superimposition, are not necessarily indicative of a multidirectional aesthetics. It remains unclear whether, for example, intertextuality in Sebald is an expression of multidirectionality, an endorsement of modernist and postmodern techniques or simply a feature of literariness as such (the same goes for the use of montage and superimposition in Kentridge’s work). In contrast to Rothberg, Silverman reflects a little more extensively on the specific function of literary discourse:

I will argue that artistic works may be more suited than historical or sociological method to making visible the complex interaction of times and sites at play in memory, as a fundamental feature of imaginative (poetic) works is to overlay meaning in intertextual space and blur the frontiers between the conscious and the unconscious, the present and the past, and the personal and the collective.<sup>445</sup>

Silverman also identifies intertextuality and layering as quintessential techniques related to palimpsestic memory, but comes across the same problem as Rothberg. For Silverman, a palimpsestic aesthetics coalesces with the aesthetics of literature as such, which is by definition an intertextual medium. Silverman’s quote furthermore promotes an understanding of literature and art as mere illustrations of certain conceptions of memory. This overlooks the specificities and inner logic of literary and artistic discourse. Art works are never simple and unmediated reflection of individual or collective memory processes, but *representations* of such phenomena, shaped by certain conventions and a specific form.

The investigation of the nexus between transnational memory and literary discourse requires a different set of questions. Instead of searching for a markedly transnational,

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<sup>441</sup> Michael Rothberg, ‘Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject. On Sebald and Kentridge’, in: Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (eds.), *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 39-58.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>445</sup> Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*, pp. 28f.

multidirectional or palimpsestic aesthetics, my analysis will concentrate on the *specific function* literary discourse can assume in relation to the recent debates on transnational memory: what can fiction do that public and scholarly discourse cannot achieve? And how and to what extent can literary discourse help to broaden or question the existing notions of transnational memory and transnationalism? Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* offers an excellent starting point for tackling these questions, since it is in many respects a meta-novel: it reflects not only on the workings of autobiographical and collective memory, but functions also as a "poetologischer Text über die Rolle von Literatur in der Gesellschaft".<sup>446</sup> Vertlib's text focuses in particular on the relationship between literary discourse and other, non-fictional discourses, suggesting that fiction provides certain dialogic, critical and ethical possibilities that supersede those of other forms of speaking and writing.

These possibilities are opened up by the polyphony and dialogism that pervade Vertlib's novel. *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* consists of a remarkable range of different discursive modes and genres, while also accommodating a host of oftentimes conflicting personal and political agendas. Tensions exist for example between the discourses of official historiography and factuality (the book project) on the one and autobiography, storytelling and fictionality on the other hand (Rosa's story). This basic conflict is complicated by opposing national and cultural outlooks (Russian vs. German, East vs. West, narratives of heroism vs. narratives of repentance), subject positions (victims vs. perpetrators, victims vs. heroes/survivors, insiders vs. outsiders, Jews vs. Gentiles, men vs. women, older vs. younger generations) and the clash between different modes of remembering (private vs. public, individual vs. collective). In addition, the novel's texture is made up of different languages (German, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Yiddish), different temporal and geographical layers (past vs. present, East vs. West, periphery vs. centre) and frequent changes in narrative style (first- person vs. third-person narrator, inserted genres such as the letter to Mascha). What makes *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* stand out is the fact that these various discourses, modes, perspectives, and voices can co-exist and interact in the space of the novel.<sup>447</sup> Vertlib's text provides space for these tensions, conflicts and contradictions which necessarily arise from

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<sup>446</sup> Annette Teufel and Walter Schmitz, "Wahrheit und "subversives Gedächtnis"", p. 248.

<sup>447</sup> Brigid Haines also stresses the "dialogism" of Vertlib's works and poetics; she also briefly mentions Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, but does not go into any further detail, see Brigid Haines, "Poetics of the "Gruppenbild"", pp. 233ff.

polyphonic mixing, without resolving them in a hierarchical manner. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the unique potential of the polyphonic novel, as it was created by Dostoyevsky, lies in its ability to accommodate a range of worldviews without having to take sides. He describes Dostoyevsky's compositional technique as "the unification of highly heterogeneous and incompatible material – with the plurality of consciousness-centers not reduced to a single ideological common denominator".<sup>448</sup> It is debatable whether Vertlib's text is characterised by the same degree of polyphony and dialogism as Dostoyevsky's work. Our sympathies are clearly steered towards Rosa as a character, and we are invited to adopt a critical stance towards certain aspects of German culture and German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. One can therefore not speak of the "*equal rights* [italics in the original text]" that Bakhtin envisaged for all the voices found in a polyphonic novel.<sup>449</sup> Nonetheless, these biases in Vertlib's novel do not result in crushing verdicts, but in humorous, ironic observations, which are open to interpretation. Due to its fictional and polyphonic nature, the text does not have to resolve the tensions and conflicts that exist in the narrative, as it is not bound to come up with definitive truth statements. In contrast to other forms of so-called "monologic" discourse (such as political, academic, religious expression etc.),<sup>450</sup> the novel provides space for ambiguities and dialogic openness. We never find out for sure whether or not Rosa lied about her meeting with Stalin, and we are unable to neatly separate the parts of her story which are based on facts from those which are invented to meet her audience's expectations. While the organisers of the book project require documentary proof of the meeting between Rosa and Stalin, we as readers do not, because as a discursive mode the novel is not governed by the rules of facticity but by those of fiction. In a carnivalesque reversal, *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* questions this prerogative of documented, factual proof: the end of the novel reveals that the medieval charter which the town's jubilee and self-image is based on is forged. This is only one of the many instances in the novel where the reliability of official documents is openly challenged, establishing ambiguity, and openness as the norm and not the exception. This echoes Bakhtin's core conviction that monologic, centralised discourse does not represent the actuality of the social world and its language, but is something that needs to be artificially produced: "Alongside the

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<sup>448</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 17.

<sup>449</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward”.<sup>451</sup>

The polyphonic novel instigates a dialogue between its various voices, which leads to what Bakhtin calls “interillumination”: instead of cancelling each other out and fighting for supremacy, two (or more) contesting concepts, perspectives or voices can *interact dialogically* and produce a better understanding of all the components involved.<sup>452</sup> And so it is that the Russian and the German perspective on the histories of totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century interilluminate each other in Rosa’s narrative and the space of the novel. The intersection of German and Russian history in Rosa’s narrative does not engender relativisation or competitive victimhood. Instead, it draws the reader’s attention to the neglected aspects of German-Russian history (such as the Siege of Leningrad), and to the complex and transnational history and legacy of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. This interillumination exposes the shortcomings of the German narrative of guilt and redemption, while also criticising the Soviet heroic template which resulted in the repression of certain histories of suffering. Rosa’s story therefore enables what official historiographical and political discourses often fail to achieve: the creation of an “integrated European memory” that brings together the German and the Russian legacies of war and totalitarianism without relativising or trivialising them.<sup>453</sup> However, the point of open-ended, ambiguous novelistic discourse is precisely that it does not aim to integrate or resolve (both of which imply a higher unity), but to foster eternal dialogue, predicated on “*coexistence and interaction* [italics in the original text]”,<sup>454</sup> as Bakhtin puts it. This may well be the reason why Vertlib’s novel is more successful when bringing these conflicting perspectives together, which raises the important question of whether and how this dialogic, interilluminative approach can be translated into other modes of discourse – what would dialogic history books, memorials, transnational relationships look like? Is dialogism even possible here?

*Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* thus stages the failure of various

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<sup>451</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Discourse in the Novel’, p. 272.

<sup>452</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, ‘Epic and Novel’, p. 12. Bakhtin’s concept of “interillumination” is surprisingly similar to Michael Rothberg’s idea of “multidirectionality”; in fact, Bakhtin’s entire theory on dialogism is in many respects a theory of “multidirectionality” *avant la lettre*, see Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

<sup>453</sup> Aleida Assmann, ‘Europe’s Divided Memory’, p. 33.

<sup>454</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, p. 28.

master narratives in the face of a quintessential multi-layeredness of individual and collective experience. Monologic in nature, these grand narratives rely on the exclusion and hierarchisation of certain aspects of personal and collective history. This problem is clearly reflected in the novel, which repeatedly contrasts the book project and Rosa's personal narrative. The initiators of the book project apply an exclusionary logic ("Fremde" vs. "Heimat", Germans vs. their others, 'good' vs. 'bad' immigrants), to produce the narratives they want to hear (for example the Jew as the eternal victim) and the outcomes they expect (the stabilisation of a certain self-image, i.e. Germany as a multicultural society). They radically shut out anything that does not fit these (pre-)conceptions, as is demonstrated by the initial interviewing/casting process. Rosa at first obeys the rules of this monologic discourse, before increasingly giving it a dialogical twist. She strays from the prescribed path, by introducing her own emphases, by defying expectations, and by increasingly blurring the boundary between fact and fiction. Rosa's story therefore no longer promotes the self-understanding of the project initiators but emerges as a novel in the Bakhtinian sense. The fact that the book project as such eventually gets cancelled while Rosa's narrative persists as part of *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* suggests that novelistic discourse eventually supersedes any form of monologism.<sup>455</sup>

Returning to the initial set of questions, we can thus say that literary discourse connects to the broader debates about transnational memory and transnationalism in specific ways: it seems as if the space of fiction offers the possibility of fully expressing a dialectic understanding of transnationalism as promoted by Ann Rigney and Chiara de Cesari. However, in Vertlib's case, the notion of a dialectics needs to be replaced with the idea of dialogism, which is not aimed at resolution (as is the case for dialectical *Aufhebung*), but allows for the continued co-existence of diverse and diverging perspectives.<sup>456</sup> In *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*, transnational narratives and national or even nationalistic discourses intersect with border-crossing, universal or very local concerns in a multi-scalar fashion. Rosa's transnational, contrapuntal and novelistic perspective allows for a co-existence of these various

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<sup>455</sup> Sebastian Wogenstein arrives at a similar assessment: "Indem er das Scheitern der institutionalisierten Historiographie darstellt, inszeniert der Roman den Triumph des besonderen, narrativen Gedächtnisses", see Sebastian Wogenstein, 'Topographie des Dazwischen', p. 79.

<sup>456</sup> Bakhtin repeatedly stresses the difference between dialectics and dialogism; while dialogism promotes co-existence and diversity, dialectics aims for evolution and unity. This is also why dialogism is a spatial (or spatio-temporal) rather than a temporal concept, see Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 31.

angles, while calling into question the idea(1) that the transnational movement of people and memories automatically produces cosmopolitanism and mutual understanding. This can only happen when transnational memory is understood and practiced as dialogic memory. Vertlib's text suggests, however, that the dialogic approach is limited to the realm of fiction and, in all likelihood, not translatable into other discourses.

In Bakhtin's view, the novel is not only a dialogic but also a quintessentially meta-discursive and self-reflexive medium. As the omnivore among literary genres, it constantly ingests other modes of expression:

The novel permits the incorporation of various genres, both artistic (inserted short stories, lyrical songs, poems, dramatic scenes, etc.) and extra-artistic (everyday, rhetorical, scholarly, religious genres and others). In principle, any genre could be included in the construction of the novel, and in fact it is difficult to find any genres that have not at some point been incorporated into a novel by someone.<sup>457</sup>

This dynamic of incorporation is so fundamental to the novel that it almost looks like it has no approach of its own – its vital principle consists in not having a principle, as it constantly recycles other forms, genres, discourses. However, Bakhtin stresses that the novel accomplishes much more than simply regurgitating what is already there. As a variation of the genre of parody, novelistic repetition actually serves a critical purpose: “The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); *it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language* [my emphasis] [...]”.<sup>458</sup> For Bakhtin, parody is always connected to (carnavalesque) laughter and comedy, but it is also a tool for meta-generic or -discursive reflection: novelistic repetition and parody lay bare the underlying scripts, rules and conventions that determine other genres and discourses. The novel draws attention to their cultural evolution, thereby denaturalising and demystifying them. It is this potential that allows literature to initiate a meta-discourse, enabling a (critical) reflection of the dynamics that underlie broader cultural (and its own) debates. In the case of Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* this is true on various levels: the text engages critically with historiographical discourse (the book project), and with the broader discourse of institutionalised Holocaust remembrance in Germany, while also problematising Soviet narratives of heroism and the genre of autobiography – Rosa's story at least

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<sup>457</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', pp. 320f.

<sup>458</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', p. 5.

partly *mimics* or *stages* processes of autobiographical remembrance. The insertion of these discourses into the novel and their dialogic intersection make us aware of the rules and scripts underpinning them. The exposure of these templates serves a critical purpose: Vertlib's novel shows that the rigid conventions and political agendas underpinning historiographical discourse, as exemplified by the book project, or national(ist) memory cultures leave no space for the particularities that make up Rosa's individual life. Her personal pain and suffering cannot be articulated within the book project, as this discourse relies on universalising or sensationalising categories (the Jew as the paradigmatic and eternal victim). In a similar vein, Vertlib's text casts doubts on the institutionalised culture of Holocaust remembrance in Germany which allows for ritualised displays of sympathy but no real empathy for the Jewish and other migrant Others – this culture is different from the Soviet context, however, in which Jewish suffering is systematically blanked out. At the same time, *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* questions the extreme valorisation of the eyewitness and seemingly unmediated, emotional approaches to the past, by highlighting that Rosa's report is far from authentic.

Parody is connected to another central feature of Vertlib's novel and novelistic style more generally, namely the ironic narrative mode. Irony is a crucial device employed on various levels of Vertlib's text: in the framing narrative, the third-person narrator reports Rosa's experiences in post-Soviet Russia and in Germany in a highly ironic manner. Rosa herself repeatedly uses irony and sarcasm to respond to what she perceives as ignorance and/or impertinence: when a German friend of her grandson's wants to know whether it is true that many of the so-called 'Kontingentflüchtlinge' are not actually Jewish, she replies sarcastically: "Ich habe die anderen Lagerinsassen nicht nach ihrer Abstammung gefragt [...]. Ich bin keine Expertin für Rassenkunde" (*DbG*, 26). Finally, the novel resorts to situational irony, mostly to highlight the absurdities of history or certain ideologies. I already introduced the story involving Jewdokija Karaschtschuk and her son Jascha, and the account of Benedikt Hirsch creates a similar darkly comic effect – he is a Polish Jew who survived the Nazi genocide because he was deported to Eastern Siberia by the Russians, so that one form of totalitarianism saved him from another (*DbG*, 210f.).

Bakhtin claims that (carnavalesque) laughter "expose[s] the disparity between his

[i.e. man's] surface and his centre, between his potential and his reality".<sup>459</sup> Irony achieves a similar effect – it stresses the gap between our expectation and reality. Ironic humour stages a clash between different perspectives, highlighting the discrepancies between what we expect the world to be like and what it is actually like, bringing out the gulf that separates people's perception of themselves from the ways in which others perceive them. By focusing our attention on these disparities, irony makes us aware of the existence of these underlying expectations, perceptions etc. One can therefore say that Vertlib's novel ironically exposes the gap between Germany's self-image as a multicultural, open and tolerant society and a reality based on the stereotyping and exoticisation of migrant groups. By pointing out this gap, *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* draws our attention to an underlying script in which a prescribed xenophilia and a failed multiculturalism spring from a desire to somehow atone for the crimes of the past. By trying to do better, the Germans in the book, ironically, make it worse. Further to this, Vertlib's novel comments ironically on the institutionalisation and transnationalisation of Holocaust memory as such. The hypermediation and globalisation of Holocaust memory creates the fertile soil for Rosa's story and guarantees that there is an interest in what she has to say. This corresponds to the rise of the survivor and/or eye witness as a contemporary icon and the establishment of a "trauma economy" in Terri Tomsy's sense,<sup>460</sup> i.e. the commodification of and constant competition between stories of pain and suffering on a global scale. The broader cultural climate surrounding the book project furthermore casts the past as something that can and needs to be managed, not so much in a psychological, but more in a political and economic sense. It is precisely this combination of mass-mediatization, iconisation, instrumentalisation and commodification that ensures that Rosa can tell and sell her story, but no-one will really listen. This creates a contrast between the ever-growing presence of the Holocaust and the survivor as global icons and the invisibility of any real pain and suffering.

*Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* therefore stresses the critical potential of the ironic novelistic mode. However, ironic criticism differs from other forms of engagement, as it does not instruct or indoctrinate.<sup>461</sup> It is a fundamentally open – or,

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<sup>459</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', p. 35.

<sup>460</sup> Terri Tomsy, 'From Sarajevo to 9/11'.

<sup>461</sup> This difference is also stressed by Sebastian Wogenstein in connection to Vertlib: "Vertlibs Roman ist eine Antwort auf essentialistische Vorstellungen, nicht jedoch, indem er ihnen mit einem

as Bakhtin would say, “dialogic” – form of criticism, since it merely highlights the discrepancies between expectation and reality and lets the recipient draw his/her own conclusion. Vertlib’s novel at no point openly polemicises against Germany’s forced multiculturalism, this is a conclusion the reader has to draw. By illustrating that things are not what they seem, irony has a destabilising, de-essentialising effect, which radically sets it apart from any form of monologic and naturalising discourse. Finally, the crucial point of irony is that these disparities and tensions can be *laughed off* instead of leading to conflict, division, and aggression. Rosa’s experiences in Germany for the most part make us laugh and maybe shake our heads, they do not make us hate Germany or the Germans.

Apart from dialogically interlinking a multiplicity of perspectives, the novel can expose various discursive templates and criticise them in an ironic fashion. Based on the Bakhtin-inspired analysis of Vertlib’s novel, this chapter argues that literature can instigate a dialogic or ‘ironic’ transnationalism, which not only accommodates conflicting perspectives, but is also quintessentially self-reflexive and self-critical. ‘Ironic’ transnationalism enables us to keep in mind the historical, political and material circumstances and realities that underpin academic and political debates (such as borders, blockages, misunderstandings), which the utopian discourse on transnationalism seems to forget. Ironic transnationalism is related to what Stuart Taberner describes as “‘kynical’ cosmopolitanism”, which also uses “‘ironic distance’”.<sup>462</sup> However, while Taberner stresses the ethical possibilities of his concept, I would like to emphasise the critical and meta-discursive potential of my term. What unites both notions are their close affiliation with the logic of literary and novelistic discourse.

While I understand ‘ironic’ transnationalism as a critical-analytical rather than an ethical term, there is a specific ethics of literary discourse and storytelling at work in Vertlib’s novel. This is also what sets it apart from Stein’s writing: although both authors use a meta-discursive approach to make similar points about the fluidity of identities and the subjectivity of truth, their trajectories differ. While Stein’s text is concerned with the epistemological issues that arise from the hypermediation of

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aufklärerisch-instruktiven Gestus begegnet, sondern indem er sie viel mehr ironisch dekonstruiert”, see Sebastian Wogenstein, ‘Topographie des Dazwischen’, p. 76.

<sup>462</sup> Stuart Taberner, ‘Transnationalism and Cosmopolitanism: Literary World-Building in the Twenty-First Century’, in: Stuart Taberner, Elisabeth Herrmann and Carrie Smith-Prei (eds.), *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature*, pp. 43-64, p. 57.

Holocaust memory and reality more generally, Vertlib's novel favours the specificities of Rosa's memory and literary discourse for ethical reasons. In his lecture entitled "Spiegel im fremden Wort", Vertlib reflects on the relationship between the particular and the universal as it is developed in the realm of fiction:

Soweit die Fiktion als Ergänzung zu Selbsterlebtem eine symbolische und allgemein gültige Dimension besitzt, kann sie, wie ich glaube, zu guter Literatur werden. Wenn ich beim Schreiben das Gefühl habe, dass das Erlebte oder das Erinnernte sowie das Erinnernte, das man nachträglich als Erlebtes wahrnimmt, etwas widerspiegelt, das über die eigene Person hinausgeht, in dem sich also auch andere Menschen spiegeln können, dann kann daraus etwas Wertvolles entstehen.<sup>463</sup>

Vertlib suggests that "good" literature brings out the "allgemein gültige Dimension" of personal experiences, thus linking the particular to the universal. For Vertlib, it is *only* the medium of fiction that can achieve this effect, and this is what distinguishes it from other forms of writing. His point is exemplified in *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*: although the book project tries to wed the particular with the universal, it is simply not the right medium to create this union. This is so because it approaches the particular in universalising categories (i.e. clichés, and stereotypes), while simultaneously subordinating the universal, cosmopolitan appeal of Rosa's story to the particularity of its own agenda (the consolidation of a certain self-image and image of the past). The instrumentalising approach inherent to the book project leads to a systematic erasure of the particularities, incongruences and ambiguities that make up Rosa's (or any individual's) life story. Bakhtin claims that "[t]he consciousnesses of other people cannot be perceived, analysed, defined as objects or things – one can only relate to them dialogically. To think about them means to talk with them [...] [italics in the original text]".<sup>464</sup> This dialogic relationship cannot be achieved by the book project, but it is attainable as part of the novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*: while the former tends to objectify, instrumentalise and commodify Rosa's memories, the latter urges the reader to engage dialogically, to empathise and to confront and question his/her own assumptions, blind spots and preconceptions. The remarkable and "unfinalisable" memory of Rosa Masur can therefore only realise its full potential as a *literary* memory which is presented as the more viable ethical option. Hence, it is only logical that the book project fails while Rosa's story persists as part of the novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*.

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<sup>463</sup> Vladimir Vertlib, *Spiegel im fremden Wort*, p. 25.

<sup>464</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 68.

Vertlib also stresses the importance of the reader as an agent of universalisation. S/he connects to the experiences presented in the text, turning them into a “Spiegel – auch einem Zerrspiegel – der eignen Gefühle, Erfahrungen, Ängste und Sehnsüchte [...]. Nur wenn das gelingt, vermag der Text wirklich zu berühren. Er kann dem Leser einen neuen Blickwinkel eröffnen oder aber helfen, Abgründe auszuloten”.<sup>465</sup> I therefore conclude with a consideration of the role of the reader for Vertlib’s novel, by returning to my earlier claim about the lack of empathetic listening space in the novel: Rosa cannot meaningfully articulate her trauma, either as part of the book project, in the context of the German and Russian narratives about the past, or in the space of her own family. However, the reader acts as witness to Rosa’s trauma, as s/he gets a multifaceted insight into Rosa’s personality and her suffering that none of the above-mentioned discourses provide. We get to read the first-person story she tells for the book project, but we also know the passages told by the third-person narrator, which provide background information that is missing during the interviewing process. We thus learn about Rosa’s true motivation for participating in the project, but we also witness the changes in her behaviour from ironic mockery to re-traumatisation. She begins to suffer from nightmares, flashbacks, and anxiety attacks, while the interviewing process turns from an exclusively economic enterprise into therapeutic endeavour. Finally, it is only the reader who gets to see the letter she writes to her dead friend Mascha. This letter is the only unmediated access route to Rosa’s consciousness in the novel, as it is written in private and not filtered through the third-person narrator. Its position in the text is therefore significant: the letter follows Rosa’s visit to her completely annihilated hometown shortly after the end of the war. Here she is for the first time confronted with the murder of her parents during the Holocaust, and the brutality of the Soviet politics of prescribed amnesia. Rosa loses the battle over the memorial and leaves Witschi with a double loss: her parents have disappeared and she has no space – literally and figuratively – to mourn or commemorate them. This descent into an extremely painful past is potentially re-traumatising for Rosa, but she holds back during the interview process. She only admits to her sleeping problems, irritability, and growing sense of temporal and geographical disorientation (*DbG*, 307; 316ff.) in the intimate (imaginary) conversation with Mascha. The reader is similar to Mascha in that s/he acts as an entity that listens to and witnesses those parts of Rosa’s

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<sup>465</sup> Vladimir Vertlib, *Spiegel im fremden Wort*, p. 26.

story which are ambiguous and painful. The act of reading creates an intimate setting, as does the epistolary conversation, which is the precondition for the expression of personal pain and empathetic listening. My initial claim that there is *no space* for Rosa's personal story of suffering is therefore not entirely true – there is a space, but it is located not on the intradiegetic level of character interaction (neither the initiators of the book project, nor the (post-)Soviet or German state or Rosa's family will listen), but on the level of reception.

The role of the reader extends even further, as a number of critics have pointed out.<sup>466</sup> As mentioned, the book project eventually gets cancelled and Rosa's story never reaches its initial target audience. However, in its preliminary form her narration is salvaged as part of the novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur*. Novelistic discourse thus saves Rosa's story from disappearing into the archive (or worse: the waste bin), but this recovery would be incomplete without a reader who actualises and transmits it.<sup>467</sup> With the institutional and familial systems of transmission failing, it is therefore down to the reader to witness, remember and pass on Rosa's story. Annette Teufel and Walter Schmitz are therefore only partly right when they stress the importance of the narrator in this process.<sup>468</sup> As demonstrated above, the third-person narrator only registers parts of Rosa's story – the other passages consist of her first-person narrative and the letter to Mascha. The preservation and transmission of Rosa's story *as a whole* therefore falls to the reader who has to join together its various pieces. The active and creative role of the reader corroborates Bakhtin's observation that there are no bystanders in polyphonic novelistic discourse: “[E]verything in the novel is structured to make dialogic opposition inescapable. Not a single element of the work is structured from the point of view of a nonparticipating ‘third person’”.<sup>469</sup> Vertlib's *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* follows through with its dialogism by making the reader an integral part of the memorial processes it describes and analyses: considering the novel's ironic distance towards (and scepticism of) nationalistic

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<sup>466</sup> See for example Dieter Neidlinger and Silke Pasewalk, ‘Die Redlichkeit des Betrugs’; Annette Teufel and Walter Schmitz, ‘Wahrheit und “subversives Gedächtnis”’.

<sup>467</sup> Aleida Assmann's differentiation between active “working memory” and passive “reference memory” is useful here; as a mere transcript, Rosa's story would be *passively stored away*; it is only through the act of reading that it is *actively re-stored* by the reader, see Aleida Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, p. 99.

<sup>468</sup> “Rosa Masur hätte beinahe vergebens erzählt – wäre da nicht der Erzähler von Vertlibs Roman. Ohne diesen Erzähler, der von der Erzählerin Rosa erzählt, wäre auch ihre Geschichte verloren”, see Annette Teufel and Walter Schmitz, ‘Wahrheit und “subversives Gedächtnis”’, p. 248.

<sup>469</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 18.

mythologies and the discourses of institutionalised historiography and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the reader is responsible for an alternative route of transmission. The particular memory of Rosa Masur is therefore not only a quintessentially literary but also a participatory memory that can only be fully acknowledged and realised in the act of reading.

Vertlib's ironic transnationalism thus evokes an ethical agenda of its own. This agenda, however, does not entail the automatic levelling out of all differences and erasure of the realities of conflicts and borders. By parodying dominant memory discourses, Vertlib's text seeks to create a space in which the particularity of a person's life, experiences and memory can be articulated and acknowledged. In the context of an increasing hypermediation, globalisation and commodification of (especially traumatic) memories, literature, in Vertlib's view, appears as a space in which the complexities of history as well as personal and collective memory can be expressed, recognised and (re-)negotiated. This suggests a highly empathic understanding of literature and a powerful belief in the capabilities of this specific discourse. However, novelistic discourse has its own limitations: from Vertlib's perspective, it is questionable whether the specific potentials and strategies of fiction – such as polyphony, dialogism, interillumination, ironisation, participation – are translatable into other realms of life and society where they are sorely needed.

## 6. From the Family to the Meta-Memorial Novel – Eva Menasse’s Fiction

### 6.1. Introduction: Beyond the Family Novel?

Family and multigenerational narratives, which experienced a boom in the early 2000s, still dominate much of recent Holocaust literature and scholarship. Countless novels have been published in recent years which explore family memories of the Nazi past through the lens of the children and, more often, grandchildren of victims and perpetrators alike. Instead of a straightforward re-narration of family history and memory, these texts offer investigations into memorial and genealogical gaps and the fictions they produce, putting issues of mediation and imagination, and hence the process of remembering and writing itself, at the centre. This self-reflexive potential of some (although not all) family novels, emphasised by many scholars in the field,<sup>470</sup> often manifests itself in complex negotiations of the relationship between fact and fiction and the rules of the autobiographical genre. Many narratives focus on the overlaps and clashes between the private realm of family memory and the public field of institutionalised historiography, supplementing established discourses on the past with alternative accounts. Numerous studies have been dedicated to the topic of the family or multigenerational novel,<sup>471</sup> which appears inexhaustible: “Mit dem Familienroman ist es eben noch lange nicht vorbei”.<sup>472</sup>

This optimistic assessment is questioned in a recent study by Kirstin Frieden which probes contemporary *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*.<sup>473</sup> Frieden rightly criticises the increasingly clichéd nature of many family narratives, which corresponds with a stagnation in current literary scholarship on the Nazi past and the Holocaust. This assessment substantiates Frieden’s central claim that we are currently facing major shifts in Holocaust memory, which are not (yet) sufficiently reflected in contemporary research. Like many other commentators, she refers to the disappearance of the survivor generation, and the transition from personal and familial experiences and memories of the Holocaust to a completely mediatised and institutionalised cultural

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<sup>470</sup> See for example Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte*; Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*.

<sup>471</sup> See Simone Costagli and Matteo Galli (eds.), *Deutsche Familienromane*; Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte*; Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*; Meike Herrmann, *Vergangenwart*; Silke Horstkotte, *Nachbilder*; Sigrid Weigel, ‘Familienbande’; Sigrid Weigel, *Genea-Logik*.

<sup>472</sup> Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer, ‘Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des ersten Jahrzehnts’, p. 17.

<sup>473</sup> Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*.

memory of the events. This is not a new insight as such; Frieden stresses, however, that the search for links to the past is complicated by larger societal transformations. The so-called “junge Generation”,<sup>474</sup> those born between 1965 and 1980, have grown up in an environment in which Holocaust memory has become entrenched in clichéd or ritualised frameworks. The lack of personal experience is thus met by an excess of images and representational conventions, which provoke a “Gefühl der Übersättigung”.<sup>475</sup> Frieden analyses a range of media, including literature, performance art, and new media, in her search for contemporary responses to these shifts, although the processes she is trying to grasp are, for the most part, still ongoing and in flux.

Apart from a need for new theoretical and conceptual frameworks, these shifts provoke a reshuffling “[der] Karten der Holocaust-Repräsentation und ihrer Akzeptanz”.<sup>476</sup> Frieden’s exploration thus concentrates on new aesthetic approaches in Holocaust-related art, which reflect on and extend existing representational conventions and boundaries. In the case of literature, she questions the future viability of the generational paradigm by asking: “Was kommt nach dem Familienroman?”.<sup>477</sup> Frieden’s question implies that the family novel will soon have exhausted itself in response to the demographic and social changes currently under way. This will arguably not be the case – on the contrary, family narratives will probably persist as nostalgic surrogates for the no-longer existing authenticity of lived Holocaust memories and interfamilial transmission.<sup>478</sup> However, as nostalgic surrogates, these texts will have lost all innovative potential, effectively bringing the family or multigenerational novel to an end as a *medium for critical enquiry*.

We therefore have to investigate other genres and forms that might offer original (re-)negotiations of Germany’s past in relation to a changing present. This is the focus of my exploration of Eva Menasse’s recent novel *Quasikristalle*. Menasse’s text is

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<sup>474</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>475</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>478</sup> This compensatory function of the family novel is stressed by Bernhard Jahn: “Die Abwendung vom synchronen Generationenmodell des Popromans und das Wiederaufgreifen des älteren diachronen Modells im Familienroman zeigt Unsicherheiten, die sicherlich nicht nur erzähltechnischer Art sind, sondern die auf die gegenüber dem 19. Jahrhundert grundsätzliche veränderte Bedeutung des familiären Zusammenhangs in der Gesellschaft zurückzuführen sind. Der in den Texten teilweise sehr forciert vorgetragene Wunsch nach familiären Traditionen deutet auf deren Fehlen in der Gegenwart hin”, see Bernhard Jahn, ‘Familienkonstruktionen 2005. Zum Problem des Zusammenhangs der Generationen im aktuellen Familienroman’, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 16.3 (2006), pp. 581-596, p. 596.

divided into 13 seemingly unrelated chapters, consisting of the observations, thoughts, and feelings of specific characters. It gradually becomes clear that these various impressions all relate to the text's central character Xane Molin. Xane is an Austrian-born Jewish intellectual, who, in her late twenties, abandons her home country to go to Berlin, where she launches and ruins a successful advertising company, then marries and starts a family, before returning to Vienna in old age. Each of the chapters adopts the perspective of a specific character, who relates to Xane during a specific phase of her life and in different roles. The impressions we get zoom in and out of Xane's life: while some characters are very close to her (her immediate family and best friends), others are mere acquaintances. The book's seventh (and central) chapter is told by Xane herself. We thus follow Xane's biography through the eyes of various people, but this multiperspectival narration does not produce a fully rounded picture of her. We are left with various biographical pieces and impressions which fit together loosely and not exactly smoothly.

Menasse's attempt to translate the structure of the quasicrystal, a scientific phenomenon discovered in the 1980s, into literature paves the way for an examination of biographical writing, of the nature of truth and female identity. I want to argue, however, that it also probes the aesthetics and poetics of a new, possibly post-familial Holocaust literature and memory. In her latest work, Menasse replaces the aesthetics of the family novel, epitomised in her previous novel *Vienna*, with what I call a meta-discursive or meta-memorial approach: the text depicts Holocaust memory in a number of forms and historical stages (covering the past, present *and* future), which all co-exist in the space of the novel. The more or less unifying framework of the family is thus shattered and substituted by a multifaceted depiction of Holocaust memory, which combines familial and non-familial, individual and collective, psychological and cultural approaches to the memory of the event. The biological family does not cease to exist as a carrier of memory, but it is no longer the dominant platform for the articulation and transmission of Holocaust memories. I have already argued in the introduction that meta-discursivity is a central feature of Holocaust fiction in the new millennium; this assessment is echoed by Kirstin Frieden:

Weil weder die aufklärerische Rekonstruktion der Vergangenheit noch die biographischen oder tradierten Erinnerungen zum zentralen Thema [...] werden, arrangieren sich neue Metadiskurse über die Reflexionen der kanonisierten Erinnerungskultur. Dies führt auf der Erzählebene zu immer neuen Konstrukten aus Vielstimmigkeit, Pluralität, sprachlichem Changieren zwischen Alten und Neuem,

‘Diskursgewirr’ oder Diskurs-Demontage.<sup>479</sup>

We have already seen that meta-discursivity plays a central role in Stein’s, Biller’s and Vertlib’s writing. It remains debatable whether this meta-memorial turn in recent Holocaust fiction is a direct reaction to decisive shifts in Holocaust memory (as implied by Frieden) or whether it is simply part and parcel of the by now widespread conventions of postmodern fiction. Nonetheless, it still makes sense to read the meta-memorial mode of narration in Stein, Biller, Vertlib and Menasse as a reply to both the loss of personal access to the past as well as the increased discursivation and ritualisation of Holocaust memory.

## 6.2. Familial, Affiliative or Post-Familial? From *Vienna* to *Quasikristalle*

### 6.2.1. *Breaking the Family Frame: Vienna*

A comparison of Menasse’s *Quasikristalle* with the multigenerational novel *Vienna* shows that the family, understood as a unit composed of biological bonds, of social acts of communication and of core narratives, is already problematised, destabilised, and maybe even deconstructed in *Vienna*.<sup>480</sup> *Quasikristalle* hence emerges as the logical continuation of the breakdown of the family and its memory as it is staged in *Vienna*. The issue of multiperspectivity plays a crucial role in this process, providing a strong link to Menasse’s more recent narrative.<sup>481</sup>

*Vienna* can be regarded as a paradigmatic example of the family or multigenerational novel and its postmemorial dynamics. Menasse’s text tells the story of a Vienna-based Jewish-Catholic family that encompasses four generations and grapples with the trauma of the Holocaust and the conundrums of pre- and post-Holocaust Jewish identity. *Vienna* uses the framework of the family to explore and recalibrate the larger history and memory of the Second World War in Austria, characterised by repression, denial, and a belated critical confrontation with the past.<sup>482</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Kistin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*, pp. 69f.

<sup>480</sup> Eva Menasse, *Vienna* (Munich: btb, 2007); henceforth cited in the text as *V*.

<sup>481</sup> The importance of multiperspectivity for Menasse’s writing is also stressed by Armin Weber “‘Jedes einzelne Bild nur ein Mosaikstück’? Zur Funktion des Erzählens in Eva Menasses Werken’, *Weimarer Beiträge* 61.1 (2015), pp. 46-62.

<sup>482</sup> For a very short introduction into Austria’s history of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* see Brigitte Bailer-Galanda, ‘Vergangenheitspolitik in Österreich’, in: Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2010), pp. 63-74; Gerhard Botz, ‘Die Waldheim-Affäre und ihre Folgen. Der Wandel von Österreichs kollektiven Erinnerungen (1986-2006)’, in: Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Europa*, pp.

The novel places a strong focus on practices of communicative memory; hence the dominance of oral genres such as anecdotes, legends, and jokes. The epicentre of the novel and the family's memory is the family table, around which the relatives regularly assemble to exchange and repeat the family's founding myths, "die alten Familiengeschichten" (V, 371). Whereas the reader is at first enthralled by the richness of these family stories and the witty, light-hearted tone struck by the narrator, a more critical perspective emerges as the novel progresses: what appears to be a celebration of family memory turns out to be a chronicle of its shortcomings and its gradual but inevitable disintegration.<sup>483</sup>

In fact, family memories and mythologies are problematised right at the beginning of *Vienna*: we find out that the narrator, who turns out to be one of the family's (grand-)daughters, has only limited knowledge of the most crucial events in her family's history. Her narrative centres on the father and grandfather, whose formative experiences date back to a time long before her birth. What is presented as a chronicle of the family's history turns out to be a mix of public and private documents (such as photographs, family heirlooms, historical knowledge etc.), "imaginative investment and creation",<sup>484</sup> unverified deductions and, most importantly, the "Heimeligkeit des familiären Sagengutes" (V, 372). It soon transpires that the family anecdotes are at least as historically unreliable as the narrator's postmemorial fantasies: every important story exists in several versions which continue to circulate in the family; and when a certain version dominates, then this is not based on the criterion of truthfulness but on its entertainment value, "bei dieser Familie, wo das Faktische oft so ungewiß war, wo alles nur gut und ganz wurde, wenn man es zu einer Geschichte mit einer Pointe machen konnte [...]" (V, 389). These stories also conform to the general family ideology: "Das Steuer herumreißen, against all odds, das war das geheime Thema all dieser Klassiker unserer Familienanekdoten" (V, 107). *Vienna* thus portrays family memory as a highly unreliable, malleable, and contested entity, shaped by personal agendas, desires, projections, and defence mechanisms rather than historical reality.

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75-92; Bertrand Perz, 'Österreich', in: Norbert Frei and Volkhard Knigge (eds.), *Verbrechen Erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002), pp. 150-162; Karl Stuhlpfarrer, 'Österreich', in: Norbert Frei and Volkhard Knigge (eds.), *Verbrechen Erinnern*, pp. 233-252.

<sup>483</sup>A similar interpretation has been put forward by Daphne Seemann, 'The Re-Construction and Deconstruction of a Family Narrative: Eva Menasse's *Vienna*', in: Valerie Heffernan and Gillian Pye (eds.), *Transitions. Emerging Women Writers in German-language Literature* (Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 35-51.

<sup>484</sup>Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

By openly admitting to this co-fabulation, the narrator repeatedly undermines her own authority.

The narrator-grandchild's struggle with the issues of belatedness and historical distance is exacerbated by the fact that the family stories also serve a paradoxical psychological purpose – they are both a carrier *and* a cover-up of traumatic knowledge: the narrator's grandfather lost his mother in Theresienstadt and was himself taken into forced labour, her father and uncle were sent off to England on a *Kindertransport*, and their sister, aunt Katzi, tragically died from tuberculosis soon after she had managed to escape to Canada. As is often the case in survivor families, these traumas are not directly communicated, although the silences are nuanced: whereas the grandfather imposes a prohibitive silence about his own or Katzi's fate during the war years, the narrator's father cultivates the art of forgetfulness: "Doch das meiste vergaß er für viele Jahrzehnte, manches auch für immer, denn mein Vater pflegte die weniger geglückten Dinge im Leben blitzschnell zu vergessen, oder er machte daraus einen geistreichen Witz" (V, 23). By contrast, the narrator's uncle communicates his war trauma in a displaced fashion, as Daphne Seemann has argued, who reads the uncle's somewhat inexplicable affection for his caretaker Mimi as an expression of survivor guilt.<sup>485</sup> The family stories are thus meant to transmit the family's story of defiance and survival without tearing the delicate web of silences, taboos and defences meant to cover up the core traumatic experiences. The family's anecdotal and witty style represents a defence mechanism, since both the medium of the joke and narrative irony act as forms of double-speak, designed to simultaneously communicate and conceal stories of pain and suffering.

The relative stability and cohesive power of this volatile mix of myths, jokes and traumatic silences is remarkable: for most of the novel, the significance of the anecdotes as a means of providing reassurance and familial cohesion is not called into question. This is so not least because the family's "Sagengut" is incessantly repeated, rehearsed and re-enacted throughout the text. Phrases such as "wie es später immer wieder erzählt wurde" (V, 11), "[i]n einer typischen Formulierung hieß es in meiner Familie immer" (V, 31) or "die hundertmal geübte Familienvorstellung" (V, 34) foreground family memory as a highly ritualised business, which depends on the recurring appropriation, circulation and consolidation of a few canonised events in the

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<sup>485</sup> Daphne Seemann, 'The Re-Construction and Deconstruction of a Family Narrative', p. 43.

act of “manisches Mythologisieren”: “Wenn das begann, wenn die alten Familiengeschichten zum tausendsten Mal heraufbeschworen, durchgekaut und neu interpretiert wurden, flüchteten sich die angeheirateten Frauen theatralisch eine Weile lang in die Küche [...]” (V, 371f.). These ritualised re-tellings and re-embodiments accentuate the hybrid character of the family in *Vienna*, which is presented both as a biological and a cultural unit. Hence, it is impossible to determine whether the family mythology is the product and reflection of a pre-existing family identity, or whether the family unit is only created in the act of storytelling. This highlights the quintessentially performative dimension of the family in Menasse’s novel, which is held together by a genealogical and a narrative chain.<sup>486</sup> Such performative enactment of familial identity also questions the alleged authenticity and immediacy of family memories and their access to the past: Menasse’s novel not only shows that family memory is made up of various layers of mediation and fantasy, it also stresses that the family is something that needs to be actively constructed and reinforced through performance – it does not exist outside of a narrative framework. Such a perspective reduces the power of biological bonds to an extent, as it demonstrates that blood relations alone are not enough to construct a family. The family members in *Vienna* are kept together not so much by biological relationships, but by virtue of the narrative and social ties that family mythology and rituals have created. When these begin to crumble, they cannot simply be replaced by the thickness of blood, and the family falls apart. This devaluation of biology is continued in *Quasikristalle*, which puts a strong emphasis on non-familial, non-biological forms of affiliation and memory transfer.

The two elements – genealogy and performance – are of equal importance for the preservation and continuity of the family (memory), and both come under attack as the narrative progresses. The narrator’s brother and sister are the first ones to develop a critical stance towards the latter’s “Familienwahn” (V, 370). The narrator’s brother questions the family myths mainly in an attempt to emancipate himself from his father: “Mein Bruder, der sich, seit er studierte, den Traditionen und Ritualen der Familie, besonders aber ihren Glaubens-, das heißt ihren Anekdotengrundsätzen heftig widersetzte [...]” (V, 32). By choosing to become a historian, he opts for the rigorous

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<sup>486</sup> The performativity of family memory in Vienna is also stressed by Marja-Leena Hakkarainen, ‘Melange of Memories. Negotiating Transcultural Identities in Eva Menasse’s *Vienna*’, *Orbis Litterarum* 66.6 (2011), pp. 468-486; Bernhard Jahn, ‘Familienkonstruktionen 2005’ and Yannick Müllender, ‘Generationenkonzepte in zeitgenössischen österreichisch-jüdischen Romanen’, *Journal of Austrian Studies* 46.2 (2013), pp. 23-47.

separation of fact and fiction, which is repeatedly undone in the acts of familial remembrance. When he exposes the questionable past of a major Austrian sports icon, Felix Popelnik, he causes a major public scandal. This course of action is completely at odds with the family policy of glossing over the personal and collective consequences of the war.<sup>487</sup> The brother's active contestation of family memory is complemented by the ostentatious indifference of the narrator's sister, who usually takes greater interest in her beauty regime than in the family stories. She also repeatedly breaches the unwritten family rules, either deliberately or by accident, by enquiring about the taboos and blind spots in the family's memory. Nonetheless, both of them are still active participants in the circulation of family stories, and as such they are carriers of memory.

These cracks in the family memory develop into a full-blown rupture in the final chapter with the suggestive title "Ende" (V, 369). The chapter centres on a nasty fight within the family, which flares up around the issue of Jewish identity: the narrator and her siblings have a Jewish father, who was himself the son of a Jewish father. According to the rules of the Halakha, they are therefore not Jewish, although both their father and grandfather were categorised and persecuted as Jews by the Nazis. Because their uncle's first marriage was to a Jewish woman, their cousins are fully Jewish in the eyes of Jewish religious law. These tensions surrounding the question of 'proper' Jewishness run through the entire narrative, but they only explode when the cohesive power attached to the family narrative has finally crumbled. The narrator links this collapse to the disappearance of the eyewitness and survivor generation. The authenticity of their embodied experiences and suffering gave this generation an authority that was greater than all the conflicts, contradictions, and multiple versions of the past that made up the family memory:

Solange mein Vater, meine Mutter, mein Onkel, die Tante Ka und die kleine Engländerin lebten, die die Widersprüche und Ungereimtheiten unserer Familie verkörperten, als Beweis für alles, was möglich ist, so lange konnten wir Kinder die besten Freunde sein und Mitglieder einer Familie. Doch als diese Generation tot war, kämpften wir traurigen Diadochen um eine Deutungshoheit, die vor uns keiner gebracht

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<sup>487</sup> It should be noted that the portrayal of the narrator's brother in *Vienna* is inspired by Menasse's real-life half-brother Robert Menasse, whose critical voice has shaped Austrian public discourse about the past since the mid-80s. An even closer resemblance exists between the narrator's and Menasse's real-life father Hans, who is indeed a *Kindertransport* survivor and former member of Austria's national football team. Menasse reflects on the relationship between the factual and the fictional elements of her text in the following interview: Matthias Prangel, 'Normale Familie. Ein Gespräch mit Eva Menasse', *literaturkritik.de*, 21 May 2008 <[http://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez\\_id=11706](http://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=11706)> [accessed: 3 October 2016].

hatte (V, 392f.).

The authority of the eyewitness generation is not based on the factual accuracy of their memories – the text repeatedly emphasises that distortion, repression and displacement shape these. Rather, it is an affective authority, that stems from their personal, first-hand experience and survival which has been inscribed into their bodies and minds. The narrator concedes that the eyewitnesses and survivors *embody* the past with all its contradictions, whereas the following generations can only ever *represent and reinterpret* it. By virtue of this embodiment, the eyewitness generation also testifies to the possibilities of survival (“als Beweis für alles, was möglich ist”). This provides them with a “Deutungshohheit” that goes beyond historical and factual accuracy: without this type of authority, the family legend turns into an empty accumulation of rituals, anecdotes and orphaned memories that later generations can no longer connect to, not least because they have lost their therapeutic function.<sup>488</sup> This problem is even greater for the fourth generation, as the narrator’s niece observes: “[U]nsere Familiengeschichte bestehe doch nur aus geschönten Anekdoten einerseits und umso auffälligeren Lücken andererseits. ‘Das bildet doch keinen Zusammenhalt’, sagte sie [...], ‘das ist doch nur blödes Gerede’” (V, 391). The disappearance of first-hand experiences of the war thus gives rise to a generational conflict, centred on the issue of post-Holocaust Jewish identity. The fourth generation, represented by the niece, is no longer willing to take part in the family project of glossing over and covering up painful memories (she rejects the “geschönten Anekdoten”), because she is not personally affected by the family trauma. This identarian vacuum also explains why the issues of Jewishness and ethnicity become such a point of contention, as they provide a major battle ground in the search for alternative identities – a dynamic that is reminiscent of Biller’s writing. However, the family discussion around who is or is not a ‘proper’ Jew is dangerous and fraught with contradictions, not least because it threatens to reinstate racist thinking. At the same time, the disintegration of the family narrative uncovers a latent gender conflict between the male protagonists and the female narrator who describes herself as “die Zuschauerin, die ich ja immer nur war, [...], alles nachgezählt und nachgeprüft, aber kein Gramm Inspiration” (V, 388) – a

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<sup>488</sup> This point is emphasised by Daphne Seemann who claims that the new family narrative, which emerges after the death of the survivor generation, “relies on its distinct dissociation from the traumatic frame of the preceding narrative”, see Daphne Seemann, ‘Moving beyond Post-Traumatic Memory Narratives: Generation, Memory and Identity in Doron Rabinovici, Robert Menasse and Eva Menasse’, *Austrian Studies* 19 (2011), pp. 157-172, p. 171.

claim that is of course contradicted by her narrative.<sup>489</sup> The narrator's project is therefore a delicate balancing act between preserving and dismantling the family mythology, while trying to find her voice and emancipate herself from a male-dominated family tradition.

Stripped of the authority of the eyewitness generation, the familial framework can no longer hold together the multiperspectivity of personal experiences and generational, ethnic, or gendered positions. This also means that the narrative can no longer resort to the conventions of the family novel: the "Ende"-chapter is followed by a section entitled "Nachruf" which is noteworthy from a narratological perspective: while most of *Vienna* is told by a third-person omniscient narrator, who manipulates the story's timeline and frequently comments on the events as they unfold, the chapter entitled "Nachruf" features a third-person limited narrator ('personaler Erzähler') who sees the central event – the narrator's grandfather's funeral – through the eyes of various characters, most of which are not related to the grandfather. And so it is that, after the breakdown of the family in the "Ende"-section, the narrative adopts a different, multi-vocal perspective which is no longer held together by the framework of the family novel or a single consciousness-centre. As such, this narrative foreshadows the central concerns of *Quasikristalle* which foregrounds the incongruity and multiperspectivity of personal experiences.<sup>490</sup> While the centrifugal forces of the diverse and oftentimes contradictory voices in *Vienna* are retained while the survivor generation is still alive, the cohesive power of the family narrative has vanished in the "Nachruf"-section. The chapter adopts a different aesthetic approach, which anticipates the narrative techniques applied in *Quasikristalle*.

### 6.2.2. The Poetics of (the) *Quasikristall(e)*

Although *Vienna* conforms to the template of the family or multigenerational novel, it problematises intrafamilial memory and transmission as a self-reflexive example of the genre. The novel suggests that a postmemorial approach, based on transgenerational traumatisations and the biological family, is no longer feasible after

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<sup>489</sup> This gendered conflict is also stressed by Daphne Seemann, 'The Re-Construction and Deconstruction of a Family Narrative'.

<sup>490</sup> Menasse's work is thus characterised by a long-standing engagement with the issue of multiperspectivity, which brings together her early short story anthology *Lässliche Todsünden* with the novels *Vienna* and *Quasikristalle*; this is also noted by Armin Weber, "'Jedes einzelne Bild nur ein Mosaikstück'?".

the end of the three-generation-span. The novel ends with the complete disintegration of the family, both as a genealogical and a narrative entity. I want to argue that this decline of the family as a narrative framework is completed in *Quasikristalle*: the form of this novel no longer situates the subject within an overarching, genealogical pattern. Family or genealogical time is replaced by the time span of an individual life, which is in turn broken up into the various times of the spectators who follow, interfere with or cross Xane's path.<sup>491</sup>

*Quasikristalle* is constructed around a multiplicity of perspectives and times, which no longer contribute to an organic whole, such as the family unit or the well-rounded individual. The issue of multiperspectivity is implied in the eponymous quasicrystal which also functions as a poetological metaphor: quasicrystals were discovered in 1982, by the material scientist Dan Schechtman who described them as a structure that is ordered, but not periodic. Periodicity, the defining feature of 'proper' crystals, means that the same, basic structural unit recurs at regular intervals. In the case of the crystal, these units repeat themselves infinitely in all directions, filling up all of the available space. In contrast, the quasicrystal also consists of at least two basic units which repeat themselves, but the pattern is aperiodic – this means that, on a local level, identical elements might repeat themselves and form a pattern, but on a global level, this pattern does not recur at regular intervals.

As Menasse herself observed in a recent interview, this results in the fact that quasicrystals always look different, depending on the perspective: “Und genau das ist die Idee [...] dieses [...] Buchs gewesen. Wie sehe ich oder irgendeine Person aus, aus der Sicht ihres Arztes, ihres Geliebten, ihres Kindes, ihres Vaters, ihres Vermieters [...], ihres Angestellten, ja? Immer anders. Total anders! Und das sind die Quasikristalle”.<sup>492</sup> The extent to which this scientific metaphor adequately describes the structure of the text is debatable. However, as a metaphor the quasicrystal accentuates the relationship between order and chaos, between the part and the whole, and between predictability and unpredictability in the text. Drawing on the

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<sup>491</sup> Literary critic Ijoma Mangold has furthermore identified “das Vergehen der Zeit selbst” as one of the central topics in *Quasikristalle*. This would imply that time has an agency in the text that goes beyond that of the human – it stubbornly moves on whether we like it to or not. In contrast, time in the family only exists to the extent that it can be linked back to the human and the genealogical chain, see Ijoma Mangold, ‘Alles ist eitel’, *DIE ZEIT Online*, 14 February 2012 <[www.zeit.de/2013/08/Eva-Menasse-Quasikristalle](http://www.zeit.de/2013/08/Eva-Menasse-Quasikristalle)> [accessed: 24 August 2016].

<sup>492</sup> See Literaturpreis Alpha, *Literaturpreis Alpha 2014 – Gewinnerin Eva Menasse*, online video recording, YouTube, 11 November 2014, 2:28-2:45 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMOF1M4EIVU>> [accessed: 23 August 2016].

quasicrystalline principle of aperiodicity, the novel presents Xane as an element that repeats itself as her story progresses in loosely chronological order. At the same time, this order is constantly broken up by the chapter structure and the changes in perspective, so that the reader recognises certain regularities in the various descriptions of Xane, but not in the form of a strict pattern. Neither the reader nor any of the characters can grasp Xane's essence, since she is "[i]mmer anders". Just like Stein, and even more so Vertlib, Menasse highlights the fluidity, mutability, and intangibility of the individual. Xane's only defining feature is the lack of defining features – the only constant in her life is the continuity of change. The way in which Xane's biography unfolds therefore remains unpredictable and – up to a point – unintelligible, since every description is necessarily subjective, partial and limited. In contrast to the crystal, the single pieces do not reflect the construction of the whole: although the different segments of the book relate to one another, the broader picture remains fragmented and elusive. As Xane's son Amos notes towards the end of the novel, all questions relating to his mother's life are "nicht so umfassend zu beantworten, dass man am Ende zufrieden wäre" (*Q*, 425).

While the quasicrystal therefore serves as a poetological metaphor which negotiates notions of biographical writing and (female) identity, its structure also connects to the issue of Holocaust remembrance in the text. The Holocaust surfaces as part of a multifaceted – maybe even quasicrystalline – memorial mosaic, which brings together familial and non-familial, communicative and cultural memories, different generational positions and national outlooks, which are no longer held together by the framework of the family. The Nazi-period and the Holocaust feature in a variety of contexts and guises: in the form of family trauma and historiographical discourse, as a media cliché and spectacle, as a template for reading other traumas, as a moral benchmark, or as a decontextualised term of abuse when a rebellious teenager denounces a pensioner as "Nazifresse" (*Q*, 286). The extreme pluralisation of Holocaust memory in *Quasikristalle* clearly supersedes and decentralises the frame of the family narrative. What emerges instead is a meta-memorial account, which engages with different discursive configurations and stages of Holocaust memory in loosely chronological succession. These stages comprise personal and collective repression, oversaturation, the de- and re-contextualisation of Holocaust memory and, lastly, the eventual fading of its prevalence.

While *Quasikristalle* incorporates a multiplicity of perspectives on the Holocaust,

family memory still plays a role. However, the novel continues *Vienna's* legacy by further challenging the dominance of the family as a narrative, biological and commemorative framework. This destabilisation of the family becomes most apparent in the text's engagement with biological definitions of the family and its reproductivity. In her thirties, Xane suffers from an ectopic pregnancy, leaving her unable to conceive without the help of IVF. In chapter five of *Quasikristalle*, she consults Heike Guttmann, a doctor working in a fertility clinic who helps Xane to finally become pregnant. Through Guttmann's eyes, the narrator provides us with a wry account of the clinic's routine, which reduces the mythology of motherhood and parental bliss to simple biological basics: "Jeder Hunde- oder Bienenzüchter rechnet mit Erfolg oder Misserfolg, das liegt im Wesen der Zucht. Es gibt bessere und schlechtere Jahrgänge und es gibt Ausschuss. Die Natur produziert Unmengen an Ausschuss" (*Q*, 197). Guttmann's comparison to practices of animal breeding and her use of the term "Ausschuss" are problematic from a historical perspective, as I will demonstrate shortly. However, the issue of breeding and hence reproductive manipulation stresses how the bio-sciences increasingly intervene in areas that for centuries have been considered natural, such as the family, genealogy, and reproductivity. Such interventions make us question the boundary between what is and is not natural or normal, along with the cultural valorisation of these terms. The chapter shows how notions of naturalness and/or instinctiveness still determine heteronormative perceptions of reproduction and pregnancy, even in the age of biogenetics: "Menschen, die sich den Zeugungsakt von Biologen entziehen lassen müssen, die des ganzen Mythos' von erfüllendem Sex und daraus folgender Frucht der Liebe bereits verlustig gegangen sind, wollen sich noch weniger krank fühlen als die meisten anderen" (*Q*, 181). Xane also falls prey to this in her irrepressible desire to have a biological child, although she already has step-children from her husband's former marriage.

The collapse of the family as a stable (in the sense of 'natural') narrative and biological framework also affects its role as a medium of transmission. It is only in one of the last chapters in the novel that Xane's background as the descendant of a Holocaust survivor is revealed. Xane engaged with the story of her survivor father, Kurt Molin, on a public level, in her role as a "jüdische Intellektuelle" (*Q*, 360), but suffered from a complete lack of communication within the private space of the family, which is admitted by her aging father: "Zugegeben, in dieser Familie hatten sie über

Unangenehmes nur gesprochen, wenn es sich gar nicht mehr vermeiden ließ” (*Q*, 334). This lack of direct interaction has led to the development of psycho-somatic symptoms: Xane suffered from anxiety attacks as a young woman (*Q*, 345f.), and Kurt Molin is perplexed by the “[j]üdischer Selbsthass, österreichischer Selbsthass” (*Q*, 340) that plague both of his children. The reader is left guessing as to whether or not Kurt Molin ever spoke about his personal, traumatic *Urszene*: he had to hide in a haystack while being hunted down by German soldiers. He cannot help but revisit the scene on the occasion of his birthday; his daughter notices his absent-mindedness and starts wondering what he is thinking about – he replies: “An etwas aus meiner Kindheit, das liegt vielleicht nahe, an so einem Tag” (*Q*, 353), but he refuses to go into any detail. In a similar vein, it remains unclear whether or not Xane passes the knowledge of her father’s fate on to her sons and her grandchildren. Her decision to name her son Amos can be regarded as an endorsement of the Jewish part of her identity, but it remains unclear how (and if) this identity relates to the family trauma or to the Holocaust in general. Amos himself founds a “Nahost-Initiative” (*Q*, 424), which can be read as a commitment to his Jewishness, but one that is based on the future rather than the past. As mentioned, *Quasikristalle*’s narrative construction stresses the fluidity and changeability of personal identities and hence refutes the idea of a stable, mono-causal explanation and definition of Xane’s personality as the child of a survivor. Xane is a multifaceted character, and her descent from a survivor family is presented as merely one aspect of her personal history, which is revealed quite late in the novel.

In response to this destabilisation of the biological family as a narrative and transmissional container, the text stresses alternative forms of affiliation, which evoke yet another scientific metaphor, the “Wahlverwandschaft”.<sup>493</sup> Menasse’s novel is marked by various forms of elective affinity, such as “Patenkind[er]” (*Q*, 63), surrogate and patchwork families or “Wasserverwandte” who, according to Kurt Molin, represent “das Gegenteil von blutsverwandt” (*Q*, 351). These forms of affiliation, based on choice, appear as the privileged modes of kinship in the text, as they give rise to acts of solidarity and a sense of community that cannot be experienced within the framework of the biological family. This is the case in the relationship

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<sup>493</sup> Interestingly enough, Menasse herself mentions the concept of the “Wahlverwandschaft” and Goethe’s seminal text in an interview with Ulrich Wickert. She thereby situates her own reference to scientific metaphors in a wider tradition, although the parallels between her work and Goethe’s arguably end there, see Ulrich Wickert, ‘Auschwitz ist zu oft Bezugspunkt’.

between the young Xane Molin and the famous resistance fighter Eli Rozmburk who adopts Xane as “eine Art Patenkind” (*Q*, 63). While she never fully engages with her father’s past and the way in which his lack of communication has left a mark on the family, she maintains quite a close, emotional relationship with Rozmburk. She even produces a documentary about his life and edits a book about him, which points to a willingness to confront, adopt, and transmit his traumatic memories and experiences in place of her father’s repressed memories. Xane’s indirect engagement with her father’s legacy through the character of Eli shows that she steps out of the biological framework of the family but still remains indebted to the psychological dynamics associated with her birth family. Although she leaves biology behind, Xane remains attached to the logic of family and inheritance, by extending the “idiom of family” to the realm of ethnicity (all characters involved are Jewish).<sup>494</sup> This connects rather well to my earlier criticism of Hirsch’s notion of “affiliative” postmemory which promises to move beyond the frameworks of the family biology and psychology, but ultimately extends these attachments to a larger (ethnic) group which is assumed to function *like a family*.

At a later stage in her life, Xane forms a similar bond with Nelson, a foreign politician working for the *International Criminal Court* in The Hague, himself a survivor of a nameless civil war. It is obvious that Nelson acts as yet another incarnation of Xane’s father, with whom she entertains an Oedipally-inflected relationship.<sup>495</sup> However, while Xane is generally attracted to older, fatherly males (Judith’s father, Rozmburk, Bernays, her husband Mor Braun, and Nelson), her links to Rozmburk and Nelson are motivated by her descent from a survivor family. *Quasikristalle* therefore explores the implications of affiliative forms of remembering against the backdrop of the breakdown of the family as a biological, narrative and transmissional unit. Non-biological forms of affiliation promise to secure the future of Holocaust memories and end the harmful rule of identity politics which still dominate contemporary memory discourses. Landsberg for example claims that “[p]rothetic memories are transportable and therefore challenge more traditional forms of memory

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<sup>494</sup> Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, p. 39.

<sup>495</sup> There is one episode in particular which implies an Oedipal tension between daughter and father: Kurt Molin treats “sein kleines Mädel!” (*Q*, 347) to a new watch and flirts with her: “Nachher legte er ihr auf der Straße den Arm um die Schultern, schaute sie verliebt an und machte den alten, hundertfach gebrauchten Witz: Das raffinierte Luder.../...hat sich den Millionär geangelt, ergänzte Xane” (*Q*, 347).

that are premised on claims of authenticity, ‘heritage’, and ownership”.<sup>496</sup> However, Menasse’s text enables us to question such assumptions. The text presents acts of affiliation as neither accidental nor unconditional, but as predicated on the strong bonds of ethnicity or a shared legacy of trauma. This contradicts Alison Landsberg’s concept in particular, which assumes that the identification with mass-mediated depictions of trauma is automatic, unconditional, and universal, as I have argued before. Yet, Landsberg’s theory fails to explain *why exactly* people should identify with an experience – or rather: the artistic representation of an experience – that is in no way connected to their lives, memories, or identities. For Landsberg, this identification is predicated on the immersiveness and viewing context of the cinematic medium:

[T]he cinema and other mass cultural technologies have the capacity to create shared social frameworks for people who inhabit, literally and figuratively, different social spaces, practices, and beliefs. As a result, these technologies can structure ‘imagined communities’ that are not necessarily geographically or nationally bounded and that *do not presume any kind of affinity among community members* [emphasis is mine].<sup>497</sup>

Menasse’s text demonstrates, however, that the ‘imagined communities’ that Xane enters into are based on a pre-existing and very strong “kind of affinity”, created by her sense of Jewishness, her relationship with her father, and her status as a descendant of survivors. Landsberg does not see that the possibility of identification and the production of empathy are subject to personal disposition, but even more so to culturally and ideologically informed sensibilities. Empathy is something that needs to be learned, and as such it can be stimulated or blocked, proving itself susceptible to individual or collective manipulation. This is also the view adopted by Susan Sontag in her famous study on *Regarding the Pain of Others*.<sup>498</sup> Sontag demonstrates that, in an age of the oversaturation with mediatised images, our attention and our empathy have become scarce resources. For this reason, the media – and war photography in particular – install hierarchies of suffering, often informed by Eurocentrism and racist prejudice, which guide our (in-)ability to acknowledge someone else’s pain and inform practices of representation: “These examples illustrate the determining influence of photographs in shaping what catastrophes and crises we pay attention to, what we care

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<sup>496</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 3.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>498</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*.

about, and ultimately what evaluations are attached to these conflicts”.<sup>499</sup> Landsberg’s theory simply ignores these multiple processes of filtering and exclusion that determine which traumas are made available for representation – and thus identification – in mainstream cinema in the first place. Even if a film is able to foster unconditional empathy, its production, execution, and dissemination employ various mechanisms of exclusion which determine the choice of traumas. Sontag furthermore helps to clarify that practices of identification do not result from acts of mass-mediated witnessing and/or affiliative memory: on the contrary, these acts of affiliation presuppose an already existing sense of belonging (which can be reinforced and consolidated by the mass-media), so that we feel addressed by someone else’s experience of suffering in the first place. Landsberg’s theory confuses cause and effect when exploring the relationship between the mass media and identification.

*Quasikristalle* is therefore not a truly post-familial Holocaust text. Although the narrative of the family novel is supplanted by the poetics of the quasicrystal, enabling the exploration of alternative, non-biological routes of transmission, these still depend on the “idiom of family” or familiarity. Xane’s connection to Rozmburk and Nelson functions as an extension of the relationship she maintains with her father. The idiom of familiarity is expandable: in the case of Rozmburk this is done by way of ethnicity (they are both Jewish) and in the case of Nelson on the basis of trauma (both he and her father are survivors). Far from engendering unconditional, non-essentialist ways of relating to a history or memory that is not one’s own, affiliative or “prosthetic” forms of memory, as they are presented in Menasse’s text, therefore strengthen the family as a symbolic resource: the logic of the family and familiarity is transposed from the – relatively small – realm of the family onto the – much larger – domains of ethnicity and psychology.

### 6.3. Confronting the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall” – Criticisms of Travelling Trauma

The affiliative alliances in *Quasikristalle* extend and re-validate the symbolic powers of the family at a time when Holocaust memory and its generations are facing major shifts. Despite this recourse to the family as a symbolic recourse, *Quasikristalle* is

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

certainly not a family novel: the text focuses on the *cultural* after-effects of the Nazi-genocide and approaches the event as a de-personalised and institutionalised “Diskursfiguration”.<sup>500</sup> The Holocaust is presented as a thoroughly mediated and hypermobile “floating signifier”,<sup>501</sup> which has travelled through a number of discursive and historical stages. Menasse’s novel problematises the mobility and omnipresence of the Holocaust icon, which increasingly affects areas that are not directly connected to the German past (such as reproductive medicine, biogenetics, and other genocides across the globe). According to Menasse, the ubiquity of the Holocaust signifier contributes to a “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall”:

Es gibt in der deutschen Politik eine Tendenz, die ich übrigens sehr gut verstehen kann, jede große ethische und moralische Entscheidung auf Auschwitz zurückzuführen. Was kann uns Auschwitz lehren, wenn wir über Israel sprechen? Was lehrt es uns, wenn wir über Präimplantationsdiagnostik sprechen? Was lehrt es uns, wenn wir Gewalttäter frühzeitig freilassen wollen? Auschwitz ist ein Bezugspunkt in allen möglichen moralisch-ethischen Fragen. Aber das ist nicht gut und führt oft in die Irre.<sup>502</sup>

Menasse criticises the universalisation of the Holocaust as a common moral touchstone because it depletes the event of significance and historical specificity (“Man kann Auschwitz für fast alles vereinnahmen”),<sup>503</sup> which also diminishes the other instances of violence it is compared to (such as for example the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Kosovo War). *Quasikristalle* takes a critical look at these de- and recontextualisations of the Holocaust in the chapters that concern Heike Guttmann, the doctor working in a fertility clinic, and Nelson, the civil war survivor. In both cases, Menasse’s text scrutinises the consequences of these discursive cross-fertilisations in a manner that corresponds with recent shifts in the field of transnational memory studies. Scholars have started to distance themselves from the often celebratory accounts that marked early contributions to the field of transnational (Holocaust) memory, adopting a more critical and self-reflexive stance.<sup>504</sup> Recent contributions question the optimistic narrative of progress, reconciliation and cosmopolitanism that underpinned early accounts of Holocaust memory in the global age,<sup>505</sup> and this

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<sup>500</sup> See Norbert Otto Eke, “Was wollen sie? Die Absolution?”, p. 90.

<sup>501</sup> See Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, p. 99.

<sup>502</sup> Ulrich Wickert, ‘Auschwitz ist zu oft Bezugspunkt’.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid.

<sup>504</sup> This is very much the case for two recent volumes on the topic, edited by Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson and Ann Rigney and Chiara de Cesari respectively, see Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds.), *The Transcultural Turn*; Chiara de Cesari and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Transnational Memory*.

<sup>505</sup> Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg for example make the case for an “ethics of transcultural memory” that differentiates more clearly between the various purposes that comparative and analogical

scepticism is also detectable in *Quasikristalle*.

The omnipresence of the Holocaust signifier can furthermore provoke a feeling of oversaturation, fuelled by the endless repetition and ubiquity of the same images and mantras. This is a condition famously explored in the 1970s by Susan Sontag, who provocatively stated: “The same law holds for evil as for pornography. The shock of photographed atrocities wears off with repeated viewings, just as the surprise and bemusement felt the first time one sees a pornographic movie wear off after one sees a few more”.<sup>506</sup> Sontag’s argument on numbness and anaesthetisation, which she later revised in *Regarding the Pain of Others*,<sup>507</sup> provides the basis for my reading of the second chapter of *Quasikristalle*, which addresses the problems of memorial and representational excess and the concomitant feeling of Holocaust fatigue. Both the universalisation of the Holocaust as a moral benchmark and its over-representation as a media icon raise the question of how (and if) we can still meaningfully relate to these events in an age of hypermediation and globalisation.

### 6.3.1. “*Es war das immergleiche Problem...*” – *From Repression to Holocaust Fatigue and back*

The second chapter of *Quasikristalle* focuses on the encounter between Xane and Hugo Bernays, a fictional Holocaust scholar, who offers educational tours of Auschwitz. The chapter is preceded by the following quote from Max Frisch’s *Mein Name sei Gantenbein*: “*Man kann nicht leben mit einer Erfahrung, die ohne Geschichte bleibt, scheint es, und manchmal stelle ich mir vor, ein anderer habe genau die Geschichte meiner Erfahrung...* [italics in the original text]” (Q, 49). It belongs to a larger paragraph within the novel which begins as follows: “Ein Mann hat eine Erfahrung gemacht, jetzt sucht er die Geschichte dazu”.<sup>508</sup> This epigraph sets the tone for a chapter that deals with the increasing mediatisation, ritualisation, and commodification of Holocaust memory. The excerpt from Frisch’s novel suggests that we need narrativisation – “Geschichten” – to provide a meaningful context for the

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approaches to the Holocaust and other memories serve, see Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, ‘A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory’. Dirk Moses in particular is extremely critical of the assumed cosmopolitanism behind globalised versions of Holocaust memory; he argues that they might actually have the opposite effect and entrench existing divisions, see Dirk Moses, ‘Genocide and the Terror of History’ and Dirk Moses, ‘Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Other Genocides?’.

<sup>506</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 20.

<sup>507</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, pp. 93ff.

<sup>508</sup> Max Frisch, *Mein Name sei Gantenbein* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 12.

experiences that we make. However, the Bernays-chapter demonstrates that this is no longer possible in the context of contemporary Holocaust remembrance, as decades of mediatisation and discursivation have turned the experience into empty signifiers and congealed “icons of destruction”,<sup>509</sup> which provoke automated responses while forestalling any meaningful narratives. This is especially vexing for the “generation after” which depends entirely on such mediatisations of the event. The impoverished state of Holocaust remembrance in which ritualisation and iconisation preclude any meaningful relationship with the past creates painful feelings of frustration which are implied in the quote by Max Frisch and demonstrated in more detail in Menasse’s text. At the same time, the quotation also implies that we can adopt or make up stories that may suit the experience we have made (“jetzt sucht er die Geschichte dazu”) which points to the potentially redeeming power of fiction. Whereas this potential is explored in many narratives by the postmemorial generation who often resort to “imaginative investment and creation”,<sup>510</sup> this is explicitly not the case in *Quasikristalle* which follows a different path.

The discursivation and ritualisation of Holocaust memory is at the heart of the Bernays-chapter, yet it is necessary to differentiate more clearly between the various manifestations of these processes: the history professor Hugo Bernays for example symbolises the incorporation of the Holocaust into historiographical discourse and *Geschichtspolitik*. During his guided tour of Auschwitz, the participants are continuously confronted with the fact that all knowledge they can possibly gain is second-hand and part of various cycles of academic and political contestation as well as mediatised debate. Any statement about the events or the site as such is therefore necessarily a citation, overlaid by other intertexts. This is further highlighted by the characters’ incessant references to media depictions (Resnais’ *Nuit et Brouillard*, Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*), public debates and major historiographical studies (such as the Irving trial or Christopher Browning’s seminal study on *Ordinary Men*), or the works of Bernays himself. This discursivation of the Holocaust is also reflected in the emergence of certain memorial conventions and ritualised emotional responses, which Bernays pejoratively describes as “die wechselnden Moden der Gedenkpropaganda” (*Q*, 80) and “vorfabrizierte Gefühlsstürme” (*Q*, 95). One of the central problems for the participants is that they cannot find any response to Auschwitz as a site that would

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<sup>509</sup> James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 174.

<sup>510</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

point beyond these predetermined frames of reference; even before they enter the former death camp, they are already worn down and paralysed by an excess of knowledge and the proverbial weight of history. Bernays' use of the term "Gedenkpropaganda" also implies the instrumentalisation of Holocaust memory, be it for political or for commercial gains. Apart from the culture of so-called 'Betroffenheitstourismus', Bernays is strongly opposed to the sensationalist exploitation of the "einzigartige [...] Sehenswürdigkeit Auschwitz" (Q, 93) and practices of *dark tourism*, which thrive on people's fascination with disaster. He furthermore points the finger at academia, when claiming that some of his colleagues, such as his lover Pauline Sussman, deliberately choose marketable topics that are likely to cause a stir over the laborious and "wenig belohnte Grundlagenarbeit" (Q, 86): "Und es gab die anderen, die auf das leicht Vermarktbare setzten, Bernays nannte das 'Menscheln nach dem Spielberg-Prinzip'" (Q, 86).

Further to this, the Bernays-chapter also problematises the dynamics of hypermediation. This connects Menasse's text to Benjamin Stein's novel *Die Leinwand*, which explores issues of authenticity, autobiographical writing, and appropriation in relation to the boundless transmedial travel of Holocaust memories. Menasse's writing adds a new facet, however, by accentuating the sense of frustration and fatigue that arises from being overwhelmed by an excess of "Erfahrung" that cannot be integrated into meaningful narratives (i.e. a "Geschichte"). This excess is the result of hypermediation which has created an impenetrable web of representations and references, that encompasses documentary material on the one and Hollywood productions on the other hand. The ubiquity of certain historical images has led to a state of extreme oversaturation, which corresponds with a feeling of overpowering numbness, felt by both Xane and Bernays:

Was kommt jetzt, fragte sie, und er sagte: Nichts, was du nicht schon gesehen hast.  
Aber will ich es noch einmal sehen?  
Wahrscheinlich nicht. Ich schau es mir nicht mehr an. Ich mach die Augen zu und konzentriere mich auf die Tonspur.  
Warum zeigen sie das überhaupt, flüsterte sie später, als die Leichen mit dem Bagger zusammengesoben wurden.  
Weil sie glauben, dass es dazugehört (Q, 77).

Both of them have seen the documentary images showing the liberation of the concentration camps so often that they no longer have a pedagogic (or any sort) of effect. Xane also highlights the conundrum that, by displaying these images without

further comment, one eternally repeats the extreme objectification, degradation and annihilation of the Nazi victims, which might perpetuate the perpetrator narrative: “[E]s sieht aus wie menschenähnlicher Müll. Eigentlich ist das Nazi-propaganda” (Q, 77). The passage therefore questions the alleged power and inherent pedagogic value of displaying these images, especially when their employment is down to a sense of obligation or convention (“Warum zeigen sie das überhaupt [...] / Weil sie glauben, dass es dazu gehört” (Q, 77)). Bernays reacts to this pictorial excess by simply looking away, but Xane rightly remarks that this is of course not a solution to the underlying problem of anesthetisation.

Susan Sontag’s thoughts on atrocity photographs and the issues of empathy/apathy are helpful here: Sontag famously argued that these photographs, although meant to substantiate the ‘realness’ of horrible events and to elicit empathy, actually have the opposite effect if shown repeatedly: “An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs – [...]. But after repeated exposure to images it also becomes less real”.<sup>511</sup> In *On Photography*, she blames the merciless multiplication of these images in a media culture for the loss of their emotional effect:

The vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world has given everyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary – making it appear familiar, remote [...], inevitable. At the time of the first photographs of the Nazi camps, there was nothing banal about these images. After thirty years, a saturation point may have been reached.<sup>512</sup>

While Sontag, in 1977, still wondered about whether a saturation point “may have been reached”, this is most definitely the case from the perspective of Menasse’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century text. Sontag’s fear of abrasion and banalisation seems all too justified in the light of Xane’s and Bernays’ exchange and experience. Images of extreme atrocities and suffering are included in the tour as a staple ingredient of a shock-based Holocaust pedagogy, and it is exactly this proliferation in all sorts of contexts – including the museum – that has made them “ordinary” or “familiar”. We know these images, we expect to be confronted with them, and we are therefore no longer shocked or surprised.

Sontag later extended and revised her argument in *Regarding the Pain of Others*,

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<sup>511</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 20.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

by clarifying that it is not repetition as such which drains images of their emotional force, but rather the particular rhythm of televisual replication:

What looks like callousness has its origin in the instability of attention that television is organized to arouse and to satiate by its surfeit of images. Image-glut keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content. Image-flow precludes a privileged image [...]. A more reflective engagement with content would require a certain intensity of awareness – just what is weakened by the expectations brought to images disseminated by the media, whose leaching out of content contributes most to the deadening of feeling.<sup>513</sup>

Sontag suggests that it is not so much the quantity of images, but rather the lack of time we have to process and engage with them that causes “callousness”. The steady flow of incentives produced by television excludes the possibility of singling out an image and contextualising it, as it only allows for a hovering type of attention. Viewers do not have time to deepen their understanding of these images, which is why the response remains superficial. The solution to this, according to Sontag, is a different framework of reception which is contemplative and based on a “certain intensity of awareness”: “But that would seem to demand the equivalent of a sacred or meditative space in which to look at them”.<sup>514</sup> However, such spaces are increasingly diminished in a culture of hypermediation, speed and immediacy. Sontag therefore advocates a withdrawal into the private sphere of reading: “Up to a point, the weight and seriousness of such photographs survive better in a book, where one can look privately, linger over the pictures, without talking”.<sup>515</sup> Linger implies slowness and taking one’s time but also a sense of privacy and intimacy. It is here contrasted to the speed of the image-flow created by the medium of television, a more public or at least a collective medium.<sup>516</sup>

Menasse’s text shows that the endless loop of images displayed in the Auschwitz visitor centre has exactly the effect described by Sontag: it creates a feeling of “image-

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<sup>513</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, pp. 94ff.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>516</sup> One can certainly challenge Sontag’s conviction that such alternative modes of attention can only flourish during the act of reading. In his book *On Slowness*, Lutz Koepnick shows how the “mode of slowness” (p. 4) – an idea that is very similar to Sontag’s concept of contemplation – can be developed and employed in relation to a range of media and artistic forms. Koepnick’s focus on visual media, such as photography, films, video art, and multimedia installation art, complicates Sontag’s assumption that image-driven forms of representation tend to simplify and produce “image-glut”. One should note though that Sontag’s criticism of visual media mainly targets their mass-mediated manifestations (war photography, print journalism, news channels); she does not consider the realm of avant-garde inspired contemporary art which is at the centre of Koepnick’s study, see Lutz Koepnick, *On Slowness. Toward an Aesthetic of the Contemporary* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014).

glut” which leaves no other option than to look away or keep looking but feel disgusted, as Xane does. Both variants exclude the possibility of empathy, which would require a different, more intimate, setting. However, the ritualisation of Holocaust memory, which implicates the museum environment, further hinders the development of such contemplative spaces, as it points the audience’s thoughts and feelings into prefabricated directions, dictated by political consensus and/or memorial conventions. Menasse’s text does not feature private, intimate spaces of Holocaust memory (the family also fails, as demonstrated earlier on) – none of the characters escape hypermediation, ritualisation and commodification. Nonetheless, *Quasikristalle*, understood as the narrativisation of these images and the experience of oversaturation, allows the reader to critically reflect on the current state of Holocaust anaesthesia, memory and pedagogy and escape the loop, at least to an extent. It achieves this by replacing the numbing effects of the image-loop and memorial routinisation with the meta-discursive capabilities of the literary text.

Whereas the documentary images in *Quasikristalle* have become ‘unreal’ in Sontag’s sense, the Hollywood depictions also gloss over the reality of events, albeit in a different manner: while documents become less and less effective, the authority of mass-mediated representations actually increases to such an extent that their visual authenticity seems greater than that of the original footage. They even have the power to supplant the historical facts, as Bernays points out:

Die normalen Touristen [...] sahen diesen Querriegel von einem Tor, das sie längst aus Kino und Fernsehen kannten, auch wenn es dort meistens ein Nachbau war, und gruselten sich bei der Vorstellung, dass die vielen hunderttausenden Opfer erst durch dieses Tor gefahren und dann aus den Viehwaggons herausgebrüllt worden waren. Doch das stimmte nicht. Die längste Zeit waren sie woanders angekommen, an der sogenannten Judenrampe, aber was machte das schon für einen Unterschied (*Q*, 93f.).

The paradoxical fact that, in an age of remediation, the mass-mediated representations of an event become the yardstick for measuring its ‘realness’ has been explored by Slavoj Žižek in his essay on 9/11,<sup>517</sup> and Sontag makes similar observations in connection to the *World Trade Center*-attacks.<sup>518</sup> In relation to the issue of contemporary Holocaust memory in Menasse’s text, these findings leave us with the somewhat demoralising conclusion that there is in fact nothing (more) we can ‘learn’ from the image. The documentary footage has lost its emotional force due to our

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<sup>517</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, pp. 12ff.

<sup>518</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 19.

overexposure to it, while its informative or evidentiary value is diminished by the paradoxical ‘authenticity effects’ exerted by mass-mediated images. The following response by one of the younger members of the tour group reflects this problem:

Der junge Mann, im Grunde ein halbes Kind, hatte seine Kamera auf die nach innen gekrümmten Zaunpfähle aus Beton gerichtet, zwischen denen sich der Stacheldraht bauschte, und dabei gemurmelt: Das schaut gut aus, wie die Pfosten die Köpfe hängen lassen. Und Xane konnte nicht anders, als ihm sarkastisch zuzustimmen: Ja, und ich finde, das ‘Arbeit macht frei’ ist hier auch besonders schön geschmiedet (*Q*, 77).

The young man appears to have replaced the urge to learn something from the image or to convey a message with purely aesthetic concerns. He judges the trip to Auschwitz on the basis of the visual appeal of his snapshots because authenticity is no longer an issue. His photographs in all likelihood reproduce the polished aesthetics of Hollywood productions such as *Schindler’s List*, rather than the raw authenticity that we usually expect when viewing images of extreme suffering. This approach leaves behind (or even reverses) what Sontag identifies as a major conundrum faced by war photographers: “For the photography of atrocity, people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry, which is equated with insincerity or mere contrivance”.<sup>519</sup> Artistic ambition, in the realm of atrocity photography, traditionally provoked accusations of manipulation or simplification. Yet, from a point of view that is historically far removed from the actual events, artistic ambition takes centre stage. The young man no longer feels personally affected by the events and can thus reject the ethical obligation to bear witness. His attitude is unbearable for Xane, who is still embedded in a discourse about representational appropriateness and tied to the survivor generation by personal and familial bonds. The example of the young man, which in some respects connects to the *Yolocaust*-debate mentioned in Chapter One, leaves the reader wondering for how much longer this discourse will prevail and what alternative responses to the sites of suffering the future might hold.

Bernays and Xane are still participating in a discourse that clearly differentiates between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (in the sense of ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’) representations. One of the major tasks that Bernays has set for himself consists in unsettling and shattering the conventions, prefabrications, and exploitative structures that the commodification, hypermediation and ritualisation of Holocaust memory have created. It is not clear if more appropriate responses will emerge from this, although

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

Bernays believes that there is an instinctive (and hence “correct”) reaction to a place like Auschwitz that is gradually overwritten by layers of hypermediation and ritualisation (*Q*, 80). It is of course ironic that he sets out to perform an act of “Diskurs-Demontage”,<sup>520</sup> while relying on the authority that a particular discourse – that of critical pedagogy and scholarship – bestows on him. His educational programme employs a mix of shock tactics, demystification, and Brechtian *Verfremdung*, understood as the strategically produced “Abweichung von unseren vorgestanzten Annahmen” (*Q*, 95). But the irony does not end here: Bernays’ agenda of myth-shattering *Verfremdung* is itself part of a routine which he has established as an experienced tour guide: “Breitbeinig, die Daumen in den Gürtelschlaufen, stand er da und spulte seine Erzählung ab, die wie alles, was er in den kommenden Tagen sagen würde, auf das Unterhöhlen vorgefertigter Gefühle zielte” (*Q*, 70). The ironic contrast results from the clash between words that imply routine, planning and ritualisation (“abspulen”, “alles, was er in den kommenden Tagen sagen würde”) and Bernays’ intention to actually expose the prefabricated nature of Holocaust memory and discourse. He openly admits that he is playing a part, relying on tried and tested preventive measures – such as his functional clothing, a strict timetable, and a pre-given itinerary through the concentration camp. His approach seeks to demolish the participants’ ritualised patterns of perception and preconceptions, while also channelling and controlling their reactions: “Von allen wurde erwartet, dass sie den Leuten sagten, wo es langging, in jeder, auch der innerlichsten Hinsicht. Bernays’ Überzeugung war: Je strenger man loslegte, desto weniger scherten sie später aus, emotional, alkoholisch. So klar geregelt wie Sadomaso [...]” (*Q*, 69). Bernays thus replaces one form of exerting influence and control (by the media and institutionalised politics with its “Gedenkpropaganda” for example) with another, but his own influence is supposed to foster independent and critical thinking.

*Quasikristalle* suggests that even the most avid and self-aware critic cannot escape the entrapments of discursivity and ‘hyperspeakability’. Any statement about the Holocaust and Auschwitz as a site is exposed as either an intertext or a cliché, and any attempt to break out of this tangle of references is itself condemned to end in routine and ritualisation. Authentic access to the past has become entirely unachievable – not even the site of destruction as such can offer a sense of immediacy, as the topography

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<sup>520</sup> Kirstin Frieden, *Neuverhandlungen des Holocaust*, p. 70.

of Auschwitz, the “scheinbar gut bekannte [...] Ort” (*Q*, 95), is overlaid by pre-existing images and (imaginary or actually existing) directives about how to (not) feel and act in this place. This conundrum is in some ways reminiscent of *Vienna*: without the authority of the survivors, the possible perceptions, interpretations, and depictions of the event multiply uncontrollably and/or turn into empty rituals. The chapter is also marked by an unbridgeable gap between the survivor, in this case Eli Rozmburk, and those who did not experience the Holocaust personally. Bernays as well as Xane repeatedly emphasise that Rozmburk’s relationship with a site like Auschwitz is not reproducible for them: “Die existenzielle Erfahrung ist nicht nur eine andere, sie hat auch andere Rechte” (*Q*, 94). This quote emphasises that the survivor, due to his discursive authority, is entitled to a different approach towards Auschwitz and the Holocaust. Bernays, for example, repeatedly points out that there are some forms of extreme black humour, which can only be used by those who actually lived through the hell of the concentration camps (*Q*, 68; *Q*, 76). The “generation after” is therefore doubly limited in their response to the past – there are some discursive modes they cannot resort to, while others have become completely oversaturated, empty, and meaningless. As the entrapment of the “generation after” is at centre of the chapter, it is not surprising that the survivor remains silent in Menasse’s text. Eli Rozmburk, the Auschwitz survivor who was supposed to guide the tour, falls ill unexpectedly and very probably dies shortly after, which is why the “Ersatzmann” (*Q*, 59) Bernays takes Eli’s place. On a larger scale, Rozmburk’s illness foreshadows the dying out of the survivor generation as a whole and points to the future of disembodied Holocaust memory. *Quasikristalle* demonstrates how this future will rely on the further mediatisation and institutionalisation of Holocaust memory, while outlining the difficulties that arise when trying to connect these free-floating memories to the lived experiences of later generations.

This brings us back to the issue of non-biological, affiliative strategies of memory transfer: Bernays’ role as an “Ersatzmann” (*Q*, 59) not only implies a collegial sense of duty, but also an ethical obligation, as he is willing to adopt and pass on a trauma that is not his own. The same goes for Xane, who is mistakenly introduced as “Rozmburks Nichte” (*Q*, 56), before clarifying that their kinship is based on affinity not biology: “Rozmburk hat keine Nichte, sagte sie kühl [...], ich bin eine Art

Patenkind” (*Q*, 63). While foregrounding such “connective” forms of memory,<sup>521</sup> Menasse’s text also points to their limitations. *Quasikristalle* complicates the ethical imperative which underpins most concepts of “affiliative”, “connective” or “prosthetic” memory.<sup>522</sup> The Bernays-chapter suggests that, although Bernays feels a strong ethical obligation towards Eli Rozmburk, he also sees him as a rival. The role of the “Ersatzmann” does not only concern the transmission of memories, it also implies a conflict of priority, succession, and influence in Harold Bloom’s sense. The chapter hints at multiple tensions between the two historians who adopt the roles of the mentor and the pupil. These professional rivalries are complicated by the gap between the authority and authenticity of the survivor-historian Rozmburk and the unclear position of the second-hand witness Bernays whose Jewish identity is defined by what he calls the “halbjüdische [...] Doppelhelix [...], ein schwer auflösbares Geflecht aus Angst, Schmerz über unklare Zugehörigkeit, ironischer Distanzierung und Selbstüberschätzung auf der Suche nach der angemessenen Haltung” (*Q*, 73). It is necessary to differentiate between the three kinds of authority at play here: one form relates to the accuracy of research and historical knowledge, which is something that Bernays can compete with. The other type of authority, however, encompasses the affective authority of the survivor as the one who has suffered through the camps. This authority is not linked to factual knowledge – in fact, many Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses in general misremember events – but the authenticity of lived, embodied experience and suffering. This is something that Bernays, as a nonwitness, cannot ever achieve. Finally, Bernays also sees himself as the less authentic Jew, as he considers himself to be ‘only’ half-Jewish. This assessment is interesting, since, as the son of a Jewish mother, he is actually a ‘proper’ Jew according to Halakhic law. He, however, adopts the National Socialist label of ‘Halbjude’ to define himself, which may suggest an understanding of Jewish identity as essentially (and maybe exclusively) tied to victimisation and suffering. The difference between factual and affective authority becomes clear in a conversation between Bernays and Rozmburk, which is broken off by Rozmburk with the words: “Du bist mir zu gescheit, [...] auch meine Unbildung

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<sup>521</sup> “Connective” memory is an alternative term used by Marianne Hirsch to describe the phenomenon of affiliation; she draws on Andrew Hoskins’ work, see Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, pp. 21f.

<sup>522</sup> This ethical impetus is particularly important for Landsberg’s and Rothberg’s theories, I would argue. Landsberg for example formulates the hope that “the construction of prosthetic memories might serve as the grounds for unexpected alliances across chasms of difference”, and we can find similar ideas in Rothberg’s writing on multidirectional memory, see Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, p. 3.

verdanke ich den Nazis” (*Q*, 100). Bernays admits that this reply makes him inexplicably aggressive – this is probably because Rozmburk’s sentence implies that, although Bernays might have more factual knowledge, he can still not compete with the authority of those who have actually been in the camps. They possess a knowledge that is inaccessible and irreproducible for the “generation after” and which extends far beyond the realm of simply being “gescheit”. The relationship between Bernays and Rozmburk therefore touches on the issues of priority, succession and influence that also mark Biller’s postmemorial writing. It similarly suggests that the postmemorial relationship with the survivor (or previous) generation(s) and their memories or inheritance may consist of conflicting feelings, encompassing affiliation, obligation, and aggression, which are much more ambivalent than Hirsch’s theory suggests.

Faced with this impossibility of an authentic connection to the past, Menasse’s text leaves its main character Bernays – and possibly the reader – with an overarching feeling of *Holocaust fatigue*: “Er wurde müde und stumpf, wenn er nur daran dachte, an all die Querelen und Kämpfe, an die unzähligen Ausschüsse, in denen er selbst gesessen war [...]” (*Q*, 78). This sense of frustration derives from tedium (“Vielleicht war es einfach genug” (*Q*, 89)), and a sense of disgust: “[D]iese ekelhaften Gefühle aus zweiter Hand” (*Q*, 94).<sup>523</sup> In the absence of any personal connection to the event, the characters are confronted with an excess of stories, images, conventions, and debates which block access to the past. This oversaturation also hinders the expression of empathy; in Bernays’ case, it is replaced by a detached sarcasm, while the other characters are so determined by their pre-existing knowledge and memorial conventions that they simply do not know what to feel.

For Susan Sontag, the reception of these images and sites requires a different approach: she stresses the importance of a contemplative inwardness and a certain sense of intimacy. However, Sontag also observes that such modes are diametrically opposed to the incessant stream of images in a hypermediated culture. The automatised and calcified commemorative rules and rituals further undermine the very conditions of a more contemplative attitude, as they favour

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<sup>523</sup> It might be fruitful to read the Bernays-chapter in conjunction with Iris Hanika’s *Das Eigentliche*, which addresses problems of memorial routinisation and commodification in Holocaust discourse via a recourse to traditions and tropes of melancholy, sloth, and boredom, as Mary Cosgrove has shown. These sentiments seem to resonate with the sense of tedium, frustration, and fatigue experienced by Bernays, see Mary Cosgrove, *Born Under Auschwitz. Melancholy Traditions in Postwar German Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), pp. 185ff.

mechanic, well-rehearsed responses over more thorough engagement. While I agree with Sontag's argument, we need to keep in mind its broader political implications: if the withdrawal into the private, individualised sphere of reading or contemplation is the only response to hypermediated "image-glut" and fatigue, what does this mean for a collective culture of (Holocaust) remembrance? Is it at all possible to foster a more contemplative culture of remembrance on the collective level? Or will the future of Holocaust memory consist of ever more pluralised and individualised approaches, which practice inwardness on the smallest possible scale? There is an interesting parallel to Vladimir Vertlib's text here, which also pits the intimacy of the reader-text-relationship against the unresponsiveness of broader cultural and discursive frameworks. The withdrawal into the private sphere thus emerges as a possible antidote to the problems of memorial ossification and oversaturation – but how viable is this alternative?

### 6.3.2. *Uneven Memorial Development in the Global Age*

It is necessary to contextualise the Bernays-chapter within the broader structure of *Quasikristalle* by considering transnational or globalised Holocaust memory: the Auschwitz-tour is framed by two chapters which are set in Austria, the first one during Xane's adolescence and the second one a few years after her meeting with Bernays. Both chapters thematise the repression of Holocaust memory and thus provide a counterpoint to the Bernays-chapter. The segment dealing with Xane's teenage years tells a coming-of-age story, focusing on sexual awakening, the first confrontation with death and, as a result, "das Ende der Kindheit" (*Q*, 48). Xane's friendship with Judith and Claudia, and the way it changes when Claudia dies unexpectedly, feature prominently. Judith's dysfunctional family relations contrast with Xane's rather carefree, petit-bourgeois upbringing. The true cause of Judith's family troubles – her father is verbally and physically abusive and her mother Zsuzsa is mentally unstable – is never made explicit, but it seems to involve the issue of Jewishness. While Zsuzsa's and her daughters' ethnicity is never openly addressed, the text suggests that they are Jewish, as indicated by the children's first names "Judith" and "Salome". Judith's father broke free from his own Nazi parents because they rejected his wife, probably based on her ethnicity: "[W]eil sie Nazis gewesen waren und es dennoch wagten, seine junge Frau abzulehnen" (*Q*, 9). This suggests a connection between the family conflicts and Austria's past. Austria's private and broader political culture is obviously

still marked by repression and the persistence of anti-Semitic stereotypes. The tensions between the Jewish and the Gentile parts of society are not publicly addressed and worked through, which is why they are acted out within the private space of the family. The father's aggression towards Judith may actually target her and her mother's Jewishness which prevents them from leading a 'normal' life. Judith's mother reacts to the unaddressed collective and personal aggression by escaping into mental illness, which also allows her to protect herself from her husband's bouts of violence.

However, it is not just the Gentile environment that rejects Zsuzsa's Jewish origins, she also struggles with them herself. Judith's first day at school is described as follows:

Am ersten Schultag [...] hatte Judiths Mutter wieder einmal die Haare ihrer Tochter verleugnen wollen. Sie begann frühmorgens mit der Prozedur, die kaltes Wasser, Zitronensaft, scharfe Kämmen und Brenneisen erforderte. Judith schrie und tobte, ihrer Mutter rutschte mehrmals die Hand aus, wie man die Ohrfeigen damals nannte, das Kleid wurde schmutzig, weil Judith sich zwischendurch am Boden wälzte [...] (*Q*, 12f.).

The violence of this interaction suggests that Zsuzsa is not merely attempting to enhance her daughter's appearance. The use of the peculiar word "verleugnen" implies that Zsuzsa is trying to disavow something that goes beyond the shape and texture of Judith's hair. The political implications of hair(-styling) have been debated in the context of Afro-textured hair,<sup>524</sup> and I want to propose that the fight about Judith's hair – which apparently looks like "rote Zuckerwatte" (*Q*, 13) – also evokes the issue of racial/ethnic otherness. Both frizzy and red hair are part of iconographic traditions of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, which associated the Jew's body with what were perceived as undesirable attributes.<sup>525</sup> Zsuzsa's attempts to violently "verleugnen" Judith's hair thus appears as a reaction to such racial stereotyping. By trying to eradicate any visible signs of her daughter's otherness, she is either motivated by internalised oppression or by the desire to protect her daughter from experiences of discrimination similar to her own. In any case, the first chapter of *Quasikristalle* paints a bleak picture of Austrian post-war society, in which the refusal to collectively deal with the past leads to inter-generational violence and mental illness.

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<sup>524</sup> Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps, *Hair Story. Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America. Revised and Updated* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2014).

<sup>525</sup> Martin Gubser for example points out that the Jew in 19<sup>th</sup>-century German literature often possessed "rotes, auf jeden Fall aber struppiges Haar", making him/her the "exakte[...] Gegenteil des in den gleichen Werken gezeichneten nichtjüdischen Schönheitsideals", see Martin Gubser, *Literarischer Antisemitismus. Untersuchungen zu Gustav Freytag und anderen bürgerlichen Schriftstellern des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 1998), p. 128. Andrew Colin Gow traces the negative association of Jews with the colour red back to the Middle Ages, see Andrew Colin Gow, *The Red Jews. Antisemitism in an Apocalyptic Age 1200-1600* (Leiden et al.: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. 66ff.

Following Bernays' exploration of memorial oversaturation and Holocaust fatigue, chapter three of *Quasikristalle* returns to Austrian society and the issue of repression. Here we meet Ludwig Tschoch, an engineer and member of the Viennese bourgeoisie, who rents one of his prestigious apartments in Vienna's Hietzing-district to a young Xane in her late 20s or early 30s. Tschoch emerges as the caricature of a certain type in Austrian society – he is an overly Catholic, crypto-fascist, homo- and xenophobic philistine with voyeuristic tendencies. In the course of the chapter we find out that Tschoch prefers to spend most of his time in his attic, where he keeps several ferrets as pets. The attic features as a prominent *topos* in recent discourse about the German and the Austrian past,<sup>526</sup> as a space which harbours those aspects of a personal and collective history which have been shut out, expelled, or suppressed.<sup>527</sup> This is no different in Tschoch's case, whose political convictions become abundantly clear when we find out that he has secretly named one of his pets "Adolf" (*Q*, 129). The young Tschoch and his mother also stood idly by and witnessed the deportation of a young man during the war period. Xane, who is by now a young and rebellious documentary filmmaker with a (proud) reputation as a 'Nestbeschmutzerin', uncovers this hidden history. In her opinion, Tschoch represents everything that is wrong with Austria's postwar society: "[D]ieses Selbstgefällige und Geschichtslose, weil sich die meisten Österreicher immer noch weigerten, sich an die Verbrechen zu erinnern, die direkt vor ihrer Haustür, ja vor ihren Augen stattgefunden hatten, stattdessen bekreuzigten sie sich und fütterten fröhlich ihre Frettchen" (*Q*, 135). The text suggests that Tschoch is not even aware of the extent of his complicity, and when the entire family supports his ignorance by denouncing Xane's "linken Schmafu" (*Q*, 135), any attempt at confronting the past is nipped in the bud.

The memorial excess in the Bernays-chapter is thus contrasted with two different kinds of repression: one concerns Judith's Jewish-Austrian family, which tries to fit in with the mnemo-politics of the Gentile Austrian environment; the other one is symptomatic of certain attitudes in post-war Austrian – and especially Viennese-bourgeois – society. The contrast between oversaturation and repression can be read

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<sup>526</sup> Most notably in Arno Geiger's *Es geht uns gut*, which centres on a grandchild trying to clear his grandparents' attic in a mansion which is also located Vienna's Hietzing district, see Arno Geiger, *Es geht uns gut* (Munich: Hanser, 2005).

<sup>527</sup> The basement fulfils a similar function in memory discourse, as can be seen in Ulrich Seidl's 2014 documentary *Im Keller*. Seidl's film portrays various individuals whose basements harbour repressed stories, desires or convictions, among them a basement full of Nazi memorabilia, see *Im Keller*, dir. by Ulrich Seidl (*Neue Visionen Filmverleih*, 2014).

in terms of a historical development when comparing the Judith- and the Bernays-chapter. The chapters are separated by a span of approximately 15 years, implying that Holocaust discourse has obviously moved from one extreme (total silence) to the other (overexposure). However, the Bernays- and the Tschoch-segments are set at roughly the same time (probably two or three years have passed between Xane's excursion to Auschwitz and the episode in Tschoch's mansion) so that the contrast between oversaturation and repression here exposes the backwardness of Austrian society. But these clashes also point to a pluralisation of Holocaust memories and the co-existence of various stages of memorialisation as part of an *uneven memorial development*: the Bernays-chapter is set within a transnational, scholarly community, caught up in what is ultimately an elitist discourse on the Holocaust, concerned with an excess of images and knowledge. Meanwhile, the chapter focusing on Tschoch gives us an insight into the bourgeois Viennese milieu of the Hietzing-district, where, several decades after the war, the unholy alliance between prescribed amnesia, Catholicism and anti-Semitism persists. Both the Bernays- and the Tschoch-chapter are set in the mid- to late 2000s, so at a time when a globalised culture of Holocaust remembrance had emerged. Yet, *Quasikristalle* reveals that the transnational, hypermediated mobility of Holocaust memories is always influenced and governed by local factors, and that different or even contradictory stages of remembrance – ranging from repression to oversaturation – can indeed co-exist. The analysis of the Holocaust in terms of a ubiquitous “global icon” therefore implies a temporal and memorial homogeneity which does in fact not exist.<sup>528</sup> Menasse's text also highlights that the transnational mobility of Holocaust memories alone is not enough to foster new cultures of remembrance, understanding or empathy, as suggested by Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider. The Tschoch-chapter shows that the globalisation of Holocaust memory in the shape of a “floating” signifier can actually coincide with a culture of silence, repression, and continued anti-Semitism.

### 6.3.3. De- and Recontextualisations of the Holocaust Signifier

The problems of memorial excess and oversaturation, as they are depicted in the Bernays-chapter, also evoke the issues of de- and re-contextualisation. *Quasikristalle* critically examines the hypermobility of the Holocaust signifier, which migrates into

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<sup>528</sup> The term “global icon” is borrowed from Aleida Assmann, ‘The Holocaust – a Global Memory?’, p. 109.

discourses that are not directly or necessarily connected to the German past. Criticising the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall”, the author Menasse objects to the transformation of the Holocaust into a common moral touchstone: “Auschwitz ist ein Bezugspunkt in allen möglichen moralisch-ethischen Fragen”.<sup>529</sup> The chapters dealing with Heike Guttman and the politician Nelson reflect the possible consequences of this transformation. They feature a stage of Holocaust remembrance in which the personal links to the past have vanished, as the discursivation of the events has become all-encompassing. And so it is that Dr Heike Guttman no longer sees the legacy of the Holocaust as a personal burden but as a nuisance:

Die deutschen Gesetze! Rigide bis dort hinaus, das Embryonenschutzgesetz, man darf fast gar nichts, im internationalen Vergleich, sogar die Österreicher sind liberaler [...]. In Deutschland aber wirkt der Holocaust fort und fort, ethisch jedenfalls, jede Entscheidung wird darauf bezogen, alles Tun muss sich vom Tun der Nazis maximal unterscheiden (*Q*, 191).

Guttman’s frustration is different from the experience Bernays and Xane undergo at Auschwitz. They are unable to empathise in a culture of mass-mediated oversaturation, and suffer from their inability to express any feelings that go beyond the level of ritual, routine or cliché. Guttman, by contrast, no longer deems it necessary to feel anything about events that occurred in the distant past – it is time to move on. In her view, Germany’s cultural fixation on the Holocaust hinders its future progress, especially in the realm of science and reproductive medicine. Guttman also suggests that Germany’s exaggerated concern about the past produces injustices in the present: under Germany’s embryo protection law doctors are largely prohibited from selecting embryos for IVF procedures (so-called “Präimplantationsdiagnostik”). They therefore tend to implant more embryos than in other countries, to increase the chances of pregnancy, a practice that often leads to “unnötig vielen Mehrlingsschwangerschaften”, “[w]ofür die deutsche Regierung folgerichtig wieder Mutterkreuze einführen sollte” (*Q*, 191), as Guttman remarks sarcastically.

She thus echoes Menasse’s personal concerns about the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall”,<sup>530</sup> which target the universalisation of the Holocaust as a moral and ethical benchmark (“[...] jede Entscheidung wird darauf bezogen”). However, it is essential to differentiate more clearly between Menasse and her fictional character Guttman.

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<sup>529</sup> Ulrich Wickert, ‘Auschwitz ist zu oft Bezugspunkt’.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

In the above-quoted interview, Menasse is primarily concerned with the decontextualisation of the Holocaust, which she fears may encourage banalisation and instrumentalisation (“Das ist zu einfach und banalisiert die Zusammenhänge”).<sup>531</sup> If every political or legal decision and action is related and compared to the Holocaust, this leads to a homogenising deflation, which no longer acknowledges the historical specificities of either the Nazi period and the genocide of the Jews or the events it is compared to. Menasse’s mention of the Kosovo War highlights that such Holocaust comparisons can also be used to justify politically questionable operations and aims. Lucy Bond for example has shown how the invocation of Holocaust analogies in the context of 9/11 was used to justify the military policies of the Bush-administration, while at the same time contributing to an undifferentiated universalisation of Jewish suffering.<sup>532</sup> She criticises this particular comparative approach, based on analogy and aimed “towards the occlusion of difference”, by “taking the specifics of one story as a blueprint for a universal experience of suffering”.<sup>533</sup> While Levy and Sznajder use the analogy between the genocide committed during the Balkan war and that of Europe’s Jews to promote the ethical productivity of the Holocaust template,<sup>534</sup> Menasse’s comments are more in line with recent critical developments in transcultural and transnational memory discourse: scholars such as Lucy Bond, Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg increasingly opt for a more differentiated and critical approach towards comparative and analogical practices of Holocaust memory.<sup>535</sup>

However, this is not the position advocated by Guttman who simply wants to move on. Menasse’s text criticises this position, showing that, although Guttman denies any connection with the past, she uses extremely loaded terms such as “soziale Auslese” (*Q*, 192), “Ausschuss” (*Q*, 197) und “Aussondern” (*Q*, 202). Her choice of words evokes the register of Nazi eugenics and Social Darwinism, the latter of which shapes Guttman’s professional self-understanding and her views on reproductive medicine. She has implemented her own system of selection, based on social status and psychological fitness. She openly admits that the high costs caused by IVF treatment,

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid.

<sup>532</sup> Lucy Bond, ‘Types of Transculturality: Narrative Frameworks and the Commemoration of 9/11’, in: Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson (eds.), *The Transcultural Turn*, pp. 61-80.

<sup>533</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>534</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*, pp. 189ff.

<sup>535</sup> See for example Lucy Bond, ‘Types of Transculturality’; Dirk Moses and Michael Rothberg, ‘A Dialogue on the Ethics and Politics of Transcultural Memory’; Dirk Moses, ‘Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Other Genocides?’.

half of which have to be covered by the patients, contribute to a form of “soziale Auslese”, which she welcomes because this practice “erleichtert” her work (*Q*, 192). She also introduced a “System von Labilitätspunkten” (*Q*, 194f.) to minimise the drama that usually follows a failed treatment. She has divided her female patients into three groups – robust and optimistic, average, and unstable – and proceeds by notifying the ‘weak’ ones first, “dann hat sie es hinter sich” (*Q*, 195). Guttman’s deployment of such selective measures fits in with her own equation of her work with practices of “Zucht” which necessarily produce “Ausschuss” (*Q*, 197), suggesting a re-emergence of Darwinist thinking. This does of course not mean that Heike Guttman is an advocate of Nazi eugenics; rather, the text makes a subtle comment about the ways in which certain domains of present-day society (such as for example the realm of reproductive medicine) unwittingly resort to Social-Darwinist terminology, although Guttman herself is unable to spot these continuities. In her case, the ‘survival of the fittest’ and the right to reproduce have become dependent on economic status and psychological suitability. She herself admits that these requirements favour a certain, white and ‘biodeutsche’ clientele. Guttman’s judgements are further questioned by her racist and stereotyping remarks about “Aufstiegstürken” (*Q*, 182), a “undeutsch temperamentvolle Ambulanzärztin” she once encountered (*Q*, 203), or her American dinner guests who should be handled with care: “[M]anchmal sind sie Vegetarier oder Juden, aber danach kann man ja vorher schlecht fragen” (*Q*, 205). Evidently, the omnipresence of the Holocaust signifier has not eradicated existing mechanisms of stereotyping and racism. I want to argue that this is what Menasse’s criticism of the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall” is aimed at: the universalisation of the Holocaust as an ethical and moral benchmark does neither help to prevent future conflicts (as is shown in the Nelson-chapter) nor does it contribute to a more cosmopolitan, neighbourly approach towards the Other. Menasse’s assessment points back to Vladimir Vertlib’s *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* which also calls into doubt the integrative potential of institutionalised Holocaust remembrance, which fulfils a redemptive function for Germany’s collective psyche while leaving certain mechanisms of exclusion and Othering untouched.

Chapter six of *Quasikristalle* centres on the unrealised love affair between Xane and the foreign politician Nelson. Nelson, who lost his entire family in a nameless civil war, is an internationally renowned politician and media personality at the time Xane meets him, working for the *International Criminal Court* in The Hague. Nelson’s

traumatised mind keeps recalling the image of a “großen, sternförmigen Blutleck an der Hausmauer, der wohl zum Großteil von seiner Frau und dem jüngsten Kind stammte” (*Q*, 223). This harrowing image can be read as an illustration of “multidirectional” or “palimpsestic” memory, as the star-shaped stain superimposes the violence Nelson has experienced with a key symbol of anti-Semitic oppression and persecution, the yellow star. The Nelson-chapter underscores how Holocaust memory informs other discourses in a “multidirectional” fashion, particularly the public perception and collective processing of other instances of extreme violence.<sup>536</sup> Holocaust memory, in the Nelson-segment, is therefore present solely through its after-effects and re-contextualisations in two key areas: the iconisation of the survivor figure on the one and the “legal legacies of genocide” on the other hand.<sup>537</sup>

Nelson’s character is used to scrutinise the iconisation of the survivor figure in the wake of Holocaust discourse. When Xane first meets Nelson, he is already an internationally renowned politician and activist, who regularly features in all the big newspapers and is a contender for the Nobel Peace Prize. Nelson is well aware of the function he fulfills in public debates and of the demands that this position places on him: “Er hatte schon früh bemerkt, dass ihn das, was geschehen war, von den anderen Menschen glatt abtrennte, nicht nur aus seiner, sondern auch aus deren Sicht. Er war der Gezeichnete, dem man aus frommen Glauben an seine bannende Wirkung zuhörte, sobald er zu sprechen begann” (*Q*, 233). Nelson is partly living testament to the atrocities he experienced, along with the possibility of survival, and partly a totem whose magic might fight off future atrocities. Such overdetermination of the survivor figure in media culture and public debate is unthinkable without Holocaust discourse and the iconisation of prominent survivor activists as Elie Wiesel.<sup>538</sup> Nelson’s attitude

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<sup>536</sup> However, this multidirectionality also unfolds on a more personal level: as a survivor, activist, and public persona, Nelson acts as the mirror-image of the other central survivor figure in the book, Eli Rozmburk. While Rozmburk remains silent throughout the novel, we get an insight into Nelson’s traumatised mind. Although Rozmburk’s trauma is not directly accessible for the “generation after”, it is communicated in a displaced form through Nelson’s experience. Indeed, many of the issues addressed in the Nelson-chapter – such as the biographical and psychological rupture represented by trauma, the problems of public (mis-)recognition of mass atrocities, and their historical and legal processing – are likely to have shaped Rozmburk’s life. This substitutional relationship between the two survivors therefore ties in with the topic of the “Ersatzmann”, which is important for the Bernays-chapter.

<sup>537</sup> This is the title of a conference held at the *American University of Paris* in October 2016, for further information see: <<https://www.aup.edu/news-events/events/2016-10-21/legal-legacies-genocide-nuremberg-international-criminal-courts>> [accessed: 6 October 2016].

<sup>538</sup> A recent international conference was dedicated to this rise of the “survivor” in contemporary discourse, see Anke Kalkbrenner, Review of ‘*Survivors. Politics and Semantics of a Concept*’, *H-Soz-u-Kult*, *H-Net Reviews*, June 2015 <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=44591>> [accessed: 25 April 2016].

toward this quasi-religious role is ambivalent: while his prominence ensures that his and other survivors' voices are heard – which was emphatically not the case in the immediate aftermath of the events – it also forces him to withhold certain aspects of his personality in public. He is famous and well-respected for what he represents in public discourse – his totemic quality – and is thus under constant pressure to perform a neatly prescribed role, slipping into what he describes as his “Außenhaut” (*Q*, 225) whenever he is among other people. His position also means that he can show no signs of weakness in public, as this would compromise his image as a monument of resilience and survival: “Aber er selbst musste vital wirken, unverdrängbar” (*Q*, 220). This split between the public and the private Nelson becomes most apparent in his relationship with Xane, which is intimate, personal, and playful when they are in private but becomes formal and distanced as soon as they have an audience.<sup>539</sup>

The rise of the survivor figure in modern culture is of course aided by the mass media, which remediate and popularise certain stories to the extent that they become iconic. Nelson's relationship with the media is strained; he reproaches them for operating with sensationalist and simplifying “vorgefertigte Bezugsrahmen” (*Q*, 225) which do not recognise the complexities of his and other people's stories of survival. This choice of words is reminiscent of the critical tone ringing through the Bernays-chapter, and a similar sense of fatigue permeates some of Nelson's observations. Shortly after he meets Xane, Nelson gets involved in a major trial at The Hague, which concerns one of the main perpetrators responsible for the war crimes that wiped out his family. While he and other survivors follow this trial with mixed feelings – they want justice, but at the same time they know that the proceedings could be potentially re-traumatising – the media simply exploit the case:

Ihre Geschichten in den internationalen Zeitungen waren nicht zu übersehen, und nicht die blutigen Schlagzeilen, mit denen man diese Geschichten versah. Am wenigsten zu übersehen war das Foto dieses Mannes, dem Nelson nie selbst begegnet war. Es schien nur ein einziges zu geben, das klein und groß, schwarz-weiß und bunt gedruckt und gesendet wurde. Die Eintönigkeit der immergleichen Aufnahme war eine Qual für sich (*Q*, 219f.).

Nelson is tired out by the ubiquity and endless repetition of the same image, which

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<sup>539</sup> This split is also obvious for the reader, who has access to Nelson's thoughts and feelings which reveal a side of him that is usually hidden. Menasse's novel, or novelistic discourse more generally, is therefore established as a more intimate counter-discourse to the public, highly mediated discourse that normally surrounds Nelson.

keeps confronting him with the man responsible for the crimes that killed his family. This pictorial excess weakens the indexical power of the photograph to the extent that it no longer refers to an exterior reality, creating what Sontag described as “surfeit of images”.<sup>540</sup> Nelson is also repelled by the sensationalism of the press which manifests itself at various points: when, at a later stage of the trial, Nelson faints in the courtroom, the press reads this as a reaction to the “Anblick der Bestie” (*Q*, 225). This turns Nelson into an absolute victim with no agency, while also perpetuating problematic notions of perpetration. The Nelson-chapter thus critically examines the discourses and medial conventions that have developed in the wake of a globalised culture of Holocaust remembrance, by demonstrating how the hypermediation of the Holocaust has contributed to an extreme iconisation of the survivor figure in contemporary culture. Menasse’s novel questions the effects of this iconisation, which favour a quasi-religious cult around the survivor figure, while also highlighting the responsibility of the media and certain journalistic practices in this process, which are portrayed as reductive and sensationalist.

Menasse’s text considers not only the medial and cultural, but also the legal after-effects of the Holocaust, which explains the importance of the trial and the *International Criminal Court* in the Nelson-chapter. The fact that the war crimes Nelson has experienced are subject to a legal investigation in The Hague clearly evokes the Holocaust. It is a widely-held view that the moral shock caused by the Nazi-persecution and extermination of the Jews gave rise to the so-called “human rights revolution”,<sup>541</sup> which propelled the development and implementation of international human rights law and international criminal law. The Nuremberg trials were a milestone in the context of international criminal law, although the trial’s concentration on crimes against humanity, which could only be committed in the context of aggressive warfare, hindered the persecution of the crime of peacetime genocide. The *Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* was adopted in 1948 to enable the legal persecution of wartime and peacetime genocidal acts.<sup>542</sup> All three offences – war crimes, crimes against humanity

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<sup>540</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 94.

<sup>541</sup> This is a term coined by Thomas Buergenthal, see Thomas Buergenthal, ‘International Law and the Holocaust’, *Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff International Lecture*, 28 October 2003 <<https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20050428-buergenthal.pdf>> [accessed: 5 October 2016].

<sup>542</sup> The legal history of the concept of genocide is explored by William A. Schabas, ‘The Law and Genocide’, *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 18 September 2012

and genocide – are currently under the jurisdiction of the *International Criminal Court* which is thus in more than one way implicated in the (after-)history of the Holocaust. The prominence of the ICC trial in the Nelson-chapter therefore raises questions about the “legal legacies” of the Holocaust, by asking whether the tools that have been installed ever since the Second World War do really serve their main purpose – bringing justice and preventing future genocides. *Quasikristalle* arguably adopts the perspective that the legal proceedings at The Hague can only partly address the injustice at stake. The Nelson-chapter shows that while the trial may well bring recognition and justice, the price the survivors pay in the judicial process is high: Nelson is completely drained by the proceedings which attack his “letzte [...] Reserven” (*Q*, 221), and one of his best friends, who is also a survivor, ends up taking his own life because he simply cannot relive the painful past all over again. Part of the problem lies with the procedures and modes of narration that a court trial is based on. Nelson describes the time of the trial as “die zähe Zeit” (*Q*, 226), since it is based on the exact reconstruction and picking apart of every single detail in the process of uncovering reliable evidence. However, in the eyes of Nelson this evidence is extremely difficult to obtain, due to the nature of the crime:

Aber diese Eruptionen soll man anschließend so detailliert untersuchen wie die vollständigen Flugbahnen aller Einzelteile einer Granate? Man bräuchte die millionenfache Zeit dafür, und selbst wenn man sie hätte, verfälschte ihr Vergehen die Wahrheit in einem tieferen Sinn. Der Scherge weiß es selbst nicht mehr, bei all dem Adrenalin, das in ihm pochte, aber der Zeuge muss es wissen, wer zuerst umgebracht wurde, das Kleinkind oder die Großmutter. Und er muss beweisen, dass er es aus seinem Versteck so genau sehen konnte (*Q*, 226).

The court trial requires analytical modes of narration that are predicated on cause and effect and a precise and chronological sequence of events. However, Nelson points out that this is exactly not how the victims of mass atrocities experience the events. They perceive the killing as a murderous chaos and have probably blanked out substantial parts of it. The court is thus bound by a procedure which is completely alien to the subject it is investigating. This causes a clash between the modes of narration dictated by the framework of the trial and alternative approaches that reflect the victim’s subjective experience. Nelson also remarks that the legal approach can be humiliating for the victims, if they are put under more scrutiny than the perpetrators, due to their

inability to provide the reliable evidence that is required.

Thomas Buergenthal addresses the problem that criminal trials tend (and need to) focus on the individual perpetrator, leaving untouched those “societal forces that made crimes against humanity and genocide possible” in the first place.<sup>543</sup> While single perpetrators and smaller groups of instigators directly responsible for the atrocities can be put on trial and punished, the structural and systemic dimensions of genocide cannot be addressed in court. Buergenthal therefore speaks out on behalf of truth commissions which can adopt a more comprehensive angle, while also enabling different and conflicting modes of narration. Nelson himself also doubts the court’s ability: “Es gibt nichts mehr zu sagen, mir fällt nichts mehr ein, sie werden ihn verurteilen, aber juristisch wird es an einem seidenen Faden hängen, [...]. Ein Kompromiss. Für die einen zu viel, für die anderen zu wenig” (*Q*, 231). At the same time, Nelson acknowledges that the collective recognition of suffering via the court trial is essential for the victims, and a necessary step in the process of healing. Considering the “legal legacies” of the Holocaust and genocide, *Quasikristalle* therefore arrives at a mixed judgement. The forms of legislation and jurisdiction that have developed in the aftermath of the Holocaust have certainly not helped to prevent future genocides. The novel also questions whether they can fully address the injustices at stake, as the modes of narration dictated by the courtroom environment clash with the ways in which the events took place and were perceived by the victims. Menasse’s novel points to the need for a more comprehensive approach to transitional justice, although truth commissions, reparation programmes etc. are not mentioned in the text. At the same time, *Quasikristalle* asserts that, for the victims, there is nothing worse than the collective misrecognition of their suffering – so a flawed system of international jurisdiction is still better than no such system. The ICC thus emerges as an imperfect yet indispensable tool for addressing large-scale manifestations of extreme violence.

#### 6.3.4. *The Fading of Holocaust Memory?*

Menasse’s meta-memorial novel traces and fictionalises the development of Holocaust discourse from the extremes of oversaturation and repression to the transformation of the event into a free-floating signifier which is used as a blueprint in various cultural, political, and legal contexts. Menasse herself criticises the emergence of the Holocaust

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<sup>543</sup> Thomas Buergenthal, ‘International Law and the Holocaust’, p. 18.

as a travelling trauma, and I suggest that the novel *Quasikristalle* adopts a similar perspective. While the Guttman-chapter shows that the omnipresence of the Holocaust can lead to a defensive reaction, which leaves racist stereotypes untouched, the Nelson-chapter explores and problematises some of the after-effects of institutionalised Holocaust discourse – such as the iconisation of the survivor figure and the international persecution of genocidal crimes. Menasse’s novel engages with topics that can also be found in *Die Leinwand*, but offers a much more critical assessment. Although both texts highlight the inevitability of memorial de- and re-contextualisation in an age of hypermediation, Menasse’s text zooms in on the many problems that come with this.

Most of the chapters considered so far – Judith, Bernays, Tschoch, Guttman – concentrate on the (over-)presence of the Holocaust signifier and/or analogy and the characters’ reactions to this. This is not the case in the Nelson-chapter in which the Holocaust is no longer directly represented and remembered but implied via its discursive and legal after-effects. This process is taken even further in chapter 12 of *Quasikristalle* which explores the issue of geronticide. Shanti, an investigative journalist, caused an uproar with the publication of a book which uncovered the systematic killing of older people in retirement homes, either by their relatives or by staff members. Shanti’s discoveries are particularly explosive as the chapter is set in a (maybe not so) dystopian future in which the state-sponsored care system has broken down, making the mass murder of older people economically attractive for both private persons and institutions. Although Shanti has withdrawn from the public sphere in the wake of the scandal, she is sought out by a desperate man who is being hunted down for supposedly having killed his aunt Mia but asserts his innocence. He partly blames Shanti for having created an “Atmosphäre von Verdacht und Denunziation” (*Q*, 389). Shanti reluctantly agrees to help him and comes across an organisation advocating the right to die (“Sterbehilfeorganisation”) which is somehow connected to aunt Mia. While talking to her police contact, Inspector Karimi, he uses the word “Todesengel” (*Q*, 398) to describe the head of this organisation. Shanti reprimands him with the following words: “Achten Sie auf Ihre Metaphern, Herr Kommissar” (*Q*, 398), while thinking to herself: “Immer dieselben Missverständnisse und Kurzschlüsse, immer dieselben irrationalen Frontlinien“ (*Q*, 398). She rejects Karimi’s conflation of assisted dying, i.e. the voluntary decision to end one’s life with the help of others, and the forced killing of what were perceived to be inferior lives in the acts of Nazi euthanasia,

as is implied in Karimi's reference to the 'Todesengel' Josef Mengele. While Karimi's comparison is not historically accurate – Mengele was not involved in the euthanasia programmes by the Nazis – it nevertheless demonstrates how discourses around assisted dying and euthanasia are still influenced by the Holocaust comparison. The chapter also draws a parallel between the past and the dystopian future where the Nazi-concept of 'lebensunwertes Leben' seems to have re-emerged, although the notion of racial inferiority has been replaced with economic unproductivity. Shanti herself is convinced that the younger generations would not protect the old and the vulnerable: "[D]ie meisten Jüngerer [würden] die Millionen Pflegebedürftigen und Dementen insgeheim am liebsten legal aus dem Weg räumen lassen" (*Q*, 389).

The Shanti-chapter imagines a future in which direct and active Holocaust memory has completely vanished. 'Memories' of the event have become indirect, ghostly, and completely decontextualised. The Holocaust is merely invoked on the level of metaphors and associations – as an emblem of absolute evil and inhumanity – but Karimi's inaccurate reference to Mengele demonstrates that any sound historical knowledge of the event has vanished. At the same time, *Quasikristalle* emphasises that certain issues and patterns of thinking do actually persist. While the Nelson-chapter pointed to a continuity of genocidal conflicts, the segment about Shanti demonstrates how a calculating, rationalising approach, which evaluates human life purely in terms of productivity, might cause new catastrophes in the future. The chapter furthermore underlines the persistence of racist preconceptions, when Shanti is repeatedly ostracised on the basis of her "dunkle Haut" (*Q*, 401). Menasse's novel thus arrives at a sceptical verdict in relation to institutionalised Holocaust remembrance and pedagogy. The Shanti-chapter warns us against using the Holocaust analogy as a knockout argument in contexts where it is not appropriate or even politically dangerous. Instead, we should scrutinise the underlying, structural patterns of exclusion and discrimination, which, in their persistence, link the past to the present and the future.

#### 6.4. Conclusion: "'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone" – Mapping Out the Future of Holocaust Memory

Menasse's novel is prefaced by a famous quote from John Donne's 1611 poem *An Anatomy of the World* in which the speaker mourns a world that is out of joint: "'Tis

all in peeces, all cohaerence gone/All just supply, and all Relation”.<sup>544</sup> Donne’s poem presents itself as a funeral elegy, mourning the death of Elizabeth Drury, who was the daughter of Donne’s chief patron, Robert Drury. The poem’s all-pervasive sense of melancholy and lament is seemingly caused by Elizabeth’s death, which “drew the strongest vitall spirits out” and left the world in a state of sickness and decay.<sup>545</sup> However, if one considers the lines that come directly before this excerpt, an additional layer is revealed:

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th’earth, and no mans wit  
Can well direct him where to looke for it.  
And freely men confesse that this world’s spent,  
When in the Planets, and the Firmament  
They seeke so many new; they see that this  
Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies.  
‘Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;  
All just supply, and all Relation:  
Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,  
For every man alone thinks he hath got  
To be a Phœnix, and that then can bee  
None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee.<sup>546</sup>

Linking the microcosm of Elizabeth Drury’s life and death with the macrocosm of cultural, social, and political developments, *An Anatomy of the World* then appears as a reflection on much larger shifts in society, such as the Protestant Reformation which majorly influenced Donne’s life time (the “new philosophy”) and strongly affected the Catholic poet. Coupled with other major transformations during the so called English Renaissance, these shifts will bring the end of the world as the speaker knows it, installing a new order (“Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot”). Donne’s poem can therefore be read as a skilful adaptation of the genres of the “anniversary” and the “funeral elegy” and as a poem about a time that is undergoing major transformations and perceived as out of joint.

The paratextual reference to Donne relates to the quasicrystalline structure of

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<sup>544</sup> This and the following quotes from Donne’s poem are taken from John Donne, ‘An Anatomie of the World. The First Anniversary’, in: Herbert J.C. Grierson (ed.), *The Poems of John Donne, Vol. 1: The Text of the Poems with Appendixes, Oxford Scholarly Editions Online*, 6 September 2012 <<http://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780199692378.book.1/actrade-9780199692378-div1-14>> [accessed: 7 October 2016]. For a short introduction to the genre of the “anniversary” see Graham Roebuck, ‘The Anniversary Poem’, *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 18 September 2012, <<http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199218608.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199218608-e-25>> [accessed: 7 October 2016].

<sup>545</sup> Ibid.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

Menasse's text which is also "in pieces" and lacks the coherence of a traditional biographical narrative. Yet, just as Donne's poem comments on larger cultural and social shifts of his time, the issue of incoherence also concerns the depiction and development of Holocaust remembrance in the novel. With the disappearance of the survivor generation, a certain type of coherence is irrevocably lost. This is already demonstrated in Menasse's previous novel *Vienna*, in which the dying out of the survivor generation causes a breakdown of the family frame (and novel), giving rise to a multiperspectival final chapter of the book. This pluralisation of perspectives is continued in *Quasikristalle*, in which various stages and modes of Holocaust remembrance co-exist. The reader encounters the repression of memories alongside the oversaturation caused by a completely ritualised culture of Holocaust remembrance. We witness the increasing decontextualisation of the Holocaust signifier and the eventual disappearance of personal and collective memories of the event. The Holocaust is portrayed as a private and familial memory, but features much more prominently in the guise of various after-effects, which include its transformation into a ubiquitous "floating signifier" or a universal moral touchstone. Gone is not only the coherence of an era of remembrance dominated by first-hand accounts, family narratives and clear messages, such as "Never Again" – Menasse's text also stresses that the cohesive power of some of the central paradigms of Holocaust remembrance has exhausted itself: this not only concerns the family novel as a specifically artistic paradigm but also the future of Holocaust pedagogy and its reliance on shock and affective approaches to the past. The Bernays-chapter shows that the shock of concentration camp images does not elicit affect but its opposite: numbness and fatigue. At the same time, Menasse's text is wary of the extreme decontextualisation of the Holocaust signifier: *Quasikristalle* targets what Menasse herself describes as the "Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall", i.e. the universalisation of the Holocaust as a moral benchmark and ethical touchstone. Her criticism is based, at least in part, on the insights that the proliferation of Holocaust memory may actually distract attention from ongoing instances of racist prejudice, genocidal conflicts, and the devaluation of human lives.

*Quasikristalle* thus explores the last 35 years of private and collective Holocaust discourse in a meta-discursive manner, while also considering its future. The novel at some point leaves behind the past and the present and moves into the middle of our current century, i.e. the future. This future will be determined by the fading of personal

and collective Holocaust memory (consider the Shanti-chapter), but does this also mean that there is no future legacy of the Holocaust? While Menasse's novel challenges the usefulness of a further increase in mnemonic activity, the text does not advocate forgetting as a viable alternative. Rather, *Quasikristalle* advocates a shift in perspective towards what Michael Rothberg calls "implication" or "implicated subjects".<sup>547</sup> Rothberg proposes a concept of historical responsibility that responds to the increasing historical distance to events such as the Holocaust:

I use the deliberately open-ended term 'implication' in order to gather together various modes of historical relation that do not necessarily fall under the more direct forms of participation associated with traumatic events, such as victimisation and perpetration. Such 'implicated' modes of relation would encompass bystanders, beneficiaries, latecomers of the postmemory generation and others connected 'prosthelytically' to pasts they did not directly experience [...]. These subject positions move us away from overt question of guilt and innocence and leave us in a more complex and uncertain moral and ethical terrain [...].<sup>548</sup>

The focus on direct, personal involvement and the victim-perpetrator-divide – categories that apply less and less to present and coming generations – is replaced with a systemic approach by Rothberg, targeting "the *conditions of possibility of violence* as well as its lingering impact and suggests new routes of opposition [my emphasis]".<sup>549</sup> In keeping with this, *Quasikristalle* seems to call for a transition from memorial oversaturation and the dangers of analogous thinking to an exploration of the "conditions of possibility of violence" that link the Holocaust to present and future histories of violence. By showing us how certain patterns of exclusion, Othering, and rationalisation – epitomised in the novel's mention of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the possibility of future genocides (Nelson), the return of eugenics (Guttman) and organised euthanasia (Shanti) – create alarming links between the past and the present, *Quasikristalle* (re-)introduces the possibility of agency: by tackling the "conditions of possibility of violence" we may be able to overcome the stagnation of the "Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall" and unproductive Holocaust comparisons.

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<sup>547</sup> This is the topic of Rothberg's next book project which has not been published yet. So far, Rothberg has published an article and a blog entry on the issue of implication, see Michael Rothberg, 'Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject' and Michael Rothberg, 'Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine', *Profession*, 2 May 2014. <<https://profession.commons.mla.org/2014/05/02/trauma-theory-implicated-subjects-and-the-question-of-israelpalestine/>> [accessed: 7 October 2016].

<sup>548</sup> Michael Rothberg, 'Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject', p. 40.

<sup>549</sup> Michael Rothberg, 'Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects and the Question of Israel/Palestine'.

## 7. Conclusion

This study analysed recent works of fiction by a range of contemporary German- and Austrian-Jewish writers, who belong to the so-called “generation after”.<sup>550</sup> It centred on the question of how these authors depict and relate to the Nazi past and the Second World War in the face of major shifts in Holocaust memory since the turn of the millennium. The disappearance of the survivor and eyewitness generation entails the transition from first-hand memories of the war period to an increasingly mediated and ritualised cultural memory of the events. This transformation intersects with larger changes in Holocaust memory in the last 15 years which have been characterised by the re- and hypermediation of Holocaust memory and the emergence of a global *Erinnerungskultur*. Memories of the Nazi past and the Holocaust are no longer discussed within an exclusively national framework but on a “transnational” or “transcultural” scale.<sup>551</sup> Such approaches trace the transformation of the Holocaust into a universalised memory emblem that intersects with a variety of discourses, histories, and memories.<sup>552</sup> Embedded in dense networks of plurimedial and transnational exchange, the Holocaust has thus emerged as a “floating signifier”.<sup>553</sup>

The altered shape of Holocaust memory in the age of remediation necessitates new ways of relating to the event: in recent years, the notion of postmemory has established itself as the central aesthetic and theoretical category that promises to illuminate the transition towards a (hyper-)mediated memory culture. Offering an in-depth appreciation and critique of this concept, I argued that, in spite of its broad applicability to family novels, it does not adequately capture the ongoing re-calibrations, renegotiations and remediations of Holocaust memory. This is so because postmemorial discourse foregrounds the *familial, biological, and psychological transmission* of trauma, which is imagined as a form of contagion. I explored and problematised the genesis and implications of this contagion paradigm in Hirsch’s work, tracing it back to the post-structuralist trauma theory of Cathy Caruth. I then showed that the biologising and psychologising concept of contagion is at odds with

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<sup>550</sup> Efraim Sicher, “‘Tancred’s Wound’”.

<sup>551</sup> See for example Stef Craps and Michael Rothberg, ‘Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory’; Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*; Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter*.

<sup>552</sup> This is the focus of Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* and Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*.

<sup>553</sup> Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, p. 99.

contemporary representations of the Holocaust, which highlight the *cultural mediation* of memory and trauma. It is therefore necessary to complement the notion of postmemory with alternative concepts, such as “remediation” and “travelling trauma”,<sup>554</sup> which contribute to a theory of cultural trauma that tackles the interplay between trauma, media, and mediatisation (“remediation”), while also highlighting the (political) re- and decontextualisation of traumatic memories in a global age (“travelling trauma”). I have demonstrated how this focus on the *cultural mobility of trauma and the Holocaust signifier* opens up new pathways in Holocaust (literature) research that go beyond the pathology of traumatic contagion or aporetic notions of unspeakability: the texts under consideration transcend the confines of the family frame and novel, by focusing on cultural dynamics of memorial adoption and/or appropriation, be it via practices of intertextuality or “affiliative” postmemory. They also tackle the hypermediation of Holocaust memory, by re-configuring the notion of authenticity or by problematising the nexus between medial oversaturation and empathy. Finally, they engage critically with the global omnipresence of the Holocaust emblem and the politics of trauma that emerge from this.

My analysis of Benjamin Stein’s novel *Die Leinwand* concentrated on the transmedial migration of Holocaust memories in the age of remediation. I based my reading of Stein’s novel on a reconsideration of the Wilkomirski affair, arguing that Wilkomirski’s fake memoir *Bruchstücke* needs to be interpreted as a successful example of remediation: Wilkomirski’s text recycled the rhetoric, tropes and conventions of the Holocaust memoir and the genre of testimony which had been popularised in the wake of post-structuralist trauma theory. By adhering to these patterns, *Bruchstücke* created an ‘authenticity effect’. The dynamics of remediation link the Wilkomirski affair to Stein’s novel, which represents the Holocaust as a hypermediated and boundlessly mobile signifier which can be adopted and appropriated at will. This leads to an abandonment of the concept of the authentic Holocaust witness and revaluation of the Wilkomirski affair in the novel, which propagates a radically subjective notion of ‘truth’. Stein’s text presents these acts of memorial adoption and appropriation as inevitable consequence of the hypermediation of Holocaust memory, and does not consider the broader ethical issues at stake, as is for example the case in Eva Menasse’s *Quasikristalle*. Stein’s text moves away from

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<sup>554</sup> See Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (eds.), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*; Terri Tomsy, ‘From Sarajevo to 9/11’.

the notion of unspeakability and representational appropriateness to questions of memorial property, while also abandoning the framework of familial Holocaust memory. The self- and meta-reflexive potential of Stein's text is undermined by its masculinist conceptions of Jewishness and its turn to folklore in search for (a renewed) authenticity.

The concern with masculinity and post-Holocaust Jewish identity connects Stein's novel to Biller's novella *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* which reconceptualises notions of transgenerational Holocaust memory. Biller's text also moves away from the biological family as a carrier of memory, by constructing intertextual genealogies that draw on the works of the imaginary father figure Bruno Schulz and Eastern European Jewish writing traditions more generally. I argued that Biller uses these intertextual relationships to play out and ward off an "anxiety of influence" that relates to his position as a Jewish writer in post-war Germany: he cannot positively identify with the influence of German 'perpetrator' culture while at the same time being cut off, historically and geographically, from vital Jewish writing traditions. Biller's novella uses the character of Bruno Schulz, who imagines a sadomasochistic relationship between himself and the German writer Thomas Mann, to act out this conflict. *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* emphasises that falling into the traps of German 'perpetrator' culture and poetics, epitomised by Thomas Mann, will end badly for the Jew. Biller's text therefore uses Schulz's pre-Holocaust fantasy about German-Jewish relationships as sexual perversion to express a post-Holocaust consciousness, marked by the unavoidability of the "negative Symbiose".<sup>555</sup> Biller's textual relationship with various literary heritages thus combines highly (self-)reflexive techniques with an aggressive appropriation of the figure of Bruno Schulz; this underscores that the postmemorial relationship is not necessarily an ethical one.

My analysis of Vladimir Vertlib's novel *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* remained within the space of Eastern Europe; in this chapter I examined the issue of transnational Holocaust memory. My reading added another facet to the mobility of the Holocaust signifier in an age of globalised hypermediation, by investigating its geographical travels. Vertlib's novel accentuates recent shifts in memory and Holocaust studies which increasingly adopt transnational and/or transcultural perspectives: I argued that the celebratory agenda of some early theorists

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<sup>555</sup> Dan Diner, 'Negative Symbiose'.

in the field, who see transnationalism as the entryway into a cosmopolitan, borderless world and memory culture, needs to be replaced with a more reflexive, dialectical approach that takes into account the transcendence *and* re-affirmation of borders, the frictions *and* flows of memories. *Das besondere Gedächtnis der Rosa Masur* shows how the intersection of Holocaust memory with the histories of violence and victimisation in Eastern Europe does not necessarily produce understanding but conflict: the novel stages the clash between various discursive modes and memorial templates – particularly those of a German, guilt-centred culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and a heroic Soviet narrative – which are brought into dialogue via Rosa’s particular memory and story. The novel affirms the specific capabilities of the literary text to foster what I described as ‘ironic’ transnationalism – a self-reflexive concept that is able to accommodate conflicting perspectives in a dialogic manner.

Eva Menasse’s text *Quasikristalle* brings together the central themes that already featured in the other novels, by engaging with the transgenerational, transmedial and transnational travel of the Holocaust signifier in a historical perspective. I read *Quasikristalle* as a meta-memorial text, which traces various transformations of Holocaust memory in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Here Menasse moves from a concern with the genre of the family novel in her debut *Vienna* to a more multifaceted, pluralistic approach to Holocaust memory, which is captured by the poetological metaphor of the quasicrystal. *Quasikristalle* depicts Holocaust memory in a number of stages and discursive modes, which include familial and non-familial, individual and collective, psychological and cultural approaches to the past. Menasse’s text shares some of the concerns that are presented in Stein’s *Die Leinwand* – both novels thematise the boundless mobility of the Holocaust signifier in an age of hypermediation. However, while Stein’s book refrains from an in-depth consideration of the ethical issues at stake, Menasse’s novel highlights how the flood of images and remediations conjures up a crisis of empathy – her characters are unable to relate to the Nazi past beyond the level of ritual, routine or cliché, and react with exasperation or fatigue. *Quasikristalle* also resonates with the writing of Maxim Biller, which explores routes of transmission that go beyond the biological family. While Biller’s text constructs imaginary, intertextual genealogies that span several decades, Menasse’s work highlights the emergence of so-called “affiliative” forms of postmemory, i.e. forms of memorial adoption that take place outside the familial

frame. However, her novel complicates some of the assumptions that underpin the current discourse on such alternative pathways of transmission, namely the notion that they are fundamentally anti-essentialist and a suitable antidote to identity politics. *Quasikristalle* demonstrates that, although “affiliative” postmemory no longer relies on biology, it is still predicated on the strong bonds of ethnicity or a shared legacy of trauma. Finally, Menasse’s novel intersects with some of the issues negotiated in Vertlib’s writing, such as the emergence of the Holocaust as a global memory emblem. Vertlib’s text shows that a cosmopolitan culture of Holocaust remembrance is still a distant dream, as it highlights the frictions between German and Soviet approaches to the Second World War and the general failure of meta-narratives in the face of human “unfinalisability”. *Quasikristalle*, by contrast, foregrounds the ubiquity and uninhibited travel of the Holocaust signifier, which has become a blueprint for our perception of a whole range of issues. Echoing Menasse’s personal criticism of the “Post-Auschwitz-Ethik-Schwall”,<sup>556</sup> the narrative queries the productivity of this blueprint. I therefore argued that Menasse’s novel points us in a new direction in Holocaust discourse, in which the dominance of the Holocaust comparison is replaced with the notion of “implication” and a concern for the “conditions of possibility of violence”.<sup>557</sup>

So what are the new perspectives of Holocaust memory and Holocaust literature at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This study focused on how the novels under consideration broaden or even abandon the confines of the family novel and postmemorial discourse by adopting a meta-discursive approach that highlights the cultural mediatisation of Holocaust memory. While this perspective was highly productive for analysing the texts under consideration, I want to point out some other areas of interest that are likely to shape (literary) Holocaust discourse in the future:

Although gender was not the main category of analysis in this study, the intersection of (*Holocaust*) *memory and gender* seems worthy of further investigation.<sup>558</sup> I criticised Benjamin Stein’s and Maxim Biller’s (hyper-)masculine Jewish identity constructs which, in the case of Biller, carry misogynistic undertones. They clash with

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<sup>556</sup> Ulrich Wickert, ‘Auschwitz ist zu oft Bezugspunkt’.

<sup>557</sup> Michael Rothberg, ‘Trauma Theory, Implicated Subjects, and the Question of Israel/Palestine’.

<sup>558</sup> Katherine Stone has written a – soon to be published – PhD on the intersection of gender and German memory culture as well as an article on gender constructions and family narratives, see Katherine Stone, ‘The Pitfalls of Constructing a Female Genealogy: Cultural Memory of National Socialism in Recent Family Narratives’, in: Hester Bear (ed.), *German Women’s Writing in the 21st Century* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), pp. 54-72.

the more female-centred approaches to Jewish identity and history in Vertlib's and Menasse's texts, which, interestingly, rely more strongly on the genre of the family novel and oral traditions. I therefore asked the question whether there is a relation between gender constructions in the text and genre: why is it that the dynamics of family memory seem to be associated with female narrators and oral traditions, at least in the realm of Jewish literature? What kind of preconceptions about gender roles play into the construction of these narratives? It is noteworthy that the notion of the Jewish female as the guardian of family memory can be found in a range of contemporary authors, such as Eva Menasse, Katja Petrowskaja, Julya Rabinowich, Viola Roggenkamp and Vladimir Vertlib, to name a few. It also seems fruitful to scrutinise the gender politics of the concept of "postmemory" as such a little more closely, which seems to be shaped by a similar dynamic.

A second avenue concerns *the Eastern European turn in contemporary Holocaust literature*: the influx of Jews from the former Soviet Union has significantly reshaped present-day Jewish communities in Germany.<sup>559</sup> This is also reflected in contemporary Jewish literature and culture – many of the genuinely new voices in German- (and Austrian-) Jewish writing, represented, for example, by Alina Bronsky, Lena Gorelik, Olga Grjasnowa, Wladimir Kaminer, Katja Petrowskaja, Julya Rabinowich or Vladimir Vertlib, share their Eastern European origins. They contribute a range of new perspectives, which re-model the field of German-language Jewish literature: generally, the experience and memory of the Holocaust is less central for these authors, who tend to reflect more extensively on the histories of anti-Semitism and/or totalitarianism in Eastern Europe. Among the younger writers, the encounter with German mainstream society, the negotiation of different cultural heritages, and the development of a transnational (Jewish) identity is a central concern. The gender aspect is another key component of this Eastern European turn, as many of these writers are women and showcase female protagonists and life stories. These texts thus contribute to a more multifaceted image of what it means to be Jewish in present-day Germany and Austria which warrants further investigation in all its complexity.

The quest for *transnational Jewish identities* is a third line of enquiry: Jewish identities have always been transnational to an extent, as they are often-times

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<sup>559</sup> For a concise introduction into the topic see Yfaat Weiss and Lena Gorelik, 'Die russisch-jüdische Zuwanderung', in: Michael Brenner (ed.), *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart. Politik, Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2012), pp. 379-418.

diasporic, shaped by (forced) migration and various forms of travel. Transnationalism features prominently in contemporary Jewish texts, sometimes in connection with the above-mentioned Eastern European turn. The (negative) fixation on Germany, that is so prominent in Biller's writing, for example, is replaced by a more global, and multidirectional outlook which connects various (traumatic) histories and memories. A good example of this is Olga Grjasnowa's novel *Der Russe ist einer der Birken liebt*,<sup>560</sup> whose female protagonist comes to Germany from Azerbaijan and has to find her way in a new society. After experiencing a personal tragedy, she escapes to Israel where she is confronted with completely different – non-European – conceptions of Jewish identity. Her (Jewish) identity is fundamentally transnational – she speaks five different languages, has friends from all over the world and is confident that she could survive anywhere: "Ich könnte in den meisten Ländern überleben".<sup>561</sup> An investigation of transnational Jewish identities in contemporary German-language literature promises to further illuminate the broader turn towards the transnational in recent German studies-research.<sup>562</sup>

Concluding my analysis of *Quasikristalle*, I introduced Michael Rothberg's concept of "implication", which reacts to the growing historical distance to events such as the Holocaust, and suggests a move *beyond the victim perpetrator divide*. In a recent interview, Rothberg expressed

[...] dissatisfaction with our limited vocabulary for talking about historical and political responsibility for acts of violence and exploitation. We don't have a good way of talking about people who are not themselves perpetrators but who nevertheless participate in, benefit from, or 'inherit' violent histories. This is relevant to the past: how do we characterize, for example, third-generation Germans after the Holocaust? They're not perpetrators and they're not guilty of the genocide. But they're not unconnected to that past: they remain in some sense responsible for confronting Holocaust history; [...].<sup>563</sup>

Applying Rothberg's concept to the history of the Holocaust poses a number of ethical and conceptual challenges – does it highlight or collapse lines of difference? Is it really helpful to assemble perpetrators, victims, bystanders, beneficiaries, and latecomers under the homogenising umbrella term "implication"? However, I find "implication" highly useful to capture the *cultural after-effects* of the Nazi period (and other

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<sup>560</sup> Olga Grjasnowa, *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (Munich: Hanser, 2012).

<sup>561</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>562</sup> Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei and Stuart Taberner (eds.), *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Literature*.

<sup>563</sup> Eneken Laanes, 'Ethics of Historical Comparison: An Interview with Michael Rothberg', *Narrative&Memory* <<https://narrativeandmemory.com/press/>> [accessed: 20 April 2017].

instances of violence), particularly among the third and fourth generations. As argued by Rothberg, the separation between victims and perpetrators no longer makes sense for today's Germans and Jews; and neither do the concepts of guilt and innocence. Replacing these with the notion of "implication" might enable more productive forms of historical responsibility, as I have pointed out in connection with Menasse. In a forthcoming article on Katja Petrowskaja's text *Vielleicht Esther*,<sup>564</sup> I suggest that certain topographies of violence, as they are presented in Petrowskaja's writing, implicate the reader in ways that move us beyond the framework of the family and the separation between victims and perpetrators.<sup>565</sup> "Implication" might therefore allow us to truly move beyond postmemory and its conceptual baggage, as it replaces personal involvement and familial-biological ties with broader notions of historical entanglement, embodied encounter and cultural rather than biological "inheritance". The important question here is whether and how the concept of implication can be translated into the arts – how does one visualise the interlinkages proposed by Rothberg? What kind of aesthetics might emerge from this? How do we represent the Holocaust beyond the victim-perpetrator-divide?

This outlook demonstrates that German- and Austrian-Jewish writing remains an exciting and rapidly changing field of enquiry that offers a multitude of research perspectives. While the history and memory of the Holocaust remain a central concern for many contemporary authors, new perspectives are emerging which will further re-configure the aesthetic, ethical and political boundaries of Holocaust discourse and representation. More than ever, future artistic and academic engagements will have to find the Holocaust in metaphor,<sup>566</sup> as an event that is not unspeakable but in constant dialogue with other histories, memories, and traumas.

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<sup>564</sup> Katja Petrowskaja, *Vielleicht Esther*.

<sup>565</sup> See Maria Roca Lizarazu, 'The Family Tree, the Web, and the Palimpsest – Figures of Postmemory in Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*', *Modern Language Review* 113.1 (2018) (forthcoming).

<sup>566</sup> James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, p. 89.

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