“BORN INTO ABSENCE”:
TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN ANNE MICHAELS’ FUGITIVE PIECES

by

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ABSTRACT

My research draws on critical theories of trauma, specifically the concept "postmemory" (Hirsch) and the emerging concept "cultural trauma" (Alexander et al). I investigate the representation of transgenerational memory in the aftermath of cultural genocide in the Canadian Holocaust novel *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels (1996). These two models, one with polysemous and multivalent influences (Holocaust literature, visual culture, cultural memory, testimony) and one sociological, offer a sociocultural perspective from which to investigate how the individual and the collective respond to cultural trauma and articulate meaning-making for the group. In addition, I draw on the psychoanalytic frameworks of trauma studies to respond to ethical concerns arising in relation to the effects of catastrophic events on the individual and collective (Caruth, Freud, LaCapra).

Deploying paradigms from trauma studies, I focus on an undertheorized aspect of *Fugitive Pieces*—second generation member Ben, the narrator of Part II. I compare traumatic memory, grounded in the geologic and geographic landscape of the child survivor Jakob Beer, narrator of Part I, to Ben's domestic sphere. I argue that in Part II the sites of catastrophe shift from the ground of the bog, the riverbed, the shelf of limestone and relocate indoors to the "ground" of the family home. The sociological conception of cultural trauma contributes to my reading of Ben's postmemory in *Fugitive Pieces* and establishes Ben as a conduit for cultural trauma—the group's collective memory and collective identity. Ben's importance to the representation of collective suffering lies in the transmission of trauma from Ben's parents to Ben that results in his membership in the collective. Next, I include visual theorists (Barthes, Mitchell, Sontag) and speculate on the presence of the Holocaust photograph in Part II. I suggest that the Holocaust family photograph helps Ben fill in some of the narrative gaps from his past.
and distinguish his parents’ historical losses, as well as his own losses, from transhistorical absence without diminishing or negating his parents’ original traumatic rupture. Finally, following from Hirsch, I discuss the photographic postmemorial aesthetic of *Fugitive Pieces*, and I identify, in Barthes’ language, Ben’s familial *noeme* as “born-into-absence.”
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PREFACE

The most important event in my life occurred before I was born.
—Melvin Jules Bukiet, *Auschwitz: Inside the Nazi State*

I did not witness the most important events of my life.
—Jakob Beer, *Fugitive Pieces*

My parents’ past is mine molecularly.
—Ben, *Fugitive Pieces*

As they appear on the page, the above three epigraphs form an inverted pyramid and represent a distillation, or to use a metaphor more in keeping with the language of Anne Michaels, a *sedimentation* of traumatic memory, event, and history. First, let me begin with a note on the speakers and what might appear to be an unorthodox grouping and ordering of epigraphs. Jakob Beer, Jewish Polish child survivor of the Nazi genocide, and Ben, a member of the second generation, a term used to describe the children of Holocaust survivors, are the two narrators of Michaels’ Canadian Holocaust novel *Fugitive Pieces* (*FP* 1996). Melvin Jules Bukiet, a member of the second generation whose father survived Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and Theresenstadt, is a Holocaust novelist. Why, then, put these three men, one an historical person and the other two fictional characters, in conversation with one another? There are striking similarities between Bukiet’s “The most important event in my life occurred before I was born” (*Rees*) and Jakob Beer’s, “I did not witness the most important events of my life” (*FP* 17) to express the impact and aftermath of the Holocaust on their lives and on their ability to witness and mediate their own memories. These speakers represent two different generations yet the echoes of Beer in Bukiet and Bukiet in Beer muffle their generational differences. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the complex network of traumatic affect that originates with the survivor continues to sound in the second generation.
The third epigraph, “My parents’ past is mine molecularly” (280), from Ben, Bukiet’s fictional, generational counterpart, makes explicit the transgenerational nature of cultural trauma. Ben, who also did not witness the most important events of his life, events that occurred before his birth, identifies a familial and cultural inheritance, his parents’ status as Holocaust survivors, that affects his ability to form his own present and his own memories as distinct from their past and their remembrances. As children of Holocaust survivors, Ben and Bukiet describe their relationship to the experiences of their parents, experiences that Marianne Hirsch, in “Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy” (“PM”), characterizes as “so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right” (8). The distinct legacies that Ben and Bukiet inherit from their survivor parents and that Hirsch identifies as “postmemory” proves central to this paper.

My research draws on critical theories of trauma, specifically the concept “postmemory” and the emerging sociological concept “cultural trauma,” to investigate the representation of transgenerational memory in the aftermath of genocide in Fugitive Pieces. In doing so, I explore these central questions: what is postmemory? How might models of postmemory and cultural trauma enhance interpretation of Michaels’ narrative? How does the photographic image contribute to the transgenerational transmission of cultural trauma in Fugitive Pieces?

My thesis has three chapters. Chapter One links and distinguishes the theoretical models of cultural trauma and postmemory. I situate Hirsch’s work in relation to the reception of her term and the considerable scholarly discourse that postmemory continues to attract (Baer, Bos, Goertz, Gubar, Radstone, Sicher, Suleiman), including those of the second generation themselves (Bukiet, Kertzer, Rosenbaum, van Alphen). In addition to Hirsch, I draw on the psychoanalytic frameworks of trauma studies to respond to ethical concerns arising in relation to the effects of
catastrophic events on the individual and collective (Felman, Freud, LaCapra). Sigmund Freud's identification of traumatic neurosis, the compulsion to repeat, and mourning and melancholia continue to influence current psychoanalytic thought. Historian Dominick LaCapra's relational distinctions between mourning and melancholia and acting-out and working-through modify Freud's work and prove important to some of the foundational concepts in this paper, specifically postmemory. Finally, I explore Jeffrey C. Alexander's and Ron Eyerman's sociological concept "cultural trauma" and ask: what might a sociocultural conception of transgenerational trauma offer English studies?

Chapter Two moves to a consideration of this question as it relates to *Fugitive Pieces*. First, I identify the major thematic concerns from Michaels' poetry and essays—the Jewish diaspora, the ethical connections between history and memory, the geographical mapping of time and space—and I comment on the importance of this earlier work to her novel. I then turn my attention to an undertheorized aspect of *Fugitive Pieces*—the second generation survivor Ben, the narrator of Part II. Much of the critical work on the novel focuses on the principal narrator and survivor Jakob (Bentley, Cook, Coffey, Criglington, Gubar, Kandiyoti, Kertzer, Hillger, King, Manning, Whitehead, Zeitlin), whereas I locate my interest in the representation of Ben's traumatic memory. Deploying paradigms from trauma studies (Caruth, LaCapra, Laub), I compare the constitutive features of Jakob's survivor memory to that of the second generation witness Ben.

The final chapter speculates on the preoccupation with the Holocaust family photograph in *Fugitive Pieces*. I ask: what is the relationship between the representation of traumatic memory and the photographic image? What role does the photograph play in Michaels' novel? The photograph is integral to Hirsch's work on "postmemory" and I, too, include cultural
theorists who work on visual culture from outside trauma studies (Barthes, Mitchell, Sontag).

Then, deploying LaCapra’s notions of transhistorical absence and historical loss, I suggest that in Part II, the Holocaust family photograph occupies a central location and imparts a particular ethos which distinguishes the representation of survivor memory from Ben’s postmemory. Next, I suggest an imagined future for Ben that derives, in part, from his discovery of a family photograph that fills in some of the narrative gaps from his parents’ past. Finally, following from Hirsch, I discuss the photographic postmemorial aesthetic of Fugitive Pieces, and I identify, in Barthes’ language, Ben’s familial noeme as “born-into-absence.”
CHAPTER ONE

TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

In this chapter, I introduce two formulations of transgenerational trauma as represented in two distinct terms. The first term, “postmemory,” comes to us from literary critic Hirsch, while the second term, “cultural trauma,” derives from the work of sociologists Eyerman and Alexander. First, I trace the genealogy of the term “postmemory.” Second, I survey a selection of Hirsch’s scholarship: the inception of her term in relation to the work of Art Spiegelman, the implications of the term for the family photographic archive with special attention to the Holocaust photograph, and a materialist investigation of gender and postmemory. Alongside Hirsch, I discuss the multivalent approaches to trauma that inform her work (Felman, Freud, LaCapra). Third, I engage with scholars who have taken up Hirsch’s definition and application of postmemory (Baer, Bos, Goertz, Gubar, Kertzer, Radstone, Sicher, Suleiman, van Alphen). Next, I introduce Eyerman’s and Alexander’s sociological research on individual and collective suffering. Finally, together with the questions I pose in the “Preface,” I ask the following: what is the difference between Hirsch’s postmemory and Alexander’s cultural trauma? How do transgenerational memory and cultural trauma intersect and diverge? In conclusion, I suggest that Alexander and Eyerman’s sociological perspective of profound injury and collective suffering, and the intellectual and aesthetic representations that arise from the trauma process, contribute important, supplemental concepts to Hirsch’s definition and application of postmemory.
Post-memories, post-memory, postmemory

In Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography and the Holocaust (1998), contemporary art historian and cultural theorist Andrea Liss traces the origins of her term “postmemories” to her 1991 essay “Trespassing Through Shadows: History, Mourning and Photography in Representations of Holocaust Memory” where she refers to documentary photographs of the Holocaust as evoking “‘blinding post-memories’” (n2 134). Subsequently, in reference to photographic representations from the “post-Auschwitz generation” as well as the work of Art Spiegelman, Liss defines “postmemories” as “the artists’ distance from the events as well as their relation to the fallout of the experiences. Postmemories thus constitute the imprints that photographic imagery of the Shoah have created within the post-Auschwitz generation” (86). In the absence of direct experience with the traumatic event, Liss suggests, members of the second generation negotiate, through photography, “the often debilitating barriers between the past and the present” in an attempt to gain partial access to Holocaust history and memory (114).

Hirsch first takes up this term, in the singular, in her 1992 essay “Family Pictures: Maus Mourning and Post-Memory.” She has since dropped the hyphen; hence, “postmemory.” In Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (FF), Hirsch suggests that the belated transgenerational aftermath of atrocity emerges as postmemory—memory of memory—and claims that postmemory is a powerful and particular form of memory because the connection to the source occurs, not through recollection, but through an imaginative mediation and recreation (22-23.) Additionally, Hirsch distinguishes her term from Nadine Fresco’s notion of “absent memory” that describes a temporal and spatial exile from a time and place one has never occupied. In addition, Hirsch notes similarities to Henri Raczymow’s fragmented and belated memory, “mémoire trouée,” (“memory shot through with holes”) a type of absent memory that
Raczymow suggests should be preserved. However, Hirsch recalls that in her experience, at times, there were “too many stories” and “too much affect” that, paradoxically, could not fill in all of the “gaps and absences” of her parents’ lives (FF 243, 244).

Currently, Hirsch teaches at Columbia University where she is Professor of English and Comparative Literature; she also holds an appointment at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender. In recent years, she has written on visuality and gender, cultural memory, and testimony and photography. Over the course of fifteen years, Hirsch has published articles and books on literary and visual representations of the Holocaust. A portion of Hirsch’s scholarship (2001, 1999, 1997, 1992) interprets the aftermath of the Holocaust in Spiegelman’s memoir *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, a graphic novel and paradigmatic example of a postmemorial text, where the photograph, actual and depicted in cartoon drawings, is central to Spiegelman’s “imagetext,” a term she borrows from W.J.T. Mitchell to describe the spatial, temporal, visual, and verbal dimensions of memory. Hirsch tells us that the multiple layers of visual, textual, documentary, fiction, narrative, and testimony in *Maus* “lay bare the levels of mediation that underlie all visual representational forms” (FF 25; emphasis original). I suggest, further, that multiple levels of mediation underlie all representational forms; all media that concern themselves with trauma compel and resist multiple levels of mediation. In Chapter Three, I return to Hirsch’s use of Mitchell’s term as it relates to a discussion of the pre-Holocaust family photograph.

As Hirsch notes in *Family Frames*, she first formulates the idea of postmemory in relation to children of survivors, specifically the work of Spiegelman. In her earlier work on *Maus*, Hirsch confines the application of her term to the visual. In practice, she “reads” the documentary photographic inventory of the Holocaust in postmodern photographic collages, the
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and archival photographs of victims, survivors, and witnesses of the Holocaust. However, as her definition (below) demonstrates, her theoretical claims and her later work include non-visual applications. She does not restrict the term’s definition to Holocaust remembrance nor does she restrict the term’s relevance to the Holocaust (FF 22). While Hirsch concedes that her term may be useful to describe the second generation memory of other cultural and collective traumatic events she does not suggest, in her early work, that postmemory may be useful for non-visual aesthetic representations of those events (FF 22). Here’s how Hirsch defines postmemory:

In my reading, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. This is not to say that memory itself is unmediated, but that it is more directly connected to the past. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up 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 neither be understood nor recreated. (FF 22)

In this sense, postmemory is a particular form of cultural memory produced by collective or cultural trauma. The multiple layers of mediated recollection, past and present, self and other, individual and collective, draw on and contribute to the formation of collective memory.
In *Family Frames*, Hirsch moves from an examination of aesthetic representations and the various types of archival Holocaust photographs mentioned above and extends her inquiries to the family photograph and the family photographic album. Hirsch posits the family snapshot and family portrait as the family’s primary means of self-representation and memorialization, suggesting that these types of photos connect private memory to collective memory and to history. Utilizing Felman’s term, “breaking the frame,” from “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching,” which Felman uses to describe a critical “dissonance” that occurs when the “frame” changes from the textual to the visual, Hirsch claims that, in *Maus*, Spiegelman figuratively and literally “breaks the frame” when he introduces three archival family photos into his graphic narrative (29-31). In cartoon drawings, Spiegelman depicts Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Poles as pigs, Americans as dogs, and the French as frogs. These cartoon characters (aesthetic depictions) act as polar opposites to the three family photos he includes of his mother, his never-met ghost-sibling Richieu, and his father.¹ This visual and narrative dissonance, the pastiche of cartoon drawings and family photographs, affords additional opportunities to read the gaps and fractures, the margins, and the alternate stories of the Spiegelman family. As Hirsch demonstrates, family photographs and cartoon drawings of family photographs play a pivotal role in Spiegelman’s depiction of memory and postmemory and in his expression of mourning and melancholia. The three family photos overlap, disrupt, and intrude upon the borders of the cartoons while the introduction of the alternate “human” dimension into the animal ménage adds a forensic evidentiary dimension that unsettles the narrative and compels ethical questions.

In “Projected Memory,” Hirsch further defines postmemory as “not an identity position, but a space of remembrance, more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely
individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification, and projection” (8-9). To ensure that the postmemorial space of remembrance does not “annihilate[d] the distance between self and other,” Hirsch calls upon Kaja Silverman’s use of the term “heteropathic memory” as “a way of aligning the ‘not me’ with the ‘me’ without interiorizing it” (9). As Silverman puts it, heteropathic memory is an act of “identification-at-a-distance,” an empathic position in a space of remembrance that includes the self and the other (9). While Silverman’s “heteropathic memory” implies psychic distance, Hirsch’s term “postmemory” introduces temporal and spatial distance between self and other and establishes a “space of remembrance” rather than a subject position.

In accordance with her definitions from Family Frames and “Projected Memory,” Hirsch further articulates the temporal differences between survivor memory and second generation postmemory in “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory” (“SI”), establishing the space of postmemory as “an intersubjective transgenerational space of remembrance, linked specifically to cultural or collective trauma,” thus delineating an ethical relationship, no longer necessarily familial, that links the persecuted other to the person who “remembers” through an act of empathic identification (10). Hirsch engages Geoffrey Hartman’s term “witnesses by adoption” and, in a move that enlarges the notion of family and broadens the implications and applications of postmemory, Hirsch suggests that postmemory is “retrospective witnessing by adoption” (10-11; emphasis original). With this formulation of postmemory, Hirsch attempts to extend the “lines of relation and identification” established in the relationship with one’s parents beyond the family and to subsequent generations while acknowledging the need to “theorize[d] more closely” this new view of postmemory (11).
Additionally, and paradoxically, Hirsch, introduces a psychoanalytic understanding of traumatic repetition compulsion that supports a familial transmission and connects the second generation to the first: “What I attempt here,” she continues, “is a more general reading that locates repetition itself in a specifically generational response to memory and trauma”(8). The second generation occupy a space of remembrance that affords psychic distance from the original event and from traumatic repetition and provides a place from which to work through their parents’ traumatic past:

compulsive and traumatic repetition connects the second generation to the first, producing rather than screening the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly as compulsive repetition by survivors and contemporary witnesses. Thus, I would suggest that while the reduction of the archive of images and their endless repetition might seem problematic in the abstract, the postmemorial generation—in displacing and recontextualizing these well-known images in their artistic work—has been able to make repetition not an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatization (as it often is for survivors of trauma), but a mostly helpful vehicle of working through a traumatic past. ("SI” 8-9; emphasis original)

This passage makes clear that psychoanalytic conceptions of trauma and traumatic memory inform Hirsch’s scholarship and, therefore, a brief summary of these theories will be helpful in understanding her use of the term “compulsive repetition.” In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920), Freud first recognizes “traumatic neurosis” in World War I returning soldiers, classifies “the compulsion to repeat” as a defining feature of traumatic neurosis, and compares the
pathologized markers of repetition compulsion to the pathological state of melancholia (15). In his earlier work, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), Freud identifies the two conditions, mourning and melancholia, and compares the mental features of the so-called pathological state of melancholia to the "normal affect of mourning" (243). Elaborating on Freud’s conceptions of mourning and melancholia, LaCapra connects melancholia to acting-out and mourning to working-through. In "Revisiting the Historians’ Debate: Mourning and Genocide" ("RHD"), LaCapra compares acting-out to the repetition compulsion of a traumatic event and suggests that working-through could mitigate the trauma. Thus, postmemory encompasses the inheritance and transmission of cultural trauma, the relationship of children of survivors to the experiences of their parents, while at the same time attending to the re-presentation and repetition of traumatic affect across generations.

Although Hirsch often locates her theory in visual media, specifically the photograph and photographic composites, a recent article cowritten with husband Leo Spitzer, also a member of the second generation, “Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission” ("TO"), examines the process of memorial transmission in “testimonial objects” other than photographs. Hirsch and Spitzer consider questions of memory and postmemory in relation to two objects from two concentration camps: a book of recipes collected and exchanged amongst the women of Terezín and a miniature artists’ book produced by seven men and women of Vapniarka. Significantly, they investigate the role of gender in Holocaust memorial transmission and ask fundamental questions about the readability of gender in unconventional and remarkable accounts from the camps. Here, building on Barthes, they introduce their term “points of memory” to describe artistic works that express a particular generational aesthetic that emerges in the post-Holocaust era and marks them as postmemorial texts. For instance, archival
photographs in postmemorial artistic renditions often exist in altered form and "function as supplements" (245)—collages, mixed media, "imagetexts"—a bricolage of time and place, the personal and the public, historical record and cultural memory.

Thus, "Projected Memory," "Surviving Images," and "Testimonial Objects" extend the theoretical applications begun with respect to aesthetic representations from members of the second generation, notably Spiegelman, and the application of postmemory to family snapshots and portraits. Hirsch's conception of postmemory has struck a distinct chord despite her initial, self-declared hesitancy in Family Frames to use the prefix "post," which might imply "beyond memory"—not at all her intention (22). Although, as noted earlier, Hirsch traces the origins of the term to Liss, Hirsch's development of postmemory continues to capture the attention of a wide array of scholars. In the next section, I include scholars who engage with her term from Holocaust studies, English studies, and studies in auto/biography, some of whom, like Hirsch, are themselves members of the second generation.

Critical reception of postmemory

A research specialist in the Holocaust, Pascale Bos deploys "postmemory" alongside "positionality" and "personal investment" to examine the study and teaching of the Holocaust. For Bos, postmemory provides a "framework" with which to analyze the effects of the Holocaust on personal and cultural memory and on the "cultural imagination of those born after 1945" (51). While Bos accepts Hirsch's term when applied to a familial position, the application of "postmemory" to describe an extra-familial position, one not established through genealogy or culture, but instead, in Hirsch's language, "retrospective witnessing by adoption" seems, to Bos, "not sufficiently analyzed" (61). Bos asks: "Why does one choose or feel compelled to
become a ‘secondhand’ witness?” Bos argues that postmemory does not explain or resolve positionality and, further, that use of the term should not delimit an investigation of our relationship to these events. In short, Bos fears postmemory may lead to a personal and sentimental appropriation that occludes historical context. Thus, she brings the problematic subject of inappropriate over-identification to the fore of her argument.

Mother-daughter coauthors Elizabeth R. Baer and Hester Baer also examine postmemory in relation to positionality in an attempt to explore issues pertaining to gender, memory, and the Holocaust and to “problematize discourses of authenticity and legitimacy” (75). Aware of her “long involvement” in Women’s Studies and of her desire to find a “space” in the contested field of Holocaust Studies from which to speak authentically, E. Baer posits that “postmemory moves a scholar from margin to center. Second generation scholars can claim legitimacy, inside knowledge, and insight unavailable to those not of the second generation” (81). However, E. Baer’s English translation of a distant family member’s memoir places her in uneasy proximity to a victim of Nazi oppression whose ideologies she finds distasteful. Despite the author’s persecution and confinement to a concentration camp, Baer finds the memoir “filled with nationalist sentiment, racist and antisemitic stereotypes, and a blatant attitude of superiority over her fellow inmates” that evokes an uneasy identification with the distant relative (83). Baer’s own disquieting postmemorial location points out the complex issues that Susannah Radstone highlights in “Social Bonds and Psychical Order: Testimonies.”

Radstone analyzes an oversight in Hirsch’s scholarship that results in, as she puts it, “identifications with pure victimhood” (59). Radstone recuperates Freud in an effort to reread Hirsch’s postmemorial aesthetic through a psychoanalytic lens that doesn’t lose sight of three important aspects of Freud’s work: fantasy, the unconscious, and present conditions. She
complicates the subject positions ignored by Hirsch’s reading of the iconic *Stroop Report* photograph in Jaroslaw Rymkiewicz’s *The Final Station: Umschlagplaz*, claiming Hirsch misses an opportunity to fully deploy an ethical postmemorial aesthetic and she criticizes Hirsch’s inability to extend the generational transmission of her postmemorial aesthetic beyond the limits of ethnicity or family. As noted above in the discussion of Hirsch’s “Surviving Images” and the criticisms from Bos, Hirsch does extend her concept to include an extra-familial position, with the admission that, in this regard, postmemory needs to be “theorized more closely” (11). Radstone, though, claims that Hirsch ignores the subject position of the soldiers in the photograph. She points out that Hirsch fails to interrogate, through fantasy and the unconscious, the position of the child in relation to the perpetrators. Radstone implores us not to ignore the capacity for all humans to engage in dehumanizing acts and to use this potential point of identification with the perpetrators to facilitate a working-through of an historical atrocity. Anticipating her critics, she reminds us that humans have already imagined and enacted the unspeakable (here she invokes Primo Levi with whom she opens) and our legacy is that we must continue to speak about and work-through these limit-events.

Radstone argues for the recuperation of lost opportunity in Hirsch’s “interpretive framework of testimonial witnessing” that relies upon a relationship between text, history, and memory, while excluding fantasy, thereby eliding any possibility of identifying with the soldiers (64). Hirsch’s reading of the *Stroop Report* photograph, Radstone continues, renders the soldiers and the narrator’s relationship to them “totally invisible” (65). As Radstone puts it: “an artwork’s ethical *value* lies in its capacity to move its spectators through fantasy identification with perpetration as well as with victimhood” (65; emphasis original). In this regard, she advocates for the working through of a position of possible “presumptuousness” that can lead to “self-
righteousness” rather than, as her critics might suggest, the blurring of distinctions between perpetrator and victim: “Heteropathic identification with perpetration as well as with victimhood – ‘it could have been me but it wasn’t me’ – might mitigate this self-righteousness” (65-66) and recognize moral ambiguities that exist in Levi’s “grey zone” [sic]. Mapping the gray zone, in The Drowned and the Saved, Levi notes, “the harsher the oppression, the more widespread among the oppressed is the willingness, with all its infinite nuances and motivations, to collaborate: terror, ideological seduction, servile imitation of the victor, myopic desire for any power whatsoever, even though ridiculously circumscribed in space and time, cowardice, and, finally, lucid calculation aimed at eluding the imposed orders and order” (43). Radstone’s application of the “gray zone” to Hirsch’s postmemorial aesthetic addresses, in the present historical moment, an important identificatory relationship—“‘it could have been me but it wasn’t me’”—in an iconic Holocaust photograph that might otherwise remain invisible to current and future generations, generations that extend beyond the children of survivors. Radstone’s critique accomplishes a difficult and necessary working through of an important heteropathic identificatory relationship that Hirsch’s scholarship overlooks. Hirsch’s claim, in “Surviving Images,” for postmemory as an “ethical” position, rather than a “strictly” familial position, that must be “theorized more closely,” thus invites and compels further discourse.

In “Circular Journeys and Glass Bridges: The Geography of Postmemory,” Adrienne Kertzer, a member of the second generation, wonders “how postmemory can be both specific to the experiences of the second generation and descriptive of all succeeding generations” (206). She takes up the issue of post-Holocaust generations and generational distance in Hirsch’s theory and proposes to map the temporal coordinates in the “private landscape” of postmemory as she considers the future shape of postmemory (207). For instance, how will subsequent
generations' postmemories differ from their parents' postmemories? Karein Goertz offers one configuration for the future shape of postmemory in "Transgenerational Representations of the Holocaust: From Memory to ‘Post-memory.’." Goertz brings together Caruth’s assertion that the truth of an event resides not only in the historical facts of the event, but also in the traumatic woundedness and compulsive return of the event with Hirsch’s research to focus on “narrative and emotional truth” as distinct from “actual, veridical truth” (33). The transmission of trauma operates along a continuum, posits Goertz, and reveals the lingering affect of trauma and the cycle of transgenerational delayed mourning (35). Goertz identifies, in the work of several contemporary European novelists, the anguished collective memory, dreams, and fantasies of the second generation as reflective of their parents’ traumatic experiences, experiences that occurred before their own birth yet continue to haunt them in the present. Despite some unfortunate phrasing, for instance “secondhand witnesses” (a term Bos uses as well) and “imagined trauma” (36) that serve to undermine rather than support her argument, Goertz’s suggestion that trauma transmits along a continuum provides a (possibly finite and multidirectional), configuration that resists questions of authenticity, guilt, and legitimacy precisely because of its non-hierarchical structure. Rather than a unidirectional, vertical cascade of traumatic affect, the continuum offers one possible “future shape” for the transmission of transgenerational traumatic memory in the aftermath of historical trauma.

Holocaust scholar Ernst van Alphen addresses the problematic continuities, as he sees it, between first and second generation victimhood and survivorship intrinsic to the concept “transmission of trauma” and the term “postmemory” (473). He suggests that the “discourse of transmission” problematically implies a shared victimhood and survivorship between the generations. Instead of fundamental differences, these two concepts, “second generation” and
"transmission of trauma," establish continuities that bridge the experiences and memories of the first and second generation and contribute to "an erosion of the term 'survivor'" (486, 477). His critique emphasizes the indexical relationship of memory to (traumatic) event: "the person whose memories it is has lived the past," and thus, suggests van Alphen, "postmemory is fundamentally different from memory" (474). The inclusion of the word "memory" implies an "indexical connectedness" for postmemory that does not exist (486).

Arguing that an event is traumatic when the "symbolic order" fails to provide coherent frames of reference with which to establish meaning-making, a split exists between the nature of the event and the available means of representation, van Alphen presents children of survivors as growing up with an "inconsistent or diffuse" symbolic order (488, 482). Simply put, he posits a radical "dis-connection" between the first and second generation. However, van Alphen's critique of "transmission" assumes an unbridgeable gap between individual and collective memory. An important contemporary text from cultural sociologist Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember, explicitly points out that older group members develop systems of communication to transmit memories to younger members and that these systems often persist through "acts of transfer" that involve commemorative ceremonies, rituals, and bodily practices (39). Connerton provides an account of how memories are transmitted and posits memory as a cultural, rather than individual, faculty and accounts for the importance of social groups to the formation and recollection of recent and distant memories. The word "transmission," in van Alphen's delimited interpretation, assumes fluidity and coherence and precludes any possibility of a distorted, altered, partially audible and, at times, inaudible transmission. Hirsch clarifies that postmemory is not a matter of "simple retraumatization" ("SI" 9) and her key definitional
terms—belated, mediated, and displaced—characterize the complex, often fractured, relationship between the Holocaust survivor and those who come after.

As some scholars note, Hirsch fails to sufficiently and rigorously define the notion of “generation” in her term postmemory (Bos, van Alphen). Certainly the broader definition and application for postmemory that extend beyond the family (“SI” 8-9), raise questions that Hirsch doesn’t address in this essay: what happens to the notion of “deep personal connection” in Hirsch’s original formulation? (FF 22). How might a reconceptualization of postmemory as “retrospective witnessing by adoption” account for the displacement and belatedness that characterizes the experiences of those whose dominant narratives are those of the previous generation? These aspects seem central to Hirsch’s original conception of the term and need to be more thoroughly worked out.

**Cultural trauma**

In a related yet distinct formulation of cultural trauma, distinguished sociologists Alexander and Eyerman et al build upon discussions of trauma in psychology and humanities to develop a sociological approach that encompasses, in Alexander’s terms, “compelling theoretical importance and empirical power” (CT viii). According to Alexander, cultural trauma “occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (1). In “Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African-American Identity” (“CT”), Eyerman defines cultural trauma as a rupture or tear to the integrity of a community that spans geographical distances, crosses historical generations, and affects group members long after the original moment of catastrophe.
Whereas Hirsch distinguishes postmemory from history "by deep personal connection," Alexander and Eyerman point out the importance of the socio-political institutions at work in the construction of cultural trauma that contribute to the vexed historical lineage of collective suffering. Together, these two models, one sociological and one multi-inflected, offer a sociocultural perspective from which to investigate how the individual and the collective represent the profound injury to the collective, how they shape and broadcast their narratives about the cultural crisis, and how they articulate meaning-making for the group.

In "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma" ("TTCT"), Alexander presents the theoretical background and outlines the social process of cultural trauma employed in the authors' common approach. According to Alexander, cultural trauma is an "empirical, scientific concept" that breaks new ground in the sociology of trauma (1). Alexander identifies and illuminates ethical considerations and responsibilities that cultural trauma compels at civic and national levels. The failure of communities to identify the cause of traumas and accept responsibility for the suffering of others, he argues, reflects a social group's failure to achieve social "solidarity" and results in members suffering alone (1). This type of empirical approach, however, implies an objectivity, accuracy, and meticulousness that is never fully achievable or perhaps desirable. Additionally, his empirical method tends to rely upon a critique of Western nations and foregrounds a Eurocentric view of collective suffering without paying enough attention to non-Eurocentric nations, while assuming sameness across cultures.

Alexander points to the everyday language of trauma that currently operates in social groups and, concomitantly, to the "sense of strangeness" in trauma, important in his view, to a sociological understanding of traumatic events as socially constructed rather than as naturally occurring phenomenon (2). Alexander objects to reductionist conceptions of trauma that
emphasize physical symptoms as material proof that traumas exist while eliding the social and cultural conditions that contribute to the occurrence and recurrence of catastrophic events. With this view in mind, he takes issue with Enlightenment and psychoanalytic approaches to trauma and claims these approaches promote a “naturalistic fallacy” whereby “the power to shatter—the ‘trauma’—is thought to emerge from events themselves” (2). The disruption in meaning for the individual and the collective, Alexander suggests, “is not the result of an event but the effect of a sociocultural process” that disrupts social systems and power structures and transforms social crises into cultural crises (10). Collective traumas emerge as the result of an “acute discomfort,” a threat to the community’s sense of who they are as a social group, at the “core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity” and he identifies the “‘trauma process’” as “the gap between event and representation” (10). Importantly, Alexander views these representations as “claims” and suggests that these members’ representative claims begin the process of the cultural construction of trauma. Drawing on Max Weber, Alexander posits these representative members, the collective agents, as the “carrier groups” of the “trauma process” (11). Alexander’s contention that cultural trauma is an “empirical, scientific concept” attempts to distance his trauma process from theoretical (“psychoanalytic”) and, as he sees them, quasi-theoretical (“lay”) approaches that do not substantiate their theoretical claims in observed, lived experience, but remain in the realm of abstraction (1, 3, 2). He, thereby, posits practical relevance and testability as the cornerstones of his method.

The carrier group’s formulation and articulation of the narrative, their representation of their “new master narrative” (12) during the trauma process, depends upon four critical classifications and accompanying questions presented sequentially for analytical purposes rather than to suggest temporality: First, “The nature of pain. What actually happened?”; Second, “The
nature of the victim. What group was affected?"; Third, “Relation of the trauma victim to the wider audience. To what extent do the members of the audience for traumatic representations experience an identity with the immediately victimized group?”; Fourth, “Attribution of responsibility. Who actually injured the victim? Who caused the trauma?” (29; emphasis original). As Alexander notes, this conception of cultural trauma illuminates for members of a collective the source of human suffering, while these four classifications allow the social group to define moral responsibility and formulate political action (12-15).

In “Collective Trauma and Collective Memory” (“CTCM”), Eyerman explores trauma, not as experience but as “collective memory,” a form of collective remembrance of an event so profound as to “ground the identity-formation of a people” (1). In making a connection between collective experience and collective memory, Eyerman establishes a difference between “trauma as it affects individuals and [trauma] as a cultural process” mediated through various artistic expressions (1). Eyerman clarifies:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss in identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has attained some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant “cause,” its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation. (2)
Utilizing Alexander's theory of cultural trauma, Eyerman differentiates cultural trauma from psychoanalytic perspectives that, he claims, focus on psychological trauma as a direct and individual experience (3). Although Eyerman and Hirsch employ distinctly different terms, Hirsch's scholarship focuses on the deferred effects of traumatic experiences and how the memories of the first generation become the postmemories of the second generation. In this regard, she, too, describes a cultural process of mediation and representation. And, of course, a range of approaches exist within the psychoanalytic and psychological traditions from which Eyerman and Alexander distance themselves. For instance, LaCapra posits that fundamental psychoanalytic concepts that reinforce the binary between the individual and the collective always involve modes of interaction and therefore, ultimately, undermine the binary. Using mourning as an example, LaCapra asks to what extent mourning, sites of mourning, and working-through may be a collective ritual and not limited to the individual, arguing for a distinction between existential trauma (structural, psychic, shattering) and historical trauma (specific limit events), and asserts that one type of trauma should not subsume, reduce, or absorb, the other. As LaCapra suggests, we must not privilege one type of trauma: "[i]t is deceptive to reduce, or transfer the qualities of, one dimension of trauma to the other, to generalize structural trauma so that it absorbs historical trauma." And, as he suggests, his "problematic distinction," between structural and historical trauma, compels further discussion on the possible connections between the two ("RHD" 43, 44, 47-48).

Eyerman frames a collective notion of trauma that accounts for the emergence of collective identity as a response to social crisis and summarizes his understanding of this key concept:
Cultural trauma articulates a membership group as it identifies an event or an experience, a primal scene, that solidifies individual/collective identity. This event, now identified with the formation of the group, must be recollected by later generations who have had no experience of the “original” event, yet continue to be identified by it and to identify themselves through it. Because of its distance from the event and because its social circumstances have altered with time, each succeeding generation reinterprets and represents the collective memory around that event according to its needs and means. This process of reconstruction is limited, however, by the resources available and the constraints history places on memory. (15)

This conception of cultural trauma contributes an important formulation to discourses of the collective as well as to discourses of collective identity formation and representation in the aftermath of catastrophe. In this regard, he views discourse undertaken by the carrier group as a part of the process of mediation and representation. Eyerman connects collective identity formation to collective memory and suggests that “the narrative frame” of collective memory unifies the group through time and space while leaving room for individual agency and the formation of personal memory. In reference to Alexander’s notion of “carrier groups” and reminiscent of Hirsch’s claims in regard to aesthetic postmemorial representations, Eyerman delineates the centrality of these members in the articulation and representation of the claims, interests, and desires of a more widely affected community in the transgenerational aftermath of trauma (21).
He offers a detailed historical account of slavery from the period that extends from the end of the American Civil War to the Civil Rights movement and argues that as the slave past receded and the American nation entered the post-slavery period, subsequent generations of black writers, artists, and intellectuals sought new means of representation to reflect their moral, political, and aesthetic ideologies amidst an ongoing climate of racism and spiritual and material oppression and denigration. He concludes with a genealogy of “generational memory” and outlines time periods, locations, and characteristics that further define this term from a sociological, rather than a biological, perspective (12, 20). A “generation,” posits Eyerman, “requires a set of conditions beyond biological age and time of birth.” Further, “the convergence of social forces and the emergence of social movements are key to the formation of a collective consciousness which forms a generation in my sense of the term” (20). As Eyerman notes, Karl Mannheim’s “‘fresh-contact,’” the direct experience of an age specific group to an event, central to his idea of collective identity, involves a positive assessment of the function of generational remembering and forgetting in the transmission of collective memory (11).

Eyerman’s use of “generation,” within the context of cultural trauma, extends beyond Mannheim’s conception of direct experience (“fresh-contact”). In “The Past in the Present: Culture and the Transmission of Memory” (“PP”), he links collective memory and collective identity to “a theory of intellectual generations” whose members discuss, reflect upon, and mediate creative representations of their collective memories (159). Just as social groups document history in narrative and visual forms, social groups represent collective memory in narrative and visual forms in order to reflect upon and give meaning to traumatic events. Eyerman connects collective identity formation to collective memory and suggests that “the narrative frame” of collective memory unifies the group through time and space while leaving
room for individual agency and the formation of personal memory (161). Informed by social movement theory and once again drawing on Mannheim, Eyerman identifies intellectuals within specific generations, such as the civil rights movement exemplified by Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, and cites them as emblematic of their carrier group in their fight for social justice (165-66). Although Eyerman’s scholarship focuses on the cultural trauma of slavery and the impact of slavery on meaning-making and representation in the formation of African-American identity, his ideas contribute an important theoretical framework to a discussion of transgenerational survivors of the Holocaust.¹⁷

Postmemory and cultural trauma

This socially constructed view of the trauma process, although distinct from postmemory’s psychoanalytic and poststructuralist underpinnings, is not incompatible with Hirsch’s model. In Family Frames, Hirsch uses the term “postmemory” to describe the memories of the second generation, the children of survivors of a collective trauma in relation to the experiences of their parents, an interfamilial frame, and delimits the transgenerational aftermath of trauma to that of the second generation. However, Hirsch, in further theorizing postmemory in “Surviving Images,” posits a transgenerational and transfamilial model.

In an effort to theorize these models together, as I see it, postmemory defines, describes, and acknowledges one avenue in Alexander’s “trauma process” for collective meaning-making through artistic representation by members of carrier groups. As Alexander notes: “A carrier group can be generational, representing the perspectives and interests of a younger generation against an older one” (11). Just as Eyerman identifies Martin Luther King Jr. as an outstanding generational representative, a “carrier,” of the 1960s civil rights movement in the United States,
so too is Spiegelman’s *Maus* emblematic of the second generation’s intellectual contributions to “the narrative frame” and to collective memory in a post-Holocaust age (16). The intellectual and artistic aesthetic of the second generation contribute to the iconic archive of Holocaust images and narratives through a post-Holocaust reconceptualization of traumatic affect without risk of desensitization on the one hand or retraumatization on the other hand (“SI” 8-9). Alexander’s four classifications and their intended outcome, recognition of the suffering of others, and a call for political action and social justice, create “an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful and causal relationships between previously unrelated events, structures, perceptions, and actions” (1). Hirsch’s “transgenerational space of remembrance” articulates an important causal relationship and gives new meaning to the previously little understood phenomenon of transgenerational memory.

Theorizing “postmemory” and “cultural trauma” alongside one another compels a sociopsychological perspective of the intellectual and aesthetic representations of suffering, the articulations of profound injury in the aftermath of trauma, and accounts for both individual and collective phenomena without assignation of special advantage to one or the other. Alexander et al’s sociological contribution offers English studies the opportunity to theorize trauma outside of a psychoanalytic and psychological framework that privileges the individual, to view trauma as discursively constructed and historically contingent, and to investigate notions of collective suffering. As suggested earlier, cultural trauma emerges, within a community, as the result of a disruption in collective identity and represents a threat to the community’s sense of who they are as a social group. How the collective represents their profound injury, how the community shapes and broadcasts their narratives, the symbolic claims of the cultural crisis, articulates meaning-making for the group in the public sphere. *Fugitive Pieces* is one such narrative. With
these similarities and distinctions in mind, in Chapter Two, I extend Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” beyond the photograph and memorial objects that act as material traces to narrative, specifically to the contemporary Canadian novel *Fugitive Pieces*. 
Notes: Chapter One

In the first volume, Spiegelman’s earlier comic, “Prisoner on the Hell Planet,” inserted as an inter-text and inset with a family photograph of his mother at the beach, depicts a differently mediated version of his relationship with his mother and his mother’s suicide (100). In this section, we see Artie, just released from a mental institution, dressed as an inmate of Auschwitz. In the second volume, Artie’s ghost-brother Richieu haunts the text from the outset. His photo acts as epigraph, and it is through this absent relationship that Artie reveals his complex feelings for this never-met sibling. Finally, Spiegelman includes a photograph of his father Vladek in a dress-up *souvenir* prisoner uniform (clean, neat, and therefore to his liking) (134). Vladek, an obsessive man, admired the extreme orderliness of the Nazis and holds a highly problematic admiration for this aspect of camp life.

In “Postmemory, Backshadowing, Separation: Teaching Second-Generation Holocaust Fiction,” Sicher, writing about second generation authors Spiegelman and David Grossman and their paradigmatic postmemorial texts, *Maus* and *See Under: Love*, respectively, draws a similar conclusion to Hirsch and points out the attempt to give narrative coherence to their parents’ fractured past: “For both Grossman and Spiegelman, in a paradoxical double bind, writing out the trauma is to return to it, but it is also a prerequisite of working through immeasurable loss and coming to terms with the past” (271).

In establishing the new constellation of symptoms for “traumatic neurosis” and reconciling this notion with his theory of the Pleasure Principle, Freud argues, in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” that in their waking lives survivors are concerned with “not thinking” about the original traumatic event (13; emphasis original). The returning soldier who presents with traumatic neurosis “is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past” (18; emphasis original).

Freud points out that mourning and melancholia involve a reaction to the loss of an “object of love” with the distinction that melancholia involves a withdrawal of consciousness whereas in mourning there is nothing unconscious about the loss (244, 245). Further, Freud asserts that the internal work mourning requires keeps the loss conscious. The melancholic experiences “an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (246). The melancholic shifts the loss of the loved object onto their own ego and, thus, transforms normal mourning into pathological mourning--melancholia (248-50). As well, Freud details somatic and psychic disturbances that occur during the complex of melancholia, including dream disturbances and sleeplessness, and he refers to the symptom picture of this state as “like an open wound” (253). The notion of trauma as a wound to the psyche is taken up by a number of contemporary trauma theorists, notably Caruth.

In Chapter Two, I return to Caruth’s characterization of the pathology of trauma as a psychic wound when I apply her conception of traumatic memory to *Fugitive Pieces*. In Chapter Three, I return to LaCapra’s ideas in relation to the family photograph in Michaels’ novel.

25
In “Revisiting the Historians’ Debate: Mourning and Genocide,” LaCapra argues that melancholia is “characteristic of an arrested process in which the depressed and traumatized self, locked in compulsive repetition, remains narcissistically identified with the lost object. Mourning brought the possibility of engaging trauma and achieving a reinvestment in, or ‘recathexis’ of, life that allowed one to begin again” (44-45). LaCapra makes this argument for individuals and, importantly, for the collective when social rituals of mourning exist. In short, from a psychoanalytic perspective, acting-out is evidence of the compulsion to repeat.

See Gratton, “Postmemory, Prememory, Paramemory: The Writing of Patrick Modiano,” for his clarification of the prefixes “post,” “pre,” and “para” and their relationship to “an extended capacity of memory, a belief that ‘personal’ memory is not just in and of the self but can also be in and of the other” (42).

In their collaborative essay, “WHAT’S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?,” Hirsch and Spitzer note the emergence, in recent years, of “the writings and artistic productions” that incorporate archival photographs and memorial objects; interestingly, they include Anne Michaels in their brief list (237). They suggest that these artistic remembrances act as “powerful ‘points of memory’ linking past and present, memory and postmemory, individual remembrance and cultural recall” (237). Further, and importantly, these remnants “not only signal a visceral material connection to the past and carry its traces forward, but they also embody the very fractured process of its transmission” (237). Theorizing an historical and generational response to Holocaust photographs, Hirsch attempts to understand the range of affect these iconic images produce for the first and second generations as well as their effect on knowledge and memory production.

Crownshaw takes up Hirsch’s directive and focuses on the role of the photographic archive in the postmemorial relationships in Sebald’s *Austerlitz*.

van Alphen, also a member of the second generation, expresses concern that the continuity of generational memory contributes to the erosion of the terms “survivor” and “victim” with the implication that the second generation not only survive their parents’ past, but are victims too. In his opinion, the child’s traumatic experience does not consist of the Holocaust experience, but comes about as result of the parental trauma. In this regard, van Alphen objects to the term “transmission of trauma” and prefers “traumatized” (482).

Suleiman poses compelling questions about philosophical and historical theories of the concept of generations and notes social philosopher Karl Mannheim’s emphasis on “generational belonging,” the idea that the common experiences of one’s “similarly ‘located’ contemporaries” contribute to collective behaviours, attitudes, and a “common destiny” (278). Suleiman introduces her concept of the “1.5 generation” to identify those child survivors of the Holocaust who were “too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have been there during the Nazi persecution of the Jews” (277; emphasis original). Moreover, Suleiman refers to Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” and suggests that, whereas members of the second generation share an experience of “belatedness,” the memories
of the 1.5 generation are marked by an experience of “premature bewilderment and helplessness” (277).


13 See note 16 for additional commentary on the interrelatedness of individual and collective memory.

14 Although I do not discuss the relevance of the rhetorical principal stasis theory to social justice, it is worth noting that Alexander’s four stages of the trauma process bear striking similarities to the four stases with their accompanying questions. Primarily a function of forensic rhetoric, stasis theory defines and orders the questions and accounts for the manner in which issues develop in a public forum: First, conjectural: What exactly happened and who did it? Second, definitional: What was the nature or definition of the act? Third, qualitative: What is the quality of the act? Fourth, translative: What action is called for and who has jurisdiction? See Fahnestock and Carter.


16 Connerton distinguishes “social memory” from “historical reconstruction” while pointing out the important ways that historians contribute to and shape the memory of social groups through formal written histories (14; emphasis original). As well, he notes the contribution of less formal narrative histories integral to communal memory. In Imagined Communities, Anderson expands already established notions of the collective to include “imagined communities” connected through national membership. Anderson argues that a “deep attachment” accounts for individual social identification with a nation and defines the nation-state as an “imagined political community.” A nation is “imagined,” Anderson asserts, because members of the nation will never have contact with most of the other members, yet each holds an idea of what that community describes (6). In The Collective Memory, Halbwachs establishes individual memory as always conceived in relation to a group, in some sense of that word, be it ideological, political,
or generational and therefore as the outcome of a dialogic process. Although Halbwachs does not employ the terms “cultural trauma” or “postmemory,” his theory of collective memory shares some of the features of these constructs. As Halbwachs puts it, “These events occupy a place in the memory of the nation, but I myself did not witness them. In recalling them, I must rely entirely upon the memory of others, a memory that comes, not as corroborator or completer of my own, but as the very source of what I wish to repeat” (51).

17 As Gilroy points out, the term “diaspora” comes to black studies from Jewish studies and these two communities share “themes of escape and suffering” in the settings of dispersal, exile, and slavery (205). He situates a shared experience of terror at the heart of this “diasporic web” and uses the Holocaust to focus his own inquiries while reiterating that the uniqueness of the Holocaust need not undermine discourses that seek comparative discussion of black racisms and Nazi racisms.
CHAPTER TWO

TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN FUGITIVE PIECES

But I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. Rains had made the lowest parts swampy, the green melancholia of bog with its swaying carpet of pollen. I lived there with my parents. A hiding place, rotted out by grief.

—Ben, Fugitive Pieces

In this chapter, I investigate the representation of transgenerational trauma in the contemporary Canadian Holocaust novel Fugitive Pieces through an application of the two terms “postmemory” and “cultural trauma” introduced in Chapter One. First, I theorize the importance of repeated tropes and motifs in Michaels’ poetry and essays, the Jewish diaspora, the ethical connections between history and memory, the geographical mapping of time and space, and note the contributions of these earlier themes to her novel. In this discussion, I include relevant biographical details and interviews with Michaels. Next, with these theoretical and thematic concerns in mind, I turn my attention to the critical reception of Fugitive Pieces (Bentley, Cook, Coffey, Criglington, Gubar, Kandiyoti, Kertzer, Hillger, Manning, Whitehead, Zeitlin). Then, I posit Jakob as golem in order to delineate the constitutive features of traumatic memory in the novel, before turning my attention to Ben. Finally, I focus on an undertheorized aspect of Fugitive Pieces—Ben, the child of Holocaust survivors and the narrator of Part II. Drawing on psychoanalytic conceptions of trauma (Caruth, LaCapra, Laub), I compare Ben’s second generation postmemories to the traumatic memories of child survivor Jakob Beer and suggest that with Ben’s recognition of his own unhappiness he is able to imagine a future for himself.
Anne Michaels: History, memory, landscape

Throughout Michaels’ writing—poems, essays, her novel—metaphoric language operates as a threshold to philosophical issues and demonstrates her commitment to, and engagement with, entangled, complex notions of individual and collective memory, the integral and interdependent relationships of landscape and humanity, and the place of remembrance and ritual commemoration in history. Michaels’ pays particular attention to how these issues impact a late twentieth-century understanding of the Holocaust and the Jewish diaspora.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels narrates the devastating impact of the Holocaust on Jakob Beer, who, as a young boy, witnesses, from his hiding place in the wall, the murder of his parents and the disappearance of his sister Bella during the Nazi soldiers’ invasion of their home. He flees his home and homeland after Greek geologist Athos Roussos rescues him from a Biskupin bog and spirits him out of Poland to the safety of Zakynthos, Greece. Throughout Part I of the novel, Jakob crosses forest, bog, and riverbed while the “spray of buttons, little white teeth” on the floor, echo the brutal deaths of his parents. Jakob sums up the impossible burden of his familial catastrophe, saying, “I did not witness the most important events of my life” (7, 17). Michaels’ narrative produces and reproduces the memorial image of Jakob Beer’s dead parents and the spectre of his “disappeared” sister Bella. The repetition of one scene leaves a visual imprint that underscores the representation of traumatic memory as a photographic image and produces the effects and affects of an “imagetext.” Jakob’s suspended state of not-knowing what happened to Bella, his “imagetext,” haunts the child survivor and affects his quality of life, his decision-making, and his intimate relationships throughout his youth and adulthood. The impossibility of Jakob burying the remains of his dead parents and his abducted sister means that he carries his entombed family within him. The desecrated remains of his loved ones emerge in
his scarred psyche and in the scarred landscape—geologic and geographic tropes abound—as Jakob struggles to cope with his radical dislocation and loss. Through archaeological and geological places and metaphors, Michaels constructs the compressed folds of traumatic memory as vertical layers: a shelf of limestone; the silted mud of a riverbed; eskers of ash. Her narrative accumulates slippages of time, where the geologic layers of Biskupin, Zakynthos, and the Humber River in Toronto conceal memories within their strata only to toss them up later and unsettle the narrative’s chronology.

In her first book of poetry, *The Weight of Oranges* (1985), the familiar tropes of earth, time, and memory from *Fugitive Pieces* appear—layered, compressed, and inseparable. The poem “Lake of Two Rivers” demonstrates Michaels’ preoccupation, more than ten years before the publication of her novel, with these stratified figures:

We do not descend, but rise from our histories.

If cut open memory would resemble

a cross-section of the earth’s core,

a table of geographical time.

Faces press the transparent membrane

between conscious and genetic knowledge.

A name, a word, triggers the dilatation.

Motive is uncovered, sharp overburden in a shifting field. (5. 85-92)

And, as in *Fugitive Pieces*, in this earlier text, Michaels locates these thematic concerns in the Jewish diaspora. The young woman narrator from “Lake of Two Rivers” recounts her father’s
story of leaving Poland, as a boy, in 1931, told to her as a child on family vacation and her
father’s history recalls Jakob’s forced diasporic journey from Poland as a boy. Travelling to Lake
of Two Rivers in Algonquin Park, “Spirit faces crowded the windows” of the family’s Buick as
1960s suburban Toronto careens into 1930s Grodno and as they continue their family outing to
Algonquin Park the “moon fell into [the] car from Grodno” (2.15, 2.18). The narrator’s first
person voice contributes to the inseparability of past and present while this fundamental
dislocation of time and space and a refusal of historical boundaries, the spirit faces of Grodno
pressed against the ’64 Buick, remind us of Hirsch’s claim in *Family Frames* that “postmemory
characterizes the experiences of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their
birth” (22).

In this poem, Michaels represents the mother’s generational history as startlingly
different from the familial history of the exiled father, compelled to narrate his own childhood
story, years later, surrounded by spectral relatives—“Spirit faces” and “Unknown cousins” (2.15-
16). In contrast, the mother’s domestic heritage is “tangled / overgrown with lives of parents and
grandparents / because they lived in one house and among them / remembered hundreds of years
of history” (4.57-60). The mother’s history represents the normal forgettings, overlappings, and
rememberings of a family living together “in one house” sharing their memories and their
histories while the narrator/daughter, more closely aligned with her father’s stories, experiences
postmemories. The poem compares the mother’s “tangled,” narrative memory, and recalls from
*Fugitive Pieces* Ben’s family home “fetid with undergrowth” and “no energy of a narrative”
(233, 204), with the father’s traumatic memory and with the markers of transgenerational
cultural trauma in the, now, adult daughter who claims: “When I was twenty-five I drowned in
the River Neman, / fell through when I read that bone-black from the ovens / was discarded
there” (5.93-95). In this poem, personal memory, postmemory, and historical memory, paradoxically, share time and space. Her father’s boyhood memories of leaving Poland and the knowledge that many Jews were sent from Grodno, his birthplace, to concentration camps, exterminated, and their remains cast into the river, evacuate or “drown” her own memories: “I drowned in the River Neman.”

Michael’s second volume, *Miner’s Pond* (1991), continues these ruminations on memory and history as geological layers, archaeological fragments, and vertical accretions of time. As in *Fugitive Pieces*, in these poems, historical memory and personal memory are at odds with each other. Michaels resurrects the exiled and silenced European intelligentsia—Alfred Döblin, Johannes Kepler, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Lunia Czechowska, Marina Tsvetaeva, Osip Mandelstam, and Anna Akhmatova—and records their reminiscences on the page. In the section “Notes on the Text,” Michaels annotates the biographies of some of the lesser known historical personages of this disparate group, such as neuropsychiatrist and novelist Döblin, who fled Germany in 1933. They share a ruptured history and, subsequently, are scattered across Europe, Africa, and North America. She includes a global assortment of men and women who refuse consignment within national borders and whose work represents a substantial contribution to the sciences and the arts, precisely what this volume celebrates. In “What the Light Teaches,” the final poem in this collection, Michaels lauds “three of Russia’s best known modern poets,” Tsvetaeva, Mandelstam, and Akhmatova, “all [of whom] suffered under Stalinist repression.” In this poem, she represents time as pleats, folds, and layers of earth that connect her concerns for the disappeared and the dispossessed people of Europe to the stained landscape:

We also pleat time.
Remembering we learn to forget.
The kind of forgetting that stops us, one foot
in the spring soil of your farm,
the other in the mud where bits of bone and teeth
are still suspended, a white alphabet.
The kind of forgetting that changes
moonlight on the river into shreds of skin.
The forgetting that is the heart’s
filthy drain,
so fear won’t overflow its deep basin. (5.12-22)

The betrayal of person, place, and language concern Michaels as she continues to “pleat time,”
and folds together biographical persons with fictional characters.

The writing timeframe for both volumes, *The Weight of Oranges* and *Miner’s Pond*,
overlaps with the writing timeframe for *Fugitive Pieces*. In “How to Give Poetic Prose a Good
Name: Eva Tihanyi Speaks with Anne Michaels” (“ET”), Michaels comments that she first
conceived of the idea for the novel in 1980 and began the writing in earnest in 1986, which
resulted in the 1996 publication of the novel. Both poetry collections cover territory critical to
*Fugitive Pieces* and the poems anticipate the thematic concerns of the novel: World War II, the
Jewish diaspora, and geological and archaeological tropes of sedimentation and excavation that
locate personal and historical memory in the earth. The “white alphabet” of bone and teeth in
“What the Light Teaches,” recalls, from *Fugitive Pieces*, the “little white teeth” echoing the
brutal murder of Jakob’s silenced parents (6, 7). In the novel, Michaels’ concern for the betrayal
of history and language surfaces early on as Jakob emerges from the ancient site of Biskupin, “wild with deafness” and hunger: “I screamed into the silence the only phrase I knew in more than one language, I screamed it in Polish and German and Yiddish, thumping my fists on my own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew” (12-13). This early scene is one of the few moments in the text where Jakob’s desperation and drive for physical and psychic survival surface as shame, taking precedence over metaphoric depictions of his physical and psychic needs. In Fugitive Pieces, Michaels’ assigns Athos, Jakob, and Ben literary professions and, through their writing, lays down a rich polyphonic narrative that reinforces these figures; Jakob’s first volume of poetry, Groundwork, reiterates the metaphors of earth and excavation, memory and retrieval that pervade Fugitive Pieces. Italicized lines of poetry from Jakob’s published works appear throughout the novel and layer his reminiscences of Bella as a shelf of memorial limestone—vertical time. Three chapter titles from Part I reappear in Part II: “The Drowned City,” “Vertical Time,” and “Phosphorus,” reverberate and echo sights, sounds, and memories from Part I into Part II—one of many meta-techniques Michaels employs to underpin her palimpsestic refrain: “Every moment is two moments” (138, 140, 143). As well, these chapter titles reinscribe the geological tropes, as do the italicized writings from Athos’ and Jakob’s texts.

The experience of reading Michaels’ poetry, after Fugitive Pieces, evokes a number of spectres from the novel not least of which is the young boy who flees Poland (“Lake of Two Rivers”). Of Miner’s Pond, Michaels writes, in “Unseen Formations,” that the title “tries to hint that being able to see the water’s surface and down to the bottom at the same time—the present
moment and the past—are of equal importance. The significance of a present moment is *not* that it is a gate to the past, but that it takes its place in a significant, mysterious narrative” (96-97; emphasis original). As I read her poems in the shadow of Jakob’s story, “Every moment is two moments,” I become an interloper, like Ben, on Idhra, reading Jakob’s journals and discovering, under the bedcovers, Michaela’s intimate note to Jakob: “If she’s a girl: Bella / If he’s a boy: Bel” (279). Like the poems from *The Weight of Oranges*, the poems from *Miner’s Pond* “press the transparent membrane” of the novel’s narrative, contributing to a “shifting field” of knowledge, memory, and history in all three texts (“Lake of Two Rivers” 5.89, 92). Michaels demonstrates the unique relationship between the ambiguity of the poetic trope and the reiterative compulsions of traumatic memory as well as the tenuous and frayed connections between personal memory, cultural memory, and history.³

*Skin Divers* (1999), the poetry collection that follows the publication of the novel, takes up the familiar tropes of sorrow and loss which permeate Michaels’ previous works, but in an entirely different manner. Landscapes and ghosts inhabit these poems as well, yet humanity’s catastrophes and the cataclysmic events of *Fugitive Pieces* and the two earlier collections are absent. Here, the ghosts and landscapes are regional, nuclear, and quotidian: cows populate the fields and stars fill the sky, seasons change, fertility metaphors are common, and the word “love” appears often. Hauntings take a positive turn, romantic and personal, and announce the resolution of old wounds and the arrival of new life. The third and final section of the volume contains one poem, “Fontanelles,” and the narrator’s concerns revolve around the impending birth of her child and signal a turn away from metaphors of infertility, adoption, and the betrayal of humanity in her earlier work to the body as trusted friend, bringer of life, exalter of beauty and bounty.
In “Frozen Acrobatics of Memory: Branko Gorjup Speaks with Anne Michaels” ("BG"), Michaels’ proposes that Skin Divers is, “in a sense, the last in a trilogy, a companion to The Weight of Oranges and Miner’s Pond. Together the books are representative of a large musical composition in which vocabulary and themes recur, and are examined from different angles” while at the same time, Skin Divers “signifies a turning, the closing of one door and the opening of another” (“BG” 4). In short, Skin Divers represents a turn from geological metaphors and themes to the biological sciences and birth metaphors. Moreover, if we put aside genre considerations, in many ways Fugitive Pieces represents one movement in this “large musical composition,” perhaps a fugue, where vocabulary and themes recur.

The status of metaphor

In Douglas Fetherling’s “Narrative Moves: An Interview with Anne Michaels,” Michaels leaves behind the musical metaphor and returns to geologic tropes when she describes the lyric poem as a river, “a powerful force,” working its way through the landscape of narrative “carving its way down into the ground” (238). As one might expect, Michaels speaks about the relationship between narrative and lyric in the long poem in metaphoric and organic terms: “I’m very, very conscious of all the metaphor being organic to the content, and I will wait a long time for a metaphor, wait to find the metaphor that works or the connecting metaphors that work” (238). In describing the challenges of writing the long poem form, in her essay “Unseen Formations,” Michaels seems to be describing her accomplishments in narrative: “Like a landscape, the poem is a cross section; an archaeological/geological slice: its density must reflect layers of time as well as meaning” (96). The long poem must “achieve horizontal flow and vertical descent at the same time, seeming effortless as a river searing its way through hills over time” and, she
continues, “I’ve tried several ways of exploring the ways in which a life can embody an age, historically and geologically” (97, 98). She explores the poet’s reliance on metaphor to illuminate the paths “between personal and social, between memory and meaning. Without it [metaphor] the poem remains mired in the self; the lights are out, the poem stays dark” (96). Speaking in defence of metaphoric language, Michaels argues that metaphor sheds light on the historical events one has not witnessed personally. In this essay, rich in historical and temporal metaphors, Michaels identifies the poem as “a slice of time” and poetry as “a response to silence,” and contributes her voice to the discourse on the appropriateness of literature to represent ineffable historical events (98). These essays and poems respond to Theodor Adorno’s contention that “poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (34) and her novel continues her literary response, “after Auschwitz,” in the prose form. Michaels claims that while “no writer speaks for her tribe, only from her place in it,” the writer and the person of action share the same dilemma, “the dilemma of the witness. Not only: Who am I to say? but also: Who am I, if I don’t say? The more deeply you examine your own life, the more deeply you enter your own times, and from there, history” (99).

Although Michaels most often endows humans with attributes from the physical world, she does, at times, reverse this metaphoric process with striking effect, imbuing geologic formations and geographic locations with human breath, heart beat, and desire:

It’s no metaphor to feel the influence of the dead in the world, just as it’s no metaphor to hear the radiocarbon chronometer, the Geiger counter amplifying the faint breathing of rock, fifty thousand years old. (Like the faint thump from behind the womb wall.) It is no metaphor to witness the astonishing fidelity of minerals magnetized, even after hundreds
of years, pointing to the magnetic pole, minerals that have never forgotten magma whose cooling off has left them forever desirous. We long for place; but place itself longs.

Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment. Eskers of ash wait to be scooped up, lives reconstituted. (53)

In this passage, while explicitly denying metaphoric language, Michaels resacralizes poisoned ground and contaminated landscape; she marries human memory to the sediment and ashes of the earth and reconstitutes both landscape and humanity, fertile womb intact. Desirous and ready to procreate, to continue the fraternal symbiotic relationship with place, Michaels figures Jakob, and by extension humanity, as the “afterbirth of earth” and highlights the inseparability of the “faint breathing” of the earth from the “faint thump[ing]” heartbeat of a person (5).

In the Fetherling interview, Michaels addresses the relationship of personal history and memory, which Fetherling characterizes as “‘discontinuous fragments of the story, fragments about the roots in Europe on one side of your family etc’” (236; emphasis original). Michaels responds: “The family history is there obviously, and the way that the family history relates to larger events, the Second World War particularly. History appears throughout the book. But that leads one inevitably to try to get beyond that event, to speak of events in general that one has not witnessed, that one has not lived through personally but absorbed through the culture, through the family, through the home.” Michaels refers to these cultural and historical events as “‘unseen forces’” a phrase that echoes the thematic concerns from her essay “Unseen Formations” (236-37, 241).

From time to time, Michaels’ own genealogical connections inform discussions of her writing. Born in Toronto in 1958 to Rosalind (née Rosenberg) and Isaiah Michaels, a Jewish
immigrant whose family fled Europe in 1931 when he was a young boy, Michaels acknowledges that her own upbringing influences her understanding of history. When Tihanyi asks Michaels, "How have your parents’ views and experiences shaped your own view of the Holocaust?" she responds, "The war was in the house, and in fact, for someone of my generation, no matter what their cultural background, I think that that’s true to varying degrees. . . . For my generation, the war and its aftermath was evident in so many ways" (8; ellipsis original). In the Tihanyi interview, Michaels speaks about faith, the existence of evil, and what she sees as the relationship between the natural world, the physical body, and human memory, tropes she introduces in *Miner’s Pond* and continues in *Fugitive Pieces*. In response to Tihanyi’s question, "So what was at stake when you wrote *Fugitive Pieces*?" Michaels accounts for the "war material" that she "wanted to address and come to peace with" as well as the issue of faith—faith used in the broadest sense—and for me the place that Jakob reaches in himself is the heart of the book. His recognition of autonomic faith, the body itself as a proof of faith. Athos teaches Jakob that the earth, the physical world, can help carry some of his grief and can be a kind of repository of memory, that the natural world can help him carry what is too much to carry. Much later Jakob takes this even further, when he imagines that faith can reside in the flesh, literally, autonomically, an autonomic function. And this of course is not reductive, but miraculous. (7)

Michaels’ "miraculous" view of the body as proof of faith is, in part, a response to the law of the Third Reich that made it illegal to refer to a Jew as a human being and reduced a people to *stücke*, 4 pieces, lumpen matter. Michaels reinforces the "miraculous" relationship between the
physical world and language and human memory; out of a place of non-being, destruction, and annihilation (sticke), Michaels reclaims and revivifies Jakob’s abject body as he rises out of the mud screaming in, “Polish and German and Yiddish,” “dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew,” while Athos, who plucks him out of the peat, recognizes his humanity (13).

No matter the genre, Michaels’ writes about the interrelatedness of history, time, and memory and locates these concerns in the earth. At times, her language goes underground only to resurface later in the same text (vertical time) and, at other times, fragments and phrases from one text reappear in another text (historical time), mimicking geological formations. The opening line from Michaels’ novel, “Time is a blind guide,” becomes the first line that Ben reads from Jakob’s notebooks, and represents historical time’s betrayal of history, a theme that Michaels pursues throughout her poetry, her essays, and her novel. Her meditation on the nature of love and memory, “Cleopatra’s Love” (“CL”), published two years prior to Fugitive Pieces, contains phrases which reappear, almost verbatim, in the novel. In “Cleopatra’s Love,” Michaels writes:

The distinction between knowledge and “poetic knowing” resembles the distinction between history and memory.

Knowledge/History is essentially amoral: events occurred. “Poetic Knowing”/Memory is inextricably linked with morality: history’s source is event, but memory’s source is meaning. Often what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. (15)

And, in Fugitive Pieces she writes:
History is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. History is the Totenbuch, The Book of the Dead, kept by the administrators of the camps. Memory is the Memorbucher, the names of those to be mourned, read aloud in the synagogue.

History and memory share events; that is, they share time and space. Every moment is two moments. (138)

As these thematic concerns highlight, Michaels connects the ambiguity of poetic tropes, recursive and self-reflexive iterations and reiterations, and the interplay between literature and history, to collective memory and morality and she makes a startlingly similar distinction between personal memory and public memory to that of Maurice Halbwachs: "Memory haunts us until we attempt meaning; this is how the poem can haunt us; both collective memory—things we haven't experienced personally—as well as deep personal memory. (And when a poem successfully merges the collective and the personal, its power intensifies)" ("CL" 15). With Jakob's story, she locates the features of traumatic memory—temporal delays, temporal paradoxes, fundamental dislocation of time and space, refusal of historical boundaries, possession by the past, and repetition compulsion—in geographic sites rich with sedimentation and stratification. With Ben's story, the constitutive features of traumatic memory recede and the features of postmemory come to the forefront. Following from Hirsch, I identify the constitutive features of postmemory as: belatedness, displacement, generational distance, mediation through imaginative representation, stories shaped by traumatic narratives of the previous generation, and a space of remembrance that affords psychic distance. Ben's family home "fetid with undergrowth" (223) and absent of shared, familial stories that contribute to a storehouse of
personal memories, becomes the central trope emblematic of the postmemorial space of remembrance.

Critical reception of *Fugitive Pieces*

While scholarship considers the representation of Jakob’s traumatic suffering in Michaels’ novel, scholars have yet to consider the postmemorial aspects of Ben’s narrative in *Fugitive Pieces*. Much of the discourse revolves around questions of the representability of the Holocaust in a literary novel (Bentley, Gubar, Zeitlin) as well as the tropes of geology and geography that permeate the text and connect Jakob’s memories, and the impact of his trauma, to the ground (Cook, Hillger, Kandiyoti, Whitehead). Critical work on the novel focuses on the principal narrator Jakob and many authors establish a lineage between Jakob and Ben citing their common profession as writers and Ben’s fascination with Jakob’s history as foundation for this genealogy (Bentley, Cook, Gubar, Kandiyoti, Kertzer, Hillger, Whitehead, and Zeitlin). For instance Zeitlin, in “New Soundings in Holocaust Literature: A Surplus of Memory,” posits Jakob’s memoirs as the catalyst for Ben’s self-understanding and a way for memories to pass from generation to generation (202). In Chapter Three, I propose the family photograph as the primary catalyst in Ben’s potential self-transformation.

In “Beyond Accommodation: National Space and Recalcitrant Bodies,” Erin Manning suggests that “home becomes a central trope that mediates space and time, juxtaposed between geography’s gradual evolution of the landscape and history’s violent dominion over space” (58). As Manning points out, both Jakob and Ben experience national and domestic space, “home,” not as a locus of protection and safety, but rather as a “repository of insecurity” (58). In the wake of his forced diasporic journey from Poland, to Greece, to Canada, Jakob writes about the
impossibility of returning home where “home” exceeds national and domestic space and becomes a trope for safety, a liminal and unreachable locale. As a member of the second generation, however, Ben’s experience of home differs from Jakob’s. Ben, now an adult, is the only child of parents who are survivors of Auschwitz. He grows up in a household of oppressive silence and untold stories; the shroud of silence that covers the home contributes to Ben’s sense of a foreshortened future: “I saw the aura of mortality” (204). In his parents’ house “fetid with undergrowth,” “there was no energy of a narrative,” no narrative map to plot out the terrain of his parents’ lives before his birth (223, 204).

Meredith Criglington identifies a different chronotope from Manning. In “The City as a Site of Counter-Memory in Anne Michaels’s Fugitive Pieces and Michael Ondaatje’s In the Skin of a Lion,” Criglington defines space as a “social, historical, and political dimension,” and claims that the city of Toronto is at once a site of “hegemonic power and official history” and also an “unofficial, hidden city” of “subterranean spaces” (130). In Fugitive Pieces, Criglington identifies Toronto’s ravines, and the “drowned” spaces of Toronto and Poland, as subterranean spaces. These landmarks function as topoi and, she contends, the novel “re-presents” these spaces as counter-monuments and thus as sites of memory. Additionally, Criglington identifies Toronto as a city of immigrants and explores memory through the immigrant’s perspective of “here and now” as always understood in relation to an earlier time and place. Thus, argues Criglington, the immigrant perception of time combined with the identified topoi completes M.M. Bakhtin’s chronotope.

What Manning calls the “gradual evolution of the landscape,” and Criglington calls “subterranean,” Bakhtin identifies, in “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” as a “vertical chronotope” (158). As Criglington and Manning suggest, Bakhtin’s concept of the
chronotope offers insight into the interrelationships of time, space, and history in the novel, and expresses the inseparability of these dimensions where “[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (84). Bakhtin’s “vertical chronotope” contains within it “the result of a struggle between living historical time and the extratemporal other-worldly ideal. The vertical, as it were, compresses within itself the horizontal, which powerfully thrusts itself forward” (158). Bakhtin asserts that within this vertical chronotopic construction there is “an acute feeling for the epoch’s contradictions, long overripe; this is, in essence, a feeling for the end of an epoch” (156). Divisions that characterize horizontal time, Bakhtin’s “earlier” and “later” and, as Criglington suggests, “here and now,” compress into a vertical hierarchy and result in temporal paradoxes where all time is perceived as simultaneous (vertical); the individuals who populate this world, such as Jakob, bear the distinctive marks of trauma.7 Thus, Michaels’ metaphorical chapter titles, “The Gradual Instant” from Part II and “Vertical Time,” from both Jakob’s and Ben’s narratives, permeate the text and operate as a vertical chronotope.

The aesthetics of Michaels’ novel, the tension between the Holocaust as a cataclysmic historical occurrence and its imaginative representation, such as vertical time, prove problematic for Méira Cook who takes issue with Michaels’ narrative decision to use metaphoric language. In “At the Membrane of Language and Silence: Metaphor and Memory in Fugitive Pieces,” Cook suggests that Michaels’ lyrical and non-linear narrative, dense with metaphors, attempts to “force the apparently meaningless world of the Holocaust to signify” (28). Cook suggests that Michaels’ emphasis on nature and natural processes—geology and geography, earth and landscape—elide the conscious brutality of the politically motivated Nazi genocide, thereby naturalizing atrocity and obscuring agency. Michaels’s poetic narrative, Cook continues,
positions itself "at the membrane of language and silence, memory and forgetfulness" (22) and thus "translates" incomprehensible and untranslatable horrors.

While Donna Coffey agrees that *Fugitive Pieces* raises many ethical questions about fictionalizing the Holocaust, she applies Daniel Schwartz's term "'docufiction,'" the use of documentary techniques in a fictionalized version of events to avoid "'trivializing'" the Holocaust (30), to the novel and remarks, in "Blood and Soil in Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces*: The Pastoral in Holocaust Literature," that Michaels’ text fits Schwartz’s criteria for docufiction "since it is a fictionalization of a memoir" (31). As Coffey points out, Michaels’ intention in her "traumatic pastoral in which both nature and humans are victims and witnesses of catastrophe" is "to reinvent the pastoral in a way that brings it into collision with the events of the Holocaust" (28). The "traumatic pastoral," suggests Coffey, differs from the pastoral elegy in that *Fugitive Pieces*, as a Holocaust novel, never entirely heals the wounded earth or wounded persons and elegiac images of pastoral fertility are replaced with traumatic images of loss, decay, and infertility (28). The pastoral seems particularly inappropriate in the context of the Holocaust because "the language and the mythos of the pastoral had been so thoroughly appropriated by the Nazi’s” suggests Coffey (32).

With these same concerns in mind, Adrienne Kertzer, in "*Fugitive Pieces*: Listening as a Holocaust Survivor’s Child,” argues that the “rhetoric of beauty” in a Holocaust novel, even one set outside the camps, opens up the distance between herself, “who was once the child who listens” and other readers who embrace the novel’s transformative ending (204). Kertzer, a member of the second generation, responds to the novel with ambivalence and unease, insisting, "No, I am not like Ben, with his melancholic childhood and ‘Ess Ess’ inflected nightmares,” meaning she is not traumatized by the aftermath of her own parents’ Holocaust experiences in
the same way Ben was by his parents’ experiences in the death camps (193, 194). Thus, she approaches the reading of *Fugitive Pieces* as auto/biography and resists the “essentializing phrase ‘child of a survivor’” noting that her childhood experience (as a member of the second generation) differs from many others including those of her own sisters; siblings raised in the same household often remember family stories differently and experience varying degrees of positive and negative affect. Kertzer posits that, as one who did not witness the murder of his parents and the disappearance of his sister, Jakob, in many ways, “resembles not so much the survivor, as the child of survivors, the one whose knowledge is so dependant on the aural,” on the stories told and retold from one generation to the next (194, 205).9

Kertzer suggests that her “knowledge” of her mother’s experiences at Auschwitz, “not trauma,” causes her to “listen differently” to her mother’s voice and it is this listening differently that positions her as a member of the second generation (194). She further emphasizes that her mode of listening, “then,” as a child, sets her outside the two presiding public trauma discourses, “now,” the psychiatric and the celebratory (195; emphasis original). Neither discourse, and certainly neither label, appeal to Kertzer (she notes that in psychiatric discourses “children become medicalized texts requiring the sympathetic attention of the reader”) and her inability to identify with Ben’s portrayal as traumatized “seems to invalidate [her] legitimacy as a survivor’s child” (195). In the same way that Coffey notes “all literature of the Holocaust is in a sense elegiac,” Kertzer seems to suggest, with her reading of the novel, that all literature of the Holocaust is in a sense autobiographical (31). She notes Elie Wiesel’s view that all Jewish children born after the Holocaust are children of survivors as well as Susan Suleiman’s term “‘autobiographical reading’ to describe a reading that foregrounds the critic’s autobiography in her reading of another text” (n10 214). However, as Hirsch points out, members of the second
generation experience a range of affect in their childhood homes (FF 243). Kertzer’s fear that Ben’s different childhood experience “invalidates” her “legitimacy as a survivor’s child” calls into question the truth of Ben’s memories and delimits his experience to an approximation of her own while ignoring the opportunity for heteropathic identification—‘It could have been me, but it wasn’t me,’ in her “autobiographical reading.”

In “Generations of the Holocaust in Canadian Autobiography,” Susanna Egan and Gabrielle Helms indicate that the insertion of the virgule in “auto/biography” acknowledges that two genres, biography and autobiography, often “overlap,” “an overlap that is particularly pertinent for Holocaust memoirs, which are often communal productions and contribute to a communal history” (n1 45). Certainly, Michaels plays with the auto/biographical aspects of the text and hints, at the outset, that genre boundaries blur and overlap. With, “for J,” the cryptic dedication from Fugitive Pieces and the introductory biographical sketch that precedes the first chapter, Michaels puts in motion a complex temporal relationship between history and memory, which she pursues throughout the text. In this novel, fiction, auto/biography, and docufiction overlap. Who, then, we might ask, is author of the dedication, Michaels or Ben and, who does “J” recall? The most obvious answer seems to be “J” for Jakob, but perhaps “J” reclaims Judaism from the “‘J’ stamped on a passport,” a single letter with “the power of life or death” (207), a single letter meant to recuperate Jakob’s fractured, multilingual articulation, “dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew.” For, at various times, Michaels evokes Kabbalistic traditions (12, 100, 160, 162) and in the following passage she recalls the Hebrew tradition of referring to forefathers as “we”: “When we were delivered from Egypt. . . .” This encourages empathy and a responsibility to the past, but more important, it collapses time. The Jew is forever leaving Egypt. A good way to teach ethics. If moral choices are eternal, individual actions take on immense significance no
matter how small: not for this life only” (160; ellipsis original). From the first page, then, aural and written histories, biographies and autobiographies, prove central to Fugitive Pieces and illustrate that traumatic memories (postmemories and cultural traumas) endure across generations and geographic distances and are “not for this life only.” Through their reading and writing, Athos, Jakob, and Ben “collapse time” and their personal histories become “communal productions” and thus “communal histories.” As the novel progresses, the lives of Athos, Jakob, and Ben continue to intersect and overlap.

In “Empathic Identification in Anne Michaels’s Fugitive Pieces: Masculinity and Poetry after Auschwitz,” feminist scholar Susan Gubar examines the role of gender in the tellings and re-tellings of the Shoah, addresses the reluctance of feminist scholarship to bring gender “into the field of Holocaust studies,” and suggests a place for the restorative power of art—to write after Auschwitz. Gubar details the importance of a novel, such as Fugitive Pieces, written by a female author that “investigates patrilineal plots because the Holocaust shattered the patrilineal communities of Europe’s Jews” and she connects Naomi’s empathic identification with Michaels’ own capacity for “empathic imagination and identification” apparent in her writing. She further suggests that the Shoah, a cataclysmic rupture in history, pollutes paternal authority and scatters the genealogies of the survivors across continents (250, 251, 250).

Gubar moves to a discussion of “the service a work of art can perform” and responds to Adorno’s famous dictum that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,” insisting that “it is barbaric not to write and read literature” after the Shoah. Gubar connects male protagonists, in Fugitive Pieces, and their recuperation of language (virtually all are writers) to the subject of patrilineal inheritance, arguing that male survivors denied the usual route of inheritance “could never become the heirs of their father’s places, properties, or positions” (250, 251). In short,
Athos, Jakob, and Ben invent a lineage through adoption with words as heirlooms. Gubar points out that the non-witnessing of his parents’ murder and the silence of Bella’s unknown fate “links Jakob’s experience to the very crux of trauma, a response to an unexpectedly wounding event that cannot be grasped at the moment of its occurrence and thus returns in flashbacks or nightmares” (255). These non-witnessed, wounding experiences, as articulated by Gubar, encapsulate Caruth’s notion of “unclaimed experience,” the inability of the traumatized individual to fully experience an event as it occurs (“UE” 1).

In her subsequent work, *Poetry After Auschwitz*, Gubar explains that literature after Auschwitz must be written by authors such as Michaels who represent generations of “empathic imagination and identification”: second generation survivors, proxy-witnesses, and witnesses by adoption. In this text, Gubar celebrates the “cognitive quandaries” that straddle a number of bordered communities: generic, aesthetic, historic, generational, and gendered (27). In both her texts, Gubar identifies adoption as the metaphor for “empathic imagination” in Michaels’ novel, and introduces LaCapra’s term “empathic unsettlement” to describe the position authors occupy when writing about subject matters that require empathy, rather than sympathy, as well as a recognition of disparity and alterity, rather than cohesion and sameness (242, 253, 272). LaCapra’s notion raises important ethical questions about postmemorial representations of the Holocaust and about the subject position authors such as Michaels occupy when writing about limit events that they themselves did not experience. As mentioned in Chapter One, however, Hirsch defines postmemory as “a space of remembrance” and “not an identity position” so as to ensure an imaginative, empathic relationship between self and other, the ‘me’ and the ‘not me’ (8).
In “Postmodernist ‘holocausts,’” a chapter from his survey of Holocaust novels, Efraim Sicher discusses *Fugitive Pieces* alongside other “fictional holocausts of postmodernism” which “are not concerned with historical descriptions of Nazi genocide, but with what [they] can suggest about the postmodern aftermath, when delusions of human liberalism have shattered” (175).\(^\text{12}\) Sicher suggests Jakob’s view of history is decidedly “postmodernist” in that he “absorbs” from Athos “a geological view of history as an endless series of cataclysms which humans somehow survive” and in his refusal to privilege one form of knowledge or an ethnically defined group memory. Jakob is brought to Toronto as a survivor of history, not as a Jewish victim of the Holocaust. To be a Jew is to carry the spirit of the corpses in one’s bloodstream, to be a genetic carrier of destruction and persecution, an all too common identification, in the absence of authentic Judaic values, with the Holocaust as the yellow badge of a universalized suffering. (186)\(^\text{13}\)

In Sicher’s view, Jakob is “displaced in the novel by Ben” who re-enacts Jakob’s story of survival (185). Sicher’s assertion, however, that Jakob “in the absence of authentic Judaic values” is not a “genetic carrier of destruction and persecution,” is precisely the role I assign to Jakob as a member of the first generation, “a Jewish victim of the Holocaust,” and to Ben as a member of the second generation, the “genetic carrier” of his parents’ cultural trauma. Sicher’s position connects genetics with a particular “authentic” value system thereby problematically authenticating and privileging the suffering of a chosen few while negating the suffering of others.
Jakob “absorbs,” not only “a geological view of history,” but also the “invisible paths in Athos’ stories” of familial and Judaic history (51). His koubaros tells the history of Judaic survival as precisely genetic where “the dead entered [the survivors] through their pores and were carried through their bloodstreams to their brains and their hearts. And through their blood into another generation” (52). In response to Athos’ annotation and transmission of this impossible history carried within, Jakob asks, “How can one man take on the memories of even one other man, let alone five or ten or a thousand or ten thousand; how can they be sanctified each?” (52). Ben comes to understand, through his relationship with Jakob, his inescapable role as the transmitter of his parents’ destruction and persecution in the aftermath of the Holocaust. In interview, Michaels comments that “Ben sees in Jakob a self that he is trying to achieve. In a sense, Jakob represents to Ben a place that he’s trying to reach in himself” (“ET” 7). The sedimentation of Jakob’s experiences, his memories, and his losses as represented in his writing are such that discerning no “gap between the poems and the man” Ben “wanted to believe that language itself had freed [Jakob]” (207). Reading Jakob’s later poems, Ben comes to realize that Jakob attained a personal peace, “as a geologist might say, [he’d] reached the pure state of residual concentration” a state that Ben longs to achieve (207).

In the next section, I posit Jakob as golem in order to establish his compulsive, repetitive memories as emblematic of traumatic memory and to, by way of example, differentiate the constitutive features of traumatic memory from Ben’s postmemories. Following my discussion of Jakob, I turn my attention to Ben, his parents, and the transgenerational “trauma process.”
Jakob as golem

Kabbalistic notions of the relationship between nature, humanity, and divinity influence Michaels’ representation of history and memory and subvert Nazi notions of nature, matter, and race. When speaking about the existence of good and evil in a physical world, which figures both nature and humans as witnesses to catastrophe, Michaels suggests that good goes “underground” in order to survive, resurfacing whenever possible, whereas evil self-replicates and “social evils always stalk before they strike” (“ET” 8). In “Terra Nullius,” a chapter from Part I of *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels voices this same concept of evil personified as “history stalks before it strikes” (*FP* 159). Tihanyi notes that Michaels selects Biskupin, a place of Polish antiquity that the Nazis’ attempted to appropriate as a site of Aryan lineage and then consequently destroyed, as the locus for Jakob’s resurrection and rescue.

The Jewish Kabbalistic golem is undeniable in *Fugitive Pieces*. Western Judeo-Christian ontotheology recognizes a long tradition of sacred and profane monster myths that mark the limits and borders of communities. The golem traces its roots to Prague, where legend suggests that a creature fashioned out of clay came magically alive, through the invocation of God’s name, to protect the Jews of Prague from a pogrom. According to the Kabbalah, the golem is created through a highly structured ritual of utterances. The corporealized golem wears God’s utterance—*emet*, meaning truth—on his forehead. In various popular versions of the golem myth, the creature grows beyond the power and knowledge boundaries established by its creator and, then, identified as monstrous, the golem must be destroyed. The invocation and recovery of God’s word from the golem’s forehead vanquishes the golem and returns it to the mud and clay from which it was created. Interestingly, the golem is most often a mute and, unable to speak for itself, the golem operates at the boundaries of society, portrayed as abject, or as machine-like,
and, as such, represents the subversion of the power of language and the devolution of human to matter.

Early in the novel, Jakob emerges from the peat bog, "stiff as a golem," and his adoptive father, Athos, carries the golem-boy to his own Jewish community in Greece thus (re)creating boy from stücke and restoring the boy from abject status to member of a community. The wounded boy rises from the bog, not in silence, but in corrupted speech, "dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew," fragmented and fugitive, bound to the earth and out of the earth, into the arms of the archaeologist Athos, "middling master of languages," retriever of fragments, and restorer of humanness (12, 14). Thus, Fugitive Pieces plumbs the depths of the physical world and regards the earth "as a potential source of restoration of the human spirit" ("BG" 2). The joining of earth to person, figures Jakob the bog-boy as a reconstituted golem, a sort of disassembled and reassembled personal and collective self who re-emerges, in Prague, from dust, sediment, and mud.

In this regard, we might also think of the golem as a trope, in the language of psychoanalytic approaches to trauma. Substituting the word "trauma" for "golem" renders an uncannily accurate distillation of the entangled relationship between the original traumatic event and the compulsive, repetitive memory that often characterizes trauma. In Trauma: Explorations in Memory, Caruth points out the pathology of trauma consists in the "peculiar temporal structure" of the experience and, thus, results in a collapse of historical and temporal boundaries (8). Trapped inside the trauma, the person discovers "the historical imperative to bear witness could essentially not be met during the actual occurrence" (7). The paradoxical nature of the pathology of trauma lies in this temporal delay, which Caruth characterizes as a "continual leaving of a site" (10). The traumatic event elides "normal encoding" in memory schemes and

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the event fails to be woven into the pattern of integrated memories. The event is deferred, its history becomes latent, and it is this very latency, Caruth claims, that preserves the event and causes it to manifest as immediate. As Caruth puts it, “[t]o be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event,” and so the traumatized unwillingly “carry an impossible history within them” (4, 5). The characteristic distortions, disruptions, and dislocations of the event, coupled with the inability to resolve the event, result in the haunting power of the catastrophe. Jakob’s lament, “‘I did not witness the most important events of my life’” characterizes one of the constitutive features of traumatic memory—the inability of the survivor to act as his own witness (17). For Jakob, Bella becomes a spectre whose disappearance haunts him and paradoxically this un-witnessed event resurfaces, unbidden. Jakob’s “shadow past” which “never happened” intrudes into his present (17; emphasis added).15 Locked within the solitary confines of traumatic memory Jakob tells us, “I couldn’t turn my anguish from that precise moment of death. I was focused on that historical split second: the tableau of the haunting trinity—perpetrator, victim, witness” (140). His failure to integrate the “haunting trinity” impedes his relationships and his obsession with “that precise moment” results in imagined travels to the site of the traumatic event. The memory of the event not fully realized at the time comes to haunt the individual, whose inability to coherently narrate his own story results in disbelief and abjectification, just as the malignant golem haunts the city.

Caruth suggests that the possibility for resolution and healing of the trauma lies in the speech act, “an address that takes place in all the struggles to communicate traumatic experience—opens up the possibility of what could be called a truly historical transmission” (156). This communicative process requires the participation of an active listener who acts as witness to the traumatic address. In “Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening,” Dori
Laub proposes that the listener to “the narrative of extreme human pain, of massive psychic trauma,” participates in the formation of “a record that has yet to be made” (57). The listener contributes to the cognizance of the trauma and Laub compares the listener, the witness, to “a blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time,” and this participatory relationship causes the witness to “partially experience the trauma in himself” (57). Laub points out that the witness “feels” the “residues” of the victim’s past, “feels the victims’ victories, defeats, and silences, knows them from within;” however, the listener “preserves his own separate place, position and perspective” (58). Importantly, Laub says, “testimonies are not monologues” (70); they’re a joint venture, undertaken in a safe place, for a limited period of time, and “only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen—to himself” (71). The listener to the trauma must accompany the survivor on her journey, a journey that the survivor cannot complete on her own. Laub and Caruth use much of the same language and both insist that for a trauma to loosen its grip on a survivor (the event possesses the individual) the individual must narrate the story in a therapeutic setting. The act of testimony vanquishes the compulsive repetition from the individual’s wounded psyche just as the speech act, the invocation and recovery of God’s name from the golem’s forehead, vanquishes the corrupted golem from the community.

In the following section, I investigate Ben’s second generation status in relation to Jakob’s position and argue that Ben’s narrative demonstrates and clarifies the distinctions between Jakob’s traumatic memory and Ben’s postmemory. Returning to Michaels’ reliance upon metaphoric language, I argue that the novel’s master tropes, those that connect Jakob’s traumatic inner landscape to the earth’s landscape, relocate indoors, in Part II, and figure Ben as not only custodian of Jakob’s writing through his editorial relationship with Jakob’s notebooks,
but, significantly, as a representative second generation member in the chain of his own family’s traumatic memories.

**Ben and the “trauma process”**

Utilizing the models of postmemory and cultural trauma, I suggest a different custodial relationship from the one other scholars propose, a different position for Ben in the chain of memory and the transmission of trauma in this novel. While Ben and Jakob share an important history, and important connections in their adult lives, the traumatic link exists between Ben and his parents; Ben derives his status as a member of the second generation from his survivor parents and not from his acquaintance, formative though it may be, with Jakob. Alexander and Eyerman’s sociological conception proves central to my reading of Ben in *Fugitive Pieces*, contributing to my conception of Ben as a conduit for cultural trauma—the group’s collective memory and collective identity. Moreover, with Ben, we come to understand, as does he, the potential for the ongoing transmission of trauma to subsequent generations. Although Jakob and Ben’s relationship is not familial, they share membership in a collective trauma that ruptures their group consciousness and creates, as Eyerman puts it “a tear in the social fabric” of their community. In *Fugitive Pieces*, Jakob’s direct relationship, as a survivor of the Nazi genocide that killed his parents and sister, to cultural trauma and traumatic memory, is clearly established; Ben’s “membership” in this collective is less well defined.

In Ben’s narrative, Michaels relocates traumatic memory, grounded in the geologic and geographic landscape of the survivor Jacob, to the domestic sphere of second generation witness. The sites of catastrophe in *Fugitive Pieces* shift from the ground of the bog, the riverbed, the shelf of limestone and relocate indoors to the “ground” of the family home. In Part I, “The
Drowned City,” the ancient bog tosses up Jakob, as though the boy himself is an artifact of humanity, part “golem” part “Tollund Man,” survivor and witness to an event so terrible that the ground ruptures and changes, forever, as the geological stratification of the surrounding district bears witness to the catastrophe and in response produces Jakob, the “[a]fterbirth of earth,” a testament to the fractured archaeology of humanity (12, 5).

In Part II, “The Drowned City,” the 1950s Toronto escarpment tosses up modern domestic artifacts. Even when geography and geology continue to operate as the locus for traumatic memory, the “geographic” objects, in Part II, originate in the home and derive from the home’s hearth—a photograph, a spoon, a child’s toy—from the heart of the home. Ben becomes the custodian, and (potential) transmitter to subsequent generations, of his parents’ trauma. Ben’s lament, “My parents’ past is mine molecularly,” distinguishes his second generation location from his parents’ experience (280). Ben’s importance to the narrative and to the representation of collective transgenerational trauma lies in the transmission of a trauma from Ben’s parents to Ben that results in his membership in the cultural trauma. In theorizing the “trauma process,” Alexander posits these representative members in the chain of memory, such as Ben, as the “carrier groups” of the “trauma process” and as the subsequent transmitters of cultural trauma that continues to span generations and geographic distances (“TTCT” 11).

Although both men live with ghostly presences from the past that effect their present, Ben’s spectres come to haunt him as a result of his parents’ associations of national space as a reservoir of violence and containment. Even though they survive Auschwitz, the contaminated national locus of Ben’s parents continues to pollute their national and domestic space and as a result they are unable to offer their son the safety and certainty of “home.” His mother lives in a perpetual state of preparedness—she carries food, citizenship papers, and their passports in her
purse—and keeps a suitcase, packed and ready for them to flee their home. His father, who shares no details of his life and family before Ben’s birth, tries to “erase himself as much as possible within the legal limits of citizenship” (232). As a result, Ben, the carrier of his parents’ collective trauma, lives in the shadow of their ineffable experiences and sums up his childhood in spectral terms:

But I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. Rains had made the lowest parts swampy, the green melancholia of bog with its swaying carpet of pollen.

I lived there with my parents. A hiding place, rotted out by grief. (223)

Ben’s “hiding place,” the family home “rotted out” by grief and melancholia, evokes Jakob’s hiding place in the wall of his family home and poignantly highlights the differences between the home as a place of refuge for Jakob, complete with a hiding place in the wall to protect him from the Gestapo, and the home as a place of spectrality, unwittingly established for Ben the child of survivors, a home in which he “hides” alongside his parents.

While I agree with Kertzer’s contention that Jakob and Ben share an obsession for the aural, listening for silences and absences, their “aural” differences, their relationship with sound, I suggest, derive from and reflect their generational status. Jakob lives with an excess of sound that echoes the murders of his parents and, paradoxically, the (silent) disappearance of Bella, while Ben’s household, as noted earlier, resounds with silence. Years after Bella’s disappearance, Jakob “listens” for his sister and stands aside at doorways in order to let her pass through before him, “making sure she [is] not left behind.” He hears her, “awake at night,” next
to him, “breathing or singing;” his ear “pressed against the thin wall between the living and the dead,” he’s aware of her “watching” him “from her side of the gossamer wall” (31). Ben, on the other hand, describes his home as one of “damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking.” He and his parents “were forever whispering into a strong wind” and they “communicated by slight gestures.” Ultimately, Ben resents not hearing the story of his deceased siblings from his parents and his exclusion from the direct aural transmission of his family history reinforces his feeling of being “born into absence” and into a family with “no energy of a narrative” (204, 223, 204).

On Idhra, Ben enters into an affair with a young woman, Petra, whom he brings to Jakob’s house and in the bedroom they discover Michaela’s note to Jakob hidden in the bedcovers: “If she’s a girl: Bella / If he’s a boy: Bela” (279). The undisturbed note, a compact poem, “two lines of blue ink,” reveals Michaela’s pregnancy at the time of her death and returns us to the opening “biographical” sketch of their accident and, at the same time, to the memory of Bella. The “two lines of blue ink” from Michaela’s note and the mention of a girl and a boy evoke the “spidery writing” on the back of the photograph Ben discovers amongst his father’s belongings and his realization that “there had been a daughter; and a son born just before the action” (278, 252). When he shares this new knowledge of the family that preceded his birth with his wife, Naomi, he discovers that she already knows of their existence.

The next day, in a rampage, Petra upends the household and her unruliness reveals to Ben, in her absence, Jakob’s journals. Sitting on the floor, he opens a journal and reads, in Jakob’s handwriting, “neat and small, like a scientist’s,” the first line, “Time is a blind guide,” the opening line of the novel (284). We come to understand with Ben’s discovery of Jakob’s notebooks, and the repetition of this line that these very notebooks comprise Part I of Fugitive Pieces, edited and published by Ben. Additionally, Ben’s search for Jakob’s journals, written in
the handwriting of a scientist, mimics Athos’ archaeological profession as he carefully “excavates” Jakob’s home searching for the texts. The third artifact Petra uncovers before leaving, a scarf, resembles Naomi’s scarf, and becomes “a tiny square of silence” (285), as Ben’s own infidelity and guilt lead him to the suspicion that his wife had an affair with Jakob with whom she shared a mutual affection and “who stole [her] heart” (285). He resents Naomi’s capacity for intimacy with Jakob and for empathy with his parents, something he himself lacks, and her complicity in the family secret becomes “a tiny square of silence” between Ben and his wife.

At the novel’s close, Petra sparks memories in Ben that assist his grieving process as he discovers, like Jakob, “the elation of ordinary sorrow” (292). On the night before he leaves Greece, Ben finds his “way station” where eaters took comfort in food, “garbage gave way to wildflowers,” and “the air was cool and new” (291). Thus, Ben changes from a melancholic state, the relationship with his parents that was his “molecularly,” to the “ordinary sorrow” of his marital relationship with Naomi. In the final scene, on his return flight from Greece, high above the ground (Ben’s scientific interest is meteorology not geology and archaeology), his face turned toward the future, Ben imagines his wife waiting at the kitchen table. A childhood location rife with decay and dislocation where shame and fear overtook a father, whose hunger is never satisfied until he swallows a bottle of sleeping pills, becomes a place of potential reconciliation and nurturing. As he imagines Naomi waiting for him in the kitchen, Ben remembers an image from his childhood, his father seated at the kitchen table, eating, yet this time he recalls his mother there as well, standing behind him comforting her husband as he cries over his food. This domestic scene points to an imagined future where Ben manages to, if not entirely escape a shadow past, at least realize “[a]t last my unhappiness is my own” (292). With
his ability to imagine a future, Ben differentiates between a past that is his "molecularly" and the 
"ordinary sorrow" of his own recollections.

Although Jakob's and Ben's families will never be made whole again, the metaphors of 
fragmentation integral to the depiction of Jakob's traumatic memory, metaphors that connect 
memory to history to landscape and map time and place as vertical, geologic sedimentations, 
metamorphize into tropes that depict Ben's melancholic existence, his experience of being born 
into a family of narrative and emotional deficits. His belated, mediated memories, emblematic of 
the second generation, demonstrate his reliance upon the affective experiences of his parents' 
traumatic past and the enormous difficulties in recognizing and overcoming a melancholic 
existence. In Chapter Three, I continue my inquires into Ben's "ordinary sorrow" and suggest 
that a family photograph assists Ben's transition from melancholia to, as Michaels suggests, "a 
place that he's trying to reach in himself," a place of personal peace.
Notes: Chapter Two

1 The Gulag, a branch of Russian State Security established in 1918, was responsible for the administration of a network of camps for the internment of political prisoners, specialist camps for families of dissidents, for the disabled, for children, and for exiled scientists—anyone deemed a threat to the security of the state government. Officially, the Gulag system persisted for decades until state dissolution in 1961. See Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

2 I am using Jakob’s experience of shame in the sense that Berger uses the term. Berger writes: “By shame I do not mean individual guilt. Shame, as I’m coming to understand it, is a species feeling which, in the long run, corrodes the capacity for hope and prevents us looking far ahead. We look down at our feet thinking only of the next small step” (“Le Monde”). Berger’s contention that shame is “a species feeling” describes Jakob’s state as being something other than his need for physical nourishment and sustenance, indicate the depth of the psychic catastrophe and its aftermath.

3 In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin asserts that the poetic trope produces double or multiple meanings, and ambiguity, for example, in the interplay between the philosophical and the ontological, and the concrete and the abstract, yet it is always single-voiced (328).

4 Michaels refers to this law in Gorjup and Tihanyi. Coffey writes of the Third Reich’s *stüccke* law, the Nazi appropriation of Biskupin, the aberrant connections between blood and soil, and the entrenchment of these beliefs in political policy (42, 44, 36).

5 As noted in Chapter One, Halbwachs establishes individual memory as always being constructed in relation to group memory and he remarks upon how even unwitnessed events occupy a place in personal and collective memory (51).

6 Whitehead refers to these drowned spaces as negative spaces and notes that “In *Fugitive Pieces*, the Holocaust lacks a landscape” and is associated with places of burial and concealment (64).

7 Coffey points out that Adorno’s phrase “after Auschwitz” encompasses time-space and is itself chronotopic (32).

8 Bentley, however, suggests that Michaels’ narrative memorializes Jakob’s struggles with his own memories of the Holocaust, as well as those of Ben, and in doing so holds out a positive, meaningful response.

9 As noted in Chapter One, Suleiman refers to young child survivors of the Holocaust as “the 1.5 generation” (277).

10 On survivors sharing their stories with their children, Lefkovitz writes: “We will give our children words for heirlooms” (229).

11 In *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth discusses the “wounded psyche” with regard to traumatic
recollection, the ways in which an individual recalls and communicates an event, and points out the double nature of trauma; trauma wounds the body and the psyche. The reiterations of uncontrollable compulsive details that surface during traumatic recollection provide access to memories hidden from conscious recall and these unassimilated fragments return to reinscribe the wound. Complex and paradoxical, recollections exhibit variously during sleep as dreams and nightmares and during waking hours as intrusive flashbacks. In the wounded psyche, the traumatic experience resides in the past and the present, in what is known and what is unknown (1-4). Additionally, Caruth emphasizes the belated nature of traumatic affect as well as repetition compulsion that results in “amnesia” of the past event that, paradoxically, causes the event to manifest as immediate.

12 Second generation novelist Gratton insists on the category “post-Holocaust novelist” as a way of ensuring that the Holocaust is not directly portrayed, but rather is written about from the periphery. He bases his insistence in a belief that it is immoral to fictionalize the camps themselves (39).

13 Benjamin’s view of history seems to inform Sicher’s critique of the novel. In “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” during the paradoxically repeated yet single catastrophe of history, the angel is propelled into the future: “His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (257). Criglington employs the term “empathic time travel” to characterize Jakob’s ability to “project himself back through the millennia” (87), evoking Benjamin’s angel of history. Whitehead also makes the connection between Michaels’ history of matter and Benjamin’s angel of history (67-68).

14 See Whitehead and Hillger on the importance of the Kabbalah to Michaels’ narrative tropes.

15 Hillger, drawing on Benjamin’s messianic materialism, expresses this conception of time, in Fugitive Pieces, as “messianic” (41).

16 As cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Laub refers to himself, in “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival,” as “an interviewer of the survivors who gave testimony; as a psychoanalyst who treats Holocaust survivors, and as a child survivor” (75).
CHAPTER THREE

THE HOLOCAUST PHOTOGRAPH IN FUGITIVE PIECES

We think of photographs as the captured past. But some photographs are like DNA. In them you can read your whole future.
—Fugitive Pieces

“This Remembering,” Michaels’ introduction to The Art of Betty Goodwin, begins with what appears to be a one line poem, in capital letters, set off from the body of the text:

“LIMBS THAT HAVE LOST THE GROUND. BONE AND WIRE, CARBON AND BLOOD,” and concludes with another one line poem: “HOW DOES LOVE LEAVE ITS MARK? A VOW” (1, 5). Each condensed poem, a brief meditation on memory, love, and loss, could be excerpts from Fugitive Pieces. The introduction, held between these somewhat abstract poetic layers, concretizes:

Betty Goodwin annihilates metaphor. Bone is bone. An object once held by a loved one who’s lost to us is not a metaphor for the absent body, it does not stand in for the body, it is itself: a remnant, the artifact left behind, a trace. We are left with possessions, clothes that will never again be worn by their owner, forsaken. . . . How does love leave its mark? Memory, possessions, a taste, an imprint on flesh. . . . a vow. (1; ellipses original)

According to Michaels’ reading of Goodwin’s art, loss, a visceral, somatic experience, annihilates metaphor and the artifacts left behind represent the material trace of the loved one. What if the artifact left behind is not a piece of clothing but a photograph of the loved one? This chapter speculates on the presence of the Holocaust family photograph, Ben’s family photograph taken before his birth in 1941, in Part II of Fugitive Pieces. Ben uncovers the photo of four family members many years after the deaths of Hannah and Paul, who perish during the war,
siblings he never knew nor knew of until he finds their names inscribed on the back of the photo, after the recent deaths of his parents.

While the Holocaust photograph is integral to Hirsch’s “postmemory,” I include in this discussion Roland Barthes, Susan Sontag, and Mitchell, theorists who focus on visual culture. Each of these theorists originates terms and ideas central to this chapter: Hirsch contributes “visual narratives” and “prose pictures” (FF 8) by way of engaging with Mitchell’s “imagetext;” in Camera Lucida, Barthes theorizes the photograph’s “punctum,” an “accidental prick,” and “That-has-been,” the uncanny ability of the photograph to signal both life and death (26, 77); Sontag’s illuminating analysis on the nature of the photograph in On Photography informs all subsequent discussions. Then, I engage with LaCapra’s notion of historical loss and transhistorical absence to distinguish Ben’s parents’ historical losses, as well as his own losses, from transhistorical absence. I ask: what is the relationship between the representation of first generation traumatic memory, second generation postmemory, and the photographic image? Next, I suggest an imagined future for Ben that derives, in part, from his newly acquired knowledge of a family who existed before the war—knowledge that helps him to fill in some of the narrative gaps from his parents’ past. The photograph of his parents and his ghost-siblings, an “imagetext,” imparts the “energy of a narrative” missing from Ben’s family home, ameliorates his sense of being “born into absence,” and assists him in reframing his “molecular” past without diminishing or negating the original traumatic rupture (204, 223, 280). Following from Barthes, I propose what I am calling Ben’s familial noeme, “born-into-absence.” In conclusion, I suggest that LaCapra’s terms and their relational distinctions, distinctions intended to propel further discussion, demonstrate advantages in theorizing the psychoanalytic concept of postmemory in relation to the sociological formulation of cultural trauma.
The family photograph

In “Mourning and Postmemory,” from *Family Frames*, Hirsch begins with a story of the Jakubowicz family, neighbours from her girlhood and survivors of Auschwitz. Hirsch depicts the Jakubowicz family members and their domestic aesthetic as simultaneously “old-world” and “other-worldly”: the seemingly elderly Polish- and Yiddish-speaking parents bear tattooed numbers from the death camp on their pale arms; ten-year old Chana, with her ghostly pallor and her hushed speech, behaves “unchildlike”; as orthodox Jews they kept kosher in their American duplex decorated in doilies, fringes, and formica; framed photographs of deceased spouses and deceased children—Mr. and Mrs. Jakubowicz’s first families—sit on a “doily-covered living room table” (17, 18). Hirsch’s narrative aesthetic—cinematic and photographic—enhances her theoretical methodology. This familial pastiche of past and present lives, in past and present worlds, supports the postmemorial subject matter of the essay. In relating the story of the Jakubowicz family photographs, Hirsch suggests that daughter Chana “lives in the shadow of these legendary ‘siblings’ whom she had already outlived in age, whom, because she never knew them, she could not mourn, and whom her parents could not stop mourning” (18). Hovering around the edges of the family group, pale, ghostly Chana fades into the recesses of the living room, while the ghost-siblings haunt the mournful foreground of her parents’ lives.

In contrast to the Jakubowicz revenants, Hirsch then describes a photograph of her husband’s aunt Frieda and characterizes the aunt, a concentration camp survivor, as “not emaciated or deathlike. On the contrary, she looks very much alive and ‘normal’” (19). Nothing in the photograph betrays Frieda’s escape from a death camp—she embodies the contradictions of the survivor who has a story to tell, life out of death, yet not the words to speak nor the audience to listen. Drawing on Barthes’ *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Hirsch
suggests the “indexical nature of the photo” announces, concomitantly, through the materiality of
the subject, death and life (20). The photograph’s material trace points simultaneously, and thus
paradoxically, to both the life and the (immanent) death of that person and of all persons,
including and perhaps most importantly, in the moment, the self. At its most basic impulse, the
photograph prompts an existential angst and, at its most complex, an ethical connection to a
community of others.

Photographs, claims Hirsch, act as counter-memories; they resist memory, promote
forgetting, and “bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant” thereby reinforcing the
irretrievability of the past (FF 20). The Holocaust photograph’s unique ability to signal life and
the loss of life, potential as well as missed and stolen opportunities, also signals an opportunity
or necessity for mourning while at the same time pointing to the “impossibility of mourning”
(FF 20). The quotidian setting of the image, the doily-covered tabletop, coupled with the framed
photographs’ domestic location, increases the horror of the Holocaust and highlight the enormity
of its destruction. In “Surviving Images,” Hirsch contends that the process of reading
photographs and reconstructing their contexts (trying to comprehend the enormity of the event
not contained in the image), “is a distinguishing feature of the Holocaust photograph” such as
those of the Jakubowicz family and of aunt Frieda (FF 21). The photograph, as an indexical sign,
announces, concomitantly, through the materiality of the subject, death and life. Hirsch points
out the connections between these photos and the cascade of memory and forgetting that they
elicit, in order to situate her term “postmemory” (FF 21-22).

Hirsch locates the family photograph “in the space of contradiction between the myth of
the ideal family,” the images that individuals strive to live up to in social groups, “and the lived
reality of family life,” the socioeconomic and historical circumstances of a particular family.

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Hirsch identifies the photograph as having the "capacity to tap" the family's mythological narrative, the unfulfilled hopes and dreams that reside in "the space of contradiction" (FF 8). As Hirsch points out, "images and texts both tell stories and demand a narrative reading" a reading which often points back to the family of origin's narrative in search of parental approval (FF 9).

She notes the mutual subject position in this familial narrative exchange; reading the photograph does not entail a subject to object relationship, but rather a mutual exchange. The subject (family member) who stands outside of the photographic frame looks to the object (a subject looking back) within the family frame in anticipation of a non-verbal interaction, "a series of intersecting and mutually confirming looks" (FF 9). Hirsch suggests this distinctive non-verbal exchange, which renders the individual both subject and object, occurs between family members seeking an "affiliative and identificatory" interaction without, necessarily, being aware of the power relationships at work, the psychological underpinnings of the family (FF 9). Families narrate and silence limit-events, such as the Holocaust, even when, and perhaps especially when, the catastrophic event ruptures and fractures the family. Hirsch's contention for the Holocaust photograph's unique ability to signal an opportunity for mourning while at the same time pointing to the impossibility of mourning, illustrates her claim for the Holocaust photograph to simultaneously announce life and death.

Hirsch points out the deficit of "theoretical language" needed to talk about the "psychological layers of familial looking" in these photographic texts, and, in addition to Barthes, she draws on Benjamin's theory of "unconscious optics," the notion that the camera eye and the photograph reveal a network of looking, otherwise invisible, as well as Charles Sanders Peirce's definition of the sign—symbol, icon, and indexical (FF 10, 6). She notes Peirce's observation that the photograph is both iconic and indexical; the photograph bears an
iconic resemblance to the object and, concomitantly, an indexical trace or footprint between sign and object. Her own theoretical vocabulary builds upon this semiotic lexicon that posits the family photograph as integral to reading and exposing the complex, psychological layers of family interactions. In addition to Mitchell's "imagetext," she contributes the terms "visual narratives" and "prose pictures" to articulate the relationship between visual and verbal texts, as well as her signature term, "postmemory," in order to read the knotted narrative of the "familial gaze" within the context of the second half of the twentieth century (FF 8, 11).

Hirsch borrows "imagetext," from Mitchell. In "Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method," Mitchell raises questions about an array of representational objects and their theoretical concerns and, in doing so, introduces the problem of the "imagetext" (83). This term is meant to convey the composite nature of fields of representation while at the same time pointing to the "gap or fissure" between representational modes, "image/text" and the relations between the two, "image-text" (n.9 89). In an attempt to move away from the confines of comparative methods of studying words and images, Mitchell suggests, instead, that the subject matter of verbal and visual representations be viewed as a "whole ensemble of relations between media" and he offers the illuminated books of William Blake as a paradigmatic example (89). Mitchell describes his term "not as concept, but as a theoretical figure rather like Derrida's différence, a site of dialectical tension, slippage, and transformation" (106). Finally, he suggests the increasing mediatization of contemporary culture, the advent of "the pictorial turn" inflects all arts while at the same time contributing to regimes of spectacle and surveillance (106).

In Camera Lucida, Barthes meditates on the triadic relationship between the photograph, life, and death and notes that the photograph's material trace points simultaneously, and thus paradoxically, to both the life and the (immanent) death of that person and of all persons,
including, and perhaps most importantly, in the moment, the self. He identifies two aspects of the photograph that act on individuals, the “studium” (an “enthusiastic commitment”) and the “punctum” (an “accidental prick,” “bruise,” or “mark”) (26-27). To illustrate his terms, Barthes describes the “Winter Garden Photograph” of his recently deceased mother, from her girlhood, whose image, in his eyes, captures her “essence,” and “pricks” him, “wounds” him, whereas, he posits, the effect on all other persons would be, simply, an expression of interest, “I like / I don’t like,” the studium. Importantly, he distinguishes the photographic referent, “the necessarily real thing,” from all other representational referents, suggesting, “the presence of the thing [in photography,] is never metaphoric” (72, 26, 76, 78). Moreover, the “founding order of photography” is “Reference,” “That-has-been,” and, therefore, Barthes claims for the photograph a “Totality-of-Image” (77). He compares the completeness of the image that emanates from the photograph to the “Dearth-of-Image,” the “poverty of mental images,” that reading a novel produces (89). “The Photograph,” says Barthes, “possesses an evidential force, and its testimony bears not on the object but on time. From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation,” and the photograph “is without future (this is its pathos, its melancholy)” (88-89, 90; emphasis original).

The photograph’s lack of future returns our attention to the complex relationship of the photograph to time and to history, to “That-has-been,” and to the paradoxical, simultaneous presence of life and death. Barthes distinguishes “what is no longer” (“the nostalgic path of memory”), from “what has been” (“the path of certainty”), precisely because the referent adheres to the photograph and “ratifies” the certainty of existence and operates as a “certificate of presence,” a certificate of authentication: “The photographic image is full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it” (85; emphasis original, 87, 89). The image’s completeness, its
“finitude,” Barthes continues, “blocks memory, quickly becomes a counter-memory” (91) and reinforces the paradoxical nature of the photograph and the testimony of time—that which allows the viewer to witness the image of one who is already dead while contemplating their own inescapable, future death:

Now, in the Photograph, what I posit is not only the absence of the object, it is also, by one and the same movement, on equal terms, the fact that this object has indeed existed and that it has been there where I see it. Here is where the madness is, for until this day no representation could assure me of the past of a thing except by intermediaries; but with the Photograph, my certainty is immediate: no one in the world can undeceive me.

(115)

The phenomenological “madness” of photographic time belies perception and links the person, the photograph, and, a third element, “Pity” (116). Madness “obl[ig]es the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revulsive moment which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic ecstasy” (119; emphasis original). In short, the intractable, “that-has-been,” noeme of photography insists upon a confrontation with the certainty of (past and present) existence.

In On Photography, Sontag speculates about the authority of images and the ability of an image to “usurp reality because first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (154). Certainly, a naïve comparison of “original” (referent) to “copy” (photographic image) is not the point that either Sontag or Barthes makes. The “magical”
nature of the still photograph, which renders it co-substantial with its subject, raises ethical questions especially when the documentary photograph depicts a limit-event, for instance, the Holocaust.

Sontag’s encounter, as a young girl, with photographs of Bergen-Belsen and Dachau forever marked her: “Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about” (20). Of the Holocaust photograph, Sontag asks:

What good was served by seeing them? They were only photographs—of an event I had scarcely heard of and could do nothing to affect, of suffering I could hardly imagine and could do nothing to relieve. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying. (20)

Sontag’s preoccupation with the “good” of her experience reflects her concern that the mass duplication and consumption of images of suffering does not necessarily compel a compassionate response in the viewer, but might, instead, corrupt one’s reception and understanding of an event known only through a photograph; “Images transfix, images anaesthetize” and make an event less real (20).

On the other hand, photographic images contribute to the acquisition of individual and cultural knowledge. Photographs provide a vehicle, sometimes magical, sometimes a prick, and at other times uncanny, through which families and larger social groups encounter historical and
transhistorical events and communicate those events to other members and thus, as Connerton suggests, into collective memory (and in the case of totalitarian regimes into collective forgetting or, as Connerton would say, “organized oblivion”) (14). Sontag rightly points out that photographs have the power to redefine experience, to fragment continuities, and, through duplication and mass production, to increase surveillance and effect cultural memory (156-157). In this regard, her latter concern reflects those of Mitchell and Barthes.

The potential for photographs to fragment, duplicate, and redefine experience returns me to Hirsch’s term, “postmemory,” and her claim that postmemories undergo a greater degree of “mediation” than memories. Thus, postmemorial aesthetic depictions, such as Lorie Novak’s photographic collage “Past Lives,” of which Hirsch writes in Family Frames, must, surely, reflect these multiple layers of mediation. Whereas Barthes treats the photograph as “full, crammed: no room, nothing can be added to it” (89), Hirsch remarks upon the viewer’s inability to comprehend the enormity of the contradictions—domesticity and destruction, presence and absence—contained in the Holocaust photograph as constitutive of the Holocaust photograph. Certainly, Barthes reads both presence and absence in the Winter Garden Photograph; he acknowledges his mother’s life and her recent death. His choice of a photograph from his mother’s childhood, a span of time before his birth which he can only imagine, contributes to his sense that the photo, much like her life, is “full, crammed.” Her presence and absence, however magical and wounding, do not contain the enormous contradictions, the oscillation between life and death, domesticity and destruction, that the Holocaust photographs of the Jakubowicz children evoke.

As noted in Chapter One, for some scholars, Hirsch’s theoretical application of postmemory to documentary photographs and to photographic collages places the photograph’s
“footprint” under siege and points to potential fragmentation and redefinition of historical events. As Hirsch’s critics demonstrate and as Sontag notes, there exists an assumption that the original and copy are, each, static entities; on the contrary, Sontag and Hirsch suggest that, in Sontag’s words: “When the notion of reality changes, so too does the image, and vice versa” (160). Sontag points to the predilection of families to collect multiple photographs whose entirety of record exceeds the sum of its parts, while Barthes, eschewing all others, chooses the Winter Garden Photograph of his mother as the sum of her essence.

Barthes, Sontag, and Hirsch, each in their own way, refer to the almost magical referentiality of the photograph, the uncanny ability of the photograph to simultaneously and paradoxically point to life and death, presence and absence. As Hirsch points out, the paradoxes of family photographs, paradoxes emblematic of family life, become, in the Holocaust photograph, irreconcilable and offensive contradictions; domesticity cohabitates with destruction. To paraphrase Sontag, where is the “good” in seeing this abomination? I locate these ethical considerations in my reading of the Holocaust photograph from Fugitive Pieces. In the final section, I introduce LaCapra’s notions of mourning and melancholia, and absence and loss, broadening my focus to the postmemorial aesthetics of the photograph.

“Hannah. Paul.”

In Fugitive Pieces, a deficit of family pictures marks Ben’s household. The non-existent photographic record detracts from the family biography, the sum of its parts, and contributes to Ben’s sense of being “born into absence.” What role, then, does the Holocaust photograph play in Fugitive Pieces? What might the photograph of Hannah and Paul, Ben’s ghost-siblings, contribute to an understanding of the transgenerational effects of cultural trauma?
Like Hirsch, Barthes, and Sontag, Michaels recognizes the extraordinary and uncanny power of Holocaust photographs. In "Why Did They Laugh?" a review of Fugitive Pieces, Mark Abley reports that Michaels became disturbed by Holocaust photographs depicting the "wartime laughter" of "evildoers—soldiers and civilians alike" as they "rounded up Jews and herded them onto trains" (73). She refers to these images as "‘those frozen moments’" and acknowledges that past conflicts continue to shape lives in the present tense" (73). In short, survivors and subsequent generations experience the effects of the war and its aftermath.

In Fugitive Pieces, Michaels places, through description, the photograph of Ben’s siblings into the narrative and produces a sort of "imagetext," of a family that preceded his birth, supplying what Hirsch calls a "visual narrative" or a "prose picture." Ben’s siblings, their images "fixed" in time alongside a younger version of his parents, contribute to and enhance our understanding of Ben’s own complex family interactions that occur as a result of their trauma. The Holocaust photograph occupies a central location and imparts a particular ethos which distinguishes the representation of posttraumatic memory in Jakob’s earlier narrative from that of Ben’s postmemory. Ben grows up amidst an atmosphere of conspiracy, filling in the elusive, patchwork of his parents’ biographies with details gleaned from the stories he and his mother share after school. As he nears adolescence, she tells him about "the camp," "Kristallnacht," and "the sign of the Ess Ess, Ben, on their collars" and he tells her current events, stories of the outside world, a world she and her husband enter only out of necessity (225).

As a child, long before he uncovers the family photograph of Hannah and Paul, Ben suffers from an uneasy relationship with Holocaust photographs. His father forces him to read about the history of the camps and to look at Holocaust photographs so as to ensure that history will not be forgotten, all the while remaining silent about his own and his wife’s catastrophic
loss. As an adult, Ben discovers among his father’s belongings a single photograph of his parents and two children: “On the back floats a spidery date, June 1941, and two names. Hannah. Paul. I stared at both sides of the photograph a long time before I understood that there had been a daughter; and a son born just before the action” (252). This photograph signals the absence and the presence of Ben’s ghost-siblings and acts as testimony to both life and death before his birth into a family fallen mute with grief, fear, and tragedy. At the time of the photograph’s discovery, both Ben’s parents have died and he learns, through the photograph, that when his parents were forced into the ghetto they had two young children who did not survive that experience. Silence and secrecy permeate and shape Ben’s postmemorial family dynamic to such an extent that when he shares this new knowledge of the family that preceded his birth with his wife Naomi, he discovers that she already knows of their existence:

My parents, experts in secrets, kept the most important one from me to their last breath.
Yet, in a masterful stroke, my mother decided to tell Naomi. The daughter she longed for.
My mother guessed that my wife wouldn’t readily mention anything so painful, but she knew that if she confided in Naomi, the truth would eventually be passed on. (252)

The Holocaust photograph prompts “an affiliative and identificatory” interaction so overwhelming that the memorial artifact renders the absent body present (FF 9). Ben’s parents are ill-equipped to deal with the impossible loss that the photographic “presence” of Hannah and Paul recalls.

In Part II, the architectonics of the novel transform; the historical annihilations of the past live on in the memory of subsequent generations and in material remnants—a notebook, a scarf,
a photograph—imbued with those losses. In Ben’s narrative, Michaels relocates traumatic memory, grounded in the geologic and geographic landscape of the survivor Jacob, to the domestic sphere of second generation witness Ben. The sites of catastrophe shift from the anatomical, archaeological, and geological structures—the body of Jakob, the ground of the bog, the shelf of limestone—and relocate to the architectural, built environment of Toronto and indoors to the “ground” of the family home. In “Where Once We Dwelled,” her foreword to John Sewell’s *Doors Open Toronto: Illuminating the City’s Great Spaces*, which celebrates the city’s architectural heritage and derives from the eponymous cultural event launched in 2000, Michaels demonstrates her familiarity with the architectural history of Toronto. In her foreword to Sewell’s text, she once again takes up the novel’s themes, the imbrications of history, memory, and landscape, when she writes: “The built world is where geologic and human memory meet, like fate and free will” (xiii). The ancient geologic landscape that witnesses and mourns historical catastrophe becomes the “swamp” of Ben’s home as the fetid undergrowth of the outside world enters the interior, transhistorical landscape of Ben’s family:

History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth, worms chewing soil abandoned by roots. Rains had made the lowest parts swampy, the green melancholia of bog with its swaying carpet of pollen.

I lived there with my parents. A hiding place, rotted out by grief. (233)

As a teenager, Ben extends his “built world” on his circuitous walk home from school each day through Toronto’s garbage-laden ravines, industrial ruins, and empty brickyards. In an unspoken bid for freedom from a mother, tethered to son, watching at the window for his return, worried
that he never would, he stretches the umbilicus through the city's abandoned neighbourhoods. Despite his mother's worry, Ben wanders, out of doors, through the city of Toronto, in order to avoid going home to his parents' silent existence. At fourteen, Ben lacks insight into his own motivations yet as an adult he understands that with his daily treks he substitutes his fascination for the "aftermath" of the city for the isolation and alienation, the aftermath, of his parent's trauma that resides in the home with the family (228).

Attuned to familial silences and absences, Ben remarks upon the aural transmission of cultural trauma in his family and says of his father's storytelling: "Instead of hearing about ogres, trolls, witches, I heard disjointed references to kapos, haftlings, 'Ess Ess,' dark woods; a pyre of dark words" (217). After reading Athos' *Bearing False Witness*, Ben ruminates on the positive effect of Athos' stories on Jakob and asks: "How could you not have been shaped by such storytelling?", hinting, of course, at the effect of his father's stories on him (209). In terms of the transmission of trauma, Ben compares the act of listening to a story to that of reading a photograph. Forced by his father, "the hair on his arm, his number close to my face," to look at "images of Europe, postcards from another planet" (217), Ben compares the imprinting, the "burning" of the photographic image onto his retina and his psyche to the burning of the number on his father's arm:

Images brand you, burn the surrounding skin, leave their black mark. Like volcanic ash, they can make the most potent soil. The images my father planted in me were an exchange of vows. He passed the book or magazine to me silently. He pointed a finger. Looking, like listening was a discipline. What was I to make of the horror of those photos, safe in my own room with the cowboy curtains and my rock collection? He thrust
books at me with a ferocity that frightens me, I would say now, more than the images themselves. What I was to make of them, in my safe room, was clear. You are not too young. There were hundreds of thousands younger than you. (218-19)

Each act of “burning” identifies a member of the cultural trauma within their own generation. His father, a first generation survivor, wears the camp number tattooed on his arm while Ben “wears” the psychic tattoo of the looking and listening, the stories and images, that scar his psyche and identify him as a member of the second generation. In addition, in this except, Ben compares “volcanic ash,” an important material substance and repeated metaphor from Jakob’s trauma narrative, to the “potent soil” of his own cultural trauma “planted” in him as a member of the second generation.

Although Michaels represents Jakob, the “afterbirth of earth,” as closely connected to the ground—a bulbous root, a turnip, a bog-boy—from the outset he seeks solace and safety in enclosed, manmade spaces—the wall of his parents’ closet, the coat and trousers of Athos, the lighthouse on Zakynthos, his home, with Michaela, in Toronto and on Idhra. Even though the ground acts as companion witness to the catastrophic events Jakob endures, witnesses, and survives, Jakob always associates the outdoors, the ground, with these limit-events. In a sense, he is obsessed with and marvels at the geology of the earth and his miraculous life after death, his “afterbirth.” Yet, his relationship with nature always seems marked with the traumatic features of his past, which, at times, intrudes into his present—“everywhere nature remembers. Trees, for example, carry the memory of rainfall. In their rings we read ancient weather – storms, sunlight, and temperatures, the growing seasons of centuries. A forest shares a history, which each tree
remembers even after it has been felled”—as though trees carry the markers of destruction, through the centuries, alongside their human counterparts (211).

On the other hand, Ben’s fears escalate indoors where the silence of his parents and the darkness of his room, the room where his father forced him to look at history books on the Holocaust and photos of family members, “[his] uncle whose body vanished under a squirming skin of lice” become insufferable to him (217). Whenever possible, Ben prolongs his excursions away from his dank home and seldom invites friends to his house after school. On one such rare occasion, his mother interrogates his school chum: “‘What is your last name . . . what do your parents do . . . where were you born?’” embarrassing Ben with her old-world manners and her distrust of strangers (229; ellipses original). About to start his second year of university, Ben moves to his own apartment and encounters his mother’s suspicion of outsiders, turned on him, when he visits. Overwhelmed with feelings of betrayal at leaving home, a necessary component to beginning an independent, adult life, Ben refuses to answer his mother’s phone calls and puts off visiting his parents for weeks at a time, knowing that his absence and his silence cause them anguish and “make[s] them ill with worry” (231). For a long time, he makes no real effort to form friendships of his own, saying, “‘I felt I had expended all my energy walking out my parents’ front door’” (232). When he does visit, his mother’s behavior alters; she is reluctant to share stories, but his father remains unchanged, “staring at a book in his room—another survivor account, another article with photographs,” silent and immobile (231).

His parents, who remain nameless, never completely recover from the death of their named children, Hannah and Paul. Ben learns from Naomi that their fear of losing him causes them to name him “Ben, not from Benjamin, but merely ‘ben’—the Hebrew word for son,” hoping “the birth of their third child would go unnoticed” and that “the angel of death might pass
by" (253). After Ben’s mother dies, his father’s health deteriorates and with “his brain tuned to the frequency of ghosts,” Ben realizes, that for the first time, his father is able to “experience[e] pleasure at looking back at a happier time” and with this realization comes a partial and belated understanding of his father’s inability to witness his own past (250, 251).

It may be helpful to return for a moment to Michaels’ meditation on loss in Goodwin’s art: “An object once held by a loved one who’s lost to us is not a metaphor for the absent body, it does not stand in for the body, it is itself: a remnant, the artifact left behind, a trace,” and to think of Ben’s trauma, in relation to his parents’ trauma, in terms of absence and loss. LaCapra differentiates between these two concepts and notes “losses may entail absences, but the converse need not be the case” (700). Importantly, in “Trauma, Absence, Loss” (“TAL”), he points to the “historical” nature of loss and the “transhistorical” nature of absence:

I would situate the type of absence in which I am especially (but not exclusively) interested on a transhistorical level, while situating loss on a historical level. In this transhistorical sense absence is not an event and does not imply tenses (past, present, or future). By contrast, the historical past is the scene of losses that may be narrated as well as of specific possibilities that may conceivably be reactivated, reconfigured, and transformed in the present or future. The past is misperceived in terms of sheer absence or utter annihilation. Something of the past always remains, if only as a haunting presence or revenant. (700)

LaCapra relates loss to particular “events” that happen to individuals, such as the death of a loved one, and to communities and cultures, such as apartheid and the Holocaust. The Shoah
experience, a “founding trauma” in a group’s history becomes the basis for one’s identity (714); this sums up Ben’s experience of his familial history, of being born into a family whose “founding trauma” continues as a debilitating and anguished silence he seeks to escape. His father’s selective yet overzealous efforts to pass on his generational legacy produce in Ben isolating, reclusive behaviours that mimic his father’s. As a child, Ben’s profound fear for his own safety causes him to distance himself physically and emotionally, to delay his return home from school each day as a means of temporary escape, to cease communicating with his father, and, to a lesser degree, his mother.

LaCapra’s conception of transhistorical absence and historical loss enable an understanding of the transhistorical nature of cultural trauma as well as the importance of the Holocaust family photograph to Ben’s narrative. The photograph, another “tiny square of silence” (FP 285) in his life, personifies the historical losses of his parents, losses which they, following from LaCapra, “convert,” into “endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia” (“TAL” 698). His parents’ cultural trauma, their impossible, historical losses and his own unknown historical losses become melancholic absences. His parents’ inability to tell the story of Hannah and Paul means that not until Ben discovers their photograph and understands their life and their death is he able to understand his parents’ loss and his resultant feeling of being “born into absence.” As noted in Chapter One, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud suggests that both states involve a reaction to the loss of an “object of love” with the distinction that melancholia involves a withdrawal of consciousness whereas in mourning there is nothing unconscious about the loss (244, 245); the act of mourning, the internal work mourning requires, keeps the loss conscious. With the belated knowledge and understanding of his parents’ past and of his own historical loss, Ben begins the conscious work
of mourning. The "presence" of Hannah and Paul supplies Ben with an "imagetext," a "prose picture," which enables him to fill in some of the narrative gaps and fissures of his family: "We think of photographs as the captured past. But some photographs are like DNA. In them you can read your whole future" (251). The photograph of Hannah and Paul with his parents, a photograph taken before their incommensurable losses, ameliorates some of the silences and absences of his family "picture." With this partial, belated "visual narrative," Ben begins to comprehend his parents' catastrophic, historical losses and his own historical losses as separate from transhistorical absence and, thus, to imagine a future, for himself, of "ordinary sorrow."

**The photographic aesthetics of postmemory**

Hirsch proposes that family photographs and the family photograph album constitute "a familial visual field," encompassing positive and negative affiliative looks between family members, spanning distances and generations (*FF* 53-54). Barthes muses on a number of photographs of his mother, then chooses the image of her that conveys to him her essence, her personhood. In the context of this familial agreement, Barthes is able to look at a photograph of his mother and experience a mutual recognition. Hirsch asserts that we both see and want to be seen. When Barthes gazes at the Winter Garden Photograph of his mother, he experiences a mutual exchange; in some sense he (re)experiences his mother looking back at him and, because of this shared recognition he is able to remember the joys of her life and mourn her loss. Hirsch suggests that when Barthes excludes the Winter Garden Photograph from *Camera Lucida*, he delineates the limits of the family album thereby excluding the non-familial gaze of his readers (*FF* 54). The photograph Ben encounters takes on a meaningfulness that outweighs its quotidian
origins as a family snapshot. When Ben gazes at the photograph of Hannah and Paul, the distance between them is "unbridgeable, there is no return look of recognition, no shared knowing;" Ben, Hannah, and Paul do not share "a familial visual field" (FF 54). Ben’s parents, in keeping the secret of his siblings’ life and death, exclude him from the shared visual field and from all the positive and negative affiliative looks of the family. The single photograph assumes the impossible burden of bearing witness to the incommensurability of his parents’ past. Although the photograph can never entirely realize this task, it does provide Ben with a site of mourning.

The alterity, emblematic of postmemory, in the photograph Ben uncovers, resides in its belatedness, its silence, and its degree of mediation—Hannah, Paul, his mother, and his father all together in the photograph, four family revenants. The fractured process of their discovery announces the (unspoken) past in the present, "pricks" and "wounds" Ben, and suggests an alternate discourse, one he has, sadly, never been told. Alone and in silence, like Jakob in bed at night imagining Bella and listening for her presence, pressing his ear against the thin wall that separates the living from the dead, Ben too glimpses a tear in the fabric of the "gossamer wall" as the photograph creates an opening in the present and he experiences a visceral connection to the past (31). Material remnants, especially the photograph with its uncanny referentiality, have the power to promote mourning in the present historical moment and create the opportunity for retrospective witnessing and working-through. For Ben, the photographic indexical traces of his siblings with his parents’ traces provides this impetus, even in their absence.

What Hirsch calls "the photographic aesthetics of postmemory—the photograph’s capacity to signal absence and loss and, at the same time, to make present, rebuild, reconnect, bring back to life" (FF 243), read alongside Barthes’ photographic noeme, illuminate the
potential of the “Hannah. Paul” photograph to assist Ben’s mourning. The photographic noeme, “that-has-been,” that Barthes identifies in Camera Lucida, Ben expresses as “born into absence” paradoxically summing up his familial noeme as deficit, whereas Jakob’s familial essence expresses as surfeit, “the-gradual-instant,” an excess of the past in the present. Identifying these phrases as noetic expressions further locates and particularizes Jakob’s and Ben’s respective experiences as members of the first and second generation. The “tissues” of Ben’s community, the four family members in the photograph, were either annihilated, Paul and Hannah, or irreparably wounded, Ben’s parents, and their collective wound creates an ethos different from (I hesitate to draw hierarchical comparisons of suffering and say more than) the sum of its individual wounds, an ethos I am calling the familial noeme, “born-into-absence.”

Ben’s familial noeme “born-into-absence” does not preclude his working through his parents’ hereditary bequest in their absence, but rather his experience of postmemorial absence in the wake of his own, recently learned-of losses assists his commitment to a differently determined future. His commitment to future change (and thus a future) takes place on his return flight home; high above the earth, he re-imagines and re-writes an oft-repeated “imagetext” of his parents, from his past, and, in doing so, he imagines a future with Naomi:

Once, I saw my father sitting in the snow-blue kitchen. I was six years old. I came downstairs in the middle of the night. There had been snow as I slept. The kitchen glowed with new drifts piled against the windows; blue as the inside of a crevasse. My father was sitting at the table, eating. I was transfixed by his face. This was the first time I had seen food make my father cry.
But now, from thousands of feet in the air, I see something else. My mother stands behind my father and his head leans against her. As he eats, she strokes his hair. Like a miraculous circuit, each draws strength from the other.

I see that I must give what I most need. (294)

Once again the architectonics of the novel shifts. This second shift, from the "ground" of the home upward to the sky, captures the purity of untouched stars and snow that falls from the sky and reflects Ben's interest in meteorology rather than the earth sciences of archaeology and geology that fascinate Jakob and Athos. Images, draped in the colours of sky and stars, colours and landscapes altogether foreign to this novel, until this point, appear anew. Blues and whites cover the fetid, mossy ground of the home, while familial absence and loss recede underneath the cover of sky and snow. In the same way that Michaels' poetic themes transform in the final volume of her trilogy—tropes of birth and fecundity replace decay and loss, lovers and mothers rather than soldiers and Holocaust survivors observe the stars in the sky and the cows in the fields—here, too, tropes of fragmentation and rupture give way to positive reconfigurations of earth and sky and family; however, this is not to suggest that Ben's reframing of his family picture repairs or negates the original traumatic rupture that his parents suffer at the hands of their Nazi perpetrators.

Immediately prior to the above excerpt, we're told, "[t]he plane descends in a wide arc" (294). We know, of course, that Ben doesn't remain in the sky; he returns (we imagine) to the ground and to his home with Naomi. Within the circuitry of transgenerational cultural trauma, Ben recognizes an opportunity to alter the current of his own traumatic transmission. The deictic markers "now" and "I" in conjunction with the image of his parents in the present tense bring the
past into the present, but without affective compulsive repetition and retraumatization. On the contrary, Ben’s postmemorial aesthetic enables him to re-vision and recontextualize this “prose picture” of his parents; within this “miraculous circuit,” Ben transforms the “electric field” of his past, once a “desperate energy” with no narrative into a family story of acknowledged losses and conscious mourning (253).

This brings me to my conclusion. In Chapter Two, I suggest that Michaels’ language endorses a view of the natural world as inseparable from human existence: “Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment. Eskers of ash wait to be scooped up, lives reconstituted.” The dead enter the living “through their pores” and into their “bloodstreams to their brains and hearts. And through their blood into another generation (FP 53, 52). Thus, she presents natural formations and human inhabitants as interconnected, transgenerational systems.

Hirsch and Alexander et al theorize distinct processes of transgenerational trauma that, together, offer a sociocultural perspective. Alexander defines cultural trauma as discursively constructed and maintains that cultural trauma “is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (“TTCT” 10). In order to turn an event into a significant generational experience, “carrier groups,” the strategic agents of the trauma process, must be able to persuade other community members of the event’s significance or meaning. Alexander’s “trauma process,” the gap between the event and its representation by carrier groups, is a meaning-struggle, an attempt to seize hold of an inchoate experience and through what Hirsch calls “an imaginative investment and creation,” shape the event in such a way as to give meaning to that experience (FF 22). Although Hirsch’s use of the term second generation remains more ambiguous than
Alexander's use of carrier group and Eyerman's notion of what constitutes a generation, Hirsch, too, identifies a significant generational experience of suffering and profound injury with her concept of postmemory. In this sense, postmemory shares with cultural trauma the idea of a transgenerational transmission of trauma. The intellectual and imaginative postmemorial creations that Hirsch identifies, participate in the ongoing struggle of meaning-making in the aftermath of trauma and represent the experiences of those who come after.
Notes: Chapter Three

1 Here, I borrow Erickson's use of "tissue" as it applies to a community. A specialist in the effects of collective trauma, Erickson suggests that "traumatized communities" differ from "assemblies of traumatized persons" and describes the "social dimension" of trauma, in terms of a wound. The "tissues of community," he posits, may be damaged in much the same way that the "tissues" of the individual sustain physical and psychic trauma (185).
Works Cited


Whitehead, Anne. “‘Ground that will remember you’: trauma and landscape in Anne Michaels’s Fugitive Pieces.” *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004. 48-78.