Remembering Who We Are in the Post-Holocaust Diaspora: Memory, Imagination, and Identity in the Work of Rafael Goldchain and Angela Grossmann

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Abstract

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Amanda Burstein

The ways in which we remember the Holocaust individually and collectively remains a topic of critical consideration in the current day and age. Issues related to Holocaust memory have been taken up by scholars and artists alike, who question the role of remembering this history and its mediations. Examining the practices of contemporary artists Rafael Goldchain and Angela Grossmann, this thesis explores how imagined realities fit into to the processes of memory, and what their implications are for post-Holocaust art and life. The relationship between memory and the construction of personal identity is also taken up here, with a questioning of how memory (including imaginatively-mediated memory) becomes involved in the processes of personal, familial and cultural identification. This thesis will argue that alternative forms of memory work, with a focus upon imagining as remembering, are a necessary and productive means of working through the ongoing consequences of the events of the Holocaust, among the children and grandchildren of survivors who must negotiate their identities in relation to these personal and collective pasts.

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Introduction

I remember a small, hinged silver frame that my grandmother kept on a bookshelf in her apartment. Nested in each side was a worn black and white studio portrait photograph. These faces were unknown to me: a man and a woman from a bygone era revealed through the formality of their poses, their hairstyles and manner of dress. The couple represented in these photographs are my paternal great-grandparents. These images were the only visual connection I had to my family's history beyond my grandparents, whose own photographic records seemed only to begin after their arrival in Canada. Following the birth of their children, my grandparents immigrated to Montreal in the early 1950s. With the exception of my maternal grandmother, each of my grandparents were the sole members of their family to survive the war in Europe, and thus they started life anew with only their spouses and their newborn children, in a country far removed from their originary home in Poland. Save the two photographs displayed in my grandmother's apartment, there remained no relics of their lives before emigration.

My experience, I recently discovered, is one I share with many others whose ancestors were forced to leave their countries of origin in the wake of events of atrocity, wherein home had become hostile territory.[1] Perhaps due in part to language barriers, and certainly due to the difficulty of recounting traumatic experiences, my grandparents, like those of so many others, never spoke to me about their lives before the war. Without photographic evidence of this past, I could only imagine what life had looked like for

[1] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 219.

them. My recourse to imagination as a means to engage with my family's past is characteristic of the experience of postwar generations of Jews who live in the diaspora.

The children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors must often grapple with a lack of knowledge about their family's past, and further, with growing up in a geo-cultural context that differs significantly from the places in which their ancestors lived. These issues present themselves most forcefully through the difficulty experienced by these subsequent generations in understanding how to relate to fraught and often unknown family narratives, and especially how to identify with the Jewish culture of their parents and/or grandparents while living in diaspora. Drawing on her own experience as the child of survivors, literary and cultural theorist Marianne Hirsch explains,

> None of us ever knows the world of our parents. We can say that the motor of the fictional imagination is fuelled in great part by the desire to know the world as it looked and felt before our birth. How much more ambivalent is this curiosity for children of Holocaust survivors, exiled from a world that has ceased to exist, that has been violently erased. Theirs is a different desire, at once more powerful and more conflicted: the need not just to feel and to know, but also to re-member, to re-build, to re-incarnate, to replace, and to repair.[2]

As Hirsch points out, for the children of survivors – and I would add, the grandchildren as well – there exists not only a need for knowledge that, in its absence, can only be mediated imaginatively, but also therein a need to re-construct that which has been lost in order to find a place, an identity, despite and in relation to their dislocations. Hirsch characterizes the diasporic experiences of Jews as a "condition of exile from the space of

[2] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 242-3.

identity,"[3] spaces to which they cannot return because these places "are no longer the cities in which their parents [or grandparents] lived as Jews before the genocide, but the cities where genocide happened and from which they and their memory have been expelled."[4] Postwar generations of Jews thus face a crisis of identity in relation to familial, cultural, and geographical losses. As Hirsch notes, there is an effort made by many children of survivors not only to confront these losses but also a desire to negotiate their own identities through reclamatory and redemptive gestures.

Contemporary visual artists Rafael Goldchain and Angela Grossmann are both affected by a family history that has been marked by the consequences of the Holocaust. The influence of their respective familial histories is evident in their artistic processes and in their artworks. While Goldchain is much more outspoken about the role of family narratives in his project *I Am My Family* (late 1990s-2008), Grossmann's series *Looking Back* (2000-2002) reveals its familial connotations, especially when read through Goldchain's work, which is in part how I will approach it here. Both artists employ photography within their practice, with Goldchain favouring studio-type black and white self-portraits in the guise of real and imaginary ancestors, and Grossmann painting and drawing upon enlarged reproductions of found photographs of unknown European children taken prior to the war. These two artists are among a great number who have taken up issues relating to the Holocaust and its remembrance through visual representation. Their use of photography to explore memory related to these enduring issues also follows a long-standing tradition in the collective memorialization of the events of the Holocaust.

[3] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 243.
[4] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 243.

In her text, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, cultural theorist Barbie Zelizer discusses the major role played by photographs in shaping the collective memory of the Holocaust and of events of atrocity more generally. In light of the disbelief and denial that followed the Holocaust, shocking and disturbing photographic images became popular tools of persuasion, convincing the doubtful of the veracity of survivors' testimonial accounts.[5] Indeed, critical theorist Roland Barthes asserts that, "From a phenomenological viewpoint, in the Photograph, the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation."[6] The photographic image thus became a prominent and powerful aspect of the construction of a historical narrative about the Holocaust. People were forced to bear witness, through the photograph, of the unfathomable scale of atrocity that had occurred, securing these affective images a prominent place in the collective visual memory of its history. In her examination of the complex relationship of photographic images of Holocaust to the construction of collective memory, Zelizer argues that there have been three waves of memory that have continued to reinscribe these images on the public imagination, each period possessing its own modes of bearing witness. A lapse in the popular imagination's interest in Holocaust imagery followed an initial period of heightened attention that had lasted until the late 1940s. This first phase, which saw "a seemingly endless display of photographic shots of the camps," was responsible for "shocking both [the United States and Britain] out of their skepticism."[7] It was not until the late 1970s that these images once again became the subject of public as well as academic and critical consideration. This phase of renewed

[5] Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14.
[6] Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989), 89.
[7] Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 11-12.

consciousness about the Holocaust also bore witness to a shift from thinking about what was known about the event, to how it was remembered.[8]

Here, I would like to call the latter question into consideration in the context of contemporary art production: how is the Holocaust remembered now? Further, what are the different types of remembering that subsequent generations are engaging with? Historian Dominick LaCapra, in his text *Trauma, Absence, Loss*, suggests that memory work can be an effective modality of working through traumatic experiences.[9] Atypical forms of memory work have been proposed in the ongoing negotiation of Holocaust remembrance in relation to both collective and individual historical narratives. Hirsch, in her exploration of remembering among the children of survivors, proposes the notion of "postmemory," a form of memory that is mediated through imagination as opposed to direct experience.[10] She develops this idea to characterize the memorial experiences of the children of survivors who imaginatively engage with inherited memories of trauma of their parents. The qualities of postmemory as outlined by Hirsch do not entirely reflect the practices of Goldchain nor Grossmann, though her concept does successfully open up a space in which new forms of memory work can be explored, particularly those that are influenced by imagination and fantasy. While currently there is a greater willingness to explore alternative expressions of memory in relation to the history of the Holocaust, as recently as two decades ago such artistic explorations were hotly debated and approached with moral caution.

In *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory*, literary theorist Ernst van Alphen critiques the opposition of historical and

[8] Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 171.
[9] Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss" in *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (Summer 1999), 713.
[10] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.

imaginative discourses established in late 1990s Holocaust studies, instead proposing a dissolution of the distinction between these two types of narratives. Van Alphen notes that imaginative discourses of the Holocaust are often regarded as an inappropriate means of addressing historical tragedy, citing Adorno's objections to aestheticizing such a "barbaric" event through imaginative interpretation.[11] Testimony is often viewed as the most direct and transparent account of history, capable of offering an unmediated account of historical events. Van Alphen argues against this notion, instead suggesting that aesthetic experience and the transmission of historical knowledge can be mutually supportive processes.

Van Alphen argues that official historical narratives of the Holocaust can be limiting in their fixed moral positions. As he explains,

> War and Holocaust narratives were dull to me, almost dulled me, as a young child because they were told in such a way that I was not allowed to have my own response to them. My response, in other words, was already culturally prescribed or narratively programmed … [The meaning of the Holocaust] depended on the narrative framework of the Second World War, in which it was embedded. But somehow, for me the place the Holocaust occupied in that story did not make sense, or not enough sense: there was much more to say about the Holocaust than was possible in terms of the meanings provided by the framework of war on which it depended to be 'explained.'[12]

For Van Alphen, images and stories that develop outside of 'official' historical narratives (i.e., those narratives which are constructed through primary sources such as testimonies

[11] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 17.
[12] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 2.

and memoirs) become "discrete events foreign to a constructed world that seemed too coherent and understandable."[13] Conversely, official historical narratives of the Holocaust do not suffice as suitable explanations for the Holocaust. Moreover, this history necessitates more than a de facto explanation – it also requires an exploration on various levels (emotional as well as factual) and through various means (even those not privileged by history's methodologies) if any sort of meaningful understandings are to be derived. For Van Alphen, the narratives constructed were "too coherent and understandable,"[14] and it is in part for this reason that many continue to think about the Holocaust, as no monolithic narrative of atrocity can possibly account for the myriad meanings and experiences that comprise the entirety of the event. Indeed, Zelizer notes, "No single memory reflects all that is known about a given event ... Instead, memories resemble a mosaic, where they generate an authoritative vision in repertoire with other views of the past."[15]

Inviting imagination into the possibilities for memory work creates room for subjective responses and, therein, the working through of difficult pasts and a reinvestment in current life. Conflating imagination with memory is also particularly useful in reclaiming and reconstructing familial memories. For those for whom the direct mediation of familial memories was stunted by the consequences of the Holocaust, imagination can be one the few means through which such familial narratives can be constructed. Hirsch cites Barthes's *Camera Lucida* to assert that photography is "inherently familial."[16] Through these critics and others, photography and photographic

[13] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 2-3.
[14] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 2-3.
[15] Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 4.
[16] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 5.

theory have become prominent tools in the reconstruction of familial memories and narratives that have been erased through the destructive effects of genocide.

The relationship between memory and imagination, particularly in their "complicity"[17] in the viewing of photographs, is complex. Art historian Martha Langford explains,

> Only the slightest elaboration is needed to make the connection between memory, a mental image, and photography, a mechanical one. But as this exercise unfolds, it quickly becomes obvious that imagination is actually pulling the strings, making objections, proposing variations, and effectively complicating the relationship between memory and photography that seemed so simple at the start.[18]

Imagination is an actor alongside memory in our perception of photographs, suggesting that the two modes of consciousness should not be understood as mutually exclusive, as could be heard among initial objections to the entrance of the imagination into Holocaust narratives. Particularly given the major role of photography in the development of historical narratives, as noted by Zelizer, the role of imagination in the current mediations and negotiations of this history necessitates further consideration.

Scholarly discussions about the distinguishing features of imagination point to the difficulty of its definition within both the philosophical and psychological disciplines. The action of imagining is generally understood as the mental representation of a thing (be it an object, event, sensation, etc.), though the term is employed in such broad usage that subcategories have been proposed to help elucidate the different types of

[17] Martha Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone: Expressions of Memory in Contemporary Photographic Art*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 100.
[18] Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 98.

imagining.[19] Imagination, as Langford has shown, is an active participant in our experience of looking at photographs; further, it is the viewing subject's imagination that "mak[es] photography's reality effect persuasive."[20] Imagination is employed to this end in much literature about the Holocaust, with authors making use of their creative imagination to heighten the emotional effect of their texts. In the autobiographical literature that followed the Holocaust, the difficulty – or what is often recognized as the impossibility – of describing the experience of atrocity requires recourse to the creative imagination to forcefully convey the emotional and psychological dimensions of such traumatic experiences: "Imaginative discourse not only allows the writer to attest to this breached threshold between the real and the unimaginable, but also provides a way to reenter, reanimate, and make real this otherwise inaccessible world."[21]

While imaginatively-engaged literary accounts of the Holocaust were initially met with hesitation, numerous critics agree that imagination is an inevitable and a necessary aspect of representation given what many consider the impossibility of re-presenting the experience of the Holocaust.[22] In *Imagining the Holocaust*, Daniel R. Schwarz writes:

> The imaginative energy of Holocaust fictional narratives, transmuting facts in the crucible of art, has become more and more prominent a part of how the collective memory of the Holocaust is shaped and survives… The mythic and metaphoric rendering of the Holocaust in … [literature] show[s] how we no

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[19] Tamar Gendler, "Imagination," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2011 ed. (2011), last modified March 14, 2011, accessed August 3, 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/imagination/#ImaResRes.

[20] Martha Langford, "Movements Toward Image," introduction to *Image & Imagination* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2005), 7.

[21] Karein Kristen Goertz, *Generational Representations of the Holocaust: Trauma, Memory, and the Imagination* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1997), 31-32.

[22] Due in part to the psychological effects of trauma that limit the ways in which traumatic events are processed and later recalled, as discussed by Pierre Janet, and also due to the difficulty of capturing the degree of atrocities committed and experienced.

> longer think of Holocaust narratives as objective truths or events but as the dramatized consciousness of those seeking appropriate words and images to render experience that seems to defy understanding.[23]

Lawrence Langer also suggests the necessity of the use of imaginative elements in literature about the Holocaust as a means of addressing such a difficult topic, explaining, "Creating an imagined context … makes accessible to the imagination what might have seemed intractable material."[24] According to Langer, imagination is essential on the part of the author, in her mediation of narratives of atrocity, as well as the reader, in her ability to develop an understanding of the Holocaust. Imaginative literature can effectively and, importantly, truthfully – Langer refers to the "imaginative truths"[25] of literature about Holocaust – "depict the emotional and psychological reality of traumatic events that … bypass full consciousness while they are happening."[26]

Schwarz and Langer emphasize the conflation of imagination with fact (to the degree that certain facts can be faithfully recalled) as an important feature of imaginative literary works about the Holocaust. Jeffrey M. Peck remarks that, "Even in cases where 'real' events are fictionalized as another tool in the struggle to represent the unrepresentable, such authors do not 'fictionalize' in a traditional sense. While they may create characters, times, and locations that are not 'real,' they never veer to far from the Holocaust itself, which keeps its firm grip on verisimilitude."[27]

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[23] Daniel R. Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 32-33; 36.
[24] Lawrence Langer, "Fictional Facts and Factual Fictions: History in Holocaust Literature," 1990, in *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 79.
[25] Langer, "Fictional Facts and Factual Fictions," 76.
[26] Goertz, *Generational Representations of the Holocaust*, 17.
[27] Jeffrey M. Peck, "The Holocaust and Literary Studies," in *Literature of the Holocaust*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 233.

In the literature of the Holocaust then, as with the experience of viewing photographs, imagination aids the depiction and mediation of 'real' events helping the reader (or, viewer) to develop a conceptual and emotional understanding of the subject represented. Langford writes, "Imagination refreshes [the act of beholding], allows us to view a photograph of a landscape as though we were there, to assume the experience along with the view."[28] A similar vicarious experience that is elicited, with the help of the imagination, through viewing a photograph is shared by the literary expression of the emotional and psychological reality of the experience of the Holocaust and its aftereffects: "Artists and creative writers are able to tap into yet another dimension of testimony, namely how trauma leaves indelible traces on the body, imagination, memory, and narrative."[29] As subsequent generations of writers and artists have taken up issues relating to the Holocaust in their work, imagination takes on a greater role out of necessity, yet narratives often remain rooted in historical facts and experiences. For those authors and artists who did not experience the Holocaust directly but whose family members had, imagination is used in concert with memory and historical fact to represent some aspect of traumatic experience and/or its consequences. Such an approach is visible in the practices of Goldchain and Grossmann.

The affinities between memory and imagination are explored in Goldchain's ancestor self-portraits, where they collaborate to create a full picture of the artist's family. The role of memory is less clear in Grossmann's works, where imagination seems to play a greater role their creation. Perhaps in her case it may be fair to suggest that, "Memory is supporting imagination without dragging it down into too many particulars. A

[28] Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 101.
[29] Goertz, *Generational Representations of the Holocaust*, 31.

photographic mode that deals in *pastness*, rather than *the past*, has been invaded by this kind of imagining."[30] Both artists' work engages with memory and imagination in complex and interrelated ways, calling into question how imagined realities fit into to the processes of memory, and what their implications are for post-Holocaust art and life. Further, Goldchain's and Grossmann's practices explore the role this type of memory plays in the construction of personal identity. This thesis will examine how memory is explored in Rafael Goldchain's and Angela Grossmann's respective works, with a focused inquiry into the notion of imagining as remembering, by questioning how memory (imagined or otherwise) becomes involved in the process of personal and cultural identification.

Rafael Goldchain: *I Am My Family*

Contemporary artist Rafael Goldchain's series of self-portraits entitled *I Am My Family* explores the connections between photography, memory, family, and identity. Created in studio, these photographs feature the artist elaborately costumed in the likeness of numerous family members, some of which are based on existent images, others on family legend, while some are invented entirely. Of memory or imagination – at times a conflation of the two – Goldchain's black and white portraits are extensively researched and meticulously constructed to create the appearance and character of both male and female ancestors. The artist restages several extant family photographs, his performance informed by relatives' memories as well as his own genealogical and archival research, while a number are based largely upon imagined narratives inspired by a knowledge of, and assumptions about, the historical and cultural contexts in which his

[30] Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 100.

ancestors would have lived. Goldchain's self-portraits are presented collectively, as in a family photo album, in his book, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions*.

Born in 1953 to a secular Jewish family in Santiago de Chile, Goldchain became increasingly curious about his family history in his late thirties. Like many Jewish families, Goldchain's has for many decades been scattered across the diaspora, posing challenges to the construction of a unified family narrative. A number of the artist's Eastern European ancestors emigrated to South America, some to Canada and the United States, following the First World War, while those who remained in Europe perished during the Holocaust. With little record of those extended family members who had been persecuted during the war, Goldchain emphasizes, "The few photographs that remain from the time of the Shoah[31] are more than precious. It was through these photographs that I was able to connect to my ancestors."[32] For Goldchain, as for so many of us, looking at the remaining photographs of his ancestors elicits a feeling of kinship, a shared connection through which he identifies with the individuals represented. The artist is very much aware of the role of photography in the construction of familial identities, memories, narratives, and mythologies, employing this technology to reconstruct a family album and, by extension, a family history.

Goldchain's process is elaborate, involving costumes, hairstyles, makeup, props, lighting, performance, and digital manipulation to (re)create the characters embodied in his self-portraits. The artist's methodical approach is necessary to convincingly personify the varied types that compose his family album. Spanning several generations,

[31] The Hebrew term for the Holocaust.
[32] Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 19.

Goldchain's photo album pays close attention to particulars of attire, styling, and composure before the camera. He frequently draws inspiration from period photographs, his characters – real and imaginary – bearing the physical and psychological attributes of their time and place. The older men appear sober-faced, grey-haired, densely-bearded, and topped with a yarmulke[33] or fashionable hat. Tightly-framed images are cropped at the sitters' shoulders, featuring their faces. The younger, seemingly more secular, generations of male subjects are often photographed from the waist up, offering a range of middle-aged, suit- and uniform-clad professionals, clean-shaven or occasionally moustached. Military men don their uniforms, and numerous musicians are accompanied by their instruments. These portraits offer more psychological insight into their respective characters, displaying a greater range of facial expressions among the younger generations, particularly the youthful, riotous schoolboy pictured in *Self-Portrait as Chaim Goldszayn (Laughing)* (fig. 1), or the exuberant *Self-Portrait as Don Marcos José Goldchain Liberman (Older)* (fig. 2). A number maintain sombre, self-possessed dispositions, while some are visibly content, joyous, and others melancholic.

Like the array of male relatives represented, the women that Goldchain portrays are generally well-dressed and well-groomed. They appear quite reserved, some wearing softer expressions than others, but are altogether more contained than some of their more expressive male counterparts. Many of the women appear quite feminine –poised, made-up and coiffed – while a few, notably those pictured in *Self-Portrait as Chaja Golda Precelman* (fig. 3) and *Self-Portrait as Sarah Gitl Ryten* (fig. 4), are much more androgynous in appearance and dress. Goldchain does not merely pose as these ancestors,

[33] A skullcap worn by religious Jewish men and boys.

but fully personifies and performs their respective physical and psychological characters, drawing on the theatricality inherent to the tradition of studio portraiture. The photographer's studio becomes the set, a backdrop against which individuals perform as their 'selves' for the camera, according to current ideals of appearance and decorum, guided by the photographer who adjusts the sitter's pose and expression. Barthes notes that there is a perceptible inauthenticity in the imitation of oneself before the camera,[34] wherein the sitter becomes the actor, the 'self' becomes the role, and the photographer becomes the director. It is a complex performance wherein, Barthes explains, "In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."[35] The normal staging of portraits is therefore very similar to Goldchain's process, where he is both director and actor, both himself and 'other.'

The broad range of Goldchain's impersonations reflects the physical and psychological diversity visible in most family albums. What is unique about Goldchain's book, unlike most family albums, is his inclusion of text alongside several images revealing the inspiration for and the process of creating the portrait. In addition to laying bare the artifice of his project, Goldchain underlines the specific memories, those drawn from memory and those imagined, that fed the development of his self-portraits. The "collection and assembly of memories,"[36] the artist's own as well as those of family members, is as significant a part of Goldchain's process as the creation of the final image. Indeed, memory is often the primary source of inspiration for Goldchain: his first self-portrait, based on his maternal grandfather, "was motivated by the desire to create an

[34] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 13.
[35] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*,13.
[36] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 18.

image purely out of memory."[37] Imagination plays a major part alongside memory in Goldchain's work – as evidenced by the subtitle of his book, "Photographic Memories and Fictions" – as he constructs the appearances of unseen and even unknown relatives. Goldchain is utilizing the existing relationship between memory and imagination, which are inseparable within the process of photographic perception, in both the production of his images and in their anticipated reception. Langford argues, "The photographic spaces *that we create* between original and translation are filled with purposive imagining."[38]

Encountering gaps in his family's history, Goldchain, out of necessity, has imagined memories of his ancestors in order to fully develop and perform their characters through his photographs. The artist often leaves these elements of fantasy visible to underline the construction at play, particularly in in the book-bound version of the project considered here, sharing personal sketchbooks and production stills, along with covert disparities in the dates the images were created and the photographic technologies available at that time, as in his sly *Self-Portrait as Naftuli Goldszaijn* (fig. 5). Born in the "early 1800s," Naftuli looks to be about forty years old in the portrait, locating the supposed date of the picture around mid-century when, in Poland, daguerreotypes[39] would still have been the most common types images produced.[40] The image Goldchain has created is a visible product of more advanced photographic technologies, revealing the imaginary fabrication.

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[37] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 18.
[38] Langford, *Scissors, Paper, Stone*, 105.
[39] A photographic process, invented in 1839, in which a picture made on a silver surface sensitized with iodine was developed by exposure to mercury vapour. (Daguerreotype. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/daguerreotype).
[40] Krzysztof Jurecki, "The History of Polish Photography," Culture.pl, 2001, http://www.culture.pl/web/english/resources-visual-arts-full-page/-/eo_event_asset_publisher/eAN5/content/the-history-of-polish-photography.

Goldchain's conflation of memory and imagination is exploratory on an artistic level as well as a personal one. What the artist refers to as "weav[ing] history and fiction into a simulacrum of a family album,"[41] represents a project of reclamation of those ancestors whose traces have been lost or destroyed through normal and extraordinary circumstances, within the context of self-identification, and in relation to familial and cultural pasts. At the heart of Goldchain's project is the desire to grasp some knowledge of his ancestors in an effort to negotiate his own familial and cultural identity. Reflecting on the impact of his family's fragmented history, Goldchain notes, "Children of survivors of such cultures and their children experience the need to reach towards the past as a means to grapple with identities made unstable by multiple migrations and cultural displacements."[42] The diasporic experiences of many Jews can complicate the development of cultural and familial identities, at times stimulating a desire for a re-examination of and a reinvestment in cultural and familial histories, in an effort to find a place within what Hirsch calls the "lost spaces of identity."[43] Particularly in the case of an exilic diaspora, as is common among Holocaust survivors and their descendants, identification with a place of origin as well as a familial lineage is disrupted. For many, access to the material and memorial traces of a family line is limited. Goldchain therefore endeavours to fill the gaps of his family's documented history employing one of the primary means through which we remember and identify with our respective familial groups: photography.

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[41] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 18.
[42] Menachem Wecker, "Self-Referential Memories: Rafael Goldchain's 'I Am My Family' at the Jewish Community Center of Houston," *Houston Chronicle*, October 19, 2010, http://blog.chron.com/iconia/2010/10/self-referential-memories-rafael-goldchains-i-am-my-family-at-the-jewish-community-center-of-houston/.
[43] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 243.

Photographs can establish connections between various generations of family members who may be strangers to one another – they make the unfamiliar familiar through the recognition of shared physical traits. Through their documentation of the visible similarities within a specific lineage, photographs contribute to the "illusion of [familial] continuity over time and space."[44] The impression of continuity, established by family photo albums, constructs an exclusive narrative into which subsequent generations of descendants can insert themselves. Especially for those living within a cultural diaspora, identification with a familial group can offer a fixed, enduring sense of belonging. Barthes notes, "Lineage reveals an identity stronger, more interesting than legal status – more reassuring as well, for the thought of origins soothes us,"[45] hence the popular turn to ancestry as a source for answers to existential questions of self-identity (as suggested by the title of Goldchain's project, *I Am My Family*). However, Barthes reminds us of the limits of relational identities provided through genetic linkages: "This discovery disappoints because even while it asserts a permanence (which is the truth of the race, not my own), it bares the mysterious difference of beings issued from one and the same family: what relation can there be between my mother and her ancestor …?"[46] Photographs record and reveal the physical markers of lineage, yet this is the extent of the information they provide on their own, given that, as Barthes points out, meaning is constructed outside the image. This recognition of shared attributes – be they physical or simply genealogical – is just the beginning. It prompts the construction of relational identities, and it is this process that makes family photographs meaningful.

[44] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, xi.
[45] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 105.
[46] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 105.

The meanings constructed from images of individuals with familial affiliations play a significant role in the construction and perpetuation of familial ideology.[47] Goldchain takes advantage of the ways in which "photography's social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family,"[48] as means to reconstruct his own family. The assembly of photographs within a family album contributes in large part to the impression of cohesion and belonging within the modern family group, and it is this practice that Goldchain employs in his project of reconstructing a visual history of his ancestors. Cultural theorist Annette Kuhn argues that the family album does not provide an objective visual history, but rather it evidences a moment in the cultural construction of the family. For Kuhn, the construction of the family photo album is one of the means by which the family produces itself through the presentation and organization of a circumscribed set of images according to convention. She suggests that the family album constructs an image or narrative of 'family' more than it records the 'real' family to which its photographs refer.[49] Given the subjective and constructed nature of familial images and narratives, Goldchain's (re)production functions in much the same way as 'legitimate' family photo albums which, as Kuhn points out, are themselves objects of social and cultural construction. The creation and interpretation of the family photo album is always subject to the influence of personal beliefs, feelings, associations – imagination is already at play in the construction of such visual histories, on the parts of those observing and those (consciously) being observed. Goldchain's project employs the same strategies and devices common to the ideological construction of 'family' through

[47] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 6.
[48] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 7.
[49] Annette Kuhn, "Remembrance: The Child I Never Was," in *The Photography Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (New York: Routledge, 2003), 395-401.

the production, collection, and presentation of photographs. He takes greater creative liberties with the theatricality of his performance of his family's (at times imagined) history, but with a consciousness of the participatory and often mythologizing nature of this practice.

Photography is thus a strategic medium for Goldchain, who is obviously cognizant of its relationship to the social construction of the family, and its impact upon the construction of personal identity. Goldchain explains, "My self-portraits suggest that by looking at family photographs one seeks to know one's ancestors and, in turn, one seeks to construct oneself."[50] Barthes recognizes the role of photographs in this process of personal identification through the family, when he observes,

> The Photograph sometimes makes appear what we never see in a real face ... a genetic feature, the fragment of oneself or of a relative which comes from some ancestor … The Photograph gives a little truth … But this truth is not that of the individual, who remains irreducible; it is the truth of lineage.[51]

This recognition of a genetic feature and the sense of affiliation it produces are present in the artist's process. Describing the experience of looking at a photograph of his great-grandmother with her husband, Goldchain explains,

> [My family] does not know whether the man in the photo is [my great-grandfather]. Looking at the face of the man seated beside [my great-grandmother] in the photograph, I found a possible genetic link between us, evident in his raised eyebrow, a trick all Goldchain men can do with ease. This observation led me to adopt the man in the photo as my great-grandfather and base [my *Self-Portrait as*

[50] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 21.
[51] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 103.

Mojszes Precelman (Older) (fig. 6)] on him.[52]

The same type of visual exercise is performed in the viewing of Goldchain's photo album. With his photographs, the viewer, knowing that Goldchain's images are self-portraits, recognizes the artist's face in each image and seeks out the physical similarities among the diverse characters he represents. As Hirsch explains, it is the same type of affiliative looking that we practice when we look at our own family photos. She recounts Barthes's exercise in *Camera Lucida* of examining a childhood photograph of his mother, explaining that, "The picture of his mother provokes a moment of self-recognition which, in the reading process, becomes a process of self-discovery, a discovery of a self-in-relation."[53] Hirsch explains this as "a distinctive form of looking that emerges in familial interaction … [a look that is] affiliative and identificatory."[54] In the same way, for Goldchain, engaging with the remaining photographs of ancestors is an activity of self-identification through affiliation.

As Goldchain's work makes clear, imagination is involved in the process of memory-making that contributes to the creation of meaning within family photographs and family photo albums. Indeed, a degree of imagination is required to derive the physical and even psychological similarities across generations of relatives represented in photographs.[55] Imagining enters into the process through which we remember our ancestors through photographs. Looking at images of our relatives, particularly those captured in a different era, prompts us to consider what they may have looked like (or to

[52] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 42.
[53] Hirsch, *Family Frame*s, 2.
[54] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 9.
[55] A few years ago, upon meeting a friend's parents for the first time I mentioned to her that I could see the resemblance among them; she laughed and informed me that she had been adopted – seeking out similarities in appearance, I had imagined that I had seen a genetic link between them. It is therefore not unlikely that we approach viewing our own family photographs with the same imaginative force.

negotiate a striking difference in appearance of an ancestor in their youth), what their life may have been like. Reflecting on a self-portrait in the guise of his grandmother, *Self-Portrait as Doña Aida Precelman Ryten de Goldchain* (fig. 7), the artist notes, "Having known my grandmother as an older *bubby* … it was challenging to imagine her as a younger, glamorous woman."[56] It is this type of remembering through imagining that Goldchain explores in his work. For his *Self-Portrait as Pola Baumfeld Szpiegel* (fig. 8), Goldchain developed the appearance of his character from a mental image influenced by period photographs:

> My mother had two aunts … but until recently, I did not know what they looked like. Back in 2001 I created an image of a young woman based on period portrait photographs, and called her Pola, in memory of my mother's younger aunt [who perished in the Shoah].[57]

A number of Goldchain's self-portraits are based more on imagination than on mediated memories (themselves subject to imagination, as already noted), given a lack or loss of information about distant relatives. For instance, Goldchain created his *Self-Portrait as Naftuli Goldchain* based on the assumption that "there must have been farming ancestors in our family line."[58] The work was inspired by a period photograph of an unknown Polish man holding a farmyard bird, found by the artist in Fundacja Shalom's book, *And I Still See Their Faces: Images of Polish Jews*, a collection of recovered photographs of (often anonymous) Polish Jews taken before the war. Though his father assured him of the contrary, there is something fulfilling for Goldchain in his

[56] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 32.
[57] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 58.
[58] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 78.

creation of this ancestor through a self-portrait. What is intriguing about Goldchain's perspective is that he claims that he "set out to prove [the existence of farming ancestors] in a playful way by creating this photograph."[59] For him, the photograph's "power of authentication"[60] becomes proof of this ancestor's existence despite his imaginary origins: imagination is transmuted into memory by means of photography.

Goldchain is very much aware of the phenomenological force of photographs, referring to Barthes's assertion of photography's indexicality: "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent."[61] The photographic image confirms a person's presence before the camera at a specific point in time. The artist plays with the power of authentication commonly attributed to photography, manipulating the signifying structure of the photograph on order to portray distant and lost ancestors. Goldchain confounds the semiology of photographs as outlined by Barthes, signifying the referent of the image – his ancestor – through his own body. He assumes the masks of various family members, so while the signifier is Goldchain himself in costume, the signified meaning and the referent of the sign is the ancestor portrayed. Therefore while the photograph should theoretically affirm that the individual portrayed had existed in front of the camera at the moment the image was captured, Goldchain's process undermines the assumption that they "have-been-there."[62] Through this destabilization of the presumed truthfulness of the photographic image, the artist manages to insert his own presence into the photograph's chain of signification. Goldchain thus becomes an integral part of the construction of his ancestors' images, and 'they' are part of his, communicating on a semiological level his

[59] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 78.
[60] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 89.
[61] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 80.
[62] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 79.

process of self-identification through his family. The what-has-been refers to his performance.

Picturing Postmemory: Memory, Imagination, and Trauma

Hirsch explores the relationship between family photos and memory, specifically as it is tied to post-Holocaust remembrance. Noting the extent to which photography's social functions have become linked to the ideology of the modern family, Hirsch considers the ways in which familial memories are mediated through family photos by the group she terms the "second generation,"[63] referring to the children of Holocaust survivors. Hirsch distinguishes this distinct form of remembering as "postmemory," a form of memory characterized by a "generational distance [and a] deep personal connection"[64] from direct experience. She explains, "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."[65] For Hirsch, postmemory refers to memories of "cultural or collective traumatic events"[66] experienced by the "second generation" which, though not experienced directly, have a marked effect upon their lives: "The children of exiled survivors, although they have not themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and forcible separation from home and the destruction of that home, remain marked by their parents' experiences: always marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora."[67]

[63] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 23.
[64] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 22.
[65] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 22.
[66] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 22.
[67] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 243.

'Generation' is a key word in Hirsch's work. It creates channels of transmission and boundaries. Members of the 'second generation' are individuals like herself, whose parents' lives have been shaped by traumatic events that cannot be fully understood by the second generation.[68] Here it is also important to consider not only the children of survivors but also the children of victims and of perpetrators, whose experiences may also be considerably inflected by mediated traumatic memories. Hirsch's understanding of "second generation" seems to be based upon her own experience as a child born shortly after the war to parents who were then in their early forties. But 'generation' also refers to other stages of the life-span. It important to recognize the wide age-range of the people who perished during the Holocaust and who survived it. To group these individuals into a singular generation – the "first generation" in Hirsch's terms – historically situates their existence not by age group but by their common experience of the Holocaust. This understanding of generation is problematic, for it sets up the Holocaust as the primary marker of their existence. For those who survived the war, the atrocities witnessed and experienced certainly had a profound effect upon their lives, however many resisted being defined by this experience.[69] It must also be said that 'postmemory' is a term with considerable currency in cultural studies, and its meaning has been somewhat generalized. Hirsch is quite specific in her usage, which allows for a systematic comparison with Goldchain's expressions of memory.

By Hirsch's definition, Goldchain might seem to be engaging with postmemory in

[68] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 22.

[69] Following my grandmother's passing, I found a letter she had written in the early 1950s explaining her purpose in applying for a teaching position at a Jewish elementary school in Montreal after arriving in to the city in the company of my grandfather, my father and my uncle. Having been a teacher in Poland prior to the war, she expressed her need to feel that in spite what she had experienced, that she was the same person she had been before. There is no question that her experiences during the war had impacted her life in ways that are unimaginable, but she clearly did not want those experiences define her life.

his work. Imagination clearly plays a major role in his process of 'remembering' his ancestors, some of whom perished in the Holocaust. Furthermore, Goldchain has shared his observation that the descendants of exilic generations struggle with identities that have been destabilized by "multiple migrations and cultural displacements."[70] Hirsch also claims that, "Photography [is] the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory."[71] She is not referring to staged photographs, but her emphasis corresponds to Goldchain's way of connecting with his ancestors through family photographs, memories, and his own self-portraits. Goldchain himself has deployed the term 'post-memories' in an artist's statement:

> Just as I am the carrier of memories and ancestral post-memories through whom the familial past is brought up into the present for my son to carry into the future, the self-portraits in Familial Ground [a former project-title] visually articulate a process of mourning and remembrance, whereby figures from familial and cultural history take on my visage as they emerge into visibility (while at the same time remaining concealed behind my features and behind the opacity of the portrait photograph) to remind us of the unavoidable and necessary work of inheritance.[72]

However, the mediation of traumatic memory that Hirsch's theory entails is not a significant part of Goldchain's process of remembrance. While Goldchain's connection to his ancestors is mediated largely through imagination and creativity as opposed to direct

[70] Wecker, "Self-Referential Memories."
[71] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 23.
[72] Cited in Jonathan Boyarin, "Just Jewish Enough: An Introduction to Rafael Goldchain's Familial Ground" (paper presented at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, April 2007), 2, http://conferences.library.wisc.edu/index.php/conney2007/article/download/278/277.

recollection, there are no real connotations of trauma present in his work. He is certainly mourning his ancestors and honouring their memory, but his way of doing that is developing a body of photographic knowledge – the missing album to be used for the purpose of negotiating his own identity in relation to his family and culture.

The artworks that Hirsch considers in her exploration of postmemory are primarily those that deal with the mediation of memories by the children of victims of cultural or collective trauma. She takes Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* as an example of the imaginative experience and transformation of memories transmitted from one generation to another. She explains, "*Maus* tells the story of Spiegelman's father, Vladek, from the 1930s in Poland to his liberation from Auschwitz in 1945," while at the same time recounts "the story of the father's testimony and the son's attempt to transmit that testimony in the comics genre … and the story of Art Spiegelman's own life dominated by memories which are not his own."[73] Hirsch underlines the fact that Spiegelman's father's enduring memories of trauma has had a determinative effect on the author's own life. Spiegelman mediates his father's testimony through his drawings not only to preserve his story, but also to negotiate memories that, though they precede him, have "dominated" his life and have, as a result, in some way become his own as well. Spiegelman has also included three photographs among his drawn panels in *Maus* and its sequel, including an image of the artist's father taken after the end of war. The photograph was taken in a souvenir photo shop that offered the concentration camp uniform Vladek wears as a costume.[74] Hirsch explains, "This photograph is both documentary evidence (Vladek was in Auschwitz) and isn't (the picture was taken in a

[73] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 26.
[74] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 39.

souvenir shop). This picture may look like a documentary photograph of the inmate – it may have the appearance of authenticity – but it is merely, and admittedly, a simulation, a dress-up game."[75] The effect is very similar to Goldchain's photographs, yet it is not Spiegelman but his father who reenacts the inmate. It is difficult for the viewer to imagine why, after surviving Auschwitz, Spielgelman's father would voluntarily assume the camp uniform once more and perform this identity for the camera. Hirsch explains that for Vladek, who took the picture for his wife, this photograph was meant to represent his survival, though as viewers, and perhaps for Spiegelman too, we are compelled to imagine the experience of trauma that the costume connotes. In its mediation of a father's trauma taken up by his son, this image functions as a medium of postmemory for Spiegelman, who has recontextualized this image within a reimagining of his family's experience during the Holocaust.

Goldchain too is mediating memories of his parents' (and grandparents' and great-grandparents') generation through his own imaginative, artistic interpretation of events and stories. He also looks to the past, to the stories of relatives who have preceded him (and looks for those that are absent), the effects of which have affected his understanding of various dimensions of his identity. The events of the Holocaust have been a determining factor in his family's history and the relationships that exist or that are absent among them – Hirsch notes, "The details of family interaction are inflected by a history that refuses to remain in the background."[76] For Goldchain, this difficult history is partly due to the consequences of the Holocaust; at the same time, it is also a history affected by

[75] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 39.
[76] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 12.

"systemic anti-Semitism"[77] more broadly – that is, outside of the events of the Holocaust – that prompted his ancestors' emigration from Eastern Europe prior to the Second World War. As the child of parents who had left Poland before the start of the war, Goldchain's experience is still inflected by cultural trauma but differs from those of children whose parents survived the war in Europe and some of whom, like Hirsch, retain memories as well as postmemories of their family's emigration.

It is clear that Hirsch's model of postmemory is rooted in her own experiences of trauma alongside those mediated through her parents who had survived the war. Trauma figures much more prominently in her experience. She recalls the anguish of her family's displacement from Rumania to New York,[78] and of her parents' ghettoization during the war when they "could not leave the house without wearing the yellow star."[79] For Goldchain, the experience of trauma is perhaps less immediate, and his imagined memories are focused less on the mediation of inherited traumatic memories and more on the consequent displacements and losses. He is most concerned with the impact of "[his] exile from the Polish Jewish culture of [his] ancestors"[80] and the "large gaps in family history"[81] that complicate processes of identity formation in relation to family and culture (on both a religious and a geographic level). Therefore, while Goldchain's process of remembering is very much influenced by imagination, much like Hirsch's imagined memories of her parents' lives before and during the war, unlike Hirsch, trauma is not his framework.

[77] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 16.
[78] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 218.
[79] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 226.
[80] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 17.
[81] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 21.

Though Hirsch's model does not reflect all memorial experiences of those living in the post-Holocaust era, her notion of a generational, imaginative form of memory is useful in opening up new spaces for unconventional forms of memory work. Hirsch is accompanied by a number of scholars who consider the imaginative realms of memory as a useful tool in developing productive ways of addressing the history of Holocaust, while deconstructing the conventional, privileged approaches through which its narrative has been constructed, mediated and remembered. Literary theorist Ernst Van Alphen advocates the conflation of historic and imaginative discourses in post-Holocaust art with an aim to work through the difficulties that arise in attempts to mediate the events of atrocity.[82] Art historian Dora Apel also remarks upon a shift from these dichotomous approaches to modes of representation that employ the imaginative alongside the factual, in recognition of the fragmented and subjective nature of experience.[83] Hirsch, however, in her emphasis upon the mediation of specifically traumatic memories among an exclusive group limits the type of memories explored, as well as the people engaging with them.

Hirsch's generational model also excludes a much larger population of individuals who may experience postmemorial remembrance in relation to the Holocaust, but who have no familial connections to this history. By referring only to the children of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch's notion of the second generation fails to take into consideration the ways in which a broader community shares in the experience of remembering. Zelizer considers the ways in which images of the Holocaust have been continually reinscribed onto the public imagination over the course of the five decades

[82] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 37.
[83] Dora Apel, *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 7.

following the war, and how these images contribute to collective memory of the Holocaust. As Zelizer points out, collective memory does not only represent the shared remembrance of specific images, but also the cultural processes through which such images are transformed into representations of events that acquire symbolic value.[84] These representations have long been manifest in the visual and literary arts, and in the last four decades have been absorbed into pop culture media as well. The seepage of Holocaust imagery into popular culture is visible through the growing popularity of box-office films from the early 1980s onward, including the dramatization of the novel *Sophie's Choice* (1982) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993), adapted from Thomas Keneally's 1982 novel.[85] Major filmic productions brought (creatively interpreted and mediated) images of the Holocaust to a more widespread and varied audience, securing this history a greater presence within public consciousness and contributing to its collective memorialization. This kind of exposure has permitted a great number of individuals to engage with the events of the Holocaust imaginatively and emotionally. Unlike the generations that Hirsch refers to, these people do not identify as a group, however they may still be distraught and disturbed by these historical events. This broadened view of the possibilities for affect suggests that memories of the Holocaust can be mediated in ways other than the generational storytelling that is the focus of Hirsch's model of postmemory. Further, there are different understandings of the notion of generation that enter into individual and cultural discussions of post-Holocaust memory.

Despite the restrictions that define Hirsch's model, there are aspects of her notion of postmemory that illuminate important themes within Goldchain's body of work. Along

[84] Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 2-3.
[85] Of course, artistic and literary accounts of Holocaust were produced in the decades following the war, though the adaptation of many of these stories and images into film mark its spread into popular culture.

with Hirsch, Goldchain experiences an unrelenting sense of displacement from his families' countries of origin. Dominick LaCapra's discussion of issues of trauma, absence, and loss problematizes this perceived loss of identity that results from an exile-based diaspora. LaCapra, who cautions against the conflation of absence with loss when working through traumatic experiences, explains: "[This conflation] threatens to convert subsequent accounts into displacements of the story of original sin wherein a prelapsarian state of unity or identity – whether real or fictive – is understood as giving way through a fall to difference or conflict."[86] As both Goldchain and Hirsch have demonstrated, the sense of loss of a unifying cultural and familial identity is a common aspect of the postwar generations' experience, given that the events of the Holocaust caused a rupture of local, cultural, and familial identities that persists within the contemporary diaspora. Hirsch refers to Nadine Fresco's notion of a "*diaspora des cendres*"[87] to characterize the exilic experience of the postwar generation: "The place of origin has gone up in ashes. There is no return."[88] LaCapra suggests that the impression that there existed cultural and familial unity through which identificatory processes were formed prior to the Holocaust may in fact represent an idealized vision of the past. From LaCapra's perspective, the perceived of loss of something that may have never existed can cast trauma within a role that is irreconcilable with processes of working through. It is true that prior to these historical events Jews had continuously lived in diaspora, across various borders and among diverse sects with distinct religious identities; however, localized communities were disbanded and therein familial groups were broken apart. From this perspective, "place of origin" should be understood as the geo-cultural context of the family, as

[86] LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," 700.
[87] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 243.
[88] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 243.

opposed to Jewish culture as a whole. Hirsch's and Goldchain's accounts should both be understood in the context of the personal – as opposed to culture-wide – impacts of displacement, and how identities constructed in relation to family and their environment were profoundly fractured.

In addition to being geographically removed from the cultural contexts in which their families lived, for many living in the diaspora the psychological and emotional connections to these places of origin have become complicated by racial and political tensions. Hirsch characterizes these places as "both *home* and *hostile territory*,"[89] making familial and cultural associations with these fraught places unstable. It is this ambivalent relationship to the places their families once called home that plagues many Jews living in the postwar diaspora. For Goldchain, as for many others who were born after the war, the total abandonment of these places by family members (either by choice or by tragic fate) has created a void, leaving only "the elegiac aura of the memory of a place to which one cannot return."[90] The role of imaginary remembering then is to fill these voids, to create a place with which one can identify in order to better under their family's history and, in turn, to better understand their own cultural situation. As Hirsch argues, this type of remembering is no less valuable than memory informed by experience or material fact: "The Czernowitz [her family's former home-city] of my postmemory is an imaginary city, but that makes it no less present, no less vivid, and perhaps because of the constructed and deeply invested nature of memory itself, no less accurate."[91]

Having established that there can exist alternative modes of postmemorial

[89] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 219.
[90] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 244.
[91] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 244.

remembering, including those inflected by trauma and those that are not, it is also necessary to consider forgetting as an alternative postmemorial experience. Traumatic forgetting can manifest as a denial of inherited personal, collective or cultural trauma. Visual artist Christian Boltanski is well known for his works that confront issues of remembering and documenting the Holocaust. However, "Not until the mid-1980s … did Boltanski confront directly his own postmemory of Holocaust, exile, and survival."[92] Following a 1990 interview Boltanski corrected its transcript to read, "My work is not about xxxxxxx it is after xxxxxxx."[93] Van Alphen suggests that the replacement of the word "Holocaust" with an unreadable mark implicates Boltanski's belief that the Holocaust is "unreadable or incomprehensible," and therefore his art cannot be "about" it, only "after" it.[94] However, in an interview three years later Boltanski claimed, "All my work is more or less *about* the Holocaust [emphasis added]."[95] Boltanski's initial assertion is therefore not only a declaration of the unrepresentability of the Holocaust, but also a denial of its reference in his work. He expresses this initial hesitance to acknowledge his family history and its role in his work: "There were all sorts of things about my own childhood that I suppressed in my work because they were too special. For example, in my first works I never mention that I was from a Jewish family, I described it as a normal French family."[96] Boltanski omitted information about his Jewish background, likely to discourage readings of his work that were tied to the Holocaust. For the artist, acknowledging his position as the son of a Holocaust survivor[97] was a personal

[92] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 258.
[93] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 120.
[94] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 120.
[95] Van Alphen, *Caught by History*, 149.
[96] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 258.
[97] Boltanski's father was born Jewish and though he converted to Catholicism before the war, he spent its entirety in hiding in Paris.

fact that was "too special," either exclusive of non-Jewish audiences or possibly too difficult for him to deal with at that stage on a conscious level.

Angela Grossmann: *Looking Back* (2000-2002)

The denial of personal connections to the Holocaust in light of associations of trauma in a given body of work is also present in the work of visual artist Angela Grossmann. Grossmann, whom artist-friend Douglas Coupland compares to Boltanski,[98] has denied any direct references to the Holocaust in her work,[99] though numerous critics have suggested its influence upon her practice. Never drawing or painting from models, Grossmann's use of found black and white photographs dating from the prewar and war period has been central to her practice for the past two decades. Eventually admitting to a "subterranean influence on her creative consciousness,"[100] she has come to accept the connection made between the Holocaust and her work,[101] though she maintains an ambivalent relationship to her family's history.[102] As the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Grossmann's initial resistance to this reading of her work suggests that the rejection of inherited traumatic memories also figures as a significant part of the postmemories of postwar generations. Even though Grossmann may not be intentionally mediating inherited traumatic memories through her work, their influence is evident in the connotative qualities of her materials and her subjects. Further, she clearly retains

[98] Deborah Campbell, "Angela Grossmann's Portrait Toughs – Alpha Girl" *Canadian Art* 23.2 (Summer 2006), http://www.angelagrossmann.com/canadian-art-2006.htm.
[99] Sean Starke, "Angela Grossmann" *Hobo Magazine* 8 (April 2007), http://www.angelagrossmann.com/hobo.html.
[100] Starke, "Angela Grossmann."
[101] Campbell, "Angela Grossmann's Portrait Toughs."
[102] Loren Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann, Personal interview, Artist's studio, Vancouver, March 25, 2001.

powerful if fraught memories and emotions related to her family history. Speaking about a trip back to her family's former home city of Dusseldorf, Grossmann recalls the "utter horror" and "anger" she felt walking by what was once her grandparents' mattress factory.[103] Reading her work in relation to Goldchain's uncovers the memorial practices inherent in her own makeshift portraits; further, considering her work in relation to Hirsch's ideas suggests that an alternative form of postmemory is at work in her practice, wherein memories of trauma sustained by her ancestors are expressed through unconscious creative impulses. Grossmann reflects,

> People have always said, whether I was painting prisoners or angels, that there was a suggestion of the Holocaust. And I suppose I do have to wonder why I'm attracted to old letters, old suitcases, old clothes, displacement, nostalgia, things that have gone that can't be replaced, to handwriting. It's all about disappearance and I'm so bent on it because of my history. My father is a German Jew. His whole family was lost. It's not something I deal with directly, but I can't possibly deny that it's part of who I am. Of course, it comes out in the work.[104]

Grossmann's mixed-media practice incorporates found photographs culled from European flea markets and junk shops into her makeshift canvases: cut, cropped, and reassembled through dynamic brush strokes in paint and ink, these images take on new appearances and their subjects are given new identities. Grossmann explains, "I collage the figures from a million different sources. What acts as a leg in one is not a leg; I put in boys bits for girls ... I wanted to use my collage so that it appeared to make sense, but

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[103] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.

[104] Bill Richardson, "Artist Angela Grossmann Calls Her New Show My Vocation - Because Painting is Her Profession and Her Passion," *National Post*, March 10, 1999, http://www.dianefarrisgallery.com/artist/grossmann/ex99/press_post.html.

actually didn't. I found it much more exciting to have it look real."[105] Grossmann describes her process as "painting with photography," whereby she draws and paints over found photographs, at times re-photographing and enlarging the image before continuing drawing and painting.[106] The artist has also experimented with bleaching photographs, making them look like they are on fire. Employing found materials for her canvases, Grossmann asserts that, "I've never wanted to work on a pristine piece of canvas … I like there to be a bit of history, and the work to be in communication with something that had happened before, so it's not just a conversation I start on my own. Even when I work on canvas, it's not just canvas, it's tent canvas or an old surveiller's [*sic*] canvas."[107]

Grossmann's series *Looking Back* (2000-2002) features portraits of young women developed from the artist's reclaimed vintage photographs, photocopied, resized and manipulated through paint, ink, and collage. The images of these women are constructed upon the repurposed canvas tarps and military kit bags that Grossmann often uses, framed by a variety of object fragments collaged onto the work's surface: black and white photographs, ticket stubs, letters, envelopes, postcards, sheet music, ribbons, rope, pieces of cloth. At times these objects are layered, adding dimensionality to the work along with a textural roughness that is echoed by thick, visceral applications of paint. Grossmann leaves the process of collage visible to the viewer, particularly in the construction of subjects from multiple photo fragments, where torn edges and hardened daubs of glue build up the composite figures. The rawness of the images' construction is reflected by the subjects themselves, whose facial and bodily expressions contribute to a psychological portrait. The richness of Grossmann's images is evident through their

[105] Starke, "Angela Grossmann."
[106] Starke, "Angela Grossmann."
[107] Starke, "Angela Grossmann."

visual impact as well as the force carried by objects that possess a recognizable but unknown, even forgotten, history of their own. Grossmann often selects war-era ephemera: "[I usually use] letters that have to do with the war, certainly around that time and during the war, and I like personal notes. I've got lots of poems and letters. They're not usually anyone I know. [They're from] junk shops."[108] The impression of a relationship between the female subjects and the personal nature of the objects with which they are represented is passed on to the viewer who infers that these assemblages provide access to some knowledge of these individuals, impelling viewers to contemplate these women's identities, especially since they are contextualized within a particularly tumultuous historical moment.

As viewers, we are presented with a series of perplexing images: unnamed women, their bodies rendered only partially in quick, dry brushstrokes and heavy daubs of paint, are surrounded by objects to which their association is unclear. Just as we are unsure of how to read these images, with their collections of cryptic memorabilia framing anonymous women, Grossmann too seems to be unsure about how to address her family's own past. We do not know – cannot know – who these women are, we can only imagine who they might have been, the lives they may have lead based upon the fragmentary evidence provided. It is thus telling that Grossmann has chosen to title her works not with names but with allusions to particular attributes of the image: *Stand*, *Sitt*, *Ginger*, *Blue Barrette*, *Dancer*, *Birthday Girl*. It is only by way of association that we can draw and assumptions we can make about what we see, that we can speculate on the identities of Grossmann's subjects. As curator Loren Lerner explains,

[108] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.

> Grossmann invites us to write a script or scenario based on the visual information in the collage. She encourages us to allow our imagination to take us to a time before or beyond the moment portrayed.[109]

Imagining thus becomes central to the process of remembering these anonymous subjects for both the viewer and for Grossmann herself. Her use of personal images and materials with a notably early-to-mid twentieth-century aesthetic suggests a reconstruction of equally personal identities, especially in consideration of her family history.

In the catalogue for the 2002 exhibit *Memories and Testimonies* including Grossmann's work, Lerner notes that Grossmann's father was among the few members of his immediate family who escaped persecution during the Holocaust,[110] having been sent to London on the Kindertransport train prior to the start of the war.[111] Some of her father's relatives escaped to the Dominican Republic, later returning to Germany, with the exception of Grossmann's paternal uncle who moved to the United States but with whom her father has not maintained contact.[112]

Unlike Hirsch's or Spiegelman's parents, Grossmann's father was hesitant to share his experience with her: "Having lost almost his entire family in the Holocaust, Grossmann's father hardly spoke to her about his life in Germany or the relatives who died in Europe."[113] It was only Grossmann's mother, who is also Jewish, who spoke to her about their family's history.[114] Grossmann's experience also differs from those of Hirsch and Spiegelman in that she maintains a physical relationship to the place her

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[109] Loren Lerner, "Angela Grossmann" in *Memories and Testimonies* (Montreal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, 2002), 79.
[110] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 76.
[111] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.
[112] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.
[113] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 76.
[114] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.

family lived before the war. Though she was brought up in London, from ages three to five Grossmann lived in Dusseldorf with her family while her father was claiming restitution there, and would later return to visit Germany while living in Holland during her twenties.[115]

In the absence of a dialogue with her father about his traumatic experiences, Grossmann negotiates an obscured familial past through her mixed-media artworks. Lerner explains, "Lacking such stories and remembrances [of her family], Grossmann invents a history where the female body bears the signs of memory and identity."[116] Understanding "girlhood as a foundational moment of (re)definition,"[117] Grossmann's young female subjects find themselves at a period of life during which self-identity is in flux. On the cusp of sexual maturity or in the recent stages thereafter, these young women represent a moment of personal change wherein new identities must be forged in relation to a newfound womanhood. Likewise, Grossmann's project also represents the negotiation of new identities on her part as well. In much the same way that Goldchain builds a self-identity through affiliations with and representations of his ancestors, Grossmann's (re)definition of her subjects reflects a personal negotiation of self-identity in relation to an absent family narrative.

In her discussion of Boltanski's practice, Hirsch asserts that, "Although Boltanski's mother was Catholic, and although he repeatedly speaks of his 'Jewish culture, non-culture,' his paternal history has no doubt determined the shape of his avant-garde photographic career."[118] The same might be said of Grossmann, whose paternal

[115] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.
[116] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 78.
[117] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 193.
[118] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 257.

history, or rather the lack of knowledge thereof, has influenced her work. Schwarz suggests,

> Perhaps all Holocaust fiction is disguised autobiography. The personal is rarely far from Holocaust texts, whether they purport to be autobiographical or not. Whether in autobiography or fiction, surviving children … tell stories in which they struggle with trauma and try to rescue themselves from history. In language reaching back and reconnecting with Shoah, they strive to reestablish a lineage, a paternity to which the self has a link.[119]

Schwarz suggests this possibility in terms that apply equally to literature and visual art. In Grossmann's *Stand* (2000), Lerner suggests that the female figure represented "seems to be a stand-in for Grossmann's ancestors."[120] In the absence of any physical or memorial traces of her paternal ancestors, Grossmann's appropriation and transformation of 1930s photographs can be read as a process of reclamation and recreation of a lost familial history. It is not only the use of pre-war photographs that suggest that Grossmann's subjects may represent her unknown ancestors. The manipulation of these found photographs along with the use of a variety of other reclaimed objects, as well as the expressive, painterly treatment of her repurposed canvases "hint at a narrative"[121] that has been affected by the experience of trauma.

Grossmann's use of photography, like Goldchain's, at once persuades the viewer of the livelihood of her subjects as well as their untimely death. Drawing on Barthes, Hirsch explains, "It is precisely the indexical nature of the photo, its status as relic, or

[119] Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust*, 39.
[120] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 76.
[121] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 75.

trace, or fetish – its 'direct' connection with the material presence of the photographed person – that at once intensifies its status as a harbinger of death and, at the same time and concomitantly, its capacity to signify life."[122] Given the nature of the photograph, which always refers back to death, the absence of Grossmann's revived subjects is also forcefully recalled. Barthes explains,

> I thought I could distinguish a field of cultural interest (the *studium*) from that unexpected flash which sometimes crosses this field and which I called the *punctum*. I now know that there exists another *punctum* … the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (*"that-has-been*") … I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake … I shudder … *over a catastrophe which has already occurred*. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."[123]

Grossmann's subjects are brought back to life through their (re)construction in her artworks, and yet, in looking at a photograph taken roughly eighty years ago and understanding that photograph in the context of a post-Holocaust narrative, the viewer is reminded not only of their death but also the extraordinary circumstances of atrocity in which their lives were taken.

Grossmann's choice to use old photographs of European girls found in flea markets invests her work with particular meanings that arise from the connotations offered by these images. The antiquated quality of the photographs themselves combined with that of their subjects alludes to a specific past: the black and white images, in some

[122] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 20.
[123] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 96.

cases blurred or grainy – effects which have been emphasized through the artist's manipulation of these images – locate these photographs within a specific historical period whose photographic technologies produced these types of images. Along with the qualities of the photograph, the hairstyles and dress of the women represented in the photographs also situate their existence (at the moment the photograph was taken) within a particular historical era, around the time of the Second World War. As with Boltanski's appropriated photographs, Hirsch explains, "We recognize an historical moment, with its distinctive clothing, body language, and representational styles."[124] Moreover, the fact that Grossmann has found these old photographs in a state of abandonment furthers suggestions of the possible victimization of their former proprietors – indeed, Hirsch notes that family photographs are often connected to the Holocaust "by their context and not by their content."[125]

Situating these images in the period just before the outbreak of the war creates an uneasy context for their subjects. The viewer worries about what became of these women in the following years – an uncertain fate that Grossmann's artistic treatment suggests may have ended in tragedy. In *Stand* (2000) (fig. 9), the photographed face of a young girl has been given a nude body, sketchily painted in fine black lines and partly contoured at the right thigh, breast, and shoulder. Her right arm is bent with her hand resting against a confidently jutted hip, while her other limbs fade into the background or disappear mid-joint. The stark white of her face is further emphasized by darkened eye sockets and a frame of black hair, striking against the greenish-brown of her body given by the creased, soiled canvas tarp upon which Grossmann has created the work. The ghostly pallor of the

[124] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 264.
[125] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 20.

girl's face, its contrasts heightened through the reproduction of the original photograph, and her undefined, see-through body give her a spectral quality. Beneath her knees is a frayed piece of cloth stained with "specks of red […] that resemble wounds,"[126] echoed by streaks of dark red paint at the lower left corner of the canvas. These details allude to a life cut short, as expressed through the subject's unfinished body, the bloody red stains upon the white cloth and the canvas, and the construction of the image upon a surface – a military canvas tarp – with explicit connections to war. Making the figure of the young girl nude increases its vulnerability for all the usual reasons of sexual power and politics, but also because it brings to mind the photographs of naked surviving/deceased individuals taken by journalists after the liberation of the camps. If this is too fanciful, Grossmann's work invites such imaginative engagement.

Like many of the women represented in Grossmann's *Looking Back* series, the subject rendered in *Stand* appears almost as an apparition, a ghost of an ancestor fallen victim to tragedy. These specters appear before Goldchain as well, who explains, "There are ghosts who haunt the psyches of those whose families have experienced the ravages of war and displacement."[127] Understanding the extent to which Goldchain remains haunted by the unknown ghosts of his family's past suggests that, in reading Grossmann's work through that of Goldchain, she too continues to be pursued by familial ghosts. The horrific circumstances from which Grossmann's ghosts emerge are felt through her frenetic brushstrokes, the dirtied military tarps, and the severed limbs that a number of her subjects lack. Like the girl in *Stand*, the seated female figure in *Doll* (2000-2002) (fig. 10) is also missing her arms. Here, however, her arms do not fade away

[126] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 75.
[127] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 23.

into abbreviated brushstrokes; developed through dimensional highlighting and contouring, her arms end abruptly at the elbow with a blackened, ovoid shape, revealing where the arm has been cleanly cut off. This physical trauma forebodes much more sinister inflictions. Meanwhile, a shock of red hair atop the young woman's head animates her otherwise dull, wan body.

This tension between the ghostly quality of Grossmann's pallid-skinned subjects and the enlivening application of colour alongside fragments of a personal past is a reflection of the artist's negotiation of her fraught memorial relationship to her ancestors. Goldchain is more blunt about this, asserting that,

> Ghosts haunt the living for very specific reasons, chief amongst them is unfinished business. A ghost cannot rest because crucial matters have been left in an unacceptable condition, and it seeks to make things right through the living.[128]

Perhaps ghostly figures haunt Grossmann's works because she refuses to acknowledge their presence. Grossmann denies the ghosts of her familial past and thus they continue to reappear, filtered through her creative unconscious, demanding acknowledgement.

The figure of the ghost has long had a presence in Jewish lore, and has been mobilized by artists, like Goldchain and Boltanski, as a symbol of the persistence of traumatic memories. Louis Kaplan invokes the figure of the dybbuk, "The spirit of [a] deceased [person] that inhabits and cleaves to the body of a living person,"[129] as a means of thinking about Derridean deconstruction in contemporary Jewish art. Kaplan introduces the in-between being as a concept for thinking about the practice of deconstruction. In traditional stories, the spirit of the dybbuk would need to be exorcised

[128] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 23.
[129] Louis Kaplan, *Dybbuks of Derrida: Traces of Deconstruction in Contemporary Jewish Ar*t in *Journal of Canadian Art History* 33, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 171.

from its host, characterized as an evil spirit possessing the innocent.[130] Kaplan challenges the casting of this concept within a binary of good/evil, extending the idea of the dybbuk to characterize themes of deconstruction in contemporary Jewish art.[131] Opposing a reconstructionist approach toward contemporary Jewish identity – which would imply the possibility of a homogenous Jewish identity – Kaplan instead considers the ways artworks can "speak in the voice of the Derridean deconstructive dybbuk – in the name of a restless and diasporic soul that asks profound and unsettling questions (sometimes about Judaism itself) and that resists simple identification."[132] He argues that a monolithic narrative of reconstruction represses the opportunity for deconstructive work that addresses the ongoing difficulties and impossibilities of negotiating Jewish identity in the current day and age.[133] However, the rebuilding of identities that have been fractured by the effects of genocide, exile, and diaspora do not need to be understood as part of a reconstructionist project. The possibility for navigating, as opposed to defining, religious (and cultural, familial, geographical, etc.) identities while maintaining an understanding of the subjective and fragmented nature of identity should also be considered here.

Unlike the dybbuk, which has traditionally been characterized as an "evil spirit,"[134] Grossmann's family ghosts, like those of Goldchain, do not seek harm or revenge. Instead, they represent the unfinished business of uncovering hidden pasts and the difficult project of negotiating a future in relation to the memory of these histories.

[130] Kaplan, "Dybbuks of Derrida," 171-172.
[131] Kaplan, "Dybbuks of Derrida," 172.
[132] Kaplan, "Dybbuks of Derrida," 174.
[133] Kaplan, "Dybbuks of Derrida," 174.
[134] Kaplan, "Dybbuks of Derrida," 172.

Goldchain explains, "My family ghosts reappear to point to our forgetting and to demand a reversal of the process of erasure of familial histories caused by historical events, as well as by daily living."[135] Goldchain's ghosts reappear through himself, through his restaged portraits, and he welcomes their presence as a reminder of the task of remembering. Grossmann does not accept her ghosts as readily, and thus they continue to cleave to her subjects.

In describing the experience of seeing ghosts in the prewar photographic images used by artists like Boltanski – "I see the children in my mother's and father's school classes who did not survive"[136] – Hirsch asks, "As postmodern subjects is our generation not constructed, collectively, in relation to these ghosts … are we not shaped by their loss and by our own ambivalence about mourning them?"[137] Grossmann's artworks certainly reveal her ambivalence towards making a direct connection between her work and the loss of her ancestors and, consequently, a family narrative. The use of visibly dated, found photographs, along with the implication of death inherent in all photographs, the ghostly treatment of the subjects, their missing body parts, and the military connotations of the used canvas all point to past traumas. Considered alongside the artist's background, Grossmann's works speak through a family history that has been gravely affected, and obscured, through such traumas. That all the subjects within the series are women further invite a reading of these artworks as a negotiation of self-identity in relation to a familial past.

[135] Goldchain, *I Am My Family*, 24.
[136] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 266.
[137] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* 266.

Traumatic forgetting is an important part of Grossmann's postmemorial experience: there are certainly suggestions of the imaginative mediation of inherited familial and cultural traumas in her work, yet she resists acknowledging these narratives despite the emotional engagement she expresses when discussing her family's past. Forgetting is another mode of dealing with difficult and traumatic experiences. Though it may not be the most effective means of working through trauma, it offers what many victims never got: escape. Speaking about a series of artworks based on old photographs of petty criminals Grossmann explains, "I can undo, redeem or give them back something … though it's too late in their own lives. I can recreate them and take away what was done to them."[138] Grossmann's artistic intervention into her found photographs restores their subjects, in a sense "undoes" what was done to them in the years that would follow. She actively obscures, and yet at the same time, paradoxically reveals their tragic fates.

Lerner remarks of *Looking Back* that "the title of the series is taken from the biblical story in which Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt when she looks back upon the destruction of Sodom."[139] For Grossmann, looking back to her family's history entails an acknowledgement of the familial and cultural trauma that figures prominently within its narrative: there are consequences to seeing this past. At the same time, it is clear that on some level Grossmann feels compelled to reclaim that which she and her family have lost. Speaking about her use of anonymous portrait photographs, Grossmann admits, "I don't have any old personal photographs [which] somewhat ties into the situation [of] losing the history … and regaining it."[140] Schwarz notes the ambivalent relationship between the following generations and their family's history, suggesting that, "[Surviving

[138] Cited in Campbell, "Angela Grossmann's Portrait Toughs."
[139] Lerner, "Angela Grossmann," 81.
[140] Lerner, Interview with Angela Grossmann.

children] try to wrench themselves from history even while acknowledging history."[141] Grossmann's practice is characteristic of this struggle between the need to negotiate identity in relation to familial tragedy and trauma, and the desire to protect oneself from the emotional and psychological effects of engaging with such a difficult past.

Conclusion

Grossmann creates new masks for her subjects in order to obscure their identities as likely victims. Goldchain too assumes various masks but for him this performance is an effort to reveal identities, to remember that which has been forgotten or is in danger of being forgotten; Grossmann, on the other hand, seeks to forget for the danger of remembering. Both artists' work is fueled by imagination and both are dealing with the ongoing and incessant processes of memory. Both artists look back to a past that has been complicated and obscured by the traumas and the consequences of genocide. Goldchain is explicit about the familial framework through which he examines this past and the processes of self-identification that are central to his project. Grossmann is reluctant to acknowledge associations of her work with her family's fate that has also been drastically altered by the events of the Holocaust. But considering her work in relation to Goldchain's practice suggests that her aesthetic choices have indeed been influenced by a familial and cultural history that is too weighty too ignore. Just as Goldchain restages and recreates photographic images of his ancestors, so too does Grossmann reconstruct identities for her anonymous subjects. The personal quality of her images, communicated through the addition of private possessions and keepsakes, reinforces a sense of affinity

[141] Schwarz, *Imagining the Holocaust*, 39.

between Grossmann and the young women in her artworks. Her reluctance to position her work in direct relation to family history may be the reason that her aesthetic of pastness inflected by trauma persists: her work continues as she resists working through this difficult history.

Hirsch's notion of postmemory proposes a form of remembering situated in between memory and imagination that defines the memorial experience of the children of Holocaust survivors. The mediation of generational traumatic memories is central to Hirsch's model, suggesting that the acknowledgment of inherited familial, cultural and collective traumas is a necessary part of mourning and working through. She also emphasizes the impact of the exilic experience upon the 'second generation,' and the need to engage with lost places through imagined memories. Hirsch explains, "The aesthetics of postmemory, I would like to suggest, is a diasporic aesthetics of temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to (re)build and to mourn."[142] Both Goldchain and Grossmann express an aesthetic of postmemory, though its effects are different in their memorial processes. Goldchain is certainly mediating memories of his ancestors imaginatively, though he does not focus upon the remembrance traumatic memories. His exercise is not one of negotiating trauma, but of negotiating the effects of historical trauma that consequently affect the way he relates and identifies with his family and his Jewish culture. Grossmann, however, does seem to be mediating traumatic memories through her work, yet she does not explicitly engage with their transmission. Goldchain and Grossmann's work suggest alternative possibilities for postmemory among those affected by inherited traumatic histories and their consequent sense of dislocation within an exilic and diasporic culture. As Hirsch mentions, for some, these memorial

[142] Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 245.

explorations are part of the process of mourning losses – of family, of identity – and of working through trauma. She also notes a need to (re)build among these generations, and it is through such constructive, generative gestures that working through is possible. For many survivors, a reinvestment in life was an essential part of their recovery. For the generations that follow, a (re)building of identity in relation to familial and cultural pasts, through the complex interactions of memory and imaginative creation, is a necessary part of our own repairing.

Now, looking back to those photographs of my great grandparents that were displayed in my grandmother's apartment, I realize that although their subjects are completely unknown to me they can still function as vehicles of memory. Where I took for granted the past lives I conjured for unknown relatives as mere imagining, others have shown that this type of remembering can be a productive exercise in working through issues of trauma and identity. As the grandchildren of survivors, my generation must now find their way to relate to the familial, cultural and diasporic identities that they have inherited. As imagination continues to be a primary link to familial, cultural, and geographic pasts, memory work will continue to be involved with the inventions of fantasy, so that the futures that unfold from the events of our individual and collective pasts can inform our continuous projects of self-identification.

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Figures

Figure 1
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Chaim Goldszayn (Laughing)
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 127.

Figure 2
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Don Marcos José Goldchain Liberman (Older)
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 31.

Figure 3
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Chaja Golda Precelman
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 37.

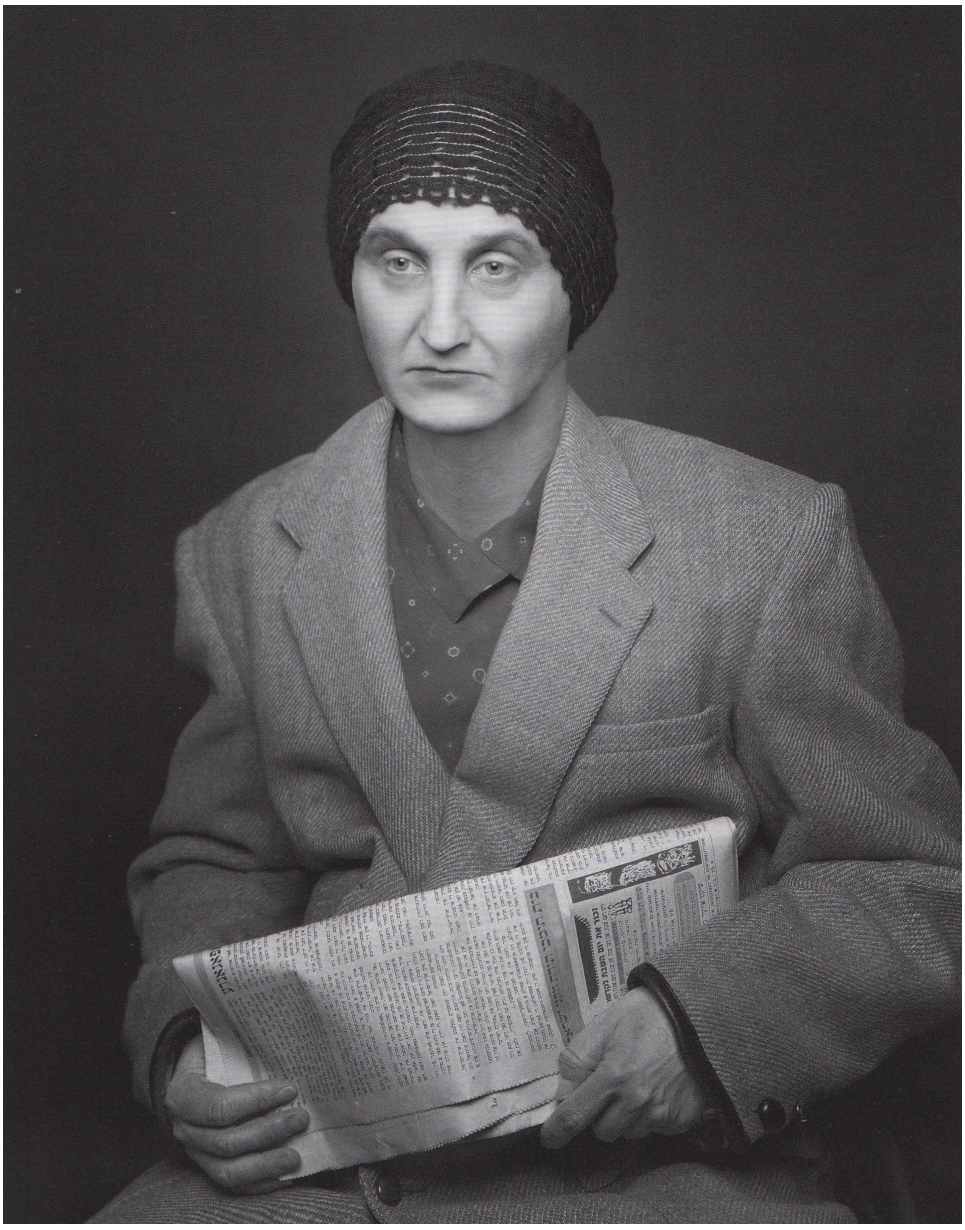

Figure 4
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Sarah Gitl Ryten
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 39.

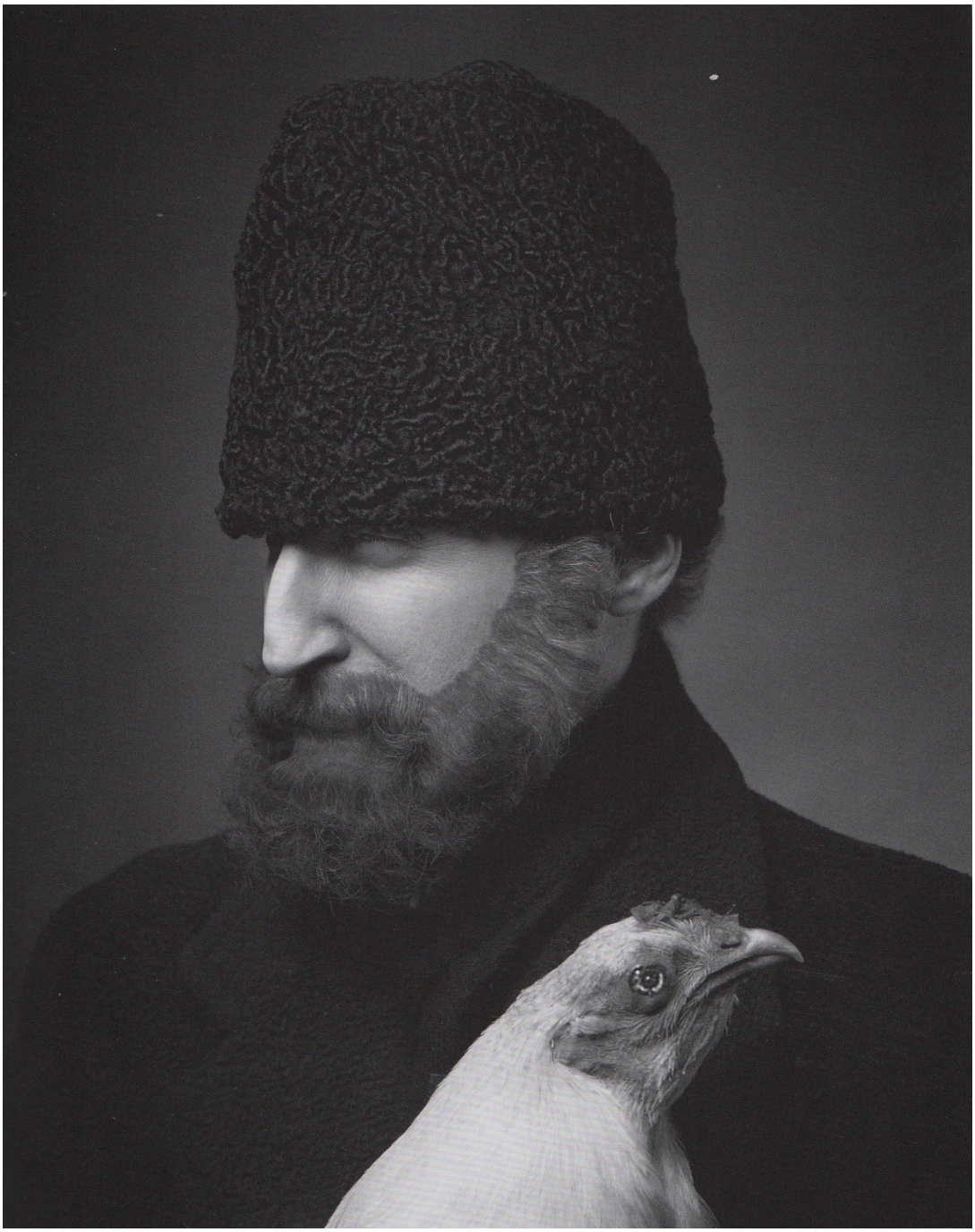

Figure 5
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Naftuli Goldszaijn
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 79.

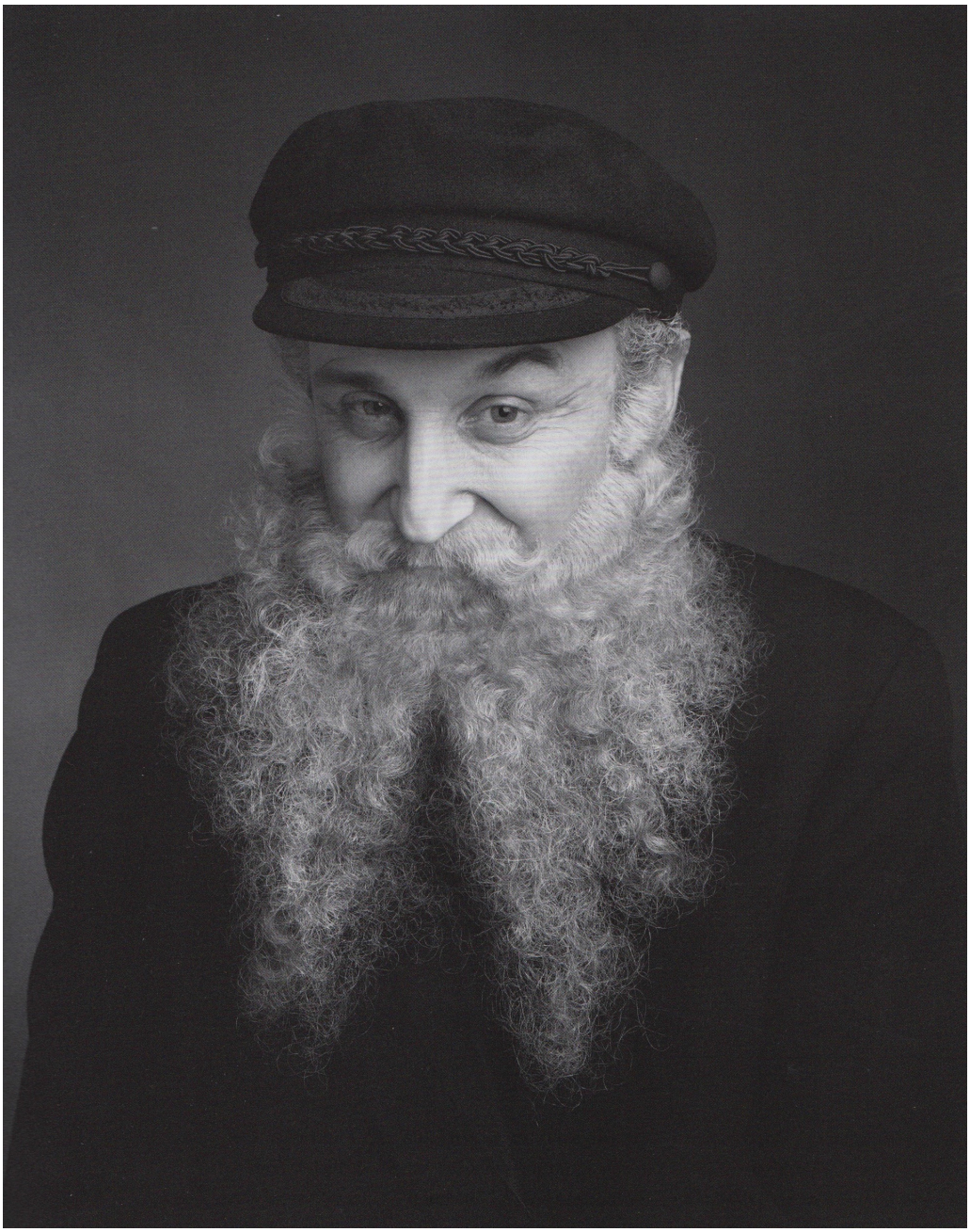

Figure 6
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Mojszes Precelman (Older)
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 43.

Figure 7
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Doña Aida Precelman Ryten de Goldchain
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 33.

Figure 8
Rafael Goldchain
Self-Portrait as Pola Baumfeld Szpiegel
Chromogenic print
From Rafael Goldchain, *I Am My Family: Photographic Memories and Fictions* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2008), 59.

Figure 9
Angela Grossmann
Stand
2000
Mixed media on found canvas tarp
203 x 99 cm
From Loren Lerner, *Memories and Testimonies* (Montreal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, 2002), 74.

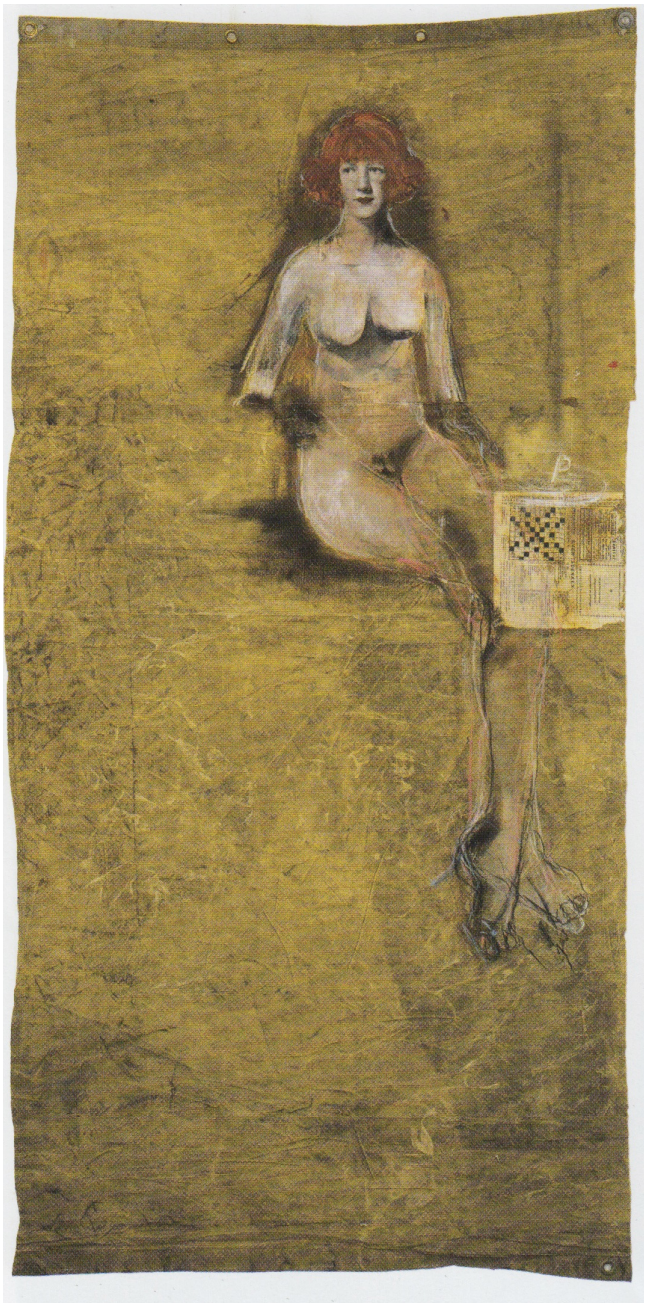

Figure 10
Angela Grossmann
Doll
2000-2002
Mixed media on found canvas tarp
206 x 99 cm
From Loren Lerner, *Memories and Testimonies* (Montreal: Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, 2002), 78.

Figure 11
Angela Grossmann
Forget
2000
Mixed media on canvas
140 x 104 cm
Digital image, available from:
http://www.dianefarrisgallery.com/artist/grossmann/ex00/images/forget.html