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Children’s Erratic Memories of the Holocaust: On Cross-Cutting Exchanges in Exhibitions and Visual Projects about Child Survivors and Children of Survivors

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ABSTRACT

My paper analyzes two recent French exhibitions dedicated to Holocaust child survivors and two visual projects by children of Holocaust survivors from Poland and the U.S. I argue that the generations of child survivors and children of survivors share a form of memory which I call erratic memory, one which is fragmented, limited, evanescent, fleeting, and erring at times. The function of such projects is to use the model of erratic memories as structuring blocs of their albums and exhibitions which have a unique potential to foster new generations’ questions as queries that constantly acknowledge and confront the hard-to-reconcile contradictory meanings associated to increasingly more distant Holocaust experiences.

Keywords

Holocaust experiences, child survivors, children of survivors, erratic memories, vicarious traumatization

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cholars have recently delved into the precious insights offered by children’s perspectives on the Holocaust and many museum exhibitions which foreground child survivors’ written and visual testimonies have lately been organized. My paper analyzes two recent French exhibitions dedicated to Holocaust child survivors and two visual projects by children of Holocaust survivors from Poland and the U.S. My intention is to trace the specifics of intergenerational encounters involving children’s memories in visual projects, whether the featured memories belong to people who were children during the Holocaust or people who had a problematic childhood as the offspring of Shoah survivors. To that endeavor, the exhibitions I consider are: C’étaient des enfants. Déportation et sauvetage des enfants juifs à Paris/They were children. The Deportation and Salvation of Jewish Children in Paris, organized by the Paris City-Hall between 26 June and 27 October 2012, and Au Coeur du Génocide. Les enfants dans la Shoah/At the Heart of the Genocide. Children during the Holocaust, organized by Mémorial de la Shoah, Paris, between 19 June and 30 December 2012. The visual projects involving children of survivors are Golda Tencer’s And I Still See Their Faces. Images of Polish Jews (1998) and Jeffrey Wolin’s Written in Memory: Portraits of the Holocaust (1997). I argue that these projects involving child survivors’ and children of survivors’ cross-generational visual and verbal transmission of Holocaust traumas identify the task of exhibition halls dealing with Holocaust memories as similar to that of postmemorial artists, one which was recently explained by memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch. Its aim is “to allow the spectator to enter the image, to imagine the disaster ‘in one’s own body,’ yet to evade the transposition that erases distance” (Hirsch 2012, 98), a form of pro-social, cognitive, vicarious traumatization.

My main contention from analyzing the above visual projects is that the generations of
child survivors and children of survivors share vicarious traumatization which is related to a form of memory that I call erratic memory, and whose main features include fragmentation, limitation, the dominance of evanescent, fleeting flashbacks, and erring configurations. The task of foregrounding this type of memory undertaken by recent memorial visual projects offers a significant direction for the future of Holocaust and memory studies: it proposes a historiography sensitive to traumatic affect, incongruities, and mediations, one which not only acknowledges but bears the imprint of life’s pulse in its construction as well as an acute awareness of temporal distances, dislocations and ambiguous positionings. I will first explain the concept of vicarious trauma before my actual examination of the exhibitions and projects.

Vicarious Trauma, Child Survivors and Children of Survivors

In her seminal study on degrees in which viewers of media can be traumatized either under the form of “empty empathy” (i.e. via sentimentalized attachments that turn viewers away from the suffering of others) or as potentially pro-social agents, Ann Kaplan brings into discussion the relevant concept of vicarious trauma initially developed by McCann and Pearlman (1990) and Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995). These psychologists defined vicarious trauma as the disruptive psychological effects of patients’ trauma on therapists especially in the sense of arousing the latter’s empathic distress. Kaplan’s study extends the scope of vicarious trauma to also include a secondary, indirect access to it that can be felt by non-specialists exposed to others’ pain: she concentrates on viewers of trauma-related media or people exposed to another’s trauma. I believe that Kaplan’s ideas can be further associated with two other categories of people. More specifically, I consider vicarious trauma as the most important linking bloc between child survivors and children of survivors, one whose specific characteristics I want to delineate and explain in what follows in relation to four visual projects.

Unlike scholars like Cathy Caruth and Susannah Radstone who have overstressed disassociation or the unconscious character of trauma, Kaplan proposes a more complex, malleable theoretical approach, starting from identifying three kinds of possible brain functions in the case of first-hand trauma. Most often, as strongly suggested by Cathy Caruth, the direct experience of trauma implies a disassociation function in which the trauma is not accessible to cognition or memory, the event does not have a meaning, it is only perceived through affect—through feelings of terror, fear, shock, loss of comfort (Kaplan 2005, 38). In this case, only the sensation factor of the brain—the amygdala—is active during the traumatizing act while rational factors and cognitive processing by the cerebral cortex are shut down. A second possible form of brain function in the case of first-hand trauma is circuitry or temporary repression: this involves living through trauma via temporary dissociation followed by registration of the event in the cortex, allowing the trauma to be in conscious memory (Kaplan 2005, 38, 89). Thirdly, a victim of trauma involving perpetrators can partially identify with the aggressor and is hence implicated in the traumatic situation, which usually triggers earlier memories and unconscious fantasies that become mixed with those of the new event (Kaplan 2005, 38, 89). In comparison to these various forms of direct trauma, Kaplan notes that vicarious trauma probably always involves the cortex, triggering empathy for the other’s suffering and “arousing mechanisms interacting with their [the observers’] own traumatic experiences” (Kaplan 2005, 90), which can have a pro-social result, the need to help and act. Therefore, cognition, awareness, and activist social responsibilities are important components for those suffering from vicarious trauma. I would further add that the prevalent sense of despair usually fostered by first-hand trauma because of the traumatic situation’s association with a context of helplessness and
hopelessness is usually counterbalanced by a sense of indignation and an action-triggering stance for those experiencing vicarious trauma.

Why do child survivors and children of survivors qualify as categories undergoing vicarious trauma? Why is it important that these two distinct World War II categories share this characteristic? To what extent is there a difference in degree in point of their experiences? As pointed out by Amy Williams, Heather Helm and Elysia Clemens, CSDT (the constructivist self-development theory) is at the basis of vicarious trauma. CSDT postulates that we construct, recreate and restructure “our personal realities based on the complex cognitive schemas used to interpret and make sense of life experiences,” which especially occur by the interaction of one’s frame of reference to others’ stories of trauma (Williams et al 2012, 135). In this sense, child survivors and children of survivors are particularly prone to develop vicarious traumatization given their close contact with the first-hand traumas of adult survivors, most often their parents. As a consequence, their awareness of the potential impact of their trauma-marked history can enable them to engage in personal wellness activities that mediate traumatic effects on personal and professional functioning (Williams et al 2012, 147). My contention is that the trigger for the shared vicarious trauma position of child survivors and children of survivors is represented by their specific erratic memories that favor simultaneously empathetic and critical responses. I will show in what follows how this idea has been foregrounded by recent exhibitions and visual projects about children and the Holocaust.

The 2012 Paris Exhibitions on Children of the Holocaust Sanctioning Vicarious Trauma

In 2012, two exhibitions were organized in Paris in memory of children of the Holocaust (C’étaient des enfants. Déportation et sauvetage des enfants juifs à Paris, organized by the Paris City-Hall between 26 June and 27 October 2012, and Au Coeur du Génocide. Les enfants dans la Shoah, organized by Mémorial de la Shoah between 19 June and 30 December 2012). Both of these exhibitions were didactically constructed in view of fostering viewers’ vicarious traumatization rather than empty empathy, featuring texts explaining the chronological development of events for children from the 1930s until the post-Holocaust moments and sustained by official documents, testimonies, photos and artifacts. Thus, the exhibition C’étaient des enfants was straightforwardly organized in four parts that elaborated on the chronological fate of Jewish children living in Paris from the beginning of World War II till the post-war period, suggestively titled “Identification et exclusion”/“Identification and Exclusion,” “Arrestation et deportation”/“Arrest and Deportation,” “Sauver les enfants”/“Save the Children!” “Survivre, et après?”/“Survive, and Then What?” Similarly, the exhibition Au Coeur du Génocide followed a pedagogical, chronological structure, being made up of 21 sections that spanned from pre-Holocaust times until the post-World War II period. The exhibition items were displayed on wooden boards, the information thus given combining general historical texts with excerpts from children’s diaries, photos, Jewish or Nazi documents. As such, the exhibition hall looked like a giant classroom in which visitors found themselves in the position of students that were being introduced to the complex situation of children during the Shoah by being offered the initial critical and historical apparatus without which it would be almost impossible to undertake serious independent research.

The sections first explained the general context of life in which Jewish discrimination started in Europe. They continued with the actual deportation of children to various ghettos, and followed the crescendo of a changed lifestyle for the worse, from the initial difficulty to continue learning and playing, to children’s need to start working in order to escape hunger and death. They subsequently highlighted chil-
The most important networks in this respect were l’OSE (l’Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants), active from 1941, and l’EF (Les Éclaireurs Israélites de France), active from 1942. Additionally, one counted the solidarity of individual Parisians whose reactions and aid were triggered in the wake of the round-up of Vél d’Hiv, when they learnt about the violent separations of families and decided to stand up against authorities and the Occupation (Gensburger 2012, 80-81).

As marked in the introduction to the catalogue of C’étaient des enfants, the organization of these events in 2012 France was not coincidental. These exhibitions actually marked the commemoration of 70 years from the round-up affecting the lives of some of the 320,000 Jews living in France at the start of World War II, of which only a third had been born in France while two thirds were immigrants from Eastern Europe or Germany. More precisely, on 16-17 July 1942, all the Jews of Paris who were considered foreigners had to assemble at Paris’s Vélodrome d’Hiver, almost 14,000 people in all. This was the first action that directly involved the amassing of children alongside adults, problematic in itself because the majority of the youngsters were born in France but, because of their parents’ lack of French citizenship, were considered “foreigners.” Soon afterwards, some 11,400 Jewish children were deported from France, over half of whom were coming from Paris, and no more than 200 returned alive. Most of France’s deported children were first taken to the temporary camp of Drancy and then to Auschwitz, where the majority of them were immediately killed. Most disturbingly, a third of these French Jewish children actually came from Vél d’Hiv, where they had been brought over the course of very few days (Gensburger 2012, 8). In light of this, the declared aim of the exhibition C’étaient des enfants was to honor the memory of these children and to also present the stories of the 80% of French Jewish child survivors, the thousands of hidden children who were saved thanks to the actions undertaken by the organized networks functioning around France during the war.1 The activities of people working on their own or within organizations marked World War II Paris as an ambiguous site whose actions oscillated between deportation and salvation (Gensburger 2012, 8, etc.). In comparison, given the already-presented structure of Au Coeur du Génocide, this latter exhibition offered a broader outlook on children during the Holocaust, presenting images from all over Europe, not only France. Otherwise, Au Coeur du Génocide favored a similar complex look on children’s lot which commended their extraordinary capacity for resistance and adaptation to new situations in which they were forced to live at very young ages.

Both exhibitions were introduced as following in the footsteps of the pioneering work carried out by Serge Klarsfeld, the Romanian-born French Jewish historian, lawyer and activist2 who has dedicated his life to rescuing the memory of those who were children during the Holocaust. Klarsfeld is one of the first historians to recuperate the voices and memories of France’s deported children, especially of the 11,385 girls and boys who died during the Shoah. His work to that effect began with his founding the Association of Sons and Daughters of Jews Deported from France in 1979, perhaps the earliest step towards gaining the public and professional recognition of the child survivor category.

The 2012 exhibitions by the Paris City Hall and Mémorial de la Shoah undertake the task of continuing Klarsfeld’s monumental work and complementing it with the recuperation of the voices and memories of child survivors who were saved thanks to associations for hiding children, the members of Resistance groups, or individuals who worked on their own in order to ensure the children’s survival (Gensburger 2012, 9; Le Point 2012, 3-5). Like Klarsfeld, their hope is to thereby gain public recognition of children’s due place in the history of the Holocaust, as subjects and not merely passive objects in those events. Both exhibitions suggest that the way to achieve this involves the coupling of historical explanatory texts with a high number of fragmentary documents reflecting children’s points of view and

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1) The most important networks in this respect were l’OSE (l’Oeuvre de Secours aux Enfants), active from 1941, and l’EF (Les Éclaireurs Israélites de France), active from 1942.

2) Born in 1935, in Bucharest, in a Romanian Jewish family, Serge Klarsfeld is a child survivor who immigrated with his parents to France before the start of World War II. In 1943 his father was deported to Auschwitz, where he perished, and his mother survived in hiding in Vichy France, helped by the Resistance Movement. Serge survived in a home for Jewish children operated by l’OSE.

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experiences, their fears and pain, but also their games and on-going friendships in spite of all (Gensburger 2012, 9). These latter necessary documents significantly represent typical strategies of discourse construction aimed at fostering viewers' vicarious trauma rather than empty empathy.

Children's own writings and drawings from the time of the Holocaust become the two exhibitions' main strategies to render the traumatic dimension of these children's experiences. In this sense, 15-year-old Clara Garnek's letter written at Vél d'Hiv on 18 July 1942, and addressed to her aunt, uncle, and cousins is particularly relevant. The girl writes matter-of-factly and records the internees' pessimistic situation in simple but extremely telling terms. She writes, "Nous sommes très malheureux. À chaque instant il y a de nouveaux malades, il y a des femmes enceintes, il y a des aveugles... nous couchons par terre."/"Our situation is unfortunate. New people turn ill every moment, we are surrounded by pregnant women and blind persons... we have to sleep on the floor" (document from Mémorial de la Shoah reprinted in Gensburger 2012, 44). In a way, by identifying the people rounded up at Vél d'Hiv as women, children and people with disabilities, the girl unconsciously draws viewers' attention to why only the most vulnerable members of Paris's Jewish community would be amassed at that time. This happened because the first Paris round-ups had already taken place starting with 14 May 1941, when only men were summoned to the police and were soon deported, those actions representing a first stage in the separation of Jewish families (Gensburger 2012, 39). Most importantly, in indicating the presence of pregnant women, Clara also sensed the terrible fate awaiting not-yet-born babies who would have to come to a world in which life conditions were terrible, just as all of Clara's family had to sleep on the floor and no longer have any sense of comfort.

In similar terms, one counts some drawings made at the OSE-run House of Chabannes, and belonging to two twin brothers who had found refuge there, 10-year-old Abraham Marcel and Benjamin Cukier. Born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1930, the twins addressed some words and drawings to their parents from whom they had been separated by the war. In their letters, both siblings first drew a genealogy of their parents' lives, suggesting the poverty and early work they had undertaken in Eastern Europe, and their immigration to France. Their emphasis was slightly different, though. Abraham mentioned the "happy" family they used to be as long as they were all together (included in Gensburger 2012, 104-105). Instead, Benjamin focused on his father's no longer having a place to work as they were writing this, in 1939-1940, and his hope that he would be able to return to work, a situation he associated with the peaceful family life before parents and children were separated and forced into hiding (included in Gensburger 2012, 109). Significantly, Benjamin went on to present the house of Chabanne where the siblings were living as a cold place which could not represent a real home, despite the care and teaching offered to them. Both children's words actually betrayed a deep sense of lack, and the similar images by which they ended—their drawings of transportation means such as a car, a bus or a train—underscored their hopes and dreams for the family's reunification. Abraham suggested this by means of a train ride that took the children to a home-like place imagined under the form of a glass of wine and food being cooked on a gas stove. Benjamin pointed to the family reunion by drawing two children happily running with open arms to meet their serious-looking, stooped, returning parents. Undoubtedly, the twins' acts of writing and drawing were important means attenuating the pangs of separation; they represented ways by which the children maintained at least an imaginary feeling that they managed to keep in touch with their parents. Yet, the fact that the elements of pain represented the building-blocks within their messages to their parents are also proof of how much these children were affected by Holocaust events, and were themselves play-
ing an active and difficult part in the process, one which involved that they accepted the need to temporarily separate from their parents, to change identity, to quit one place for another, to accept new friends or even families. Therefore, children’s particularly emotional cognition and social responsibilities undertaken by those who were a bit older, were important components characterizing those suffering from vicarious trauma, and which allowed them to counterbalance the surrounding context of helplessness and hopelessness with a sense of indignation and an action-triggering stance for their future lives. By placing these fragmentary aspects of children’s Holocaust memory within a didactically-presented historical context of those times, the exhibitions C’étaient des enfants and Au coeur du génocide prevent the viewers from being subjects of empty empathy (i.e. simply developing sentimentalized attachments that turn viewers away from the suffering of others). Instead, viewers are placed in the position of potentially pro-social individuals, especially thanks to the exhibitions’ strategies to incorporate the vicarious traumatic experiences of children of the Holocaust.

In think that especially the photo chosen for the poster of the exhibition C’étaient des enfants works similarly to the above ideas. The image powerfully suggests the important role played by children of the Holocaust in triggering an activist vicarious trauma position in the audience. This is a December 1942 photo from the Drancy Camp taken by the Nazis for drawing up an image-based report for internal use, entitled “Anti-Semitic measures. Drancy concentration camp, December 3, 1942” (Figure 1). It depicts a group of children, some of whom happily carried loaves of bread in their hands, while others looked straight into the camera lens in expectation. The caption of the photo was “Jews receive bread. Their faces betray how they feel” – it suggested lust as an innate negative feature stereotypically associated with Jews by the Nazis. In actual fact, the children were most likely obliged to pose as such for the photo, so it was a case of Nazis’ manipulation of reality by the means of a framed picture. Most importantly, however, the exhibition organizers decided to crop the image, they left out the smiling youngsters holding bread in their arms, and focused on another group of children whose expression suggests curiosity, expectation, impatience, determination (Figure 2). Stripping the photo away from the Nazi
gaze which produced it and from the racist function suggested by its original caption, the cropped exhibition poster manages to capture the erratic character of the memories of those who were children during the Holocaust, pointing to incongruities, fragmentation, evanescence, ambiguities. In this way, well-informed viewers are asked to always keep alert about the content of what they read or see, since both texts and images are prone to changes, manipulations, re-contextualizations, to be sorted out on one’s own.

I will now turn to two visual projects due to children of survivors who equally foreground the importance of vicarious trauma and children’s erratic memories, but through a different structure of the projects. In these cases, the creators replace the clear-cut didactic form of organization with one that primarily replicates the memory and perspective of a child survivor or a child of survivors.

Golda Tencer’s Project And I Still See Their Faces. Images of Polish Jews

Golda Tencer’s 1998 project, And I Still See Their Faces. Images of Polish Jews, was developed within the Shalom American-Polish-Israeli Foundation, an organization launched in 1988 at the actress’s initiative. The project was started in 1994, when Tencer showed on national Polish television photos from her mother’s album that had survived World War II and asked for others to send theirs, without too much initial hope of getting many contributions. Within two years people from around the world exceeded all expectations, sending some 9000 photos as well as “messages smuggled from the Ghetto, postcards issued on the occasion of religious holidays by Jewish printers, poems, diaries, and what is more—even glass plates sought by collectors of early photographic art” (Tencer 1998, “To my brothers the Polish Jews”). Of these, 454 photos were included in the album and its associated travelling exhibition. Additionally, a permanent location was found for the exhibition, the Jewish Cultural Center from Warsaw, and it was also constructed as an active web site (http://shalom.org.pl/eng/index.php?mid=53.

The project is important for grasping the interrelated erratic memories of child survivors and children of survivors. This first and foremost happens because it is the product of a child of survivors. Tencer identifies herself from the very beginning as a member of the second generation, noting in the introduction to the album/exhibit, that she was born after the war but grew up with “the echoes of the Holocaust” given her father’s screams at night about his terrible experiences in the Warsaw ghetto and the death camps of Auschwitz, Maidanek, Mauthausen. Therefore, it is the memory and perspective of a child of survivors which structures the project, and makes its particular voice heard from the very outset. This becomes obvious thanks to the Opening speech of the exhibition, from which we learn that the photos “were drawn from ruins, they came from family albums saved from destruction.” Here, the characteristics of photos overlap with those of the erratic memories held by children of survivors: both are fragmentary,
partial, troubled, at times triggered by contingency, oftentimes subject to terrible hazards.

The photos in the album do not only belong to children of survivors, since we read that the contributors’ ages ranged from 12 years old to 90 years old, they came from people born in the early 1900s and from those born around the early 1980s. This implicates in the project people of the pre-Holocaust, Holocaust and post-Holocaust generations, therefore issues of trans-generational transmission become paramount.

Most importantly, the first one of the six sections of the project, “Maybe someone somewhere will recognize me,” explains the album’s structure and mission. Structurally, the album does not mean to offer a coherent story but represents a patchwork of “scattered snatches of memory which clung to old photographs” via the juxtaposition of photos and texts sent by various contributors. The written part of the project brings together “barely legible inscriptions on the reverse side of photographs,” “bits of salvaged correspondence,” while most often “the motionless figures in the frames are described by people who knew them personally, or at least had seen them.”

Golda Tencer’s project therefore eschews conventional chronology and indulges in presenting the complex situation of Polish Jewish life, in pre-Holocaust, Holocaust, and post-Holocaust contexts by including the humiliation and killing of Jews, their acts of resistance, some of their own mishaps, the perspective of the photographic past moment encompassed in the image. To these one adds “barely legible inscriptions on the reverse side of photographs” and the hindsight perspective of the young generation or of survivors speaking in the present. As Marianne Hirsch has rightly noted, the actual six sections are organized thematically and generically, following different types of images (studio portraits, street photos, school and youth group pictures, images of demonstrations, army units, officials, weddings and anniversaries) (Hirsch 2012, 234). Additionally, Tencer’s statement of the project’s mission capitalizes on the dangerous locations traversed by the project’s photos, their function as mere traces, and especially their intergenerational, trans-ethnic/transnational role. Sanctioning this idea, Hirsch relevantly praises the historical corrective function of an exhibit like I Can Still See Their Faces: “Through Tencer’s activist mediation, we find a counter-history to the traditional understanding of Polish collaboration, of pogroms perpetrated by neighbors that continued after the war, and of contemporary anti-Semitism. This album does not deny that history, but it supplements it with evidence of neighbors and friends who act as keepers of each other’s memory” (Hirsch 2012, 246). This happens because most of the photos featured in the project are pre-war images of domestic and outside scenes whose engagement with our post-Holocaust knowledge can provide a corrective to received history, which includes various types of contacts and interactions, for example the emergence of Poles as not just anti-Semitic voices but also rescuers, witnesses and carriers of Jewish memory. That is so because the texts accompanying these images fall into two categories: some of them identify family members in the photos (oneself or, most often, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts), others speak about neighbors and friends of the contributor or of his/her ancestors; in this way blood and affiliative attachments across generations work together to reflect back upon a traumatic past. The most important contribution of such an album/exhibit for Holocaust, genocide and memory studies has been pointed out by Hirsch. It consists in its endeavor to bring forth an engagement with “structures of affiliation and transmission that exceed the family” and also involve “intergroup and transnational structures of contact and attachment, revealing the work of postmemorial practices in vastly different historical contexts” (Hirsch 2012, 246). This work is done by the conjoining of various perspectives from family members and friends, and by the coupling of images with texts, since the photos alone can only offer partial, distant and unclear information, while the accompanying text shows the connection one could try to establish between
past and present.

The trigger for the above postmemorial practices of vicarious trauma at work in Tencer’s project is represented by its being structured according to child survivors’ and children of survivors’ shared erratic memories that simultaneously highlight blurry, partial, empathetic and critical responses which favor cross-generational, transnational transmissions. In this sense, one can only consider some of the first featured photos in the project, photos 2 and 3¹. Both of them depict people who were not family members but friends of the second generation senders’ adult families. Photo 2 is sent by Andrzej Taczynski from Lodz, and presents three Yeshiva students engaged in studying a book, and who used to be good friends with Andrzej’s mother in pre-war times. We then learn that photo 3 was taken around 1914 and was found by Romvald Jaskiwicz from Koscian in his wife’s family album, while she knew nothing about the people and why it had been included by her parents therein. The image features three skinny, poorly-dressed old Jews from Brzesc, where a lot of Jews used to live prior to the Holocaust: these were two women and a man reading the newspaper Berliner Tageblatt. In both cases, the texts make it clear that lack of clear knowledge about the depicted people and their presence in other families’ albums predominate over what the photo-holders know about them. In the case of photo 2, Andrzej Taczynski notes how he is aware of nothing else apart from the fact that the youths were his mother’s friends. Similarly, Ewa and Romvald Jaskiwicz write: “We can’t explain who had taken the photograph or why it was in the album. Seeing the tragedy of this nation and living through the Nazi occupation, we kept this picture.” These two early entries inaugurate a practice that will be further developed by subsequent images and texts within the project and which goes into two directions. Firstly, the entries highlight the strong cross-generational character in transmitting Holocaust memory given the contributors who were not directly acquainted with the people in the photo but who are the children of the actual people who knew them and become the transmitters of an indirect memory held in their families. Secondly, they put forth the transnational function of Holocaust memory since both of the above contributors and their parents were Poles who integrated within their family albums photos of Jewish neighbors and friends who only fleetingly came in contact with them, yet who became a permanent fixture of their personal lives by a parent’s simple act of keeping their images alongside those of close blood relations. This particular gesture of family albums coupling images of blood relations with images of strangers associated to the family by affiliations—one which becomes multiplied throughout Tencer’s project (e.g. photo-entries 90, 91, 92, 107, 109, 313, 397)—extends the function of family albums from simple holders of blood ties over time. Family albums, especially when created in conjunction with the Holocaust, become the simultaneous holders of blood and affiliate ties, which reconfigure the notion of the family to include outsiders that can be only partially grasped over time by the new generations. Nevertheless, we see how the new generations accept the role of carriers of another’s existence across time, even though the other was just encountered briefly by somebody in the family, and the second generation member acknowledges her highly limited degree of understanding the distant past. This stance belongs to children of survivors, children of Pole neighbors and friends of Polish Jews during the Holocaust, who have kept contacts and found ways to help one another.

The same blurred memories characterize photos presenting the case of child survivors, especially those from the section entitled “They were seven children” and dealing with “Sons and daughters.” Photo 124⁴, in particular, talks about young infants’ experiences of a life in hiding and the problem of family separation which becomes extremely troublesome after the war’s end, as the children grow up and start to understand what has happened. The text due to a friend of the affected family,
Zofia Olszakowska-Glazerowa, is particularly poignant:

Our friend Cypora Zonsztajn (née Jabion) and her daughter Rachela, born in Siedlce in September of 1941. On August 22, 1942, the whole family, including the Jablon grandparents, were shut up in the Siedlce Ghetto. The Germans gradually took the Jews to the extermination camp in Treblinka. When it was Cypora’s turn, she handed over 11-month-old Rachela to Sabina Zawadzka. From there in 1943 I took Rachela to Zakrzwek, near Lublin, where she was raised with my sister’s son under the name Marianna Tyminska. After the War, Cypora’s brother Szymon, who was living in Palestine, came for her. Rachela grew up in the Maabarot kibbutz. Today Rachela Hen Shaul works in New York as a representative of an Israeli export firm, has two sons, and is a grandmother. Zofia Olszakowska-Glazerowa, Warsaw

Marianne Hirsch found out more about Cypora’s lot from her cousin Judith Greenberg. The scholar learnt how Cypora committed suicide rather than be deported, after she entrusted her girl to Sabina Zawadzka. On leaving, she also sent a brief diary and three photos to the girl, each one bearing a hand-message on the reverse which read: “This is your mother who could not raise you. I wish you would never feel that I am not with you and that you will not feel abandoned by me. I wish that life brings you happiness as you are on your own and for you to be proud of yourself. That is what I wish for you. Your poor mother” (qtd. in Hirsch 2012, 245). Hirsch rightly concludes how these slight insights into child survivors’ experiences “cannot begin to give a sense of layers of loss and interrelation that enabled the images to be included in the collection” (Hirsch 2012, 245). Put differently, with child survivors, we are back to a world of lack of knowledge, partial stories, transnational and cross-generational attachments.

Finally, three photos add another interesting dimension to Tencer’s project. Part of the last section, entitled “For everyone to see” and mostly featuring views of ghetto life in point of landscape, round-ups, women, men and children, these three photos stand out from the rest of the 451 photos in the album. These are the photos of three classmates from 1935 Zloczw, for which the Star of David is used as a frame-within-a-frame. As such, they raise a series of fascinating questions about historical practices and memory: Was the use of Stars of David as photo frame-within-frames regular around 1930s? How, when, where did it originate? How widespread was its use and was it specific to certain families on account of class, religious piety, etc.? Could it be the practice of certain Jewish schools around Poland, since these are photos of classmates? Were such framed photos used in any way by the Nazis during WWII? These questions behind the photos show how exhibitions about children and the Holocaust additionally open up uncharted research paths to follow while they attest to the interrelated erratic memories of child survivors and children of survivors.

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Jeffrey Wolin’s Project Portraits of the Holocaust

Jeffrey A. Wolin’s 1997 album Portraits of the Holocaust shares many characteristics with Golda Tencer’s project in point of the transnational function of Holocaust memory, the coupling of blood and affiliate ties, and the erratic character of memories. Yet, Wolin’s approach to these issues complements Tencer’s aims with different, equally important emphases.

Like Tencer, Wolin is part of the postwar generation, since he was born in 1951 and his grandparents had been born in Poland and Lithuania, leaving for the United States before World War II and sharing with their grandchild their memories of a pre-Holocaust culture in distant lands and times. A professor of photography at Indiana University, Wolin started his Holocaust project in 1988 with just one entry, the one that serves as cover and frontispiece to his album. This consisted of “a photograph which inscribed text of Miso
Vogel, an Auschwitz survivor living in Indiana who was born in Slovakia in 1922, had to search the belongings of incoming prisoners in Auschwitz and joined the U.S. army after his escape in 1945 (Wolin 1997, 95). Later on, in 1991-1992, Wolin decided to construct a whole series of other texts-and-images around Miso's. His method was to first videotape survivors prior to making their portraits with his still camera. Then, rather than rewrite survivors’ accounts in his own words, as in the case of the earliest pieces, he decided to use handwritten text that “excerpted whole chunks of testimonies, letting the individuals speak for themselves” in their own European accents and speech ways (Wolin 1997, 95). These handwritten texts were added in the large areas within the final images that had been intentionally left void. The function of the texts was to complement the limited nature of photos by anchoring them within historical accounts consisting of survivors’ acute, vivid memories in which personal bodily-inflicted memories as well as reflective memories were combined. Nevertheless, in contrast to Tencer’s project where the photos and texts are structured by the various titled sub-sections of the album, or in contrast to the Paris exhibitions that follow a chronological, didactic structure, Wolin merely juxtaposes one photo-and-text entry after another, without providing any signposts.

Significantly, Wolin identifies three important elements that represent the groundwork for all the entries he uses for his Portraits of the Holocaust and which supplement Tencer’s ways of imbricating memories of child survivors and children of survivors with a more attentive portrayal of the complex and ambiguous paths of remembrance. Firstly, he highlights the importance of notes that actually reproduce the interviewees’ own voices, offering bits of testimonies that allow us a more accurate interpretation of past events based upon actual episodes that have left a deep mark on people’s memory. Secondly, his use of visual images to show tattoos or other bodily marks left upon survivors by the experience of the Holocaust are meant to convey the un-representable but forever haunting character of these people’s experiences. Thirdly, the choice to include another artifact in the image, by usually making photographed people hold the photos of other family members who died in the Holocaust, represents a mnemonic associative technique as that identified by French-Jewish author Marcel Proust. For Proust, an everyday object, when infused with a powerful emotive force, becomes the trigger for reawakening a buried experience. Unlike Proust, though, who favored the return to pleasant memories such as the famous scene of the madeleine soaked into tea from Remembrance of Things Past, the Shoah experiences unburied by Wolin privilege unpleasant, traumatic memories that come back to the foreground and remain a haunting presence in the survivors’ current lives.

Wolin’s project sustains the transnational function of Holocaust memory in a different direction than that offered by Tencer’s project, who emphasized the preservation of Jewish memories and photos in albums of Gentiles from Poland. In the case of Wolin’s project, the transnational dimension is associated to the various locations survivors inhabited before and after the Holocaust, as suggested by the technique of coupling one past photo of pre-Holocaust experiences or immediate post-liberation times in Europe or the U.S. on the left-hand-side page, with a photo from their location in America depicted within the present-day photo on the opposite right-hand-side page. These photos function as visual testimonies depicting how enforced dislocation in the wake of the Shoah became a fundamental feature of many survivors’ lives both at the time of World War II and after. More precisely, the past photos can be grouped into three categories.

There are 9 photos from pre-Holocaust times, from 1933 till 1938, of which 3 were taken in Poland, 3 in Germany, 1 in Slovakia, and 2 in Hungary. The common denominator for these photos is a sense of comfortable, hopeful trajectories of well-integrated individ-
uals in various European countries as to economic status, military service, educational prospects, leisure time and religious piety. This is primarily sustained by their smiling and stylish, elegant postures in the pictures. Yet, dislocation of normal life frames already becomes imbricated in some of these photos. Such is the case, for instance, with the photo of studious German-Jewish Liselotte Klopstock from 1938 Berlin, which is taken soon before the girl’s departure for the U.S in 1940. Liselette’s experience suggests how growing up in America as a refugee from Germany becomes problematic during World War II, since class mates at school associate her with the Nazis, beating her up and calling her “Hitler’s daughter” on account of her German accent (Wolin 1997, 71). These prejudiced, uninformed views of average Americans merely replicate Liselotte’s experience in pre-World War II Germany, when one day after school members of Hitler Youth beat her up and called her “Juden Weib–Dirty Jew Broad” (Wolin 1997, 71). Her on-going experiences of racist talk both on the part of Nazi-sympathizers and what would normally be termed as democratic, liberating Americans, prove how deeply-seated and uninformed prejudices can be, irrespective of the regimes of state in which people live. Thanks to such photos lined up alongside pre-Holocaust ones, a sense of erring, understood as permanent wandering and no sense of belonging to one particular place seems to have become a condition of post-war life especially for those who used to be children during the Holocaust.

The 8 photos covering the time of the Holocaust (1938-1945) parallel the same patterns of the pre-World War II pictures. That is the case because, though chronologically situated after the advent of World War II, for all the people involved, they refer to the times prior to their being subjected to Nazi persecutions, mirroring the same life conditions as those of pre-Holocaust times. The images were taken in three locations, 3 in Hungary, 2 in Poland and 3 in France. They suggest a similar positive atmosphere as to economic status, educational prospects, or leisure times.

Nevertheless, the greatest number of photos from the past, 31 in all, were taken soon after liberation within a wider range of locations, namely 10 different states that involved both countries of birth to which some survivors returned, or new destinations they assumed. These included 1 image from Yugoslavia, 6 from Germany, 4 from France, 4 from Poland, 4 from Czechoslovakia, 3 from Hungary, 2 from Sweden, 3 from Italy, 1 from Israel, 3 from the U.S. These photos most powerfully prove how enforced dislocation in the wake of the Shoah became a fundamental feature of many survivors’ lives after World War II. This happens because only 13 of them still present the case of people returning to live in the country they used to inhabit before being encamped or going into hiding (the case of Rafael Pinto from Yugoslavia, Hans Finke in Germany, the people from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia). In their case, images usually portray the return to normal life via depiction of engagement photos, people engulfed in life’s ways, or smiling young children who haven’t lost hope. The rest of the photos, though, 21 in all, depict individuals deciding to leave Eastern European countries after the end of the war in fear of new persecutions. The majority of these people decided to start a new life in countries that used to give them permits during the war (the case of Sweden), in states that organized Displaced Persons camps to assist survivors (e.g. Italy), in the newly-founded Israel seen by some as the only land where Jews could find a home, or in the democratic United States that had long been seen as an exceptionalist “city upon a hill” Promised Land, offering people opportunities and freedom. Given all these intertwined testimonies, we get a sense of transnational Holocaust dislocation as an ambiguous possession for survivors that paradoxically indicated both the destruction of a person’s family in point of those who died or chose to leave behind the surviving family members and move to another country and the potential for starting a new family after meeting other survivors that shared a sense of traumatic understanding of the ways of the world.
Pang and hope become inextricably related through these acts of dislocation specific to survivors, especially for child survivors or those who were young in the war's aftermath.

Wolin's project further suggests the strong cross-generational character in transmitting Holocaust memory by two major means. Firstly, the 42 entries making up his album include 32 testimonies by either adults or youths who were at least 15 years old at the time of their Holocaust ordeal and 8 testimonies of child survivors who were either only a few months old at the start of the war, in 1938, or at most 12 years old; additionally, 2 other child survivors were actually born during the Holocaust, Ida Paluch in Sosnowiec in 1939, and Gittel Jaskulski in Berlin in 1942. Secondly, Wolin couples blood and affiliate ties for certain entries in which the present-day photo includes not just the image of the survivor but also of another member of the family (either one's spouse, child, or grandchild) or of others who died in the Holocaust. The bitter complications of this process are more obviously suggested in Wolin's project than in Tencer's. In this sense, the first entry of the album, due to Rena Grynblat, who was born in Warsaw in 1926, visually and textually expresses the failure of cross-generational transmission for her baby boy, whose photo she carefully holds in the present, looking at it with regret and concern. We learn from the text that at first she and her husband ran from ghetto to ghetto to protect this depicted son, Jurek Trajman, but as things got more terrible, when Jurek was 1 year and a half, Rena left her baby in the care of her sister-in-law, married to a policeman who was well seen at the time. On her return to the place, two days later, she could find "Nothing. No baby. No town. No Jews" (Wolin 1997, 11), being told they had been taken to Treblinka where the boy most probably perished. Meanwhile she has had to live with a terrible burden ever since, the belief that her son might still be alive, perhaps all grown up, or living next door. Given that, Rena Grynblat's story is a heart-wrenching testimony that foregrounds the lingering trauma and despair of those who were parents during the Holocaust and lost all contact with their children. Her posture in relation to the baby-son's photo, one which betrays the mother's simultaneous acts of care and fear to touch the child's image, especially suggests a fragility and erratic character of memory on a par with that of children. This type of memory characterizes Holocaust surviving parents that were separated from their children and have never learnt for sure the fate undertaken by their offspring, keeping a feeble and burdensome hope of "Maybe he's grown. Maybe he lives next door" (Wolin 1997, 11).

Otherwise, thanks to Wolin's project that includes memories of survivors of various ages, the erratic character of children's memories becomes a particular feature distinguishing the memories of young child survivors from those of youths and adults. In this sense, the memories of the youngest child survivors who were born in Holocaust times are of particular relevance. Firstly, the story of Gittel Jaskulski, who was born in Berlin in 1942, and taken to Terezienstadt in 1944 by her grandmother, after her parents had been killed by the Gestapo, does not actually come from Gittel. Instead, we learn it has been excerpted from "a 1949 Berlin newspaper article" translated into English and celebrating Gittel's seventh birthday (Wolin 1997, 73). The text basically consists of information only provided by the grandmother, while the girl's voice is completely suppressed, sanctioning the early post-Holocaust position to child survivors' memories, which were largely ignored or considered of lesser importance. This happens because until the 1980s, average people and psychoanalysts wrongly believed that, given their young age, children didn't realize the trauma they had lived through, hence, they were not affected. However, clinical observation ever since the 1980s has shown the contrary, that "the younger the survivor, the greater were the potential harmful effects of traumatic experiences" (Valent 1998, 109). Given this, Wolin's text actually manages to encompass the evolution undertaken by the
child survivor category, suggesting the higher difficulty of dealing with the traumatic past for those who were very young during the Holocaust, since at the time they grew up, in the war's aftermath, they were not even assimilated to survivors by specialists and families. In other words, in a first phase child survivors' memories were erratic in the sense of being ignored and regarded as non-existent or irrelevant according to the social conventions of the times.

Ida Paluch's memories are also erratic but in another sense. They largely represent merely evanescent, fleeting flashbacks, and they take up erring configurations in the sense of a prejudiced, unfair view of others. Born in Sosnowiec in 1939, Ida Paluch was taken into hiding in 1942, at 3 and a half years old, soon after her family was herded in the ghetto and her mother committed suicide on having to separate from her children. The woman ran to the third floor of a nearby building and jumped out the window, while the children were coming after her. Ida recognizes this episode as representing her earliest memory, when she assisted to her mother's death by jumping (Wolin 1997, 47). Ida only relates this accident to her mother's extreme emotions, to her getting “upset and panicky.” Otherwise, she simply reports how her aunt took her and entrusted her to the care of a Christian friend, William Maj. The girl's next scant memories are related to her arrival in this new family, and how the man presented the girl to his wife as a “Christmas gift” he drew out from under this coat (Wolin 1997, 47). We further learn that while the man was killed by Nazis in the neighboring villages of his home town, where he was an illegal merchant, the girl learnt “to hate Jews and be afraid of them,” since children and neighbors living in Czestochowa spoke of Jews as Christ-killers catching Polish children and killing them for Passover matzos. As a result, when at the end of the war the foster mother took Ida to a Jewish school, the girl ran away, afraid of “those terrible Jews,” while she screamed and yelled “Help, help! Jews are taking me for matzo! Jews are gonna kill me!” (Wolin 1997, 47). Meanwhile, she ended by stating how “All I wanted to do was run, jump from the window—I was afraid of those Jews” (Wolin 1997, 47). Her reaction was imitative of the mother's suicidal attempt but actually marked the problematic situation of many Jewish children who survived the war by hiding in Christian foster families. Like Ida, most of these children weren't even aware of their ethnicity and were brought up in an anti-Semitic atmosphere in which they internalized anti-Jewish hatred. Their memories were erring in the sense of including prejudiced views against Jewish identity which then became very hard to reconcile in adult life after they had deeply inculcated racist stereotypes. Ida's situation corresponds to Joanna Michlic's findings from the essay “Jewish Children's Search for Identity in Post-War Poland 1945-1949,” an excellent study focusing on Polish Jewish children who survived the Holocaust in hiding, were sheltered by Poles and cut from their Jewish families. On one hand, Michlic discusses the case of older children who had to consciously conceal their Jewish identities, and how this influenced them after the war. On the other hand, the historian elaborates on the different case of younger children who, like Ida, were brought up in ignorance of their Jewish identity, a situation that later had important influences on their perceptions of identity, in the sense of making many children emerge from the war “with a confused or split self-image of who they were” (Michlic 2007, 99, 100). The most important factor which applies in the case of Ida consists in how much her life trajectory was influenced by “anti-Jewish prejudices as expressed by some sections of the ethnic Polish community” (Michlic 2007, 100) and by the fact that the child had been brought up as a Christian which “inevitably led to the internalization, to varying degrees, of the Roman Catholic moral cultural code, rituals, and traditions” (Michlic 2007, 111). No resolution awaits a child survivor who has been imbued with such images. As a consequence, Ida can do nothing else but cry out of despair, just like her mother, a suicidal attempt that takes an ironic twist: the mother jumped from the win-
dow to escape anti-Jewish feelings, the girl feels like jumping from the window because she is afraid of the diabolical image of Jews she has been brought up with.

Similarly to Ida Paluch, Irma Morgensztern, born in 1933 in Warsaw, explains the burden of shifting identities during the Holocaust for older child survivors. Her situation sanctions Michlic’s ideas about older Jewish children who had to conceal their real ethnic identity primarily because of their need to perform for a long time that they were someone else while remaining in the absence of the biological family (Michlic 2007, 100). In this case, the parents not only arranged for Irma to leave the Warsaw ghetto and acquire false I.D. papers as a Polish girl, Barbara Nosarzew ska. Before her departure, they also made her learn by heart her new name, the catechism and prayers, all this in order to prevent her being caught. At the same time, though, they straightforwardly told her of the need to perform such identity shifts, so that Irma forcefully remembers how “They were telling me that I can tell my name after the war, not before to nobody” (Wolin 1997, 23). As a result, while she lived in hiding in Poland and went on a pasture to mind some cows, a sense of confusion about her real identity took hold of the girl, making her ponder, “that’s me or not me? Because here I have to remember if I survive I am Irma Morgensztern—I’m not allowed to say that now—and I was a kid and this was sitting in my head…” (Wolin 1997, 23).

Considering all this, the 2012 French exhibitions and two recent visual projects I have considered in this essay complement one another as to the importance of vicarious trauma and children’s erratic memories as tools for analysis in Holocaust studies. The 2012 Paris exhibits emphasize the need for strong critical and historical knowledge in the new generations’ approach to different Holocaust testimonies and documents. Tencer’s project foregrounds the memories and perspectives of child survivors and children of survivors by highlighting blurry, partial, empathetic and critical responses which favor cross-genera-

tional, transnational transmissions. Wolin emphasizes the meaning of erratic memories in the sense of children’s traumas being ignored and regarded as non-existent or irrelevant according to the social conventions of the immediate post-World War II context or in the sense of including prejudiced views against Jewish identity for those who had been saved by Christian families. Thanks to these diverse features of meaning foregrounded by these recent exhibitions and visual projects, the generation of young child survivors in possession of erratic memories seems to embrace a similar type of “reparative reading” associated by Hirsch with the postmemory generation, a position which does not try the impossible task to fix a past photo’s or memory’s meaning but leaves “ambiguities unresolved, providing an expanded context for more affective knowing” (Hirsch 2012, 75). The function of such projects is to use the model of the erratic memories characterizing child survivors and children of survivors as structuring blocs of their albums and exhibitions. These techniques have a unique potential to foster the new generations’ questions as important queries that permanently acknowledge and confront multiple indeterminacies and hard-to-reconcile contradictory meanings associated to increasingly more distant Holocaust experiences. In this way, the new generations might manage to find viable ways to relate to past situations they never knew.

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