

The Enigma of the Homeland Place By Chris Barry

In 1992, I had an exhibition *Lost in Translation* at the Mala Galeria, Museum of Contemporary Art in Warsaw, Poland. Whilst visiting my family in Lodz, I asked my cousin to take me to the Jewish cemetery. I borrowed a Rolli reflex camera from the director of the gallery and then proceeded to photograph the cemetery in the midst of a golden Polish autumn – ‘Polska zlota jesien’. The place was covered in yellow leaves that began to resemble deep snowfalls. I remember being totally intoxicated by this atmosphere of heavy autumn. Memory, beauty, nostalgia, longing, belonging...flooded my senses and imagination – the sensory and emotional phenomena associated with the cyclic nature of autumn, time passing, and the enigma of the homeland place. My cousin couldn’t understand why I wanted to photograph the Jewish cemetery, but I knew instinctively upon entering and passing through the gates, that this would be my gesture of atonement.

Exile and Home

Exiles and immigrants are very often ‘haunted by some sense of loss’, writes Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands*, ‘some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt’. Yet, ‘if we do look back’, he warns, ‘we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation... inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions...imaginary homelands’ (1992, p.10).

Writers and historians alike have elaborated on the impossibility for exiles and immigrants to reclaim their homeland place – the ambiguous territory left behind or extinguished by physical removal and alienation. Instead, they carry with them in their wanderings – as they traverse towns, countries and hemispheres – freeze frames of constructed memory: imaginary homelands inhabited by their fearing and desiring.

The physical departure from one’s original home involves an ontological and psychological severance that is irredeemable (Berger, 1984, p.67). The source and locus of life is *cut*. Edward Said describes this as ‘the unhealable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home...’(1990, p.357).

For the immigrant or exile, photography supplements oral histories, personal narratives, and places of belonging. The circulation of photographs links and binds familial relationships across space and time. It works towards the construction of place and the articulation of that belonging. Photographs perform imaginative returnings to those places, communities, and families left behind or extinguished – imaginary homelands drawn into present-day itineraries and lives. Photography archives genealogies and familial links and participates in the circuits of power and desire. The photograph acts as both icon and narrative.

In the opening paragraph to *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie makes reference to an ‘old photograph in a cheap frame’ of his family home taken in 1946, before his actual birth, and suggests that the photograph instils the past as home, and the present as foreign, ‘albeit a lost home in a lost city in mists of lost time’ (1992, p.9). For Rushdie, the émigré, the photograph locates his own continuity. It establishes his sense of self.

My experience at the Jewish cemetery of Lodz is testimony to my own *tesknota*, a Polish sense of yearning, and one culturally positioned somewhere between belonging and a nostalgia for place and homeland. In this case, the narratives of place and family, evocative in the mind, and embroidered on the body – *of memory* and *about memory* – an imaginative construction of homeliness and belonging. *Tesknota* remains culturally and linguistically untranslatable, but resides within the spaces of ancestry and heritage and deep within the Polish psyche. Poles often speak of it with the greatest of emotion and national pride. It is intrinsically tied to one’s sense of home, and one’s nostalgia for it.

The *tesknota* felt in the Jewish cemetery is located within the mythology surrounding 'a golden Polish autumn' (Polska złota jesien) - a homage to Poland and its difficult and traumatic historic passages of occupation and survival - located and symbolised within nature; *the golden turning of autumn leaves*. And, simultaneously, for me at least, the beauty and peace found in the cemetery, suggesting another time when life existed within the normality and harmony of nature – images drawn from the collective imagination. The Holocaust is not just the sum of those who were murdered: it is also the sum of those who came beforehand, restoring a measure of normality and contingency to daily life, compared to the pathos that followed. For a moment, one experienced the epiphany of an imagined natural order.

The word 'translation', Salman Rushdie tells us, 'comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across'. Having been borne across the world, we are translated... It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, he says, to the notion that something can also be gained.' What is gained according to Rushdie is a 'stereoscopic vision' whereby the immigrant or exile lives in the dichotomous state of insider/outsider simultaneously. S/he is able to offer a 'double perspective' (1992, pp.17-19).

In '*Imaginary Homelands*', Rushdie poses the most fundamental questions for all immigrants, émigrés, and exiles: What does it mean (in his case) to be *Indian* outside *India*? How can these cultures be preserved without becoming ossified? What are the consequences of embracing Western ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us (the cultural baggage of traditions, rituals and histories)? From my own experiences and observations, these are the questions that form the discourses around hybridity; incommensurability (the maintenance of difference), and what he calls 'stereoscopic vision' – the duality of selfhood.

Memory is a bind that links us to place, time and country. Shared memories can provide a social cohesion, but they can also become our greatest source of conflict. Memory, it seems, is better understood as a point of view in the present, rather than as nostalgia immersed in the past. 'Perhaps it is only when we look back that we can make a certain kind of sense of what we see' (Kuhn, 1995, p.108).

Memory can also be honourable and suspect. Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands*, positions his novel *Midnight's Children* as imaginary truth – a novel *of memory* and *about memory*, wherein the main character and narrator 'is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost'. He suggests that the paradox here is that the broken mirror (the émigré/immigrant) is just as equally valuable as the one that is supposedly unflawed (the native dweller). These 'shards of memory' aspire towards greater resonance and greater status within their fragmentation, making the mundane numinous and the trivial symbolic: the *tesknota* of migration, or oral history defined as episodic memory?

Rushdie speaks of looking at images of his childhood monochromatically and the 'colours of history' seeping out of the mind's eye. However, returning to Bombay after a half a life's absence, he is assaulted by the colours and vividness of place, *in situ*. His identity and reclamation of history is restored to him. 'I too had a city and history to reclaim' (1992, pp.10-12).

For those being 'borne across the world' and translated by and through migration, the state of exile offers the freedoms of modernity – mobility, transplantation, reinvention, and the desired break from traditions – whilst simultaneously yearning and desiring precisely the thing that was lost, the home or heimat – the place of ancestors, traditions, and the specificities of culture, the place where memory and meaning is articulated, where the self is formed (Papastergiadis, 1998, p.9).

The polarity between 'traditional home' as place of integration and conformity (attachment) and modernity, that place of self-expression, freedom and self-determination (*dis*-attachment), defines the symbiotic relationship between 'home' and 'exile': the permanence of home and the desire to journey away (Papastergiadis, 1998, p.9). Modernity becomes a

condition of exile characterised and located within its *dis*-attachment to a fixed place. Modernity frames identity and one's relationship to homeland as fragmentary and partial, broken off or broken away from knowable traditions and societies. Anthony Giddens describes these societies as a place where, 'the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. Tradition is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices' (1990, p.37). Migration grafts ethnic identities onto new locations and identity is then played out within the continuing tensions of belonging and displacement.

The potential for photography is not only to commemorate loss, but also to transform it. It allows for the re-imaging of new places of belonging and the production of new relationships to the past. Photography, then, is deployed in the act of reconstituting relationships (to the past, and in the present) and redefining our possible futures. Photography becomes the potentialising agent in the act of reparation and reclamation. It rewrites familial narratives and rewrites private lives.

Atonement

Atonement, my recent photographic installation at the Jewish Museum of Australia (August/September 2002) deals in historic memory – *of memory* and *about memory*. Familial and collective narratives are revisited and repositioned, this time within the context of the absence of the Jewish community. These images were taken in 1987 and in 1992 during the Communist regime in Poland and shortly after its downfall. In my mind, the works are positioned between the Holocaust and the end of Communism. This is also the period when my father was taken away from Poland at the age of 17 and interned in Germany as 'forced labour' during the German occupation - and his eventual return as émigré in 1987. In 1950, he migrated to Australia as a 'displaced person' and returned to Poland only twice in his lifetime, 1975 and 1987.

Atonement consists of two suites of photographic work: *The Jewish Cemetery of Lodz* and *Polska Zlota Jesien (A Golden Polish Autumn)*. These works are redolent in historic memory and reference a Poland of the recent past anchored by two historical moments – the Holocaust and Communism. The absence of the Jewish community is located in the gaps and silences – images of doorways, empty streets and laneways, public squares, building facades, and apartments – make reference to prior and present occupation and challenge ownership. These works also signal life under the Communist regime. A set of portraits cuts through this installation, mainly of children, and, in fact, my extended family. Their presence signals potential and future possibilities - and offers the symbolic gesture of atonement.

Polska Zlota Jesien (A Polish Golden Autumn) also makes reference to other historic passages that have permanently scared the country as well and terrorised its population. This series of portraits also signals the abduction of 200,000 Polish children – from homes, schools, playgrounds, and villages – kidnapped and graded during the German occupation. These children were deemed and identified as 'racially valued' – part of the Nazi 'Germanisation' program and instrumental towards replenishing the homeland's population. Gitte Sereny calls them 'the stolen children' (2000, pp.25-52). This program banned all links with their Polish families and relatives; renamed and reclaimed the children in German Teutonic origins; and held all birth and heredity certificates. These children were basically graded as 'racially valuable' or 'worthless'. They were then systematically allocated to childless or worthy German families. Grading was based on 'the measuring of 62 parts of their bodies'. According to Sereny, '...the decisive characteristic for being placed in the top racial categories, aside from the colour of hair and eyes, were the shape of nose and lips, hairline, toes and fingernails, and the condition of genitalia. What counted too were reactions to neurological tests and personal habits: persistent uncleanliness and bed-wetting and farting, nail biting and masturbation – which older boys were told was forbidden – would, if repeatedly observed, (mean) automatic disqualification from top classification' (2000, p.47). 'Unless the child (including babies) was pretty, healthy, and well built and had blonde or light brown hair and blue eyes, it was eliminated from the selection' (p.45). Of the 200,000 missing

Polish children, about 40,000 returned home, psychologically scarred and traumatised by this double removal. Sereny also references German documents wherein an estimated 10,000-50,000 Polish children between twelve and fourteen years of age, were selected and brought to Germany to work on the land – known as the ‘Hay Action’.

Central Poland, which included the cities of Warsaw, Krakow, and Lublin, with an estimated population of 11 million people, became known and defined as a supply depot of human stock for Germany’s labour requirements. Five million people were subjected to ‘slave labour’ – brought to Germany by force – in order to work the concentration camps, labour camps, German factories, and German agriculture. My father was selected as labour for German agriculture. He was taken away from Poland at the age of 17. At the end of the war, 1.5 million Eastern Europeans, most of them devout Christians, were torn between national loyalties and the fear of return: the German occupation of those territories was replaced by Communism. The political situation challenged their loyalties and the fear of returning. They did not know whether to go back home or emigrate, that is, leave Europe. My father was one of those people. He became part of the mass of chaotic humanity known as ‘displaced persons’.

Sereny also makes a disturbing contrast to Jewish children, ‘historically, no Jewish child is known to have survived the four specific extermination camps of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. However, children between the ages of 12-15 years appeared to have survived the concentration and labour camps. They had survived against a plan of *extermination by work* – a process applied to Jews and other slave workers alike’ (2000, p.28).

The Jewish cemetery of Lodz is perhaps the most significant symbol of Jewish life that flourished in Poland since the thirteenth century. Lodz, at the time of the industrial revolution, was one of the largest manufacturing centres in the world – establishing a textile industry on par with Manchester. The Jewish cemetery lays claim to this power, affluence, and stateliness. The monumentality of the mausoleums and family crypts, Greco-Roman columns, classical porticos and remnants – represents the depth of culture and prosperity and commemorates the vibrancy of Jewish life. Kay Ferres writes in the exhibition catalogue, ‘The dark verticals of the trees and the luminous brightness of the drifts of autumn leaves reaffirm the propriety of death in the cycles of natural existence’ (2002, n.p.) The Jewish cemetery provides a counter-space to recent history where life once existed harmoniously - within order and within nature. However, Ferres goes on to say that the cemetery also signals, ‘the thousands whose death confounds us’ and ‘evokes an unbearable pathos as it recalls those who were not buried here’ (2002, n.p.)

However, between the cemetery and the metropolis, there exists the actualising history of Lodz – the Lodz Ghetto - sealed in 1940 and one of the last to be destroyed in Poland, and the removal of 230,000 people, a third of the city’s population, via transportation, displacement, and extermination. Lodz was the site of the second largest Jewish Ghetto established by the Nazis during their occupation. It originally contained 163,000 people, however the Ghetto’s population increased considerably via deportees from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Luxembourg. When the war finally ended, 877 Jews were left from the Ghetto. It is estimated that only 7,000 Jews from Lodz survived the war. Present day Lodz has a population of around 200 Jews. More Jewish people lived in Poland than in any country in the world; consequently more lost their lives in Poland than in any other Nazi occupied territory. It is a well-known fact that Melbourne has one of the largest groups of Holocaust survivors in the world; most are from Poland, and, more specifically, most are from Lodz.

Memory and History

Collective memory allows us to remember those people, places and events that we’ve never encountered or participated in. The construction of these imaginative memories creates the world in which we live and structures our perceptions of the past. They congeal to establish our social and public rememberings. Collective myths become the popular understandings of

history and contribute towards explanations of the present. They become our social currency. Mythologies are not beholden to linear or sequential time.

The perimeter of this thesis exists in the recent past, 'a time that can still be remembered' (Darian-Smith/Hamilton 1994,p.3) and peopled by those who still hold the memories, the custodians of those lived experiences. A popular form of recording such experiences is through oral histories – the subjective response to time and place.

Paula Hamilton in *The Knife's Edge* (1994) speaks of the tension and opposition between history and memory and suggests the battle lines are firmly drawn - within the analogous context of the knife being struck between the bark of history and the tree of memory, an intrinsic and integral relationship. It seems the analogy favours the tree. This analogy also alerts us to the tension between memory and historians, subjectivity and objectivity. Like Hamilton, I also favour the tree. I am interested in seeing how memory *makes* history and the relationship of memory to place and identity in the formation of self and homeland. Hamilton, in fact, goes on to belie the above and believes in the essential interdependence between memory and history. 'Memory is gradually lost and here the historian steps in to tell the stories that people forget – the *gaps* in the collective remembering' (Hamilton, 1994, p.12) and reciprocally, individuals must step in and remember the gaps that historians forget.

Memory can also be an agent for unsettling the past. In the case of traumatic or silenced histories, it becomes an active agent towards reparation and recovery. Oral histories, autobiographies, and active subject literature, privilege the position of the 'eyewitness' to events of the past. The Jewish Holocaust and *The Great Australian Silence* (Stanner, 1968) are two histories that were systematically removed or silenced by governments and governmental policies. Hamilton also makes reference to Stalin's labour camps. Here we see no written evidence to 'bear witness' to the past, to 'remember' it for later generations, that is until more recent times when testimonials and accounts from survivors, witnesses, and those willing to speak out, began to shape our history.

Oral histories provide a retrospective and fluid character to memory. Their distortions and discrepancies are accommodated in the quest for historical recovery and the processes of remembering. Oral testimonies become central to the process of 'bearing witness'. The struggle over memory is fraught with ownership and interpretation: what is said; what is left out; and whose story is it? Not to mention the position and agenda of the one collecting these texts. Memory provides legitimacy and security in the present. It legitimises and creates one's sense of self. It also contributes towards the formation of nationhood.

Inge Clendinnen's, *Reading the Holocaust* (1998), situates memory with talk - the inherent narratives of experience, place, and time wherein trauma, catastrophes, witnessing, and surviving are situated within the act of talking: 'they assembled and checked themselves from stories and poems, from their memories, from one another's talk' (Clendinnen, 1998, p.39). She also cites Italo Calvino when he remembered the first weeks of peace in a devastated Europe and the 'curious narrative compulsion' as 'every traveller told strangers about the things which happened to him... the greyness of daily lives seemed to belong to another era; we circulated in a multicoloured universe of stories' (Calvino, 1998). What we experience here is narrative functioning as social glue, bridging the gulf between language and experience and, in turn, creating a history of place.

Throughout my own childhood I was privy to this act of talking – the telling and re-telling of personal narratives of departure and arrival, generally in a thick haze of cigarette smoke, alcohol, and laughter. These Polish migrants, or more correctly, 'displaced persons', arrived in Australia in 1950 on the same ship and from the same 'displaced persons' camp in Italy. They were to become my substitute family in Australia and part of a community of people who rewrote and redefined themselves through the act of story-telling – the telling and re-telling of the stories which defined their lives and on arrival in a new country, would also redefine their difference. These were the stories that children were raised on. Childhoods and lives were shaped by these personal accounts.

War experiences can create 'residual anger, racism, hostility and confusion in the mind's of the survivors' (Hamilton, 1994, p.21). These feelings can be transferred and absorbed by offspring and resonate in other generations to follow. Trauma can also create the silencing of personal experience, whether chosen by the individual or orchestrated by the state. Some experiences remain in a void – unimaginable, unspeakable, and *unsayable*.

Nancy Wood states that 'in the post-war world, popular culture, rather than scholarly debate, has become the principal site for the politics of memory' (1992, p.153). In her recent book, *Too Many Men*, Lily Brett supports Wood's statement wherein she suggests that tourism in contemporary Poland is more interested in retracing the steps of the making of the film *Schindler's List* (Spielberg's homage to the Holocaust and his own Jewish identity) than seeking out the actuality of former Jewish life in Poland. Here we witness the impoverishing nature of mass culture over our original memories. Real history competing against fiction and the inability to distinguish what is real and what is made up. Hamilton substantiates this and says that we should also fear losing our sense of community and identity since mass technology changes not only our sense of the temporal but also the spatially specific nature of remembering - the texture of memory. We remember the representation rather than the direct experience. Amenable and accessible consumption eclipses historical fact with cinematic fiction.

Maurice Halbwachs, the first theorist to explore memory as a social phenomenon, claims that 'the collective memory is a record of resemblances, similarities that is kept alive by continuous reworking and transmission' (1980, pp.211-17). It provides the living link between generations. Connerton similarly states, 'The narratives of one's life is part of an interconnecting set of narrative...from which individuals derive their identity' (1989, p.21). Social memory, after all, is solicited and made public according to political and societal needs and agendas; governments are often the holders of public memory. Hamilton suggests that 'we arouse and arrange memories to suit our psychic needs' - as nation, community, and as individuals (1994, p.23).

Post Memory

In his introduction to, *At Memory's Edge* (2000) James E. Young poses the question: How is a Post-Holocaust generation of artists supposed to remember events they never experienced directly, when, in fact, they are born into its memory only and informed through the literature and mass media surrounding it – 'the histories, novels, poems, photographs, movies, plays and video testimonies' – an archive of testimonials and post-memory production, stories which seem to be grafted onto their own lives. What defines and distinguishes post-memory is its generational distance.

Alice Yeager Kaplan asks, 'What happens to the memory of history when it ceases to be testimony (when) it becomes memory of the witness's memory, a vicarious past?' What effectually *does* happen is the maintenance of actual boundaries, an awareness to allow the survivors to speak and testify to their own experiences. Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988) attests that only the true witnesses 'the sommersi' are in full possession of the truth. Gillian Rose in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (1996) reinforces this position as well by reminding us of the last wishes of victims, 'know what has happened, do not forget, and at the same time, you will never know'. The purpose for this post-memory generation, it seems, is to keep this testimony alive in its unfinished and ephemeral state – to sustain this uncertainty and to resist any closure. Hence we witness the philosophies of the emergent 'counter-monument' or 'counter-memorial' - a strategy against forgetting and a strategy against any redemptive ideals; an attempt by contemporary Germany to reinscribe its Jewish past and the memory of a people who no longer feel at home there - memory in an anti-redemptive age. Young also coins the phrase, 'after-image', the afterlife of memory represented in history's after-image – 'the impressions retained in the mind's eye of a vivid sensation long after the original, external cause has been removed'. He also asks whether there is a danger of the vicarious experience becoming a narcissistic enterprise, that 'if artists of the second and third generation want to make art out of the Holocaust, then let it be about the Holocaust itself and not about themselves'.

Historian, Saul Friedlander, continues this rhetorical questioning: 'Is such attention fixed on the past only a gratuitous reverie, the attraction of spectacle, exorcism, or the result of a need to understand; or is it, again and still, an expression of profound fears, and, on the part of some, mute yearnings as well?'

However, one thing this generation of artists does understand is the 'accentuated dilemmas' inherent in any form of 'history-telling'. 'Post-modern memory-work seems to feed perpetually on the impossibility of its own task' (Young, 2000, p.6). The enormity of the catastrophe has unanchored all previous utopian and revolutionary Modernist ideals and created the uncertainty and scepticism of post-modernism. Speculative interpretations and the absence of closure, are well known idioms, couched here within this series of rhetorical questioning which doesn't seem to offer any conclusive answers, rather it creates the framework for speculation, inquiry, and interpretation.

Daniel Mendelsohn in his article, *Before the Holocaust Fades Away* (The Age, Saturday Extra, 15 September, 2002) states that the second and third generations are the last generations to be touched by the Holocaust, 'We are the last generation to whom the dead are close enough to touch, yet frustratingly out of reach'. We are also the ones in touch with its survivors. I am not of Jewish descent but belong to this same generation of artists who have been intrinsically linked to the same historical events and catastrophes, through ancestry and heritage. We are all participants in the act of recovery – recovering familial narratives that have defined and burdened our personal lives and histories. My family narratives include: removal, internment, labour camps (both in Germany and Siberia), death camps, displaced persons, and exile. These are the generations who have had to negotiate their parent's memories, as well as their own local immediate memories of passive participation.

Kay Ferres (2002) in her catalogue essay to my exhibition *Atonement* suggests that the work should be read and considered 'aporetically', based on Plato's concepts of 'aporia'. She states that 'the term addresses the difficulties of understanding, or clarifying, or resolving philosophical investigations, by leaving gaps or silences'.

Susan Crane in *(Not) Writing History* (1996) continues this rhetorical inquiry but veers it towards the possibility for a *personal* history: 'How does history become *personal* – only when it is survived, or only when private lives become public knowledge? What constitutes an *experience* of history – *being there*, or being told about it (telling it), being taught it (teaching it), reading about it, writing it? Or does history become *personal* when an individual cares about it?'

Atonement

Thursday 26 September, Jewish Museum of Australia, Melbourne

On the last day of my exhibition, *Atonement*, I was approached by an elderly Holocaust survivor who seemed extremely agitated and incommunicative. She was not convinced that the series, *The Jewish Cemetery of Lodz*, was Jewish at all. She could not identify any Hebrew or Yiddish texts on the graves or gravesites. I tried to explain that the images were blurred, or rather, softly focused, and that the cemetery at the time of my photographing (Autumn 1992) was reasonably abandoned and neglected, although at the same time, was protected and under surveillance. However, at this point in time, there were no structures in place to begin any form of maintenance or restoration. The elderly woman became uncompromising in her belief that this was not *strictly* a Jewish cemetery and could have easily been one of mixed religion – based on her conviction that she could not see or identify any Jewish texts. She was also critical of the family crypts and mausoleums, suggesting that not all Jewish are wealthy – nor were the dead housed in such elaborate structures. I tried to explain to her that the images that I had taken, were, in fact, some of the wealthiest industrialists at the turn of the century, suggesting their importance, stature, and stateliness in the development of the manufacturing industries in Lodz and Poland alike. Her response

continued to be the same. She could not see any Hebrew texts on the graves and gravesites and can't remember any Jewish crypts or mausoleums. She was convinced that this was *not* a Jewish cemetery. I tried to suggest that she should look up the cemetery's respective website, which had been set up by an international Jewish community, featuring the cemetery and positioning it as one of the largest Jewish cemeteries in Europe. It has since become a tourist attraction. The website also featured former Jewish life in Lodz – identifying Jewish quarters, streets, and buildings previously occupied and owned by the community. In fact, the staff in the Museum's office would be more than happy to assist her. She refused to listen to any of this information and remained unconvinced and suspect of anything that I tried to suggest.

What I encountered was this woman's traumatic past and her on-going present-day trauma – directed at me, a woman of Polish heritage, second-generation, and born in Melbourne. What I experienced was her traumatic relationship to Poland and to Poles, and, in her opinion, the fraudulent nature of the photographs. She was unable to grasp my sense of creative interpretation – an experiential perspective and response to place and family – set in present time. This interpretation was at odds with her 'real' experience and 'history' of Poland, and, in particular, Lodz. She could not grasp that this was *not* a historic document of place, but a speculative body of work based on contemporary Poland and the absence of the Jewish community. She wanted me to identify each building and street with supporting text. I could not successfully explain or convince her that this was a conceptual and interpretive body of work and not a historical document identifying the past for her. Her dislike of the suite of children's portraits was the same. These were portraits of *Polish* children – included specifically as a symbol of future possibility and potential – the potentialising agent for change and a shift in historic perspective: *a gesture of atonement*. She had already made up her mind that these young children – generations removed from her history – would hold the same racial prejudices against the Jewish – that this attitude would have already been instilled into their young lives. No doubt, there is an element of truth to this, especially with the recent advent and rise of the far right in Europe, however, what she failed to understand as well, was her own historic prejudice at work and the generational replaying of this historic prejudice.

I felt equally disturbed by her response and animosity towards my Polish identity. I experienced, vicariously, the burden of those traumatic histories, inner fears, suspicions, and unmoveable racial hatreds – a generation-removed and a hemisphere-removed from the place and time of this conflict.

The purpose for commissioning this body of work by the Jewish Museum of Australia was to speculate on those troubled and troubling histories, and for me, the artist, to move towards some gesture of atonement, on behalf of my own Polish ancestry. The photographic installation acknowledges and positions the absence of the Jewish community, who up until 1939, were an integrated and integral part of that history, and through a framework of 'gaps and silences', brings forth and reinscribes a Jewish past and an on-going Jewish presence in place and history. This is told through a series of photographic images taken of contemporary Poland and my relationship to that country.

I will never know the personal experiences of this woman, nor will I ever be able to gauge or engage in her personal trauma. Her animosity towards me, the photographs, Poles and Poland, and even the children in the photographs, suggests her unhomeliness, her 'unheimlich', towards that country. She belongs to a group of people who no longer feel 'at home' in Poland. Her Poland belongs to a time before the war.

What was also experienced in this encounter was the inarticulate nature of this trauma - on one level, directed at the photographs, but more so, existing in what James E. Young calls 'deep memory', 'that which remains essentially inarticulate and un-representable, that which continues to exist as unresolved trauma, just beyond the reach of meaning.' He goes on to say that 'every common memory of the Holocaust is haunted by that which it necessarily leaves un-stated', the unassimilated trauma represented by some manifest behaviour (2000, p.14).

Telling Stories: Art Spiegelman's *MAUS*

Young constantly cites Friedlander's quest to somehow integrate the survivor's memories into the canons of rational historiography. How does this historiography integrate deep and common memory, the unassimilated with the more knowable? Friedlander suggests that such commentary must be disruptive, able to disturb the linear progression of a narrative; it should introduce counter-narratives, alternative interpretations; it should question any partial or suggested conclusions; and, of course, it should resist any form of closure. Such a narrative would gesture towards 'the existence of deep, inarticulate memory and its own inadequacy towards delivery of that memory'. Young suggests that this would then produce a multi-vocal history of narrative and counter-narrative, creating a frisson of meaning, a more integrated sense of record or document. Within this context we would be able to grasp the telling of those stories and their receipt: how they are passed down to us, and how we understand and interpret them.

In Spiegelman's *MAUS*, we are also subjected to the daily interruptions of their telling by life itself – 'with all its dislocations, associations and paralysing self-reflections (the fathers pill-taking, raucous father-son relationship, fathers new and sour marriage)'. Young calls this the 'ambient noise surrounding it's telling'. *MAUS* in this respect, is not about 'what happened in the past' but resides within its own telling – 'what the son understands of the father's story'. It becomes a narrative hybrid, what Marianne Hirsh calls 'received history' – a mixture of the events of the Holocaust and how they are remembered; and how these stories are passed down to us, interpreted, and played out - the promise and betrayal of story telling.

'And on September 1, 1939, the war came. I was on the front, one of the first to...Ach!'
His elbow knocks two bottles of pills onto the floor.
'So. Twice I spilled my drugstore!'
He blames his lost eye and cataracts for not seeing so well and launches into the story of eye operations and neglectful doctors.
On that day and in that chapter of the book he doesn't finish his story of the Nazi invasion and says it's enough for today.
'I'm tired and I must count my pills'
(MAUS 1:39-40)

Alice Yeager Kaplan asks, 'Which is the true historical project – the pin-pointing of an empirical cause or the trickier, less disciplined attempt to make links between past and present'. In *MAUS*, not only are past and present linked but, as Young states, 'they constantly intrude and occasionally even collapse into each other' (2000, p.28). The inseparability of the father's story and its affect and contingency on its offspring is the context for Art Spiegelman's *MAUS: A Survivor's Tale*, a 'comix-ture of image and narrative'. Hence *MAUS* contextualises past historical events within their transmission in present time, for instance:

When Anja died I had to make an order with everything... (Father)
These papers had too many memories, so I burned them (Father)
You burned them? (Son)
Christ! You save tons of worthless shit, and you... (Son)
Yes, it's a shame! For years they were laying there and nobody even looked in (Father)
Did you read any of them? Can you remember what she wrote? (Son)
No, I looked in, but I don't remember...only I know that she said 'I wish my son, when he grows up, he will be interested by this' (Father)
God damn you! You-you murderer! How the hell could you do such a thing!! (Son)
Ach (Father)
To your father you yell in this way? Even to your friends you should never yell this way! (Father)
But, I'm telling you, after the tragedy with mother, I was so depressed then, I didn't know if I'm coming or I'm going! (Father)
I'm sorry. Look, Pop. It's getting late, I'd better get home (Son)
Come first up-stairs for a little coffee (Father)

No... really, I'd better get going right away (Son)
So... telephone to me... you should visit here more often – don't be such a stranger? (Father)
Sure... you bet! So long (Son)
... Murderer (Son)
(MAUS 1:159)

MAUS is also the vehicle in which the father and son make sense of Vladek's Holocaust experiences through the act of 'many tellings'. Instead of a progressive, linear tale, Spiegelman wants to posit, 'the forks in the road, the paths not taken, how and why decisions were made under those circumstances, mistakenly or otherwise' (Young, 2000, p.26). Spiegelman wants to excavate the contradictions, contingencies, and competing details that shape his father's personal history.

I was frightened to go outside for a few days... I didn't want to pass where they were hanging
(Father)
And maybe one of them could have talked of me to the Germans to try and save himself
(Father)
Ach. When I think now of them, it still makes me cry... Look – even from my dead eye tears are coming out! (Father)
What was Anja doing at around this time? (Son)
Houseworks... and knitting... reading... and she was writing always her diary. (Father)
I used to see Polish notebooks around the house as a kid. Were those her diaries? (Son)
Yes, and also no (Father)
Her diaries didn't survive from the war. What you saw she wrote after: her whole story from the start (Father)
Ohmigod! Where are they? I need those for this book! (Son)
Coff! Please, Artie, stop with the smoking. It makes me short with breath (Father)
I think it's all your peddling! (Son)
Don't be so smart! ... What I was telling you? Yes... After the hanging I looked for another business... (Father)
I started to trade gold and jewellery (Father)
It was easier to hide than clothings
I kept things hidden in the child's stroller, and I made a few zlotys (Father)
(MAUS 1:84)

However, the telling of one story indelibly leaves another story untold, once again, 'common memory' masking 'deep memory' – that unassailable, unspeakable place where silence lives. My own mother's deep unrecoverable stories about her childhood and the unspecific nature of her identity and family origins have now vanished into Alzheimer's disease. She has abandoned the Polish language and speaks only in German, or the occasional 'broken English'. Inevitably, one realises that this must be her first, original language. I spent a lifetime hearing everyone compliment *Amelia on her perfect German*, realising now that this is a woman of German extraction. Somehow my father has never volunteered this story to me. Laziness? Disinterest? Or histories laid to rest. In retrospect, it seems that my own sense of identity has been recently haunted by those untold and lost stories.

The Undesired Jewish Narrative

Germany and Poland alike are places where previous histories are preferably denied, forgotten, or silenced. Present day occupants or dwellers choose to forget difficult and traumatic pasts; forgetfulness and amnesia subsumes previous ill-doing and previous ill-deeds. Contemporary life exonerates itself - these are someone else's pasts: *the undesired Jewish narrative*.

Berlin-born artist Jochen Gertz has suggested that generations born after the war exercise a sort of sublime repression of the past. According to Freud, most things that have been repressed continue to haunt us throughout our lives.

Young positions contemporary Germany's relationship to its Jewish past within the framework of the uncanny. 'This uncanny', described by Freud, 'is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the processes of repression...the uncanny (is) something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light' (Freud, 1955, p.241). The uncanny transforms the familiar and homely into unhomely and strange. Anthony Vidler describes Freud's concept of 'unhomeliness' as 'the fundamental propensity of the familiar to turn on its owners, suddenly to become de-familiarised, de-realised, as if in a dream' (1996, p.7). He also positions Germany's free-floating anxiety towards the memorialisation of its Jewish past, fraught in uncanny behaviour, wherein one can never domesticate such events of the past, or live within their homeliness. They remain discomfiting and unredeemable.

These discourses and semantic debates have been realised and articulated through Germany's desire to design and build a museum to its Jewish past. The dilemma of housing a memory that is ostensibly *unhousable*. Young poses a series of rhetorical questions surrounding this dilemma: How does a city *house* the memory of a people no longer *at home* there? How does a city like Berlin write a people like the Jews back into its official past after having driven them out so murderously? How does one remember and memorialise an absence? This dilemma is confounded further by the fact that very few Jewish choose to return to, or live, in either Germany or Poland. These contested homelands remain places of trauma and conflict and deep rooted in their unhomeliness. They exist as countries which are today 'Judenrein'.

The Jewish Museum of Berlin

Daniel Libeskind, born in Lodz in 1946, to Polish-Jewish survivors who were almost decimated in the Holocaust – through his attachment to, and study of, deconstructivist architecture (under the tutelage of John Hejduk and Peter Eisenman, two of its founding members) – architecturally reinscribes the spatial enactment of the numerous philosophical problematics surrounding the Jewish Museum's design, function, and symbolism. Libeskind proposes a building that would be 'all process rather than product', a building that would always be on the verge of 'becoming' – no longer suggestive of the final solution, that is, *closure*. 'In its series of complex trajectories, irregular linear structures, fragments and displacements, this building is also on the verge of *unbecoming* – a breaking down of architectural assumptions, conventions, and expectations' (Young, 1998, p.163), analogous to the breakdown of chronology, linearity, and normality – a post-modern, deconstructivist ethos opposing the tenets of Modernism, whilst simultaneously materialising Berlin's disrupted history and the removal of a whole social strata, once an indelible fabric of that city's life.

Falkk Jager, architectural critic, describes Libeskind's building as a 'petrified flash of lightening'. Jager suggests that Libeskind's design represents a *working-through* - a form of mourning that reaches its climax in the experience of a melancholy that has been made material. A melancholy lodged within the fraught relationship between present-day Germany and its Jewish past. A city fundamentally haunted by this Jewish absence. Libeskind locates this melancholy within a search for meaning materialised in architectural form – a structure broken in several places. Vera Bendt aligns the zigzag design to the broken backbone of Berlin's society and the impossibility for architecture to recuperate the city's ruptured moral integrity.

Thus notions of rupture and separation, voids and broken narratives, materialise as architectural form for the disruption and breakdown of former Jewish life, as well as the ultimate void created by the Holocaust - absence and its impenetrable nature. Deep memory, that unassailable, inarticulate space, is given meaning through architectural structures.

Libeskind's architecture maintains an anti-redemptory position – based on the resistance towards any closure, and based on the maintenance of strategies against forgetting; remembering that the most important space for any form of memorialisation is the space of memory itself.

A Shared Space: Lily Brett's *Too Many Men*

'In 1983, on her first trip to Poland, Ruth thought that they looked oppressed because of the terrible conditions that most Polish people were living under. There had been a dire shortage of food then. Long lines of people queued for bread, for milk. There were queues for everything. Queues for soap, shampoo, toilet paper. Things were very grim for all Poles, in 1983. The luxury goods stores (Pewex) in Warsaw displayed tubes of toothpaste and packets of washing powder, in the middle of otherwise empty shelves' (Brett, 1999, pp.10-11).

Brett, in *Too Many Men* (1999), goes on to say that things have certainly changed since then. In the 1990s one could buy all brands - Chanel, Armani, Guerlain, Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein. Stores were stocked with the finest meats and smallgoods, herring, sausages and cheeses, and all kinds of potted and smoked meats. However, according to Brett, the people looked just as miserable and remained just as un-liked by most Jews. 'They're a suspicious and sour people, and they seem to have a monopoly on stained, brown teeth'. According to Brett, Jews weren't in the habit of deriding Germans in the same way as they slurred the Poles... 'Ruth found this strange. Yet she was the same. For instance, 'Given half the chance, a round of aggression would fly out of her if she spoke about the Polish'. Brett's descriptions often slipped into a Polish grotesque. 'They look harsh and crushed and wrinkled and old as soon as they hit forty, as though their souls have slipped out of them and turned into skin', Ruth said to someone (in New York) recently. 'What sort of a way was that to speak about any human being? She hated herself when she said things like that'. (1999, p.11)

Brett's critique of Polish behaviour continues her escalation into the grotesque, when she crudely describes a young woman defecating in a public park, and, again, she questions her attitude towards this isolated incident. 'Ruth wondered why this relatively uncommon sight seemed so Polish to her. She had never seen anyone shitting in public, in Poland, before. Why did she see Poles as coarse and vulgar?' (1999, p.13)

Throughout her book, *Too Many Men*, Brett maintains this prejudicial stance against Polish society; often her descriptions escalate vehemently into the grotesque, focusing on the most extreme behaviour found in any society, without providing any sense of fair play or balance. She offers no empathy or understanding, nor does she offer any positive images of the place or the people. Edek, her father and Holocaust survivor, becomes the device or trope for Brett to re-balance Ruth's blatantly prejudiced perspectives, her unhomeliness towards Poland. The irony here is that she is not the survivor, the 'eye witness', the one who bore witness to this history and past. Her prejudice towards the Poles is vicarious – played out through transference and the inherited familial narratives of her childhood and youth. Ironically, Edek, who is the keeper of those memories, behaves in an antithetical manner to that of his daughter, Ruth. Brett, a Holocaust survivor's child herself, signals the legacy of this vicarious past and its impact and amplifications imposed onto the second and third generations that follow.

Brett also fails to acknowledge the specifics and accuracies of history. Her descriptions of 'sour faced' Poles fails to explain forty-five years of hardship under a Communist regime. The queues and lack of food didn't end in 1983 in fact they existed from 1945–1989, nearly half a century of hardship and trauma. The inefficiencies and bleakness illustrated by Brett in the 1990s exist as continuing bi-products of a post-Communist Poland.

Another bi-product of post-Communism is the black marketeer made good. 'The breakfast room was full of men. They were already smoking and drinking. They talked while they ate. Gold teeth and gold rings flashing. "They're peasants", she said to Edek. He glared at her. He was right. She shouldn't call Poles peasants. It was a harsh and unfair assessment' (1999, p.174). Brett in this account of breakfast at the Grand Victoria Hotel in Lodz, once again reinforces her biased attitude towards the Poles. What she is describing, in fact, is that strata of black marketeers who have transferred themselves and their dealings into the capitalist system. Even within Polish society, they are considered scum. Brett quite prejudicially positions these men as atypical of Polish society, when, in fact, by western standards, they

are more akin to the Mafia. One then begs the question, is the Mafia representative of, say, the average Australian or American citizen?

Very few average Poles are able to 'flash' gold rings, chains and teeth. Most still struggle to survive economically and remain caught in the grip and stasis of post-Communist Poland. Luxury items and luxury lifestyles belong to a very small percentage of society, tourists, or to the nouveau riche, the black marketeers made good. 'The gold neck-laced thick-necked doorman' (1999, p.177) who Edek and Ruth have to negotiate each day, falls into this category.

However, within this context, Brett also plays out her own privileged position. The exile or immigrant made good. She makes unrealistic comparisons to functioning western societies – her new life in New York or Edek's life in Melbourne – failing to accommodate the historic trajectories of a country still suffering from the grip of Communism and post-Communism. The stores may be stockpiled with luxury items and western goods, but this does not imply that the local community has the means to access this new found luxury and wealth, especially in a place like Lodz, a working-class industrial city, rife in unemployment, alcoholism, and poor living standards. There are few social services in place. Those found out of work and unable to rent, or to pay for the now privately owned apartments, live in close proximity to poverty. Much of the housing remains in disrepair and reasonably dilapidated, after four decades of virtually no maintenance or restoration. Tenements are crudely and basically constructed – concrete structures made domestic by their individual tenants. There is no Australian comparison to this near half-century of hardship and rudimentary way of life. Edek's return to post-Communist Poland is hardly the country and life he knew before the war.

Brett's lack of compassion or empathy towards the plight of the Poles reinforces the divisive nature of this 'shared space'. This is a contested homeland. Two divisive histories confront each other. Ruth, in present-day Poland, cannot escape her Jewish past – the expulsion of the Jewish community from Poland and the moral violations inherent. She views contemporary Poland through the prism of this expulsion and the dilemmas of those moral violations - attached to the past and played out in the present. Her scathing attack on Poles and Poland is situated within this contestation of a shared space. The Poles, in her eyes, become the contemporary dwellers of this contested homeland – occupation and ownership based on racial/religious expulsion. The decrepit nature of the country and the deficiencies in normal civic behaviour – is ascribed onto this conflicting relationship, rather than a product of historic trajectories – German occupation followed by a harsh Communist regime.

Opposite to this historic space is the plight of the Poles themselves, subjected to decades of oppression and hardship, orchestrated by a Communist regime enforced immediately after the war. A time of secured borders; political incarceration; religious suppression; suspicions; informants; a dehumanising of social values and behaviours; and the contamination of what is considered free, normal life. A life of survival and resistance through perseverance and ingenuity. People forced to queue for basic necessities; food shortages; threadbare shelves; antiquated mechanisation and industry; inefficient economies; inefficient workplaces; threadbare health services; a life of bribes. Bi-products of this desperate past continue to resonate everywhere in present day Poland.

Brett's eulogy of Polish caricature contextualises this well: shabby hotel foyers; porters with dandruff, threadbare collars and greasy hair; over-lip-sticked women; dubious taxi drivers; repellent doormen; inefficient travel agents, drinking coffees and leafing through magazines: conditions and behaviours more akin to Communism. A burgeoning capitalist economy, fuelled by world markets cannot easily erase the physical, psychological, and economic damage enforced onto a country through decades of Communism. Neither race, it seems, is able to share each other's traumatic history. Both have been divisively victimised.

Ruth is subsumed by the impact of the Holocaust on her own life. Information about her parents' past lives and extinguished families is pieced together in isolated fragments – unsorted, ill fitted, and disjointed. Her past is colonised by missing fathers, missing mothers, unfinished sentences, gaps and vacancies. Information delivered in fits and starts; the impossibility of wholeness and closure; and missing parts that are left to one's imagination.

Edek's return to Poland, some 58 years later, re-contextualises the fragmentary, disjointed, and unfinished nature of retracing a Jewish past. The retrieval of his mother's dinner and tea set, his father's woollen coat, and the few family photographs – are the only isolated fragments indicative of his former life in Poland. The continuity, richness, and fulcrum of familial life is reduced to the few personal possessions Ruth is forced to buy back from their current illegitimate and unpleasant owners.

'Edek Rothwax had been forced out of his house, in Poland, when he was twenty-three. He hadn't been back since. He was nearly eighty-two now. He was twenty-three when he, his sisters, his two brothers and his mother and father were ordered to leave their home. Like all other Jews of Lodz, they left everything behind. They left the furniture, the piano, the bedding, the books, the china, the cutlery, the crockery, the photographs, the clothes. They took only what they could carry' (Brett, 1999, pp.8-9). In February 1940, one hundred and fifty thousand Jews were ordered into the Lodz Ghetto by German occupation. 'They walked out of their own lives and, some six years later, the few Jews who had survived found no trace of their former lives left' (1999, pp.8-9).

The most contentious aspect of this shared space is ownership and occupation. The material wealth stolen from Jewish owners and families – the loss of businesses, buildings, enterprises, and industries – is juxtaposed against the country's amnesia and forgetfulness towards this stealth and expulsion. The illegitimacy, suspicions, paranoia, and explicit racist behaviours, is played out when Edek and Ruth visit Edek's former family home at 23 Kamedulska Street, an apartment block owned by Edek's father and occupied by his extended family and other Jewish tenants. The current elderly occupants of Edek's former home contextualise the paranoia and insensitivity directed towards the expulsion of the original owners and the fear of their return, in a supposedly more amenable capitalist climate.

'There was nothing in this building', the old woman said. 'When I moved here, the whole building was empty.'

'She moved in in early 1940', Ruth said to Edek. 'Everything was still here'.

'No one else was here', she said. 'The building was empty'.

'We have a lot of trouble in this building', the woman said.

'Nobody will fix anything, as you can see. It is a broken down building and not worth any money at all.'

'Nobody pays their rents', the old woman said. 'So you would not make any money from this building'.

'There was not one thing in any of the apartments in the building'.

'I did see, in the corner, a bowl which did belong to my mother', Edek said to her.

'There was nothing in this building', the woman said. 'The Jews took everything with them'.

'Ask her where all the Jews went?' Ruth said.

'The Jews moved to bigger apartments', the woman said.

'I wasn't here when the Jews moved out', the old man said.

'No one appeared to have been there when the Jews moved out', Ruth thought. 'No Poles at all'.

'The teapot and the milk and sugar things did belong to my mother', Edek said, 'the spoons too'.

'My wife is really a very nice woman', he said. 'It just takes something extra to put her in a good enough mood to talk'.

At the same time, this most unpalatable elderly couple, caricatured by the old woman's 'huge synthetic hair' and their cunning in selling back Edek's few familial possessions (and their love of American dollars), seems more systemic and atypical of the behaviours and civic deficiencies experienced during the war or during Communism. They appear to be a product of their own past.

The only relief Brett situates in her book, *Too Many Men*, is found in language and food. Brett positions her father's temporary belonging and homeliness in present day Poland within the Polish language and within Polish cuisine. (Not to mention the fact that Edek eventually marries a Polish woman). Edek's ease and animation in language is expressed via his encounters with Polish drivers, doormen, concierges, and tour guides – those facilitating his

return. By contrast, Ruth finds most of these people and foods, unpalatable, whereas Edek enjoys and repositions his belonging within the familiarity of language and within a knowable cuisine. His memory of these foods and his knowledge of this language is being re-remembered and re-enacted in present time. By contrast, Ruth does not possess this memory of place and culture. Her relationship to Poland is vicarious.

'She looked at her father. He looked happy. He had been back to the buffet several times. He had eaten the two slices of ham, four fried eggs, some smoked mackerel, some compote, and some toast. Ruth hadn't touched her food' (Brett, 1999, p.175). The ritual of food and the familiarity of this cuisine enables Edek to ease back into his past. Ruth goes on to say that Polish ham always transported Edek back into his childhood. 'Polish ham is out of this world. Sweet like anything' (1999, p.33). Same as the *pontschke* (donuts). 'This *pontschke* is better than all the *pontschkes* in Acland Street', he said. 'It has got such a dark jam in it, not like that red jam they put in the *pontshkes* in Melbourne' (1999, p.114).

'Pierogi!' Edek shouted a minute later. 'Meat pierogi, cheese pierogi, potato pierogi, mushroom and cabbage pierogi'. He was standing outside a small bar, The Bar Pod Golebiami (The Bar Underneath the Pigeons). Bars in Poland were not primarily for drinking. They were small, cheap eating establishments. For Edek, the recognition and availability of these foods from his past provides a temporary homecoming. Edek feels at home in this cuisine. It restores his sense of self. Polish cuisine provides a point of return and a point of belonging within these most difficult and conflicting histories.

'Edek and the driver were now talking flat out. Edek was animated. One sentence poured out after another. He sounded as if he was having the time of his life' (1999, p.127). Throughout this encounter, Ruth sits in the back seat of the Mercedes taxi, disinterested and disengaged. Her mission is to revisit the places of her Jewish past – not to engage with present day Poland. She wants to retrace the vicarious familial narratives internalised and transposed onto her own life. Her quest is to reposition her Jewish past and identity in a place that is 'Judenrein'. Brett juxtaposes Ruth's ill ease and discomfort against Edek's comfortableness and ease within place and culture. Language provides a temporary homecoming and homeliness for Edek.

'You look shocking', he said. 'Maybe it was not such a good idea to come to Poland?' Edek looked at her again.

'You don't look so *heltzy*'.

'If you really want to leave Poland, we can leave', she said.

'I never wanted to force you to be here'. (Ruth said)

'I don't think about calling the whole thing off for myself', Edek said.

'I am fine. There is nothing wrong with me. *You* look terrible'.

The relationship between Ruth and Edek in Lily Brett's, *Too Many Men*, mirrors that of Artie and Vladek in Art Spiegelman's *MAUS*. The retelling and revisiting of Edek's past is colonised by their abrasive and, sometimes, explosive relationship, daily interruptions, arguments, and the comical replaying of some of those events. What Young calls the ambient noise surrounding it's telling. The difference here is that the retelling and replaying of these personal histories occurs *in situ*. Like *MAUS*, the past resides within its own telling in the present and as Young states, constantly intrudes and even collapses into each other (Young, 2000, p.28).

A typical episode of retelling and replaying historical trauma is played out by Brett when Edek and Ruth visit the Warsaw Ghetto. Here trauma is simultaneously positioned and deflected through the device of humour. As they entered into the courtyard of 60 Zloty Street (60 Gold Street) they confront the three metre high red wall that imprisoned 450,000 Jews. 'By the end of 1941, less than two years after the ghetto had been formed, over 100,000 Jews had died of exhaustion and starvation. By September 1942, 200,000 Jews had died or been transported for liquidation. According to Brett, imprisoning the Jews in the ghettos killed them as effectively, if not quite as efficiently, as the concentration camps.

The sole occupant in this courtyard happened to be a homeless derelict that smelt of alcohol and frightened Edek. He asked Edek in Polish whether they would like their photograph taken in front of the wall.

'I told him no', Edek said.

'Why not?' she said to Edek. 'It would be nice to have some photographs of this trip'.

'I don't think we should give him the camera', Edek said.

'He's not going to run off with it', Ruth said. 'I could easily outrun him'.

(The man held the camera up to his face and stepped back. Edek stepped forward).

'Dad, he's not running away', Ruth said. 'He's stepping back so that he can get us both in the photograph'.

'I am staying here', Edek said. 'He looks like such a type to me'.

'Like what type?' Ruth said.

'Like such a type who will steal', Edek said. 'And who knows what else he will do to us'.

'Dad, I'm twice his size', Ruth said.

'A head shot will be fine', she said to Edek.

Edek beamed for the camera.

'I don't think we need to look cheerful,' Ruth said. 'We're not at Luna Park'.

'One more for good luck', Edek said to the man, in Polish.

Edek took out some zlotys for the man.

'Don't touch him', Ruth said. 'Drop the zlotys into his hand'.

Why do you wear such a school bag?' Edek said looking at her backpack.

'It's a backpack, Dad', she said. 'School children aren't the only ones who wear these now'.

'I'm glad we came here', Ruth said, in the car.

Edek looked out the window' (1999, pp.121-125).

Like *MAUS*, Edek and Ruth exorcise the contradictions, contingencies, and competing details that shape the father's personal history and his personal trajectory. Paying their respects at the Warsaw Ghetto is brought into the present and normalised through their constant arguing and generational differences. The past collapses into the present.

Throughout her book, *Too Many Men*, Lily Brett maintains the authenticity of Edek's 'broken English'. She rewrites it devotedly within its grammatical inconsistencies and inaccuracies and juxtaposes it against the comfort and ease with which Edek slips back into his original language - Polish. Hence, in spite of his initial dispossession and the *unheimlich* nature of his return, Edek finds a homecoming and homeliness in his original language and his familiarity in Polish culture.

In Conclusion

It seems the purpose for this post-memory generation, albeit Lily Brett in *Too Many Men*, or Art Spiegelman in *MAUS*, has been to keep familial testimonies alive in their unfinished and ephemeral states; to sustain this uncertainty and to resist any form of closure. Where the unspeakable and unsayable are translated into comic strips, inter-generational arguments, intrusion, even collapse; where the 'frisson of meaning' is played and replayed and continues to participate in 'the ambient noise of its own telling'. Memory as *lived* experience, not locked in the past, but residing within its own contemporary telling.

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