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2.1 Carl and Lotte Hirsch, Strada Iancu Flondor, Cernăuți, 1942. *Courtesy of the Hirsch family archive*

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## WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

(WITH LEO SPITZER)

Au mois de juin 1942, un officier allemand s'avance vers un jeune homme et lui dit: "Pardon monsieur, où se trouve la place de l'Etoile?" Le jeune homme désigne le côté gauche de sa poitrine.

[In June 1942, a German officer approaches a young man and asks him: "Excuse me, sir, but where is the Place de l'Etoile?" The young man points to his left lapel.]

—Patrick Modiano, *La Place de l'Etoile*

It is the only photograph of Lotte and Carl Hirsch, my parents, taken during the war years, and it is tiny,  $2.5 \times 3.5$  centimeters, about the size of a 35-millimeter negative, with unevenly cut edges. I have always loved this image of a stylish young couple—newlyweds walking confidently down an active urban street. The more difficult it was to make out the details of the faded and slightly spotted black-and-white image, the more mysterious and enticing it became to me over the years. In it, my mother is wearing a flared, light-colored calf-length coat and attractive leather or suede shoes with heels, and she is carrying a dark purse under her arm. My father wears well-cut pants and dark leather shoes, and a tweed jacket that looks slightly too small. Details of their facial expressions are difficult to read, but their strides appear animated, matching, their arms interlaced, my mother's hands in her pockets. The picture must have been taken by one of the street photographers on the Herrengasse in Czernowitz (later, Iancu Flondor in Romanian Cernăuți; today, Kobylanska in Chernivtsi, Ukraine), who took the photos that populated my parents' albums and those of their friends, photos dating from the 1920s and 1930s. Equally small, they were

all no doubt developed and sold to clients on the spot.<sup>1</sup> This picture's radical difference is marked on the back, however, where my father's handwriting reads "Cz. 1942."

In 1942, Czernowitz/Cernăuți was again a Romanian city, ruled by a fascist Romanian government that collaborated with Nazi authorities. Two-thirds of the city's Jewish population—some 40,000 persons—had been deported to Transnistria in the fall of 1941, about half of those perishing from hunger and typhus during that winter, or murdered, either by Romanian gendarmes or Nazi troops. Those, like my parents, who were still in the city had been issued special waivers to remain by the city's mayor or the region's governor as Jews who were deemed necessary to the city's functioning. After the Jewish ghetto into which they had been forced was largely emptied and dissolved, they were permitted to return to their own homes, but they were subject to severe restrictions and a strict curfew, and were obliged to wear the yellow star. Men were routinely taken off the street to do forced labor. Later (or earlier, depending on exactly when the picture was taken) in the summer of 1942, Jewish inhabitants would have been vulnerable to a second wave of deportations to Transnistria or farther east, across the river Bug into German-administered territories and almost certain death.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing in the picture betrays the hardship of the time. Carl and Lotte are not visibly suffering; they don't look starved, unhealthy, or afraid. The photo is not comparable to pictures of Jews in Warsaw or Łódź streets taken in 1942—images of acute misery and deprivation in ghettos or other restricted quarters.

"Here we are during the war," my parents once said to me, with what I took to be some amount of defiance. This photograph had been a measure for me of the difference between my parents' way of telling the story about their experiences during the war years and the much more dire and frightening narratives we read and collected from other survivors and witnesses. The photo seemed to confirm Lotte and Carl's version of events: what they thought of as their "relatively lucky circumstances," and the "youth" and "young love" that helped them to endure and keep up their spirits. Still, I became increasingly puzzled by the little picture's incongruities: by its refusal to testify to what I knew

to be true of the context in which it was taken—a time of persecution, oppression, and totalitarian constraints in which photography itself took an ominous turn from a medium of personal and familial remembrance to a threatening instrument of surveillance. Flipping the little photo from front to back, I was unable to get its two sides to match up.

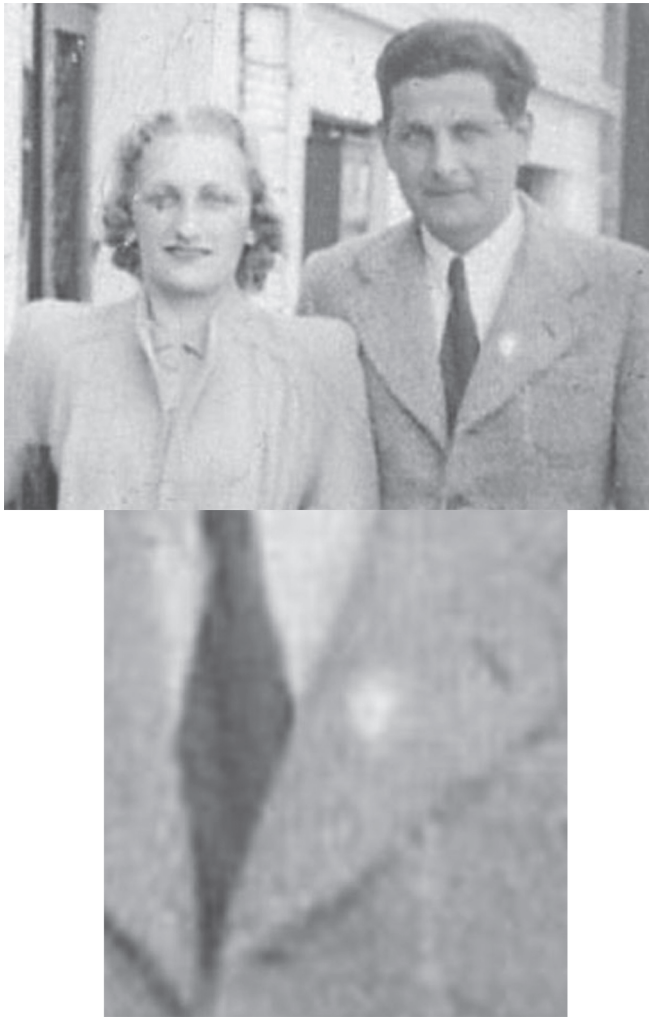
## THE LITTLE PICTURE

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When the two of us began to write about the wartime in Cernăuți, this photo was one of very few images we had on hand from there that might supplement the many written documents, memoirs, and oral testimonies on which we were basing our understanding of the place and time. However small and blurred, however seemingly incongruous, it was a valuable piece of evidence that, we hoped, would give us some greater insight into the texture of wartime Jewish life in this city. Eager for it to reveal itself even more to us, we digitally scanned and enlarged it, blowing it up several times, searching to find what might not be visible to the naked eye (figure 2.2).

Amazingly, as it came up now at about 10 × 14 centimeters on the screen, the image and the story it told changed dramatically—at least at first glance. All of a sudden, it looked like there *was* something on Carl Hirsch's left lapel that had not been noticeable before. A bright light spot, not too large, emerged just in the place where Jews would have worn the yellow star in the spring or fall of 1942. Perhaps the picture was not as incongruous as we had thought: perhaps it would indeed confirm the darker version of the story we had learned and absorbed from so many other accounts. We printed the enlargement, took out magnifying glasses, went up to the window, and used the best lamps in our study to scrutinize the blowup. We played with the enlargement's resolution on the computer in Photoshop, sleuthing like detectives to determine the exact nature of the spot.

The spot's edges remained blurry. But didn't their shape suggest points? This *must* be the yellow star, we concluded; what else could he be wearing on his lapel? We blew the picture up even more, then again, even a little more—yes, of course, it had the *shape* of the Jewish star.



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2.2 “A spot?” *Courtesy of the Hirsch family archive*

We began to reread the photograph’s content, its message, against Lotte’s and Carl’s facial expressions and body language that were now also much more clearly visible. We remembered some of their stories about the star, about how they sometimes went out without it, daring fate to buy groceries more easily or simply to re-experience their former

freedom and mobility. The stars in Cernăuți were not sewn on but affixed with safety pins: young people like Carl and Lotte sometimes wore them on the *inside* of their coats, illegally, but able to show them should they be stopped by the authorities. But if that, indeed, explained the seemingly missing star in Lotte's case, wouldn't the couple have been afraid to have their picture taken by a street photographer? The smiles with which they greeted the camera and, indeed, the fact that they had stopped to *buy* the photo after it was developed, gave us no such impression.

We sent the enlarged photo to Lotte and Carl. "There is a small spot on my lapel," Carl wrote in an e-mail, "but it could not be *the* star. The stars were large, 6 centimeters in diameter. Maybe I should have written 1943 on the photo. They did away with the stars in July of 1943." "And if that is a star," Lotte wrote, "then why am I not wearing one?" In a later e-mail she said: "Yes, it was definitely taken on the Herrengasse during the war, and to me it looks like a star, but the date is causing us problems." In fact, we later found two other photos of Czernowitz Jews wearing the yellow star (figure 2.3).

Those photographs are dated "around 1943" and "May 1943." Their stars are larger and more distinctive than the spot on Carl Hirsch's lapel, but they also are walking through the city—seemingly on the former Herrengasse—having their picture taken by a street photographer and evidently purchasing the photo after its development. Like Lotte and Carl's, their stroll also seems "normal," as though the temporal and political moment in which they were snapped and the "otherness" that they were made to display were hardly relevant.

It may not be possible to determine exactly what, if anything, Carl has on his lapel. Perhaps it is *dust*—no more than a small dot of dirt blocking light on the print. *Our* reception of the photo, the questions we pose in examining it, the needs and desires that shape our postmemorial viewing, inevitably exceed the image's small size and its limited ability to serve as evidence. Even after its enlargements, the results of our persistent efforts to penetrate beyond its mysterious surface are intriguing, but also inconclusive. No doubt, our determination to magnify and enhance the picture—to zoom in, blow up, sharpen—reveals more about our own projections and appropriations than about life in



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2.3 (top) Ilana Schmueli and her mother, Cernăuți, ca. 1943; (bottom) City Dermer, Berthold Geisinger, and Heini Stupp, Cernăuți, 1943. *Courtesy of Ilana Shmueli and Silvio Geisinger*



wartime Greater Romania. As the previous chapter argued, this picture's indexicality is more performative—based on the viewer's needs and desires—than factual.

What, then, can we learn about a traumatic past from photographs? Ulrich Baer notes that such photographs in the context of trauma constitute a kind of “spectral evidence,” revealing “the striking gap between what we can see and what we can know.”<sup>3</sup> Addressing the Second World War and the Holocaust, in particular, he argues that they mark a crisis of witnessing and “call into question the habitual reliance on vision as the principal ground for cognition.”<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, as this book suggests, photography has functioned as one of the principal forms mediating the memory of this period. The powerful memorial aesthetic that has developed around archival photographs and objects from this era over the last three decades invites us to look more broadly at what knowledge and insight they can, in fact, offer us about that past and our relation to it. If photographs are limited and flawed historical documents, in an evidentiary sense, they can function as powerful “points of memory” supplementing the accounts of historians and the words of witnesses, and signaling a visceral, material, and affective connection to the past. They thus become both instruments and emblems of the process of its transmission.

## POINTS OF MEMORY

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Roland Barthes's much discussed notion of the punctum has inspired us to look at images, objects, and memorabilia inherited from the past, like this little picture, as “points of memory”—points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall.<sup>5</sup> The term “point” is both spatial—such as a point on a map—and temporal—a moment in time—and it thus highlights the intersection of spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory. The sharpness of a point pierces or punctures: like Barthes's punctum, points of memory puncture through layers of oblivion, interpellating those who seek to know about the past. A point is also small, a detail, and thus it can convey the fragmentariness

of the vestiges of the past that come down to us in the present—small rectangular pieces of paper we invest with enormous power. In addition, such remnants are useful for *purposes of remembrance*—in order to help generate recall—another meaning of the term “point.” And points of memory are also *arguments* about memory, objects or images that have remained from the past, containing “points” about the work of memory and transmission. Points of memory produce *touching, piercing insights* that traverse temporal, spatial, and experiential divides. As points multiply, they can convey the overlay of different temporalities and interpretive frames, resisting straightforward readings or any lure of authenticity.

Following Barthes, then, we might say that while some remnants merely give information about the past (what Barthes terms the *studium*) others prick and wound and grab and puncture, like the punctum, unsettling assumptions, exposing the unexpected, suggesting what Barthes describes as “a subtle beyond” or the “blind field” outside the photograph’s frame.<sup>6</sup> For Barthes, the punctum is first a detail: the necklace, for example, or the pair of lace-up shoes in the family portrait taken by James van der Zee in 1926.<sup>7</sup> It is a detail only he notices, often because of some personal connection he has with it: as we have seen, he is interested in the necklace because someone in his own family had worn a similar one. This acknowledged subjectivity and positionality, this vulnerability, and this focus on the detail and the ordinary and everyday—all these also belong to reading practices that can be associated with feminist methodologies.<sup>8</sup> And they belong to the work of postmemory.

Even though it is in some ways subjective and individual, the memorial punctum is also mobilized by collective and cultural factors. A point of memory emerges in an encounter between subjects—the parents who lived through a traumatic history and survived, and the daughter who transmits their story to others, along with her irresolvable questions, hopes, and regrets. As encounters between subjects, as acts of reading that are personal as well as cultural, familial as well as affiliative, points of memory are contingent upon the social factors that shape those subjects, and upon the way those subjects experience these. But as acts of reading, they also expose historical and cultural

codes of meaning, codes marked by gender and other forms of social difference.

In the second part of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes elaborates his discussion of the punctum, stating: “I now know that there exists another punctum (another ‘stigmatum’) than the ‘detail.’ This new punctum, which is no longer of form but of intensity, is Time, the lacerating emphasis of the *noeme* (‘that-has-been’), its pure representation.”<sup>9</sup> The punctum of time is precisely that incongruity or incommensurability between the meaning of a given experience, object, or image *then*, and the one it holds *now*. It is the knowledge of the inevitability of loss, change, and death. And that inevitability constitutes the lens through which we, as humans, look at the past. The photograph, Barthes says, “tells me death in the future.”<sup>10</sup> But, as Michael André Bernstein warns, reading the past backward through our retrospective knowledge is a dangerous form of “backshadowing”—“a kind of retroactive foreshadowing in which the shared knowledge of the outcome of a series of events by narrator and listener is used to judge the participants in those events *as though they too should have known what was to come*.”<sup>11</sup> The work of postmemorial reading entails juxtaposing two incommensurable temporalities, and exposing and keeping open the devastating disjunction between them.

## THE DARK ROOM

*The Dark Room*, Rachel Seiffert’s 2002 novel about German memory of the Second World War, is structured around three distinct stories that are linked not by their plot, but by their use of photographs as points of memory. Seiffert shows how problems of photographic evidence evolve between the 1940s and the 1990s, between the experience of witnesses and that of their children and grandchildren.<sup>12</sup> The family, in her novel, is not an intimate private space, but is enmeshed in a complex and shifting social and political landscape that determines every private relation and transaction.

Helmut, the protagonist of the first story (which takes place in Germany during the war) is a bystander to its developments. Exempted from

Wehrmacht service due to a severe physical disability, he works as a photographer's assistant, and is able to witness and to record, on film, some of the events in his native city in the early 1940s. In the section's climactic moments, Helmut watches through a camera's viewfinder and photographs a scene the narrative describes through his eyes, but does not interpret: "There are trucks and uniformed men shouting and pushing. . . . Through the lens he sees possessions scattered: clothes, pots, boxes, sacks kicked and hurled across the muddy ground. An officer stands by screaming orders."<sup>13</sup> Helmut is agitated, frightened, but perhaps also exhilarated by what he is seeing, and he photographs furiously. "In the viewfinder his eyes meet the eyes of a shouting, pointing gypsy. Others turn to look, frightened angry faces in headscarves, hats and in uniform too."<sup>14</sup> But when Helmut returns to the studio and develops his film, he is severely disappointed. The blurred, grainy photos just refuse to show what he had observed earlier in the day: the medium is simply inadequate, wrong. "The bright skirts of the gypsy women are just drab rags in his photos. . . . The dark SS uniforms blend into the soot-black walls of the buildings making them almost invisible. . . . He blows up the image, but the grain evens out the angry lines on the face of the officer who was screaming orders by the jeep, and he barely looks like he is shouting" (30). The list of the photographs' failures goes on. Ultimately, deeply disappointed, Helmut throws both the negatives and the prints into the trash can. All that remains is the enormous disjunction between the affect of the scene of witness and Helmut's encounter with his photographs: the frenzy of the moment gives way to frustration, rage, even self-hatred.

Helmut's failed photos illustrate the belatedness of photographic looking and the temporal gap between the moment an image is taken and the moment it is developed and viewed—a gap that, paradoxically, is no less enormous within the very brief time frame of the scene in the narrative (no more than several hours) than it is for second-generation viewers like us. Helmut's photos are destroyed; the most important ones in his act of witnessing were never even taken. Photographs, Helmut's responses indicate, are shaped by intense emotion—in this case, by fear, nervousness, inadequacy. In this first story of *The Dark Room*, Rachel Seiffert establishes the interested nature of photographic evidence, the

partial view of the photographer, and the contingency of the images that survive.

And yet, in the book's second story, taking place at the very end of the war amid arrests, flight, relocation, and ensuing chaos, photographs are accorded enough evidentiary power to be burned, torn up, and buried. Here a mother and daughter trying to protect the Nazi father from accusation, and themselves from association with him, destroy photos and family albums that can implicate all of them. But the evidentiary authority of photography is also utterly undermined when, at the end of the section, a mysterious character named Tomas is found to be using an identity card and picture that clearly belongs not to him but to a Jew who, Tomas reveals, had been killed in a camp. Why Tomas is impersonating this Jewish victim, what he is trying to hide under this false identity, what the ID card has to do with the blue number tattooed on his arm, remains as ambiguous as the other photos that are being used as pedagogic displays after the liberation of concentration camps in Germany.

When the daughter, Lore, and her young siblings walk through various small towns on their way to Oma's house in Hamburg, they occasionally confront large blurry photographs tacked up in central locations. Silent crowds of onlookers surround these images.<sup>15</sup> Like Helmut, Lore can take in the scenes depicted on these photos only viscerally; she is incapable of identifying their context or of interpretation: "In front of Lore is a picture of a trash dump, or it might be a heap of ashes. She leans in closer, thinks it could be shoes. . . . She steps forward out of the group, smoothens out the damp creases with her palms. A whisper sets off behind her and makes its way around the group. The pictures are of skeletons, Lore can see that now" (76). These pictures had been glued onto a tree, but the adhesive was still wet and they rippled upon drying. Daring to touch them, to flatten them, to step up close and then back again, Lore reveals their details to the crowd. But neither her stroking touch nor the more distant vantage point of the onlookers helps the girl understand what the pictures reveal. Lore is touched by them in return, and her body responds with sweat, heat, faintness; but her mind is a rush of questions. The images stay with her; they remain visible behind her eyelids. She is relieved when she hears adults suggest that the Americans

may have staged the frightening photos. Indistinct, unidentifiable, difficult to connect to her experience, the pictures carry a very different kind of evidence for Lore than the factual one that those posting them had most likely intended. Through their sheer emotional force, they spell out for her that crimes were committed, that those around her, even her parents, may be implicated. Yet they also remain impenetrable and inexplicable: blurry visuals of horrific scenes encountered by onlookers responding with whispers, throat-clearing, silence, or audible protests of denial and rationalization.

In these first two stories, Seiffert's point of view remains close to that of her young, uninformed, yet deeply (if indirectly) implicated German witnesses, and she records their responses in great detail. These illustrate the act of traumatic seeing, in which the image—at first felt affectively and not cognitively—acquires meaning only belatedly, in retrospect. Even later, more meaningful insights and deeper comprehension are blocked by conscious and unconscious needs, by desires and resistances, both individual and collective. Knowledge remains partial, fragmentary, with its enlightening components both partially revealed and blocked from exposure.

*The Dark Room's* third story then jumps ahead several decades and one generation, focusing on Micha, the grandson of a Waffen-SS officer, Askan Boell, who had served in Belarus and had not returned to Germany from a Soviet prison camp until 1954. The story traces the grandson's painful research into his Opa's past and his difficult realization that his grandfather was present when masses of Jewish civilians were killed in the summer and fall of 1943. Photographs are Micha's main research tools: he takes a 1938 picture of his grandfather to Belarus and shows it to witnesses who recognize Boell as one of the SS Germans who were there in 1943. But, primarily, photographs serve to bring home the disjunction between the kind grandfather Micha remembers and the Nazi killer he suspects him to have been. Micha's sister insists: "They don't show anything, the pictures. They're family shots, you know? Celebrations, always happy. You can't see anything." But Micha "does not want to believe her," does not give up the attempt to find "truth" in the photos: "*He always looked away from the camera, though. Did you notice that? After the war*" (266). Together, grandson and granddaughter,

brother and sister, try to read the grandfather's postwar feelings in conventional, opaque family snapshots. Why did Opa look away from the camera in family photos? Did it mean he "had eyes only" for his grandchildren, standing beside him? Or did it mean he was feeling guilty about his crimes?

Micha wants and needs something from the photographs that they cannot possibly convey. However much he studies them, carries them back to Belarus and around Germany, they remain unreadable, always saying either too much or too little. At most they can serve to identify Askan Boell to the Belorussian collaborator Kolesnik and to gain the latter's confirmation of the grandfather's presence in Belarus in 1943. But even here we find out more about Micha's affective response than about participation and guilt. "Micha has put the photo on the table, so that the old man won't see that his hands are shaking" (256). Kolesnik's testimony is general, vague, describing Nazi killings and the Soviet arrests of the culprits, leading Micha to ask again and again: "*Did you see my Opa do anything?*" (258). Repeatedly prodded, Kolesnik eventually admits that, yes, he knows that Askan Boell participated because all the Germans who were there did, with the exception of one who shot himself. Askan must have done it, like the others. The evidence is there, but it is not incontrovertible; the old collaborator had been present, but he was not an explicit eyewitness to Boell's participation in killings. "*There are no pictures of him holding a gun to someone's head, but I am sure he did that and pulled the trigger, too. The camera was pointing elsewhere, shutter opening and closing on the murder of another Jew, done by another man. But my Opa was no more than a few steps away*" (264). Thus, the crucial, confirming photo was not taken, or did not survive, and so the third-generation retrospective witness is left only with the ambiguous evidence carried by the photos that he inherited, and onto which he projects his own anxieties, needs, and desires—feelings disproportionate to what the pictures can, in fact, support. The truth about the past always seems to lie somewhere else, in Barthes's blind field just beyond the frame. As powerful conduits between what was then and what is now, as performative vehicles of affect carried across generations, the photographs can at most gesture toward that elsewhere.

## PROJECTIONS

Photographic documents, like the pictures of Micha's Opa, bring the contradictions of the archives we have inherited into the open. Invariably, archival photographic images appear in postmemorial texts in altered form: they are cropped, enlarged, projected onto other images; they are reframed and de- or re-contextualized; they are embedded in new narratives, new texts; they are surrounded by new frames.

Muriel Hasbun's composite memorial images can sharpen our analysis of this postmemorial photographic aesthetic and the psychic structures that motivate it. Hasbun crops and reframes archival photos, superimposes them on one another, reconstitutes them to alter their color, surrounds them with written text, with twigs that look like barbed wire, or with old wooden frames, prints them on linens she inherited from her grandmother, and installs them amid aural recordings of music and conversations about them.

The images that result are often blurry, out of focus, partial, hard to read. In spite of their obscurity, an obscurity the artist actually augments in her installations, Hasbun describes them as a "refuge against silence and forgetting" and as means to "transcend generational amnesia."<sup>16</sup>

Hasbun's work results from her own hybrid background as the daughter of a Polish Jewish mother who survived the war with some of her family in hiding in France and a Palestinian Christian father who emigrated to El Salvador where Hasbun grew up. The images and objects Hasbun includes in her composite photographs and installations stem from multiple sites and archives, coming together through her own combination, synthesis, and recreation. Even the multilingual titles of the projects that recall her mother's survival in France, with their parentheses and question marks, *¿Sólo una Sombra?* (*Only a Shadow?*) (figures 2.4 and 2.5) and *Protegida/Watched Over* (figures 2.6 and 2.7) inscribe the tentative, ambiguous, and diasporic quality of Hasbun's postmemory work.

In one part of the triptych *Protegida: Auvergne- Hélène* entitled *Mes enfants—Photographe Sanitas, 1943*, Hasbun overlays a photo of two young children and a letter dated Paris, 3.I.1942, addressed to "Mes enfants," my children (figure 2.6). "I would love to have some photos of





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2.4 Muriel Hasbun, *¿Sólo una sombra? (Familia Łódź)/Only a Shadow? (Łódź Family)*. Selenium gelatin silver print, 16.5" × 12" (32 × 30 cm). From the series *Santos y sombras/Saints and Shadows*, 1994. Courtesy of Muriel Hasbun, [www.murielhasbun.com](http://www.murielhasbun.com)

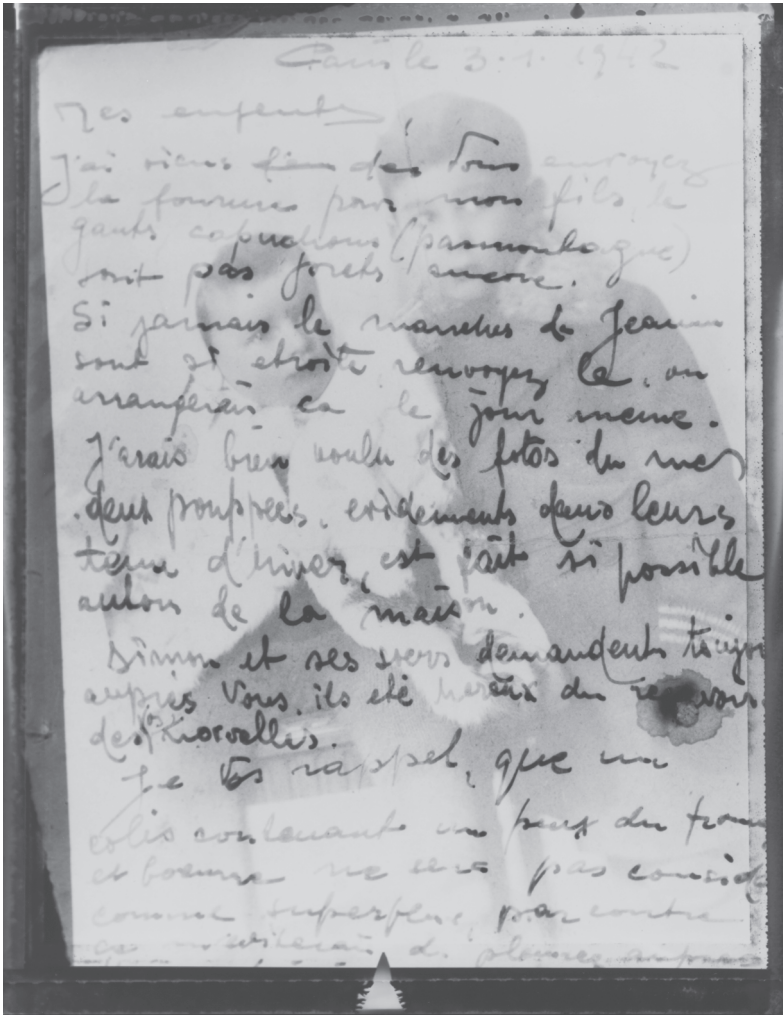


2.5 Muriel Hasbun, *¿Sólo una sombra?/Only a Shadow? (Ester I)*. Gelatin silver print, 18" × 14" (46 × 36 cm). From the series *Santos y sombras/Saints and Shadows*, 1994. Courtesy of Muriel Hasbun, [www.murielhasbun.com](http://www.murielhasbun.com)

my two dolls,” the letter says, “preferably dressed in their winter clothing and taken around the house.” Did the writer, the artist’s grandfather who was hiding in Paris, receive this studio picture of these two “dolls,” his grandchildren hiding with his wife and daughter in Le Mont Dore, or is it Hasbun who now brings together the letter and the photo in an act of retrospective repair? The composite image is as blurred as it is haunting, signaling loss, longing, and desire, but giving no specific insight into the circumstances of the letter or the photo. Exhibiting the material imprint of the writer’s hand, the indexical trace of the children who posed for the photo, and of Hasbun’s own postmemorial act of reframing, the image becomes a site in which the familial and cultural present and past intersect with one another. But what do we actually learn about Jewish survival in France by looking at Hasbun’s images? The composite installations inscribe and highlight the inscrutability of the images and the questions they raise, as well as the artist’s [and our] present needs and desires to find out more about her mother’s or grandmother’s past lives.

Hasbun’s images, like those of her contemporaries, resist our desire to see more clearly, to penetrate more deeply. They are often cropped in unexpected and frustrating ways: in *Hélène’s Eye* (figure 2.7) we see only half of Hélène’s (her great-aunt’s) face, and the face is blown up, almost distorted. On the other side of the triptych, *Hélène B/Hendla F.* (she changed her name from Finkielstjain to Barthel to survive), she holds the photo that was attached to her two identity cards with two different names. We see only her mouth and her hand: we cannot look into her eyes. And yet the voices playing in the background of the pictures of Ester, the sister of Hasbun’s grandfather, whom he did not find until 1974, reveal another dimension of knowledge and transmission:

In my darkroom, I was looking at the portrait of Ester, its image projected on the paper. Only a shadow? Impossible. The brittle leaves from an earlier autumn had already been transformed by the light. Upon finishing the portraits, I wrote to Ester: “When I make these pictures—*cuando hago estas fotografías*—it’s as if I were finding what has been underneath the shadows—*es como que si encontraría lo que estaba debajo de las sombras*—or what lives inside our



2.6 Muriel Hasbun, *Mes enfants*/Photographe Sanitas, 1943. Gelatin silver print, 13.25" × 10.25" or 20" × 15". From the series *Protegida/Watched Over*, 2003. Courtesy of Muriel Hasbun, [www.murielhasbun.com](http://www.murielhasbun.com)



2.7 Muriel Hasbun, *Hélène's Eye*. Selenium gelatin silver print, 10.25" × 13.5" or 15" × 20. From the series *Protegida/Watched Over*, 2003. Courtesy of Muriel Hasbun, [www.murielhasbun.com](http://www.murielhasbun.com)

hearts—*o lo que vive dentro de nuestros corazones*—.” [Ester:] “I remember, in the camp I worked . . . Every Sunday when we don’t work, we sit all the girls and look at the pictures. It was not important it was the pictures of us, but pictures from the home . . . The first thing, when I came here, the first thing that I asked, ‘Have you pictures,’ the first thing.”<sup>17</sup>

## REPARATIVE LOOKING

In memoir and testimony, and in historical accounts and scholarly discussions, as within new artistic texts, archival images function as supplements, both confirming and unsettling the stories that are explored and transmitted. On the one hand, they are imperfect documents, as Seiffert shows, already deeply problematic when they are taken; on the

other hand, as points of memory, they embody an alternate discourse, create an opening in the present to something in the past that goes beyond their indexicality or the information they record. As Andrea Liss writes, they have the “potential to provoke historical memory and to confront the viewer’s subjectivities.”<sup>18</sup> The fantasies they call forth are deep and often inarticulable and uncontrollable, capable of provoking ethical attempts at mourning and repair but also unwanted and illicit identifications.<sup>19</sup>

When we blew up Carl and Lotte Hirsch’s photograph to the point where all contrast was gone, but where it revealed that curious spot on Carl’s lapel, we were searching for the confirmation of our own understanding of the past, one that fundamentally contradicted what the picture made visible. We very much wanted to challenge its seeming air of normality—the way it fit like any other everyday snapshot into a page of a photo album without proclaiming the irregularity of the place and time in which it was taken.

Like the artists who reemploy documentary images in their contemporary works, we felt we had to amend, and tweak, and modify the picture—to open up the range of affects and meanings it contained, as well as those we were projecting onto it. Looking at the picture now, we realize that in it Carl and Lotte are *already* survivors, alive within a fortunate minority that had been spared a terrible fate. They are on the former Herrengasse, but they are not supposed to be there; they have overstayed their welcome in this city of their birth. They are looking, shyly, smilingly, toward a future they could not, cannot foresee. This is the knowledge a retrospective witness brings to a photograph that, as Barthes says, “tells me death in the future.”<sup>20</sup>

In wanting to restore to Carl and Lotte’s photo the hardships it seemed to be eliding, we adopted, we now see, the backshadowing glance that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed “paranoid reading”—anticipatory, eager to unveil hidden violence and to expose unseen danger.<sup>21</sup> Through this reading, we wanted to find and reveal the negative lurking within and outside the frame of the image and, through our vigilance, somehow, to protect Carl and Lotte, walking down the Herrengasse, from the terrible fate that in hindsight we know could have been—and, in the summer of 1942, could still be—theirs.

But archival photographs also challenge their viewers not to impose retrospection to the point where a photo's own temporality and surface, however delicate and contingent, is erased. While this photo qualifies the grand historical narrative we have of the time, it also requires a more generous "reparative reading" than the paranoid scrutiny we initially employed.<sup>22</sup> Such a reading would leave ambiguities unresolved, providing an expanded context for more affective knowing. Was Lotte and Carl's photo taken in 1942 or 1943? Were they wearing a yellow star, or not? If it was 1942, and they walked on the Herrengasse without it, trying to pass, why didn't they fear a photographic record of their transgression? Why did they stop to buy the photo? Did their purchase accentuate an act of resistance? Or, in a technology that produces a print and no negative, were they buying up the evidence? What was the encounter and the negotiation with the photographer like—was he an interested bystander, or a distant one, above the fray? If they were both, in fact, wearing a star (Lotte, perhaps under a turned-up coat collar), were they humiliated by the photo, yet nonetheless defiant enough to buy it as a record of an outrage Jews were forced to endure? Or, perhaps, was the inscription on the photo's back indeed an error? Was it taken in 1943, after the stars were discontinued in Greater Romania? The Herrengasse stroll, in that case, would attest to a moment of greater freedom, increased hope, following Carl and Lotte's fortunate evasion of mass deportations. But if so, then what is the spot on the lapel? Will we ever be able to know?

Muriel Hasbun's *Mes enfants* raises similar puzzling questions and incongruities. First the date: as Hasbun writes, the letter was written "in the first days of January 1943. The date on the letter is 1942, but the postmark (on the dorso) is 1943, which probably meant my grandfather made a mistake since it was the new year. They had already been hiding in Le Mont Dore since August of 1942."<sup>23</sup> How were her grandparents able to correspond if both were in hiding in different places? How was it possible for Jews who were passing or hiding to have their children's pictures taken in a formal photography studio such as Photographie Sanitas? Would they not have been afraid of detection and exposure through these two revealing media? As though to underscore the dangers that the rather benign if blurry and haunting image seems almost

to be eliding, Hasbun includes another image on the back of the pedestal on which this picture is mounted. “‘Mes enfants’ has ‘El lobo feroz’ on its dorso, which I’ve rephotographed from a book that came out after the war, telling the story of WWII to children, called ‘La Guerre chez les animaux,’ and the big bad wolf is Hitler (the wolf has a swastika on the armband).”<sup>24</sup>

By considering, rather than dismissing, these multiple and contradictory readings of Jewish existence during 1942 and 1943, by leaving ambiguities unresolved, postmemorial viewers, artists and scholars, like Hasbun, and like us, broaden the boundaries of our understanding and tap into a deeper register of intergenerational transmission. We gain access to what the images and stories about this past do not readily reveal—the emotional fabric of daily life in extreme circumstances, its aftereffects in the process of survival. If our own search into Carl and Lotte’s wartime photo was indeed successful in revealing the traumatic wound that seemed so strangely absent from the tiny image in the album, our scrutiny of the picture also reveals the indeterminacy of that wound and the unlocatability of its source. Yet it also reveals that as much as survival might be a struggle against the return of trauma, structured by forgetting or denial, the mark is there, present, even if it remains submerged, disguised, invisible to the naked eye. Extracting whatever information we can from fragmentary documents, unreadable sources, and blurry, indeterminate, spots in a tiny pale image, we also realize that allowing the image to fade back to its initial size, we might be able to make space for the possibility of “life” rather than “death in the future.”



