POSTMEMORY

PHOTOGRAPY

- Holocaust photos are the remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory
  - Indexical but also iconic
- Enable us to see/touch the past & reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic "take"
- Key role as a medium of postmemory is to clarify the connection between familial & affiliative postmemory & enable public archives/museums to reembody & reindividualize cultural/archival memory
- Truth/obscurity; Exactitude/simulacrum
- Family photos tend to diminish distance, bridge separation, facilitate identification and affiliation.
- Look for information/confirmation; for an intimate material & affective connection (shocked, pricked - *punctum*, torn apart)
- Small and framed, photos minimize the disaster they depict & screen the viewers from it.
- Also give a glimpse of its enormity and its power
- Photos give rise to certain bodily acts of looking & certain conventions of seeing & understanding but shape & reembody, render material the past that we are seeking to understand and receive
- Sight is deeply connected to "affective memory"
- Images have the capacity to address the spectator's own bodily memory; to touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event.

DEFINITION

- The relationship of the 2nd generation to powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births but that were transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to form memories in their own right.

Living connection

- personal/familial/generational sense of ownership
  - Descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators)
    - Hinge generation = guardians of the postmemory
    - Events happened in the past, but effects continue into the present.

Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

- Holocaust
  - Photography crucial element of postmemory

FAMILY

- Postmemory is not an identiy position but a generational structure of transmission deeply embedded in such forms of mediation.
- 2nd generation inherit horrific, unknown past parents were not meant to survive. Shaped by desire to repair.
  - Victimhood
  - Language of the family: nightmares, sighs, illnesses, tears; language of the body; nonverbal & noncognitive acts of transfer occur within a familial space
- Adoption of public, anonymous images into family photo album has its counterpart in use of private familial images in museums
  - Every visitor is rendered a familial subject. This is made possible by the power of the idea of family, by the pervasiveness of the familial gaze & mutual recognition that define family images & narratives

MEMORY

- Memory is indexical
  - Postmemory similar to real fairy tale - flashes of imagery and broken refrains transmitted through the language of the body

Living connection

- Memories are linked between individual
  - No longer exclusive - exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed and written down
- Can be impaired by traumatic experience
  - Cultural archives destroyed under Nazis
- Cultural Memory
  - Cultural/archival memory
    - trans-generational - embodied through symbolic systems
  - National/political memory
    - trans-generational - embodied through symbolic systems
  - As witnesses enter old age they wish to institutionalize memory = books/archives/ritual/commemoration/performance
- Loses direct link to its past
  - Best mediated by photographic images. "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent" (Barthes: Camera Lucida: 80)
- Structure clarifies how multiple ruptures & radical breaks introduced by trauma & catastrophe inflect intra-, inter- and trans-generational inheritance
- Postmemorial work strives to reactive & reembody these structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual & familial forms of mediation & aesthetic expression

Collective remembrance

- Compromised by erasure of records
- Survivors express emanations in chaos of emotion
- Can be impaired by traumatic experience
- Group memory is based on familial transfer of embodied experience to next generation = intergenerational
  - Family/Group memory
- Individual Memory
- biographical & factual
- Witnessed by adults, passed on bodlly and affective connection of event to their descendants
- Memory is transmitted across 3-4 generations (80 - 100 years)
- Family is crucial unit of transmission