(Re-)Collections: Reading the Family Memoir as Archive

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(Re-)Collections:
Reading the Family Memoir as Archive

MA Thesis by Hanna Ware Olters

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Abstract

In recent decades, our understanding of archives has evolved beyond the familiar, institutional archive carefully tended to by a small group of trained professionals. Movements such as postcolonialism and postcustodialism, combined with the digital turn, have allowed interest in other, less conventional forms of archiving to emerge. As such, the concept of an *archival continuum* (that is, the understanding of archives as evolving and participatory systems rather than fixed institutions) has been accepted by archival scholarship. This thesis investigates whether printed family memoirs that incorporate visual material from family archives can be placed along said archival continuum.

Four such memoirs – *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (2010), *In Memory of Memory* (2018)*, Heimat: A German Family Album* (2018)*,* and *Letters to Camondo* (2021) – have been selected as case studies by which to examine their potential archival and evidentiary value. Each memoir is a work of postmemory – following Marianne Hirsch, the authors are processing generational trauma passed down as a result of the Holocaust. I argue that it is not only the narratives that lend them archival value, but also their inclusion of archival material. As I will show, understanding published memoirs as archives supports an expanded recognition of non-professional memory work as archival. Importantly, the increased accessibility of published memoirs to a general audience versus that of conventional archives allows for greater interaction with the preserved objects, and so aids in supporting the societal memorialization of the Holocaust. By focusing on the paper editions of the books, I am able to examine the unique benefits and challenges of the printed book as a form of accessible archive and memory object.

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Introduction

> Then the museum advisor, a historian, asked me what I was writing about and I began
> to explain. "Ah," he said. "One of those books where the author travels around the
> world in search of his or her roots – there are plenty of those now." "Yes," I answered.
> "And now there will be one more."[1]

Such is Maria Stepanova's understated description of the project that culminated in her book
In Memory of Memory (2018) – a deeply moving, complex work on family, loss, and memory.
Stepanova's book belongs to a genre of memoir correctly identified by the museum advisor as
one concerned with the family history of the author – a journey into their own inherited,
fragmented past. This book is a just one example among an increasing number of books
published in recent decades by the descendants of Holocaust victims or, alternatively, Nazi
perpetrators.[2]

These books will occasionally include not only narratives but visual material as well –
scans of photographs, documents, letters, and diary entries left behind by the departed and
rediscovered by their descendants. This material is collected, researched, and curated. It is
finally gathered together into a physical entity – a printed book[3]. This process and its result
could perhaps be described as *archival*. This consideration leads to the question I shall be
examining over the course of this paper: can printed memoirs that incorporate material from
family archives be considered a form of archive? If they can indeed be considered as such,
then published family memoirs would have the potential to represent a new source of
historical material for scholars outside the literary realm. Beyond their artistic value, they
would serve as examples of curatorial practice.

Four influential books with similar objectives, all commercially published explorations
of family history, will serve as the case studies for the paper's analysis – the aforementioned
In Memory of Memory as well as *Heimat: A Germany Family Album* (2018) by Nora Krug,
The Hare with Amber Eyes (2010) by Edmund de Waal, and *Letters to Camondo* (2021) by
the same author. In terms of form and graphics, the books vary greatly from one another and
could be seen to represent differing points along a formal spectrum of text and image
relations: *Heimat* is a graphic memoir that combines full-color illustrations, handwritten text,

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[1] M. Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory: A Romance* (New York: 2021 [2018]), p. 325.
[2] A trend started by the publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991). This will be discussed in more detail in
Chapter 1.
[3] This paper focuses specifically on the print editions of the selected case studies. An examination of the digital
and audio versions of the works is beyond the scope of this paper, but perhaps a topic for future research.

and scans of photographs and documents. *In Memory of Memory* does not show a single photograph (until the last page), but instead describes the images seen by the author, or transcribes letters and diary entries belonging to Stepanova's ancestors. *The Hare with Amber Eyes* and *Letters to Camondo* intersperse both text and image, and so fall more centrally on the spectrum. These works were selected not only because of their differences, but also their significant similarities: all have appeared on the commercial market within the last 15 years, and as such allow me to interrogate variations within manifestations of the family memoir genre.

The concept of a spectrum is not only applicable to the physical presentation of the books. In relation to her work on postcolonial archives, Jeanette A. Bastian has written on the 'archival continuum that archivists work within already.'[4] However, continuum models and other expansive forms of archive have been discussed within scholarship for decades.[5] As such, Bastian argues that 'control and access to records in any format are the keys to community memory.'[6] It is exactly these concepts of control, accessibility, and memory that shall be explored by this thesis and, in so doing, I will attempt to determine whether the published memoirs can be placed upon such an archival continuum. If they can indeed be classed as such, this would have implications both for the potential custodians and users of archives – it would represent a further step in the democratization and expanding accessibility of archives and archiving.

The first chapter will focus on the memorial aspect of the works, that is the *content* of what would be stored in an archive. While the differences in their physical manifestations are of great interest (and shall be discussed over the course of the paper), their similarities in content must also be addressed. The case studies are not only interesting because they are concerned with family history, but specifically because all of the authors are members of the 'third generation'[7] – the grandchildren of either Holocaust survivors and victims or, in the case of *Heimat*, perpetrators.[8] 'The third generation […] must reconstruct events from […] incomplete, oblique, cryptically coded, and elusive knowledge.'[9] As such, it is not only the result of these reconstructions that are deserving of attention, but the description of the

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[4] J.A. Bastian, 'The records of memory, the archives of identity: celebrations, texts and archival sensibilities' *Archival Science* (13, 2013), p. 130.
[5] J. A. Bastian, 'Taking Custody, Giving Access: A Postcustodial Role for a New Century,' *Archivaria* (53, 2002), p. 89.
[6] Bastian, 'Taking Custody, Giving Access,' p. 91.
[7] V. Aarons and A. L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History and Memory* (Evanston: 2017), p. 4.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Aarons and Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*, p. 5.

reconstructive processes themselves. Marianne Hirsch's concept of *postmemory* – descendants' confrontations with inherited traumatic memories[10] – will serve as the theoretical foundation for this discussion. Although not a literary paper, the content of the books cannot be ignored – in the attempt to determine whether the books can be considered archival, it must also be established whether the content has evidentiary value and could constitute a form of record.

Chapter 2 will then examine the question of the archival nature of the books more explicitly, that is their *way* of storing and presenting information. Both conventional and unconventional – expanded – understandings of archives will be considered.[11] In order to determine whether books of this genre can be considered a form of archive, the nature of what qualifies as archival evidence must be established, along with its application to the material contained within the chosen case studies. The interplay between the books, postmemory, and archives will also be examined over the course of the chapter.

The final chapter reflects on the historical and evidentiary (added) *value* of the supporting visual materials. The holdings of archives are often considered to be unique objects, but the published books and the materials they contain are polyform – as such, the evidentiary value of the scans of original photographs and documents must be discussed in detail. Using Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* as well as works by Susan Sontag and Peter Burke, the historical value of the materials and the question of whether these materials constitute *records* in the archival sense will be debated.

In doing so, I seek to establish that family memoirs can be considered a form of archive – that they do not simply aid in remembering and memorializing the past, but that they serve, in capturing the postmemorial journeys of the present, also as records of the third-generation's processing of their inherited, historical traumas.

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[10] M. Hirsch, 'Postmemory', <https://postmemory.net/> (3.8.23).
[11] I shall be using the terms *conventional* and *traditional* interchangeably.

Chapter 1:
Family Memoirs and Postmemory

A memory can only last for so long – lives come to an end, letters and diaries are lost, destroyed, or thrown away, and stories warp with time. Nevertheless, some stories and documents persist, in one form or another, and are passed down through generations – it is these surviving fragments that inspire certain descendants to venture back and attempt to reconstruct the past. Occasionally, these attempts result in a book.

The case studies chosen for this paper – *The Hare with Amber Eyes, Letters to Camondo, Heimat,* and *In Memory of Memory* – are formally vastly different. Yet, they are bound together by their content: these books are all examples of authors gathering and confronting their families' histories, all of which have been marked in some way by the Holocaust and the Second World War. Importantly, all visually incorporate family archives (to varying degrees). However, it is not only the visual material that makes these books so compelling. The confrontation with, and reconstruction of the past are themselves processes worthy of examination and documentation.

The following chapter shall argue that each case study is a work of *postmemory*, as defined by Marianne Hirsch. She describes postmemory as 'the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and culture trauma of those who came before.'[12] As such, the books published by those who came *after* could be considered not only records of the past, but the present processing of inherited traumas. Hirsch first employed the expression *postmemory* during a discussion on the iconic graphic memoir *Maus* by Art Spiegelman in the 1990s.[13] She continued to build upon this concept over the next three decades, culminating in the 2012 publication of her book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. I use her concept as the lens through which each case study is analyzed over the course of this chapter. Before embarking on the analyses, the terms *family memoir* and *postmemory* will be defined and examined, along with their application to the case studies.

This paper asks whether such memoirs can be placed along the archival spectrum. To do so, the content of the books must be considered as well as their visual material. In considering the works through a postmemorial lens, this chapter aims to interrogate whether

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[12] Columbia University Press, 'An Interview with Marianne Hirsch', <https://cup.columbia.edu/author-interviews/hirsch-generation-postmemory> (24.6.23).
[13] Hirsch, 'Postmemory', <https://postmemory.net/> (15.11.22).

the body of such texts can be considered a record of a unique moment in history – the third-generation processing of the Holocaust. As such, the records of this processing would constitute a part of the books' archival holdings.

1.1. Creation and Curation of Memory in Family Memoirs

Memoir as a genre is rather difficult to define – it toes the line between fiction and non-fiction.[14] Memoirs can generally be defined as works that present a (perhaps somewhat embellished) account of a real person's life (usually the author's). G. Thomas Couser explains the concept as follows: '[…] memoir presents itself, and is therefore read, as a nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans' experience. Fiction does not; it creates its own lifelike reality.'[15]

A *family memoir* is then a memoir that is concerned not with one individual, but with their family as well. As Popkin writes, '[i]n the increasingly popular genre of "family memoir," authors take readers with them as they pursue the details of the lives of their parents and other relatives.'[16] Popkin's definition applies to all of the selected case studies – they are works that describe the lives of family members as well as their creators.

Of the books that I have selected as case studies, Nora Krug's *Heimat: A German Family Album* is the most straightforward example of a family memoir. *Heimat* tells the story of Krug's attempt to unravel decades of silence surrounding her family's claimed innocence of being Nazi perpetrators during World War II. Over the course of the graphic memoir, Krug incorporates photographs, documents, and illustrations in her conversations with her parents and (estranged) relatives, as she searches for answers about her family's culpability in the war. The generational aspect of the work is highlighted from the very beginning – both through the title and its formal structure. The graphic memoir is presented as a type of album, with photos and other material appearing to be taped to the pages or haphazardly slipped between the pages, suggesting a play on the (family) photo album. Even the description of the book on Krug's website makes sure to emphasize this: '*Belonging*[17] wrestles with the idea of Heimat, the German word for the place that first forms us, where the sensibilities and identity of one generation pass on to the next.'[18]

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[14] G.T. Couser, *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: 2012), p. 15.
[15] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 15-16.
[16] J.D. Popkin, 'Family Memoir and Self-Discovery,' *Life Writing* (12:2, 2015), p. 127.
[17] *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home is* an alternate title for *Heimat: A German Family Album.* For this paper, I have used a copy with the latter title.
[18] N. Krug, 'Belonging/Heimat: A German Reckons with History and Home', <https://nora-krug.com/belonging-heimat> (17.11.22).

Edmund de Waal's *The Hare with Amber Eyes* also falls quite neatly into the category of *family memoir*. After the death of his great-uncle Ignace Ephrussi, de Waal inherits a collection of 264 netsuke (small Japanese figurines made of wood or ivory).[19] Now the keeper of the collection, de Waal delves into the history of the netsuke, starting with its collector, Charles Ephrussi, a wealthy Jewish banker in 19th century Paris. De Waal does not want to simply own the figurines, he wants to understand the family history behind them, especially considering the miracle of their survival of the turbulent and violent times of the Second World War. 'I need to find a way of unravelling its story. Owning this netsuke – inheriting them all – means I have been handed a responsibility to them and to the people who have owned them. I am unclear and discomfited about where the parameters of this responsibility lie.'[20] *The Hare with Amber Eyes* is then a book about family, loss, and discovery. Following the definitions of *family memoir* discussed by Couser and Popkin, de Waal's book can indeed be classed as such. He chronicles not only his own experiences with the netsuke, but those of his family across generations.

In Memory of Memory begins to test the limits of Couser's *family memoir* moniker. Maria Stepanova jumps between memoir, essay, and what appears to be transcribed texts of letters from her family archive (she includes only a single scan of a photograph on the last page). As such, *In Memory of Memory* is a much more abstract, conceptual text than *Heimat* or *The Hare with Amber Eyes* – Stepanova actively engages with other authors and thinkers (including Hirsch), examining concepts like postmemory in an essayistic fashion. That is to say, she discusses them outside of her own, familial context and ventures into the abstract (as exemplified by her explicit discussion of postmemory) more than Krug or de Waal.[21] However, I believe that it still falls under the category of family memoir, as it is, at its core, an intimate engagement with her family history. As such, the basic requirement of the genre is fulfilled. The book opens with the death of her Aunt Galya, and Stepanova becomes fascinated by the diaries she left behind.

> Among the possessions she kept till her dying day, the possessions she often
> asked for, sometimes just to touch with her hand, were countless used notebooks
> and diaries […] These diaries were stored in a wooden box by her headboard
> and there were a lot of them, two full bag loads, which I carried home to Banny

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[19] E. De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Hidden Inheritance* (London:2010), p. 10.
[20] De Waal, *Hare with Amber Eyes,* p. 13.
[21] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, pp. 76.

Pereulok. There I sat down at once to read them, in search of stories, explanations: the oval shape of her life.[22]

The final book that I have chosen for this paper is *Letters to Camondo,* also by Edmund de Waal. Of the four, this is the most formally experimental. It consists entirely of letters written to the deceased Moïse de Camondo and is interspersed with photographs of the Musée Nissim de Camondo and scans of photographs and documents. Through the letters, de Waal is engaged in (a one-sided) conversation with the late Count, rather than presenting a more conventional review of the subject matter. However, considering that the text chronicles the story of the Camondo family (neighbors and friends to the Ephrussi) as well as de Waal's own feelings about the objects and stories he uncovers, I believe that *Letters to Camondo* also qualifies as a family memoir. Three generations of Camondos are followed throughout the book – family history is key to the book's narrative.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, each book incorporates graphics differently, and these differences can be considered as existing along a spectrum. *Heimat* sits on one end of this spectrum and *In Memory of Memory* on the other. The two de Waal books could then be placed in the middle of said spectrum, with images placed throughout the texts with accompanying descriptions. However, there are even differences between these two – many of the images in *Letters to Camondo* are highly stylized and not historical (rather, they are photographs of the Camondo museum). *The Hare with Amber Eyes* is perhaps the most formally traditional book, interspersed as it is with text and accompanying images. This formal variety is part of what makes the selected case studies so interesting – although they are all family memoirs, the information is presented differently in each example.

1.2.Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch defines the term as follows: '"Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.'[23] As such, the defining characteristic of postmemory is that the individual processing the past did not live through the events themselves.

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[22] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory,* p. 6-7.
[23] Ibid.

Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors.[24]

That this concept was introduced in connection with Spiegelman's *Maus* is not surprising. The work has long been considered groundbreaking and continues to inspire scholarship and controversy even three decades after its publication. The two-part memoir, written and illustrated over the course of more than a decade, 'represents an effort to recuperate his family roots from a variety of perspectives.'[25] Spiegelman chronicles conversations with his father, Vladek, about his experiences in Auschwitz. *Maus* also depicts how those traumatic experiences and the subsequent suicide of Spiegelman's mother have affected not only the relationship between father and son, but Spiegelman as an individual. It is this aspect of the work that inspired Hirsch's conception of postmemory.

'These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.'[26] As such, trauma can be passed down through generations like heirlooms. The aftermath of such events continues to influence the lives of those who never lived through the tragedies themselves. The descendants of the victims (in this case the *third generation*) are then left with the daunting task of tackling a past they never experienced – an essentially impossible task. Hirsch describes such endeavors as 'an open-ended narrative that embraces the need for return and repair, even as it accepts its implausibility.'[27]

A significant part of this implausibility is due to the fact that the memories being processed by the third generation are full of gaps that must be filled, and this cannot be done without taking some creative liberties. It is simply not possible to fully *know* what was seen, thought, or felt by a person without being able to speak to them directly, regardless of how faithfully one attempts to retrace their steps.

As Stephen Frosh writes in his article 'Postmemory and Possession,'

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[24] Hirsch, 'Postmemory', <https://postmemory.net/> (16.11.22).
[25] A. Merino, 'Memory in Comics: Testimony, Autobiographical and Historical Space in MAUS,' *Transatlantica* (1, 2010), p. 2.
[26] M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: 2012), p. 5.
[27] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 225.

> [r]ecalling something is not, or at least not just, a matter of reproducing it in the mind in the state one found it, but rather of re-constituting it from fragments of perception, hints and mental suggestions; it is at least half-created, which is why memory is fallible and malleable but also often pleasurable.[28]

Frosh goes on to argue that this is one of the potential pitfalls of engaging in postmemorial work – that the third generation could conflate their own experiences with those of their ancestors to such an extent that the two become indistinguishable from each other.[29]

This is also a danger of which Hirsch is aware, and which she acknowledges in her book *The Generation of Postmemory*. Over the course of the chapter 'What's wrong with this picture?,' Hirsch discusses the use of photographic material in postmemorial works. She states that, as a viewer regards photographs, the 'images function as supplements, both confirming and unsettling stories that are explored and transmitted.'[30] An image alone does not represent an objective truth, as there will always be an element of projection on the side of the viewer. As members of the third generation attempt to work through the generational trauma they have inherited, they must also confront the fact that there will always be parts of their family history that will remain unknowable to them. Confronting the reality that some gaps in the story cannot be filled can be painful. As such, imagination will inevitably attempt to right what photographs cannot. 'The fantasies they call forth are deep and often inarticulate and uncontrollable, capable of provoking ethical attempts at mourning and repaid but also unwanted and illicit identifications.'[31] As such, readers and users must keep these projection processes in mind when interacting with the books – they do not contain a whole, objective truth.

However, the creative aspect of the work is not necessarily purely negative. As Frosh writes:

> Postmemorial work is creative work, ameliorating the trauma by owning it so that there is an actively worked "relationship" between the children and the previous generation, not one in which this relationship is solely that of subservience, of being trapped by what has already happened. This is a very compelling argument and is

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[28] S. Frosh, 'Postmemory and Possession,' *International Journal of Semiot Law,* (33, 2020), p. 517.
[29] Frosh, 'Postmemory and Possession,' p. 518.
[30] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 73.
[31] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 73-74.

filled out by Hirsch through examining photography as an artistic form that can take received images, however traumatic they might be, and do something with them to shake up the frozen repetitions that constitute the postmemory experience.[32]

Even if some of the story is be invented, it is still healing to create a narrative to supplement the history of which one was robbed. It is, of course, not a perfect solution, as 'in the specific case of catastrophic memory – such as the memory of slavery or the Holocaust – that distance cannot ultimately be bridged; the break between then and now, between the one who lived it and the one who did not remain monumental and insurmountable.'[33]

As such, we must accept that some projection will happen. The act of engaging in postmemorial work is, however, solely defined by these projections, and they must be both acknowledged and confronted. 'Such are the gaps around which our archives are constructed, and the challenge is not to fill the space with projections that would allow these gaps to be screened or disguised.'[34] When dealing with memory and remembering, we cannot forget that these are inherently flawed and imperfect processes. This does not make these processes any less important, it is simply an aspect of this work that should not be forgotten when analyzing postmemorial works.

That the accuracy of past records cannot always be authenticated fully has also led to some criticism of postmemory. In his article 'Postmemory as Trauma? Some Theoretical Problems and Their Consequences for Contemporary Literary Criticism,' Samuel O'Donoghue writes:

> Trauma theory urged a disregard for the criteria of reliability and accuracy, treating testimony not as a typical historical source but as an alternative, tortured system of knowledge about the past. Hirsch's work contains a theoretical ambiguity that allows the artistic recreation of the past to be invested with a comparable psychological justification.[35]

Hirsch claims that the depth of the trauma inflicted is such that the ensuing pain extends over generations, giving the inheritors of said pain influence over its remembering, as they are in

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[32] Frosh, 'Postmemory and Possession,' p. 518.
[33] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 86.
[34] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 248.
[35] S. O'Donoghue, 'Postmemory as Trauma? Some Theoretical Problems and Their Consequences for Contemporary Literary Criticism,' (October 7, 2018), n. pag., <https://www.politika.io/en/notice/postmemory-as-trauma-some-theoretical-problems-and-their-consequences-for-contemporary> (17.11.22).

some ways continuing to experience the trauma. O'Donoghue questions this stance, emphasizing the lack of lived experience. 'Postmemory expands the authority of the witness to encompass those with no direct experience of the historical atrocities they narrate.'[36] He does not recognize the creative works deemed postmemorial as the results of trauma, but rather activism.[37] He takes issue with 'overly literal'[38] readings of postmemorial texts and cautions against understanding them as such. While his article largely focuses on the genre of historical fiction rather than memoir (making a criticism of superficial readings understandable), he does not shy away from criticizing postmemory in general. He believes that Hirsch was 'motivated predominantly by ethical concerns'[39] rather than postmemorial ones. As such, O'Donoghue believes that postmemorial works are the result of artistic and activist efforts rather than a processing of generational trauma.

However, I do not believe that the positions of Hirsch and O'Donoghue are mutually exclusive. Works of postmemory contribute to the act of remembering some of the worst tragedies that have ever been recorded over the course of human history. That they aid in keeping these events in the public consciousness could be considered activist, especially in the case of the Holocaust, considering that antisemitism has by no means disappeared in the decades since World War II. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag emphasizes the role that photography plays in bringing tragedies closer to those who did not experience them personally. 'Something becomes real – to those who are elsewhere, following it as "news" – by being photographed.'[40] In my view, this can be applied to postmemorial books (including family memoirs) as well. They are material objects, carriers of information, that document suffering both past and present. They are narratives that incorporate visual images. They bring immense tragedies down to an individual, human scale. In doing so, they make these stories and their consequences more accessible for readers.[41] As such, I maintain that the books are the result of postmemorial trauma processing, as well as tools for postmemorial activism, as put forth by O'Donoghue.[42]

In terms of whether these works are responses to trauma, I believe that O'Donoghue fails to recognize that suffering does not occur in a vacuum. Simply because the event itself has ended, does not mean there will not be consequences for future generations. As Hirsch

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid. (18.6.23).
[39] Ibid.
[40] S. Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: 2004 [2003]), p. 19.
[41] The topic of accessibility shall be explored in depth over the course of the paper.
[42] O'Donoghue, 'Postmemory as Trauma?', n. pag., <https://www.politika.io/en/notice/postmemory-as-trauma-some-theoretical-problems-and-their-consequences-for-contemporary> (7.8.23).

states: 'Along with stories, behaviors, and symptoms, parents do transmit to their children aspects of their relationship to places and objects from the past.'[43] As such, patterns are repeated and stories are retold – elements of trauma are woven into the fabric of the everyday.

The following section of this chapter will be concerned with the chosen family memoirs for this paper and how they can be understood through Hirsch's postmemorial lens. As mentioned in the introduction, each book was written by a family member coming to terms with their family's history, attempting to reconstruct lost and hidden memories. This paper aims to determine whether these books, if regarded as postmemorial memoirs, can be placed on the archival spectrum. Considering that the contents of the books record both stories of the past and the processing thereof, it is important to discuss each individual case study and evaluate their status as postmemorial works.

1.2.1. In Memory of Memory

The act of physically revisiting places where one's ancestors once lived is described in each case study. In *The Generation of Postmemory,* Hirsch refers to these trips as 'embodied journeys of return.'[44] These journeys of return have the same goal as journeys through archive and memory – to connect with the past and process the trauma of a family's loss.[45]

While *In Memory of Memory* is, perhaps, the least orthodox family memoir, it is an important work of postmemory. In fact, it was Stepanova's book that introduced me to Hirsch's concept and so helped shape this paper's focus. As such, it is only fitting that this work is discussed first, as it is explicitly a work of postmemory and actively engages with Hirsch. 'I was reading Marianne Hirsch's classic work, *The Generation of Postmemory*, as if it were a travel guide to my own head […] Any story about myself became a story about my ancestors.'[46] As she jumps between essay, memoir, and transcriptions of letters and diary entries, Stepanova confronts the unknowns of her family history throughout the text. As such, of the three authors in question, only she implies that her own book is a postmemorial one through her discussion of the concept. She is an active participant in what she terms the 'heat transfer between past and present.'[47]

One of the aspects that makes Stepanova's work so intriguing is that, unlike works such as *Maus* or *Heimat*, Stepanova is the descendant of neither victims nor perpetrators of the Holocaust.

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[43] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 213.
[44] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 212.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, pp. 76-77.
[47] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 79.

But although much was known or half-known or under a veil of darkness, I thought I knew a few firm facts about my family:

> No one died in the Stalinist purges
>
> No one perished in the Holocaust
>
> No one was murdered
>
> No one was a murderer

Now this seemed doubtful, or even simply untrue.[48]

As Stepanova delves deeper into her family's history, it becomes increasingly clear that there are some questions that are impossible to answer, as there is no one left to ask. For example, when attempting to determine whether any of her relatives were victims of a 1905 pogrom in Odessa, she must accept that she 'will never know.'[49] However, accepting that there are some questions that cannot be answered is an integral part of the postmemorial journey, as it is a lifelong one, not limited to the confines of a single book. 'It is an open-ended narrative that embraces the need for return and repair, even as it accepts its implausibility.'[50] This acceptance is also described by Stepanova. 'I have had no success, only the usual feeling of walking into yet another empty green field and realizing once again that the absence of an answer *was* the answer, and if that upset me, I just had to get over it.'[51]

Another notable characteristic of postmemory is the imaginative and creative aspect of the works. This is also present in *In Memory of Memory*, and it is also addressed as a part of the postmemorial process. 'At the same time the landscape of memory is strewn with projections, fantasies, and misrepresentations – the ghosts of today, with their faces turned to the past.'[52] It should once again be emphasized that the writing of postmemorial books is an act of trauma processing. 'I always knew I would someday write a book about my family and there were even periods when this seemed to be my life's purpose (summarizing lives, collecting them into one narrative) because it was simply the case that I was the first and only person in the family who had a reason to speak facing outward, peering out from intimate family conversations as if from under a fur cap, and addressing the railway station concourse of collective experience.'[53] As such, the imaginative aspect is not a negative one. A

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[48] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 323.
[49] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 376.
[50] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 225.
[51] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 315.
[52] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 80.
[53] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 21.

postmemorial book is not a scholarly historical study, but an emotionally and generationally charged work of personal experiences, both lived and inherited.

As such, *In Memory of Memory* is a complex work, as much a musing on the very nature of memory as on Stepanova's personal familial memory, making it an important and unique contribution to the field of third-generation postmemorial works.

1.2.2. Heimat

As stated above, Hirsch first coined the term *postmemory* in a discussion of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a groundbreaking work in the memorialization of the Holocaust. 'Beginning with the publication of *Maus I* by Art Spiegelman in 1986, Holocaust graphic novels have formed a genre of their own within the medium of graphic novels, and the corpus of texts has continued to grow, with new works being published each year.'[54] As another graphic memoir grappling with generational trauma centered around the Holocaust and World War II, Nora Krug's *Heimat* is a part of *Maus'* legacy.

Maus is essentially a conversation between Spiegelman and his father Vladek, an Auschwitz survivor. While Spiegelman himself was born after the Holocaust, *Maus* depicts how deeply his life and identity have been shaped by his parents' trauma – the past is not past, but an active component of the present.

Heimat is very similar in that respect. 'I feel a sudden pain, shallow but sharp and all-consuming as a paper cut, because even inherited memory hurts.'[55] Following years of living in the United States, Krug examines her German heritage unflinchingly, delving into her own history to uncover the true story behind decades of family legends regarding their involvement in the Holocaust. Over the course of the memoir, Krug confronts and unpacks more just her maternal grandfather's disputed NSDAP membership and war efforts. She also searches for the truth regarding the death of her father's brother during the war and examines the ensuing, splintered dynamics on both sides of her family.

Obviously, one of the most striking differences between the two works (besides their graphic differences, with *Maus* being a more formally conventional comic and *Heimat* more of a work of mixed media) is that Spiegelman is a descendent of victims and Krug of (potential) perpetrators. Nonetheless, the events of World War II left both families with perpetually open wounds that require tending to the present day. As Krug writes: 'Over time, fragmentary stories, photographs, and documents rose back to the surface like bloated

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[54] M. Reingold, '*Heimat* Across Space and Time in Nora Krug's *Belonging*,' *Monatshefte* (11:4, 2019), p. 552.
[55] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 220.

corpses. Memories turned into legends, and sometimes, legends turned into memories.'[56] These stories and memories that cannot be suppressed by the passage of time are exemplary of Hirsch's theory of postmemory. As she states in her book *The Generation of Postmemory*, 'These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present.'[57] That *Heimat* is an example of a postmemorial work is a view also shared by Marija Grujić and Ina Schaum, based on their exploration of the loss and generational pain that underpin its creation.[58] 'We take her novel as an aesthetic representation of postmemory – or, rather of *postmemories* – but, this time, one that considers the reverberations of the perpetrators' and bystanders' worlds.'[59]

As such, the writing of a book such as *Heimat* is a conscious attempt to confront those events. Krug is explicit about her need to understand her family's past throughout the text, and the relief said confrontation has brought her.

> I'm glad that I asked all the questions I needed to ask – that I went back and collected the bread crumbs [sic], that I kept looking until I was sure that none were left, that I know now what I didn't know before: that HEIMAT can only be found again in memory, that it is something that only begins to exist once you've lost it.[60]

Additionally, in the creation of *Heimat*, Krug did not only look to reconcile herself with the past, but do so for future generations: 'I want my daughter to grow up with the same sense of responsibility, but without the paralyzing guilt.'[61]

Many postmemorial works are focused on the family.

> For Hirsch, postmemory does not involve conscious recall or direct access to one's own memories of a traumatic past. For the past is another's, usually a parent's, which is why family is a privileged locus of transmission and the generational link of greatest interest to her is between a first generation that actually lived through traumatic events

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[56] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 172.
[57] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 5.
[58] M. Grujić and I. Schaum, 'German Postmemory and Ambivalent Home Desires: A Critical Reading of Nora Krug's (2018) Graphic Novel *Heimat: A German Family Album*,' *EthnoScripts* (21:1, 2019), p. 204.
[59] Grujić and Schaum, 'German Postmemory and Ambivalent Home Desires,' p. 205.
[60] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 272.
[61] F. Mouly, 'The Bracing Honesty of "Belonging," a Graphic Memoir About German Identity,' *The New Yorker*, 31 July, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-bracing-honesty-of-belonging-a-graphic-memoir-about-german-identity> (12.7.23).

and a second generation that has to live with "such overwhelming inherited memories."[62]

Krug's work is emblematic of this. She feels compelled to do the work of combing through archives and interviewing family members because the traumatic past is still very much a part of her present, as it was for her parents and their siblings. The importance of confronting the family's past is emphasized in an exchange Krug has with her mother's sister, in which they discuss the tension that was a direct consequence of unspoken trauma.

> "Unfortunately I don't know any more than what I told you," Karin says. "One of the things I've always struggled with is the fact that I was never able to get emotionally close to him, which is why I often got into fights with him. We often had conflicts. Every night at dinnertime, I would push my knees against his and fight him for space. Now I think his remoteness had to do with the fact that he probably experienced horrible things, and that he tried to deal with them by covering them up inside. If he were still alive today, I would ask more questions, because I want to understand why he was so withdrawn. But it's too late now!"[63]

That it is 'too late' to ask any questions is part of the tragedy of the situation, not only for Krug and her family but for all who are burdened with generational trauma.

As those who lived through the traumatic events are no longer able to offer answers themselves, descendants must attempt to find answers. However, this means that there will inevitably be questions that cannot be answered, gaps that cannot be filled. The temporally distanced writer will then potentially be pushed to invent the answers they need. This is an issue addressed by Stephen Frosh, as discussed in a previous section. 'The past is very much present, we are connected in a "hyper" way with it; but it is also elusive and untrustworthy, continually reinvented in the light of the present, yet also somehow formative and unendingly creative in its effects.'[64] This challenge with postmemorial works has also been discussed by Maria Roca Lizarazu in her book *Renegotiating Postmemory: The Holocaust in Contemporary German-Language Literature*. 'What subsequent generations cannot possibly

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[62] M.G. Levine, 'Speaking in Starts: Postmemory and the Archive,' *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies* (4:1-2, 2015), p. 126.
[63] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 104.
[64] Frosh, 'Postmemory and Possession,' p. 516.

remember, they must imagine or invent, which puts fiction in the broadest sense at the center of Hirsch's work.'[65]

That projection and (potentially) false memories will become a part of such a work is then unavoidable, as was also discussed in a previous section. However, I argued there that the imaginative aspect of postmemorial works is not necessarily negative, as long as it is recognized. While Krug tries to find out where her maternal grandfather, Willi, was during *Kristallnacht*, she comes across a wine bar located in the same building as his office. Krug begins to search for 'artifacts from Weinhaus Just online.'[66] She finds a postcard featuring an image of its interior.[67] As Krug looks at the postcard, she imagines Willi in the bar, what he must have seen and heard, but also contemplates the unbridgeable gap between them. 'And all I need to do is sit down on the chair across from him in the midst of the music and the happy tipsiness and look at him and put my hand on his and ask him the questions I've always been burning to ask.'[68] This is, of course, impossible, and an example of postmemorial projection at work.

This leads to the issue of knowledge-gaps of the past that cannot be filled. Like Stepanova, the fact that some aspects of the past will ultimately remain unknowable is acknowledged by Krug. For example, she must admit that there is a limit to what she can discover about her father's brother (who was killed in the war at age 18, years before her father was born[69]), whose death overshadowed his entire childhood and affected his relationships with his mother and sister (and as a result, Krug's relationship with them as well). Krug reconnects with her paternal aunt and recognizes the end of her journey with her uncle, Karl-Franz. 'This is the closest I have ever been to my uncle. And this is the closest I will ever get.'[70] It is here that Krug encounters what Hirsch describes as the 'distance that cannot ultimately be bridged.'[71] The present and the past simply cannot be fully reconciled.

Frosh states that postmemorial works, while inherently flawed, 'ai[m] at relieving the anxiety of possession by externalising postmemory and working it through.'[72] As such, the goal of the work is not to present an objective truth, but rather to process and communicate inherited trauma. *Heimat* is a stunning example of this. As Krug uncovers her family history,

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[65] M.R. Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory: The Holocaust in Contemporary German-Language Jewish Literature* (Rochester: 2020), p. 16.
[66] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 159.
[67] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 160.
[68] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 162.
[69] Krug, *Heimat,* p. 52.
[70] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 267-268.
[71] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 86.
[72] Frosh, 'Postmemory and Possession,' p. 525.

she is able to feel the pain that has been below the surface for generations. 'Finally, my emotions catch up with me. For the first time, I feel my family's loss. And through this loss, I feel the gap between me and Willi shrink.'[73]

1.2.3. Edmund de Waal – *The Hare with Amber Eyes and Letters to Camondo*

'I realise that I've been living with this netsuke business for too long. I can either anecdotalise it for the rest of my life – my odd inheritance from a beloved elderly relative – or go and find out what it means.'[74] Such is the explanation given by Edmund de Waal for beginning his journey into his family history in his book *The Hare with Amber Eyes.* This book, along with *Letters to Camondo*, also by de Waal, constitute the two final case studies under examination in this thesis.

De Waal is a descendant of the Ephrussi family – an influential and wealthy Jewish family who lost everything during the Holocaust – possessions, houses, and lives. *The Hare with Amber Eyes* began as an investigation into a collection of 264 netsuke (small carved figurines from Japan) that de Waal had inherited from his great-uncle, Iggie Ephrussi. However, the resulting book is much more than an art historical survey of said collection. What was ultimately presented to the world was an intimate and moving exploration of family, loss, and memory. This is perhaps the book that (along with *Heimat*) fits most neatly into the *family memoir* genre, as de Waal writes about his own family, along with his thoughts and reactions to the insights he gains, using the netsuke as a frame around which the narrative is built.

Letters to Camondo is somewhat less traditional, as it is formally more experimental. As was stated in the introduction, the book is what could almost be called an epistolary memoir, consisting of letters written by de Waal to the late Moïse de Camondo. Nevertheless, the subject matter is closely intwined with *The Hare with Amber Eyes*. The Camondos and the Ephrussi were both Jewish families of practically identical social standings, and both experienced devastating losses during the years of the Holocaust. De Waal also makes references to his previous work throughout *Letters to Camondo*.

The Hare with Amber Eyes has certainly been recognized as an important example of the family history genre, belonging to the 'wave of second and third-generation research currently being carried out and published in a response to the void this silence created […].'[75]

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[73] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 121-122.
[74] De Waal, *Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 17.
[75] S. Lipner, 'Seeing the Holocaust through the Lens of Family History', <https://wienerholocaustlibrary.org/2020/04/30/438/> (27.10.22).

Sandra Lipner's article lists it among these works, along with others.[76] *Maus*, as a classic of the genre, is part of this list.[77] While de Waal may have begun his research into the Ephrussi based on his curiosity surrounding his inherited netsuke collection, the scope of the project grew far beyond that. 'I no longer know if this book is about my family, or memory, or myself, or is still a book about small Japanese things.'[78] Questions that were not there at the onset emerged as more answers inevitably revealed just how much was still unknown.

Over the course of the memoir, de Waal describes trips not only to libraries and archives, but also to the places where his relatives once lived: Paris, Vienna, Tokyo, and Odessa. 'It is November and I need to go to Odessa […] I want to see the Black Sea and imagine the grain warehouses on the edge of the seaport. And perhaps, if I stand in the house where Charles and my great-grandfather Viktor were born, I will understand. I am not sure what I will understand.'[79] This excerpt describes what Hirsch refers to as 'embodied journeys of return.'[80] As discussed earlier in the chapter, she describes these journeys as attempts to generate a closer connection with deceased relatives through a shared experience of a physical place.[81] Such trips were described in the context of *Heimat*, along with the disappointment that almost inevitably follows such attempts, as one cannot recreate the past or undo the trauma that was inflicted. 'The impossibility of return is intensified if descendants who were never there earlier return to the sites of trauma.'[82] This impossibility is alluded to in the quote by de Waal, illustrated by his inability to clearly define what it is that he is hoping to gain by travelling to the birthplace of his forefathers. Even as he walks the streets that Charles Ephrussi must have walked in Paris, there is only so much that he can learn. 'From family house to these editorial offices is exactly twenty-five minutes' brisk walk, or on my April morning forty-five minutes of flaneurial stroll. I suppose Charles might go in a carriage, I worry, but I can't time that.'[83] No matter how often or how diligently he follows his ancestor's path, there will always be unknowable factors that prevent de Waal from creating the closeness for which he is searching.

This is also present in *Letters to Camondo*. In order to write the book, de Waal travelled to Paris to spend time in the Musée Nissim de Camondo – the mansion that had once

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[76] Other examples include *My Dear Ones: One Family and the Final Solution* by Jonathan Wittenberg, *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind* by Sarah Wildman, and *What you did not tell: A Russian Past and the Journey Home* by Mark Mazower. Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] De Waal, *Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 342.
[79] De Waal, *Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 336.
[80] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 212
[81] Ibid.
[82] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 213.
[83] De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 41.

been the Camondo family home. 'I thought that I'd left all this flâneuring around Paris forever – I do have other interests – but here I am again in your street, this hill of families, writing to you, talking to the dead, archiving.'[84] However, despite the physical proximity to the family's belongings, there will always be a certain distance that cannot be bridged, certain things that will forever remain unknown. In one of the letters to Monsieur le Comte, de Waal suggests 'some topics to discuss together in the matter of Montaigne.'[85] These topics range from fatherhood to his thoughts on Kaddish.[86] Of course, as the addressee of this letter is deceased, these discussions are an impossibility.

However, this excerpt is also indicative of another characteristic of postmemory – creativity. To revisit Stephen Frosh and his criticism of postmemory, '[t]he past is very much present,'[87] and it is inevitable that the descendant's own present will inform their work. This is supported by Michael G. Levine in his article 'Speaking in Starts: Postmemory and the Archive.' Levine states that, in the attempt to process a family's traumatic past, 'the second generation may also project itself back in time, forging a connection to the past that is "not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation."'[88] Levine describes a 'second generation,' but the same phenomenon is also present within the third.

In the section mentioned above, de Waal is listing topics that he knows he will never be able to discuss with Camondo. However, there are certainly other examples that suggest a certain degree of projection, in both books. In *Letters to Camondo,* de Waal describes a photograph of Moïse and his son, Nissim: 'You both sit the same way, I'm touched by this photo of a father and a son. You must be fifty-six and have grown a little stout. I like your boater. I look at this and think you are confident about what you love and who you love and that you just like veneer. I like it too.'[89] Passages in *The Hare with Amber Eyes* project even more explicitly. The beginning of chapter 19 ('Types of the Old City') consists fully of de Waal's interpretation of what a childhood in Iggie's home in Vienna would have looked and felt like, what it would have been like to play with the netsuke. 'And you tell stories about these carvings to your mother, and she chooses one and starts a story about it to you. She

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[84] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, p. 36.
[85] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, p. 113.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Frosh, 'Postmemory and Possession,' p. 516.
[88] Levine, 'Speaking in Starts,' p. 127.
[89] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, p. 68.

picks up the netsuke of the child and the mask. She is good with stories.'[90] While the narrative might be based in fact, de Waal is projecting himself into the past.

Nonetheless, one must remember that postmemorial works are, according to Hirsch, ultimately tools in a generational healing process. It does not matter whether Iggie's mother made up stories about that specific netsuke, what matters is that de Waal (and other authors of the third generation) are able to confront pains that they might not have been aware they were carrying. 'I knew the story. I didn't *feel* the story until my third visit to Vienna, when I was standing in the courtyard of the Palais with a man from the offices of Casino Austria who asked me if I wanted to see the secret floor.'[91]

That there is then a record of this healing process is also highly significant. That a family member did the work of filling in as many gaps as they could possibly fill means that a more complete narrative can be handed down to subsequent generations, as opposed to the silence and legends that they themselves had inherited. In *Letters to Camondo*, de Waal describes his efforts on *The Hare with Amber Eyes*:

> My book on the collection passed down to me is a fitting tribute to a lost family, naming the dead, saying their names as a way of making it cohere. I make a book, an attempt to try and work out what to pass on. If I can pass on *this* then I am not passing on other responsibilities, that archival weight. I dedicate the book to my father and to my children. It is just so.[92]

1.3. Conclusion

The four chosen case studies vary greatly from one another, in terms of presentation of both text and image. Nonetheless, their status as family memoirs has been established over the course of this chapter. Following Couser, family memoirs are books that chronicle the lives of individual authors and their ancestors, albeit with some creative liberties. All four books fulfill this characteristic, despite the differences in their approaches.

They are also connected by their postmemorial nature. Marianne Hirsch's groundbreaking concept of postmemory (the continued influence and transmission of inherited generational trauma) was discussed at length. Hirsch and other scholars (such as O'Donoghue) recognize both the strengths and weaknesses of postmemorial works – while

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[90] De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 170.
[91] De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 280.
[92] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, p. 155.

they represent important tools in both remembering and healing from deep traumas, there will always be a certain amount of projection on the part of the works' creators. However, as long as this is acknowledged, the projection does not need to be considered detrimental to their historical relevance. They still represent a record of individuals (both past and present) that would likely have been lost otherwise. Following O'Donoghue, they also still serve both an artistic and activist purpose by presenting such stories to the public and so keeping the Holocaust and its enduring consequences in the collective, cultural consciousness.[93]

The concept of *spectrums* has been mentioned in connection with form and memoir. In asking whether these books can be placed on an archival spectrum (or, as Jeanette A. Bastian refers to it, the 'archival continuum'[94]), it was important to first consider the content within them, and the motivations behind the gathering and presentation of said content. If the books are in some form archival, then their content is what makes up their holdings. As postmemorial memoirs, the texts record both the stories of the past, as well as the processing of said past at a specific moment in time (the third generation). Additionally, if the books are to be considered archival, the presence of projected (and perhaps false) memories within the works needed to be acknowledged and discussed. Now, the concept of an *archive* must be explored in detail. The following chapter shall examine both conventional and unconventional archives, and the potential placement of family memoirs within the latter category.

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[93] O'Donoghue, 'Postmemory as Trauma?', n. pag., <https://www.politika.io/en/notice/postmemory-as-trauma-some-theoretical-problems-and-their-consequences-for-contemporary> (28.7.23).
[94] Bastian, 'The records of memory, the archives of identity,' p. 130.

Chapter 2:

Family Memoirs and Archives, Family Memoirs as Archives

'An archive is a location for the ordering and preservation of information.'[95] This definition, put forth by Anne Golomb Hoffmann in her 2009 article 'Archival Bodies,' could be considered the most fundamental description of an archive – it is a place containing organized information. If one were to picture a conventional archive, it would likely be a building where objects seen to be of some kind of relevance are organized, stored, and maintained. However, this concept is being constantly explored and expanded – there are more types to be found across the 'archival continuum.'[96] Indeed, in the past years, there has been much discussion within archival scholarship around what can be considered an archive, beyond accepted institutional examples; the 'pluralism of evidentiary texts, memory-keeping practices and institutions'[97] has established itself as a subject within archival discourse.[98] In fact, Hoffmann's article is concerned with considering the body as a form of (highly unconventional) archive.

This paper aims to establish whether family memoirs can be considered a form of archive. In order to do so, both the traditional, conventional understandings of the archive as well its deviations must be discussed. The following chapter shall first determine the characteristics of a conventional archive and its archival practices. The question of what qualifies material as archival evidence, and how that can be applied to the material presented in the published memoirs, will be debated. Examples from the case studies shall be threaded throughout – if the books are able to serve as archives, their content represents their holdings, while their form represents their organizational principles. Laura Millar's book *Archives: Principles and Practices* (2017) will serve as the basis for this discussion. Finally, the connection between the case studies, archives, and postmemory will be interrogated.

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[95] A.G. Hoffmann, 'Archival Bodies,' American Imago (66:1), 2009, p. 5.

[96] Bastian. 'The records of memory, the archives of identity,' p. 130.

[97] E. Shepherd and A-PAEARIPTAC Group, 'Educating for the Archival Multiverse,' *The American Archivist* (74:1, 2011), p. 73.

[98] Compare:

V. Frings-Hessami, 'Continuum, continuity, continuum actions: reflection on the meaning of a continuum perspective and on its compatibility with a life cycle framework,' *Archival Science* (22, 2022), pp. 113-128.

F. Upward, S. McKemmish, and B. Reed, 'Counterpoint: Archivists and Changing Social and Information Spaces: A Continuum Approach to Recordkeeping and Archiving in Online Cultures,' *Archivaria* (72, 2011), pp. 197-237.

2.1. Conventional Archives

The International Council on Archives (ICA) defines *archives* as follows: 'Archives are the documentary by-product of human activity retained for their long-term value.'[99] This is, of course, an incredibly vague description of the concept. The ICA goes on to elaborate somewhat, stating that they are 'contemporary records created by individuals and organisations […] and provide a direct window onto the past. They come in a wide range of formats including written, photographic, moving image, sound, digital and analogue.'[100]

Laura Millar also provides a general definition of the term; according to Millar, archives can be understood as being either the materials themselves or the structure that houses them.[101] Beyond this, the role of an archive is the 'creation and management of authentic evidence through a chain of reliable record-keeping actions […].'[102] What constitutes *reliable record-keeping* is less than obvious (as is *authentic*, as shall be addressed later in the chapter), and many varied approaches to archiving exist and are practiced (including decisions regarding what is worthy of archiving, as shall be discussed in the following subsection). As such, an archive is a place where records are organized and stored. The question of *how* this is done is then where the differences between archives lie. Throughout, I will explore the defining aspects of conventional archived and discuss how and if the selected family memoirs vary in their practice of assembling and presenting information.

Whether the archives in question belong to a university, government, or other cultural organization, all have policies in place to provide a framework for the management and ordering of their materials.[103] 'Formal policies determine whether the organization's official records should be in digital or physical form; which records have legal, administrative, financial or other value; and which materials should be defined as archival.'[104] Herein lies a highly significant difference between conventional archiving and the creation of family memoirs – conventional archives are bound by their policies, whereas authors have no such constraints. There may be legal requirements that authors and publishers must respect, such as copyright concerns when including material that has been sourced externally (for example, the paintings reproduced in *The Hare with Amber Eyes*), but the author has relative freedom.

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[99] International Council on Archives, 'What are archives?', <https://www.ica.org/en/what-archive> (25.6.23).
[100] Ibid.
[101] L. Millar, *Archives: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: 2017), p. 4.
[102] Millar, *Archives*, p. 25.
[103] Millar, *Archives*, p. 129.
[104] Millar, *Archives*, p. 24.

Further, one of the main duties of an archivist is the acquisition of new material for that archive. 'The logic behind an institution's acquisition focus should be articulated in an acquisitions policy.'[105] This is because the vast majority of archives are living institutions – their collections are meant to expand over time. This is not the case with published books. The fixity of the printed word is one of the most significant characteristics of this medium – once it has been published, it i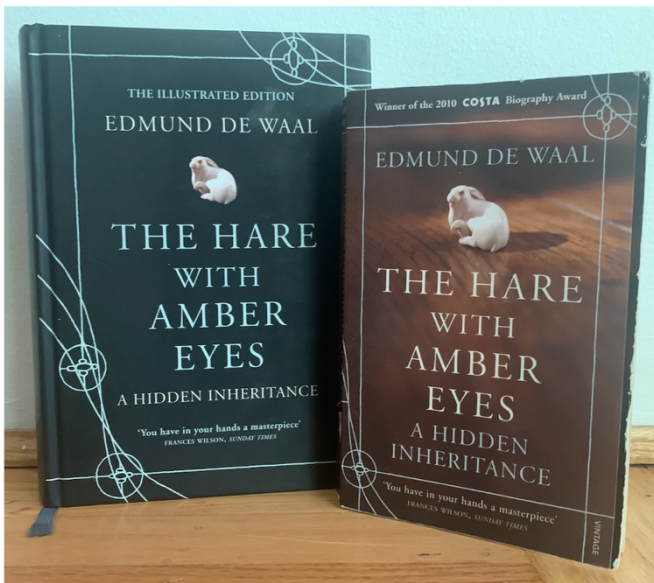s unchanging. They are not dynamic in the way that conventional archives are able to be, as they represent a finished whole (although it is, of course, possible to publish revised or expanded editions of a work).

Fig. 1. Illustrated and original edition of *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (author's own photograph).

The Hare with Amber Eyes is one such example, as there is both an original and illustrated edition of the book. While the original edition contained visual material, it was printed exclusively in black and white and all images (appeared to be) cropped. The illustrated edition (as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3) not only includes more material than the original, but also appears in a larger format hardcover, is printed on heavier paper and presents all the images in color, (seemingly) uncropped. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these editions are not necessarily representative of publishing norms. *The Hare with Amber Eyes* was an international sensation that spawned not only an illustrated edition, but also multiple international exhibitions.[106] Not every family memoir inspires such a response. Additionally, the illustrated *Hare with Amber Eyes* represents a limited expansion of the original – the text is fixed, but the form and the visual content is not.

In conventional archives, the formal aspects of ordering material are typically structured around certain standards. For example, the International Council on Archives offers the *General International Standard Archival Description* (ISAD(G)).[107] These standards are

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[105] Millar, *Archives*, p. 181.
[106] P. Karasz, '"The Hare With Amber Eyes" Comes Home,' 12 Nov., 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/12/arts/design/hare-with-amber-eyes-vienna-edmund-de-waal.html> (11.6.23).
[107] International Council on Archives, *ISAD(G): General International Standard Archival Description* (Ottawa: 2000), <https://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/CBPS_2000_Guidelines_ISAD%28G%29_Second-edition_EN.pdf> (18.6.23).

meant to aid the in the description and 'impose consistency and control.'[108] Somewhat ironically, there is no one set of standardized standards, and numerous variations exist across all manner of institutions.[109] There is also no way to enforce their use. 'On the other hand, because they are standards and not laws, no archivist is legally obligated to use them. This lack of enforceability reduces the chance of achieving complete consistency, which is the perceived goal of a standard.'[110] Nonetheless, standards exist, and archives attempt to apply whichever set they have chosen for their particular use.

In the case of family archives gathered in memoirs, there are no such standards to fall back on. Rather, the authors are free to decide how they wish to order and present descriptions around their material. There is no unified manner in which materials are described. There is no accompanying metadata. Rather, some material is discussed more intimately within the text, while others stand alone. Some books provide some bibliographic information, but this is more due to copyright legalities than to foster the findability of information and replication of research. For example, *Letters to Camondo*[111] and the illustrated *Hare with Amber Eyes*[112] provide clear bibliographic information in the form of lists for all presented illustrations. However, neither list appears to follow any kind of official or academic citation style, and citation is not the same as description. The bibliographies may give some indication of current ownership of the material, but there is no information regarding an object's provenance.

All of the case studies are commercial publications, yet there is not a single method by which the bibliographies are compiled. This differentiates the books not only from archives, but from academic publications as well. Considering that the purpose of bibliographies is to make the retrieval of information and replication of research possible, this lack of standardization in the family memoir case studies emphasizes that research goals are not the principal purpose of these commercial publications. This then suggests that their main purpose is entertainment and general education rather than academic scholarship, in contrast to conventional archives.

When considering a conventional or institutional archive, it can be tempting to consider these places as temples to objective truths – here is where the records of the past are guarded and kept. The reality is more complex. Archives are managed by archivists, and archivists are people with their own emotions, histories, and principles. Archival scholarship

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[108] Millar, *Archives*, p. 103.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, pp. 179.
[112] E. De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: The Illustrated Edition* (London: 2011), pp. 411.

recognizes this reality of the profession. Millar describes, for example, effect of postmodernism on the perspective on the archivist.

> They also argued that archival materials did not tell only one 'story' but could be interpreted in different ways depending on the audience. Postmodernists claimed that all texts were conscious creations and that archivists played an active role in selecting materials for preservation and therefore in deciding how evidence and history were shaped.[113]

The subjectivity of the archivist could be apparent in acquisition decisions, which partially explains the need for formal policies. 'To avoid bias, the archivist must always return to the institution's acquisitions policy as an objective and formal guide.'[114]

An analogy could be made here between archival and postmemorial practices – the influence of the individual and their experiences and projections does not necessarily need to be negative, it must simply be acknowledged. 'In an age when it seems impossible to claim pure objectivity, the archivist can still strive for transparency, which is an important outcome of arrangement and description.'[115] Transparency is the decisive factor, both in family memoirs and archives. As both are the products of human creation, both will be influenced by the individuals involved. Any claim to objectivity and absolute truth would be misleading, but, once that is recognized, memoirs and archives offer lifelines to the past that are indispensable parts of our cultural, societal memory. In his article 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community: Four shifting archival paradigms,' Terry Cook presents an ideal of archives as the result of a 'participatory process'[116] rather than as an exclusively closed, institutional one – multiple, complementary forms of archive are not just possible, but should be encouraged. Ensuring a more socially representative preservation of memory means that multiple parties must participate in archival processes.[117]

2.2. Becoming Archival

In making decisions on which objects to preserve and present, it is important to discuss the underlying principles of acquisitions policies. In order for an object to be considered archival, it must fulfill certain fundamental requirements that transcend the policies of individual

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[113] Millar, *Archives*, p. 43.
[114] Millar, *Archives*, p. 197.
[115] Millar, *Archives*, p. 215.
[116] T. Cook, 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community,' *Archival Science* (13, 2013), p. 114.
[117] Ibid.

institutions. Archival material must be 'static, unique and authentic, with its content, context and structure intact.'[118] In other words, the objects must be fixed and genuine, and it must be possible to order them into a given historical situation. The question that emerges is whether such archival standards can apply to the material presented in the family memoirs. The collections represented by the books have either emerged, more or less untouched, from the respective families' own archives, or can be attributed to other collections that have (presumably) already examined the objects and deemed them *archival*. At least, this is the impression the reader is meant to have (the evidentiary quality of the material shall be discussed in Chapter 3). However, first we must interrogate these aspects of archival acquisition (and how they pertain to the selected case studies) further.

Millar defines *static* as follows: 'The record needs to be secured so that it cannot be changed, intentionally or accidentally. It needs to be static, fixed in time and space, or else it cannot easily serve as evidence of the transaction or event it documents.'[119] Now, many of the images that appear in the memoirs have been altered – the original edition of *The Hare with Amber Eyes* has both cropped and adjusted the color of the images, while *Heimat* has taken the alterations to an extreme, either through collage or artistic liberties. *Letters to Camondo* appears to show the images as close to reality as possible, as can be seen in the uncropped edges of the scans of the family's deportation cards.[120] *In Memory of Memory* is of less relevance in this case, considering its lack of imagery. However, the published versions of the images and photographs within these volumes are now fixed and have been placed in a context that does not hide their alterations. Additionally, as the original materials are not being handled by the users of the books, their safety is of no concern, and can as such be referenced as often as desired with no fear of harm or damage.

In order to be considered *authentic*, 'the item in question can be proven to be what it purports to be.'[121] Here, much is asked of the reader/user in terms of trust. The descriptions and bibliographic data are limited, and so one must often choose to believe the author's claims concerning their authenticity. *In Memory of Memory* is a prime example of this. As Stepanova does not share any of the photographs with her audience, readers must choose to trust the impressions she provides. Stepanova does mention specific archives she visited, and provides other biographical information regarding her ancestors, and so it would be possible to retrace her steps and attempt to verify the information provided. However, the contents of

[118] Millar, *Archives*, p. 17.
[119] Millar, *Archives*, p. 13.
[120] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, pp. 145-148.
[121] Millar, *Archives*, p. 15.

her family archive are out of reach from the public. Considering much of the text is concerned with the concept of protecting the privacy of the dead, this is not coincidental. 'It is a luxury permitted to very few to vanish entirely, to disappear from the radar.'[122]

The last characteristic to be addressed is that archival objects are meant to be *unique.* According to Millar, this can be a misleading term for some. 'Uniqueness does not derive from each individual piece of paper or data element being unlike any other but from the fact that the evidence – if maintained with its content, context and structure intact – presents a single unique sequence of facts and information.'[123] As such, that the materials have been reprinted in countless editions of the various books is irrelevant. Especially today in our digital age, where entire collections can be housed and accessed online, it is not only the single, original object that can be considered to have archival relevance. The objects that have been presented in the books have been carefully placed within certain narratives. However, they are all objects that *belong* within the narratives – it is their content, arrangement, and narrative that makes them unique, not the number of copies that exist.[124] As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, the existence of multiple copies greatly increases the chances of survival for the objects – a great advantage of polyform media.

To summarize, there are certain fundamental differences between (conventional) archives and family memoirs. Archives are acquired, managed, and housed following prescribed policies and standards, and are (usually) not static in terms of their holdings. Family memoirs are published books that are fixed in terms of their holdings and represent finished projects. A further distinguishing feature between the two is user accessibility – many archives limit who is able to view their material, while commercially published works can, theoretically, be accessed by anyone. However, this shall be explored in depth later within the chapter. In terms of similarities, both conventional archives and the family memoirs present coherent, curated narratives to their users, allowing the materials to serve as references. This is possible regardless whether a user is considering an original object or a reproduction (either in an online database or a printed book).

2.3. Unconventional Archives

Now that the defining characteristics of conventional archives have been explored – along with the ways in which they differ from family memoirs – we can turn to their variations. As was stated above, archives are meant to be dynamic. In an era of unprecedented

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[122] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 57.
[123] Millar, *Archives*, pp. 14-15.
[124] Millar, *Archives*, p. 15.

documentation and constantly evolving technologies, it is unsurprising that archives and archiving are in a constant state of flux. There is much debate within scholarship around the re-evaluation of what the archive and archiving can be and what the future may look like, what role they may play.[125] Terry Cook discusses this at length in his article 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community: Four shifting archival paradigms':

> In this new digital, political, and pluralistic universe, professional archivists need to transform themselves from elite experts behind institutional walls to becoming mentors, facilitators, coaches, who work in the community to encourage archiving as a participatory *process* shared with many in society, rather than necessarily acquiring all the archival *products* in our established archives.[126]

Throughout his article, Cook explores the ways in which archives (in the Western world) have shifted up until our present day. He concludes that we have reached a point in which '[*c*]*ommunity* is the key concept [...] a democratizing of archives suitable for the social ethos, communication patterns, and community requirements of the digital age.'[127] Other scholars such as Jeanette Bastian have echoed Cook, stating that the expansion of archival models 'beyond accepted Western models'[128] has been gaining popularity.

The focus of this paper has not been on the digital turn (or on other movements such as postcolonial archives) but on paper books published within the last 15 years. However, it is Cook's focus on the democratization of archiving that is relevant in this instance. It is no longer only professional archivists who decide what will be stored in these manifestations of cultural memory. The doors have been opened beyond the institution. 'With the Internet, every person can become his or her own publisher, author, photographer, film-maker, music-recording artist, and archivist.'[129] Bastian has also engaged in this line of thinking,

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[125] Compare:

E. Ketelaar, 'Cultivating archives: meanings and identities,' *Archival Science* (12, 2012), pp. 19-33.

H. Feng, 'Identity and archives: return and expansion of the social value of archives,' *Archival Science* (17, 2017), pp. 97-112.

A. Josias, 'Toward an understanding of archives as a feature of collective memory,' *Archival Science* (11, 2011), pp. 95-112.

I. Blom, T. Lundemo, and E. Røsaak, *Memory in Motion: Archives, Technology, and the Social* (Amsterdam: 2016).

B. Battley, 'Archives as places, places as archives: doors to privilege, places of connection or haunted sarcophagi of crumbling skeletons?,' *Archival Science* (19, 2019), pp. 1-26.

[126] T. Cook, 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community: four shifting archival paradigms,' Archival Science (13, 2013), p. 114.

[127] Cook, 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community,' p. 116.

[128] Bastian, 'The records of memory, the archives of identity,' p. 123.

[129] Cook, 'Evidence, memory, identity, and community,' p. 113.

emphasizing that the archive is 'always a deliberate site of power.'[130] As such, the expansion of the archive and increased recognition of non-professional archival activities are vital steps in ensuring that memory-making is not a privilege of the few, but an act shared by many.

It is important to note that none of the authors of the chosen case studies were hobby genealogists who chose to peruse their family histories, wrote them down, and had the good fortune of finding a willing publisher. All were already established artists and active cultural contributors, and all were in some way connected to one of the most significant historical events of the twentieth century, the Holocaust. The benefits Cook sees to a more open, communal form of archiving are two-fold: stories and materials that would have otherwise been lost are brought to the surface, and the context surrounding the objects is provided by members of the communities themselves, rather than reinterpreted by others from outside. 'There is simply too much evidence, too much memory, too much identity, to acquire more than a mere fragment of it in our established archives. Furthermore, removing such archives, such memory, such evidence from the originating communities to out archives may be problematic and undesirable […]'[131] That we must be open to new and progressive archival practices is a stance that resonates with Millar as well: 'We cannot be so bound by habit that we refuse to consider different approaches, and we cannot be so constrained by theory that we lose sight of the purpose of our work in the first place.'[132] I align myself with Cook, Bastian, and Millar on this front – only by expanding our understanding of what an archive can be, and who can engage in archival activities, can we hope to ensure the survival of as many stories and objects as possible. There must be exploration of practices, materials, and technologies along the entire *archival continuum.* Bastian celebrates these explorations: 'By rejecting that stereotype, archivists today have every reason and incentive to turn away from the margins and turn towards the middle, embracing the 'archive' and its adherents and engaging with those amorphous but dynamic knowledge spaces – not as the clerks or the keepers, but as the actors and collaborators.'[133]

Considering that the case studies all contain material from private family archives, it is likely that many of the objects presented in the books would have never become publicly available. That individuals from outside of the archival profession were able to gather, organize, and present objects to the public within a structured context has ensured not only

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[130] J. A. Bastian, 'Moving the margins to the middle: reconciling 'the archive' with the archives,' in F. Foscarini (ed., et al.), *Engaging with Records and Archives* (London: 2016), p. 9.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Millar, *Archives*, p. 264-265.
[133] Bastian, 'Moving the margins to the middle,' p. 17.

their survival, but the survival of their stories. They are participating in building the 'amorphous but dynamic knowledge spaces'[134] described by Bastian.

2.3.1. The Family Memoir as Unconventional Archive

The question posed by this paper is whether family memoirs should be considered part of the archival continuum. I argue that the stories are simply held in a different container than traditional archives, and so represent a form of unconventional archive. The question of storage is imperative or an archive, whether physical or digital. 'An archival institution is, by definition, a physical space. Regardless of their form or medium, archives need to be stored in appropriate containers, from acid-free file folders to digital back-up tapes […]'[135] Books are physical spaces that house information. Going by both Millar and Hoffmann, the books are 'a location for the ordering and preservation of information.'[136]

That the creators of the books also see them as such is referenced in the books themselves. A very telling example of this is Krug's *Heimat.* Not only are archives explicitly discussed throughout the text, but the archival elements are embedded in the very form of the book. The book's climax is Krug's visit to an archive in Karlsruhe to view her grandfather Willi's US military file, where she finally learned the extent of his culpability during the Nazi regime.[137]

> The front and back cover of Krug's maternal grandfather's U.S. military file, some of the contents of which are also included in the book, constitute *Belonging*'s first and last pages, suggesting that Krug has significantly added to – and perhaps even completed – her grandfather's official record […][138]

Archives are integrated into the very structure of the book, as much as they are into the content itself. Echoing Clewell's analysis regarding the additions to Willi's file, this emphasizes Krug's role as an archivist, and *Heimat* as a form of archive.

Additionally, there is a similarity here to the illustrated *Hare with Amber Eyes* – it can also be considered the expansion of an archive (thanks to the addition of previously unprinted material). As such, though print is often considered a fixed medium, it is still possible for the

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[134] Ibid.
[135] Millar, *Archives*, p. 137.
[136] Hoffmann, 'Archival Bodies,' p. 5.
[137] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 140.
[138] T. Clewell, 'Beyond Graphic Memoir: Visualizing Third-Generation German Cultural Identity in Nora Krug's *Belonging*,' American Imago (77:3, 2020), p. 464.

memoirs to act as living, dynamic archives. The books are living up to the 'disruptive potential'[139] of artists and other creative agents in the understanding of archives.

This form of curated collage is also discussed by Marianne Hirsch in her book *The Generation of Postmemory*, specifically in the chapter 'Memory's Archival Turn.' Krug's book plays on the idea of assemblage, with some images appeared to be taped on to other surfaces, then contained within the file, and it is exactly this type of object that appeals to Hirsch. 'I am interested in the postmemorial archival practices that emerge from this moment and that, in their particular forms of *assembling*, *arranging*, and *display*, have taken the form of *albums* that exhibit and underscore some of these material properties.'[140] Hirsch is referring to projects such as gathering materials for a family memoir – the gathering of archival material to fill in the gaps. 'In a consciously reparative move, they assemble collections that function as correctives and additions, rather than counters, to the historical archive, attempting to undo the ruptures caused by war and genocide.'[141] This is what Krug has achieved with *Heimat*. Krug has not only maintained the illusion of a photo album (also referenced in the original title *Heimat: A German Family Album*), but has added to the historical archive, as discussed above. She has expanded Willi's file and added to her own family album.

In order for a book to be a family memoir, it generally must be written by someone with a close connection to said family. As such, subjectivity is an innate characteristic of the genre. As was discussed in Chapter 1, these works of postmemory are inherently emotional, as they are active attempts to heal generational trauma. Additionally, it is impossible to retrace the steps of one's ancestors without some degree of projection. This is one of the difficulties of dealing with works of postmemory, as acknowledged by Hirsch. 'Such are the gaps around which our archives are constructed, and the challenge is not to fill the space with projections that would allow these gaps to be screened or disguised.'[142] However, this issue was discussed at length in the first chapter, with the conclusion that, as long as the (potential) projections are recognized, then the explicit subjectivity of the works should not be considered detrimental, but a unique strength of the genre – readers are presented not only with the family's stories, but are given an insight into the subsequent healing process.

To conclude this section of the chapter, while there are certainly aspects of family memoirs and the evidentiary material they contain that do not correspond to archival standards and practices, there are also many that do. The very nature of archiving is currently

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[139] S. Vaughan, 'Reflecting on practice: artists' experiences in the archives,' in F. Foscarini (ed., et al.), *Engaging with Records and Archives* (London: 2016), p. 228.
[140] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 228.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 248.

evolving, and the term is being redefined and expanded by scholars and professionals within the field.

I believe that authors such as Edmund de Waal, Nora Krug, and Maria Stepanova are also contributing to this expansion from without. These authors and creators all approached their projects as archival and respected the most fundamental aspects of the practice – they created physical manifestations of memory. Within these books, they gathered material, described it, placed it into a context, and then presented it to the public. They brought their own traumas and experiences – both personal and generational – to the process and acknowledged the projection that will inevitably come with such work. They echoed the practices of professional archivists working at more conventional, established institutions.

These contributions to our societal memory represent variations of Cook's *participatory process*, they are a shade of archive. They may be imperfect, but so is every archive, so is memory. Despite the imperfections, the role they play in both remembering and healing is no less significant, as de Waal notes in the final pages of *Letters to Camondo*, as he looks back on *The Hare with Amber Eyes*:

> My book on the collection passed down to me is a fitting tribute to a lost family, naming the dead, saying their names as a way of making it cohere. I make a book, an attempt to try and work out what to pass on. If I can pass on *this* then I am not passing on other responsibilities, that archival weight.[143]

2.4. Accessibility

The previous sections of this chapter dealt in depth with various aspects of archives, but only touched briefly upon the topic of accessibility. It was remarked that there are striking differences in the degrees of accessibility offered by (many) conventional archives and published family memoirs. The memoirs are commercial publications, and, in terms of sales, memoir is a powerful genre. 'When you look at the historical sales data, it's no surprise to learn that the biggest area of adult non-fiction is memoir.'[144] In his article 'Why We Buy Books,' Daniel Bunyard describes the drive to consume memoir, citing the catharsis that a reader can gain by relating to another's actual lived experiences.[145] A publisher's interest in continuing to make such books available to the public is, however, not only to offer emotional

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[143] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, p. 155.
[144] D. Bunyard, 'Why We Buy Books,' *Logos* (31:2, 2020), p. 32.
[145] Ibid.

support to readers or to contribute to a society's collective memory. 'The extent to which books satisfy these needs is often directly reflected in sales.'[146] As such, the monetary incentives connected to making such works accessible to the public should not be ignored.

Nevertheless, there are other means of gaining access to such books beyond purchasing new copies. They can be purchased new or used in bookstores or online, borrowed from a friend, or borrowed from a library. In theory, there should be limited (financial) obstacles standing between a potential reader and one of these books.

This is not the case when it comes to gaining access to archives. There are many ways in which access to either specific objects or entire archives may be limited, and enforcing restricted access is a common practice that can lead to complications for users. 'The challenge for historians […] is to be able to access and use new archival discoveries. Many archival institutions have the right to establish their own conditions of access, which can hinder the job of interpreting the past.'[147] The degree of openness an institution allows may be dependent on the type of archive in question. Millar describes the example of a government archive – 'In certain countries, researchers must apply in writing months in advance to obtain permission to visit the institution. In other places, only citizens of that country may access the government's archives. Foreign nationals might not even be allowed in the building.'[148] As a result, such policies will limit the number of users who are able to view and use the materials housed by that archive.

A further example of restriction is described by Nora Krug in *Heimat*. 'It is my mother who suggests that I visit Karlsruhe's archive and ask about Willi's US military file […] Anyone can request their family members' files.'[149] The website of the Karlsruhe archives lists the requirements that must be fulfilled when attempting to view documents belonging to natural persons – the individual must have been dead for at least ten years (or 90 years must have passed since the date of birth if the exact time of death is unknown) and one must provide written permission from the person's descendants to access the files if they themselves are not related.[150] Other archives, such as the Stasi Records Archive, also demand that a close relation to the individual in question be provided in order to gain access to the documents.[151]

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[146] Ibid.
[147] Millar, *Archives*, p. 68.
[148] Millar, *Archives*, p. 244.
[149] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 140.
[150] Bürgerservice Karlsruhe, 'Archivgut einsehen oder Einsicht beantragen', <https://web1.karlsruhe.de/service/Buergerdienste/leistung.php?id=1044> (11.7.23).
[151] Stasi Records Archive, 'Information for Private Individuals', <https://www.stasi-unterlagen-archiv.de/en/access-to-records/access-for-private-individuals/> (13.6.23).

It is this line between accessibility and privacy that is so difficult to toe. The original owners and creators cannot be asked for their permission, so it falls to others to take decisions on who may interact with their preserved legacy. Millar states that '[t]he passage of time offers the best resolution to issues of privacy. There is a general belief that personal sensitivities diminish a generation or two after the death of the authors of archival materials.'[152] This belief may be general, but it is not universal. Throughout *In Memory of Memory*, Stepanova agonizes over whether it is better to be remembered or forgotten, and how her own ancestors would react to her decision to share the details of their lives so publicly. 'I am afraid to think what Great-Grandmother Sarra might have said if I'd asked her whether I could publish her correspondence. But no one asks the dead.'[153] The internal back-and-forth Stepanova may have experienced did not, however, stop her from publishing her book. Her refusal to share scans of the diaries, letters, and photographs can be seen as an attempt to protect her family's privacy to a certain extent – the readers do not have faces to put to names, nor can they trace over the handwriting of the deceased. The stories are shared, but at a distance. While this may be possible in a creative, commercial endeavor, it would not be in the case of a true, institutional archive. There, it is the privacy policies that attempt to protect the departed, while also serving their purpose as externalized, social memory.

The reasons for restricting access to archives are numerous, and occasionally it comes down to the simple reality that old material is fragile and needs to be protected. Archival materials must 'be stored away, with controls placed on access, so they cannot be lost or destroyed.'[154] The fewer hands that touch an object, the higher its chances of long-term survival. Nevertheless, if the objects cannot be seen, then they also cannot be studied, and could very well be forgotten. Digitization offers a solution to this problem[155] – the digital facsimiles can be viewed as many times as needed, with no risk of harming the original. Nevertheless, access to digital archives can also be restricted if so desired.

Essentially, the user is at the mercy of any given institution. While not always impossible to gain access to an archive, it can certainly be made difficult for private individuals. This remains a problem, as 'archives locked in a closed warehouse cannot help citizens to improve their understanding of identity, but instead they can be an impediment stuck between history and present, speculation and fact, individual and society.'[156] The ease

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[152] Millar, *Archives*, p. 117.
[153] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 320.
[154] Millar, *Archives*, p. 14.
[155] Millar, *Archives*, p. 166.
[156] H. Feng, 'Identity and archives: return and expansion of the social value of archives,' *Archival Science* (17, 2017), p. 104.

with which family memoirs, and the historical evidence they hold, can be accessed is of great advantage here, and is representative of the phenomenon Kate Theimer describes as 'the bypassing of traditional gatekeepers.'[157] They highlight stories of those who would have been lost to the past otherwise. As such, family memoirs serve as a form of memory institution – information has been gathered and ordered, context has been provided. Despite their previous wealth and influence (Charles Ephrussi had served as a model for Proust's Swann[158]), the names *Ephrussi* and *Camondo* had more or less disappeared from the cultural landscape. De Waal's books brought them back.

Ideally, family memoirs would, like archival institutions, also include more detailed information concerning the provenance of specific objects. Within the books selected for this paper, this lack of information constitutes a weakness. While there is some information given in terms of provenance, most have simply come to the author through their family (brought to them in a 'supermarket carrier bag'[159]). As such, the reader/user must choose to trust the authors' claims regarding the objects presented, as it is virtually impossible to verify the claims without public access to the objects. This represents a greater question of faith on the part of the user than when dealing with conventional archives, and so the objects must perhaps also be treated with some scrutiny.

In spite of this, one could also argue that the memoirs nonetheless represent important contributions to societal memory. The context provided by the books is also presented as a narrative, and not as metadata or brief descriptions that could potentially hinder understanding for a layperson unfamiliar with either archival practices or the historical event in question. Rather, the reader is taken by the hand and lead through not only the (a version of) events of the past, but their lingering effects on the present. That this is a more transparent means of gaining access to the past is highly important, considering that archives are not designed for use by the general public. There are discussions within archival scholarship concerning the future of archives and the ways in which the profession must change in order to cater to both researchers and laypeople. '[M]emory exists outside of archives and may be mobilized to enhance and facilitate recordkeeping. Others believe that for archives to figure in public consciousness, archivists need to find better means to interact with the broader public, not primarily researchers and scholars.'[160] This echoes Cook's call for a more involved and

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[157] K. Theimer, 'It's the end of the archival profession as we know it, and I feel fine,' in C. Brown (ed.), *Archival Futures* (London: 2018), p. 4.
[158] De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 104.
[159] De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 18.
[160] T. Jacobsen, R.L. Punzalan, and M.L. Hedstrom, 'Invoking "collective memory": mapping the emergence of a concept in archival science,' *Archival Science* (13, 2013), p. 222.

democratic approach to archiving. It is also important to once again highlight that these family memoirs are commercial publications, not academic historical studies. They are written for a lay audience. This means that the text itself will likely be more accessible to a wider public than an academic publication, which is meant for a much smaller, and very specific, readership. As such, family memoirs can be understood as being the result of archival activities that are easily accessible to the public – this in terms of entry, finances, and comprehensibility. They are unconventional archives with the added advantage of enhanced accessibility.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter explored our understandings of archives, both conventional and unconventional. Conventional, institutional archives are formally structured organizations, governed by their own standards and policies. Nevertheless, their perceived objectivity is just that – perceived. The professional archivists ultimately making the decisions on what objects to acquire and how they are to be stored and described are individuals with their own beliefs and biases. It is impossible that these will not influence their professional decisions. As such, in this they share the characteristics of the authors of postmemorial works (their own projections being an inevitability).

Archiving is a dynamic process, and current discussions within scholarship are echoing what is happening in society – new and more open means of sharing and preserving materials are being explored, and family memoirs are a part of this archival evolution. While it is easy to think of the printed book as a physical embodiment of fixity, new editions such as the illustrated *Hare with Amber Eyes* show that they can always be expanded, as archives can. Krug's *Heimat,* designed to mimic both an archival file and a family photo album, also plays with the idea of expanding a collection. Essentially, the reader is holding an archive in their hands – an unconventional archive, but an archive nonetheless. The book is a place where objects and information have been gathered, organized, described, and stored for posterity. The authors of these postmemorial family memoirs are unconventional archivists, contributing to the archival process. To once again borrow Bastian's phrase, the memoirs are a part of the archival continuum – all with their own strengths and weaknesses, but ultimately serving the purpose of preserving and remembering the past.

Chapter 3:

Historical Evidence in Family Memoirs

'Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us.'[161] This final chapter shall explore the visual material presented in the chosen case studies – the photographs. Chapters 1 and 2 discussed the postmemorial narratives of the family memoirs and their status as unconventional archives.

The following and final chapter will focus more closely on the evidentiary value of the books' contents, specifically their photographs. The images presented in the books are reproductions printed en masse, rather than original objects as one would expect to find in an archive. As such, their status as historical evidence must be questioned and examined in detail, if we are to understand them as the contents of an archive.

When consulting an archive, a user will generally expect to view the original object. Archives are, after all, the warehouses of the past. However, with the advent of the digital age, this is not always the case. Digital archives allow users to consult materials from anywhere in the world, with digital facsimiles standing in for the originals. I believe that (printed) books act similarly to digital archives in this regard – they are information repositories, containing material of historical, evidentiary value. It is precisely this historical, evidentiary value that is to be the focus of this chapter. To answer the question of whether the selected family memoirs can be placed on an archival spectrum, they must constitute *records*: while it has already been established that the form of the book is conducive to this purpose, the historical objects that are reproduced within must prove to be of evidentiary value.

As Sontag notes, photographs are able to convey information in a way that text simply cannot, and so they are deserving of their own chapter. First, photography, other visual material, and their place within family memoirs will be discussed, followed by photography's role as historical evidence. The case studies themselves will then be examined as holders of historical evidence. This paper focuses on the printed editions of the books. These are objects that can and have been reproduced thousands upon thousands of times – the effect that this has on the photographs' status as historical evidence will be explored in dialogue with Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1935), as well as responses to this seminal essay.[162]

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[161] S. Sontag, 'Looking at War: Photography's view of devastation and death,' *The New Yorker*, 1 December 2002, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/12/09/looking-at-war> (26.6.23).
[162] W. Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' MIT, 1935, <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf> (10.8.23).

3.1. Photography and Imagery as Historical Evidence

Throughout her book *The Generation of Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch stresses the importance of photographs in the quest for postmemorial closure, however imperfect they may be. Hirsch argues that photographs can serve as 'points of memory,'[163] they are tools to strengthen the 'affective connection to the past.'[164] This affective connection is, in part, what makes photography so compelling and simultaneously problematic when attempting to understand the past. As was discussed in depth in Chapter 1, a viewer cannot help but project their own fantasies onto a given photograph, and this reaction may be amplified when one is considering the past of one's own family.

However, this issue must be considered beyond the familial viewer. While the creation of the family memoirs may have been driven in part by a personal attempt to find closure in the face of generational trauma (as discussed in Chapter 1), they are also meant for a wider, public audience. Inevitably, the audience will not have the same emotional relationship with the subject matter of the books and the subjects of the photographs. Additionally, it must be noted that the reasons for publication extend beyond education or idealism – they are *commercial* books, the products of an *industry* (as was discussed in the previous chapter). As such, economic interests are at play, and memoirs (especially memoirs about trauma) are profitable. In his book *Memoir: An Introduction*, Couser quotes a statistic claiming that memoir sales 'increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008.'[165] As Nilanjana Roy puts it in her article 'The persistence of the trauma memoir,' 'the human appetite for books about the misery of others is growing.'[166] Since its publication, *The Hare with the Amber Eyes* has sold over 1 million copies.[167] While the success of de Waal's book is certainly not the rule for every memoir, it is representative of the genre's increasing popularity. Couser writes: 'memoir now rivals fiction in popularity and exceeds it in cultural currency. According to various cultural commentators – critics, scholars, and reviewers – this is an age – if not *the age* – of memoir.'[168] While healing may be one aspect of the books' creation and publication, money is another that cannot be ignored.

Nevertheless, commercial popularity does not erase the potential scholarly benefits offered by the books' inclusion of photographs. In his book *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of*

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[163] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 61.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 3.
[166] N. Roy, 'The persistence of the trauma memoir.' *Financial Times*, 14 March 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/17c5848a-bfbb-40fb-b499-80eb771faab6> (26.6.23).
[167] R. Brooks, 'They are my fortune. I hate them.' *The Sunday Times*, 25 January 2015, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/they-are-my-fortune-i-hate-them-hddmjzljwr9>. (26.6.23).
[168] Couser, *Memoir*, p. 3.

Images as Historical Images, Peter Burke focuses on the issue of visual imagery as historical evidence. He believes that photographs and other images (such as woodcuts[169]) have been overlooked and undervalued by generations of historians, being used as 'mere illustrations'[170] instead of historical texts deserving of serious analysis. For Burke, the strength of the image lies in its ability to connect the viewer to the past in ways that purely textual objects simply cannot. 'They bring home to us what we may have known but did not take so seriously before. In short, images allow us to "imagine" the past more vividly.'[171] In this sense, Burke and Hirsch have come to similar conclusions – the (perceived) closeness a viewer feels with the past through photographs and images is both unique and important. Elizabeth Edwards describes photographs as 'history's Other'[172] – sources that are rarely scholarship's main focus, but rather left on the sidelines.

Projection by the viewer must be taken into account whenever one is regarding a historical object, as with any text. Here, one must pose the question of whether there is a single objective *truth* that can be uncovered, or if one must accept that there will always be multiple, subjective stories, occasionally represented in a single object, such as a photograph. Susan Sontag tackles the perceived objectivity of photography as a medium in her 2003 work on war photography, *Regarding the Pain of Others.*

> Photographs had the advantage of uniting two contradictory features. Their credentials of objectivity were inbuilt. Yet they always had, necessarily, a point of view. They were a record of the real – incontrovertible, as no verbal account, however impartial, could be – since a machine was doing the recording. And they bore witness to the real – since a person had been there to take them.[173]

Photographs are, as such, contradictory objects. They capture a moment that existed, that *was* at a certain point in time, but they are also saturated by the subjective. This has led to some debate about how photographs should be treated as historical sources – a debate from which Burke does not shy away: 'There is a continuing conflict between "positivists", who believe that images convey reliable information about the external world, and the sceptics or

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[169] P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: 2019), p. 23.
[170] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 12.
[171] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 17.
[172] E. Edwards, 'Thoughts on Photography and the Practice of History,' *The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History* (New York: 2018), p. 24.
[173] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 23.

structuralists who assert that they do not.'[174] In response, Burke presents the idea of 'degrees or modes of reliability.'[175] Essentially, in arguing for a spectrum of reliability, Burke is asking for the viewer to assume responsibility when analyzing visual evidence – like any other text, images must be read critically, and one must accept the reality that there is more than one possible interpretation. More often than not, there is no *correct* answer. Like Burke, Sontag does not consider the dual nature of photography to be a flaw, but rather the very aspect of the medium that makes it unique. 'This sleight of hand allows photographs to be both objective record and personal testimony, both a faithful copy or transcription of an actual moment of reality and an interpretation of that reality – a feat literature has long aspired to but could never attain in this literal sense.'[176] It is again possible to find a connection to Hirsch, who also explicitly recognizes the convoluted nature of such historical artifacts. 'Photographic documents […] bring the contradictions of the archives we have inherited into the open.'[177] While a viewer might long for an unambiguous, absolute *truth*, one must reconcile oneself to the reality that this does not exist. That photographs so perfectly encapsulate the tension of the struggle between what can and cannot be known is exactly what makes them so compelling. We cannot look away.

That neither images nor viewers are capable of objectivity is also discussed by Jennifer Evans in the book The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History. According to Evans, '[i]mages are anything but neutral reflections of the wider world or simple traces of a present past. They tell us "what is worth looking at" – that is, what is photogenic and worth capturing for posterity in the first place.'[178] This applies to every photograph that is depicted in each of the case studies – at some point, someone decided that the person or place depicted was of enough value that it deserved to be captured and preserved. Today, digital photography allows us to take an essentially infinite number of pictures, with little regard for how they will be developed, stored, or displayed. They can also be infinitely reproduced. This is not the case for photographs from before the digital turn and should be remembered when viewing historical photographs – to take and keep photographs required many conscious decisions.

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[174] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 225.
[175] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 226.
[176] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 23.
[177] Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, p. 68.
[178] J. Evans, 'Introduction,' in J. Evans, P. Betts, and S.L. Hoffmann (eds), *The Ethics of Seeing: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History* (New York: 2018), p. 4.

3.2. Case Studies: *Heimat* and *In Memory of Memory*

All of the chosen books offer commentary on the vast majority of the visual material presented. As mentioned previously, the works represent a full spectrum of graphic and visual integration – *Heimat,* a graphic memoir, represents one end of the spectrum, while *In Memory of Memory* resides on the other end, with only a single photograph at the end. *Letters to Camondo* and *The Hare with Amber Eyes* sit in the middle, interspersing images throughout the text.

The photographs and images are not presented in isolation, but within the context of a specific, carefully crafted narrative. The reader/viewer is not only processing the creators' projections (which have been consciously edited and presented to the public), but those of the original photographer (and perhaps also the original audience) as well as their own. In other words, it is not only the content of the photograph that must be taken into consideration, but also the selection, manipulation, and description. The user of the book is not seeing these images by chance, and that must be remembered when looking at each of the photos.

This can be clearly seen throughout *Heimat*. Krug combines photos with her own illustrations in a manner occasionally reminiscent of a photo album. One of the most poignant examples of this is in her treatment of two photographs of her father and uncle, both named Franz-Karl (her father having been named for his older brother, a soldier killed during World War II[179]). Her father grew up in the older Franz-Karl's shadow, an experience which led to his estrangement from his sister, and so to Krug's own distance from this side of her family. Part of the book is dedicated to Krug attempting to learn about her uncle, and so heal some of the trauma caused by his death.
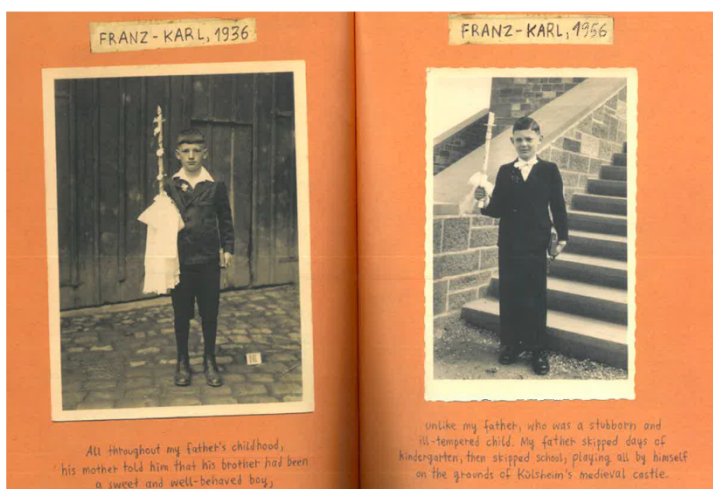

Fig. 2. The two Franz-Karls. Krug, *Heimat*, pp. 55-56.

On a double-page spread, Krug presents a picture of each Franz-Karl at his own First Communion. They are presented identically on opposite pages, separated by twenty years. The text below the images describes how their mother told Krug's father 'that his brother had been a sweet and well-behaved boy, unlike my father, who was a

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[179] Krug, *Heimat*, p. 52.

stubborn and ill-tempered child.'[180] The presentation of the photos reflects the mother's comparison of the boys. They are robbed of their individuality, one a (lesser) version of the other. It is important to note that this juxtaposition of the two images is made possible by the physical form of the codex. The user turns the page and is confronted with the double-page spread – the gutter between the two pages serves as a physical border between them, emphasizing the content they are carrying.

Krug goes one step further in visualizing this dynamic, layering the two photographs (a further advantage of both the printed medium and the manipulations made possible by digital technologies). 'Two photographs, placed on top of each other, match perfectly. Two arms, each holding a First Communion candle. Two arms, each holding a hymnbook. The new face that emerges looks directly at me.'[181] This is certainly not a neutral portrayal of the photographs. The text confirms what the viewer can see – they have been edited, the resulting image is not a reproduction of an existing original, but rather a new image all together – an experience facilitated by the printed medium. The previous example, showing the two pictures side-by-side, apparently uncropped (the white borders of both are visibly different), suggest a more faithful reproduction. However, the two depictions serve different purposes: the first conveys to the reader information not only about how the two boys looked, but how they were viewed by their mother. The second example is a narrative and artistic tool, evoking an emotional response from the reader/viewer, and Krug does not pretend that the manipulated image is a representation of an existing image. As such, both effectively aid in imparting historical information both about the subjects themselves and the perpetuation of unresolved trauma following wartime losses.

Heimat is the only graphic memoir amongst this paper's case studies. By definition of the genre, visual imagery is fundamental to graphic memoirs – there are no solid, unadorned text blocks within the book. *Heimat* belongs to a subgenre of comics and graphic novels, the graphic or comics memoir.[182] Their use of imagery is far different from more formally conventional books, as the author is both illustrating and explicitly taking creative liberties with incorporated images. 'Comics eschew the veneer of verisimilitude that supposedly infuses photography […] and prose with veracity, opting instead to generate a world purely created by the author and thereby incapable of genuine realism.'[183] Nevertheless, this lack of verisimilitude is one of the unique strengths of the genre. 'Likewise, memoir also is an art

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[180] Krug, *Heimat*, pp. 55-56.
[181] Krug, *Heimat,* p. 71.
[182] J.L. Schell, 'This is Who I Am: Hybridity and Materiality in Comics Memoir,' *The Oxford Handbook of Comic Book Studies* (Oxford: 2019), p. 257.
[183] Ibid.

form of tensions between the remembrance of the past and storytelling.'[184] As such, *Heimat* does not pretend to present *objective* truths. Rather, Krug's book illustrates how playful alterations and presentations of historical evidence can be beneficial in aiding a reader/user's understanding of a given context. *Heimat* is an excellent example of how the form of the printed book can be used to facilitate this process, such as through the use of the book gutter to separate and juxtapose the photos of the two Franz-Karls. A digital version of the same pages would lack this physical divide.

In Memory of Memory serves as another particularly interesting example, considering almost no images are shown. Stepanova does not present the reader with any visual material (with the exception of the final page), but with her own descriptions of the objects. As such, the reader cannot form their own opinion on any of the images but must rely on what information Stepanova is willing to give.

This is best illustrated in the chapter *A Handful of Photographs*.[185] The section is entirely composed of numbered descriptions of photographs, with none visually presented to the reader. The descriptions themselves vary in terms of detail – some are described in great detail (both in terms of content of the photograph and the state of the actual object), while others are presented vaguely, almost ethereally. Most are a combination of the two. For example, the entry for number six begins as follows:

> A little photograph, old, and it looks even older than it is, because it's so faded. On the lower edge, printed in pink: CHERSON and B. WINEERT. It looks like the mid-1870s, a bride stands, immovable as an upturned cup on a tablecloth, her wedding dress falls in a triangle of thick material around her, a cliff of fabric descending from her stomach to the ground, buttons all aligned.[186]

The reader's only impression is the one Stepanova wants them to have, to the extent to which that can be controlled. There is no image onto which the reader can project. The woman in the photo is not named in the passage. Nevertheless, with the information provided, the reader is able to imagine holding the picture, one is invited to join in the experience of seeing the image for the first time, with no family history coloring the interaction. As the passage

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[184] Ibid.
[185] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, pp. 37-49.
[186] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 40.

continues, Stepanova names a second figure in the photograph, her great-great-grandfather Leonty Liberman.[187] The illusion is broken, the narrator knows much more than the reader.

However, this presentation is problematic when considering the photographs as historical evidence. The most obvious reason is, of course, that there is no image to which a user can refer. They must trust Stepanova's description of the image, which demands an immense amount of trust from the user. This trust does not just apply to the content of the photographs, but their very existence. There is no way to prove that any of the images actually exist. The photos are from Stepanova's private family archive, and there is no mention of her donating any to a publicly accessibly institution. The same is true of the transcriptions Stepanova provides – we must choose to believe they are real. While this may be an interesting creative choice, it makes it impossible to use the described material as historical evidence. However, the book is marketed as a work of non-fiction, which certainly helps to lend credibility to its content. For example, the UK publishing house Fitzcarraldo Editions has made a bold choice in the design of their covers, coding their books by color – 'uniform blue for fiction and white for non-fiction.'[188] *In Memory of Memory* is published by Fitzcarraldo with a white cover.[189] While *In Memory of Memory* is both a family memoir and a work of postmemory, its content is of less value as an unconventional archive than the other three case studies. It does contain many transcriptions (and a single photograph) and so perhaps could be seen to reside somewhere along the archival continuum, but far from Krug and De Waal's works.

Nevertheless, Stepanova's choice to not publicly share the images she so intimately describes leads to a further aspect of the conversation around viewing and interpreting historical images – ethics. Throughout her book, Stepanova continuously thematizes the ethical problem of *regarding* the dead in the photographs. 'We look at the photographs of our ancestors as we might look at a human zoo, wild beasts whose lives lie out of sight, deep within the enclosure.'[190] This is a damning statement, accusing the viewership of dehumanizing those who only continue to exist in photographs. Considering that she herself is a part of this viewership and has gone to great lengths to write and publish a book about exactly those people, it is also somewhat puzzling. O'Donoghue would perhaps pose the

[187] Ibid.
[188] A. Cafolla, 'Four Nobels and counting: Fitzcarraldo, the little publisher that could,' *The Guardian*, 10 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/oct/10/four-nobels-and-counting-fitzcarraldo-the-little-publisher-that-could> (4.8.23).
[189] Fitzcarraldo Editions, 'In Memory of Memory', <https://fitzcarraldoeditions.com/books/in-memory-of-memory> (4.8.23).
[190] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 321.

question of whether this is an example of 'postmemory as activism'[191] rather than a personal (albeit public) reckoning with one's past, considering that the photos themselves are not shared. Nonetheless, this statement forces the viewer to ask themselves how they are perceiving the subjects in the photographs – are they seeing people, with full internal and external lives, that are impossible to fully know? Or is this just an exercise in voyeuristic entertainment? According to Sontag, this is an aspect of viewership that cannot be avoided. 'The rest of us are voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be.'[192] I agree with Sontag's view on the subject. Although there is much to be learned from archival material, we as users are still leafing through what was once private correspondence or a diary entry without permission from the original owners. As the popularity of the books has shown, the value of the material is also financial. Stepanova sums up the process with cynical accuracy: 'this parasitical relationship with the dead is a profitable industry.'[193]

The other three case studies provide a wealth of photographic material for the viewer. However, to claim that this is being done purely for profit would be unfair. Chapter 1 discussed the generational, inherited pain that was a driving force for Stepanova, Krug, and de Waal. They are not *mining* their families without reason – by sharing their ancestors' stories, and the objects that have survived them, they are contributing to a shared, collective memory of the Holocaust, as well as the effects that the tragedy continues to have on living descendants today. In order to attempt to confront the immense loss suffered during the Holocaust, anonymous numbers are not sufficient. 'Thus personal narratives, individual stories of lost family members, become a way into the enormity of the historical reality of the Shoah.'[194] In releasing personal, family narratives and images to the public, each of these authors is contributing to the collective, cultural processing, mourning, and understanding of the Holocaust – this is something far more complex than mere voyeurism. This is evidence.

3.3. Photographs in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

When working with historical evidence, it is often important for researchers to handle the original objects. Their size, weight, and texture can carry information that cannot be gleaned from reproductions or facsimiles. Following Walter Benjamin and his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' the original objects possess an *aura* that is impossible to replicate.

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[191] O'Donoghue, 'Postmemory as Trauma?,' n. pag., (1.8.23).
[192] Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p. 38.
[193] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 107.
[194] V. Aarons and A.L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Evanston: 2017), p. 12.

However, this has been actively debated since the publication of Benjamin's work. While Benjamin saw mechanical reproduction as a threat, others have argued that it is not only not a new phenomenon, but also a potentially beneficial one. Burke argues that other forms of reproducible imagery, such as woodcuts, are not less valuable simply because other versions of the same image exist.[195] As such, it is important to distinguish between media that are meant to be distributed as multiple copies and those that are conceived as unique, individual objects. In his article 'Copies and Facsimiles,' Mats Dahlström explores the difference between the two: 'Monoform artworks consist of a unique and single item, such as da Vinci's Mona Lisa. Polyform works consist of a set of items that claim to be identical, such as the many copies of Graham Green's Our Man in Havana.'[196] Dahlström goes on to discuss the benefit brought about by the existence of copies, drawing on the work of Bruno Latour and Adam Lowe: 'So rather than draining a work of art of its aura or originality, perhaps the very abundance, or copia, of copies is what consolidates the aura of the work and in the end assures its survival.'[197]

Survival is the operative term. If multiple versions of the same photograph, the same text exist, the chances that at least one copy will be preserved for future generations are greatly increased. The printing and publishing of family photos within a book certainly increases the odds of those photos surviving, the stories of the people portrayed being remembered. Additionally, when discussing the aura of the photographs, printed books have the advantage of being made of the same material as the photographs – paper. This closes some of the distance between whichever copy of the photo was used as the *original* and the versions that appear in the books. 'The photograph in a book is, obviously, the image of an image. But since it is, to begin with, a printed, smooth object, a photograph loses much less of its essential quality when reproduced in a book than a painting does.'[198]

The illustrated edition of *The Hare with Amber Eyes* bridges this distance even further. Unlike the original, this edition is printed on a heavy, glossy paper that more closely resembles photographic paper. Not only are the images presented on a more suitable medium, but the reader's tactile experience is elevated, and one may feel as though one were holding the actual photographs. In terms of survival, creating new versions of the book could encourage collection (as though one were collecting netsuke). The more copies are circulated and acquired, the higher the chances of survival for the images.

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[195] Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 23.
[196] M. Dahlström, 'Copies and Facsimilies,' *International Journal of Digitial Humanities* (1, 2019), p. 196.
[197] Dahlström, 'Copies and Facsimiles,' p. 197.
[198] S. Sontag, *On Photography* (London: 2019 [1979]), p .3.

There are certainly voices that argue the opposite side – Chiel van der Akker, for instance, emphasizes the importance of the individual nature of the original object in comparison to its copies. 'Since the reproduction is not the work itself, the work's history cannot be based on this particular reproduction, for that history depends on the unique work of which it is a reproduction.'[199] Van der Akker also views polyform media rather negatively, stating that such work has resulted in less intense relationships between said media and viewers. 'Contemplation is exchanged for reception, concentration for distraction (Zerstreuung) […].'[200] However, a monoform image in any form does not guarantee a receptive audience. To take the time to read and interact with a longform text – such as a book and the images it contains – requires much time and concentration. A reader must consciously take the decision to consume the text, thus the text has a receptive audience.

A further focus of van der Akker's article is the tradition and ritual that culminates in the creation of artworks.[201]

> If the new technologies of mechanical reproduction "liberate" the artwork from its remote dependence on tradition and ritual as Benjamin claims, and this remote dependence comes into view because of a historicising gaze which makes us aware of the work's authenticity and invests it with its aura, then the work of art designed for reproducibility makes this historicising gaze superfluous.[202]

While the photographs and other images may be reprinted often, they facilitate another ritual that is vital in the act of historicizing – remembering. Collective recollection and storytelling are among our most primal traditions. To sit with family and remember together, pass on stories to the next generation, is an act that most have experienced at least once. Postmemorial memoirs are, in essence, performing this ritual on a larger scale. By printing and distributing copies of the books, the readership/viewership is invited to join in the authors around the proverbial fire and hear stories about the past and remember the dead. Considering the success

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[199] C. Van der Akker, 'Benjamin, the Image and the End of History,' *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* (3:1, 2016), p. 44.
[200] Van der Akker, 'Benjamin, the Image and the End of History,' p. 47.
[201] While Benjamin's essay (and van der Akker's article) focuses on works of art, this can be extended to family photographs. The original photographer inevitably made conscious choices before choosing to moment to press the shutter, and then further decisions were made in the curation and display of the photos. As such, the aesthetic and creative aspects of these processes are comparable to the making of art.
[202] Van der Akker, 'Benjamin, the Image and the End of History,' p. 50.

of de Waal's books and *Heimat* (named one of the best books of 2018 by both the *Guardian* and the *New York Times*[203]), the stories have been passed on.

As such, survival of the material is only one of the advantages of reproduction – another is reach. When an image is reproduced, it will inevitably be seen by many more people than if it were left uncopied, as described above. Only some of Edmund de Waal's ancestors were public figures and would be known to others outside of his family. The vast majority of the other people discussed throughout the books would have likely been forgotten had these books never been published. As such, new sources were made not only known but accessible by the books' publication. Essentially, some of the *aura* is exchanged for *access*.

3.4. Use of Images and Photographs in the Selected Case Studies

It has now been established that photographs, as well as reproductions of photographs, can be used as historical evidence, and the books that hold them can be considered part of the archival continuum. As such, readers hold archives of historical relevance that can be consulted and used as evidence. This section shall discuss the case studies specifically.

Edmund de Waal takes an entirely different approach to the integration of photographs than Nora Krug or Maria Stepanova – namely, a more traditional one. In contrast to *Heimat*, both *Letters to Camondo* and *The Hare with Amber Eyes* consist of text blocks interspersed with images that correspond to the content of the text. However, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* shall be the focus of the following section, as there are two editions of the work that merit discussion – the original and the illustrated editions of the book.

First, the images presented in the original version of the *Hare* are all presented in a similar fashion – in black and white and cropped to a certain degree. While this is not stated explicitly in the text, it can be assumed, as each image (regardless of what sort of object is being shown) has either been given an identical frame or is shown with perfectly rectangular, untextured edges. All have italicized subtitles below them.

It is clear that none of the images are purely decorative, as most are discussed in the text, some quite extensively. For example, de Waal presents a photo of his great-grandmother, Emmy, on a Vienna street in 1906. The subtitle itself is quite minimal ('Emmy and the Archduke, Vienna, 1906'[204]), but de Waal includes a much longer passage describing the photo. His description is quite visual, focusing on her clothing while also adding details about

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[203] The Guardian Bookshop, 'Heimat: A German Family Album', <https://guardianbookshop.com/heimat-9780141980102> (11.7.23).
[204] De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 159.

her toilette. 'And no scent; she does not wear it.'[205] In this way, de Waal's textual treatment of his family photos could be compared to that of Stepanova. Both go into great detail regarding the content of the photographs, while also incorporating their own projections. At the beginning of the passage, de Waal states that 'Emmy dresses to go out.'[206] While it is possible to class certain type of historical clothing based on occasion, there is no discussion of that in the text. It is presented as de Waal's interpretation of the clothing. Nevertheless, de Waal presents the photograph while Stepanova does not. The viewer is able to form their own opinion of the material while taking de Waal's into account.

In terms of the textual content of the two versions, there is no difference. What distinguishes them is paratextual and material. As the word suggests, the illustrated edition places more emphasis on the visual and contains more images than the initially published work. The images are also printed in color rather than black and white. As such, the reader/viewer is presented with reproductions of photographs that are more faithful to the originals. In this case, there is a certain similarity with *Heimat* – the material presentation can help to reduce the (perceived) distance between the reader and the presented objects. This is apparent even when looking at the black and white photographs in the illustrated edition. As can be seen in the examples below, the warmth and subtle color differences of the aged, sepia photos is maintained. The resolution of the images is also much higher in the illustrated edition than the original. Additionally, the edges are uncropped – one is given the impression of the object as a whole, rather than a selected part.

The books themselves have been formatted differently – the illustrated edition is larger than the original.[207] Larger pages allow for larger images that are easier for the user to view. Combined with the more faithful coloring and higher resolution, this leads to an interaction between user and object that more closely mimics the interaction with the original object. Furthermore, revisiting Sontag's observation concerning the material similarity between a printed book page and a photograph (paper), the illustrated edition comes even closer than the original, as it is printed on a glossy paper. A similar observation can be made of *Letters to Camondo* – the entirety of the book is printed on a sturdy, glossy paper, with each image being given its own page. The size of each image is also reminiscent of a standard photograph. This haptically suggests a photograph, bridging the gap between original and reproduction as much as possible.

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[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Compare Fig. 1, p. 25.

It was this experience that de Waal wanted to create with the illustrated edition. In 'The hare marches on,' an article by de Waal for the Sunday Times, he describes his fascination with books containing various visual, archival material.

> These are bits of ephemera, and that is their beauty. These fugitive notes, scraps of thinking, are not thrown away, but given space and dignity […] These have a different presence: they feel like they have been found and slipped into the book, almost inconsequential markers from a journey. They don't illustrate his books, they add a different texture to them, slow you down in a completely new way. And that has been the rubric for this new edition of The Hare with the Amber Eyes.[208]

In a further comparison with Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory* often thematizes the intrusive and voyeuristic nature of observing these images, as previously discussed. De Waal also acknowledges this aspect of the exercise but celebrates the intrusion rather than criticizes it. 'And, though this sometimes feels like a trespass over some boundary of privacy, I want this feeling of real encounter and of surprise to come alive through the use of images in this new edition. I want the reader to feel they can also shake this book.'[209] De Waal aimed to recreate the intimacy of the encounter with the photographs and the people they depict.

A further contrast between the two editions is the manner in which the photos are labeled. As stated above, the original edition places the descriptions in subtitles below the image. In the illustrated edition, this information has been placed in a list of illustrations at the end of the book. This is a highly significant difference, and contributed directly to the experience de Waal wanted the new edition to facilitate. The entirety of the photos' descriptions is now within the main text block and the list of illustrations provides sources for every image shown throughout the book. As such, there is no other paratext besides the images that can distract from the viewing experience. By leaving the photos unlabeled, the book conveys an almost scrapbook-like impression. It allows for an archival sensation – the illusion of discovery, rather than the clearly structured and curated format of the original edition.

The information has not been lost, simply hidden somewhat. The illustrated edition contains a list of illustrations. There is no such bibliographic data in the original *Hare with Amber Eyes*. In terms of considering the photographs as historical evidence, the inclusion of

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[208] E. De Waal, 'The hare marches on,' Sunday Times, 6 Novemeber 2011, <https://global-factiva-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/ga/default.aspx?page_driver=> (11.7.23).
[209] Ibid.

sources increases the trustworthiness of the material – if needs be, the original objects can be found and consulted, the steps of de Waal's process can be traced.

Earlier in this chapter, the subject of *survival* of the archival family photographs was discussed. Following Dahlström, the reproduction of the objects is an important part of increasing their odds of survival. De Waal's memoir has certainly been reproduced quite a lot. A New York Times bestseller, the book has since become '[a] literary phenomenon, translated into more than 30 languages.'[210] It has won multiple awards and inspired a 2021 exhibition of the netsuke and other objects central to the book at New York's Jewish Museum.[211] The German translation was selected as the book of the year for Vienna's 2021 *Eine Stadt. Ein Buch* initiative (for which 100,000 copies of a book are printed and gifted free of charge throughout the city).[212] At the time of writing, the book has over 54,000 ratings on Goodreads.[213] In short, *The Hare with the Amber Eyes* has been well-received, both critically and commercially. It is widely circulated in one form or another. As such, the photographic material contained in the book has been (and continues to be) exposed to an immense audience, the vast majority of whom would likely have never come into contact with the material otherwise. The material is not only surviving – it is *accessible*.

3.5. Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, the evidentiary value of photographs reproduced within postmemorial family memoirs has been established. That the photographs are reproductions is not to their detriment, but rather, in opposition to Benjamin, a strength. Reproduction aids in both the continuing survival and accessibility of the material.

The stories and materials that are presented within are able to be accessed and viewed by a far greater audience than those held within conventional archives. The great commercial successes of books such as *The Hare with Amber Eyes* and *Heimat* prove that the audience is there, a readership exists. They are exemplary of the growth of the genre described by those such as Couser. As such, the materials *survive*. That the photographs are presented within

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[210] C. McGee, 'Elizabeth Diller Is Retelling Edmund de Waal's Story – and Her Own,' *The New York* Times, 17 October 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/17/arts/design/hare-with-amber-eyes-jewish-museum.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article> (11.7.2023).

[211] The Jewish Museum, 'Exhibition Tells the Story of the Ephrussi Family, Celebrated in the Bestsellign Memoir "The Hare with Amber Eyes" by Edmund de Waal,' 15 November 2021, <https://thejewishmuseum.org/press/press-release/the-hare-with-amber-eyes-press-release-november-17-2021> (11.7.23).

[212] echo event ges.m.b.h., '100.000 Gratisbücher', <https://einestadteinbuch.at/eine-stadt-ein-buch-archiv/> (11.7.23).

[213] Goodreads, 'The Hare with Amber Eyes', <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7821828-the-hare-with-amber-eyes?ac=1&from_search=true&qid=MbNwPRPkzy&rank=1> (11.7.23).

memoirs offers them a great advantage over those described through metadata in conventional archives: they are placed within a guided narrative that gives them historical and personal context. The navigation of a conventional archive requires a certain amount of background knowledge and training that is not required when reading commercial publications.

Additionally, printed books offer a haptic advantage over other formats, such as digital facsimiles – they are made of paper. The paper (in particular the glossy paper on which the illustrated *Hare with Amber Eyes* is printed) suggests the original photographs in a way that an image on a screen cannot. The user is able to feel closer to the material. As such, both the photographs themselves and the manner of their presentation support the claims made in the previous sections of this paper: the family memoirs deserve to be regarded as part of the archival continuum. They are examples of unconventional archives.

Conclusion

The twentieth century saw one of humankind's greatest atrocities committed on European soil. Two generations later, the traumas of the Holocaust are still being felt by the descendants of victims, survivors, and perpetrators. It now includes attempts by family members to confront their own families' personal responses and/or their involvement, reconcile with this past, fill in the gaps, and find answers in contexts often characterized by silence and suppression. One of the manifestations of these attempts is the emergence of the family memoir. The case studies selected for this paper – *Letters to Camondo, The Hare with Amber Eyes, In Memory of Memory*, and *Heimat* – are all not only examples of family memoirs, but those that incorporate family archives. In that, as this thesis has hypothesized, they have *become* archives in themselves.

That many of these documents have survived the turmoil of the last century is almost miraculous. 'In contemporary Europe, with its barely healed wounds, black holes, and traces of displacement, a well-preserved family archive is a rarity.'[214] On account of such fragmentation, the family archives that have been included in the books are unable to tell the whole story of their original owners, and so the authors each embarked on their own journeys to attempt to piece together as much of the past as possible – at least one version of it. This type of journey, as discussed in Chapter 1, is described by Marianne Hirsch to be one motivated by *postmemory* – the memories and traumas that continue to be carried by the generations *after* a major tragedy. The *third generation* that is spearheading attempts to reconstruct the past and retrace the steps of their forbears seeks to, finally, understand the burden that they have been carrying. This is an important development in overarching efforts to coming to terms with the Holocaust, and so the recordings thereof must be treated with the appropriate respect.

I had posed the question of whether published memoirs could be considered a form of archive, able to be placed on the archival continuum. Considering the nature of their content (both narrative and visual), the manner in which said content is presented, and the unique combination of tactile experience and accessibility offered by the physical, paper book, I argue that they can indeed be considered archival in terms or process and content, albeit to varying degrees (*Heimat* and *The Hare with Amber Eyes* both proving to be stronger examples of this phenomenon, in contrast to *Letters to Camondo* and *In Memory of Memory*). Nevertheless, despite their differences, all have proven to be important manifestations of both

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[214] Stepanova, *In Memory of Memory*, p. 170.

personal and collective memory – a highly important aspect of any archive. Of course, this paper focused exclusively on the paper editions of the case studies. Interactions with digital or audio versions of the books were not considered and are beyond the scope of this present paper. However, these would certainly be topics worthy of future study. For example, *Heimat*, an intensely visual graphic work, exists in audio form:[215] an interrogation of how this medium affects the listeners' interaction with the archival material presented would certainly be of interest.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, archival scholarship on the expansion of the archive has been growing for decades. Scholars such as Millar, Bastian, and Cook all recognize the benefits of opening the gates to others participating in memory preservation beyond professional archivists. As such, published family memoirs deserve to be appreciated for their archival, memorial functions. This is not to say that each example of a family memoir will serve that function to the same extent (the variety within the genre will inevitably lead to different results). The comparison between *Heimat* and *In Memory of Memory* illustrated this point.

Nevertheless, the paper books are accessible and durable objects that have the potential to preserve and share memory to audiences far beyond those of institutional archives. To reference O'Donoghue once more, they have the ability to serve both artistic and activist functions as memory objects – objects that can inspire further thought, discussion, and remembrance.

The combination of direct access to primary information, contextualization, and verifiable historical facts lead to the conclusion that family memoirs have a place on the archival continuum. As such, it has been argued that these family memoirs, with their contents and forms of presentation, could indeed be considered a different, yet comparable container to traditional archives, representing a form of an *unconventional archive*.

Over the course of writing, simply by reading (and reflecting on) the materials presented in the books, I have spent many hours in the company of the authors and their families. I have read and reread their names, learned their stories, and mourned their losses. I did not need to hold the original letter or photograph in my hand to feel awe or tenderness or pain – the *aura* was present within the pages of the books, in the words of the descendants. Reproduction did not rob these stories of anything but allowed me to experience them. In

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[215] Audible, 'Nora Krug', <https://www.audible.com/author/Nora-Krug/B07FNYZ5QS?overrideBaseCountry=true&ipRedirectOverride=true&pf_rd_p=d32cf1ba-2915-4e25-a618-8e8bb49fd3b3&pf_rd_r=PVJSNTTAN2B21Y46JMNH&pageLoadId=w44W3M83TC1Vvi70&creativeId=809adf1b-ce0b-468d-a0d4-a36479a6c0c0> (3.8.23).

creating these books, the authors created what Moïse de Camondo did in founding his museum: 'You have made a space to talk to the dead, to welcome them in.'[216]

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[216] De Waal, *Letters to Camondo*, p. 112.

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