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Media Representation and Affective Intermediality in *Der Tote im Bunker* and *Vielleicht Esther*

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Abstract. This essay presents some results of the author's current research about the intersections between intermediality and constructivist/constructionist branches of psychology (Kelly 1992; Mascolo and Mancuso 1990), which might prove productive for the study of the representation of emotions in literature. Although with some significant differences, these schools suggest that emotions are at least partly, cultural constructs that aggregate physiological and cultural elements. Some of these theoreticians also suggest that people can experience a discrepancy between what they feel and what they are culturally supposed to feel, and proceed to "work" on their emotions until they achieve the target state. The author's hypothesis is that the insertion of media representation in prose texts might point to the existence of affective discrepancies and suggest that emotion work is needed in order to achieve a target emotional state. While sometimes "changing" the medium is a successful operation in this sense, in other instances it increases the indeterminacy of the target emotion, especially when we deal with morally ambiguous characters with whom the narrator must negotiate an affective relationship, and which might give rise to an uncanny feeling of ambivalence. The author illustrates this hypothesis while reading two family memoirs that deal with the inheritance of the Second World War, and the URSS, respectively, Martin Pollack's *Der Tote im Bunker* (*The Dead Man in the Bunker*, 2004) and Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (*Maybe Esther*, 2014), but also suggests that this mechanism is not limited to the use of photographs in memoirs.

Keywords: media representation, emotions, memory studies, uncanny.

This article focuses on the emotional impact that photographs of dead relatives, entangled in the events of the 20th century, are described to have in two memoirs, Martin Pollack's *Der Tote im Bunker* (2004) and Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther* (2014). The fundamental thesis I propose is that these pictures evoke mixed emotions that the beholder has to work through in order to establish

their role with regard to morally problematic ancestors. Marianne Hirsch claims that, for writers belonging to the so-called second generation (the sons and daughters of the people who were implicated in WWII), photographs can act as "screens on which we project present or timeless needs and desires and which thus mask other images and other concerns" (2008, 120). She also underscores the bodily, affective components of images, and of sight, quoting Jill Bennet's argument that "images have the capacity to address the spectator's own bodily memory; to touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees the event, drawn into the image through a process of affective contagion. […] Bodily response thus precedes the inscription of narrative, or moral emotion of empathy" (Hirsch 2008, 117). Two different impulses emerge in these different passages of Hirsch's essay: a projective, observer-driven one, in which the observer projects their needs upon a picture, and a passive moment, in which the image acts on the observer by eliciting a bodily response that precedes narrative interpretations and moral emotions. In this essay, I will turn to other branches of the cognitive sciences to focus on how interpretive frames can shape emotional relationships with, and embodied reactions to, photographs. Moreover, I will make hypotheses on how the implied authors expect the photographs to affect readers. The pictures are inserted by the authors in texts that aim at publication and diffusion, and therefore also have communicative, not only self-analytical, purposes.

In *The Generation of Post-Memory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch suggests that archival images can "function as 'points of memory' that tell us more about our own needs and desires, our own fantasies and fears, than about the past to which they supposedly bear witness" (Hirsch 2012, 22). They recount their own encounter with a photo of Hirsch's parents taken in 1943, in which the young couple is seemingly happy and smiling, despite being Holocaust survivors, probably still afraid for their lives and grieving their loved ones. In a chapter in this book, Hirsch and co-author, Leo Spitzer try to make out whether the blur on the father's lapel is a David star, which would solve the unsettling effect that this "happy" picture taken in dire times has upon them, the observers, by making the direness visible. Eventually accepting that they will never be able to make out whether the blur is a star or not, they acknowledge that "this picture's indexicality is more performative – based on the viewer's needs and desires – than factual" (Hirsch 2012, 61). Pictures, they proceed to argue, can elicit "feelings disproportionate to what the pictures can, in fact, support" (Hirsch 2012, 67). They illustrate this conclusion on a novel featuring descendants of German perpetrators (Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room*,

in which the grandson of an SS officer, Micha, looks with frustration for proof of her father's guilt in photographs, Hirsch 2012, 65–67), too. In this essay, I will examine two instances in which pictures elicit feelings, as the writers describe them, that these images cannot offer solid ground for, or help unravel and stabilize. I will argue that theoretical tools developed in intermediality can be useful for the study of image/text relationships of this emotionally-laden kind. Lastly, I will suggest that the concept of the uncanny can be used to describe the feeling of displacement originating from the co-presence of different interpretive frames for the same image.

The two pictures I will discuss both portray bodies. The photograph has typically been associated, in memory studies, with a false promise of presence, that is doomed to be disattended, since the moment portrayed is ended, irretrievable, and the person unavailable (see, for example, Assmann, 2002; Hirsch, 2008; Albertazzi, 2010). The body is also typically supposed to elicit an affective response, something that in turn speaks to the "apodictic" value of affective memories: "These cannot be corrected because they arise and fall with the intensity of the lived relationship, of the immediate impression. If one abandons the latter, in fact one no longer has anything" (Assman 2002, 283; my translation). The two case studies proposed here explore the possibility that this lived relationship elicits discording emotions that call for re-elaboration in the textual apparatus.

Der Tote im Bunker (The Dead Man in the Bunker)

Martin Pollack's book recounts his struggles to reconstruct the story of his father, Gerhard Bast. Bast was a Gestapo officer and SS man. Some of Pollack's other relatives were also active party members, even when the Nazi party was illegal in Austria, the country where Pollack's family comes from. Pollack's biological father fled the Allies after the capitulation of Nazi Germany and died in 1946 at the hands of a *passeur* as he was trying to flee, under a false name, from Italy to Austria, and he is the titular dead man whose body was found hidden in a dismissed bunker on the Brenner pass. In Pollack's book, therefore, the stories that are reconstructed are stories of perpetrators, or at least people who were "implicated" (Rothberg, 2019) in the Nazi regime. We observe the author trying to figure out what his father's crimes were, but also to understand why, and how, the surviving members of his family mostly retained the same political orientation after the war. Pollack also retraces the development of his own passion for Eastern

European culture, which eventually causes a painful break with his family, occasioned by his grandmother's anti-Semitism and anti-Slavic racism.

Ekphrastic descriptions of old photographs of the family abound in the book: in some, but not all, of the editions these pictures are also inserted.[1] The pictures that pose Pollack fewer hermeneutic problems are those that clearly signal what is wrong in his family's ideological makeup. For example, the photograph of his father as a small child holding a real shotgun is inserted by Pollack in the wider frame of his family's love for weapons and hunting, which Pollack retrospectively connects, under the sign of dedication to cultivating violent masculinity, with their membership in the Nazi party. The photographic portraits of his father and of his grandfather, too, do not pose great challenges to the narrator's interpretive acts because of the scars they bear on their faces. Both men had been part of university fraternities while studying law at the University of Graz and they got facial scars from duelling. The fraternities were instrumental in the diffusion of Nazi politics at the University of Graz, so the scars come to confirm their implication in the regime. These pictures perform for the narrator what Georges Didi-Huberman (2003) describes as the photograph's promise of staging the visible signs of whatever the represented subject's truth is. Talking about the hysteric women "treated" by Charcot at the Salpêtrière hospital, Didi-Huberman argues that the women's photographs invited the expectation of bringing to sight the unquestionable signs of madness, which were often either staged by photographer, doctor, and inmate, or dependent on the effect of the indications contained in the caption of the pictures on the spectator. The pretense to the staging of a univocal sign made readable with absolute certainty by Charcot's "clinical gaze" is considered by Didi–Huberman to be a violent reduction of the many possible ways in which a symptom can be read.[2] In *Der Tote im Bunker*, what the narrator is asking of the pictures is that they show him the unquestionable sign of evil.

The pictures that are hard for him to decode are those in which these clear signs of evil are absent. Looking at a picture of his parents smiling at each other

1 For the German text, I refer to Pollack (2004), while I have seen the photographs in the latest Italian edition of Pollack's work, published by Keller in 2018. I have contacted Keller to inquire where they had acquired the photographs, whether from the author or a different German edition, but I have not received an answer.

2 "He [Charcot] was sparing with words, but so efficient; in retrospect, he seems to have been the great director of symptoms that, in return, spoke to him of their own accord. And in this silent dramaturgy, the symptom became sign: it seems that it was enough for Charcot to 'order the patient to move' or to call for a certain second or third patient to come to his side—this was enough to transfigure the visibility of the summoning of the patients into the visibility of explanation: a sign. A sign, that is, the temporal circumscription of the changeable, lacunal cryptography of the symptom." (Didi-Huberman 2003, 23.)

in occupied Slovenia in 1942, at a time when his father had already participated in the execution of several political prisoners in Münster, Pollack asks himself a series of questions: "Did she ask him about his job, did she want details, or did she prefer to keep it in the dark? Did she suspect what her lover did, what his job was? I don't believe it [...]. She probably didn't want to know too much about Münster either. I can't remember ever hearing the name of this town from her. On the other hand, I hadn't suspected that she had ever been to Gottschee/Kocevje – until I found the pictures in which the two of them are standing in a meadow and smiling at each other" (my translation).[3]

For the narrator, the picture becomes a sign of the possible betrayal of the bond of trust with his mother. The parents' apparent lightheartedness is hard to interpret, especially in that environment. Gottschee/Kocevje was in occupied Slovenia, a *Banditenland*, theatre of heavy fighting between the Germans and the partisans. How could the parents have a permit to vacation there? Could the mother really occupy that space without knowing what was going on? But despite these clues, there is no clear sign of evil here, and therefore Pollack does not know how to feel about this photograph, he does not know what to make of his parents' exchange of loving smiles.

The difficulty here, the reason for this uncanny feeling, is not only a matter of lack of information. Pollack's doubts as to the mother's conscious implication cannot be limited to Kocevje, 1942: and there can be no doubt as to her wider implication in the Nazi regime at the time that Pollack is writing. The difficulty the narrator is facing is an emotional one, about recognizing the fact that his mother was both a Nazi and a loving mother at the same time. My hypothesis is that Pollack employs photographs or ekphrastic descriptions of photographs as indicators of a breach in his narrative sense-making operation – I am following Meretoja in considering memory as "a mode of sense-making that is mediated by cultural narrative models" (2021, 25) – and therefore as an encouragement to do "emotion work" for coming to terms with this breach, a process that is then described in the textual section. A useful concept to understand this process is that of "mnemonic imagination" (Keightley and Pickering, 2012). According

3 "Hat sie ihn nach seiner Tätigkeit gefragt, wollte sie Einzelheiten hören, oder zog sie es vor, das im dunkeln zu lassen? Hat sie gehant, was ihr Geliebter machte, was zu seinen Aufgaben gehörte? Ich glaube nicht daran [...] Wahrscheinlich wollte sie auch uber Münster nicht allzuviel wissen. Ich kann mich nicht erinnern, jemals von ihr den Namen dieser Stadt gehort zu haben. Andererseits hatte ich auch nicht geahnt, dass sie einmal in Gottschee/Kocevje gewesen war – bis ich die Bilder fand, auf denen die beiden auf einer Wiese stehen und einander beliebt anlachen (Pollack 2006, 157–158).

to Keightley and Pickering, memory and imagination are not rigidly divided, but they interact as individuals think back upon the past while trying to forge narratives that comprise the construction of a future-oriented sense of self: "the remembering subject engages imaginatively with what is retained from the past and, moving across time, continuously rearranges the hotchpotch of experience into relatively coherent narrative structures, the varied elements of what is carried forward being given meaning by becoming emplotted into a discernible sequential pattern. It is that pattern which is central to the definition of who we are and how we have changed" (2012, 43). These acts of reflection sometimes involve media products, such as photographs or music, in various ways, explored by the authors in different works (Keightley and Pickering, 2015; 2017). Concerning the two case studies discussed in this article, we will observe the mnemonic imagination at work, as it entails reflecting on some pictures of family members: the special focus of this article will be on emotions, on the way that "emotion work" is involved in practices of sense-making. Hirsch and Spitzer talk about "reparative reading," quoting Sedgwick (2006), to indicate ways of reading that think "historical experiences in relation to one another to see what vantage points they might share or offer each other for confronting the past without allowing its tragic dimensions to overwhelm our imagination in the present and the future" (Hirsch 2012, 24). In the next pages, I will try to build a theoretical grid to focus on what exactly this sort of reading might entail especially from an emotional point of view, and the reasons that can make them fail, or succeed.

Emotion Work, Emotional States, Situated Conceptualizations

"Emotion work" is a concept coined by sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, who codified it extensively in her book, *The Managed Heart*, first published in 1982. Referring to the Stanislavsky method of acting, Hochschild claims that people can resort to a series of techniques to develop feelings that they initially lack, something she calls "deep acting," as opposed to surface acting, which refers to people only outwardly showing these feelings (2012, 38). For example, they can try to re-enact emotions they have felt in the past, or to act according to cultural representations of emotional states. This notion is connected to a view of emotions as partly culturally constructed and context-dependent: "If we conceive of feeling not as a periodic abdication to biology but as something we do by attending to inner sensation in a given way, by defining situations in a given way, by managing

in given ways, then it becomes plainer just how plastic and susceptible to reshaping techniques a feeling can be. The very act of managing emotion can be seen as part of what the emotion becomes" (Hochschild 2012, 27). Hochschild's terminology surfaces in the theory of emotion proposed by some exponents of Personal Construct Psychology. This branch of psychology offers a constructivist theoretical outlook, according to which people anticipate life events by building prototypes, inspired by culturally circulating structures and modelled on their own interpretations of previous personal experiences. PCP founder George Kelly's fundamental postulate is: "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (1992, 32). People read new situations and therefore model their responses and behaviours according to these systematic anticipations. Emotions have been considered by some PCP scholars to be organized in prototypical formations. I am referring to Mascolo and Mancuso, who summarize: "when speaking of different emotional states or experiences, we refer to a patterned prototype […] or syndrome […] of motivational, cognitive, physiological, experiential, behavioral, and expressive processes. Use of the term prototype suggests that different emotional states or experiences can be defined in terms of idealized configurations of attributes or dimensions" (1990, 211).

Mascolo and Mancuso refer to Hochschild's theories to describe the process through which people try to understand what emotion-prototype they should adopt, especially when they experience a discrepancy between what one feels and what one "is supposed to feel" according to the social, cultural, and personal context: "to the extent that constructed experiences stand as incongruent with standards represented in the remainder of a person's construction system ("I'm not supposed to feel this way in this context"), the system works to resolve the incongruity" (Mascolo and Mancuso 1990, 210).

With reference to *Der Tote im Bunker*, decoding the image is an act of emotion work because it is an act that concerns the management of emotions, performed in order to solve what Mascolo and Mancuso call a discrepancy. But it is largely a failed attempt. Pollack's issue with the happy pictures is that he does not know what "emotion work" to do, he does not know what his goal is with regard to the act of looking at these pictures. The ambivalence between the interpretive frames evoked by family pictures and by the affection he feels for his family members, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the interpretive frame and feelings of rejection evoked by Nazi war criminals, is not resolved for him in the textual apparatus, where only question marks abound. One might object that the scandal lies in the multiplication of the identities of the people represented,

not in the hermeneutic frames: it is the parents that are both smiling lovingly at each other, and currently implicated in violence. But this, too, is an emotional difficulty on the narrator's side: the problem is that the observer has to relate to the characters represented; the image elicits different relational responses. The picture is inserted as proof of this scandal, as a signifier of the difficulty of choosing between two frames. Mieke Bal has argued that we read visual artefacts according to framings, which are context-dependent codes "which limit[s] the possible meanings" (1996, 26) of the images we encounter. What Pollack's memoir allows its readers to perceive is what happens when these framings collapse, when signification, i.e. the process of meaning creation (Elleström 2021, 22), is made particularly difficult by circumstances. Acts of media representation – "the representation of another medium of a different type" (Elleström 2021, 81) – such as the reproduction of a photographic image, and *ekphrasis*, in written texts, might serve the purpose of representing these mixed, difficult emotions, because each represented medium can be described by the text as pointing to the necessity of resorting to different semiotic modalities to make sense of what is happening. Elleström defines "semiotic modality" as "the frame[s] for understanding representation" (2021, 49). In these cases, media representation is an act, which implies a shortcoming of the frame provided by the main medium (the photograph in Pollack's case). When frames are missing or slippery, this might suggest to readers the insufficiency of any strategy for signification. If we take emotions to be partly relational, situational categories, examining the media that are indicated for successful representation of emotions means focusing on the way that the implied author is encouraging readers to make sense of emotions, and therefore to position themselves with regards to the character represented.

Before coming to some theoretical conclusions, let us turn to Katja Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*.

Vielleicht Esther (Maybe Esther)

In her memoir, Petrowskaja tries to reconstruct the story of her Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian family across the twentieth century. She also reflects on the implications of this pursuit and claims that the events she mentions do not concern her merely as a relative of the victims, but as a person living in the aftermath of these events. This quest for elective emotional affiliation is not always easy. An especially difficult case is the one concerning her paternal great-uncle Jeguda Stern – his name, Jeguda, is thematized and discussed by the author, who at times

calls him Judas both because it is the way in which his name has been mistakenly translated into German, and to institute a suggestive connection with the Biblical character – who in 1932 tried to kill the German ambassador in Moscow, and was subsequently condemned to death by Soviet authorities. Ernst van Alphen (2021) indicates that there are marked differences with regard to second-generation writers' engagement with victims of the Holocaust, for different reasons: for example, the lack of collective memory, the different way in which the Nazi and Soviet regimes ended (by external or internal action), and the fact that many designated "enemies of the people" did not recognize themselves as such at the time of incarceration, while still believing in the general validity of the category "enemy of the people." Remembrance of the victims of the Soviet Union is marked by shame, by the internalization of the stigma of one's relative being marked as an enemy of the people, and by the lack of a collective dimension of remembrance: "this relationship between first and second generation is radically affected by shame. This is almost the complete opposite of the relationship between first and second-generation survivors of the Holocaust" (Alphen 2021, 119). Alphen suggests that, in second-generation artefacts, the past comes back indirectly, and the victims of the regime are often described as ghosts or zombies (2021, 121). In *Vielleicht Esther*, Katja calls Jeguda Stern *ein Phantom*, a ghost (2014, 19). He has undergone a process of forgetting by his own family, who saw him as a dangerous legacy, not a hero or a victim, but someone who had thoughtlessly put the whole family in danger. To sympathize with him is in itself dangerous: "Although my father owed his premature birth to his uncle Judas, for a long time he hardly knew of his existence, it was kept from him for his own protection and that of the whole family. Sympathizing with Judas might have raised suspicions, but if anyone ever sympathized with him, is not known. It was life threatening to remember the star of Judas. He himself had not thought for a second about the consequences of his act for his relatives. How then should they have preserved him in the family memory?"[4]

Petrowskaja also repeatedly underscores that the archives in the Lubjanka building are not innocent, neutral archives – if such archives do exist, at all. Archives are enmeshed with the powers who established them.[5] The items

4 "Obwohl mein Vater seinem Onkel Judas seine Frühgeburt verdankte, wusste er lange Zeit kaum von dessen Existenz, sie wurde vor ihm verheimlicht, zu seinem eigenen und der ganzen Familie Schutz. Mit Judas zu sympathisieren hätte Verdacht erregen können, es ist aber nicht bekannt, ob jemals jemand mit ihm sympathisiert hat. Es war lebensgefährlich, sich an Judas Stern zu erinnern. Er selbst hatte keine Sekunde lang über die Folgen seiner Tat für seine Angehörigen nachgedacht. Wie sollten sie ihn dann im Familiengedächtnis bewahren?" (Petrowskaja 2014, 143)

5 See Alphen (2007) on the issue of the moral implications of archives; and Osborne (2016)

collected are only those that point to Stern's guilt. Petrowskaja manifests ambivalence about entering the Lubjanka, an experience which makes her feel both as part of the *organy*, and a potential suspect:[6] she feels "infected" (2014, 149). All these statements point to the difficulties of relating to Jeguda, and the first reaction elicited by the photograph is not euphoric. The picture is inserted in the written text three different times with three different framings, as if to suggest the difficulty of establishing one's connection to it, even in emotional terms. There is no clear, pre-interpretive bodily reaction, other than a strong sense of ambivalence and distance that has more to do with the information and frames that surround the picture.

The narrator claims that it is hard for her to understand Judas because he has shot someone, and "we don't shoot people." He is not a straightforward victim: this, too, makes "Verstehen" hard: "As an assassin, he remained forever a stranger to us, you don't shoot at other people! Despite his violent end, he was not a victim."[7] Through archival research, Petrowskaja reconstructs the historical situation, which leads her to believe that the attack was probably orchestrated by the Soviet secret services using the social outcast Jeguda as a scapegoat to provoke Nazi Germany. But this factual, historical understanding falls short of bringing her closer to Jeguda. Therefore, she embarks on writing a stream of consciousness paragraph, in which the past is absorbed into the present, the ortographical norms of the German language collapse, and the "I" pronoun indicates both her and Jeguda, as she bonds with him over a shared feeling of social exclusion, while at the same time not erasing the specific context of Jeguda's struggles, as the narrator focuses, for example, on suggesting, but not describing, the impact of the hunger of the Ukrainian famine: "the crunching of the machines, aorta rupture, bones, machines that grind consciousness to powder, and now the second wave is coming, hunger, the grain is being taken away, part of it goes abroad, from there you get machines that, if you don't know how to serve them, are more useless than people who die, machines grind and grind, everything turns to dust or bread

for a detailed account of the treatment of archival research and its implication with power in *Vielleicht Esther*.

6 "Du kommst ins Archiv, berührst ein Blatt Papier, und schon arbeitest du in den Organen, bist eine von ihnen, du hältst dich an die Regeln, und doch wird dir mitgespielt, du bist in ihrer Gewalt. Du atmest ihre Luft, die Luft ist für alle, und schon bist du infiziert" (Petrowskaja 2014, 149). ("You come into the archives, touch a piece of paper, and you're already working in the organs, you're one of them, you follow the rules, and yet you're being played along with, you're in their power. You breathe their air, the air is for everyone, and you're already infected," my translation.)

7 "Als Attentäter blieb er uns für immer fremd, man schießt doch nicht auf andere Menschen! Trotz seines gewaltsamen Endes war er kein Opfer" (Petrowskaja 2014, 148).

and goes to hell, and there is no longer a place where there is no corruption and crime, and everyone has already shot but not me" (my translation).[8]

To achieve this strived-for understanding, or at least come close to it, the narrator has shifted from the observation of the photograph and archival documents to a writing technique typically associated with fictionality, the stream of consciousness. In interviews and in the text of the book itself, Petrowskaja has stressed the importance of fictionality in her work, claiming that, in her book, "everything is true but the German language" (Benevento 2020, 83). Here is where the importance of this partially fictional quality of Petrowskaja's work, connected to the use of literary language,[9] surfaces: obviously, she can never know whether her reconstruction of what Jeguda felt or of his motivation is entirely true, but the act of imagining them has brought her closer, at least temporarily, to the sense of affiliation that she has declared to be her goal, vindicating a past of forgetfulness and exclusion from the family history. Only partial fictionality, which emerges through the use of a literary technique, and the resort to narrativization – Jeguda is also indicated as *unser Held* (2014, 157), a term usually employed to indicate the hero of a story – resolves the problem of reading the picture for Petrowskaja.

Petrowskaja, too, employs the photographs as encouragement to do "emotion work" that is then described in the textual part, which might serve as an invitation for the reader to do the same emotion work, and so as a description/prescription of a certain way of managing emotions. Decoding the image is an act of emotion work because it concerns the management of feeling. Pollack incessantly registers his feeling towards the images; Petrowskaja starts with a feeling of uneasiness toward Jeguda which is signalled by the repetition of the pictures in different framing, but she also approaches the same picture with a clear view of what she

8 "Das knirschen der maschinen, aorta ruptur, knochen, maschinen, die das bewusstsein zu pulver mahlen, und jetzt kommt die zweite welle, hunger, das korn wird weggenommen, ein teil davon geht ins ausland, von dort bekommt man maschinen, die, wenn man nicht weiß, wie man sie bedient, nutzloser sind als menschen, die sterben, maschinen mahlen und zermahlen, alles wird zu staub oder zu brot und geht zum teufel, und es gibt keinen ort mehr, wo es kein verderben und kein verbrechen gibt, und alle haben schon geschossen nur ich nicht" (Petrowskaja 2014, 178)

9 In general, it is narrativization that emerges as fictionality. Katja's father tells her that he was able to leave Kiew because a fikus plant had occupied a place for him in the van which were to take them way: when the fikus had been removed, he had been able to board the van. But later, her father says that he cannot remember the fikus at all. He tells her: "Sogar wenn er nicht existiert hat, sagen solche Fehlleistungen manchmal mehr aus als eine penibel geführte Bestandsaufnahme. Manchmal ist es gerade die Prise Dichtung, welche die Erinnerung wahrheitsgetreu macht."So wurde mein fiktiver Fikus als literarischer Gegenstand rehabilitiert" (Petrowskaja 2014, 129–220). („Even if it didn't exist, such blunders sometimes say more than a meticulous inventory. Sometimes it's just that dash of poetry that makes the memory true. So my fictional ficus was rehabilitated as a literary object," my translation.)

wants to feel with respect to him: a form of understanding, *Verstehen*, which is both cognitive and emotional. Shifting the attention away from the picture, that served the purpose of triggering curiosity, also means changing the definition of the strived-for form of understanding, i.e. the concept of understanding: while focusing on the photo meant focusing on indicial procedures, and the observer/object divide, the stream of consciousness points to a more emphatic form of understanding that stresses the importance of emotion and the possibility of contact, of overcoming the observer/object divide, even if this can be achieved only temporarily, and not fully, since the experience will never be embodied.[10] The goal here is to remember Jeguda more effectively, not to embody him. According to Marie-Laure Ryan (2001, 121), fiction entails a process of recentering which features spatial, temporal and emotional aspects. Petrowskaja is illustrating here one of the possible ways to arrive at this act of recentering, especially from an emotional point of view.[11] The crossing of the intermedial border therefore also serves the purpose of showing that "emotions" can be redefined, worked over.

Conclusions: Interpretive Ambivalence and the Uncanny

Martin Pollack's issue with the happy pictures of his parents is that he does not know what "emotion work" to do, he does not know what his goal is with regard to these pictures. The clash of different interpretive framings, which also entails different emotional reactions blueprints, is not resolved in the textual apparatus where question marks abound. The picture is inserted into the text as proof of the scandal of the possibility of normality and love in brutal times. If we consider the uncanny to reside in the ambiguity of the figures we encounter, here the uncanny resides in this unsolvable clash of interpretive frames, as the parents are both loving and implicated in violence. According to Freud, the uncanny is "is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to

10 I avoid using the term "empathy" here because I prefer to focus on Petrowskaja's description and construction of an emotional state, rather than imposing an external categorization on it. The debate about empathy and its limits has been conducted in the fields of historiography and memory studies, too: readers interested in these thematics might turn to Assman and Detmers (2016). On the issue of fictional empathy and embodiment, I refer to Adriana Clavel-Vázquez and María Jimena Clavel Vázquez, who argue, that "our capacity for empathetic imagining is significantly constrained because this exercise of imagination is an *embodied* exercise of imagination" (2018).

11 I have already suggested a productive encounter between Hochschild and Ryan's theories in Bigongiari (2022).

the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" ([1919] 2003, 148). In a sense, this is true for the people depicted in Pollack's family pictures, as well as for Jeguda Stern. Both pasts had been voluntarily forgotten, or their importance downplayed, by the surviving family members. In these two cases, which are both emotionally difficult, but for significantly different reasons, the represented feelings suggest conflicted, unresolved relationships that re-emerge as the writers look at the pictures. While Pollack cannot solve this impasse, probably because of the enormity of the negative feelings associated with the Nazi regime, Petrowskaja proposes imaginative work as an antidote to the forgetting of victims of the Soviet regime. My suggestion is that the use of pictures or *ekphrasis* for the signification of a breach in narrative sense-making, and thus the need for re-elaboration of one's emotional position, is not limited to works of second-generation writers. For example, Gothic novels often employ *ekphrasis* of portraits to suggest a familial history of violence in which the descendant who watches the portrait might feel implicated in, or contaminated by – an uncanny effect often enhanced by the fact that the characters portrayed can come to life, or be still alive decades or centuries after the usual span of human life. One of these novels is *Melmoth the Wanderer*, in which the character who observes the ancestor's portrait is then compelled, by this coming-to-life, to have a relationship with the problematic ancestor. This might be a fantastic representation of the "aliveness" of the pictures and the past with which we have an unresolved, ambiguous relationship: the need of facing the ancestor, which requires going beyond one's initial feelings of ambivalence and maybe even dread. If an uncanny feeling is a feeling of indecisiveness – responsive to the question, is the figure am I looking at dead or alive, in its effects on me, the observer? – emotion work might temporarily be used to solve this duality by deciding for the aliveness of the pictures, in order to elaborate what the observer feels must be elaborated, be this attempt successful or not.

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