

“...*DIE LEEREN ZEILEN VOLLZUSCHREIBEN*”: MEMORY OBJECTS AND THE
CONSTRUCTION OF A TEXTURED IDENTITY IN THE WORKS OF BARBARA
HONIGMANN

by

EMILY FRANCES CASKEY

(Under the Direction of Brigitte Rossbacher)

ABSTRACT

Barbara Honigmann, an East German born Jewish author and painter living in exile in France, uses memory objects throughout her autobiographical and autofictional texts to aid in the construction of a textured identity. Rather than applying the notion of “living between worlds” as is common in the discourse on hybrid identity texts, I suggest that Honigmann incorporates the many different aspects of her identity into a continuous definition of self, despite the contradictions inherent in the varied aspects of her identity. Honigmann refers to certain memory objects, including photographs, letters, diaries, clothing and jewelry, and works of art and literature, which she reinterprets and weaves together in her journey to establish her own identity.

INDEX WORDS: Barbara Honigmann, textured identity, memory, memory objects, postmemory, *Bilder von A.*, *Damals, dann und danach*, *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, *Eine Liebe aus nichts*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Weil ich den Kalender nicht einfach nur als Erinnerungsstück mit nach Paris nehmen wollte und weil so viele Seiten leer geblieben waren, [...] habe ich angefangen, die leeren Seiten vollzuschreiben, so daß unsere Aufzeichnungen in einander verliefen.” Barbara Honigmann’s first person narrator says, holding her father’s post-war diary in her hands (*Liebe* 99). Having already acknowledged that her father’s story was over now that he was dead, the protagonist begins to add her own stories and thoughts to his, blending their two stories together both literally and figuratively. Significantly, the protagonist *fills* the pages that were once empty. Honigmann uses the verb “vollschreiben” here, bringing to mind other verbs with the prefix voll-, including “vollkommen” (complete or consummate), and another usage of the adjective “voll”, meaning complete. Her tumultuous relationship to her father is the product of emotional distance, due in part to the protagonist feeling that she never lived up to his standards nor established her place in his life as he moved from one failed relationship to another. Seeking in vain for a connection to the cities he called home and the relatives to whom he claimed affinity, the protagonist finds a sense of peace in the renewal and reinterpretation of his diary. By filling the pages of his diary, the protagonist asserts agency over her own identity as his daughter and her place in his life, even after his death. While his story is over, her story continues.

This diary, a seemingly inconspicuous object to anyone else but the protagonist, is one of many memory objects that Honigmann employs throughout her works. Memory objects, oftentimes meaningless to an outside observer, play an extremely important role in Honigmann's texts in the ways in which they shape and complete her protagonist's identity. By analyzing these memory objects, it is my goal to go beyond the traditional interpretation of Honigmann's body of works in terms of hybridity, i.e. her sense of living between two worlds and the feeling of a continuous back and forth pull between mutually exclusive identities. Instead, I argue that by incorporating these memory objects into her life and the lives of her protagonist, Honigmann creates a more textured identity, free from the fragmentation innate in the notion of hybridity, and accepting of the contradictions stemming from the disparate aspects of her identity as an East-German born Jewish woman living in exile in France.

Born in 1949 in East Berlin to Litzi Honigmann (1910-1991) and Georg Honigmann (1903-1984), Barbara Honigmann led a relatively privileged life in East Berlin as the daughter of enthusiastic builders of the new, socialist Germany. Honigmann studied theater at Humboldt University in East Berlin from 1967 to 1972 and, like her father, began her career in theater, working as a literary and artistic director at the *Deutsches Theater* and the *Volksbühne*. While expecting her first child, a son, in 1976, Honigmann began to write and decided to join the Jewish community in East Berlin, although she had not been raised Jewish. Her parents, having returned from exile in Great Britain to East Berlin in 1946, were among the elite of the young socialist state, and, in order to avoid the increasing repression of the Jewish community and its culture,

they resolved to leave it in the 1950s. Honigmann herself had no Jewish religious or cultural education, but took it upon herself to discover her Jewish heritage and identity.

After learning Hebrew and officially converting to Judaism, Honigmann married the historian Peter Honigmann in 1981 in one of East Germany's first traditional Jewish wedding ceremonies. In 1984, Honigmann, her husband, and their two sons immigrated to Strasbourg, France, a city with a large and dynamic Jewish population. Her first collection of texts, *Roman von einem Kinde*, appeared in 1986. Honigmann continues to write, publish, and exhibit her artwork. She has received numerous literary prizes, among them the Heinrich-von-Kleist-Preis in 2000, the Koret Jewish Book Award in 2004, the Max-Frisch-Preis in 2011, and most recently, the Elisabeth-Langgässer-Literaturpreis in 2012.

Barbara Honigmann's Works

Honigmann has published a number of first person narratives that draw heavily on her own biography and often recast certain aspects of it into different contexts. This thesis draws primarily on four of Honigmann's autobiographical and autofictional works: *Eine Liebe aus nichts* (1991), *Damals, dann und danach* (1999), *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* (2004), and *Bilder von A.* (2011). I will begin by giving a brief introduction of her relevant published novels and essay collections in order to establish a background and to provide examples of the autobiographical nature of her work as well as to delineate the autobiographical from the autofictional.

Roman von einem Kinde, Honigmann's first collection of semi-autobiographical texts published in 1986, two years after her immigration, "outlines the stages that led up to exile" (Guenther 220). The collection consists of six narratives and features many

themes and episodes that recur in her subsequent texts. *Roman von einem Kinde* is the first in a trilogy of works in which Honigmann explores the construction of identity and memory's role in this process. *Eine Liebe aus nichts* continues this narration and explores the process of migration itself, including the feelings of homelessness the protagonist experiences and her attempts to connect with her new life in Paris (Guenther 223). The narrative traces the protagonist's journey from East Berlin to Paris via Frankfurt to seek out traces of her father's heritage, and back to Weimar for her father's funeral. Confronted with her father's death, the protagonist must reconcile the past and its indelible influence on her present. *Eine Liebe aus nichts* is, according to Silke Schade, "a novel of searching for a sense of place, of experiencing and collecting moments of belonging and creating an imagined *Heimat*" (32). *Damals, dann und danach* completes the trilogy and consists of short autobiographical essays that had previously been published in newspapers and magazines. As the title suggests, Honigmann concerns herself with both past and present. The publisher remarks upon this in a description of the text, noting that the *damals* refers to "die vergangenen Spuren ihrer Familiengeschichte," while the *danach* refers to "ihre Gegenwart, die von der Vergangenheit geprägt bleibt" ("Barbara Honigmann").

Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben, an account of Honigmann's mother's life, is full of speculation and uncertainty, especially in regards to her mother's twelve-year marriage to Kim Philby, Great Britain's most notorious spy turned double agent for the Soviet KGB. Litzi Honigmann, born Alice Kohlmann, and known at times as Alice, Lizzy, and Lisa, depending on the city she was in, remains shrouded in mystery, due in part to her credo of living "Kurz hinter der Wahrheit und dicht neben der Lüge [...]", but also

because of her association with the NKVD (later called the KGB) (*Kapitel* 138). Honigmann's memories of her mother are interspersed with memories of her childhood. Indeed, Honigmann is not just writing about her mother, but about herself as well. Additionally, as Caroline Schaumann notes, *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* is much more open in its criticism of the GDR and its suppression of Jewish culture (194).

Honigmann's most recent work, *Bilder von A.*, is an autofictional account of Honigmann's relationship with a famous East Berlin theater director, whom she refers to only as A. While Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts* also deals with this relationship, her most recent work provides a much more detailed account of their relationship by recounting their first meeting, their work together on the staging of two Kleist plays at the *Deutsches Theater*, their separation and emigration from the GDR, and continued correspondence over a period of decades. Beginning innocently enough in *der Sphäre der Poesie* and avoiding the intimacies of everyday life, their relationship is only complicated by the silence between them, the protagonist's inability to reconcile her Jewishness with his Germanness, and accusations of anti-Semitism, until at last, the protagonist stops responding to A.'s letters.

Narrative Perspective

Of the trilogy, *Damals, dann und danach* is the only autobiographical work, by which I mean, I consider Honigmann herself to be the narrator. While the other works possess striking similarities to her biography, Honigmann's recasting of and reworking of certain details prevents a one-to-one association of protagonist and author. Because many of Honigmann's texts closely follow her biography, scholars have traditionally equated the narrator's voice with Honigmann's own authorial voice. As Silke Schade

summarizes, many scholars “freely replace the terms ‘narrator’ or ‘protagonist’ with Honigmann’s own name” (29). Schade, however, distinguishes Honigmann’s female protagonist and strictly refers to her as such. Following Schade’s lead, I will also distinguish between Honigmann’s authorial voice and that of her female protagonist. I use protagonist in the singular here, although Honigmann has written several autobiographical texts, all of which follow female protagonists with slightly different biographical details. However, as Christina Guenther asserts in her article “Exile and the Construction of Identity in Barbara Honigmann’s Trilogy of Diaspora”, the three texts – *Roman von einem Kinde* (1986), *Eine Liebe aus nichts* (1991), and *Damals, dann und danach* (1999) – can be read as a trilogy, because these texts “map the coordinates in her lifelong process of claiming, and indeed reinventing, a particular Jewish German identity” (215). Despite some differences across these works and the lack of a seamless progression of events, the protagonists share so much, not to mention the repeated appearances of memory objects, that it is no stretch to read them as one narrative voice (Schade 30). I continue in this fashion, but I also include the protagonist of Honigmann’s latest work *Bilder von A.* to this list and draw connections based on her previous works.

As Schade notes, the narrator’s voice of *Damals, dann und danach* more closely resembles Honigmann’s own authorial voice (30). Honigmann herself also acknowledges, “Auch das autobiographische Schreiben ist ja Fiktion,” suggesting that even what is considered an autobiographical essay is retains literary elements of fiction (*Gesicht* 39). I, however, would argue that this is as close to Honigmann’s authorial voice as readers will come. Additionally, the publisher markets the book as a collection of autobiographical essays and describes it as an “überaus persönliches Buch,” in which

Honigmann explores “die zwei Seiten ihres Lebens” (“Barbara Honigmann”). Therefore, I choose to equate Honigmann’s authorial voice with that of the narrator and name her thusly in reference to the essays collected in *Damals, dann und danach*.

Barbara Honigmann expresses the desire for her work to be read based on its literary style, technique, and merit, rather than solely based on her own unique biography. “Immer wieder die gleichen biographischen Fragen beantworten, die ich schon tausendmal beantwortet habe und die mich langweilen. Ja, ich bin Jüdin, Deutsche, komme aus der DDR, lebe jetzt in Frankreich” Honigmann says in her first Zürcher Poetikvorlesung entitled “Über autobiographisches Schreiben”. She continues, “Ich möchte gerne in meiner Eigenart des Schreibens und nicht in meiner Eigenart des Lebens wahrgenommen werden” (*Gesicht* 39). Simply put, Honigmann would like to be seen not as an East German Jewish woman living in exile in France, who also happens to write, but first and foremost as a writer. Scholars have traditionally read her works through this specific biographical lens, which is understandable given the strongly autobiographical nature of her works. But, as she acknowledges, “Jeder, der schreibt, entfernt sich von der erlebten, gedachten und gefühlten Wirklichkeit von der er berichtet, trennt Teile davon aus ihrem ursprünglichen Zusammenhang heraus, setzt sie neu zusammen, um sie zum Gegenstand seiner Betrachtungen zu machen [...]” (*Gesicht* 40).

The recasting or reframing of her biography allows Honigmann to examine reoccurring themes through different contexts. As Caroline Schaumann asserts, “Honigmann’s texts go far beyond the autobiographical facts, playing with fiction, varying scenarios and outcomes, and different identities, so that an exclusive autobiographical reading misses many of the texts’ idiosyncrasies” (167). It is my goal to

examine Honigmann's use of memory objects in an attempt to step back from the traditional analysis of Honigmann's works and to incorporate a more literary analysis. Drawing on the memory objects Honigmann employs again and again avoids a strictly autobiographical reading of her texts.

I will first concern myself with her overarching construction of identity, bringing in the theory of textured identity to avoid the limitations of hybrid identity, which has recently been afforded a negative connotation, and which in my opinion does not do justice to Honigmann's complicated sense of self. Secondly, I turn to memory and memory theory to establish the background necessary to analyze Honigmann's use of memory objects. My last chapter analyzes the recurring memory objects present in her autobiographical as well as autofictional texts. My goal is to show how Honigmann uses these memory objects in order to construct a textured identity that has the potential to overcome the fragmentation inherent in a hybrid identity.

CHAPTER 2

TEXTURED IDENTITY

“Ja, ich bin Jüdin, Deutsche, komme aus der DDR, lebe jetzt in Frankreich,” Honigmann proclaims, laying claim to an identity constructed from the different aspects of her biography (*Gesicht* 39). She is, all at once and despite the contradictions that seem inherent in such a multi-faceted identification, a Jewish-German woman, born in the GDR and living in France. Most importantly, Honigmann’s identity is self-determined as the result of a dynamic and evolving process. As Silke Schade writes, “the protagonist’s Jewish identity develops from a singular and static construct created by others into a hybrid, multi-layered process which she actively invents” (58). Like Schade, Christina Guenther asserts that the construction of identity is central to Honigmann’s works. This process, however, is not just about developing her Jewish identity, but reasserting her claim to, “and indeed reinventing, a particular Jewish German identity” (Guenther 215). Tina M. Campt uses the term “textured identities” to describe the relationship Afro-German women have to their German and African (and African-American) heritages. The use of the adjective “textured” connotes a diverse, dynamic, and ever-evolving identity, in contrast to the much disputed notion of “living between two worlds,” which for so long has dominated the discourse on multicultural literature and film. “‘Texture’ connotes multiplicity and plurality without fragmentation,” Campt writes, but significantly, this term eschews “the rigidity of a forced reconciliation of contradictory or conflicting identifications” (117). By acknowledging the paradox inherent in

contradictions, Campt argues that these Afro-German women attempt to “construct a form of identity and consciousness that incorporates the plurality of their cultural and ethnic identifications,” leading to a more complete picture of self (117).

While Campt uses the term specifically in reference to Afro-German women in her analysis of the discussion between Katharina Oguntoye, May Ayim, and Laura Baum in *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (published in 1986 and in English translation as *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* in 1991), I suggest that this term can also be applied to Barbara Honigmann’s auto-fictional and autobiographical texts. Specifically, I explore the notion of a “textured identity” in terms of Honigmann’s use of memory objects, in order to discover what role these objects play in the construction of her identity as a Jewish woman living in France and writing in her native language of German. However, before discussing the construction of identity in terms of memory objects, it is important to look at the other ways in which Honigmann defines and asserts her own identity and that of her protagonist throughout her works.

Damals, dann und danach begins with the essay “Ich bin nicht Anne!,” which builds a framework for the entire collection. While in this essay the protagonist’s Jewish identity is forced upon her from the outside, the collection’s last essay, “Ein seltener Tag,” brings her construction of identity full circle with the painting of a self-portrait. The protagonist refutes the attempts of others who assign her with an identity based upon the legacy of the Holocaust and her status as a victim. However, in her attempts to create her own identity, the protagonist comes into conflict with those around her and increasingly seeks a definition of self in opposition to the important figures in her life,

and especially in opposition to the important men in her life. But, as it becomes clear that this notion of identity is not satisfying either, she embraces the contradictions and begins to weave together the many layers of her textured identity. Using *Damals, dann und danach* as a framework to chart the protagonist's progress in the creation of her own identity, I draw on Honigmann's other works to further expound upon her construction of identity.

In "Ich bin nicht Anne!," Frau Schulze, an elderly woman living on the first floor in their shared apartment building, corners the protagonist in the stairway and forces her into her apartment, where she proceeds to berate and interrogate her. The elderly woman mistakes her for a Jewish girl, whom she had hidden during the war, and demands to know, "Warum bist du nie wieder zu mir gekommen, Anne?" (6). When the protagonist refutes this accusation, the woman resorts to stereotypes, claiming that she recognized her as a Jew immediately. "In defining her religious and cultural affiliation based on stereotype and the legacy of the Shoah," Silke Schade writes, "the protagonist's neighbors attempt to take away her agency of her own identity-creation" (59). Honigmann's emphatic denial "Ich bin nicht Anne!" represents her attempt to reclaim this agency by "dissociat[ing] herself from this narrow definition of identity" and is the first step in forming her own definition of self (59).

By referring to Honigmann as Anne, the elderly woman equates her not only with the young Holocaust survivor she sheltered during the war and who is, according to her, ungrateful for her help, but also with one of the best-known Holocaust victims, Anne Frank. Honigmann's assertion "Auch das autobiographische Schreiben ist ja Fiktion," highlights the fact that even her autobiographical essays possess a literary quality

(*Gesicht* 39). I would argue that Honigmann chose this name to suggest that the elderly woman, representative of a specific generation of Germans, is unable and unwilling to distinguish between Holocaust survivors and victims, thereby equating all Jews with one another.

The woman furthers this assumption when she suggests that the protagonist, as a Jew, should know Anne and should be able to bring Anne to her. Seen in the eyes of this woman, the protagonist is not an individual, but one of many who all look the same, and who all share the same fate. This conflict suggests that it is impossible for the protagonist to continue living in a society where her identity is forced upon her based solely upon the legacy of the Holocaust. The protagonist confirms that she is unable to shake the role Frau Schulze assigns her, saying, “Jedenfalls wurde ich die Rolle, die sie mir in ihrem Drama zugewiesen hatte, nicht mehr los, bis zu dem Tag, an dem ich endlich aus dem Haus auszog [...]” (*Damals* 9). It is not just one elderly woman’s drunken insults that assign this role to her, but it is the systemic nature of the post-war German-Jewish relationship. Moving out of the apartment building is a metonym for the protagonist’s immigration from East Germany to France. Only by leaving this society can she assert herself in her own life, rather than being cast by those around her into a role she does not wish to play.

After the Holocaust, the relationship between Jews and Germans has been characterized by the “negative German-Jewish symbiosis,” a term coined by Hannah Arendt, who points to the Holocaust “as the defining factor of German-Jewish relationships” (Schade 8). Honigmann picks up on the discourse of the negative German-Jewish symbiosis in her essay collection *Damals, dann und danach*. “Die Deutschen

wissen gar nicht mehr, was Juden sind, wissen nur, daß da eine schreckliche Geschichte zwischen ihnen liegt, und jeder Jude, der auftauchte, erinnerte sie an diese Gesichte, die immer noch weh tut und auf die Nerven geht” (*Damals* 15). It is impossible, she says, when speaking about “die ‘jüdischen Dinge’” in Germany to speak “unbelastet [und] unverkrampft.” Germans, too, she says, find it “ebenso quälend und eingeschränkt” when discussing her Jewishness (*Damals* 16). She indicates this conflict as her reason for immigrating to Strasbourg. Indeed, as Christina Guenther writes, Honigmann is only able to explore her Jewishness by relegating herself to the “neutralizing foreignness of French exile” (Guenther 217).

The negative German-Jewish symbiosis manifests itself in her personal relationship with a famous East German theater director. Honigmann refers to this relationship throughout several of her works, and has devoted her most recent work, *Bilder von A.*, to it as well. In *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, she names him Alfried, and in *Bilder von A.*, simply A. Despite loving him against her will, she cannot and will not reconcile her Jewishness with his Germanness (*Liebe* 46). *Eine Liebe aus nichts* provides the first glimpse of this conflict: the silence pervading their relationship. Though the lovers exchange numerous letters and notes throughout the course of their relationship, even after they both immigrate, the protagonist says, “wir [verbargen] uns voreinander. Wir sagten nie, ich liebe dich, und nie, ich liebe dich auch” (*Liebe* 44). The silence, however, runs much deeper than the inability or aversion to expressing love or feelings for one another. Because their relationship is never couched in moral terms, infidelity does not account for the tension between the two. Instead, the tension that pervades their relationship is based on the irreconcilability of their heritages from her perspective: he, a

German, she a Jewish woman. Alfried/A. is symbolic for all of Germany and Germanness, which she loves and hates, is drawn to and repelled by, all at once. She declares that she cannot bring herself to speak his name, and indeed, that she hates it: “Von Anfang an habe ich Alfrieds Namen gehasst, ich konnte ihn nicht über die Lippen bringen, weil er so germanisch klang und weil ich keinen Germanen lieben wollte, denn ich konnte, wollte und durfte den Germanen nicht verzeihen, was sie den Juden angetan hatten” (*Liebe* 46). Because of the negative German-Jewish symbiosis, the two are unable to bridge the gap separating them. However, as I explore in a subsequent chapter, what bridges this gap is their shared German literary heritage.

The protagonist speaks openly and often of her friends, family, and life, while A. speaks only about theater and politics, and never about his family or childhood (*Bilder* 33). The only thing she knows about his past is that his father died fighting on the Russian front (*Bilder* 39). Though she would like to know more, she does not dare to ask. However, as with all of the topics they avoid discussing, the more they avoid them, the more they overshadow everything else: “Je weniger wir über alles sprachen, desto deutlicher kam es hervor” (*Liebe* 47).

This silence is reminiscent of her childhood, which the protagonist reinforces by comparing her lover to her father. A., who is fifteen years older than the protagonist, was born into a different generation, a generation that experienced the war firsthand (*Bilder* 20). A.’s good relationship with the protagonist’s father reinforces this generational difference. The two get along famously and share many political as well as cultural interests. Physically, the two also share strikingly blue eyes: “Und beide hatten diese strahlend blauen Augen. A. helle, preußischblau, und mein Vater tief dunkelblaue,

indigo” (*Bilder* 40). The protagonist clearly associates her father with A. because of the large age gap between the two of them and the ease with which her father gets along with A. Often, the reminder “A. ist jetzt tot” punctuates the protagonist’s memories of him. However, after recalling her father and A. together, she reminds herself that not only is A. now dead, but that her father is as well. By placing them parallel to one another, the protagonist indicates how connected they are in her mind, although the two have distinct pasts. That the two get along so well seems almost to be of consternation to the protagonist. That her father, who experienced Nazi persecution firsthand and fled into exile, can so easily overlook the Germanness that A. represents indicates more about the protagonist and her inability to reconcile her Jewishness with A.’s Germanness, than it does about her father’s.

Honigmann explores the protagonist’s relationship to her father in depth in *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, and explores her father’s heritage and thereby her own in the essay “Von meinem Urgroßvater, meinem Großvater, meinem Vater und mir”. In contrast to her great grandfather, David Honigmann, who worked tirelessly for Jewish emancipation, founded the German Jewish reform movement, and was a prolific writer for the magazine *Der Israelit*, Honigmann’s father was not even raised Jewish. The product of his grandfather’s decision to fully assimilate into German culture, little was left of a Jewish identity for Georg Friedrich Wolfgang Honigmann, which is evident in the staunch Germanness of his given names. Indeed, her father “hat das Judentum nicht mehr verlassen müssen, es war ihm schon sowieso ganz entrückt und entfremdet” (*Damals* 43). Before Honigmann began actively seeking out her own Jewish heritage and identity, she had little to base this heritage on, because for her parents, the past was firmly located in

the past. Her parents, having defected to the Soviet occupation zone in order to help build a new, socialist Germany, avoided mention of the Holocaust. “Ihr Enthusiasmus für den Kommunismus füllte scheinbar alles aus: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, und Zukunft” (*Damals* 23). However, Honigmann also acknowledges the difficulties of openly identifying as Jewish in the GDR. Because of this – the small Jewish congregations where there was almost no room to lead a Jewish life – and the conflict she perceives between Germans and Jews in a world after the Holocaust that she described as “unerträglich”, Honigmann decides to leave Germany in favor of self-imposed exile in France (*Damals* 15).

In *Bilder von A.*, the protagonist revisits her decision to actively seek out a Jewish identity. After A.’s immigration, she says, she began to search for something more: “Aus Trotz, aus Unvernunft, aus Einsamkeit, fing ich an, etwas ganz anderes zu erkunden, nicht das Weite, sondern etwas Nahes, das in mir selbst lag, mir schon lange zugehörte, obwohl es so wenig bekannt war, und dessen Namen und Gestalt ich nun suchen wollte” (*Bilder* 80). The protagonist is looking for something already inside her, but to which she has no access, and only a vague sense of what it indeed is. The protagonist views this, along with her immigration, as a moment of great change in her life. Honigmann herself describes the turning point that led her to actively engage with her Jewish heritage as the birth of her first son. “Als mein erster Sohn geboren wurde, wollte ich, daß er nicht nur “jüdischer Herkunft” sei, sondern mit mir zusammen ein jüdisches Leben führen könne” (*Damals* 15). Unlike her own childhood, in which her questions about her Jewish family members were met with silence on the part of her parents as well as the state, she wants

her son to be raised in a community in which they are able to develop their own Jewish identities, free of the German-Jewish stigma.

However, Honigmann does not simply assert her Jewish identity through these texts; she reclaims her German cultural heritage as well. Paradoxically, as she engages with her Jewish identity after settling in France, she also reclaims her connection to Germany and the German language, and even defends it, based on her strong identification with the German culture that shaped her as a writer. The protagonist of *Eine Liebe aus nichts* finds a kindred spirit in Jean-Marc, a Jewish American studying architecture in Paris. In Jean-Marc, she finds a confidant, someone who shares her search for a specifically Jewish identity. However, despite their shared Jewishness, Jean-Marc is unable to reconcile the protagonist's Germanness with his contempt of all things German. So that neither is at an advantage by speaking his or her native language, the two speak French with one another (*Liebe* 55). The French language is a neutral zone. For Jean-Marc, who did everything he could to avoid learning the German language, German reminds him of all of the things that disgust him about Germany and Germans. After the atrocities of the Holocaust, he cannot understand how Jews willingly choose to live in Germany. He declares that he will never set foot on German soil, despite the protagonist's wish to share with him the places of her childhood: Berlin, Weimar, Schloss Belvedere and the ginkgo tree (*Liebe* 56). Here, in a reversal of roles, the protagonist defends her native language and her parent's decision to settle in East Berlin, even though she herself does not fully understand their decision. She feels attacked and responds defensively, because she is unwilling to simply relinquish her German cultural heritage in favor of a solely Jewish identity. That she uses some of Jean-Marc's

reasoning when feeling attacked by Alfried over her decision to engage with her Jewish identity, but at the same time defends the Germans to Jean-Marc, illustrates how torn between the two she is. Honigmann revisits this paradox in *Bilder von A*. The protagonist settles in Strasbourg and lives chiefly among other Jews, but is often confronted by neighbors and members of the community who do not understand the multilayered identity she has begun to weave. “Wenn jemand sagte, Deutsch igitt – Nazisprache, Sprache der SS, schleuderte ich ihm Kafka, Freud und Einstein entgegen,” she says (*Bilder* 85). It is here, in the German language, that Honigmann and her protagonist reclaim their German cultural identities. She embraces the paradox, because despite how impossible it feels to live in Germany, she cannot sacrifice her German cultural heritage, which has been shaped by Goethe, Kleist, Heine, and Freud, among others. Honigmann, in her essay “Selbstporträt als Jüdin” summarizes this best:

Es macht, daß ich mich existentiell mehr zum Judentum als zum Deutschtum gehörig fühle, aber kulturell gehöre ich wohl doch zu Deutschland und zu sonst gar nichts. Es klingt paradox, aber ich bin eine deutsche Schriftstellerin, obwohl ich mich nicht als Deutsche fühle und nun auch schon seit Jahren nicht mehr in Deutschland lebe. Ich denke aber, der Schriftsteller ist das, was er schreibt, und er ist vor allem die Sprache, in der er schreibt. Ich schreibe nicht nur auf deutsch, sondern die Literatur, die mich geformt und gebildet hat, ist die deutsche Literatur, und ich beziehe mich auf sie, in allem was ich schreibe, auf Goethe, auf Kleist, auf Grimms Märchen und auf die deutsche Romantik, und ich weiß sehr wohl, daß die Herren Verfasser wohl alle mehr oder weniger Antisemiten waren, aber das macht nichts.

Als Jude bin ich aus Deutschland weggegangen, aber in meiner Arbeit, in einer sehr starken Bindung an die deutsche Sprache, kehre ich immer wieder zurück (*Damals* 17-18).

It is as a writer then, that Honigmann is able to connect all of the facets of her life – Jew, (East) German, migrant, woman – into one, multilayered identity. The imagery of

weaving together or layering these seemingly contradictory facets of life reinforces the seamless nature of the created identity, which Honigmann reflects in her writing as well as her painting. For Honigmann, painting is as much an expression of the process of identity creation as writing is. Writing about the creation of her self-portrait then, is the ultimate combination of the two processes. The essay “Ein seltener Tag” lends insight into this creative process. “Im Kopf”, she writes, “ist Tohu und Bohu und auf der Leinwand soll sich daraus Gestalt finden” (*Damals* 133). The realities of the multilayered life she leads are jumbled together. She outlines herself with a coal pencil until it seems just right, as she had imagined herself: “etwas übergroß, oben und unten angeschnitten” (133). Then, she squeezes the colors for her self-portrait onto a palette, mixing and smearing the colors around until she is satisfied. What follows is a frenzy of production; she turns up music in the background to sing along to and smokes to keep herself under control (134). After the first burst of creativity, she steps back, observes the image and sees “daß alles gut werden wird” (135). She turns off the background noise, stops singing and smoking, and simply paints until exhaustion. After she is done, she observes: “Die Straße ist ruhig. Das Haus ist ruhig. Die Wohnung ist ruhig. Und ich selbst bin auch ganz ruhig.” (135). The mixing and layering of colors reflects the mixing and layering of Honigmann’s identities; just as the colors combine to form a new, more brilliant color, so too does Honigmann weave together the different aspects of her biography to form a multilayered, textured identity, in which each aspect plays an equally important role. The resulting sense of calm and peace suggests that she has finally embraced all of the paradoxical aspects of her life and united them into one identity.

CHAPTER 3

MEMORY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

We are in the midst of a “memory boom”, according to Aleida Assmann (“Transformations” 54). Assmann describes the current memory boom as a reflection of “a general desire to reclaim the past as an important part of the present, and to reconsider, to revalue, and to reassess it as part of individual biographies and the way individuals position themselves in a wider historical perspective” (“Transformations” 54). Likewise, Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove identify the flux in personal and familial narrative memory texts in the last decade as an indication of the public’s reckoning with Germany’s Nazi past and the legacy of the Holocaust from the context of the present (*Contests* 9). These include such works as Monika Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* (1999), Hans-Ulrich Treichel’s *Der Verlorene* (1999), Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* (2003), and Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003). Though Barbara Honigmann’s oeuvre predates in part the designated beginning of this memory boom, her texts rely heavily on individual and mediated memory as Honigmann attempts to work through the legacy of the Holocaust, her construction of identity in relation to this legacy, and her place in her familial narrative. However, before turning to the analysis of Honigmann’s text, it is important to locate Honigmann and her works in the continuum of scholarship on memory in order to view the progression of the discourse on memory and to look toward the future of Jewish-German narratives as first-person survivors pass away and are no longer able to tell their stories. The delineation of specific memory terms also serves to

elucidate how Honigmann's works do not neatly fit into these categories. I will later explore two additional alternatives that account for this, memory contests and postmemory.

Memory Perspectives

Initially, Aleida and Jan Assmann categorized memory into two memory "perspectives": communicative and cultural. Communicative memory, Jan Assmann asserts, "includes those varieties of collective memory that are based exclusively on everyday communications" ("Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" 126). Communicative memory occurs within a specific and limited group. However, without institutionalizing these memories in visual or narrative frames, communicative memory disappears when its carrier dies. Familial oral histories, an example of communicative memory, illustrate the temporality of this type of memory. At most, Assmann suggests, the "temporal horizon" of communicative memory extends no more than eighty to one hundred years, or three to four generations ("Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" 127). This is especially important in the context of Holocaust survivors; as the distance between the Holocaust and the present continues to grow, institutionalizing communicative memory in the form of memorials and museums, as well as cultural works is necessary to preserve this form of memory for future generations.

Whereas communicative memory relies upon its relation to the everyday, "cultural memory is characterized by its distance from the everyday" ("Collective Memory and Cultural Identity" 129). Unlike communicative memory, cultural memory is not temporal. Rather, it is grounded in fixed points in the past, i.e. important dates, and "maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional

communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (“Collective Memory and Cultural Identity” 129). By stabilizing these forms of cultural memory, collective experiences such as the Holocaust become accessible across generations and into the future.

Over time and as the discourse on memory expanded, the two-tiered categorization of memory into individual and cultural no longer adequately described the “complex networks of memories in which humans participate” (“Memory” 211). Aleida Assmann identifies two dimensions of memory that complicate the basic paradigm of memory: interaction with other individuals and interaction with external signs and symbols (“Transformations” 50). “Human beings,” she writes, “do not live in the first person singular, but also in various formats of the first person plural” (“Transformations” 51). To account for this interaction and sharing of memories, Assmann proposes rethinking the paradigm to include “four ‘formats of memory’: (1): individual memory; (2) social memory; (3) political memory; and (4) cultural memory” (“Memory” 211).

The Four Formats of Memory

The four formats of memory – individual, social, political, and cultural – fall broadly under the umbrella terms of communicative and cultural memory. For example, because individual memory and social memory rely on communication between small families and small groups, and are both temporal in nature, they fall under the umbrella term of communicative memory. The distinction between communicative memory and cultural memory, which can often be hard to distinguish, depends on whether the memories are institutionalized and open to the public or not. However, in some situations, which Assmann accounts for, the line between public and private memory is not clearly defined. While it is important to trace the developments of memory discourse,

I still find the umbrella terms – communicative and cultural – to be valuable means of categorizing memory. Honigmann’s texts defy being neatly categorized. Indeed, what is social memory to her is also cultural memory. By using the umbrella terms in my analysis, I intend to point out the fluidity of these categories.

Individual memory encompasses all the idiosyncratic memories based on a person’s individual perspective. Each person experiences life differently and therefore stores, categorizes and interprets their memories differently. Individual memories are unique and thus “cannot be transferred from one person to another” (“Transformations” 50). Individual memories are often fragmented and tend to “flash up isolated scenes within a network of seemingly random associations without order, sequence, or cohesion” (“Memory” 213). Only by collecting these memories into a larger narrative and giving them form do they take on meaning. Though each person’s individual memories are distinct, even distinct memories are not preserved “in a pure and fixed form,” but instead are preserved in “a process of continuing reinscription and reconstruction in an ever-changing present” (“Transformations” 53). Memory is therefore necessarily mediated by time, context, perspective, and interaction.

While a person’s individual memories cannot be transferred one-to-one to another person, they can be shared and exchanged in the form of personal narratives and family photographs. “By encoding them in the common medium of language, they can be exchanged, shared, corroborated, confirmed, corrected, disputed, and even appropriated” (“Transformations” 50). Social memory is the result of this interaction of memories, shared orally through stories and anecdotes, which “form[...] a community of shared experience, stories, and memories” (“Memory” 213). However, like individual

memories, social memories are temporal. As a rule, even shared memories cannot survive more than 80 to 100 years or three to five generations (“Memory” 213). Though these shared memories are rehearsed and repeated, for example when families gather and recount the same stories again and again, they too are susceptible to change over time and the threat of disappearing all together.

Another aspect of social memory is identification with small groups based on a common interest or shared history. Individuals become part of a group based upon an “implicit or explicit structure of shared concerns, values, experiences, [and] narratives” (“Transformations” 51-52). Individuals identify with these groups, including families, neighborhoods, peer groups, generations, nations, and cultures, in such a way that they refer to themselves as “we” when speaking on behalf of these groups. To become part of this “we” individuals incorporate a shared history into their own identity, reinforced by “internalization and rites of participation” (“Transformations”52). Additionally, individuals share their memories not just with their family, friends, and other small groups, but also with a larger age cohort. This phenomenon is known as generational memory, which is characterized by a shared “common frame of beliefs, values, habits, and attitudes.” Generational memory is shaped by members of a group of approximately the same age who “witnessed the same incisive historical events” (“Memory” 214).

Here, the line between communicative and cultural memory becomes blurry. Generational memory shapes individual memory but, as a generation that witnessed a specific and oftentimes traumatic event in history is replaced by a younger generation, the generational memory is also in danger of disappearing. Certainly, its individual meaning to every member of that generation is temporal, but these generational memories are also

institutionalized to a certain degree. By institutionalizing these memories in symbolic forms of commemoration like monuments and museums, or more systematic forms, such as rites of commemoration, “the limited temporal range of personal and generational memories can be infinitely extended” (“Memory” 215). Assmann provides an example of American generational memory in the form of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington D.C., completed in 1982. For many, this memorial is still a very personal embodiment of social and individual memory that impacts the surviving generation of soldiers, and the family and friends of soldier who died during the Vietnam War. However, its location in the nation’s capital as well as its proximity to the Lincoln memorial and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum incorporate it into “a more inclusive national memory and identity” (“Memory” 215). Because they take on a more universal role, the distinct memories of a generation are extended and imparted to successive generations and therefore lose “the quality of a generational experience”, because they are no longer anchored in specific, individual memories, but within a larger collective memory (“Memory” 215). The institutionalization of this shared generational experience into a memorial accessible to all illustrates the blurry line of transition between the umbrella terms communicative and collective memory.

The two remaining formats of memory – political and cultural – fall under the umbrella term of collective memory. Whereas individual and social forms of memory are anchored in experience and temporal in that they “vanish with their carriers” (“Transformations” 55), political and cultural memory are more durable and are intended to be shared across generations. While individual and social memory depend on social interaction to temporarily extend their lifetime, political and cultural memory depend on

“the more durable carriers of external symbols and material representations,” such as libraries, museums, monuments, education, and institutionalized celebrations and commemorations (“Memory” 215). Also important to consider in the transition from communicative to collective memory is that institutions and groups, such as nations, states, and religious denominations, do not have memories as we traditionally think of them, but rather organize and construct an identity based on these shared memories. Political memory is, as a rule, homogenous and leaves little room for alternative perspectives, because it is essentially a top-down approach to memory and identity construction. Individuals have little say in the established political memory of their country.

Like political memory, cultural memory is enduring and designed to be transgenerational. The term cultural memory refers to both active and archival memory. Active cultural memory consists of “what society consciously selects and maintains as salient and vital items for common orientation and shared remembering” (“Memory 220-221). In other words, active cultural memory “comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image” (“Identity” 132). Works of visual art, literature, music, and film fall into the body of cultural memory. While a society’s body of cultural works forms an established canon, individuals in a given society identify personally with a work and fit it into their own constructed identity. “The content of cultural memory,” Assmann suggests, “privileges individual forms of participation such as reading, writing, learning, scrutinizing, criticizing, and appreciating and draws individuals into a wider historical horizon that is not only transgenerational but also

transnational” (“Memory” 221). Because active cultural memory is highly personal, individuals relate to and contextualize cultural memory uniquely.

Archival memory refers to the caches of information stored in archives, museums, and libraries that “are neither actively remembered nor totally forgotten, because they remain materially accessible for possible use” (“Memory” 220). While active cultural memory is accessible to the public, archival memory is reserved for scholars and specialists. Because this information is not readily available to the public at large, it is not part of an established narrative. However, according to Assmann, “cultural memory has an inbuilt capacity for ongoing changes, innovations, transformations, and reconfigurations,” thus making cultural memory more flexible than a top-down established political memory (“Memory” 221). Indeed, because each individual identifies with cultural memory differently, and what is considered part of active cultural memory can change over time, collective memory as a whole is stable and constant, but continuously in flux.

Memory Contests and Postmemory

Communicative memory is almost nonexistent in Honigmann’s texts. Instead, her texts point to a breakdown in communication between herself and her parents that prohibits the transference of memory. This is not only a rupture in the familial sphere, but a generational rupture as well that similarly accounts for the silence between Honigmann’s protagonist and Alried/A. When Honigmann attempts to break these silences, often with a barrage of questions, she is met with silence or an evasive reply. As Gsoels-Lorensen notes, “This kind of interrogative catalogue occurs repeatedly in second generation texts, in which it marks the difficult, if not impossible conversations

between the generations” (374). However, the discourse on memory continues with the theories of memory contests and postmemory, two theories that account for the transference of memory in traumatic situations in the absence of communication. Honigmann turns to memory objects to bridge the gaps in her familial narrative and her relationships with her mother and father. The objects are not communicative in and of themselves because they cannot replace true communicative memory. Instead, they offer glimpses into the past, but only from the present and from another individual’s perspective. Honigmann and her protagonist reinterpret these objects in order to establish themselves in a familial narrative as well as the larger sphere of German cultural memory.

In response to the 2004’s international conference “Memory Contests: Cultural Memory, Hybridity and Identity in German Discourses since 1990,” Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove proposed the idea of memory contests as an alternative to the outdated notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Memory contests, they suggest, emphasize “a pluralistic memory culture which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past but embraces the idea that individuals and groups advance and edit competing stories about themselves that forge their changing sense of identity” (*Contests* 2). Unlike the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which suggests a sense of closure or a sense of completion, the idea of memory contests suggests an on-going process that is dynamic. Memory contests refer to the specific context of German memory culture post-*Wende*. They are “highly dynamic public engagements with the past that are triggered by an event that is perceived as a massive disturbance of a community’s self-understanding” (*Contests* 2). In Germany, such disturbances include the media frenzy surrounding the

Walser-Bubis debate, the controversy of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, the drawn out discussions on the building of the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, debates about the legacy of Socialism and the Stasi, and the controversial question of German wartime suffering (*Contests* 1).

This public reckoning with the past has unleashed a wave of personal and familial narratives that “adopt a transgenerational perspective on Germany’s past”, including works by Monika Maron, Günter Grass and Uwe Timm, among others. Often, these familial narratives are characterized not by a fluid communicative memory between generations, but by breaks and gaps of silence. “Tuning into the unsaid that punctures the archive of family legends, these narrators adopt the role of ‘phantomologists’ who explore an unmastered inheritance within the domain of the family” (*Contests* 9). Fuchs and Cosgrove identify certain techniques associated with the phenomenon of memory contests expressed through literature, including ghosting and the use of memory objects, by which they mean letters, diaries, and photographs. The extremely personal connections formed with these memory objects reflect the author’s desire to establish a connection with their past, and thereby assert power over this memory. Memory contests allow for the expression of individual stories and memories, however similar or dissimilar they may be, while acknowledging the overarching historical norm within which these stories are located.

Particularly relevant to the discussion of Honigmann’s identity navigation is Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory, which she expounds upon in her work *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Postmemory, Hirsch says, “characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that

preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated” (*Frames* 22). Hirsch examines the ways in which memories, especially traumatic memories, are transferred from one generation to the next, and how they are enshrined in a society’s cultural memory through works of literature. She applies this theory to the transmission of trauma and memories between generations, specifically between first-generation Holocaust survivors and their children, the second-generation Holocaust survivors. Second-generation Holocaust survivors “‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (“Generation of Postmemory” 106). This form of memory, she suggests, is particularly powerful because postmemory “is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (*Frames* 22). For this reason, and due to the nature of a photograph, Hirsch focuses on photography as the primary means of transmission. A photograph is a moment captured in the past, whether posed or spontaneous, which is reinterpreted anew by successive future viewers within the context of their own history and memory, as well as the current political and/or social climate. “[Photographs],” Hirsch asserts, “are the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past’s existence and, in their flat two dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance” (*Frames* 23).

In my analysis of Barbara Honigmann’s autobiographical and autofictional texts, I focus on memory objects, among them not only photographs, but also everyday items, letters, works of literature and visual art. Through the reinterpretation of these objects, Honigmann herself and her female first-person protagonist project themselves onto and

into their own family histories in order to establish their place in the present. The interplay of past and present has a profound effect not only on the present, but on the future as well, and determines how one navigates the tricky road of self-discovery. I will first explore how objects are preserved and how this differs across generations in Honigmann's texts. Additionally, I will look at how these objects from the past are reinterpreted in the present to create a framework of reference for Honigmann's definition of self in her attempt to place herself within her own family's narrative and her Jewish heritage and in the larger sphere of German cultural memory.

CHAPTER 4

MEMORY OBJECTS

Across Barbara Honigmann's autofictional texts, a stark contrast emerges between the protagonist and her family and friends in terms of the collection, preservation, and reinterpretation of memory objects. These memory objects include letters, poems, paintings, classic works of German literature, objects of everyday use, and photographs. I focus first not on the specific memory items themselves, but on the archiving of these items. The protagonist's means of archiving differ, sometimes drastically, from those closest to her. I look first at two examples of memory storage containers from the perspective of the protagonist, including a metal box and a transport container. As a counter example, I examine Honigmann's mother, whose stored memory objects offer little in the way of insight for her daughter, because she discards any letters of interest shortly after reading them and seems distant to the point of unconcerned when, as a child, her daughter loses the only possession passed down from her mother. Here, a generational disparity is evident; while Honigmann looks to the past to inform her present and future, her mother and her lover, who both experienced the war first-hand, disavow the past in an attempt to forge a new future.

Bilder von A., Honigmann's fictional recasting of her relationship with the famous East German theater director Adolf Dresen, illustrates her protagonist's concern with preserving the past through the symbol of a steel box. The box, envisioned as a storage container for cakes and cookies, could, if needed, store many cakes and cookies "für

ewige Zeiten” (*Bilder* 8). Instead of cookies and cakes, the protagonist stores her letters and mementos from the correspondence with her lover, A. After news of his death, the protagonist places a book of sonnets into the box as a “Grabbeigabe” along with all of the letters and mementos already “ingesargt” inside (*Bilder* 72). The protagonist’s word choice suggests that she is ready to bury this part of her life, or at least wishes to close this chapter of it. However, closing this chapter of her life proves difficult. The protagonist tells her story of A. from the present, a time in which he is no longer physically present, but nevertheless plays a very important role. That she places his letters in this lead box, a box capable of withstanding time and the elements, points to the narrator’s desire to collect and preserve these memories of him, despite the failure of this relationship and her belief that he is an anti-Semite. She takes these letters with her, even after she settles in France with her husband, a sign that these letters remain an important means of insight into her past, as well as into her present and future.

After A.’s death, his wife returns her letters. Only later, as the narrator sifts through the contents of the box, does she realize that she alone had preserved all his letters and cards, and that of all of her letters, “nur die da waren, die ich ihm noch aus dem Osten geschickt hatte [...]. Kein Brief aus meinem späteren Leben im Westen, kein einziger” (*Bilder* 93). The protagonist questions whether it was his wife who threw away these letters, or, the more likely theory, if A. had thrown away the letters he received after her immigration to Strasbourg. She had cautiously told A. about her experiences of immigration and conversion to Judaism, unsure how he would respond. “Manchmal fand er es interessant [...] manchmal empfand er es als befremdend,” she says, but “manchmal schrieb er rundheraus, er sehe das nur als eine Flucht an. Eine Flucht aus der Enge und

Lügenhaftigkeit des ‘realen Sozialismus’” (*Bilder* 82). The protagonist chooses to end their correspondence after A. responds increasingly negatively to her conversion. That these later letters are missing from the bundle she receives after his death indicates a caesura in their relationship. The two no longer find common ground; he rails against the capitalist West, and she, less politically-inclined than he, chooses instead to focus on her own spiritual search and life in Strasbourg. The protagonist’s attempt to compartmentalize this part of her life by storing the tangible remains of their correspondence is only somewhat successful, because the reminder “A. ist jetzt tot” recurs throughout, interrupting the narration with this sometimes somber, sometimes heartbroken reminder.

The protagonist of *Eine Liebe aus nichts* also attempts to compartmentalize her past life, hoping that the order she creates before leaving Berlin will smooth the transition to Paris and a new life outside the confines of the Jewish-German negative symbiosis. For her first few weeks, she feels only the confines of her dark and cold *southern* apartment, while around her, the city and its inhabitants are enjoying the heat of summer (*Liebe* 11). However, she looks forward to the arrival of her possessions from Berlin, for they should help ease the transition and alleviate the homesickness she feels after her immigration to Paris. The container, which she had so “sorgfältig eingepackt” before leaving Berlin, arrived, but everything in it was “durcheinandergeraten” (*Liebe* 21). That she packed her container in such a meticulous way, despite the hurry in which she had to leave after receiving her visa, suggests that she sought order and a way to organize her past, so as to make sense of it in her present. Her entire life’s worth of possessions and memories are jumbled together; old things mixed with new, some things gone forever,

and others present that do not belong to her at all. It is clear that this order or semblance of order she wished to create before leaving Berlin is not evident in Paris. Despite her attempts to begin anew there, the past does not remain behind, neatly packed away in Berlin, but resurfaces to invade her present.

Expecting a “Verwandlung”, the protagonist is disappointed by her inability to connect to her new surroundings, which is immediate; upon her arrival in the train station, every exit to the city is blocked. “Es war,” she says, “als ob wirklich kein Zugang in diese Stadt hinein zu finden wäre” (*Liebe* 13). The protagonist takes to the streets to orient herself in her new city and in her new life, seeking to find “ein ganz unbekannter Geruch, ein fremder, ohne Vergleich und ohne Erinnerung” (*Liebe* 15). However, her present is too tightly bound to her past. She writes, “Es fiel mir schwer, das neue Leben zu beginnen, und ich dachte viel mehr an alles, was hinter mir lag [...]” (*Liebe* 17). Sitting in cafés in Paris reminds her of sitting with friends in the cafés of Budapest, the longing for something indescribable tying the two experiences together (*Liebe* 20). Though she describes her immigration as an attempt to escape her parents, the first picture she hangs on her apartment wall in Paris is a map of the city, with her parents’ wartime addresses circled in red, a constant reminder of their past (*Liebe* 31). The protagonist recognizes that she cannot truly escape her parents and their past lives, though she professes, “Ich wollte ja auch nicht immer in den Spuren meiner Eltern bleiben [...]”, she also must acknowledge “ich lief ihnen doch hinterher” (*Liebe* 31).

Unlike Honigmann and her female protagonist, Litzy Honigmann lives in the present and refuses to be drawn in by the memories latent in photos, letters, pieces of jewelry, and places, such as her parents’ gravesites in London. Though she is nostalgic

for her time spent in exile and in Vienna before the accession of Austria, Honigmann characterizes her mother as living only in the present, “nicht in der Erinnerung” (*Damals* 101). In response to Honigmann’s incessant childhood questioning about her past, her mother’s standard response was “Ich weiß nicht. Kann mich nicht erinnern,” implying not only an inability to remember, but at some level a *refusal* to remember and share these memories (*Damals* 24). Honigmann emphasizes the extreme nature of her mother’s refusal to remember, suggesting that though she could not remember the natural color of her own hair, she was certain Julius and Ethel Rosenberg had been guilty of espionage (*Kapitel* 5). Honigmann’s mother did not preserve letters and objects, but rather shredded every letter she received within days of reading it, leaving little room for her daughter to gain insight into her life (*Damals* 35). Litzzy Honigmann’s association with the NKVD sheds more insight into this propensity, because leaving a paper trail would have been tantamount to self-incrimination. Her expertise in deflecting questions and changing conversation topics can also be attributed to this. However, this quality also reflects the skill with which she avoids the trauma of her wartime experiences, and prevents her daughter from gaining access to these memories.

Details of her mother’s life remain shrouded in secrecy. Honigmann recalls rummaging through drawers, boxes, and bookshelves, hoping to find some grain of truth to her mother’s stories of exile, but disappointed by what she finds: a few books inscribed with her first name and an unfamiliar last name in her mother’s handwriting that indicates an earlier marriage, as well as her parents’ official divorce certificate (*Damals* 24). Whereas Honigmann’s protagonist seeks order in the way in which she stores her

memory objects, Honigmann describes her mother's memory archival system as something that resembles destruction rather than preservation (*Kapitel 13*).

Though specific biographical details about her mother differ across her works, Honigmann continually returns to her mother and language. This recurring theme indicates that transgenerational communication is important to Honigmann, but lacking in her relationship to her mother. The protagonist's mother in *Eine Liebe aus nichts* reflects this utter lack of communication, at first through her "fehlerhaftes Deutsch", indicative of her origins and the distance at which she holds herself from German culture, and later through the complete absence of a shared language (*Liebe 29*). "Kurz vor ihrem Tod haben wir gar nicht mehr miteinander sprechen können, weil sie nur noch Bulgarisch verstand," the protagonist says, and continues, "doch das hatte ich ja nie gelernt" (*Liebe 30*). The absence of a common language reflects the sheer magnitude of the familial and generational rupture. Honigmann's own mother did not speak Bulgarian, but rather Hungarian. She also spoke German with a distinct Viennese accent, marking her immediately as an outsider (*Kapitel 30*). Honigmann therefore recasts her mother here to emphasize the magnitude of distance between them. Though Honigmann and her mother continued to speak the same language, Honigmann is never certain what truth lies in her mother's stories, or if her mother is simply following her own advice: "[...] wenn du lügst, dann lüge so nah wie möglich an der Wahrheit" (*Kapitel 23*).

This breakdown in communication inhibits the transference of memory from mother to daughter and from one generation to the next. Confronted with these breaks and gaps of silence, the second generation must explore its past in an alternative way and search out tangible connections to the past in the form of memory objects. By projecting

themselves into their familial narratives with the help of these objects, second-generation Holocaust survivors bridge the communicative gap caused by immense trauma, allowing them to assert agency over this past and incorporate it into their life's narrative.

Communicative Memory Objects

A lost necklace, a photograph of a mysterious young man (none other than Kim Philby, the notorious British double agent for the Soviet Union and Litzzy Honigmann's second husband), book covers inscribed with her mother's first name and an unfamiliar last name, a letter from her grandmother written in Hungarian - these are the fragmented requisites of Honigmann's childhood. Because Honigmann is left to puzzle out the meanings of these objects on her own, they suggest the lack of communication between herself and her parents. Because these objects cannot speak for her parents nor repair their relationship damaged by silence, Honigmann interprets these memory objects in an attempt to piece together her familial history and her own identity. Honigmann cannot as easily establish a connection to her mother's family as she can to her father's. To identify with her maternal ancestors, Honigmann must search her mother's past for this relationship.

As a child, Honigmann reports, she searched for grains of truth in her mother's life. However, it was in her mother's jewelry box, the only box not off limits to her, that she found a simple necklace with a black stone. The importance of this necklace only becomes apparent after she loses it during gym class. The necklace had been passed down from her grandmother to her mother, and from her mother's grandmother before that. "Meine Mutter sagte ganz lakonisch: es war das einzige, was ich noch von meiner Mutter besaß [...]" (*Damals* 26). After this episode, Honigmann's mother never mentions

the necklace again, indicative of this rupture in communication. No matter how much this necklace might have meant to her, Honigmann's mother is neither willing nor able to broach the subject – along with many subjects – again. The lost necklace remains an important indicator of the severed link between generations, a link severed by war, exile, death and silence.

Amongst her mother's possessions, Honigmann also finds a letter from her grandmother addressed to her mother shortly after her maternal grandfather died in exile in London. This, it turns out, is Litzy Honigmann's last and "einzige Hinterlassenschaft". "Sonst hatte sie nichts aufgehoben, gar nichts," Honigmann reports (*Damals* 20). This letter tasks Honigmann's mother with tending to her parents' graves in London and in making sure they are buried with grave markers. Included with this letter are two cards with the location of the burial sites, and directions on how to reach the cemetery, including which public transportation connections to take. Though Honigmann's mother was in possession of these cards, she never arranged for her parents' graves to be marked with headstones, nor did she return to London to visit the cemetery.

Honigmann takes it upon herself to travel to London to find her grandparents' burial sites, which she recounts in the essay "Gräber in London" (*Damals* 35). In this essay, however, Honigmann not only concerns herself with her maternal grandparents' graves, but with her first encounters with other Jewish children in East Berlin. By visiting the Jewish cemetery of Weißensee, Honigmann and the other Jewish children hoped to unravel the puzzles of their own ancestry: "Auf die hebräischen Buchstaben, die ich nicht lesen konnte, starrte ich, als ob sie vielleicht eine geheime, sehr wichtige Botschaft für mich enthielten, durch die sich das Rätsel meiner Herkunft offenbaren

würde und das Schweigen meiner Eltern gebrochen werden könnte” (*Damals* 28). However, this identification remains partially hidden to her. Though she recognizes many of the traditional Jewish names, *her* ancestors are not buried in this cemetery. Unlike her husband, Peter, she cannot trace her lineage back to these names, and is jealous, even angry, that he can (*Damals* 31). Her trip to London to visit her maternal grandparents’ graves is an attempt to piece together her own identity through that of the family she never knew. Here, she finds only empty plots, and though the names surrounding these unmarked graves are the same as the ones in Berlin, where the names of her grandparents should have been, there are only empty spaces. But, for the first time, Honigmann says, she understands why her mother held onto this letter for 45 years and left it to her, presumably because her mother knew that Honigmann would be able to make this connection to the past even if she was not able to (*Damals* 37).

Honigmann extracts her own identification from the cemetery, though the exact lineage of her family’s Jewish heritage remains unknown to her until much later. The absence of names on the graves does not disavow her identity, but rather, the presence of her practicing Jewish grandparents’ graves affirms her own Jewish identity, long denied to her by her parents’ silence. To anyone else, these unmarked graves have no meaning. As her son points out, “Da ist ja nichts!” to which Honigmann replies in the affirmative, telling him, “doch, das Grab das wir suchen ist hier. Hier ist der Platz, wo die Großeltern begraben sind [...]” (*Damals* 37). For her, finally coming face-to-face with her grandparents’ graves is enough to establish this familial link; to anyone else they are just unmarked gravesites, but to Honigmann they are a direct connection to her Jewish heritage.

Graves play an important role not only in an immensely personal way as evidenced by Honigmann's continued interest in her grandparents' graves, but also in a wider cultural sense. As Gsoels-Lorensen notes, "the cemetery is one of the few surviving Jewish institutions in post-war Germany [...], a place in which Jewish identity and history are material, visible and irrevocably, however ruinously, present" (378). These Jewish cemeteries are memorials to the decimated Jewish population, thus extending their significance to a wider public and anchoring them in a larger, cultural memory. Similarly, the diary the protagonist of *Eine Liebe aus nichts* takes from her father's room transcends the line between communicative memory object and cultural memory object, after the protagonist begins filling his diary with her own stories. Her narration, then, is the institutionalized memory of her father. Like her protagonist, Honigmann writes herself into German cultural memory.

Cultural Memory Objects

Because cultural memory encompasses works of art, music, and literature, individuals can contextualize and interpret these cultural memory objects for themselves to identify (or not) with cultural memory in a broader sense. Honigmann, for example, cites the classics of German literature – Goethe, Kleist, and Hölderlin among others – as important sources of inspiration for her. She engages with these classic works of literature on a personal level and weaves references to them throughout her works, including poem quotations from Hölderlin and Rilke (*Eine Liebe aus nichts*) and passages from Kleist's plays (*Bilder von A.*). In a letter from her father, he uses a quotation from Hölderlin, writing "Trennen wollten wir uns, wähten es gut und klug. / Da wirs taten, warum schreckte wie Mord uns die Tat. / Ach, wir kennen uns wenig" (*Liebe* 23). Here,

poetry replaces direct communication between father and daughter as the father, personalizes and recontextualizes the poem to comment on their relationship. As Silke Schade indicates, “[...] Honigmann draws a connection over time and over space. Inserting quotations from canonical texts into her own literary space allows her to recontextualize these texts and claim them” (Schade 45). Honigmann’s use of canonical texts allows her to assert herself into the already established German cultural memory, and it is the act of writing itself that both draws on and informs German cultural memory. However, writing is not just a form of cultural memory identification, but an extremely personal act of communicative memory identification as well, which she uses to trace her paternal heritage.

After her father’s death, the narrator returns to Germany, her first visit since immigrating, and visits his room one last time, hoping to take an “Erinnerungsstück” with her. However, she realizes that his possessions have lost all meaning to him, writing that his story was “darin zu Ende”, but that her own story, and the stories of others, could continue in these objects (*Liebe* 10). She takes a small, red leather notebook, an English diary, and a broken Russian watch with her. Before her return trip to Paris, she returns to the small English diary: “Weil ich den Kalender nicht einfach nur als Erinnerungsstück mit nach Paris nehmen wollte und weil so viele Seiten leer geblieben waren, [...] habe ich angefangen, die leeren Seiten vollzuschreiben, so daß unsere Aufzeichnungen in einander verliefen [...]” (*Liebe* 99). The contents of her father’s diary are significant; these pages do not just document ordinary days, but rather, his immediate experiences upon returning to post-war Germany in 1946. She reclaims this part of his life – his decision to defect to the Russian zone, his hope for the future of Germany, his “otherness” in relation to the

displaced Germans –as a part of her own history. How she continues her own story is also significant; she doesn't just write, she attempts to *fill* the pages. Honigmann's protagonist uses the verb *vollschreiben*, the prefix *voll* connoting a sense of completion or fulfillment, which suggests that this process helps her complete or fulfill a part of herself. The narrator assumes her father's stories and incorporates them into her own, signifying her intent to weave her past, present and future, and his as well, into a textured identity. As Caroline Schaumann asserts, the protagonist "has grown to embrace a more self-reflective perspective that acknowledges an identity shaped by (and not in opposition to) her father" (177). Karen Remmler shares this view, writing that Honigmann's generational texts attempt "to come to terms with the fragmented identity and the differences between her identity and that of her father" (198). According to Schaumann, by continuing her father's diary entries with her own, the protagonist "not only figuratively and literally preserves and maintains the family history, but also replaces the patriarchal perspective with a female one, changing family tradition" (178). Writing, a broad designation for a limitless number of means of expression – novels, essays, plays, letters, both published or unpublished – enhances the narrator's connection to her father, and, by continuing his diary entries, affirms her place in the family's lineage through the shared connection of writing.

Writing allows Honigmann to identify with both her Jewish heritage and her German culture, both of which she traces in "Von meinem Urgroßvater, meinem Großvater, meinem Vater und von mir." Honigmann's great grandfather, grandfather, and father were all writers, and through her identification with them, she is able to place herself not only in a tradition of writers, but within the German cultural sphere. She

traces her heritage as an author back to her great grandfather, a member of the Jewish emancipation movement, a supporter of the 1848 revolution, and “ein deutscher Schriftsteller“ (*Damals* 41). Her grandfather, also a writer, was an assimilated Jew, who according to Honigmann had given up his Jewish beliefs in favor of the rationality of science. The names of his children evidence his assimilation: Heinrich, Honigmann’s uncle, and her father, Georg Friedrich Wolfgang. By the time her father comes of age and is socialized in German culture, it is no longer a question of abandoning his Jewishness; this had already been done for him: “es war ihm sowieso schon ganz entrückt und entfremdet” (*Damals* 43). However, as he is forced to flee Germany after the onset of Nazi persecution, his Jewishness becomes unavoidable as it is forced upon him from the outside. Honigmann reports that her great grandfather, grandfather, and father longed to feel at home in the German culture and that she also feels this shared sense of dislocation and alienation, leading her to choose self-imposed exile in Strasbourg. “Als Jude bin ich aus Deutschland weggegangen, aber in meiner Arbeit, in einer sehr starken Bindung an die deutsche Sprache, kehre ich immer wieder zurück” (*Damals* 18). Honigmann’s immigration marks the beginning of writing for her, or when she begins “‘richtig’ zu schreiben”, as she acknowledges (*Damals* 52). She recognizes that her story is an old story, a continuation of a story, but her own nonetheless, and that in order to write it, she must use new words and she must begin “noch einmal anders, ganz von vorne,” in order to accomplish this (*Damals* 51). Honigmann identifies a shared heritage with her relatives as well as the millions of Jews the Nazis murdered, and those who survived, but to claim her place in this story, she must use her own words. She must tell their story, the stories of her grandparents and of her parents, to tell her own.

German literature's ability to overcome Honigmann's sense of alienation from Germany manifests itself in her relationship to a famous theater director, whom she refers to only as Alfried and A. in her autofictional accounts of their relationship, *Eine Liebe aus nichts* and *Bilder von A.*, respectively. Honigmann's narrator is unable to reconcile her Jewishness, which she does not fully identify with yet, with his Germanness. From their first meeting in a colleague's apartment, the narrator and A. are entangled in what she calls to as the "*Sfäre der Poesie*", a reference to Novalis and the Kleist project they are both working on. Both identify strongly with Kleist and equate his critique of Prussia with their own critique of the GDR: "Kleist sprach von Preußen, aber wir meinten die DDR" (*Bilder* 15).

In this *Sfäre der Poesie*, they are immune to the realities of their relationship. These realities – that he is fifteen years older than she is and of a different generation, that he has a wife and children, and that his very name brings to mind the atrocities of the Holocaust (an allusion to A.'s real name, Adolf) – fade into the background as they engross themselves in their theater work. However, when left alone, these realities creep into the foreground. A. slips notes and letters under her door, only comes to her apartment at night, never invites her to his apartment, and never spends the night in order to avoid the banalities of everyday talk. Only within their *Sfäre der Poesie* can the two lovers escape the silence weighing on their relationship. Whereas she can speak freely and openly about her family and friends, he avoids all mention of his. In a moment of impetuosity on his fortieth birthday, A. exclaims, "nun bin ich schon älter, älter als mein Vater je war," breaking the strained silence that surrounds their relationship (*Bilder*

23). A.'s father never reached his fortieth birthday because he never returned home from the front. This unspoken truth is a constant reminder of their irreconcilable differences.

As the years pass, A. begins explicitly to criticize her conversion to Judaism, comparing it to Freud's analysis of religion as a neurosis. She recounts one of his later letters, in which he shatters the illusion of the *Sfäre der Poesie*: "In der DDR, bemerkte er ein andermal, habe es zwar keine Alpen gegeben, aber man habe wenigstens nicht über Juden und Antisemitismus reden müssen. Das sei besser gewesen. Und ich hätte bloß einen Spleen" (*Bilder* 121). With this letter, she says, "durchbrach [er] unsere bis dahin eingehaltene Neutralität und desertierte aus der *Sfäre der Poesie*" (*Bilder* 121). The protagonist henceforth replies only infrequently to his letters, until she receives one last letter from him, in which he accuses her of playing the eternal Jewish victim, despite a privileged upbringing (*Bilder* 129). The ease with which he accuses her of this, throwing out the phrase eternal victim, shocks her, but confirms how far apart they truly stand. "A. mochte Juden nicht," she summarizes, continuing, "Er hielt mich, wegen der Art, wie ich lebe, für krank, oder schlimmer noch, für eingebildet" (*Bilder* 130). She never replies to this letter, instead choosing to cut off all contact with him, and only learns of his death from a newspaper.

The shattered *Sfäre der Poesie* calls into question their almost thirty-year-long "ungeregelte, unauflösliche und ungelöste Bindung" and indicates the reason the protagonist emigrated from Germany in the first place: her belief in the impossibility of a functioning German-Jewish relationship after the Holocaust (*Bilder* 133). For Honigmann, her connection to German culture and the German language remains intact even after her immigration, because, as she asserts:

Ich denke aber, der Schriftsteller ist das, was er schreibt, und er ist vor allem die Sprache, in der er schreibt. Ich schreibe nicht nur auf deutsch, sondern die Literatur, die mich geformt und gebildet hat, ist die deutsche Literatur, und ich beziehe mich auf sie, in allem was ich schreibe, auf Goethe, auf Kleist, auf Grimms Märchen und auf die deutsche Romantik, und ich weiß sehr wohl, daß die Herren Verfasser wohl alle mehr oder weniger Antisemiten waren, aber das macht nichts (*Damals* 17).

While she is able to separate the texts that shape German cultural memory from their authors, who may or may not have been anti-Semites, and acknowledges how tightly anchored in this literary tradition she is, she cannot deny that the *Sfäre der Poesie* is an artificial and romanticized creation, incapable of masking the realities of their relationship. “In the progression from *Roman von einem Kinde* [...] to *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben* [...] Barbara Honigmann appropriates her Jewish heritage by reconstructing first her father’s family history and then her mother’s,” Schaumann asserts (166). With *Bilder von A.*, Honigmann not only weaves together allusions to the Romantics to cement their influence on her literary works and to establish her place in the German literary tradition, but also breaks apart the notion of a space impenetrable by memories of the past. The *Sfäre der Poesie* is but an illusion to mask the realities of life after the Holocaust.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Barbara Honigmann constructs her identity as an East German-born Jewish woman living and writing in exile in France through the memory objects she literally and figuratively carries with her. These objects not only provide a tangible connection to the past, but also shape and complete her identity. By weaving these objects into her life's narrative, she is able to connect with contradictory aspects of her identity and avoid the fragmentation so often associated with cultural hybridity. By reinterpreting these objects of the past from a different context in the present, Honigmann projects herself onto these objects and bridges the gaps and silences apparent in her familial narrative. Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory accounts for the transference of traumatic memory between generations, but because Honigmann's familial narrative is marked by silences and gaps due to her parents' traumatic wartime experiences, Honigmann must seek out her own position in the family in the absence of transgenerational communication.

Honigmann's search for identity is an active, dynamic and on-going process. She enthusiastically refutes the Jewish identity assigned to her by her elderly neighbor in the essay "Ich bin nicht Anne!" She acknowledges the impossibility of living in a country where she will never fully be able to escape from being labeled as Jewish victim. Instead of staying in East Germany, her protagonist immigrates to Paris in order to begin anew and discover herself independent of an outsider's assertions of her identity. However, once in Paris, she finds herself justifying her German heritage and defending the German

language, but does not disavow either of these aspects. Instead, she acknowledges that being unable to live a Jewish life in Germany but still writing in German seems contradictory. By embracing this contradiction she is able to overcome the fragmentation inherent in this paradox. It is there, in the German language, that Honigmann reclaims her German cultural identity. Writing allows her to connect all the facets of her life into one multilayered identity. To assert herself in Germany's literary tradition she draws on authors of German Romanticism, specifically Kleist and Hölderlin. She weaves together quotations from their works to reinforce her own narration, and reinterprets his political critique of Prussia in her own context as a critique on East Germany. Similarly, Honigmann is able to assert her place in a long tradition of Jewish-German writers by tracing the thread of writing down the line of her paternal family. However, she both continues and breaks the tradition. Telling their stories enables her to tell her own stories, but she accomplishes this with her own words and as a woman in a long line of male authors. Honigmann thus not only draws on, but contributes to and establishes herself as a part of German cultural memory.

Honigmann's works are examples of second-generation Holocaust survivor narratives. While first-generation texts recount surviving the Holocaust, these narratives tell stories about surviving what comes after. They tell intensely personal stories about living with families traumatized by the Holocaust and reflect the transmission of these traumatic memories across generations. These texts reflect the long-term effects of such trauma and thus continue to expand the cultural memory discourse on this topic. However, I also believe that Honigmann's works point to a universality outside the confines of her biography. Exploring her work through the memory objects that populate

it reveals the literary nature of her work that so often gets lost in the details of her biography. While Honigmann certainly has a very unique biography, her texts speak to individuals who can personally engage with them, whether simply by reading, or by discussing and interpreting them. This personal engagement with cultural memory allows individuals to redefine and extend their own definitions of self. Looking at these memory objects and how Honigmann incorporates them into her works highlights that Honigmann is not simply a German-Jewish woman living and writing in exile, but that she is first and foremost an author.

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