

Lucas F. W. Wilson

Florida Atlantic University

The Structures of Postmemory: Portraits of Survivor-Family Homes in Second-Generation Holocaust Literature

ABSTRACT

My dissertation builds on Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, in tandem with critics' responses to Hirsch. Postmemory names the transmission of trauma and embodied knowledge from survivors to their children known as the second generation. In order to develop my research on postmemory, my dissertation centers on survivor-family homes, both the childhood and adulthood homes in which members of the second generation have lived. Understanding survivor-family homes as not only domestic spaces, but also as psychosocial spaces imbued with survivors' Holocaust memories, I argue that survivor-family homes, as described in second-generation literature, map, mirror, and mediate the second generation's relationship to their postmemories. I consider as the basis of my dissertation project Hirsch's notion that postmemory is "a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 6). Although Hirsch's use of the term "structure" refers to the organization of relationships between past and present, specifically determined by the family unit, I investigate how postmemory qua structure can be understood as the very physical, domestic milieus in which survivor families have lived. Household objects, domestic spatial arrangements, and the ways in which members of survivor families navigate their homes all carry (post)memorial import, communicating and perpetuating the perceived collapse of past and present for such families impacted by the Holocaust. My analysis of survivor-family homes—as spatial containers and amplifiers of postmemory—details how it is that habitually sharing time and domestic space with survivor-parents assists in the creation and intensification of postmemory.