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**Inherited Traumatic Threads:  
Postmemory and the Dis/function of  
Hand-Me-Downs in Bernice Eisenstein's  
*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors***

## Abstract

*Bernice Eisenstein's I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors demonstrates how hand-me-downs function as physical links that Eisenstein uses when attempting to bridge the gaps between herself, her late father, and his Holocaust past in order to address her postmemory; however, as much as these hand-me-downs allow her to address her postmemories, they reinscribe inherited traumas that stem from her father's Holocaust past. Eisenstein's work serves as a generative example of how the second generation's relationships to such clothing often reflect how they inherit and are "dressed in" their postmemories.*

## Résumé

*L'ouvrage de Bernice Eisenstein, I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors, montre comment les vêtements usés fonctionnent comme des liens physiques qu'Eisenstein utilise pour tenter de combler le fossé entre elle-même, son défunt père et le passé de l'Holocauste de ce dernier, afin d'aborder sa post-mémoire; cependant, autant ces vêtements lui permettent d'aborder sa post-mémoire, autant ils réinscrivent les traumatismes hérités du passé de l'Holocauste de son père. Le travail d'Eisenstein sert d'exemple génératif de la façon dont les relations de la deuxième génération avec ces vêtements reflètent souvent la façon dont ils héritent et sont « habillés » de leurs post-mémoires.*

"Today, do we collect things in order to keep the past proximate, to incorporate the past into our daily lives, or in order to make the past distant, to objectify it (as an idea in a thing) in the effort to arrest its spectral power?"

– Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things*

Second-generation Holocaust literature, written by the children of Holocaust survivors, concerns itself greatly with questions of inherited trauma and embodied knowledge. This corpus presents the ways in which members of the second generation imaginatively assume the traumatic pasts of their parents as if they were their own. Analyzing this phenomenon of traumatic and epistemic inheritance, Marianne Hirsch proposes the term *postmemory* as "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."<sup>1</sup> Alan L. Berger explains how "the second generation's legacy," which in large part is constituted by their postmemories, "is both constantly present and continually elusive."<sup>2</sup> The process of accessing this legacy of loss and putting it into words is, as Victoria Aarons and Berger note, "labyrinthine" since it must "wrest imagined memory from absence."<sup>3</sup> As such, postmemory leaves

children of survivors with the task of weaving together the narrative threads of their parents' pasts—pasts that are imaginatively incorporated into their own subjectivities and identities that are often difficult to articulate and negotiate.

Giving voice to “the presence of absence”<sup>4</sup> with which many children of survivors struggle, Bernice Eisenstein's graphic narrative, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, documents the postmemorial inheritance of a daughter of survivors. Aarons describes Eisenstein's work as a “semiautobiographical/biographical narrative,”<sup>5</sup> noting: “Characteristic of second-generation Holocaust writing and especially the genre of the graphic narrative, Eisenstein has created a hybrid work that blurs autobiography, memoir, biography, and testimony.”<sup>6</sup> In *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, as Dagmara Drewniak explains, there are multiple dimensions of absence: “What Eisenstein makes clear in her book is . . . the absence which the child of the Holocaust survivors enters. It is the absence of the dead, the absence of her parents' place of birth, the absence of memory.”<sup>7</sup> Miriam Harris further proposes that the graphic narrative “can be perceived as a quest to make tangible the phantasms that inhabited her survivor parents' tormented silences, and thereby to provide some release from their terrifying grip,” which Harris suggests is accomplished through writing and drawing.<sup>8</sup> Though Harris offers much insight into how Eisenstein works through her inherited traumas by way of writing and drawing, some of her observations do not hold water. For instance, Harris claims: “To transform this haunting world of the past into a more tangible state, and thereby banish what is mythlike and ghostly, Eisenstein collapses the linearity of time. She intertwines images, text, and eras to re-create and make corporeal the indeterminate contours of a pervasive absence.”<sup>9</sup>

Harris's suggestion that Eisenstein “collapses the linearity of time” in order to work through her postmemories implies a sense of intentionality, a willful decision to blur the past and the present. Such a proposal, however, is precisely the opposite of Eisenstein's project, just as it is the antithesis of second-generation members' attempts to work through the past more broadly; in order to work through the past, Eisenstein attempts not only to give voice to her postmemories but to sort through them in hopes of drawing a clear distinction between the past and the present. Indeed, as postmemory is understood in terms of the infringement of the past on the present—and thus a blurred sense of temporality—the effort to come to terms with the past is defined by separating inherited Holocaust traumas from the present. As such, Harris's claim proves faulty. Instead, it can be seen that the linearity of time “collapses” without Eisenstein's consent and without intention. In other words, Eisenstein does not intend to collapse time in hopes of moving beyond her parents' haunting pasts; rather, she is at the mercy of her parents' pasts that collapse time regardless of her desire for temporal linearity. In either case, what can be said about Eisenstein and her drawings is that she “undertakes an attempt at coping with the inherited memories of the Holocaust in the form of a written text and the black-white-and-grey drawings that accompany this text.”<sup>10</sup>

In their work, Aarons, Drewniak, and Harris each helpfully flesh out the literary and artistic modes through which Eisenstein attempts to detoxify her inherited traumas and embodied knowledge, yet these critics do not discuss her use of clothing in addressing postmemory. At first, it may seem odd to suggest that fashion can be an avenue for Eisenstein to address her postmemory. But, as Aarons explains, material belongings like clothing inherited from survivors “take on magical storytelling properties exactly because they embody an imagined presence against the realities of absence.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Eisenstein’s memoir demonstrates how inherited clothes, also known as hand-me-downs, furnish her with stories and thus a sense of connection to her deceased father and his Holocaust experiences. In her graphic narrative, hand-me-downs function as tangible links that she uses to bridge the gaps between herself, her father, and his past.<sup>12</sup>

In this article, I highlight not only the efficacy (and the concurrent lack of it, as I will soon make clear) of hand-me-downs that Eisenstein uses when trying to come to terms with her postmemories. I also highlight how hand-me-downs function symbolically, that is, how they can be read in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as registers of Eisenstein’s relationship to her father and to his Holocaust experiences. However, unlike Art Spiegelman in “Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History”—a four-page comic inserted into *Maus I*—Eisenstein does not depict herself in an overtly symbolic concentration camp uniform. In his comic, Spiegelman draws himself in what can be interpreted as a concentration camp and/or a prison uniform, representing the emotional and psychological imprisonment that results from growing up with survivor parents.<sup>13</sup> His clothes represent his captive existence that is a function of his postmemorial truncation, paralleling what another artist, also a child of survivors, describes as “a concentration camp of the mind.”<sup>14</sup> In contrast, Eisenstein presents herself in less overtly symbolic clothing, although her depiction is symbolic nonetheless. Instead of drawing upon the symbolism of the concentration camp uniform, Eisenstein presents her father’s hand-me-downs as metaphors for how he passed down his traumas and knowledge from the Holocaust.

In concert with Spiegelman’s metaphorical use of clothing, Eisenstein’s exploration of hand-me-downs fits into a larger discussion of sartorial culture in the lives and literature of children of Holocaust survivors. In second-generation representation, the topic of clothing emerges in a number of ways. From Helen Epstein’s early, groundbreaking *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* to Elizabeth Rosner’s more recent, ingenious, yet largely overlooked novel *The Speed of Light* and beyond, second-generation literature presents a range of relationships with clothing and physical embodiment, in addition to narrating survivors’ connections to sartorial culture and outward appearances. Through the subject of clothing, what these above-mentioned texts and others reveal is that members of the second generation, along with the ways they negotiate their postmemories, are

in no way heterogeneous. As Berger notes, “The members of the second generation are united only by their identity as children of survivors. Individual members of this generation in fact constitute a quite heterogeneous group, having varying behavioral, religious, and sexual orientations.”<sup>15</sup> Their responses to their postmemories also vary in kind and in intensity, which is mirrored in their interactions with clothing, specifically hand-me-downs.

In this study, I distinguish sartorial belongings that were brought directly from *l'univers concentrationnaire* from those that were purchased after the Shoah, even though hand-me-downs can fit into both categories. An example of the former is Eisenstein's father's wedding ring—a ring that Eisenstein's mother found in *Kanada*, a depot in Birkenau where confiscated belongings of deportees were sorted and stored.<sup>16</sup> Aarons rightly notes that Eisenstein's father's ring is “an object of memory, a tangible container for embodied memory, [which] becomes the opening for narrative, for the imagined story of past lives lived.”<sup>17</sup> In truth, Eisenstein's other inherited belongings that do not come from Birkenau also assume “the shape of the materialized past onto which is projected the fantasized completeness of the ongoing narrative.”<sup>18</sup> However, there is a qualitative difference between items that were found during the Holocaust (i.e., in Birkenau's *Kanada*) and those that were purchased in the New World (i.e., in Canada) after the Holocaust. The ways by which the second generation consciously, and unconsciously, perceives the former category of clothing versus how they perceive the latter varies across temporal, geographic, and cultural contexts. How one perceives, say, a striped concentration camp uniform and a kosher butcher's apron, of course, differs significantly. Although both are uniforms, clearly they are not the same, nor are they understood as such. There is a greater tendency to view clothing that comes from concentration camps or sites of atrocity as precious or even sacred, whereas that which was purchased after the Shoah—though imbued with meaning, to be sure—is not viewed, and therefore neither handled nor worn, in the same way. As such, for the purposes of specificity, I do not examine items of clothing that come directly from sites of Holocaust atrocity, though further research on the topic would be a fruitful supplement to my analysis. Instead, I focus on the items Eisenstein's father purchased after the Holocaust, that is, his suede vest, undershirt, tie collection, and suspenders. My study reveals how quotidian items like hand-me-downs that are not overtly related to the Shoah—items that, I argue, indirectly point to the Holocaust—are nonetheless charged with postmemory.

How members of the second generation interact with their hand-me-downs—whether they wear (or do not wear), alter (or do not alter), work in (or do not work in), touch (or do not touch) them—reflects in many ways how they negotiate their relationship to their parents and the latter's anxieties, traumas, and personal histories. With *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* as a generative example, second-generation texts reveal how members of the second generation's relationships to such

clothing reflect the ways in which they inherit and are dressed in their postmemories. Indeed, Eisenstein's work traces the traumatic narrative threads of her parents' lives through the physical threads passed down to her. As her life is predicated on a profound absence that is a product of the Holocaust, which is then compounded by her father's death, Eisenstein demonstrates how hand-me-downs become tangible relics, aide—(post)memoirs, of who and what once was but emphatically is no longer.

### **Hand-Me-Downs in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors***

After her father's death, Eisenstein no longer has access to her direct familial connection to the Holocaust. Hence, her belated connection to the Shoah becomes all the more tenuous as she tries to come to terms with her father's Holocaust experiences. Providing her a way to relate to her father's traumatic memories, hand-me-downs—those that are physical and tangible—become grounding mechanisms, modes of connection to her no-longer physically present parent. I stress the word "connection" here to highlight the partial and ever-incomplete nature of inherited clothing as a connective tool between the living and the dead. As these passed-down belongings offer connection in death, they simultaneously function as markers of separation, material signposts that—as they remain unworn by their original proprietors—speak of separation because of death. To borrow a term from Bruno Latour, hand-me-downs become "mediators," things that "transform, distort, and modify the meaning . . . they are supposed to carry."<sup>19</sup> These mediators revive the second generation's memory of their parents, yet such items also insistently speak to the absence of their parents, as well as, though perhaps less directly, to the great sense of loss that stems from the Shoah. Despite best efforts, children of survivors' interactions with such pieces of inherited clothing hold the potential to reinscribe the very anxieties and postmemories they seek to eschew. While Eisenstein attempts to keep alive the memory of her late father, the hand-me-downs that she uses as points of connection between him and herself become points of disconnection. Indeed, Eisenstein's text suggests that as much as they have the potential to temper feelings of loss and accompanying grief, such material inheritances have the death-dealing power to amplify and exacerbate the circulation of negative emotions that stem from the death of her survivor parent, along with her fraught relationship to the Holocaust. As such, hand-me-down clothing, in tandem with inherited belongings more broadly, mirrors the paradox of the second-generation condition: being mediators connected to survivors' memories of the Holocaust, while simultaneously remaining at a distance from them.

*I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* presents how Eisenstein's interactions with these hand-me-downs, these things, are indicative of her relationship to her father and to her accompanying postmemories. I emphasize my use of the word "things" in reference to Bill Brown's thing theory, which examines how a "thing really names less

an object than a particular subject-object relation.”<sup>20</sup> In the context of Eisenstein’s text, her relationship to her father’s clothing names not only a “subject-object relation” but also a subject-subject relationship, which Brown suggests when he says that things “facilitate . . . their relation to other subjects.”<sup>21</sup> For Eisenstein, the power of the things she inherits issues forth from her relationship with her father that she projects onto them. Her hand-me-downs possess “a metaphysical dimension,” as they are imbued with a distorted sense of “reality” that blurs the line between past and present.<sup>22</sup> They become postmemorial accessories—things she wears in attempts to work through her postmemories that, while assisting her in maintaining a sense of connection to her father, ironically also cloister her further in the inherited Holocaust past that she desperately seeks to escape.

Eisenstein makes clear the difficult position that she occupies after her father dies, burdened by his traumas and anxieties even after his departure. She states:

My father has been dead now for longer than a decade. . . He is no longer here for me to discover his past, to ask him about the war, about Auschwitz, or what life was like growing up in Poland. About his family, his parents, my grandparents. Though from early on, I knew that the past was something not to be ventured into. I had learned from the handful of times I had asked. My father could only begin to answer with a few willing words and then stop. He would cry. Sitting in silence beside him, I did not want to make him go further. I was left to find the pieces of his past, led by the wish to have more.<sup>23</sup>

As is common among many members of the second generation, Eisenstein fears wounding her father further by asking about his past, of which she only knows fragments. She thus does not, while growing up, make inquiries into the Shoah. In her childhood state of self-censorship, she seeks several alternative means of gleaning information about the Holocaust, such as films and memoirs written by survivors. Describing her need for information about her parents’ lives during the Holocaust as an “addiction,” Eisenstein, in her adulthood, cannot break the compulsion to understand that which eludes comprehension.<sup>24</sup> And it is through her father’s hand-me-downs, along with writing and drawing, that she continues her efforts to access and come to terms with her postmemories. Desperately seeking to be close to him, to know more about him and to find out about his past, she wears, works, and sleeps in her father’s clothes. Since she has “always been able to step into the presence of absence,”<sup>25</sup> it becomes clear that her stepping into and wearing her father’s old clothing is an effort to fill in the void of the past that resists filling.

Her father’s work vest that becomes hers functions as a postmemorial uniform, so to speak, which she wears as she tries to work through her father’s past during the Shoah. She explains: “There was a suede vest my father always wore when he drove

his truck and made deliveries to people's homes of barbequed chickens and eggs. I took the vest with me and wore it at times, when sitting at my desk, delivering ink to paper."<sup>26</sup> His work vest becomes her work vest as she writes and draws ("delivering ink to paper"). The work, however, that Eisenstein is doing is twofold. Not only is she working creatively with images and words; she is also working imaginatively through the postmemories that they evoke. Demonstrating the imaginative stock that she has in(vest)ed in her father's life before and after the Holocaust as she wears his work uniform, she asks: "What thoughts filled his mind during all those years as a kosher butcher, in his shop and when he drove a truck to make deliveries to neighbouring homes? Did he daydream himself into his youth, with his parents and siblings, in Miechow, before the war?"<sup>27</sup> Of course, her curiosity about whether or not her father imagined these scenarios stems directly from her desire to fill in her gaps of knowledge, from her unsated desire to know more about his life as it pertains to what came before the Holocaust, as well as what came after.

Such a desire to know more about her father's past by wearing his vest shares several similarities to Rochelle, whom Epstein describes in *Children of the Holocaust*. Also a member of the second generation, Rochelle stores in her closet two dresses that belonged to her father's first wife who died in the Holocaust. For Rochelle, these dresses are tangible relics of a would-be-mother. She even asks her biological mother to alter the dresses for her, before wearing each dress only once.<sup>28</sup> That she keeps her father's first wife's dresses suggests that Rochelle attempts to maintain some semblance of connection to an individual she never knew but to whom she is nonetheless tied. These dresses are material reminders of a life led by a woman who could have been her mother, haunting mementos of an alternative existence and of a relationship that may well have been a reality, had the Holocaust never occurred. These dresses function as indexes of loss and death, pieces of unworn clothing that unveil the pre-Shoah world in which her father and his first wife lived that will never be accessible to Rochelle, especially after her father's death. This part of her father's pre-Shoah narrative, a narrative that she adopts as her own through imaginative investment, is rendered inaccessible by their deaths. Her would-be-mother's dresses, which seemingly promise to offer some sort of (material) connection, also emphasize and exacerbate feelings of loss. These unworn dresses lead Rochelle to sense the presence of this woman, but such items, at best, "provide traces of past lives and stories, [and] they are just that: traces, hints, projected fantasies, their shapes altered to accommodate the requirements of those who come too late."<sup>29</sup> Because of her lack of a personal and direct relationship with her father's first wife, Rochelle is forever unable to flesh out the personality that so shaped her life in absentia. Of course, Eisenstein, on the other hand, does know her father, but it can be seen how Rochelle's attachment to two dresses that seemingly connect her to life before the Holocaust is akin to the author's connection to her father's vest. As Eisenstein wears her late father's vest, in which she wonders if he daydreamed about life "in Miechow,



before the war," as noted above, she attempts to satiate her epistemological desire to know more about this life from before the Shoah, seeking inspiration from and imaginative connection to him.

Eisenstein's attachment to her father's vest can be understood further as an unconscious attempt to occupy the same position as him, an effort to blur the lines between self and progenitor so as to better inhabit his elusive personal history. Andreas Huyssen's definition of mimesis — "a becoming or making similar, a movement toward, never a reaching of a goal"—can be applied to Eisenstein's efforts to become like her father in order to understand him and fit into his traumatic past.<sup>30</sup> To be sure, such a task is impossible—albeit understandable—but it is a function of the "social pathology" with which many among the second generation struggle.<sup>31</sup> Shedding light on Eisenstein's project to connect with her late father, Freud recounts the threat that this pathology poses to the self-contained ego: "Pathology has made us acquainted with a great number of states in which the boundary lines between the ego and the external world become uncertain or in which they are actually drawn incorrectly. . . . Thus even the feeling of our own ego is subject to disturbances and the boundaries of the ego are not constant."<sup>32</sup> For Eisenstein, the boundary between her own ego and her father's is unclear, given her imaginative assumption of his memories. That she dons his clothing reinforces this pathological desire to collapse the divide between them, to become not only close to her father but to "inhabit" him. Yet, as Eisenstein illustrates with her list of inquiries that the vest engenders, she is left with more questions than answers. Her inherited vest, as it keeps her in one sense proximate to her father, proves also to magnify her precarious postmemorial relationship to him and to his distant past. Thus, it can be said that his vest is as effective in drawing Eisenstein to her father as it is in evoking her postmemories, revealing the challenging position of the second generation who must navigate the complicated and burdensome waters of inherited trauma.

In addition to the vest she wears while attempting to work through her postmemories, Eisenstein assumes ownership of her father's undershirt and wears it to bed as a postmemorial dreamcatcher of sorts, though it becomes clear that even as it imaginatively connects her to her parent, it keeps her postmemories alive. She describes her father's undershirt as being of "the European kind, sleeveless, low at the neck and back, hanging below my waist, which I used to wear on overheated summer nights when I went to sleep. No strange dark images disturbed those nights."<sup>33</sup> Placing the subtle sexual undertones ("hanging below my waist") aside momentarily, it seems as if Eisenstein is speaking to how the item in question assists in alleviating the effects (and affects) of her postmemories—how this undershirt apparently resists the inherited nightmares that are so pervasive among the second generation. However, her description of a dream several weeks after her father's death signals how his death and his Holocaust past persists in her imagination: "On the eve of the thirtieth day [of

*shloshim*, the thirty-day period after a loved one's death], my father entered a cavelike dwelling and motioned me to him. We held on to each other and then he left."<sup>34</sup> The Electra connotations persist as both father and daughter enter, psychoanalytically speaking, a vaginal space ("a cavelike dwelling") and embrace. Eisenstein's longing to find union and connection—achieved here by holding onto one another—finds expression in sexually suggestive terms. To be clear, I am not proposing that Eisenstein is erotically attracted to her father. Rather, such sexual undertones echo her all-consuming drive to find an intimate understanding of him. Providing further detail about her experience during *shloshim*, Eisenstein describes the month-long period as

a time of transition for the mourner as he moves away from the inarticulateness of loss and returns to the familiar rhythm of everyday life. It is a time when memory can fill the hours of night and day. I dreamt often of my father during that first month after his death. He accompanied my sleep. It had been difficult for me to be rid of the final image of his struggle but in my dreams he was always youthful and in good health.<sup>35</sup>

Eisenstein notes that *shloshim* is "a time when memory can fill the hours of night and day," yet there does not seem to be a clear distinction between *shloshim* and the rest of her narrated life. Throughout *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, Eisenstein illustrates how memory "fill[s] the hours of day and night," wherein her postmemories permeate her life irrespective of *shloshim*, affecting her since her childhood and indeed years after her father's death. As such, how efficacious her dreamcatcher undershirt is in mitigating the effects of her postmemorial inheritance remains questionable. For though she argues that the nightmares become less frequent after wearing her inherited undershirt, the rest of the text makes clear that her life is still saturated with the Holocaust that continues to haunt her.

Eisenstein's relationship to her father's ties and suspenders sheds further light on her efforts to keep his memory alive that, again, hinder her in working through her postmemories. She states: "After my father died, I wore his dotted ties, his suede vest, and I sewed buttons into the waistband of my pants for his suspenders. I easily conjured up his presence."<sup>36</sup> As Eisenstein refashions her clothing to accommodate her father's clothing (e.g., by sewing buttons into the waistband), her sartorial alteration is an attempt to make her postmemorial clothes fit, reflective of how she tries to fit into her father's life. Eisenstein's efforts to squeeze into her late father's clothes parallels when Julian, the protagonist in Rosner's *The Speed of Light*, tries on his Holocaust-survivor father's clothes. Following his father's death, Julian says: "The shoes were still polished, though slightly flattened from storage; the suits needed to air. But when I tried them on, they were a perfect fit."<sup>37</sup> Although his postmemories are not proper to Julian—as they are not for any member of the second generation—these affective forces nonetheless comfort him. Describing his inherited clothes, which

he later explains “made no sense in [his] life,” Julian says: “I didn’t want them, but nobody asked me. Paula [his sister] had mother’s old dresses, so maybe it made sense for me to hang my father’s dark suits in my closet, an equivalency of ghosts.”<sup>38</sup> As Julian notes his lack of consent (“nobody asked me”) and the out-of-place-ness of his father’s clothes (they “made no sense”), his description of the shoes and suits again mirrors his inheritance of his father’s anxieties, traumas, and “memories.” The irony of the clothes’ “perfect fit” that “made no sense” to Julian is clear. Despite not originally belonging to Julian, his father’s anxieties, traumas, and “memories” force themselves onto him and become his by extension.

Unlike Julian, however, Eisenstein alters her hand-me-downs, signalling how she actively attempts to fit into her father’s past, so as to come to terms with it. Julian, on the other hand, makes no such attempt at that point in the narrative, keeping his father’s clothes in their original state, along with their accompanying demons, hauntingly in his closet. Eisenstein threads her father’s hand-me-downs to her own clothing, which functions as a form of ad(dress)—that is, of addressing her father as well as her postmemories by dressing in his clothes. Her belief that she can “conjure” his presence through his hand-me-downs signals the conclusion that a number of children of survivors draw: such articles of clothing, many believe, aid in resurrecting the loved one to whom they originally belonged. Yet, as she invokes her father’s presence, Eisenstein’s imaginings concurrently take her “back” to Auschwitz.<sup>39</sup> Her memories are always already tied up with Auschwitz; her conjuring is a constant resurrecting of her postmemories. As she demonstrates throughout *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*, Eisenstein is unable to disassociate her father from her postmemories of the Holocaust. Although she finds solace in conjuring up his presence, that presence is inextricably tied to the Shoah. Her attachment to her father’s undershirt, vest, ties, and suspenders thus reflects her attachment to the past as well as her inability to work through it.

For Eisenstein, her father’s absence-in-death renders her relationship to the Holocaust all the more fragile and all the more difficult to come to terms with. As a result, she attempts to become materially close to her father vis-à-vis his clothing. And this is the paradox: though donning her late father’s clothing imaginatively reanimates her father’s presence and a sense of closeness to him, such a presence is forever only in her imagination and always inhabited by the absence of life, meaning, and vitality that stems from the Holocaust. Her sporting his clothing, then, reveals a double absence as it also summons his imagined presence, attenuating feelings of longing and loss while also magnifying them. As such, the image of inherited clothing in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* not only serves as a metaphor for postmemorial inheritance; it further points to the material function of hand-me-downs for children of survivors in attempting to come to terms with their postmemories, even if such items of clothing do not have an explicit or clear connection to the Holocaust.

For members of the second generation, hand-me-down clothing is a precarious avenue to address the emotional and/or psychological void that nonetheless endures—in part, because of their connection to such physical relics. Of course, that they remain unworn by their original owners, that they stay folded and/or unworn, speaks to their parents' absence. But as these members of the second generation come to wear their parents' clothing, these items physically occupy the place of deceased parents, underscoring not only their parents' absence but also the impossibility of connection after death. As the hand-me-downs are imbued with the memory of their original survivor owners—those profoundly marked by immense loss and suffering at the hands of Nazis—these things assume a postmemorial quality and thus can be seen as indexes of the anxiety, trauma, and inherited “memory” with which these members of the second generation live—or, more appropriately, in which they live. In other words, as Holocaust survivors possessed their own memories, their memories became for their children, as it were, hand-me-down “memories”: “memories” that did not belong to them but were imaginatively incorporated into their post-memory bank. These possessions, moreover, possess and carry with them belated narratives that become the postmemorial inheritances of the second generation—legacies that are passed down from survivor parent to child, which, as Eisenstein's text makes clear, are communicated through and reflected in their relationships to their hand-me-downs.

1

Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

2

Alan L. Berger, *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 3.

3

Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 55.

4

Bernice Eisenstein, *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006), 167.

5

Victoria Aarons, *Holocaust Graphic Narratives: Generation, Trauma and Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020), 85.

6

Aarons, *Holocaust Graphic Narratives*, 87.

7

Dagmara Drewniak, “Addicted to the Holocaust: Bernice Eisenstein's Ways of Coping with Troublesome Memories in *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*,” *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 50, nos. 2-3 (2015): 42.

8

Miriam Harris, “Releasing the Grip of the Ghostly: Bernice Eisenstein's *I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors*,” in *The Jewish Graphic Novel: Critical Approaches*, ed. Samantha Baskind and Ranen Omer-Sherman (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 129.

9

Harris, 131.

10

Drewniak, 40.

**11**

Victoria Aarons, "Found Objects: The Legacy of Third-Generation Holocaust Memory," in *Translated Memories: Transgenerational Perspectives on the Holocaust*, ed. Bettina Hofmann and Ursula Reuter (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 233.

**12**

It ought to be noted that Eisenstein attempts to come to terms with her mother's Holocaust past as well, but for the purposes of this article, I focus specifically on her relationship to the hand-me-downs acquired from her father.

**13**

Art Spiegelman, *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale. My Father Bleeds History* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 100-03.

**14**

Yolanda (no surname provided) quoted in *Breaking the Silence: The Generation after the Holocaust*, directed by Edward A. Mason (Waltham, MA: National Center for Jewish Film, 2006), DVD.

**15**

Berger, *Children of Job*, 13.

**16**

Eisenstein, 14.

**17**

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**18**

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