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**Hidden in plain sight: The metaphysics of gender and death**

**Kane, Kathleen Osborne, Ph.D.**

**University of Hawaii, 1994**

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HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT:  
THE METAPHYSICS OF GENDER AND DEATH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

POLITICAL SCIENCE

AUGUST 1994

By

Kathleen O. Kane

Dissertation Committee:

Neal Milner, Chairperson  
Phyllis Turnbull  
Kathy Ferguson  
Michael Shapiro  
Murray Turnbull

---

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Kathleen O. Kane

For one who precedes  
To one who follows

To the work one has done  
And the work one will do

For Käthe  
To Leah

## Acknowledgements

To my committee exemplary teachers all, who taught me the stuff of the intellect and formed my imaginary, even during those times when they didn't know what to do with me. Neal Milner: my chairperson, a man of the theatre, playwright and comedian extraordinaire; Phyllis Turnbull, a crusty old gal, the exemplar "she who must be obeyed" (whom we all wish to become) and formidable watcher-thinker of things, land- and bird-watcher extraordinaire; Kathy Ferguson, our "first feminist," serious, undismissible critiquer and belly-laughter extraordinaire; Mike Shapiro, the "Walter Benjamin" of the imaginary and of the intellect, metaphor-maker extraordinaire; and Murray Turnbull (named as "outside-member"), who sat the center of this project, seer of the astonishing artist extraordinaire. These members read this work "with pleasure"; that is, they suspended the fear of taking pleasure in reading a work about nauseating violence. That generosity (not towards me, or my writing, but towards the topic itself) had a profound effect on my ability to continue on. And finally, for contributing at a critical moment on this project that just isn't his sort of thing, Peter Manicas, lively intelligence and serious good-humor, proxy extraordinaire.

To those who taught me how to teach: the many, many students from this place, who have taught me how to listen, and to facilitate learning in others who wish to understand our human predicament

in terms of gender and race. The process of learning to teach here comes from nowhere if not from these students; learning to teach here taught me my place here, and in the wide world.

To Nahua J. K. Fuji, a name that re-presents the persona of our study-and-writing-group that focused on how race and gender plays about in this place that we live. We are Nahua Patrinos, Julie Wuthnow, myself, and Louise Fuji. Without this entity, I would not have found my voice for this project. Absolutely without a doubt.

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I knew from the start that I would not be able to begin such a project without "walking the territory," literally--or, as it turns out, spacially. My travels in Europe involved the support and generosity of many, many folks, on both sides of the then-standing wall:

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Above all, the Family Mitzlaff--Elke, Stefan and Jo Marie--for their ever-generous, and trusting friendship, and for providing me with a safe and warm haven throughout a terrifying pilgrimage. Also, Claudia Schoppmann, Elaine Holliman, Rudiger Lautmann, Hans-Georg Stumke, Ingrid Flindell (Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Berlin), Ulli Jensen (Neuengamme), and Ruth Elias from Israel.

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Museum at Oswiecim), Alojzy Twardecki, Zdzislaw Fraczek, Andrzej  
Przastek, and Edmund Benter (Stuttoff, Gdansk).

At Home:

How we did it, I don't know. Leah went through her (notoriously)  
hardest year of high school at the (notoriously) most demanding  
school, Julie wrote her own dissertation and defended it one day  
before I did mine, and I flew between self-absorbed panic and the  
self-absorbed pleasure of writing and "making up the world." And  
we all just kept doing what's called "believing in one another."

I had one thing going for me that everybody should have: a good  
fairy, who read my stuff and kept telling me it was beautiful and  
brilliant. And at just the right moment, would write fairy tales, the  
likes of which few have seen. By her own account, this good fairy  
"muttered and paced, her chain-smoking giving nothing less than the  
appearance of a locomotive gone off its tracks," and this she did more

than once. She assured me that my second child would be born, "not with unlimited wealth and mathematical ability"; but that I would only have to give her up for a little while, "while others poked and pried at her, but that they wouldn't hurt her." And that I would be able to "pick her back up and stuff her in a manila envelope and send her off to publishers and make a zillion dollars and then give all of it (okay some of it) to [my] nearest and dearest so they could open a bar." So far, she's been right. If all goes well, we'll call the joint "Kubo's Coffee and Fairy Tales."

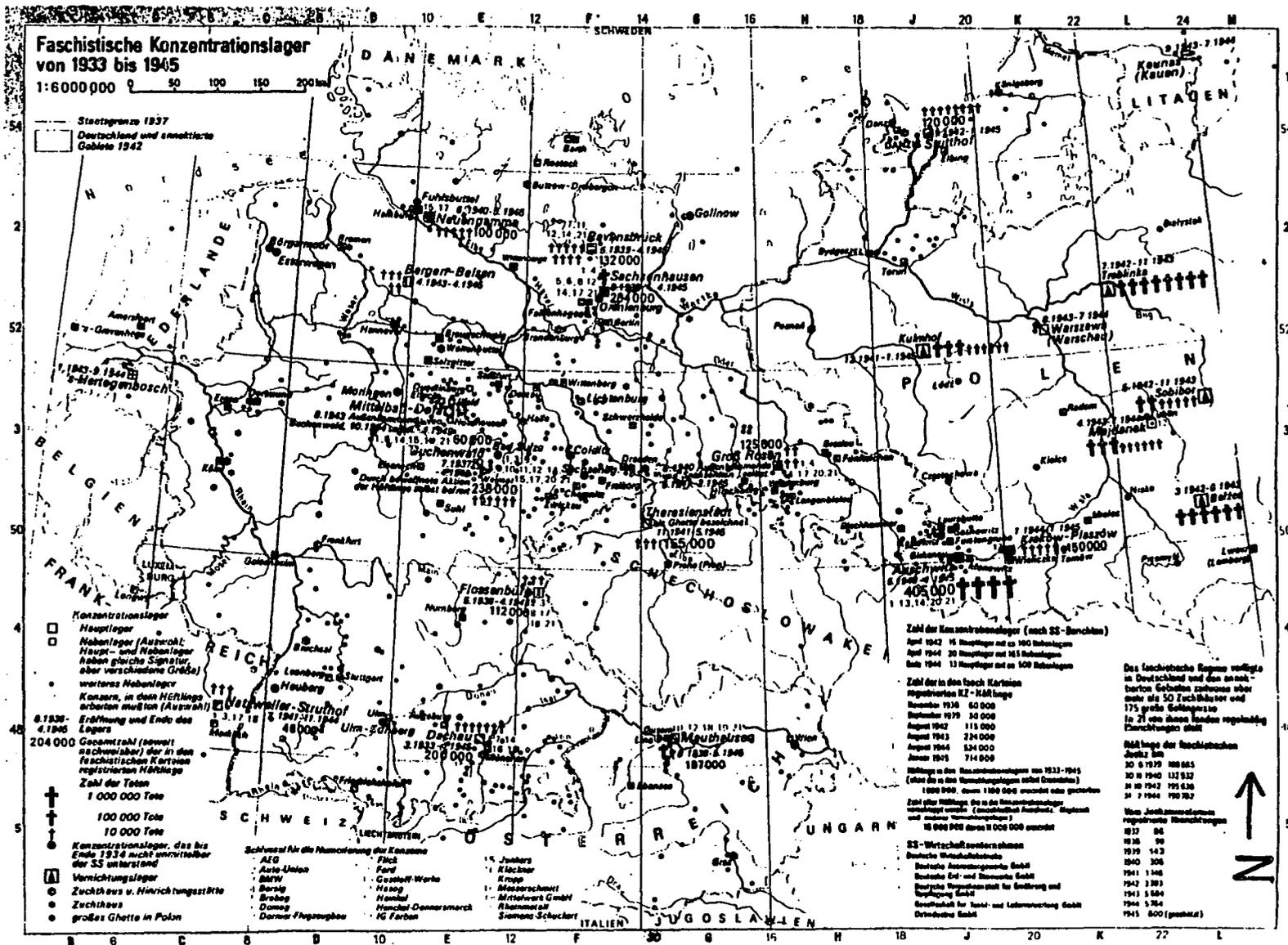
## Abstract

In my thesis, I work towards developing a theory of the ways in which political ideologies, with fascism as the most salient, constitute and articulate not only pure race, but pure gender. Some of the arguments that I make: that ideologies of dominance are about maleness, and about femaleness, and are therefore about impure maleness and femaleness; that in the constitution of meanings and practices, violence and eroticism are reinscribed on one another, and in cultures and ideologies of dominance; that fascist acts of extermination are important to understand in relation to women and issues of gender, because the forms of reality production that are constantly present and possible within fascism are to be seen in the relations of male to female; and, that those relations of power existed not only in Nazi Germany, at a particular time in a particular place, but are our relations of power, here and still. Finally, it strikes me that we who are women may be in a different, and more terrible, kind of trouble than we think. That terrible trouble is about the conviction that in the reinscription of violence and eroticism on one another, that which is salient in fascism ideology and practice is hidden-in-plain-sight in modern and liberal ideologies, meanings and practices. The female (its bodies, its knowledges, its eroticism, and its histories) is the site of the play of violence and eroticism with one another on a Procrustean bed of modernity.

# Faschistische Konzentrationslager von 1933 bis 1945

1:6000000

Staatsgrenze 1937  
Deutschland und annektierte Gebiete 1942



**Konzentrationslager**  
 Hauptlager  
 Nebenlager (Auswahl)  
 Haupt- und Nebenlager  
 haben gleiche Symbole  
 aber verschiedene Größe  
 weiteres Nebenlager  
 Konzern, in dem Häftlinge  
 arbeiten mußten (Auswahl)  
 Eröffnung und Ende des  
 Lagers  
 Gesamtzahl (soweit  
 als überliefert) der in den  
 faschistischen Kartons  
 registrierten Häftlinge  
 Zahl der Toten  
 1 000 000 Tote  
 100 000 Tote  
 10 000 Tote

Konzentrationslager, das bis  
 Ende 1938 nicht unterstellt  
 der SS unterstand  
 Vernichtungslager  
 Zucht haus v. Hinrichtungsstätte  
 Zuchthaus  
 großes Ghetto in Polen

Schlüssel für die Namengebung der Konzentrationslager

AEI	Fisch
Kate-Union	Feld
BfW	Gesetzl. Werke
Berg	Nasog
Brabeg	Handel
Donag	Hauschl-Danensmarkt
Darweg-Fingergasse	KG Farben

### Zahl der Konzentrationslager (nach SS-Bereichen)

April 1942 16 Hauptlager mit ca. 100 Nebenlagern  
 April 1944 20 Hauptlager mit 143 Nebenlagern  
 Ende 1944 13 Hauptlager mit ca. 100 Nebenlagern

### Zahl der in den fasch. Kartons registrierten KZ-Häftlinge

November 1936 60 000  
 September 1939 30 000  
 August 1942 110 000  
 August 1943 224 000  
 April 1944 524 000  
 Januar 1945 714 000

### Häftlinge in den Konzentrationslagern von 1933-1945

(Nur die in den Konzentrationslagern registrierten Häftlinge)  
 1933 1945: ca. 1 000 000  
 1945: ca. 1 000 000  
 1945: ca. 1 000 000

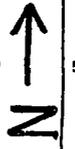
### Zahl der Häftlinge die in den Konzentrationslagern umgekommen sind

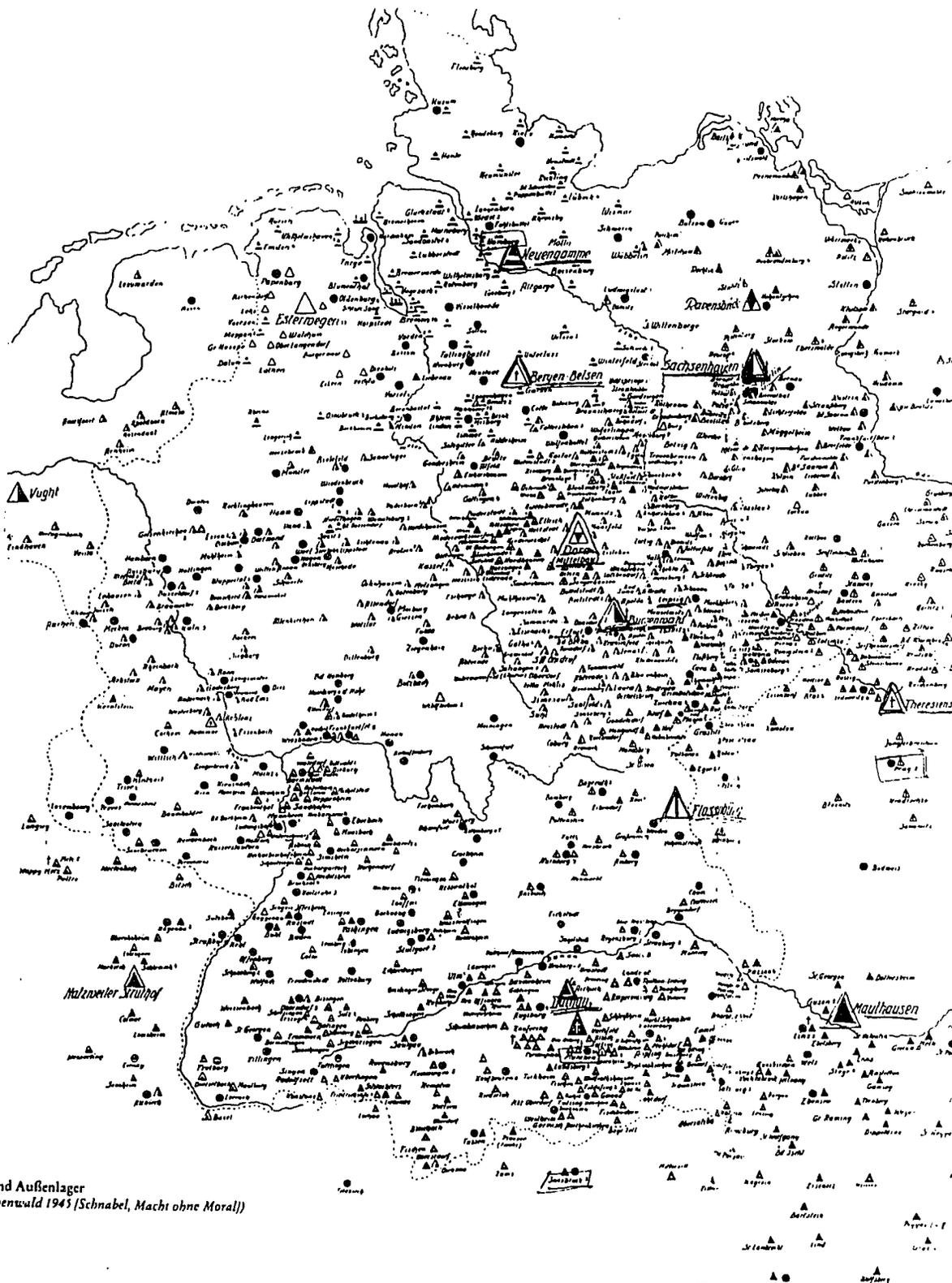
(ausgewählte Konzentrationslager)  
 1933-1945: ca. 1 000 000  
 1945: ca. 1 000 000  
 1945: ca. 1 000 000

Das faschistische Regime verfügte in Deutschland und den annektierten Gebieten zu Beginn des Jahres 1942 über 50 Zuchthäuser und 175 große Gefängnisse in 21 von ihnen fanden regelmäßig Hinrichtungen statt

Mitglieder der faschistischen Partei im  
 April 1933 300 000  
 April 1942 1 000 000  
 April 1943 1 000 000  
 April 1944 1 000 000

Neue Justizministerien registrierte Hinrichtungen  
 1933 96  
 1934 96  
 1935 143  
 1936 306  
 1941 1 046  
 1942 1 046  
 1943 1 046  
 1944 1 046  
 1945 1 046





Karte der Konzentrationslager und Außenlager  
 (Nach den Unterlagen des KZ Buchenwald 1945 [Schnabel, Macht ohne Moral])







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I should like to tell, for a second time, the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty.

She slept in her thorn bush. And then, after so and so many years, she awoke.

But not by the kiss of a fortunate prince.

The [head] cook woke her up, as he gave the young cook a box in the ears that resounded through the castle, ringing from the pent-up energy of so many years.

A beautiful child sleeps behind the thorny hedge of the following pages.

Just don't let any prince of fortune decked out in the dazzling equipment of knowledge come near it. For in the bridal kiss, it will snap at him.

Much better that the author should awaken it, reserving for [her] self the role of head cook. For too long the box in the ears has been due, that with its shrill ring would pierce through the halls of knowledge.

Then, too, would this poor truth awaken, that has pricked itself on the outmoded spindle as, forbiddenly, it thought to weave itself into the rattletrap chambers of a professor's gown.

Walter Benjamin  
Preface, *Trauerspiel*  
1926

Preface  
The Bridge

Do you know about Christo, the artist who wrapped the Pont Neuf in Paris? By wrapping the bridge, it became possible to *see* the bridge. And the bridge wrapped in silk made it possible for all who saw it to speak to one another, to take part in a conversation, not only about the bridge, not only about art, but about politics, culture, history, about their lives and how they saw themselves, why they thought what they did about things--it allowed people to see one another, and themselves. It allowed them to take part in an ancient human conversation, one that has been going on for longer than they would imagine. This is the conversation of what it means to be alive, conducted by those caught in the act. The wrapped bridge, like graffiti on a wall, called attention to the structure upon which the silk was placed. It evoked an aesthetic consideration, an intellectual discourse, and more. I think it evoked in those who saw it a sense of space and a sense of being able to consider their own place within it. It strikes me as I study the documentation of the bridge-wrapping project<sup>1</sup>, that it must have made it possible for people to see themselves seeing, to notice themselves *being*.

---

<sup>1</sup>Wolfgang Volz, David Bourdon, and Bernard de Montgolfier, *Christo: The Pont Neuf, Wrapped: Paris, 1975-85*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990).

.....

Sometimes when traveling, it happens that I suddenly see myself in the act of being in a particular place, and I am struck with the improbability that I *would* be there. I become intensely aware that I exist, precisely in that space. I see myself *in existence*. This may not be the highest level of consciousness, but it has two things going for it; its (relative) accessibility and its pleasure.

.....

To return to the Pont Neuf: It must have been a great pleasure to have been there. It would have made the improbable possible, the unspeakable speakable. It must have been a powerful experience! Like the '60s, mistakenly thought of as (a) time when in truth it was (a) place, the wrapping of the Pont Neuf takes place within the realm of space. The wrapping of the bridge dis-covers the history in, and of, the present precisely because it is rooted in space.

.....

Those who are taking part in an on-going conversation about what it means to live as female, who are busy "wrapping" the structures of our culture and its misogynies are in the process of dis-covering, of making appear a bridge. It is a bridge that exists already, and it bears the narrative of what it means to be female. We work like

Christo, wrapping the bridge, to reveal its structure, to show what it is, to mark its history, and to ask what are its meanings. As we wrap, there is much discussion around us. Most of that discussion is concerned with the legitimacy of our thoughts that have brought forth this activity, this bridge-wrapping. Not having the dubious stature of the artist, it is *we* who are in question as well as our thoughts. Due to that, we continually forget that there are many of us and we are made to forget that we are not doing this work alone. It is difficult for us to keep in mind that we have entered into a long-standing and rich conversation, and that we are contributing substantially to it. So much of this bridge-wrapping is privatized, and when we insist that it not be, that it is a political question, it is objected to. Objected to! As if between the choice of the privatized and the politicized, we ought to chose *the private?!*

There probably is a higher state of being than the political. I sincerely hope so. But those who complain about the politicization of women's lives (those who regard themselves as "political," who use examples of race and class to negate gendered claims, or use one example or another of how wives or mothers, husbands and fathers, think (or "are"), in order to make their complaint--and I always wonder how those who are being put to such use would like it if they knew), these people are taking up too much space, too much of *our* space. What they get to do is to pretend to be asking an intellectual question, a political question, when what they are actually doing is reminding us that we are alone in our thoughts, that we are not

representative of anything but ourselves, and that we ought not to be doing what we are doing in any public realm whatsoever. There is something familiar about this process, particularly when observing the purported intellectual environment of a seminar on genocide in which the bridge-wrappers<sup>2</sup> were told that what they said had no place in the seminar; that they made many mistakes anyway in their information; that when they are older they will understand better; that when women are mutilated in our culture and that mutilation is called "beauty" and it's called "eroticism," and when women are raped and when they are killed, that it is not because they are women. When violence is constructed in such a way that asserts that what happens to women does not happen to us *because* we are women, I am reminded of the process articulated by Raul Hilberg by which there is a logical historical progression to the genocide of the Jew in European history:

from the earliest days, from the fourth century, the sixth century, the missionaries of Christianity had said in effect to the Jews: "You may not live among us as Jews." The secular rulers who followed them from the late Middle Ages then decided: "You may not live among us," and the Nazis finally decreed: "You may not live."<sup>3</sup>

Of course the analogy is not a complete one and it doesn't need to be. Look to the example of the surgically pornographic image of the

---

<sup>2</sup>Jenn Baker, Scott Daniels, Barbara Fiacchio, and Debbie Halbert.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Raul Hilberg, in Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 71-72.

image of the "Barbie Twins," to the questions concerning female sexuality, to the question of whether we can speak with a voice that can claim to be "the female," and then consider the cases of witch-burnings and of women and the holocaust, and it is clear that there is a great deal at stake. There is a continuum from "the killing of the spirit"<sup>4</sup> to the killing of the body; from a mutilation of the spirit to a mutilation of the body. It is along that continuum that women live their lives. It is the bridge called our backs,<sup>5</sup> it is the bridge we are wrapping in order that it be seen. It seems to me that what we ought *not* to do is to take the case of witch-burning as the ticket that gets us in the door of genocide, into the arena of "legitimate" genocide. Rather, we take the case of witch-burning and all its meanings about female spirit and body, and we use it as a lens through which we view our bridge. It can give us the ability in language, in images, in concrete examples and stories and documentations to speak the other narratives of this bridge we are wrapping. It is not a ticket into "real" genocide. That ticket is too costly. By admitting witch-burning as *the* historical, political, social evidence of gendered violence, *the* legitimate political case, is to then have dismissed all other forms of violence exacted on the site of the female as construed as private. No. Witch-burning is related to, sits next to, informs and enlightens what we lack in our

---

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Williams, *Alchemy of Race and Rights: Diary of a Law Professor*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Watertown, Massachusetts: Persephone Press, 1981).

understanding of genocide. It also has its own contours, its own sounds, and it certainly has its own speakers.

Being silenced, the killing of the spirit, is deadly. It says, "You may not live among us as women--go talk to yourself, go talk to the trees." It is a step that precedes "You may not live." It often *does* precede it. Anyone who can see the truth of that for the Jew, but not for the woman, is a friend to genocide.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

- "Are you Jewish?"

- "No."

- "How did you become interested in this?"

- "I read the diary of Anne Frank when I was 12 or so. I never forgot it--"

- "Are you Jewish?"

- "No."

- "Why are you doing this?"

- I feel compelled to. I'm on a pilgrimage of some kind. But someone else's, I think."

- "Are you Jewish?"

- "No."

- "--oh."

I've been asked a hundred times. By gentiles and by Jews; by scholars of the Holocaust; by taxi drivers in Krakow and Swiss racists traveling in trains. The question is rooted differently depending upon the inquirer, and it matters differently to each.

.....

I'm leaving the Jewish Museum in Budapest where I have been visiting with the director of the museum. She has told me of her experiences as a child in Budapest and of her time in a small camp nearby. She's old now, and speaks pragmatically about the past, perpetually smoking cigarettes as she talks. She, too, wants to know if I'm Jewish.

- "Shalom."

Not a farewell from the director. The sound slips by my ear. I look at two young Hungarian men clustering together and directing the sound towards me.

- Shalom

Its only said once, but I've just realized what the sound was.

- Shalom

It was an accusation. I've been accused as I walk down the steps of the museum, by two handsome young men, "dark as Jews" themselves.

- Shalom

Who but a Jew would be coming from the museum?

The gentile interested in the Holocaust is a curiosity to all it seems. No Jew has ever behaved toward me with anything other than respectful curiosity. Few gentiles have behaved toward me with anything other than a mild, distracted curiosity.

But when being mis-taken for a Jew, the question "Are you a Jew?" takes a troubling turn. Only a Jew would be coming out from the museum in Budapest, only a Jew would be seriously visiting the camps, only a Jew would walk the 186 quarry steps at Mauthausen, the death stairs, only a Jew would venture into the underground tunnels at Ebensee; if it is only a Jew that could take the Holocaust seriously, then what can it mean to those who are *not*? What, indeed?

And, where are the women? Where is the holocaust text written by a woman who isn't a Jew? The female voice of the Jew constitutes a deafening silence in the historical testimony and literature of the Holocaust. It is only recently that studies by and about women and the Holocaust, from the perspectives, experiences and concerns of women survivors, have appeared.<sup>1</sup> The vast and prolific literature of the Holocaust is weighted by the gravity of male testimony. In

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, editors, *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, (New York: Paragon House, 1993); Lore Shelley, ed., *Auschwitz: The Nazi Civilization : Twenty-three Women Prisoners' Accounts: Auschwitz Camp Administration and SS Enterprises and Workshops*, (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1992); Vera Laska, ed., *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983); Marlene Heinemann, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986); and, Ruth R. Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993).

graphic demonstration of this, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust*, Claude Lanzmann's monument to the memory of those who survived, includes the testimony of but seven named women in nine hours of film, and of them, only four are survivors, and none are given more than a moment to speak. They are: Ruth Elias (Israel), deported from Theresienstadt, survivor of Auschwitz<sup>2</sup>; Gertrude Schneider and "her mother" (New York), survivors of the ghetto; and Paula Biren (Cincinnati), survivor. Another woman is Hanna Zaidel (Israel), daughter of Motke Zaidel, survivor of Vilna (Lithuania). All other women, named or groups of unnamed, are not survivors, but at best, can be said to be bystanders. For Lanzmann, suffering, surviving, suicide, shoah, studying are all mediated and memorialized by male testimony. Those women who survived are, as women have been in other narratives of time, "disappeared from the official story," excluded from the documentation of their history. There is nothing unusual in this cultural practice that fails to account for and to re-present female-gendered testimony. Recognition of the systematic absent-ing of women from the narratives of time has become banal and cynical in its reiteration, and this banality has been instrumental in creating it as a retrospective fact of life rather than an intolerable injustice that continues. As a body of work, the Holocaust narrative shares with other narratives of time this

---

<sup>2</sup>Elias teaches, writes, and travels in order to speak on the Holocaust. I met her in Hamburg and communicated with her later in Israel. Considering the extent of her knowledge and the degree of her politicization regarding the Shoah, and considering that she is extremely articulate and speaks publicly on many matters regarding the camps, that Lanzmann affords her but a few moments to speak *only* on the subject of the "family camp" in Auschwitz is astonishing.

imperative: That women's narratives be truncated, suppressed, extinguished.

What is at stake here is of extreme importance. The documentation of women's stories would contradict the male-gendered narratives that now exist as history. Female history would not just add a few problems or ambiguities to male. It would destroy it. The male narrative must so unrelentingly assert itself and its entitlement to narrative space because if one woman told the truth about her life, "the world would split open."<sup>3</sup> And the very first terrain of crisis would be that of the deeply philosophized question of good and evil<sup>4</sup> throughout history. There is nothing that can be said to so lie at the heart of the narrative of the Holocaust as this question.

The Holocaust, and the fascism that produced it, continually provide the salient solutions into which one can drop a thought and then observe it swell up with significations and contingencies.<sup>5</sup> My project is not to destroy the narrative of the Holocaust that now exists (certainly there are others intent on that), nor is it to "add women and stir."<sup>6</sup> In many ways, my project is a way to comprehend or at least examine what compels a gentile to pay so much attention to something that isn't considered to be her concern.

---

<sup>3</sup>The poet, Muriel Rukeyser, writes this phrase in her poetry.

<sup>4</sup>See: Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Ecce Homo* (New York: Random House, 1967).

<sup>5</sup>This metaphor was suggested to me by Mike Shapiro in our first discussion about this project and has been sustained throughout.

<sup>6</sup>Iris Young, "Humanism, Gynocentrism and Feminist Politics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 3 (1985): 173-183.

That, and the desire to understand how a compulsion towards the Holocaust and a compulsion towards philosophy might be connected. If philosophy is not figured as a tool, a way, or a lens to apprehend the Holocaust, the possibility appears that both are lenses through which death appears as a gendered cultural metaphor and reality. Walter Benjamin considered philosophic discourses to be "the chatter of pimps." Benjamin gets to talk like that and still belong to the club.<sup>7</sup> I will say this: I'm not particularly interested in the club, and I want to talk about what it is about women's thoughts, women's lives, and women's words that can't be tolerated in the documentation of the Holocaust any more than it can be in every other historical narrative that is considered significant.

Let's try it this way: Judy Chicago, in contemplating how to paint a tableaux for her *Double Jeopardy* sequence in the *Holocaust Project: Darkness into Light* says:

I'm slowly working on ideas for the foreground images. I'm pretty sure I want to use the figure of . . . female prisoners being raped by the liberating soldiers, something that seems to have occurred rather often. Surprisingly, there is actually a considerable amount of source information about sexual abuse. It's amazing that so little attention has been paid to it by the historians; and the

---

<sup>7</sup>In part, this opinion of the academy reflects that he wasn't entirely or always accepted there. Now that he's dead, he seems to be welcome.

questions asked of survivors in the oral history projects scarcely mention it.<sup>8</sup>

Women survived in spite of being, and at times because they were, utterly vulnerable sexually. This is a vulnerability that can be said to have been utter rather than partial, because it could exist in relation to men in all realms of the camp economy; the kapo, the commandant, the doctor, the male inmate, and perhaps most appalling, the liberating soldier. In order for a female survivor to speak of her survival, her experiences, it may also be necessary for her to speak of the sexual degradation of her body *as a female*, and when she remembers, the pain and humiliation is reiterated. But, there is also something else. The re-collection of her narrative throws all her knowledge and experience of being female into relief. The specificity of the camps resonate, the recollection of narrative reverberates in the present. Because it happened to this survivor for the reason that she is female, it points to the helplessness and the hopelessness that is engendered as the condition of being female. What the female survivor tells herself through her narrative is what Catherine MacKinnon has told us: That "women are randomly rewarded and systematically punished for being women. We are not rewarded systematically and punished at random. . . ." <sup>9</sup> There is no place better fashioned to display this. How do female survivors live

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<sup>8</sup>Judy Chicago, *Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light* (New York: Penguin Group, 1993), 127.

<sup>9</sup>Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 227. She goes on: "We may or may not be rewarded if we go along with male supremacy. If we try to get out of its cage, it is virtually certain we will be punished".

with the terrible truth of that? This reveals one of the reasons why many survivors eventually kill themselves. We who are not survivors can't come up with a better understanding of why it is that a person who suffered so extremely, and managed to survive it, would commit suicide than to say so sadly that "they must not have every gotten over it." Who knows better than they the boundaries and the bridges between the camp and the wide world?

Women entered the camps in double jeopardy and the testimony of their survival marks them as vulnerable again, in a way that the male and his body has not been. That is, the heterosexual male body is not marked as vulnerable in the same way that the female body has been. But when female history is written, when female stories are spoken, perhaps the male body will be marked in ways that are not now possible. At this time, and within the context of the literature of the Holocaust, the issue as it regards the preservation of the male narrative is this: as she reiterates her tale, the survivor's testimony can be seen as reducing the mysterious holiness of the Holocaust.

Yesterday, I read two articles in the *New York Times*: one by Wiesel proclaiming again how "holy and mysterious" the Holocaust is; the other by a museum director discussing the many "dangers" inherent in trying to represent the Holocaust. Then, today, I listened to stories about survivors who were so damaged that they acted out horribly against their own children, especially their daughters. Some fathers even re-enacted the war, casting the girls as Jews and themselves

as Nazis. It reminded me of the early days of the women's movement, when women first began to speak the truth about their relationships with men: Behind so many myths lay the reality of human pain, ruined families, and failed lives. And the worst suffering often seems to fall on the women and children.

I don't know if I'm being clear here: It's not a matter of sexism (although that's here too) but of *denial*. The idea that the Holocaust is "too holy" to be approached covers a whole range of excruciating feelings that many Holocaust scholars simply don't seem to want to discuss. . . . elevating Jewish experience to a level above and beyond other human experience and making non-Jews feel that the Holocaust is something they need not concern themselves about.<sup>10</sup>

I share this concern with the holiness of the Holocaust and with the distance from it that the gentile feels. But I think political significances lie in where one locates denial. As a Jew, Chicago locates her concern with denial in the holy text of the Holocaust. As a gentile, I locate mine in the concern with why non-Jews, and in particular women, feel that the Holocaust is something they need not concern themselves about. The extent to which the male Jewish survivor may wish to preserve the purity of the holy text is significant to me because it signifies the extent to which male-gendered philosophy and history maintain a holiness, a purity. In all these holy texts, the question of good and evil lie at the heart of the

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<sup>10</sup>Judy Chicago, 109.

narratives. The preservation of the male narrative depends absolutely on the suppression of the female narrative, because then good and evil can stay put.

In their descriptions of the tragedy of Jews during the Holocaust, the women I interviewed discussed women's particular victimization. They spoke of their sexual vulnerability: sexual humiliation, rape, sexual exchange, pregnancy, abortion, and vulnerability through their children--concerns that men either described in different ways or, more often, did not describe at all . . . her entrance to the camp . . . being nude, shaved in a sexual stance, straddling two stools; being observed by men, both fellow prisoners and SS guards.

Although there are many stories about sexual abuse, they are not easy to come by . . . One survivor told me she had been sexually abused by a number of Gentile men while she was in hiding when she was eleven years old.<sup>11</sup>

So: What happens when, within the context of survivorship, we learn that Jewish fathers and uncles terrorize their daughters, their female relatives? What happens when, within the context of resistance to the authority of the Nazi dictum against hiding Jews, eleven-year-old girls are used as sexual slaves for numbers of gentile men? What happens when, within the context of liberation, we learn that as their first act of liberation, gentile heroes assaulted the women prisoners?

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<sup>11</sup>Joan Ringelheim, excerpts from Round-Robin Dialogue, appearing in the newsletter for *Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light*, p. 125.

How does one retain the profound *meanings* of the camps, when it turns out that women are never truly released from them?<sup>12</sup> One thing it means is that the camps are the phantasms of both gentile and Jew. Another thing it means is that if the imprisonment of women shares such a resemblance with our liberation, then we are in far more trouble than we can bear to imagine. And, a third thing, and here is where the male narrative strives to maintain itself: if "good and evil" don't stay put, if they can't be signified by "Jew" and "Nazi" or by "liberators" and "captors," it begins to look as if it will be very difficult to tell the good guys from the bad. Literally. They had their lines drawn in the sand. The guys' turf is in trouble.

Who do you think you are?

- Have you been to the camps?

-Yes.

- Do you think being inside the camp is like being outside it?

-No.

- Do you imagine that it matters to the Poles whether it was a man or a woman?

-I don't know.

Only a fool would try to argue that inside and outside the camps are the same. An ignorant fool. Yehuda Bauer cautions the bridge-

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<sup>12</sup>This insight was suggested to me by Julie Wuthnow during conversations about the camps.

wrappers in Holocaust seminars<sup>13</sup> that their critiques are too harsh; that they didn't appreciate their good fortune to occupy the historical time and place that they do; that they were too young to understand; that they were, in truth and in fact, utterly wrong.

The arguments I make about the suppression of women's narratives within the holy text of the Holocaust I make not as a survivor of camps, but as one who has been raised to imagine that the camps have nothing to do with me. Bauer's defense of the holy text, and his attack on the bridge-wrappers, was no less harsh than that of his gentile cohorts, self-imagined "good guys" one and all. The only honest response of outrage and deep distress came from a young woman who responded to the bridge-wrappers with great pain. The implications of reading gender into the text of extermination was unbearable in its presence in the present. And so, she walked out. As I said, the only honest response. Written on the heart of a person whose register reads dead right with great frequency. I believe that the camps were the full expression of phantasms that can be called evil, phantasms that reside in the most ordinary of people. These phantasms are rooted deeply, not just in death camps or in fascism, but in a culture in which the productions of truth about sexual practices, gender deviance, violence and power intersect and are transformed from imagery to reality. As Klaus Theweleit concludes:

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<sup>13</sup>Seminars held at University of Hawai'i at Manoa during Fall of 1994, in which those who raised the flag of gender within the text of the Holocaust were spoken to as if they were silly children.

We need to understand and combat fascism not because so many fell victim to it, not because it stands in the way of the triumph of socialism, not even because it might "return again," but primarily because as a form of reality production that is constantly present and possible under determinate conditions, *it can and does, become our production. . . . examples of this are to be seen in . . . male-female relations, which are . . . relations of productions.*<sup>14</sup>

Those relations of power existed not only in Nazi Germany, at one time, in one place. The Holocaust has "belonged" to the Jew, and not only because the term refers to the burnt offering in the Temple of Solomon (with all the implications of a Christian reading of Jewish sacrificial history). Derived from the Greek, holokautoma, or "whole-burnt," might suggest a meaning related to the extent and manner of death rather than the victim. But hidden-in-plain-sight of the voluminous male-gendered narratives of the Holy Text of Holocaust are the narratives of the female. And, without a doubt, of the gentile. Perhaps it is useful to think of a lens through which other, more hidden sub-texts, can be imaged. The accustomed way to think of a sub-text as an under-text, as in a Dorothy Faison painting, or as a text inside another, as in *Marat/Sade*<sup>15</sup> may mislead. Its an Escher print; all it takes is the willingness to tilt the head a bit. Really.

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<sup>14</sup>Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, vol. 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 221.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, (London: J. Calder, 1965). Also: *Marat/Sade*, produced by Michael Birkett and directed by Peter Brooke. 115 min., I. S. Productions, 1989. Videocassette.

## Chapter 2

### Memory and Narrative: Space and Time

I think about the tenses all the time, especially that slash in the imperfect time line, proving that a sudden event can come and disturb the smooth thoughtlessness of everyday living.<sup>1</sup>

Alice Kaplan  
*French Lessons: A Memoir*

But why must experience be narrativized?<sup>2</sup>

Narrativization, the vigorous retainer of coherence, is efficacy, that is, hegemony, hiding-in-plain-sight. In teaching a course in *Film and Politics*, I read weekly essays by each student, highlighting and extracting phrases where insights broke through. I then juxtaposed the phrases, sometimes by something that could be called a theme; other times the quotes were simply placed in loose conversation with one another, without choreographic narrative. Because this was done with passages that concerned themselves with the significances of films, themselves highly formed by visual and discursive narrativity, the collecting and arrangement of the quotes took on a very compelling quality. Significances and contingencies appeared that otherwise would not be possible. In a large class,

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<sup>1</sup>Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 146.

<sup>2</sup>R. Ruth Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 17.

these pages of collected quotes could easily number 5 or 6 pages in length each week. For students, the return of these pages as collected quotes was magical. The quotes were anonymous so that students would permit the experiment in the first place which assured a representation of thoughts of each student without having to give "equal amounts" of representation. For students, it was apparent that there now existed new contingencies to the ideas we had about the films. To some of them, it became apparent that we were "messing with" the conventional wisdom of what film is and does, in some ways that could not have been anticipated. Something powerful occurs: "theory springs out of it without having to be inserted as interpretation."<sup>3</sup> Finally, students experienced the pleasure of seeing their words simultaneously featured and in synchrony with others in such a way that it was possible to see thoughts taking their place within this oblique mode of meaning-making.

Walter Benjamin created an unfinished work entirely from quotations, called *Passagen-Werk*, in which no words "of his own" appear. Regarding this project, Ruth Linden quotes Martin Jay: "[it] expressed a quasi-religious desire to become the transparent mouthpiece of a higher reality."<sup>4</sup> Perhaps. If a study of the power

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<sup>3</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schewpe, w/collaboration of Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), vol. V *Das Passagen-Werk*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (1982), 83 (A1, 1); quoted by Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 73.

<sup>4</sup>Linden, 15.

of symbol and myth, that is, of the metaphysical constructs of material existence, is constituted as a spiritual quest, then an ultimate reality might be construed as being represented through a transparent lens or selfless mouthpiece of an authorless work. A more precise understanding of *Passagen-Werk* submits that the work itself does not, strictly speaking, exist. "Yet in sheer quantity, this volume constitutes a sixth of Benjamin's intellectual production."<sup>5</sup> It represents 13 years of intensive work and it was still considered unfinished when he committed suicide in 1940. When the pages were published in 1982, there were over a thousand pages. And yet, *Passagen-Werk* is still considered by the academic reader as a confrontation with "a void."<sup>6</sup> In Benjamin's own view regarding the contemporary mode of knowledge production, "everything essential is found in the note boxes of the researcher who writes it, and the reader who studies it assimilates it into his or her own note file."<sup>7</sup> Of this, Buck-Morss writes:

In *Passagen-Werk* . . . he has left us "everything essential". . . Because of the deliberate unconnectedness of these constructions, Benjamin's insights are not--and never would have been--lodged in a rigid narrational or discursive structure. Instead, they are easily moved about in changing arrangements and trial combinations, in response to the altered demands of the changing "present." His legacy to the readers

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<sup>5</sup>Buck-Morss, 47.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 47. A very productive void, I would say. Buck-Morss finds much with which to work: quotations, images, and her own reflections.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Einbahnstrasse* (1928), IV, 103, and quoted in Buck-Morss, 336.

who come after him is a nonauthoritarian system of inheritance, which compares less to the bourgeois mode of passing down cultural treasure as the spoils of conquering forces, than to the utopian tradition of fairy tales, which instruct without dominating . . . <sup>8</sup>

This authorlessness of Benjamin's work, along with what Hannah Arendt calls "an unbearable sequence of sheer happenings"<sup>9</sup> constitutes a form of storytelling resistant to the hegemony of coherence. Linden states the problem: What shall we make of Arendt's "sheer happenings"--those unassimilable fragments of experience that refuse to be woven into a neat tale, the unspeakable, what literally cannot be talked about?<sup>10</sup> And when Roland Barthes speaks of art as an act that makes the speakable unspeakable, codes break, boundaries dissolve, spaces open. An act of breath. Milan Kundera says, "art . . . does not by nature serve ideological certitudes, it contradicts them. Like Penelope, it undoes each night the tapestry that the theologians, philosophers, and learned men have woven the day before."<sup>11</sup>

What meanings then can these reflections bring to the experience of the death camps where the unspeakable is the constant? What do they reflect about the testimony of the women who died in those camps? What art can illuminate their stories? What art, and under

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 336-337.

<sup>9</sup>Hannah Arendt, "Isak Dinesen: 1885-1962", *Men in Dark Times*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), 104.

<sup>10</sup>Linden, 17.

<sup>11</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 160.

what conditions, can the stories of women who survived be told with their voices, their words, intact; not just as appendage to the male narrative, not just signifier of the horrors of the camps, but the speaking subjects of their own stories.

In the context of the death-camps, it was women and children who went first to their deaths. One reason why so relatively few women's stories have survived from the Holocaust is that so many women were killed with such expediency and with such essential dismissal, that we cannot, of course, hear their stories. Not only did they go first to their deaths, they went in far greater numbers.<sup>12</sup> "In sheer numbers alone, there had never been a more extensive 'war-related' obliteration of women in any other time in history than during the exterminations."<sup>13</sup> This includes the systematic killing of women in the work camps as well. What mention of this that is made in the vast and dense testimony, memories, stories, in history, has been made as if the deaths of women (and of children) serve only to *signify* the extent of the horror, rather than *constitute* it. One way

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<sup>12</sup>This is contradicted, but not entirely, by Raul Hilberg in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992) 126-130. "In the final tally, women were most probably more than half of the dead, but men died more rapidly." 127. Because he makes distinctions between death rates in ghettos, work camps and death camps, it seems likely that in some cases, women were able to survive longer. How this occurred in some situations is not always clear.

<sup>13</sup>See: Judy Chicago, Joan Ringleheim, and Vera John-Steiner in the newsletters from the process of Chicago's work-in-progress, *Holocaust 1990*, which became at completion in 1993, *Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light*. I feel compelled here to put the tense in the past, although Chicago, Ringleheim and John-Steiner do not. Their reflections upon the Holocaust do not appear to take account of the explicit shift in strategizing war in regard to women; targeting women for rape, mutilation and murder has replaced regarding women as booty, or as the recreation that accompanies the hell of war. Consider Bosnia, Ethiopia, N. Iraq, Peru, Kashmir, and Kurdistan.

in which this is accomplished is by constructing the narrative of their death firmly within an understanding of the economy of work and death (as if work isn't gendered), rather than the economy of gender and death. As workers, women and children weren't useful, and so were simply met with the left-hand gesture, and sent together to a startlingly expedient death. The history of the lives and deaths of these who died has been almost entirely captured in the gesture of the left hand of a camp doctor. The death of millions of women and children then becomes a device to make the horror of the race-death matrix even more terrible than it might otherwise be imaged.

It would appear that Arendt's "sheer happenings," Benjamin's "fairy tales," and Kundera's "unbearable lightness of being"<sup>14</sup> share a concern regarding the nature of narrativity in art and in life. Benjamin speaks of "the story" as:

one of the oldest forms of communication. It does not aim at transmitting the pure in-itself of the event (as information does) but anchors the event in the life of the person reporting, in order to pass it on as experience to those listening.<sup>15</sup>

Benjamin's last position was that of the storyteller. He returned to this form when the continuous tradition of world war left only the

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<sup>14</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

<sup>15</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire," I, p. 611; quoted by Buck-Morss, 336.

hope that, within the *discontinuous* tradition of utopian politics, his story would find a new generation of listeners, one to whom the dreaming collective of his own era appears as the sleeping giant of the past "for which its children become the fortunate occasion of its own awakening."<sup>16</sup> Kundera, master story-teller, speaks of the art of the novel in this way: "The novel's sole *raison d'etre* is to say what only the novel can say."<sup>17</sup> The novel in Kundera's hands is gendered male; its voice, its use of words, its phantasms. What the Kundera novel plays with, and plays against, is male narrative and male philosophy. That is accomplished by breaking with a narrativity that is wedded to time. At the heart of all his work is this theme of breaking with time. In *Immortality*, Kundera makes explicit what was simultaneously implicit and fully evident in previous works. Not for naught, the title reflects a (final?) break with time by placing in conversation with one another characters from the book, the author, and "historical figures" like Goethe. This can be seen as the full expression of Kundera's hope that "indirectly, a grand dialogue [has taken] shape here between the novel and philosophy."<sup>18</sup> Hope lies here for Kundera; it may indeed lie here for the voice of the female, and her stories, and the inscription of one on the other. There is not: Here the female, here her stories; now, let's let her say them. No. There are the liminal "unbearable sequence of sheer happenings" that can only be made meaningful to the extent that those who speak them are also brought into being through the act of story-telling.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 337-338.

<sup>17</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 36.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 161.

Indeed, those "sheer happenings" which refuse narrative form, about which a story cannot be told, have a liminal quality to them. It is as though they occur outside of consensus reality in a mute, formless region that belies our species designation as *Homo sapiens* [and] recent, as against fossil, human. Consider, for instance: birth, infancy, and very early childhood; madness; intense sexual experiences; near death; also torture, extreme pain, and suffering.<sup>19</sup>

When does narrativization cease to be the spirit that lies at the heart of what constitutes our species as *Homo narrans*,<sup>20</sup> and becomes the device by which one story can only exist at the bloody expense of another?

Narrative, like power (because it is power), should not be said to be an instrument, a medium, which can be "used" either rightly or wrongly. It must be seen as the means in which we bring ourselves and our lives into being; without it, we thirst and shrivel. The camps were about this as much as they were about apocalyptic phantasm, purity of race and of gender, or economic and territorial hegemony. From the sublime to the pragmatic, the camps could reduce a culture of *Homo narrans* to storylessness. The damnable thing about the Jew is that since the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 c.e., which marked the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora, they have never stopped telling the stories of the culture. The story of

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<sup>19</sup>Linden, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), 272, quoted by Linden, p. 18.

being the chosen people has never stopped; even today, in the shadow of the Holocaust, that they are the chosen people. Will nothing silence these people, who continue to insist upon their stories, in the face of growing numbers of gentiles (not only former Nazi officers who didn't deny the reality of it, but only the responsibility for it) who argue that the Holocaust *as a narrative* is a Jewish conspiracy?

No. Not even a Holocaust will keep a people from speaking their stories, and the reason is this: to deny the act of storytelling is to be complicit with the denial of one's self. Even when, and perhaps most especially when, one's story is outside the realm of "consensus reality, a mute, formless region." This principle relates to both individual survival and cultural survival. Land, bodies and language have been the terrains upon which culture grows. They are also the terrains upon which the attack on culture is mounted. For the culture of the Jew, land and body have been the sites of the most profound assaults. But, language persists. Stories persist. And the final solution for the hegemony of the gentile narrative about the Jew, and for the male narrative about the female, is silence.

For the female, the body *is* land. It is our colonized territory.<sup>21</sup> And the narratives against us, against our telling are so dense that it can so often seem that:

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<sup>21</sup>Sonia Johnson, the theme of her talks and her book, *Going Out of Our Minds: The Metaphysics of Liberation*, (Freedom, California: The Crossing Press, 1987).

There is no getting beyond those "sheer happenings," to which, finally, no story can do justice. Can deliberate silence be the only alternative to the narrative that belies itself?<sup>22</sup>

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Writing these things, juxtaposing the sheer happenings, thinking one's way through, takes a long time. There are commonplace reasons for this, and there are uncommon ones. Lack of time, lack of confidence, lack of support and sustenance; these are all ordinary reasons why women don't write. The uncommon reasons are very specific to the subject, its difficulty and its pain. Also, they have to do with the existential quest(ion) of a bridge-wrapper; how to write into (what looks like) a void, from (what feels like) a void. The illusion of the void on both sides is a political illusion; that is, it emerges from political design and holds political implication.

Writing about women and the Holocaust five years ago was a dramatically different effort than it is now. What existed was a veritable forest of male-centric literature that mocked the void that appeared, so that every text had to be written *against*, rather than *with*. Before 1990, a few texts verified and documented the testimony of women in the camps and in the resistance.<sup>23</sup> Since

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<sup>22</sup> Linden, *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>23</sup>See: Vera Laska, ed., *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983); Marlene E. Heinemann, editor, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986).

then, there have been steadily growing sources, and a shift in the epistemology of these new texts.<sup>24</sup> Not only concerned with documentation, but also with interpretation, these texts are writing into the apparent void and creating feminist critiques and methodologies. It is now possible to think and write along *with* a text as well as against it, to converse rather than insist. These texts concern themselves with memory, and along with it, memory is becoming rescripted. Of course.

As illuminated by Kundera's character in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. Kundera elaborates:

This Mirek who is struggling with all his might to make sure he is not forgotten (he and his friends and their political battle) is at the same time doing his utmost to make people forget another person (his ex-mistress whom he's ashamed of). Before it becomes a political issue, the will to forget is an anthropological one: man has always harbored the desire to rewrite his own biography, to change the past, to wipe out his tracks, both his own and others'. The will to forget is very different from a simple temptation to deceive . . . Forgetting: *absolute injustice and absolute solace at the same time.*<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>See: Lore Shelley, ed., *Auschwitz--the Nazi Civilization: Twenty-three Women Prisoners' Accounts* (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1992); Carol Rittner, and John Roth, es., *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1993); Linden; Chicago.

<sup>25</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 130, emphasis added.

Kundera has astutely scripted the will to forget, and although I think he wrongly ascribes the political as following the anthropological rather than preceding or accompanying it, he has struck upon the point where the rescripting of oneself demands that another's script be wiped out. This is the brilliance of Kundera's art, that his text can be so fully and discursively male and simultaneously do so rich a reflective critique of its maleness.

Listen instead to these voices, and the rescripting of what constitutes memory:

You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember. The wild roses flower in the woods. Your hand is torn on the bushes gathering the mulberries and strawberries you refresh yourself with. You run to catch the young hares that you flay with stones from the rocks to cut them up and eat all hot and bleeding. You know how to avoid meeting a bear on the track. You know the winter fear when you hear the wolves gathering. But you can remain seated for hours in the tree-tops to await morning. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or failing that, invent.

Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres*

Memories are fashioned in continuous, weaving motions between "past and "present" selves. Back and forth, as the shuttle of a loom passes the thread of the woof between

the strands of the warp, memories are the greatest achievements of Holocaust survivors.

R. Ruth Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves*

Is there no context for our lives? No song, no literature, no poem full of vitamins, no history connected to experience that you can pass along to help us....Stop thinking about saving your face. Think of our lives and tell us your particularized world. Make up a story. Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created.

Toni Morrison, *Nobel Lecture, 1993*

Why is memory so suspect? Is it because memory makes it difficult for those who prefer clean slates? To those who prefer silence? Is it because memory makes real what happens now? Does memory remind us that we are not what we think we are? Do men fear memory because they harbor the belief that women would use memory and narrative to do the same to men as men have done to women?<sup>26</sup> Within a culture of dominance and of supremacy, if the

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<sup>26</sup>This question is proposed in a different context, in a video of five Black South African women, in which Winnie Mandela asks a similar question about white South Africans. She proposes that the fear harbored by whites of the Black South African lies in the denied but fully known knowledge that whites have about their own history of oppression and violence against the Black. White fear is in direct proportion to their own certain knowledge that they have historically oppressed Blacks, and continue to do so. There is an inability for whites to imagine anything other than this: if Black were free from white oppression, they would re-enact their power on whites as whites have on them; violently. Moreover, it is impossible in white imagination that Blacks would use that power to build a nation for both Blacks and whites, since whites determined to do otherwise.

frame of reference for what constitutes human capacity is oneself, it is unlikely that one's imagination will be able to dredge up anything higher than one's own actions, one's own intentions. What one believes others to be capable of says far more about the "oneself" than it does about "the others."

Because Himmler finds it so difficult to witness these deaths, the commandant makes an appeal to him. If it is hard for you, he says, think what it must be for these young men who must carry out these executions, day after day. Shaken by what he has seen and heard, Himmler returns to Berlin resolved to ease the pain of these men. . . . Before the year had ended, he presents the *Einsatzgruppen*<sup>[27]</sup> with a mobile killing truck. Now the young men will not have to witness death day after day. A hose from the exhaust pipe funnels fumes into a chamber built on the bed of a covered truck, which has a red cross painted on its side so its passengers will not be alarmed as they enter it.<sup>28</sup>

The memories of survivors of all atrocity are considered sacred by some and suspect by others, just as the survivor herself is considered sacred by some, suspect by others. Why is this so?

Himmler does not like to watch the suffering of his prisoners. In this sense he does not witness the consequences of his own

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<sup>27</sup>"Mobile units of the Nazi Security Police (SD) deployed during the years 1939-45, especially before the killing centers were established. The *Einsatzgruppen* operated principally in Poland and Russia, directly behind the occupying German troops. Along with other units of the SD, they murdered two million civilian Jews." Linden, 166.

<sup>28</sup>Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 156-157.

commands. But the mind is like a landscape in which nothing really ever disappears. What seems to have vanished has only transmuted to another form. Not wishing to witness what he has set in motion, still, in a silent part of himself, he must imagine what takes place. So, just as the child is made to live out the *unclaimed* imagination of the parent, others under Himmler's power were made to bear witness for him. Homosexuals were forced to witness and sometimes take part in the punishment of other homosexuals, Poles of other Poles, Jews of Jews. And as far as possible, the hands of the men of the SS were protected from the touch of death. Other prisoners were required to bury the bodies, or burn them in ovens.<sup>29</sup>

I would say that without memory, it would not be possible to invent. It would not be possible to invent oneself, nor to see oneself. I would say that memory is suspect to those who trust death.

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I was unable to write about travelling to the camps until now. Some while back, members of my committee commented on how odd it was that I seemed to speak and write as if I had not made the trip. I was stunned by this. How could I possibly have written *at all* had I not traveled the terrain of this topic? But I think what has occurred is that I have only just begun to *remember*.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 157, emphasis added.

There is a scene in *Shoah* that is reiterated again and again. In it, the viewer approaches along tracks that are the rail entrance to Auschwitz-Birkenau. There is nothing mediating the entry; that is, the camera travels the tracks unencumbered by train or transport. It moves steadily towards, not slowly, not with speed, but never arrives. It arrives infinitely. This scene is reiterated throughout the nine hours. For those who have not known the camps, for those who cannot be said to have *memory*, it is the brilliance of Lanzmann's vision that this scene becomes emblematic of the film. It is a film as much *about* memory as it is one that *creates* memory. It represents memory as the infinite arrival of self knowledge and knowledge of one's world.

I had no claim to memory. For a long time, I was immersed in the stories and the history, but I had no institutional memory, no familial memory, and certainly no cultural memory. These stories were meant to be of no concern to me and others like me. It was not possible for me to begin to *imagine* until I went. I had to go so that I could forget. It was necessary to understand what it means to have memory come flooding back. When it does, you are then able to imagine and to speak.

It is in this context that Marguerite Duras speaks to the absence of space and the rushing to fill it with words of theory and of certainty:

Men must learn to be silent. This is probably very painful for them. To quell their

theoretical voice, the exercise of theoretical interpretation. They must watch themselves very carefully. One has scarcely the time to experience an event as important as May '68 before men begin to speak out, to formulate theoretical epilogues, and the break the silence. Yes, those prating men were up to their old tricks during May '68. They are the ones who started to speak, to speak alone and for everyone else, on behalf of everyone else, as they put it. They immediately forced women and extremists to keep silent. They activated the old language, enlisted the aid of the old way of theorizing, in order to relate, to recount, to explain this new situation: May '68 . . .

It is not by chance that the women's liberation movement followed immediately.<sup>30</sup>

The act of speaking directly into the event, into the moment, privileges certain people or classes or groups of people; moreover, it stands in for, and purports to be, thought and reflection. To speak, to write, is to present or to re-present what is already signified, marked with meaning, stable. From the stable to the stable. To speak is to occupy a space, and in so doing, to "settle" it. The speaker-as-settler, laying claims to the territory, and thereby laying the claims of the territory. The "old tricks" that Duras refers to above is the territorial imperative, the pissing on the fire hydrant. It matters not where those referred to by Duras placed themselves in relation to the

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<sup>30</sup>Marguerite Duras, in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms, An Anthology*, (University of Massachusetts, 1980; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 111-112. This comes originally from an interview with Duras in *La création étouffée [Smothered Creativity]*, by Suzanne Horer, and Jeanne Socquet, 1973.

events of May of '68. It has to do with the retaining of the power of ingress, of exclusion.

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I shall become the chronicler of our adventures. I shall forge them into a new language and store them inside me should I have no chance to write things down. I shall grow dull and come to life again, fall down and rise up again and one day I may perhaps discover a peaceful space round me which is mine alone and then I shall sit there for as long as it takes, even it should be a year, until life begins to bubble up in me again and I find the words that bear witness where witness needs to be borne.<sup>31</sup>

Etty Hillesum  
Tuesday, 28 July 1943

Sister Mary Lucy: how odd that she should be the one to assign the reading of *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl* to us. If the Mary in her name was meant to mediate the Lucy of it, it failed its purpose. Perhaps it was her belief in evil that earned her her nun's name. It was no doubt the existence of evil that made her imminently cranky. Or maybe it was just us, the vastness of us, the perpetual requests to be excused to go to the lavatory. I could never disassociate the word lavatory from the idea of laboratory. In reality, the lavatory was a relief from the laboratory of Sister Mary Lucy's classroom. Literally. Poor Charles B., marked by her dislike. When he asked permission to

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<sup>31</sup>Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 165.

leave and she refused him the third time, there was no help for him. He humiliated himself in front of the fifty of us, and then he was punished for not being able to hold back nature. Charles sat across the aisle from me, so I was acutely aware of his pain. She terrorized us all through Charles, and then she assigned us to read Anne Frank.

Reading *The Diary of a Young Girl* was the single memorable reading of the whole of my grammar school assignments. It never struck me that I shouldn't be reading another girl's diary; I felt entirely associated with what she wrote. I'm certain that Anne Frank saved me from the wrath of Sister Mary Lucy, and probably more, because her diary so completely validated my own sense of things. Only now do I find it peculiar that I should so identify with a young Jewish girl in hiding from the Nazis in the early 1940s in Amsterdam. I now think that it has to do with Anne's inner life rather than her external social and political conditions, which I did not comprehend; nor was I meant to. In assigning her diaries to be read in their schools, the Catholic Church exempted itself from any responsibility for or complicity with evil, maintaining itself to be firmly on the side of the just and the good.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the Church reflected the desire of the culture of the United States and Europe of the late 1940s and early 1950s for a sense of sanguinity<sup>33</sup> from regarding the extermination of the Eastern European Jew. One writer who challenged the sanguine presuppositions underlying the American

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<sup>32</sup>Hilberg, 260-268.

<sup>33</sup>Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980). I borrow this phrase from her.

ideal was Meyer Levin.<sup>34</sup> His view of the role of the American writer was that of "midwife to that of the authentic recitations of the victims themselves." As he collected testimonies he recognized the incomprehensibility of what survivors had experienced:

This tragic epic cannot be written by a stranger to the experience, for the survivors have an augmented view which we cannot attain; they lived so long so close with death that on a moral plane they are like people who have acquired the hearing of a whole range of tones outside normal human hearing.<sup>35</sup>

When Levin came upon the diary of Anne Frank, he apprehended this as the voice he "had been waiting for, the voice from amongst themselves, the voice from the mass grave."<sup>36</sup> Here was a voice "within the range of normal human hearing." It is in part due to this quality that the diary was so enthusiastically received, in all its forms, including the theatrical production and the film; all play towards the sanguine tone that dominates the text<sup>37</sup> of the early edition of the diary. It may be precisely because the book does *not* record that "whole range of tones outside normal human hearing" that it could be so well received by an audience who shared in what Bettelheim describes as the "general repression of the discovery" of

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>35</sup>Meyer Levin, *In Search* (New York: Horizon, 1950) 173; quoted in Ezrahi, 200.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>37</sup>Ezrahi, 201.

the horrible facts of the concentrationary universe.<sup>38</sup> Bettelheim states: "[Anne Frank's] story found wide acclaim because . . . it denies implicitly that Auschwitz ever existed. If all men are good, there never was an Auschwitz."<sup>39</sup> But Anne's expressed belief that "deep down all men are good"<sup>40</sup> does not permeate *The Critical Edition*, in the way that it does the 1952 text, film and theatre production. Her expression of this belief exists as only a part of what she has to say about her reflections on her predicament, and her own growing awareness of the endangered condition of the Jew in her time. The ensuing story of manipulation of the text by many hands highlights an important stage in the evolution of American attitudes toward the Holocaust:<sup>41</sup>

From a moving document of the plight of an assimilated Jewish family which nonetheless perceives its suffering and its destiny as part of the particularistic destiny of the Jewish people, the diary was transformed into a work of art which comprises both a litany of human suffering and a declaration of ultimate faith in universal goodness. The playwrights who converted the diary into a commercial drama availed themselves of a young girl's naive belief in the potential for human goodness to serve the defense of American liberal optimism against the evidence of pure evil. In the emphasis on Anne's faith there is an implicit denial of her fate--either as the

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<sup>38</sup>Bettelheim, Bruno, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age*, Glencoe: Free Press, 1960, p. 252-253, quoted by Ezrahi, 201.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pg. 154, quoted by Ezrahi, 201.

<sup>40</sup>Anne Frank, *The Diary of A Young Girl* (New York: Random House, 1952).

<sup>41</sup>Ezrahi, 202.

innocent victim of demonic forces or as the Jewish victim of anti-Semitism.<sup>42</sup>

In many respects, the diary can be read as the straightforward expressions of an extremely bright and articulate young girl:

I'm awfully scared that everyone who knows me as I always am will discover that I have another side, a finer and better side. I'm afraid they'll laugh at me, think I'm ridiculous, sentimental, not take me in earnest. I'm used to not being taken seriously . . . if I really compel the good Anne to take the stage for a quarter of an hour, she simply shrivels up as soon as she has to speak . . . and before I realize it, she has disappeared.<sup>43</sup>

Tuesday, 1 August 1944

The team of editors that worked on the 1989 critical edition of *The Diary of Anne Frank* claim that in their work to expand the diary to its complete and full length,<sup>44</sup> "Anne Frank has stayed the person she was, despite our investigation, despite our full publication of her diaries."<sup>45</sup> This is a response to the radical departure taken in this

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition*, Prepared by the Netherlands State Institute for War Documentation, David Barnouw and Gerrold Van Der Stroom, eds., (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 698.

<sup>44</sup>Even at that, the critical edition has failed to make the complete work available. Some persons mentioned in the manuscripts requested that their names not be used. Moreover, the second wife of Anne Frank's father had strong objections to the inclusion of certain "small" numbers of previously unpublished details. According to the editors, "the historical character of the diary remains unaffected by the loss of such negligible detail."

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 167.

printing from the original Dutch edition in which Otto Frank, Anne's father, played a major role. That role was to suppress entries in his daughter's diaries concerning her awareness of herself as a sexual being and her self-explorations of her body, and the entries of her spirited anxieties and anger towards others in the household.

I don't think a boy is as complicated down there as a girl . . . . How in heaven's name will I be able to explain the setup to him . . . before I was 11 or 12 years old I didn't realize that there were two inner lips . . . . And the funniest thing of all was that I thought that the urine came out of the clitoris. When I asked Mummy once what that stub of a thing was for, she said that she didn't know, she still pretends to be ignorant even now!<sup>46</sup>

Friday, 24 March 1944

Entries concerning her frustrations and thoughts regarding the dominance of men over women are also absent from the early publications.

A question that has been raised more than once and that gives me no inner peace is why did so many nations in the past, and often still now, treat women as inferior to men? Everyone can agree how unjust this is, but that is not enough for me, I would also like to know the cause of the great injustice!

women demand the right of complete independence! But that's not all, respect for woman, that's going to have to come as well! .

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 566.

. Women are much braver, much more courageous soldiers, struggling and enduring pain for the continuance of mankind, than all the freedom-fighting heroes with their big mouths!<sup>47</sup>

Thursday, 14 June, 1944

However, the entries of her romance with Peter Van Daan, the son of another family in hiding, are not suppressed. Instead, they are edited carefully so that, for example, an entry where Anne writes "my left breast lay against his cheek" reads in the first edition, "my left shoulder against his chest."<sup>48</sup> Until *The Diary of Anne Frank: The Critical Edition* was released, it would have been very difficult to think of Anne as anything but the "young girl" of the previously ascribed title, *Diary of a Young Girl*. In all previous editions, she is "a young girl," and as such, she becomes the signifier of "girls," as they should be. Young girls who are bright and mature "naturally" concern themselves with romance, religious feelings and ideas, and with the pain of others. In a word, they are sentimental. Hence, the "universality" of the text. The specificity of the diary, what gives it its *significance*, is that the girl Anne Frank rises above sentimentality, because of the severity of her conditions both within the annexe and in the culture outside the annexe that has created it.<sup>49</sup> In this regard, she is not "every girl," but a particular, suffering subject. This Anne meets the challenge of her historical moment and

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 678.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 609, entry from Monday 17 April 1944.

<sup>49</sup>Not surprisingly, this is also the case with the 1994 publication by Viking, New York, of *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo*, by Zlata Filipović.

is understood as a girl who now writes more deeply than she would have under normal conditions. Hence the transcendence. Anne of the early texts transcends the annexe, but not girlhood. This is the full post-text meaning of the diary as it has been titled and edited previous to *The Critical Edition* and as it has taken its historical significance. This is the tragedy of a girl-child cheated out of her own full life without losing her girl-innocence. It is her death that confers final significance to her words. What would the words of the Anne Frank of the *Diary of a Young Girl* have meant had the allies liberated her, her family and friends, and if had life continued more or less normally?

an M.P. . . from London . . . said that they ought to make a collection of diaries and letters after the war . . . just imagine how interesting it would be if I were to publish a romance of the "Secret Annexe."\* The title alone would be enough to make people think it was a detective story. But, seriously, it would be quite funny 10 years after the war if we Jews were to tell how we lived and what we ate and talked about here.<sup>50</sup>

Wednesday, 29 March 1944

In order to maintain the widely held post-textual juxtaposition of innocence and death, two elements are essential; that the young writer of this diary does not survive, and that the diaries be written by a girl rather than a boy. Loss of innocence means entirely

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\* Anne Frank's title of her diary was *Het Achterhuis*. The nearest translation to English is *The Secret Annexe*.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 578.

different things when gendered male than it does when gendered female. That diaries are socially constructed as female space rather than male makes it highly unlikely, in any case, that a diary by a boy would exist and then survive, under the conditions that Anne Frank's diary has. Further, a boy's diary, functioning on the order of a boy's doll, would function subversively to those male narratives that now represent the social meaning of war and violence.<sup>51</sup> To question the social construct of the diary is to ask, then, how the meaning of diary-as-enunciation functions as a device to silence and control social narrative in regard to both female and male. I am most concerned with the case of the young female, in which diary-keeping functions as a device to keep us talking to ourselves about our selves. If it is through language that we bring ourselves into being, into subjectivity, then within the context of diary-keeping, the enunciation of the self never enters social space. Rather, the self remains secret, that is to say, the self is *kept* and maintains coherence with the deep function of the diary, most especially during the years that the young female enters into her womanhood. The diary as a text and diary-keeping as an act, frames the female speaking subject as hidden, secret, private, kept, socially silent.

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<sup>51</sup>I am referring here to the social construction of the diary as female rather than male, specifically within the context of childhood-into-adulthood. Once the diary becomes a device within the context of manhood, it performs an entirely different function than with the adolescent and young woman. In the case of boys, the absence of the diary as a way to bring into being the social category of "boy" functions to keep the male narrative pure from doubt, ambivalence, and from the appearance of other forms of desire other than those that are manly. Male war poems, journals and diaries, even when they are politicized as pacifist or anti-war, maintain the centrality of the masculinized "reality" of action and marginalizes the feminized "experience" of waiting. No male writer has done this better in our time than Michael Herr in *Dispatches*.

I'm awfully scared that everyone who knows me as I always am will discover that I have another side, a finer and better side. I'm afraid they'll laugh at me, think I'm ridiculous, sentimental, not take me in earnest. I'm used to not being taken seriously . . . if I really compel the good Anne to take the stage for a quarter of an hour, she simply shrivels up as soon as she has to speak . . . and before I realize it, she has disappeared.<sup>52</sup>

Tuesday, 1 August 1944

This quote reappears for reconsideration and release from its earlier description. What appears normal and natural about this passage must be read instead as social conscription. It must be seen for what it does, simultaneously hiding and exposing what is hidden-in-plain-sight. This highly articulate expression of normal young femininity can be seen as both description of what "diary" *is*, as well as a device for what it does. The diary-as-female is the expression of the female wishing to be taken seriously, and fearing it at the same time; believing that someone is "watching," hoping to be seen and fearing it at the same time; experiencing oneself disappearing at the same time that one is (said to be) coming into being. This is not perversion on the part of sensitive, feminine young beings. This is the social process of entering into womanhood in a culture in which one is expected to appear at the same time that one takes up minimum space and time.<sup>53</sup> To be *seen* (as) female, which is the sum total of

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<sup>52</sup>Anne Frank, *The Critical Edition*, 698.

<sup>53</sup>There has been much powerful political analysis done over the last 15 years on the social production of the anorexic female as the full expression of this

what it means to *act* female.<sup>54</sup> To be female is to appear and disappear simultaneously. Diary-keeping facilitates this, as well as marks it. As diary-keepers, young females enact and re-enact the constructs of our secret selves, playing out the simultaneous desire to become and fear of becoming. Culturally, the act of becoming an adult female is a disappearing act.<sup>55</sup> Diary-keeping helps to train us for that. But it also offers an out.

Diary-keeping by young women who imagine their diaries will one day gain public recognition is not common. This is not to say that diary-keepers don't worry that their words will one day be read by prying, prurient eyes; candidates for this usually reside within one's household, related through family and friendship ties. Sometimes they reside in the imaginary. Big Brother, phantasm of George Orwell, may be the underside of the desire to believe and be comforted by the notion that what we do matters, that someone does watch, and cares. And that which comforts can terrorize; that which creates value can create vulnerability. The diary-keeper knows, whether or not she has read *1984*, that if she reveals to the diary her terrifying fear of rats, for example, that the lock on the diary is no

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cultural perversion. Two strong markers of that body of work are: Kim Chernin, *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) and Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

<sup>54</sup>This is roughly equivalent to John Berger's thesis in *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 47, from which the phrase "*men act . . . women appear*" is derived.

<sup>55</sup>Adolescent and post-adolescent girls experience this as desire; for example, as the desire to *not* become one's own mother. That is, we experience it *personally*, rather than *politically*. But we do experience it, and while it is obscured by a culture that naturalizes woman-hating, the semiotics of it *almost* gives it away.

match for interrogation. Implicit to diary-keeping is the fear that there are things in it that can be used against the keeper. In the act of diary-keeping, censoring by the keeper "reveals to" the diary only what can be risked by the keeper in the face of evil omniscience.

Perhaps what distinguishes a diary-keeper from a diary-writer is that there is something of the function of formal autobiography that compels the one-who-writes. Ultimately, it is this that makes the diary of Anne Frank "a remarkable book," as Eleanor Roosevelt refers to it in her introduction of the 1952 edition. Anne Frank hoped that her diary would be published and read after the war. Indeed she had expectations of this, and wrote a second draft of her own words,<sup>56</sup> in anticipation of living her adult life as a writer. There is an exceptional quality in Anne's life in the secret annexe, and of her reflections upon it that cannot be denied. Nevertheless, many young women live and write exceptionally and privately without maintaining such hopes for themselves.<sup>57</sup> Here is a young woman who, perhaps as a result of class privilege, was able to imagine herself thus. There is no doubt that this image of herself contributes to her ability to maintain the hopefulness in her writing. Anne Frank believed in the tenet of all who act; she felt that "someone is

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<sup>56</sup>*The Critical Edition* includes three manuscripts which can be read simultaneously: a) is Anne Frank's own first version of the diary; b) is her second version, based on the first; and c) is the translation by B.M. Mooyaart-Doubleday of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, published as *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* in the 1952 U.S. edition of *Het Achterhuis*, first published in 1947. The three texts have been printed one under the other, page by page, permitting comparison. See pages 168-170 for the conditions, scheme, transcription, deletions, and additions.

<sup>57</sup>I have the continual privilege of bearing witness to this through the role of teacher in women's studies classes.

watching."<sup>58</sup> Or in the case of one who writes, one day will be watching--or reading, and listening.

I have one outstanding trait in my character, which must strike anyone who knows me for any length of time, and that is my self-knowledge. I can watch myself and my actions, just like an outsider.

I didn't want to be treated as a girl-like-all-others, but as Anne-on-her-own-merits . . .

I couldn't do anything else. I have acted entirely according to my feelings, I have acted selfishly, but I have acted in the way that was best for my peace of mind. Because I should completely lose my repose and self-confidence, which I have built up so shakily, if, at this stage, I were to accept criticisms of my half-completed task.<sup>59</sup>

Saturday, 15 July 1944

and finally I twist my heart round again . . . and keep on trying to find a way of becoming what I would so like to be and what I could be, if . . . there weren't any other people living in the world.<sup>60</sup>

Tuesday, 1 August 1944

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<sup>58</sup>Stoppard, Tom, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (New York: Grove Press, 1967, as spoken by the Player King, regarding the existential question of the actor, and by implication, of all who act.

<sup>59</sup>Frank, Anne, *Ibid.*, 689-690.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 699. These are Anne's last words; the diary ends here. On August 4, 1944, there was a raid on the "Secret Annexe" and all occupants were arrested and sent to German and Dutch concentration camps. Of all the occupants, only Anne's father survived. In March 1945, two months before the liberation of Holland, Anne died at Bergen-Belsen.

It is not true that "the content of the complete texts of Anne Frank's diary portrays her no differently than did that of the first version published in 1947, except for conveying a more rounded, a more detailed picture both of her development from a thirteen-year-old into a fifteen-year-old girl, and of her inner life and her progress as a writer."<sup>61</sup> In the title of the original suppressed text, there is a lie concealed in plain sight: *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*. On the one hand, the title is carefully coherent with the desire to suppress the voice of a young and strong female writer when it speaks with anger or with eroticism. That is a desire not particular to a Jewish father in hiding from the Nazis, one whose daughter documents inner thoughts and feelings which then survive her death at the hands of the Nazis. Anne Frank and her family lived in excruciating silence because they were Jews, and they died because they were Jews. But there is more than one pre-text for these diaries. Fascism and anti-Semitism are to be read as the pre-texts for the diaries, but the diaries themselves insist on another pre-text *as well*. That is the struggle of young women, at precisely the ages of Anne's writings, for a sense of self, for what used to be called a search for the soul. As a text, the diaries are the documentation of the female speaking subject, of the articulation of a female desire to speak without disappearing, of the fear and the longing to be taken seriously, and of the absolute necessity to hide and to hold in excruciating silence that which is one's self. In that respect the diaries are textually

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 166.

contradictory, as they are simultaneously evidence of the hiding, and the articulation of the revelation. They hide and they reveal at once, and to the extent that they do both, they are not only the diaries of the young woman Anne Frank, but represent the desires and fears of all young women.<sup>62</sup>

The life and death of Anne Frank cannot and should not be subsumed by this claim that I am making, the claim being that the secret annexe and the diary are signifiers for where it is that the young female subject must ruminate upon itself often in silence and darkness, certainly alone, in order to exist at all. On the contrary, the secret annexe existed, as Anne existed; but the creation of the annexe and gestation of the diary also signify the existential crisis of young women in a culture in which to "become a woman" is to become less than what one is. I want Anne recovered from the custodial care of those who subject her text to being less than what it is, less than

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<sup>62</sup>I want to continue to make this claim even though my occasional claims to an "all" inclusiveness are questionable. There are many reasons why all young women do not share the same experiences; race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, education, religion, and locality, among other things impact upon female subjectivity. For example: The large numbers of women raised Catholic, Jewish, and Mormon who are drawn to feminism isn't a fluke, but arises from the specificity of particular norms and beliefs, according to Sonia Johnson; the socialization and subjectivity of young local women in Hawai'i cannot be grounded exclusively in standard notions of ethnicity and race, but must include multi-dimensional subjectivity as well as an understanding of colonization *and* what culture means when "grown" on an island; the cautious observations of Adrienne Rich in "Teaching Language in Open Admissions" from *Lies, Secrets, and Silences*, that "white, ethnic working-class young women seem to have problems of self-reliance and of taking their lives seriously that young black women students as a group do not seem to share." I do not wish to claim "all women" as a category; rather, I want to use it to mark from time to time the political assertion that there are no exemptions. To state it bluntly: The rapeability of one woman signifies the rapeability of all women, even if some women are never raped.

what she was. According to the editors of *The Critical Edition*, "Anne is still Anne." Their concern with having violated is clearly a concern for having violated Otto Frank's "understandable" and "natural" concern. Certainly, these are patriarchal concerns, familiar to us all. Further, what concerns these editors about the suppression of the original text is that Frank's protective custody of the text made it open to claims of fraud. This concern is now relieved as these claims are now considered to be conclusively refuted, in great part because of their publication of *The Critical Edition*. The concentrated effort to contain Anne and her words has never ceased. The curriculum committee of the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, Sister Mary Lucy, the editors of the earlier editions translated from the Dutch by B.M. Mooyaart-Doubleday, the playwrights and the filmmakers, the editors of *The Critical Edition*; who among them has let Anne speak for herself, to permit her written text to bring her absent voice into being? In the face of them all, Otto Frank's protective custody of the diary becomes more and more necessary. The obstructions to the written subjectivity of Anne's diary have been "normal" ones. Nothing beyond the normal determinations of what is right and good has occurred. Nothing beyond it need occur in order to keep Anne Frank perpetually annexed.

Only Miep Gies, the woman who helped to hide, feed, and protect the Franks, has acted respectfully on behalf of Anne's words. In her every handling of the diary, Gies performs as a "midwife to [her] authentic recitations." After the Franks were discovered and

removed from the annexe, Gies entered their quarters to salvage what she could before the Nazis returned for further pillage:

My eyes took in a scene of terrible pillage . . . amidst the chaos of papers and books, my eyes lit on the little red-orange checkered, cloth-bound diary that Anne had received from her father on her thirteenth birthday . . . [I] scanned the rubble for more of Anne's writings, and I saw . . . many more writing papers . . . Quickly, we gathered up handfuls of pages in Anne's scrawling handwriting. My heart beat in fear that the Austrian would return and catch us among the now-captured "Jewish possessions.."..My arms and Elli's arms were filled with papers.

Trying not to drop anything, I bent to lock the door to the hiding place and returned to the office. There Elli and I stood facing each other, both loaded down with papers. Elli said to me, "You're older; you must decide what to do."

I opened the bottom drawer of my desk and began to pile in the diary . . . books . . . papers. "Yes," I told Elli, "I will keep everything . . . I'll keep everything safe for Anne until she comes back."

People in the office asked to see Anne's diary. My answer was always "No. It's not right. Even though it's the writings of a child, it's hers and it's her secret. I'll only return it back into her hands, and her hands alone." I read nothing.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Gies, Miep, *Anne Frank Remembered*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987, 198-199, and 204-205.

Otto Frank survived Auschwitz, after learning that Anne's mother, Edith, had died in the women's camp shortly before the liberation. Anne and her sister Margot had been transferred to Bergen-Belsen, a work camp. In spite of this camp not being an apparatus for liquidation, it remained difficult to learn whether they had survived the hunger and disease. He waited in Amsterdam, working with Gies in his old offices, for word:

One morning, Mr. Frank and I were alone in the office, opening mail. He was standing beside me, and I was sitting at my desk. I was vaguely aware of the sound of a letter being slit open. Then, a moment of silence. Something made me look away from my mail. Then, Otto Frank's voice, toneless, totally crushed: "Miep, Margot and Anne are not coming back."

I heard him walk across the room and down the hall, and the door closed.

I sat at my desk utterly crushed . . . I reached into the drawer on the side of my desk and took out the papers that had been waiting there for Anne for nearly a year now. No one, including me, had touched them. Now Anne was not coming back for her diary.

I took out all the papers, placing the little red-orange checkered diary on top, and carried everything into Mr. Frank's office . . . I held out the diary and the papers to him. I said, "here is your daughter Anne's legacy to you."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 234-235

Long after the publishing of the second printing, Miep Gies continued to relinquish opportunities to read the original writings that she had held for 'Anne; her relationship to the diary was the same as her relationship to Anne. Initially against a translation and publishing abroad, Otto Frank succumbed to the pressure on him to allow the diary a more widespread audience.<sup>65</sup> In this context, his protective restrictions of the diary takes on the necessity of the guardian, perhaps extending even beyond those of the patriarch. The greater the proliferation of her edited diary, the further the diary extended into fictionalized and dramatized film and theatre, the more recognizable her name and her face (the photographs and drawings used emphasized her youth, and re-present her in her earlier years rather than later); the more she stays a girl. The less her writing signifies her intelligence and her struggles, the more the fiction of Anne Frank serves the kitsch-man's (*Kitschmensch*) need for kitsch: the need to gaze into the mirror of the beautifying lie and to be moved to tears of gratification at one's own reflection.<sup>66</sup> Benjamin interpreted kitsch, the cluttered, aesthetic style of mass marketing, as "the overproduction of commodities; the bad conscience of the producers."<sup>67</sup> Among those who laid their hands on the text of the diary, it is Miep Gies alone who exemplifies restraint on behalf of Anne and the diary throughout.

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 245.

<sup>66</sup>Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 135.

<sup>67</sup>Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 284.

Finally, I gave into [Otto Frank's] insistence [to read the diary] . . . . With awful fear in my heart, I opened the book and turned to the first page. And so I began to read. I read the whole diary without stopping. From the first word, I heard Anne's voice come back to speak to me . . . . I lost track of time. Anne's voice tumbled out of the book . . . . She was no longer gone and destroyed. She was alive again in my mind.

So much had been lost, but now Anne's voice would never be lost. My young friend had left a remarkable legacy to the world.<sup>68</sup>

In spite of the concerns of the editors and the father, the filmmakers and the priests, the speaking subject of the diary of Anne Frank now speaks without disappearing. However, the extent to which she was made to signify a young *girl* is directly related to the extent to which she was made to function as a mouth piece of national, and therefore *gentile*, innocence and liberal optimism. The truncation of her voice as a young woman is directly equivalent to the truncation of her voice as a Jew. What is deleted from the original text in the Broadway drama is the engagement with Jewish history (such as Anne's sister's pledge to become a nurse in Palestine) and the affirmation of Jewish destiny (exemplified in Anne's assertion of the uniqueness and purpose of Jewish martyrdom and her declaration of faith).<sup>69</sup> The speaking subject of the diary of Anne Frank does now speak without disappearing; she can now be read as a young, bright

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<sup>68</sup>Gies, 246.

<sup>69</sup>Ezrahi, 203.

woman, and as a young Jew, working to find meaning in a truncated life. The continual cropping of her voice as a Jew throughout the 1950s can be, and has been, partly related to the conflict that Jews [themselves] perceived between their identity as Americans and...the sense they still had of their own precarious status in the American literary community.<sup>70</sup> It may well be that Jews figure their status as Americans and within the literary community to be no longer precarious. But this is not the full reason that her writings can now be fully explicated. Anti-Semitism is hardly disappeared. But the taming of this text has been complete, the years of truncation have taken their toll, and the meaning of the text can now be contained not as political, but as historical; as document, not as voice; not as present, but as past; no longer annexed, now archived. The distinct presence of the diarist has given way to the more shadowy role of the memoirist.<sup>71</sup> And while I am not particularly interested in maintaining the distinction between the two,<sup>72</sup> there is a reliability, a certainty, and an authenticity ascribed to the diarist that is not to the memorist. Time considers the memorist suspect. The truncated diary, the film, the theatre production, the temporal and special contexts within which all were situated and commodified, now constitute a cultural post-text. Our cultural codes of meaning are lodged within an ideology of temporality, and enough years have

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 204.

<sup>71</sup>Irving Howe, "Writing and the Holocaust", *The New Republic*, October 27, 1986, 32.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., "We may wish with all our hearts to yield entirely to the demands of memory and evidence, but simply by virtue of reading, we cannot forget that the diarist was a person formed before and the memoirist a person formed after the Holocaust."

passed so that the constitution of Anne Frank, like that of Joan of Arc,<sup>73</sup> has been arranged, and rearranged, by the institutional imperatives of state and church, race and gender.

.....

One day, there will be discussions and writings about the bombing of Iraq, and we'll "find out" what we already know, in spite of the seductions of technological communications. By then, it will have another meaning to us; its impact absorbed by conventionally generated deceit about our national self-understanding and explicated through Time. In the chanting down over years that bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki kept more people from dying, because it *stopped the war* is the ability for a culture of containment and suppression to construct itself as humane. Conditioned to such sing-song stories of violence, what can the resurrected words of a young Jewess, dead for 50 years, matter?

Is there perhaps a silent hope, buried along with inadmissible memories, that perhaps some fragment of what has been censored from the official story will be restored? And the pain and shock of that memory woven thus into a fabric of meaning, shared in the common area of knowledge?<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Joan of Arc, symbol of a right-wing France, the France of Bardèche. Kaplan, 177 & 190.

<sup>74</sup>Griffin, 259.

## Chapter 3

### The Stones of Mauthausen

You have come and that is a good thing.  
You have safety valves and that is a good thing.  
Otherwise you would lose your mind.

opening lines, film at Mauthausen

Will McMasters was the first American GI to enter the camp at Mauthausen on the fifth of May, 1945. He weeps and he speaks to us from the film that is shown every day at the camp for the visitors that come there. There must be another name for those who come to the death camps to remember; "visitor" implies something different from what I saw happening. It may be true that some come and take pictures of one another in front of or inside the ovens, but I never saw that occur. I did hear more than once that "we thought we ought to see at least one concentration camp while we were here." Hearing this said by young gentile couples on their first trip to Europe, the camps sounded like an excursion fitted into a rambling schedule. Still, even for them, the camp seemed to have had the effect of sedating the tourist in them. I would say that the camps induce in those who visit them a sense of bearing witness, in a peculiar way. The quiet that inhabits the camps is deceiving, as are the relatively empty spaces. In fact, those spaces were crammed with people, and the camps were noisy from enforced activity. And so what the visitor bears witness to in the camps is an absence rather than a presence. This is not to say that a presence is not felt;

rather, that a camp cluttered with visitors is antithetical to, and cannot replicate, a sense of the oppressiveness as it existed. It requires a great deal of space and quiet to allow the presence of the camp to take its place.<sup>1</sup> One would not stand and imagine a scene of a kapo beating a prisoner. It is not like a film run in one's mind. Instead, a specific comment, a detail, a sign, "in this room, people were gassed"; a piece of information and you look, and you don't imagine but *see* a terrible graffiti being scratched into the ceiling.

In all the camps I entered,<sup>2</sup> I walked around on my own before I spoke to any of my contacts or was taken on any tours. The hills around Mauthausen, the town and the camp, are absolutely lovely, and the fog that hung on them the day I was there was replicated in the film exactly. It is a stunning landscape that mocks the existence of the camp.<sup>3</sup> By the time I watched the film, I had already seen quite a bit of the camp and I had spoken to people in Vienna and at the University of Innsbruck before arriving.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The first day I arrived at Auschwitz, the entrance was packed with busloads of visitors. It had the feeling of a train station, rather than a death camp; the irony of this may be that early transports to the camp may have reproduced something of a train station atmosphere, where many travelers bring with them many anxieties. Nevertheless, there would have been a vast difference between the fear of not knowing of the dispossessed of an early transport, and busloads of visitors who arrive there because they know the fate of those dispossessed. After the early transports, when rumors of Auschwitz had circulated through other camps, the arrival of transports to Auschwitz began to involve terror and panic.

<sup>2</sup>Mauthausen, Auschwitz, Maidanek, Stutthof, and Neuengamme.

<sup>3</sup>This was the case at so many of the camps. Neuengamme near Hamburg also comes to mind as particularly striking in this regard.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Andreas Maislinger at Universität Innsbruck, Institut für Politikwissenschaft, made possible my many contacts throughout my travels, from Austria to Poland. It's difficult to imagine the outcome of my travels without benefit of his time and knowledge.

Will McMasters' testimony at the end of the film was a moving and well-edited ending to a film designed to exempt Austria from responsibility and complicity. The desire to forget was enacted more graphically at Mauthausen than at any camp I visited. Among other witnesses, the film features a woman still living in the town of Mauthausen, discussing how she, her brother and her son helped an escaped inmate. I waited for the film to illuminate the full significance of her resistance by discussing the practice of the "rabbit hunt."<sup>5</sup> But to no avail. This "rabbit hunt" was an institutionalized practice of releasing prisoners and then alerting the villagers and farmers around the camp that there were to be rewards for shooting as many prisoners as possible. This would engage not only the sporting instinct, but the ability to collect a form of booty. In my reading of her testimony, this woman who spoke of her "decision to assist these people, whether they were Jewish or not, because she was a good Christian"<sup>6</sup> could have made her case for Christianhood even more fervently if she had invoked the enticement to participate in the "hunt." There was a tentativeness in her testimony; perhaps she was thinking of the "rabbit hunt" as she spoke, and perhaps making the choice years before between "Christian ideals" and the compliance of others in her community presented a deep dilemma for her. Perhaps she was ostracized. But the film does not reveal

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<sup>5</sup>Conversations with Hannnas Hofbauer, freelance journalist for leftist journals in Vienna.

<sup>6</sup>I have put quotes on these words although they are not her exact words. I do believe, however, that the spirit of them is retained.

these contingencies. What the film does, or attempts to, do is to recover Christianity from its collaboration through this woman's testimony.

Reflecting back on my viewing of the film, I recall feeling only disgust for this Austrian woman. But in retrospect, and in the context of the whole text of the camp as a monument, she appears more as a prop in the recovery of the idea of "Austria" than as representative of Austrian collaboration or resistance. There is something pathetic about this woman. Her resistance is so tentative, it almost reads like a lie, and yet I don't regard it as one. She has an uneasy relationship with her act of resistance which would have set her outside the norms and history of her village and her nation. She clearly had to struggle with the configuration of power as it was scripted in the practice of the "rabbit hunt." Yet she is unable to place herself within a form of political resistance; instead, she is simply following the rules of being a good Christian. In her terms, she is not a resistor, she is a Christian. God and country are able to stand together on the side of right, because for her to argue political resistance rather than Christian good would sever whatever bond she has managed to maintain for herself within her community. If that bond were not significant and real to her, if she were able to sever it, then she would not be in the position of standing in for all of Austria. She would stand against it rather than standing in for it, and the bond between Austria and the Nazis would be made apparent.

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Mauthausen is a death camp, and a camp where inmates were worked to death:

. . . we visited Mauthausen, which, in keeping with its extended permanence, was built like a fortress. Here and in the adjoining network of labor camps it was death by exhaustion, desperation, or starvation. The principle work site was the quarry, where men usually labored for no more than three months before they died. As we walked down the road toward the quarry, built by hand by the workers with stones from that very place, I felt like we were walking on bodies.<sup>7</sup>

More than any camp, more than any other site I visited, the sense that one is walking on bodies is most pungent at Mauthausen. Each of these: The 185 steps into the quarry; the stones and pebbles surrounding the small lake at the base of the cliff; the tunnels into the quarry walls, open still and very dark; five iron links on a large link chain still anchored to the ground by an iron stake, the lake reflecting the one-hundred-foot drop. Taken together, these tell a story, "make sense," make real, something about how history is but barely imbedded in a place and how we are always only just barely removed from it.

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<sup>7</sup>Judy Chicago, *Holocaust Project: From Darkness to Light* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 45.

Some places manifest this more powerfully than others. This is not a phenomenon associated only with death camps, with the profane; it is also associated with what would be considered to be sacred. On the north shore of O'ahu, the Pu'u o Mahuka heiau is the site of sacred ceremonies. My first visit to this site evoked a strong sense of "walking on bodies." I attributed my discomfort at walking about this sacred site to a belief that I did not belong there, that it was not *my* place to be. One does not belong everywhere. Indeed, this does explain a great deal of my discomfort. But on returning home, I called a friend<sup>8</sup> who knows about such things, and asked her for the history of Pu'u o Mahuka. She told me that it was used for different kinds of ceremonies, and that among the stones at this heiau were birthing stones as well as sites of human sacrifices. On the island of Lana'i, I have gone walking over areas of the island where few people ever go. The silence deafens. It is possible to see the land breathe:

A Lakota woman named Elaine Jahner once wrote that what lies at the heart of the religion of hunting people is the notion that a spiritual landscape exists within the physical landscape. To put it another way, occasionally one sees something fleeting in the land, a moment when line, color, and movement intensify and something sacred is revealed, leading one to believe that there is another realm of reality corresponding to the physical one but different.

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<sup>8</sup>Phyllis Turnbull, land and bird watcher extraordinaire.

In the face of a rational, scientific approach to the land, which is more widely sanctioned, esoteric insights and speculations are frequently overshadowed, and what is lost is profound. The land is like poetry: it is inexplicably coherent, it is transcendent in its meaning, and has the power to elevate a consideration of human life.<sup>9</sup>

It may be that it requires the extremities of living and of death to provoke the appearance of these opportunities, and becoming prepared to be attentive is necessary in order to respond to human history, the history of the earth, and how the one inhabits, and contaminates, the other. In *Marat/Sade*, one of the inmates/actors abruptly steals the moment in reminder of how human history is the history of place, not time; and how we the living stand in the space, *on* the history, made by man.<sup>10</sup> He says, "I'm a thousand years old. . . . We few survivors . . . walk over a quaking bog of corpses always under our feet." Time is so much "cleaner" than space, so much more accommodating to the theory of the clean slate. By associating memory with time, history becomes so much more transient, enabling us to leave it at will. But by figuring history spatially rather than temporally, what gets left behind is that temporal realm of safety.

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<sup>9</sup>Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape*, (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1986), 273-274.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat As Performed by the Inmates, of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of The Marquis De Sade* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 32-33.

The gassing process generated enormous piles of corpses, and the number grew daily. The small crematorium could not cope, so the squads buried the corpses in mass graves in the Birkenau woods. Although the corpses were covered with chlorine, lime and earth, after a few months the inevitable decomposition began to poison the air, causing an intolerable stench throughout the entire neighborhood. Doctors found deadly bacteria in springs and wells, and predicted serious epidemics. Experts at the fisheries began to complain that the fish in the ponds in the vicinity were dying, which they attribute to the pollution of the ground water through cadaveric poison. The bodies, rotting under the summer sun, swelled up and a brownish red mass began to seep through the cracks to the surface.<sup>11</sup>

This is a description of the disposal of corpses at Auschwitz-Birkenau, not at Mauthausen. It is accompanied by this information: that it was the inmates, working in two shifts, who were forced to exhume and burn some fifty thousand decaying corpses. The point is taken: The consequences of the Holocaust are imprinted on our planet itself and on all lives that draw breath...in the aftermath of the Holocaust and in the continuing face of genocide, the earth is utterly and forever changed.<sup>12</sup> When confronted with the knowledge of what is called the past, how is it possible to imagine that such atrocity cannot, or does not, speak in the present tense?

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<sup>11</sup>Konnilyn G. Feig, *Hitler's Death Camps: The Sanity of Madness* (Holmes and Meier, 1981), quoted by Ruth Linden in *Making Stories, Making Selves* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press), 150.

<sup>12</sup>Linden, 151.

At Mauthausen: standing at the small lake at the bottom of the Stairs of Death (Todesstiege), and looking up at an exposed side of the monument placed by Germany. It is now possible to see and to understand the full impact of part of this monument, and this view of the bronze replica of barbed wire. It stretches across a section of the quarry cliffs which has been documented in drawings and in writings as the site of massive killings. These are the cliffs where kapos pushed inmates to their death and, more horrifying, forced inmates to line up and push the one in front of them. Here a landscape contaminated with the deaths of thousands of people confirms the truth of what was felt: we walk on the bodies of others. They lie at our feet.

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In stark contrast to, and in sharp denial of, the history written in and on the landscape of the camp, Mauthausen represents a choreography of nationalism, an opportunity for each nation to claim exemption. Only Germany is unable to claim such a position for itself, and in the vast and utter beauty of the rural landscape of Mauthausen, builds a concrete wall, broken by the bronze replica of a barbed wire fence, the one seen from the floor of the quarry. On the wall is written:

O DEUTSCHLAND BLEICHE MUTTER  
WIE HAREN DEINE SOHNE DICH ZUGERICHTET  
DASS DU UNTER DEN VOLKERN SITZEST  
EIN GESPOTT ODER EINE FURCHT

BERTOLT BRECHT 1933

In front of the wall, a bronze sculpture of a woman<sup>13</sup>; she sits squarely on a block, feet apart, one hand in her lap, one arm held slightly away from the body with the hand open. The structure of her body and that of her face is strong but everything about her registers a deep pain. Her eyes closed. She is Shame.<sup>14</sup>

OH GERMANY PALE MOTHER  
WHAT HAVE YOUR SONS DONE TO YOU  
THAT YOU SIT BETWEEN THE NATIONS  
A MOCKERY OR A DREAD

This monument, gendered female, signifying motherland, shamed by her sons, appears to stand alone surrounded by erections of other European nations in which the raised fist of resistance visually forms one of two predominant themes. The other theme is a scripted one announcing that "Francais Morts Pour La Liberte," or that Poland resisted fascism, or that "7000 Spanish Republicans died for liberty."

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<sup>13</sup>Created by the Buchenwald collective with Fritz Cremer as sculptor, 1967. This sculpture is 2.5 meters (ca. 8 ft.) high; the figure is on a pedestal 1.25 meters x 1.4 meters (ca. 4 ft. x 4.5 ft.). From: Sybil Milton, *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 188.

<sup>14</sup>Kathy Ferguson has called attention to this as a fascinating reversal of the National Cemetary at Punchbowl on O'ahu, where "brave sons died to save their mothers."

The resistance of the nations, and the losses that they suffered, are signified by the male body, arm raised, fist clenched, stance firm. In the case of the Hungarian monument, each group of three figures were cast from the same mold so that the figures look identical from every direction. As the viewer moves, the figures always appear the same, thereby representing prisoner solidarity.<sup>15</sup> Prisoner solidarity, victimization and atrocity, resistance, the starved and the half-crazed, revolt and liberation, the ghetto fighter, all gendered male. One is struck with the unfamiliar sight of the male body as *victim*, made more stunning in juxtaposition with the wholly familiar form of male response to male aggression.

At Mauthausen, only Deutschland can be female, because it is "her" nationalism that is failed. But this designation of nation as female and citizen as son is reiterated in all the monuments. But it is the denial inscribed in the landscape of monuments that has failed. The German monument is subject to and held captive by the fact of the camp in ways that reveal the attempt of other nations to extract themselves. But taken as a whole, the gendered codes of the monuments work as a text not only of the voice of fascism, but of nationalistic desire. In the denial of fascism, the desire of nationalism appears. As a gendered text, these monuments form a chorus of voices on nationalism, which the denial of fascism makes apparent. Alice Yeager Kaplan writes:

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<sup>15</sup>Designed by sculptor Agememnon Makrisy and architect Istvan Janaky, built in 1964. The height of the base ranges on an incline from .7 to 2.08 meters (ca. 2.3 ft. to 6.69 ft. high. Nine bronze figures without individualized features; each figure is 2.8 meters (ca. 9 ft.) high. From: Milton, 186.

Fascist subjects are virile, phallic . . . In order for the state to generate a whole new type of man...it has to be female. Its subjects are men; fascism itself is a woman, a new mother. The maternal language obviously makes them phallic, but authority is still feminine, its subjects masculine. There are many potential substitutions going on here: if fascist authority is feminine, then the leader is a woman of sorts . . . Something very powerful is happening . . . a lot of mother-bound pleasure is being "snuck in" to the fascist state in the name of virility.<sup>16</sup>

Kaplan makes both distinctions and coherences between fascism and other ideologies. But she asks: "What ideology could make it *clearer* than fascism that people have a sexual, as well as material, interest in their political life?"<sup>17</sup> What fascism makes clear is what other ideologies make obscure. Why does the Germany that constructs the Mauthausen memorial regard the mother to be the appropriate symbol, the authentic signifier, of its role in history? What would be lost, unseemly, unspoken, if Germany would now be male; The Bleich Vater? What would be made *clear*?

Kaplan studies the writings of the French fascist intellectual, Robert Brasillach, who speaks of Hitler's New Germany as an apprenticeship in a new maternal tongue, and shows that the fascist man can not be

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<sup>16</sup>Alice Yeager Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10-11.

<sup>17</sup>Kaplan, 23, emphasis added.

virile without a female fascist state to teach him the right songs.  
Brasillach says:

I've contracted a liaison with the German genius (*genie*), I will never forget it . . . Like it or not, we have lived together; French(men) of some reflection during these few years will have more or less slept with Germany, and the memory of it will remain sweet to them.<sup>18</sup>

Kaplan is convinced that nothing worked more powerfully to define Brasillach as a traitor. These lines were repeated with great outrage by the judge at the trial and they are what the prosecutor finds despicable in Brasillach; that is, as Kaplan put it, that he gave in to "irrational sexual political feelings about Germany." This would have acted as a particularly credible certification of the belief that Brasillach was homosexual, evoking a valorization of the homosexual male as the male who engages in sexualized politics, the archetypal traitor.

Sartre's famous essay "Qu'est-ce qu'un collaborateur?" is a direct argument against intellectuals like Brasillach, and against the fascism that invades France "from the outside." Kaplan imagines that Sartre had read the transcripts of the trial, and describes him as both extremely sensitive to fascism at the same time that he makes his

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<sup>18</sup>From defense attorney Jacques Isorni's edition of the Brasillach trial, *Le Procès de Robert Brasillach*, 138, which quotes Brasillach's 1943 article "Lettre a quelques jeunes gens" in *Ouvres Completes*, vol. 12, 612. Quoted in Kaplan, 15.

analytic error about it; that fascism is an "outsider" to France. Kaplan writes about how this argument builds:

The fascist is empty (of Frenchness) and [hence?] weak . . . the emphasis on weakness persists in the essay and becomes gradually more and more "feminized." . . . The resister is . . . strong enough to say "no" . . . The fascist is womanly . . .

"the relations of France and Germany under the aspect of a sexual union where France plays the role of the Woman." [this is a quote from the essay by Sartre, used by Kaplan, who then goes on . . .]

Sartre . . . seems to presuppose that the French fascist and the French collaborator, both of them imaginary girls, enjoy the same thing: a (sexual) occupation by a phallic (Nazi) authority. <sup>19</sup>

Indeed. Is it not now possible to presume that both fascist and leftist engage in the same phantasms and find the same metaphors useful?

Its rather confusing really. What is fascism? Is it girl or boy? Mutter oder Vater? A particular feature of Kaplan's analysis is her pit stops, where she tells us how she's doing.

When I am not nauseated by descriptions of fascist oppression, I am dizzy from the effort of organizing a definition of fascism. The

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 15-16.

movement that appeals to all people, to all classes, to pacifists in France, to militants in Germany, to neither right nor left, to both revolutionary and conservative, feels like an ocean . . . And I can never tell when fascism is inside or out . . . I come to dizzying conclusions.<sup>20</sup>

One can't "decide" between the mother-bound and father-bound elements in fascism . . . When I originally discovered the mother-bound element of fascism in my reading, I had . . . a desire to split fascism into two parts and "pick" one.<sup>21</sup>

What Kaplan finally settles on is an idea of a series of startling "bundlings and splittings" that are performed in fascism, bundlings and splittings that do not stand still, that move back and forth between mother/father, modern/anti-modern, other/self, populism/elitism, revolutionary/conservative. These seemingly contradictory dynamics constituted the vortex around which, and out of which, the phantasms of fascism were generated. Within the context of the death camps-as-memorial, the nationalistic monuments play about in, and with, the same categories of meaning-making as the fascism against which they are claimed to stand. And whether in the context of the whirling acceleration of fascism or in that of the cautious construction of innocent, or recovering, nationalism, these binding,

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 24.

splitting phantasms are all gendered.<sup>22</sup> This is painfully acute at Mauthausen where enshrined within "the memorial" are "the monuments" of national innocence. Walking into and through the camp, coming upon the monuments posed against the sanguinity of the surrounding landscape outside the camp produces an peculiar effect. What the eye registers is the aesthetic of peaceful, beautiful solice within the memorial of horror. What the gut registers is a tactile and pruient entry of coming upon a foul lie lurking in the belly of history, of memory. The monuments lurk in full view and with aesthetic stature, denying the memorial, denying the memory, of the camp. We are meant to be retrieved from, and relieved of, the evil and horror of the camp by these monuments propped at its center. Instead, we are confronted with the lovely lie, with the vertiginousness that precedes the recognition of what it is that is rooted in the belly of our culture like a stone. It is in this way that the most unlikely, almost obscene, idea begins to form. The idea: That it is the *camps* that reassure, for the simple reason that they do not lie. And it is the monuments that horrify, because they do.

In this regard, I do not find illuminating the distinction that Arthur Danto makes between the memorial and the monument. Reflecting on the nature of American monuments and memorials, particularly regarding the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, he waxes eloquent: "we erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build

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<sup>22</sup>It is here that the work of Kaplan and Theweileit makes this sexualized and gendered analysis not only possible, but certain. The extensive and stunning research and interpretation by Theweileit has clearly informed Kaplan, as both have informed and valorized my own thinking.

memorials so that we shall never forget . . . The memorial is where . . . we honor the dead. With monuments, we honor ourselves."<sup>23</sup> Although the specificity of each nation, of each memorial and monument, deserves consideration, in the hermeneutics of the camps both memorial and monument work linguistically and figuratively in dialectic relation. Danto goes wrong by figuring the Vietnam Wall by artist Maya Lin as an example of a memorial, when it functions aesthetically and politically as a counter-monument. As such, it stands out in supreme and stark distinction from all other sanctioned public American expression of nationalistic memory. Evidence of its subversive counter-coherence to American nationalism, as organized around the travesty of our war in Vietnam, is situated next to the Wall:

even the most popular of abstract monuments, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, was eventually forced to make concessions to the figurative demands of its public. Apparently dissatisfied with only seeing themselves reflected on its black marble surface, some of the veterans demanded a more figurative representation of "actual soldiers" nearby. As a result, a figurative statue of three representative soldiers was added to the setting--to be joined eventually by a figurative statue of nurses, also veterans, who served in Vietnam.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Arthur Danto, "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *The Nation*, 31 August 1976: 152. To my mind, Danto often waxes eloquent, incorrectly.

<sup>24</sup>James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 352, footnote 17.

Since then, the nurses have joined the soldiers, and a national monument has taken its gender-ordered stand, next to Lin's powerfully figured counter-coherence to the violence of nationalism. Fascism, Austria, Then; democratic imperialism, America, Now. What is made clear about the art of forgetting is that memory and forgetting only seem "somehow incommensurate categories."<sup>25</sup>

Forgetting seems ghostly, not because it has no force or weight (it presses against us heavily and constantly, and it may yet do us in), but because we are so unused to naming it . . .<sup>26</sup>

Since the commonsense (as opposed to Derridean) meaning of absence implies spacial nonpresence, a priori one would expect a discussion of a place to speak of absence rather than forgetting. In fact, this spacial absence is linked closely to forgetting. . . . Absence . . . exists outside history. Forgetting, on the other hand, is social and historical, and viciously so. It is a given of dominion.<sup>27</sup>

These reflections on absence and forgetting by Boyarin are insightful and relevant as I reflect upon the tensions between memorials and monuments, and upon how space and time play upon these phantasms. Boyarin calls attention to the French *oubli*, which conflates two terms kept separate by English, *forgetting* and *oblivion*.<sup>28</sup> He identifies forgetting as a process, an act whereas

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<sup>25</sup>Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 2.

oblivion is a state, and argues that "between forgetting and oblivion, space as stasis and space as manipulable"<sup>29</sup> are created several possibilities in which the relation of space to *oubli* can be articulated. The possibility of particular interest to my ruminations about the problematic nature of both monument and memory is that which "creates a representation, a sign to mark simultaneously forgetting and memory."<sup>30</sup> Such a representation is significant because it reflects back to us, we who remember and forget, that we "participate in forgetting and memory simultaneously, and we need to know which of these two masters we serve when we participate in construction."<sup>31</sup> This is not the rather simple and direct case of one narrative being privileged over another, taking center stage for a while, or forever. It is the more complex relation that exists between the concept of space and that of forgetting and remembering. Forgetting is not empty space. It, too, must be "filled," as remembering is, with something.

Memory and forgetting turn out to be, not direct opposites, but uneasy partners, their incompatibilities folded into their mutual dependencies. Forgetting is not simply the absence of memory: it has its own presence, in the unspoken weight in one's heart, and the unheeded recollections of others. Memory, similarly, is more than a straightforward presence; it is both an inexhaustible resource and a selective account.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>32</sup>Kathy Ferguson, "Kibbutz Journal: Reflections on Gender, Race, and Militarism in Israel," at this moment, an unpublished manuscript, shared with

I was looking for a sign, or a representation of the nature of simultaneous remembrance and oblivion, as I asked how it is that the death camps come to *stand in* for themselves.

The most evident, most easily anticipated matter is the historical imperative of each nation to: Re-present itself as non-fascist, if not then, then now; to re-present the atrocity that took place on its own soil to have been imposed from "outside," not rising from within; and to re-present the losses, and those who suffered and died, to have been *national* rather than Semitic.<sup>33</sup> Thus, "the French have built a memorial and museum at Natzweiler-Struthof because it was the only concentration camp built by the Germans on French soil, whereas they have ignored the internment and transit camps built and run by the French at Gurs, Les Milles, and elsewhere since these sites raise uncomfortable questions about French xenophobia and collaboration."<sup>34</sup> The Poles who work as historians and archivists at Auschwitz insist that those of us who come to talk with them ("you

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me by the author. I am also grateful for her reading of my work in light of Boyarin's, and for directing me to his, in order to keep me in my ruminations from pushing forgetting and remembering too far apart.

<sup>33</sup>Anti-Semitism is only part of the disappeared picture here: The camps were designed to exterminate the Sinti and the Roma tribes; the mentally and physically "defective"; Communist, leftist, and other politicals; and, finally, homosexual men, who remain "everybody's others." Even in the texts written to critique the ways in which the memorials/monuments are employed to feature the nationalistic over other designs will write: ". . . Jews, Gypsies [sic], the handicapped, and *others* . . ." (thereby obscuring the existence of homosexuals in the camps.) From: Sybil Milton, *In Fitting Memory: The Art and Politics of Holocaust Memorials* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 8.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

journalists and academics," as I was collectively referred to by the director of the museum) understand that it was *Poles* who died in great numbers at Auschwitz.<sup>35</sup> With thousands of concentration camps contaminating bucolic European landscapes,<sup>36</sup> this manifest desire to script nation as victim takes thousands of forms. It has to, really, because what it must deflect is the other reality: nation as collaborator; or worse, as the historical context within which the phantasms of the camps "make sense," are made real. It is hard to decide at times whether this underside, this denial of nation as collaborator, reflects an organizing principle of the nation as in possession of immense power or whether it reveals a profound penetrability. Is "nation" to be signified male (penetrating, in every sense of this word), or female (penetrable in every sense of this word), and under what conditions does it become trans-gendered?

What are monuments and memorials forced to reveal; what are they incapable of covering, about constructed meanings of the nation? What codes are used to convey how a nation is situated in relation to power, particularly when power itself is suspect? At one point, power is fascist; at another, it is lodged in the liberation from fascism. Here nation is male, then it was female. Like Kaplan's attempt to capture fascism's definition, the identity of nation appears

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<sup>35</sup>I was instructed in this point-of-view throughout my interview of the director of the Museum at Auschwitz.

<sup>36</sup>There were 2237 Nazi concentration camps as well as 114 ghettos and extermination camps. These figures extracted from a card produced at Mauthausen entitled "Ehemalige nationalsozialistische Konzentrations - und Vernichtungslager in Europa," which identifies the major sites.

to float, always gendered, unstable, dizzying. This question appears iconographically when viewing monuments and memorials, but it is not an aesthetic dilemma. It is an epistemological one, one that is lodged in the discursive practices of lofty philosophic discourse of the academy and in common jargon of the military.

By figuring power through a gendered, sexualized system of codes, it can be seen as residing finally and firmly with the masculine. Power appears to float, but the meaning of power is stable. When nation resists, it is male. When it lies back and collaborates, it is female. And Germany? No collaborator, no resister; when is she female, when is he male? Theweleit's text insists that we see fascism as doing exactly what it means to do:

The problem here is that, too often, fascism tends to become representational, symbolic. In the commonplace attenuated version of psychoanalytic theory that most of us have unthinkingly accepted, fascism is "really" about something else--for example, repressed homosexuality.<sup>37</sup>

Following Theweleit, I submit that all political ideology, phantasm, desire, and action must be taken as doing exactly as they mean to do. Not out of brilliance, prophetic wisdom, or even out of anal retention of control over others and oneself. As Nazi, Germany re-presents and initiates totalizing and terrorizing maleness. Conquered, he gets it up

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<sup>37</sup>Barbara Ehrenreich, from the foreword of: Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xi.

the butt; that's what the Versailles Treaty meant to do, and did. The Versailles Treaty was the opportunity for other nations to strap the penis back on, in order to feminize the Nazi and to reestablish national heterobility. What the monument to these nations who are denying a fascist history must do, cannot be kept from doing, is to deny this sexualized and gendered reading. And this monumental denial is ever accompanied by a display of what is denied, concealed in plain sight.

Edmund Carpenter asks whether it is possible to say "no" pictorially, and concludes that it is not.<sup>38</sup> The inclination to agree with him is very strong, and not only because he makes his argument through pictorial metaphor. When this question is put, a la McLuhan, to the photographic and electronic ability to seduce the viewer, the question may stand, posed, question mark punctuating a very heavy doubt. The photograph stands in for substance, for something or someone that is or once was:

The Photograph . . . has something tautological about it: a pipe, here, is always and intractably a pipe . . . It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself . . . for there to be a sign there must be a mark . . . In short, the referent adheres.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Edmund Carpenter, *Oh! What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 159-160.

<sup>39</sup>Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 4-5.

Every photograph . . . a certificate of presence.<sup>40</sup>

The photograph may signify an absence as well when used in service to the memorial or the monument. But the representation of absence in the conventional monument takes the form of such dense materiality and immense dimension that it cannot be said to "work" in any manner similar to the Barthian photograph. What is a counter-photograph? How does one remember, and reproduce, an absence?

By reproducing it. Literally. The most astonishing response to The Monument is the countermonument. It speaks back to the monument, and says something on the order of: The emperor wears too many clothes. The monument pretends to ask for remembrance as it covers the landscape, fills the space, demanding itself to be given notice. The "most stunning and inflammatory response to Germany's memorial conundrum is the rise of its countermonuments: brazen, painfully self-conscious memorial spaces . . . to challenge the very premises of their being."<sup>41</sup> This material expression of a counter-argument emerges out of Germany as resistance to the history of Nazi display and exploitation through monument. The young German artists doing countermonument works believe that "instead of searing memory into public consciousness . . . conventional memorials seal memory off from awareness

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>41</sup>Young, Ibid., 27.

altogether."<sup>42</sup> Perhaps in this way, the monument shares not an aesthetic but an epistemological dilemma with the photograph; in the re-presentation of the event, the moment, the person, all other possible remembrances are *emplaced*. The concern with emplacement directs the question behind the concept of the *Gegen-Denkmal* or countermonument in Harburg, a working-class suburb of Hamburg. *Monument against Fascism* was designed by Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, and unveiled in 1986. It no longer "exists"; it has "disappeared itself."

How does the artist come to terms with the two questions for which there must be one unifying answer: How to create a monument to memory and against fascism, when "monument" itself contains a didactic logic? And: How to think or to see in terms of an art that desires, in a manner of speaking, to "forget" itself, enabling others to forget it also, thereby enabling a *remembrance of their own relationship* to the memory? *Monument against Fascism* is set in a pedestrian shopping mall, a "normal, uglyish place," where "shoppers could like it or hate it, but they could not avoid it."<sup>43</sup> In 1986, it stood 12 meters high, and one meter square, a pillar of hollow aluminum, plated with a thin layer of soft, dark lead, a steel-pointed stylus for scoring the lead attached at each corner by a length of cable. Near its initial base it invited (in German, French, English,

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 30.

Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Turkish) the citizens and visitors of Harburg to add their names to the artists:

In so doing, we commit ourselves to remain vigilant. As more and more names cover this 12 meter tall lead column, it will gradually be lowered into the ground, into a chamber as deep as the column is high. The more actively visitors participate, the faster they cover each section with their names, the sooner the monument will disappear. After several lowerings over the course of four or five years, nothing will be left but the top surface of the monument, which will be covered with a burial stone inscribed to "Harburg's Monument against Fascism."<sup>44</sup>

Other artists have worked with this idea of a self-consuming sculpture in which the viewer becomes the subject of the work, the public becomes the sculpture. The vanishing work leaves the viewer in a position in which it is only possible to examine themselves in relation to what has been remembered, re-called. The *raison d'être* of the countermonument is to move the viewer to memory; once done, the monument is no longer necessary. To put a finer point on it, while it may be said that the monument is "no longer necessary," the meaning is utterly dependent upon its existence and upon its disappearance.

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<sup>44</sup>Michael North, "The Public as Sculpture: From Heavenly City to Mass Ornament," *Critical Inquiry*, 16 [Summer 1990]: 861; and Douglas Crimp, "Serra's Public Sculpture: Redefining Site Specificity," in Rosalind Krauss, ed. *Richard Serra/Sculpture*, New York, 1986. Quoted by Young, *Ibid.*, 30.

Reading the above inscription, it is possible to see that the artists, as expansive as their ideas were, held a somewhat precise expectation of how this monument and its meanings would develop. Not only would it sink into space, it would elicit an act of signing-up against fascism, inscribed names appearing neatly, honoring the living who stand against fascism, rather than the dead who fell to war. A companion of sorts to the Vietnam Wall, in which the viewer sees both the name of the dead and the reflection of oneself.

With audacious simplicity, the counter-monument thus flouts any number of cherished memorial conventions: its aim is not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desanctification; not to accept graciously the burden of memory but to throw it back at the town's feet.<sup>45</sup>

To that I would add that here is a work that requires a relinquishing of the creator's own signatures, a de-authorization of their work. Not only does the work vanish in order that memory may appear, the artist vanishes so that the rememberer may exist. This countermonument moves viewers to memory by constructing them as rememberers. "Ultimately, such a monument undermines its own

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<sup>45</sup>Young, *Ibid.*, 30.

authority by inviting and then incorporating the *authority* of passersby."<sup>46</sup>

In this way, the act of bearing witness takes on the powerful function of bearing witness to oneself bearing witness. Unexpected responses to the countermonument reflect this; after a couple of months the column was covered by illegible scratches of names over names, hearts with "Jurgen liebt Kirsten," stars of David, happy faces, swastikas,<sup>47</sup> and in some places, rough scrapings over the names and efforts to remove the lead plating off the base appeared. To complaints from the community that the countermonument was a trap for graffiti, the local newspaper responded: "The filth brings us closer to the truth than would any list of well-meaning signatures. The inscriptions, a conglomerate of approval, hatred, anger and stupidity, are like a fingerprint of our city applied to the column."<sup>48</sup> There is nothing pure about this sinking column. It is not impenetrable. Because its referent is not time, but space, it takes no distance from the historical referent. While it attracts the signatures of those who wish to stand against fascism in any form or place, it also attracts those who do not; in a word, fascists. It states the present, it marks the place. And perhaps most significantly, it requires us to rethink the constructs of a history of temporality which produces monuments that serve to purge memory. Not only

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>47</sup>To this the artist said: "a swastika is also a signature." Quoted in Young, Ibid., 35.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Michael Gibson, "Hamburg: Sinking Feelings," *ARTnews* 86 (Summer 1987): 106-07. Subsequently quoted in Young, Ibid., 36.

does the countermonument question the authority of The Monument and of the artist, and the passivity of the viewer, it requires a rescripting of what constitutes the holy text of historical temporality.

This proposition can be made even more strongly when *Monument against Fascism* is considered concurrently with another countermonument in Kassel.<sup>49</sup> First, a story: In 1908, a 12-meter-high pyramid fountain surrounded by a reflecting pool was built in front of the City Hall, designed by Karl Roth and funded by Sigmund Aschrott, a Jewish entrepreneur from Kassel. In April of 1939, it was destroyed by Nazi gangs, having been condemned as the "Jews' Fountain." Nothing remained but a great gaping hole in the center of the square. In two years time, the first transport of 463 Kassel Jews were sent to Riga, the next year another 3,000. All were murdered. In 1943, a perverse decision was made by the city of Kassel to fill the basin with soil, plant flowers, and dub it "Aschrott's Grave." During the 1960s, "Aschrott's Grave" was turned into a fountain. And by that time, the memory of this site was contained in vague notions of its having been destroyed by English bombers during the war.

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<sup>49</sup>There are other countermonuments in Germany, but I choose these two as most acutely articulating what I want displayed here, which has to do with both the form and more precisely, the *movement* which these take. They literally *direct* us to the point-of-view that it I am arguing here. The other countermonuments do also, but more subtly. For example, when regarding a Berlin street countermonument by Norbert Radermacher suggests that "the sight alone cannot remember, that it is the projection of memory by visitors *into a space* (emphasis added) that makes it a memorial . . . of course, such memory can also be avoided by simply crossing the street. . . . But, even this would be a memorial of sorts . . . For to avoid the memorial here, we would first have to conjure the memory to be avoided: that is, we would have to remember what it is we want to forget." From: Young, *Ibid.*, 41.

When Horst Hoheisel won the commission to reconstruct the fountain as an historical monument, he rightly anticipated that such a project would contribute to the covering of a violent history.

I have designed the new fountain as a mirror image of the old one, sunk beneath the old place in order to rescue the history of this place as a wound and as an open question . . . the fountain sculpture [is rebuilt] as a hollow concrete form after the old plans [and] displayed as a resurrected shape at City Hall Square before sinking it, mirror-like, twelve meters deep into the groundwater. The pyramid will be turned into a funnel into whose darkness water runs down . . . a hole emerges which deep down in the water creates an image reflecting back the entire shape of the fountain.<sup>50</sup>

Reiterated here are many of the same themes in the Getz countermonument; absence, space, the idea of a reflective mirror image, the sinking into the ground as a way to create a phantom, a phantasm.

Coming into touch with the groundwater, the history of the Aschrott Fountain continues not over but under the city. As an emblem of the Holocaust, the history of the fountain becomes the subterranean history of the city. In Hoheisel's figure, the groundwater of German history may well be poisoned--not by the Jews, but by the Germans themselves in their murder of the Jews.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Young, *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

Imagining this monument, both before and after its sinking into the ground, is difficult. Christo-like in its whiteness, the form replicates the original Aschrott Fountain as a negative, a phantom that appears but briefly. Getz-like, the iconographic meaning of the absence of the form is utterly dependent upon this brief appearance. Once lowered into the ground, touching the ground water, none of this is evident. Enter the square, the sound of circulating water grows louder, water fills narrow canals at our feet then flows to the underground. Life, the circulation of water like a flow of blood<sup>52</sup> through the corpus of the earth. We are not visiting, history has turned into a pedestal,<sup>53</sup> and we have become the memorial.

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Time is a Man, Space is a Woman  
William Blake

Time Our Torture  
Simone Weil

Counter-monuments articulate a full expression of counter-coherence, by figuring history as spacial and in functioning as the figuralization of history. Neither time nor gender disappear as elements of these monuments; rather, they are reinscribed by the coherence of space. With time-as-handmaid, phallogentric fascism becomes literally submerged, sunken into space, into the earth

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<sup>52</sup>This insight was suggested by Julie Wuthnow, in discussion.

<sup>53</sup>Hoheisel speaking about history as a pedestal, quoted in Young, *Ibid.*, 43.

poisoned previously by its rotting power. But this is not the Nazi phantasm of sexual phallic penetration into feminized earth-body; rather, space *holds* history, doesn't permit it to move away, roam about, recede, hide in plain sight. By figuring history spacially, these countermonuments break the power of "secularized Time [to] become a means to *occupy* space, a title conferring on its holders the right to "save" the expanse of the world for history."<sup>54</sup> The countermonuments represent space not as occupied, colonized, by time, but as keeping time "still," holding it. It would be tidy to be able to definitively mark as Blake does, that time and space are distinguished respectively as male and female, and to then assert that the realm of space establishes female power. I want to agree: Space "belongs" to women, to women's consciousness. Dorothy Richardson said: "I wouldn't have a man's consciousness, for anything."<sup>55</sup> Strapped to time, and ever desiring to strap women to it too: bondage. In fact, there is much in literature, science, and religion to suggest that these are well-established signifiers of meaning, and signifiers of meaning are signifiers of power and legitimacy.

I would like to be a Sheherazade. To be able to wind story after story in on itself and out again, entering this space and that, taking

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<sup>54</sup>Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 146. Emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup>A quote from Dorothy Richardson, *The Tunnel*, used at the beginning of: Gillian E. Hanscombe, *The Art of Life: Dorothy Richardson and the Development of Feminist Consciousness* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1982), 100.

the reader along with me, reserving the possibilities for rich, endless space. Letting the temporal roar its way on into outer space, creating inner space as a preserve of/for women. But then I remember the phantasm of NASA and the penetration of outer space by phallic rockets, hurdling through space. And I lose hope.

## Chapter 4

### Penance and Absolution in Berlin, and Elsewhere: or, The Unbearable Whiteness of Being<sup>1</sup>

In Berlin, I was invited to join Elaine Holliman at the Akademie Der Kunst, for a preview of a film. Elaine, an American, was studying filmmaking in Los Angeles<sup>2</sup> and visiting Berlin in order to spend time with her German partner, Claudia Schoppmann. I had contacted Claudia because of her research and interviews with lesbian women who were alive during Nazi Germany. The initial visit with Claudia amounted to a long and serious evening at Begina Cafe, a women's collective and coffee house with an extended history. The day following the long interview with Claudia, I met Elaine for the preview of the film, which centered around a number of performing artists, writers, and others, Jews who had left Berlin while they were still able to do so, and who were still alive today, speaking from Israel, the U.S., and Berlin, among other places. It is a film about the displacement and dispersion of a community of Jews, of a community of artists, and what that history has meant to them. It was not the most wrenching film, nor does it represent the most excruciating

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<sup>1</sup>"The Unbearable Whiteness of Being," of course, has been borrowed and altered, from Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1984); but the inspiration for the alteration comes from Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Worst Years of Our Lives: Irreverent Notes from a Decade of Greed*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), in which Ehrenreich entitles one of her essays "The Unbearable Being of Whiteness". She begins: "This column is addressed to my fellow white people and contains material that we would prefer to keep among ourselves".

<sup>2</sup>Evidently, Elaine studied well; her graduation film from USC, *Chicks in White Satin*, was one of this year's Academy Award nominees for Best Short Documentary.

testimony that I have read. It is not a film on the order of *Night and Fog*; nevertheless, it is a highly crafted and compelling historical narrative. The film used clips of performances and interviews with these people prior to the time they left Berlin, as well as interviews with them in the mid-80s. Elaine had brought with her a woman, a secretary to one of the theatre directors featured in the film; she herself appears in the film in interviews from the past and the present. She sat between Elaine and me, now quite blind and unable to watch the film. Elaine spoke softly to her from time to time during the film, telling her in German what she could not see with her eyes. She and I spoke English to one another before and after the film, "my" German a far greater impediment to comprehension than her failed eyesight. At our table were others who had interests in the film, but who were not in it. Many Jews were there, and many Berlin gentiles.

One man at our table, grey-haired, bearded, in his 50s, and bearing an intense presence, made himself apparent during the discussion that followed the film. His presence there appeared to me at the time to have been somewhat serendipitous. In reconsidering the drama that ensued, I still wonder if he constitutes a persistence that exhibits itself, if not through him personally, through others like him. I want to reproduce what I heard him say, in German, through my own recollection, and the drama that I saw and felt played out during and following his announcement. Before he spoke, others expressed their responses to the film, shared remembrances, spoke

of the importance of this film to the documentation of Berlin's history, and to the history of the Jews of Berlin. I had the impression that a number of those present had heard one another speak before, that there was a general familiarity among the fifty or so present. All in all, it was a serious set of responses, with a rather uplifting undertone. These were displaced artists and writers, but they had survived outside the anguish of the camps. Those who spoke tended to identify themselves, but not so much to announce themselves as to place themselves in relation to the film as a way of explaining their comments, or their desire to speak.

Perhaps it was because he was at our table that every movement and gesture he made has stayed with me. Certainly, his announcement of self was meant to assure that we were all prepared to hear and see him. He stood and announced his name, and that he was one of two sons (and he named his brother) of the Nazi officer in charge of culture and arts in Berlin during the period that the film documented. He named his father.<sup>3</sup> It was for all the world a recitation of the beginning of a confession: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the other Son. His body became the full expression of supplication, his low voice a fully formed demand to be heard. And he went on to say that what his father had done was wrong (he may have said "evil"); that he came today to apologize on behalf of his father, his brother and himself; that the previewing

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<sup>3</sup>I realized then that his father had been the only Nazi, as far as I could recall, named in the film.

of this film has been a very important event; and finally, that he personally felt very glad that it had been produced.

It was for all the world a recitation of the beginning of a confession, but it had the effect of a curse being placed. I have never before or since felt so utterly conflicted in response to another human being; reviled at the exposure, the explicit demand for attention, the implicit demand for forgiveness; and, pity for the son who went about the world doing penance for his dead father. As far as that went, I was alone in the room. It was filled with resentment and rage, and rightfully so. No one spoke or moved during the man's appalling and insistent imposition, the flagellation of self that would prevent others from striking (or provoke them to do so?), the imprinting of oneself upon others so that they could not take the day on their own terms, but on his. No one spoke or moved while he stood, but something that could be called the psychic energy in the room was extremely noisy. At long last the man sat, having cursed us all with the immense weight of his burden, and looking no lighter for having done so.

Silence. The first to rage was a woman in her 50s, whom I took to be a Berliner, a gentile. What she said in German was not comprehensible to me; what she *did* was. She cursed him back. I would have liked to have understood, to be able now to report and to repeat her curse. I am certain that it would have been instructive to me, would have given me the precise words to say back to the

gentile, the whites, those who implicate me in their presence and in the desire to place their curse on others who have been damaged by their privilege and their history; and who do so under the protection of their "guilt," their "confession," their "absolution."<sup>4</sup> I understood not one word she spoke. I am still trying out my lines, never getting them right. This is a pitiful recognition, to be unable to place oneself in relation to one's own history, in the face of what that history has done to others, and to oneself.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>There is no exception to this. Each and *every* time I sit in a seminar or a presentation in which a person of color, or a haole person, speaks on issues of race and gender, or in which a person of color just *speaks*, some representative of the damaged dominant class is compelled to recover themselves from the implications and the explications of what is being said. In January of 1994, Traise Yamamoto, interviewing with the Department of English, giving a presentation on her work on the Other, gets used as an opportunity for a professor of German language, to "ask": "Can we spread the guilt around?" And goes on to talk about how her poor German-American grandmother had to, and did, feel guilty about what the Germans did. Since her grandmother shouldn't have had to feel guilty about that, but did, it followed that the Japanese *should* feel guilty about Pearl Harbor. When bell hooks visited and spoke on our campus, and began to mention white folks, a professor of English, felt compelled to stand and state, "but we are different in Hawai'i." In a seminar in the Fall of 1993 on contemporary Asian-American artists, with Stephen Sumida and Vincent Kobayashi, the discussion in a roundtable setting was dominated by haoles, one claiming to be "never too old to learn" but proved otherwise. Another, a fair-haired bright-eyed young man from Iowa insisted that the aloha spirit was alive in his state (I think they invented it or something) and rambled on interminably, evidently too young to learn, about his culture and himself. As this ritual was playing itself out for the hundred millionth time, Louise Kubo couldn't get anyone to acknowledge her hand raised to speak. It became a test, and the group failed it. I became aware of the extent to which my presence, as a haole, *makes possible* and *protects* these haole speakers. The fact that they could speak, or would speak, without "my" haoled presence/protection does not argue against the position that I take here. This is a ritual that pretends to be explication but functions to make *all* who are present complicit in the project to disperse and displace first of all the power of the presenter, and ultimately to diminish the politics of the context which makes it possible for this speaker to have appeared in the first place. I repeat, I can offer no exceptions to this. Perhaps I am extraordinarily unlucky.

<sup>5</sup>bell hooks, among other women of color who write and speak on race and gender, suggests that the recovery movement is of enormous value to Blacks, not in the specific application of its principles to individuals so much as in the

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There are two broad themes that I would like to pursue in relation to this story. One theme is this: in what ways are the conditions of extremity imprinted upon those who follow, the child of extremity; in the above case, a child of the perpetrator, in other cases, the child of the victim. These are not equivalent cases, but both represent legacies that are exacted upon the specific child and extend beyond that. It is they are who are left, soon they will be the *only* ones left; it is upon them that the story has been etched most acutely. If it is possible to see what they say, to hear what is inscribed there, we may be kept from our lies, we who imagine we are not part of their stories. This is the other theme: that the history of the perpetrator, the history of the victim, and the history of "the witness," each keep the another company. It is not possible to grasp the meaning of one without the other.

Sylvia Yanagasako, speaking on the topic of "Becoming Haole,"<sup>6</sup> asserts the impossibility of constructing an accurate historical

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recovery of *community*, that is, of culture. A full expression of this is the Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco can be seen in the video "Rainbow in the Clouds" with Maya Angelou. It seems to me that it *may* be just as necessary for whites to think in terms of a recovery movement when trying to think just what it is that we whites are "supposed to do" in the face of our history of oppression of Blacks, among many others, and our privilege that is inseparable from that oppression; what men are "supposed to do" in the face of their history of oppression of women, and their privilege that is *bound* to that oppression; what Germans and other gentiles are "supposed to do" in the face of their history of atrocity in relation to the Jews, homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, mentally inconvenient, and others. The list goes on.

<sup>6</sup>Yanagasako spoke at University of Hawai'i at Māanoa in Spring 1992.

narrative of upper class women without also constructing the narrative of the nanny; that the identities and narratives of these two classes of women are deeply, metaphorically, physically, historically, emotionally, economically inseparable.<sup>7</sup> This assertion precedes the questions that Toni Morrison asks in *Playing in the Dark*: "What [does] racial ideology [do] to the mind, imagination, and behavior of masters? [And, how it is that the master manages not to see meaning] in the thunderous, theatrical presence of black surrogate in white literature?"<sup>8</sup> I offer an abbreviated answer to those questions: The master is very busy managing not to see himself as The Master, itself a task involving a complex and complicitous grid of deception. Not seeing the slave and not seeing the master are two parts of the same project. That the slave is beginning to be recovered, linguistically and historically, will make it even more imperative for the master discourse to deny itself and its counter, the slave.

American desire and German desire illuminate one another. But it is the juxtaposition of the German will to forget with the Jewish will to remember that discursively drives the next question. Sartre asked:

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Born and raised in Hawai'i, but educated on the continental U. S. since college, and now teaching at Stanford, she is well situated to discuss the process, in something of a reversal, by which white people become haole in Hawai'i.

<sup>7</sup>This same argument is made in a number of other feminist articulations. For example: in the video, *Women of South Africa*, produced in 1986, juxtaposing the lives of white south African women who keep Black nannies to raise their white children, a slave system in which Black women and their children are kept from one another; also, see Toni Morrison's discussions of Willa Cather's novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard university Press, 1992).

<sup>8</sup>Morrison, *Ibid.*, 12-13.

"Qu'est-ce que un collaborateur?" We might ask: What is a witness? How is history inscribed upon a child of the witness? What constitutes "exemption"? And, what does it *mean* "to forget"? In the shadow of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg warns: Neither perpetrator, nor victim, nor bystander be.<sup>9</sup> And Richard Smith addresses the non-existent status of the innocent:

No one is innocent of the Holocaust; everyone participates in maintaining the hard-hearted objectivity; the self-deceived concept and practice of rationality that eventuated not only in the Holocaust but also in the Russian mass murders of the 1920s and 1930s, or in Vietnam or Cambodia. For we live in a world [in which] the suffering we witness or know about does not move us to act. That objectivity makes us guilty bystanders to past and future holocausts. It may well be the death of us all.<sup>10</sup>

Lets take this further, make a more exacting critique: To know, to know and to not be moved to act, moves every person from the category of guilty bystander to a more intense position of complicity. This move is a critical one in the production of truth in an age of mechanical reproduction and technological communications. In the ritualization of the 1994 Winter Olympics in Lillehammer, scenes of Sarajevo 10 years ago, and 10 days ago are juxtaposed to the True Meaning of the Olympics. We watch people sitting in Sarajevo, who

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<sup>9</sup>See his most recent work on this topic: Hilberg, Raul, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

<sup>10</sup>Richard Smith, quoted in: Judy Chicago, *Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light*, (New York: Penguin, 1993) 158.

sit in tiny rooms and by candlelight they watch the audience in Lillehammer take a moment of silence for Sarajevo. We watch a poor soul in Sarajevo say that those who are enjoying the games today in Norway are like those who enjoyed them 10 years ago in Sarajevo, and none of them are doing anything to help. Then: We hear that a mother in Lillehammer did do something, began a fund, sent millions to aid Sarajevo. We can breath easy now, and the ritualization of complicity is complete. The spectacle of the pain of others is mobilized and deployed to intensify the pleasure of the Olympic spectacle.<sup>11</sup> Let the games begin.

While you watch, they die.<sup>12</sup>

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Here are some conditions upon which the fraud called forgetting is premised: The assertion of an uncomplicated recognizability of good from evil, and that one is present only in the absence of the other; a desire to believe in the ability to discern truth from lie, premised on

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<sup>11</sup>World Expositions were the "popular phantasmagorias of patriotism and consumerism that glorified capitalism's technological progress." During the 1930's, Germany hosted no expositions; instead, "Hitler presided over the new form of mass spectacle [the Olympic Games] that would supersede them in our own era (when world expositions have become unprofitable...Here the fittest in human bodies, rather than the latest in industrial machines, were put on display, performing for mass audiences...and Leni Riefenstahl captured the games on film, demonstrating the new technical ability to create a mass audience out of individuals isolated in space." Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991, 325-326.

<sup>12</sup>The last line of a poem by Ada Jackson, "Behold the Jew," written during WWII and in knowledge of the Holocaust, reads, "While you read they die." I have altered that line here.

the idea that truth is universal, not culture-bound, gender-bound, politic-bound, not bound to power because it is seen as power; the secularized chanting of the theory of the conscious and the unconscious; and, both in the case of truth/lie and conscious/unconscious, the proposition that one obscures the other, and does so by purporting to reveal.<sup>13</sup> What the legacy of extremity makes accessible is that these are powerful and misleading coherences, misdirecting the nature of the question, blindly, blissfully, dangerously lurching towards other Golgothas.<sup>14</sup>

Nietzche. Now here is a man with whom I would have liked to have spoken. Listened to a bit. Watched. Seen what would happen next. Like Wittgenstein, a strange bird on miraculous flights. When Kundera takes Goethe and puts him in conversation with Hemingway in *Immortality*, I take pleasure in it and can imagine fictive conversations with Nietzche's text. But some time ago, I stopped telling about how we made up the world, and then forgot that we made it up, and then we forgot that we forgot. While teaching, it was always a high point when Nietzche could be brought out like a Zen koan, making us laugh and illuminating our foolishness, our silly forgetfulness. The will to forget is complex, and Nietzche cannot be

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<sup>13</sup>Louise Kubo contributed this last important step in the discursive workings of the psychoanalytic discourse.

<sup>14</sup>Again, credit is due to Barbara Ehrenreich, who in *The Worst Years of Our Lives: Irreverent Notes from a Decade of Greed*, refers to the great mass of Americans once known as "the salt of the earth" as "lurching towards Babylon. Babylon: simultaneously figurative for a great, luxurious city, and allusion to the captivity of the Israelites. Somewhere between Ehrenreich and Gore Vidal, who in *Live from Golgotha: The Gospel According to Gore Vidal*, takes us live to a suburb of Golgotha for the Crucifixion, lies my reference here.

held accountable for my bad use of it. I fear that the will to forget has far more immediate significance than I had been leading students to think; appearing as a kind of cosmic joke that time plays on us, turning us into absent-minded little fools of our own histories, our own narratives.

If we *homo narrans*, we storytelling humans, have failed ourselves by relinquishing storytelling to become the art and the articulations of folly and deceit, then my question is: But, why?

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La verita non sta in un solo gogno,  
ma in molti sogni.

Da "Le Mille e Una Notte"<sup>15</sup>

Sheherazade, a most accomplished *homo narrans*, told stories in order that she save herself and other women from the violence of marriage to a ruler once disappointed by a woman.<sup>16</sup> The only

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<sup>15</sup>"The truth is not found in one dream, but in many." Translated from the opening scene of Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1974 *Il Fiore Delle Mille e Una Notte*, A Thousand Nights and A Night.

<sup>16</sup>I admit that "disappoint" may be understating the situation. What happened was this: when he was absent from the palace, his wife set out to gather the concubines and their Mamelukes, up to twenty of these slaves, engaging them in orgy. Her real crime lies in the fact that she engaged in debauchery with a negro, "a big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes which showed the whites, a truly hideous sight" (from 6). Burton footnotes this passage, and elaborates on his own and the text's sexualized racism with the following:

Debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts. I measured one man in Somoli-land who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is a characteristic of the negro race and of African animals; whereas the pure Arab, man and beast, is below the average of Europe; one of the best proofs by the by, that the Egyptian is not an Asiatic, but a negro partially

power Sheherazade has against violence is the power to tell the story, the story that has no ending. No ending and no beginning, interrupted only by the light of day, the story winds inward and outward again, meeting itself at the spots from which it departs. Within the story, time is irrelevant; it is place that marks a new departure. Time is marked only "outside the story"; that is, outside Sherherazade's nightly telling, time is marked by the "doing away with her maidenhead" on one end and by the light of day on the other.<sup>17</sup> And inside the stories? These are stories within stories, and no distance exists between the stories and those who listen or

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white-washed. Moreover, these imposing parts do not increase proportionally during erection; consequently, the "deed of kind" takes a much longer time and adds greatly to the woman's enjoyment. In my time no honest Hindi Moslem would take his women-folk to Zanzibar on account of the huge attractions and enormous temptations there and thereby offered to them.

I defer to Sir Richard's experience in these matters, and I include them not for the reader's titilating edification, but for what they tell us about what makes sense to both tales and translator. The King slew his wife for the act of taking immense pleasure, for having done that with a member at once superior and inferior to himself, but only after having watched her do it a number of times and for many long hours. The King took a great deal of voyeuristic pleasure, it seems to me, in his own grief. After he slew his Queen and all his concubines and their Mamelukes (and here Burton is quite clear about one thing: "One can hardly pity women who are fools enough to run such risks"), he commanded that he be brought a fresh bride of the night, "marrying a maiden every night and killing her the next morning" (p. 14). All of this "makes sense" in the Tales, and to Sir Richard, and is the motivation for Sheherazade to request that she be offered to the King, believing that she can stop the slaughter of women. Finally, all of this also uncovers the lie that initiates the whole narrative, the lie being that it is the Queen that disappoints the King when it is in fact the other way round.

<sup>17</sup>It is in Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1974 film, *Il Fiore Delle Mille E Una Notte*, that this appears so clearly. Pasolini's rendering of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night*, by Sir Richard Burton, is brilliant and lovely in this regard, and in others. The organizing principle, if it can be called that, of Pasolini's work may be said to be that of "pleasure for all," even though the tales themselves (and their translator) often warn against it in women. As powerful as the blatant male voyeurism in the tales is, it is not nearly as powerful as the voyeurism demanded by the text in the act of reading it. Pasolini distributes the possibility of pleasure and of voyeurism more liberally than the translated text by Burton.

she who tells. A woman whose life depends upon being able to fascinate a patriarch with intricacies of narration tells stories in which the lives of women depend upon their being able to fascinate men. Among other things. In this regard no disjuncture exists between the outer story and the inner stories; it can be read as a story told by a slave about slavery. Among other things.

I do not intend to collapse the seventeen volumes of translated text by Burton into a three-liner. They sit on the piano, place marker still in volume one, full of potential. Among other things, these tales are taking their place both as theme and as prototype for novels in which storytelling is an opportunity to make a break with the constrictions of temporality.<sup>18</sup> Why does this matter? What does the art of the novel have to do with the will to forget? How is this all connected to penance and absolution in Berlin and Elsewhere?

Legacy. It has to do with legacy, and how things are left for those who follow. It has to do with how it is that "in the end what one might call a private history is not so private after all."<sup>19</sup> It is not about how history repeats itself, as if agency was exempted by foolish forgetfulness. It is about how phantasms grown in a culture of dominance come to be expressed, not in vague and subtle ways, but in specifically violent and real ways. And get called something

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<sup>18</sup>For the short and the long of it, read and revel in: Jeannette Winterson, *Sexing The Cherry*, (New York: Vintage International, 1991); and John Barthes, *John, The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor*, (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

<sup>19</sup>The unifying theme of Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War*, (New York: Doubleday, New York, 1992), 315.

else. Get storied into the narrative claims of a culture of dominance, constructing an impenetrability of that culture and its dominant identities. The will to forget is full of desire. It takes a great deal of work, the will to forget, which means that the part of the claim that speaks truly is "will," the part of the claim that lies is "forget."

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Toni Morrison writes in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* of a master narrative that permeates the codes of meaning in the literary, social and political culture of America. And she asks: What are Americans always so insistently innocent of?<sup>20</sup> What indeed. This is a way of asking: What are we so insistently forgetful of? To have forgotten is a meager claim for innocence, but its better than nothing at all. Particularly when one's self-definition is dependent upon the Nietzschean 3-step: first we made up the world, then we made up our superiority and a culture of domination over others, and then we "forgot that we forgot." We white Americans, we gentiles, we haoles, like Germans, have much to become innocent of, and we work very, very hard at it. All of us, all the time. Because we have to. Because it never goes away, that knowledge. Knowledge, however mundane and utilitarian, "plays about in linguistic images and forms cultural practice . . . and this leads into the social and political nature of received knowledge as it

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<sup>20</sup>Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1992), 45.

is revealed in American literature."<sup>21</sup> Domination, at its most mundane and its most atrocious, *has* to take place over and over again. There is pleasure inscribed onto the sado-masochistic dance of domination/submission, but even when pleasure in domination is taken, it never really "takes" because it passes, and has to be repeated. In *A Thousand Nights and a Night*, the pleasure of King Shahryar's power depends upon marriage, maidenhead, and murder; all bound and reiterated every night. In this deadly dance, submission is always a temporary strategy for survival; whether it ever works at all is another matter, but survival that depends upon submission passes. Domination lying in wait has to recur, to reiterate itself again and again, because it is a lie that has to be ritualized in order to appear real, to become solid, to assert impenetrability.<sup>22</sup> It is an erection that must be constantly stoked in order to keep alive.<sup>23</sup>

There's a reason, of course. We have to make a lie seem real. It's a very big lie. We each have to do our part. Otherwise the lie will look like the lie that it is. Imagine the enormity of what we each must do to keep the lie alive in each of us. Imagine the

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>22</sup>"In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king." Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I An Introduction*, (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 88-89. Here, cutting off the head of the King takes on new meanings. Or, more likely, reveals what was barely hidden in the old ones.

<sup>23</sup>This can be refigured from a different, but related, set of codes: Sonia Johnson gives us patriarchy as an old man hooked up to life-support systems (women) and ready to die. The only humane thing to do, she says, is to pull the plug.

awesome challenge we face to make the lie a social fact.<sup>24</sup>

And it has to recur, because in spite of the depth of the phallacies, and outside the constructs of The King, there *are* possibilities for *something other than submission*, and those possibilities keep being there, right there where they have always been.

Deep on the surface of the narrative of the tales is the lie that drives them: that it is the King's "disappointment" that initiates the narrative, that it is his disappointment that is at stake rather than the Queen's. By standing Escher-like in relation to the story, as I do, it is clearly the King who has failed to satisfy his Queen and his concubines.<sup>25</sup> It is *his* failure that drives him to declare, "For, there never was nor is there one chaste woman upon the face of earth."<sup>26</sup> The significance of the Jinni (Genie) in these texts is as that of the female that confirms this masculinist point. While the King and his brother are pining around about the King's problem with his women, they come upon the Jinni, in more ways than one. After they dismount her, she then tells them that an Ifrit (the malignant counter-being to the Jinni) "bore me off on my bride-night, and put me into a casket and set the casket in a coffer and to the coffer he affixed seven strong padlocks of steel and deposited me on the deep bottom of the sea that raves, dashing and clashing with waves . . . but

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<sup>24</sup>John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 35.

<sup>25</sup>Thanks to Louise Kubo for pointing out what is implicit to my argument.

<sup>26</sup>Burton, *Ibid.*, 14.

I have lain under as many of my kind as I please, [thereby proving] that whatso woman willeth the same she fulfilleth however man nilleth." It seems that no matter what King or Ifrit do, nothing will keep we who are women from doing "what we willeth." Nothing but death, of course. The actions of the King are justified by what women "are," rather than by what he fears and what he fails to do.

Morrison defers to Antonia S. Byatt in *Possession* :

In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, is followed, almost immediately, by the sense that it was always *there*, that we, the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was, though we have now for the first time recognized, become fully cognizant of, our knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

Because dominance is a master narrative of a people "of a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanisms for devastating racial oppression,"<sup>28</sup> to which I would add sexualized oppression based on gender, the constant, choking reiteration becomes an extension of the initial violence, by way of having to swallow the master's words over and over and over.<sup>29</sup> The narratives of each of the "brides of the night" are never heard: their terror; their strategies that never work

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., xiii.

<sup>29</sup>This imagery of violence was suggested by Louise Kubo, who never saw *Deep Throat*, but didn't have to, in order to understand the inextricable sexualized violence of racism and sexism.

against the violence; their only hope, that if perhaps they just offer themselves well enough to the King, that he might spare them; and, their inability to take account of what is at stake for the King. That is, that he must continually deny his own feared inferiority to the "hideous, big slobbering blackamoor with rolling eyes," and assert and reassert his ascendancy over all women, one by one, every day, forever.

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Sonia Johnson says that most women cannot bear the thought that men hate us; bell hooks, speaking on the meaning of the Howard Beach case, says that we whites cannot bear the thought that Blacks fear us. Neither of them say: some men hate us, men hate some of us; some Blacks fear us, Blacks fear some of us. There are no exemptions.<sup>30</sup> That has constituted the premise and the point of departure for asking the following questions and for situating oneself within the inquiry. What does racial ideology do to the mind, imagination, and behavior of the master? What does sexual ideology do to the mind, imagination, and behavior of the master? How does the act of bystanding and the identity of the bystander function in

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<sup>30</sup>In discussion, Kathy Ferguson pointed out how the totality of Johnson's and hooks' ways of thinking produce a condition in which, in fact, the only "way out" is exemption. This argument makes sense to me, and because I am unable to respond directly to it in a way that would settle this problem (and I do think it is a serious one), I am hoping that the body of my thought about these things evoke ruptures, sites of resistance, and even more imperative, sites of creativity, that give us all "ways out." On the other hand, it is possible that the "ways out" are closed to us, by reason of our long histories of violence. That the metaphor of the "fouled fishbowl" is (like the image of an environmentally fouled earth) the one we are all stuck with and in.

relation to these questions? What is the relationship between bystanding and bearing witness? Is penance and absolution possible? For whom? Can indulgence be bartered for? By whom? What is the nature of complicity?

Because the act of bystanding intrinsically lacks a certain masterability, it functions as a denial of masterly status, creating exemption from masterly agency. Or does it? The anxiety that might be felt at viewing another's misfortune or poor judgment or weakness is accompanied by the relief that one's own lot in life is otherwise. Thank God I'm Norwegian, not Croatian; I'm safe from sexual assault because I don't go out alone at night; the homeless belong to a different class of people than I. There is great pleasure to be taken in viewing one's life in *relief*, against a backdrop of pitiable circumstances, and being able to take the privilege of feeling pity for others rather than one's own pain. Or not. "I then said, yes, the inmates of the concentration camp Mauthausen are all hardened criminals with whom one should have no pity."<sup>31</sup> The privilege of feeling pity for others, or withholding it; both are the province of the master and both are the province of the bystander:

This was the thing I had wanted to understand ever since the war. Nothing else. How a human being can remain indifferent. The executioners I understood; also the victims, though with more difficulty. For the

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<sup>31</sup>Horowitz, Gordon J., *In The Shadow of Death: Living Outside the Gates of Mauthausen*, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 39. A quote from a waitress in the neighboring town of Gusen.

others, all the others, those who were neither for nor against, those who sprawled in passive patience, those who told themselves, "The storm will blow over and everything will be normal again," those who thought themselves above the battle, those who were permanently and merely spectators . . . all were closed to me, incomprehensible.<sup>32</sup>

There are photographs of inmates, starved and crazed, staring through the wire fence to the outlying landscape, towards a village or a road where others live or pass by. If these are people who are still capable of observation and of wondering, if they have not yet forever sunk into an internal oblivion, what must they be asking? I read once about an adult male, an American in his 60s, who was reflecting upon his childhood and the terrible physical abuse that he had suffered. The urgency in his story was the appeal to readers to not ever stand by while a child is beaten; that in his life, he had one person who saw and who spoke of what they saw, of his pain. He credits that person with saving him from despair, from the death of his inner being, his belief in life. This is supported by the work of the psychoanalyst, Alice Miller. Above all, the absolute necessity of a "helping witness," "*who. . . at least once in their life*" (italics hers) sees and reflects to the child that his or her own experience of pain is real and true, who "knows without a doubt that the environment, not the helpless, battered child, is at fault. In this regard, knowledge or ignorance on the part of society can be instrumental in either saving

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<sup>32</sup>Wiesel, Elie, *The Town Beyond the Wall*, cited in Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 71-72, and in Horowitz, 3.

or destroying a life."<sup>33</sup> Linda Marciano, in giving testimony of how she was held captive and beaten, forced into performing in the film *Deep Throat*, testifies:

During the filming . . . I suffered a brutal beating in my room for smiling on the set. It was a hotel room and the whole crew was in one room, there was at least twenty people partying, music going, laughing, and having a good time. Mr. Traynor started to bounce me off the walls. I figured out of twenty people, there might be one human being that would do something to help me and I was screaming for help, I was being beaten, I was being kicked around and again bounced off the walls. And all of a sudden the room next door became very quiet. Nobody, not one person came to help me.<sup>34</sup>

The juxtaposition of a child within a family, a woman within the pornography industry, and the inmates within a camp is not incidental.

The camp Neuengamme at the outskirts of Hamburg provides a most stunning articulation of the proximity of the hellish inside of a camp, and the blissful beauty of the surrounding landscape. Barely outside the village of Neuengamme, the wall of the camp is set back only as far from the tree-lined road as the stream that runs by it is wide. In order to enter the camp, the visitor walks across one of a series of

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<sup>33</sup>Miller, Alice, *The Untouched Key: Tracing Childhood Trauma in Creativity and Destructiveness*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 168-169

<sup>34</sup>Stoltenberg, John, *Refusing to Be A Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 145.

small foot bridges. The surroundings are idyllic. How can one pass by without understanding, without *seeing*? Neuengamme Concentration Camp is not as large as Mauthausen or Auschwitz, but it *stands out*, it *appears*, it is clearly *there*. What is it necessary to say to oneself in order *not* to see it? Where do the lies reside? Are not the camps, the pornography industry, the family, built on lie upon lie, so many lies that if lies were bodies, they would form mounds of stinking flesh and bones as monumental as the nuclear power plants that dot the idyllic landscape of Pennsylvania? Three of them between Pittsburgh and State College, looming in the misty distance like Neuengamme up close, lying. Lies, like rotting bodies. Where do such lies reside?

Wolfsohn's new theories about art were inspired by his experiences as a stretcher-bearer in the war. He came out of the war shell-shocked, and he had lost much of his memory. What he could not forget, however, were the voices of the men who lay wounded and dying on the battlefield . . .

By this process the voice is liberated from the boundaries of the culture. It makes a terrible sense that Wolfsohn should have discovered this method in the midst of a war that seemed to be tearing civilization to pieces. And he was no bystander to that disintegration. The destruction that occurred among nations continued after the war in his own mind. He had lost part of his memory. It happened after he was discovered under a pile of bodies.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Griffin, 290 and 296.

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Our bodies have learned many lies. If we dare to be ruthlessly honest, we can perhaps recover truth.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Stoltenberg, 114.

Chapter 5  
Complicity and Legacy

*"Call off your hunger strike."*

*"No!"*

So they took her and force-fed her through a tube inserted into her nose: this was the only such occurrence after my concussion. They did not risk forcing her again, though--she had reached snapping point. This was the penalty Raya was forced to pay for what she later referred to as her weakness, and for which she considered to be a serious retreat on her part before the KGB. As for us--we only sympathized with her. Sadly, I have had occasion to encounter that breed of "burning fighters" who are always prepared to vilify anyone who has ever retreated by so much as a tiny step in the face of KGB pressure. But what is the worth of their uncompromising stance if they are as quick to condemn our own as they are to condemn our persecutors? As a rule, those who are loudest in their scorn are *those who have not personally experienced even a tenth* of what the objects of the denigration have had to endure. Yet those who have trodden the painful path have witnessed so much human suffering that they do not stoop to censure over trifles...Each bears that burden which matches his strength, and he who is not on the side of the executioners is your brother. Former zeks do not usually need to have these simple truths explained to them--but oh, how often they

must be explained to those who have never  
had to swallow camp skilly!<sup>1</sup>

Irini Ratushinskaya

I want to ravel (rather than unravel) a notion of complicity and the terms by which it is constituted when viewed through the lens of the camps, and through the eye of the beholder of the legacy of the camps. By placing the child of the survivor, and to a smaller extent, the child of the perpetrator, at the heart of the notion, I attempt to evoke how disclosed, coded, or denied narratives of the parent, marked by culture and its violences, etch themselves on the lives of the child as a legacy. Ultimately, I want to evoke the dilemma of the child of the survivor and of the perpetrator as a part of the legacy that marks us all.

Perhaps every moment of time lived in human consciousness remains in the air around us. Mitsukuni Akiyami, who was a schoolboy at the time of the blast, has written of the moment that the bomb exploded . . . an eerie silence . . . sound and color stopped . . . . Then . . . in "a fraction of a thousandth of a second [an] unimaginable number of incidents took place." There is a territory of the mind, vacant and endless as the miles and miles of rubble the city of Hiroshima had become.

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<sup>1</sup>Ratushinskaya, Irini, *Grey is the Color of Hope*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1988), 132-133. Emphasis added. Zeks are prisoners, camp skilly is what passes for food.

. . . more than a lifetime . . . to grasp the meaning of . . . how the vanished repeat themselves in the minds of the living.<sup>2</sup>

The questions that are being addressed here are: To what extent do we all bear witness? And, it is ever accurate to construct an "outside," a state of exemption, a position of innocence, a possibility of dispensation?

It really is a question of a crime against the human essence, of a metaphysical crime committed against the very being of man on the person of every Jew who was killed. Again--and one hopes for the last time--the Jewish people has fulfilled its role as the people who bears witness.<sup>3</sup>

By asserting that exemption always functions as deception, I find accord with many, like Lanzmann, who maintain the Holocaust as a holy text. There is a continual dialectic relation between the disciples of the holy texts of the Holocaust and my own thoughts, but it is a dialecticism that shuttles from thesis to anti-thesis, with few points of synthesis. In the commitment to maintain in the texts the specificity of anti-Semitism is a deeply-bound allegiance to male testimony<sup>4</sup> as the mediator of meaning. The unwillingness to

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<sup>2</sup>Griffin, Susan, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 101.

<sup>3</sup>Claude Lanzmann, "From the Holocaust to the *Holocaust*," *Telos: Notes and Commentary*, No. 42, Winter 1979-1980, 137.

<sup>4</sup>According to Mary Daly: "If the searcher looks up the verb *testify* in the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* she will find that it is from the Latin *testis*, meaning witness. If she looks up *testicle* she will find that it is said to be from the Latin *testiculus*, "diminutive of *testis*: witness (the organ being

question the conditions of that testimony and mediation, to question the construct of masculinity and manhood that permeates nationalism generally and fascism specifically, often puts my arguments at odds with the very texts that illuminate them. For an example of that on-going tension, here is an argument by Claude Lanzmann for the first principle in rendering justice: the fracturing of chronology, but one which lodges memory in the temporal zone rather than in an atemporal one:

The suspense of the investigation--its difficulties and risks being themselves the cohesive part of my film--will be complemented by another suspense that I have called "historical" and which will always be based on the confrontation between a particular moment of the extermination and an occurrence of withholding help from someone in danger distant either in time or in space.

One does not kill legends by opposing memories to them, but only by confronting them with the inconceivable present of which they are the origin. The only way to achieve this is precisely to resuscitate the past as present, to reconstitute it in an atemporal immediacy.

...The worst crime, at once moral and artistic, which may be committed in creating a work

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evidence of virility)." Since women do not have testicles, they cannot really be qualified to testify--give evidence--in patriarchal courts. Moreover, the christian bible appropriately is comprised of two divisions called *testiments*. This term, of course, is also derived from *testis*. Clearly, the idea of a woman swearing on the bible is incongruous. Her testimony (also from *testis*) does not count." It seems likely that the words are directly related; therefore, it is curious that men would cover the credential of authority in order that that authority speak.

of art devoted to the Holocaust, is to consider it as a *past*. The Holocaust is either legend or of the present time, it is in no case of the order of memory.<sup>5</sup>

Reconstructing the meaning of what has been termed "memory" as the work of a continuing present, in order to deconstruct bodies of knowledge, to bring oneself into being, to illuminate "the unbearable sequence of sheer happenings," requires an act of deliverance, a passing through the eye of the needle.

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At the conclusion of a presentation several years ago at the University of Hawai'i, Stuart Hall was asked how it is that, given the serious implications of his work, he manages to laugh so frequently and with such evident enjoyment. On the way to answering that, he spoke of knowing as being like passing through the eye of a needle. Having passed through it, it is not possible to pass back again; having seen injustice and human suffering, there is no possibility of retreating to the comfort of not-having-seen. In this respect, knowing makes laughter necessary. Kundera wrote his way toward this in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, a narrative in which laughing *is* knowing. Real laughter. Not the cynical laugh of the deputy to the Nazi commissioner of the Warsaw Ghetto in

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<sup>5</sup>Lanzmann, 142-143.

Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*.<sup>6</sup> Kundera's idea of laughter: what we feel when we play the belly game; we lie on the floor with our head on the belly of another, whose head is on the belly of another, whose head is on the belly of another. Belly laughs! The laughter of angels.

To pass through the eye of the needle demands more than sitting in seminar, reading three books, or a hundred, on the suffering of the Eastern European Jew. Passing through the eye of the needle takes more than visiting Auschwitz, or watching *Schinder's List*. No. In all these ways, it is possible to stand on this side of the eye of the needle, with great seriousness and in great horror...and look. Watching through the eye of the needle, it is possible to feel moved by what we see there. To feel brave to have taken the responsibility to look. And to imagine that complicity exists only on the other side of the needle, the one we watch in such fascination and with such horror. To stand in this place is to have one's feet planted on the safe ground of "those who have not personally experienced even a tenth," with one's eye placed firmly against that needle's eye. It is not necessary to suffer nor is it necessary to notice that one has not earned the privilege of the laughter of angels, that in fact, one is capable only of the cynic's laugh. Exhibitions of outrage are common from this vantage point. The strategic advantage of having one's eye to the needle is that it is possible to imagine that one is not complicitous, that one would not-have-been, and has never been. What is being bred in the imaginary is the notion that resistance is

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<sup>6</sup>Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust*, (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 175.

constituted outside of complicity, rather than inside it as a potential rupture to it.

The Holocaust is unique in that it creates a circle of flames around itself, a limit which cannot be crossed because a certain absolute horror cannot be transmitted. Pretending to cross that line is a grave transgression. One must speak and hold silent at the same time: knowing that here silence is the most authentic mode of speech; one must maintain a protected region like the eye of a hurricane.<sup>7</sup>

We are always complicitous with life, as much in dissent as in collaboration. At the heart of what has been termed "survivor's guilt" is that dilemma. It is at the heart of many a story of survival in volumes of testimony; every survival requiring the complicity of someone, on behalf of oneself or on behalf of another. This lies at the heart of the suicide of Freddie Hirsch; by taking his life, he marked an incapacity to continue to suffer the required complicity of his acts of resistance.

And so he said to me: "If we make the uprising, what is going to happen to the children? Who is going to take care of them?" I [tell him] that there is no way out for them. [That] this he cannot prevent.

.He explains to me that he understands the situation . . . and that he cannot see how he can just leave those [100] children to their

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,139.

fate. He was sort of their father. [He asked] if I could leave him alone to think for an hour.

[When] I came back in an hour, and I could see that he is . . . dying. He was cyanotic in the face . . . and I could see that he has poisoned himself.<sup>8</sup>

And the perpetrators? The son of the Nazi officer in Berlin, doing penance and absolution for his father, alive and burdened by his bloodline to perpetration. I don't know how his father died, but I do know how the father of a woman in Hamburg did. After leaving the Twenty-first birthday party of her son, his grandson, he went home and he hanged himself. This man had ceased speaking to his daughter a year before, since she confronted him and her mother with the secret years of her suffering from his sexual abuse of her. He hanged himself not in penance but in punishment, not in absolution but in retribution. This father tormented his only child and threatened her grandmother with physical violence, and with threats of removal of his daughter from the grandmother's custody, if she disclosed her suspicions. In prior years, he had been a faithful Nazi officer. The act of taking his own life was an act of vengeance, the full desire to leave his own vile legacy. The daughter has suffered her penance, privately, at his hands. She has never done public penance for his Nazism nor for his sexual terrorism; she has instead suffered the quiet complicity of the abused and betrayed child, because this is what that kind of terror is about. She was

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<sup>8</sup>Testimony of Rudolf Vrba, in Lanzman, *ibid.*, 161-162,.

complicitous for the reason that she was there, because she was born to that side of the eye of the needle; and for that, she resides there forever. Complicity is the burden of the living. And, the legacy of those who are innocent is always out of proportion with the misery of their compliance.

Children of perpetrators are always a threat to the history of their parents.<sup>9</sup> Children of survivors are considered a threat by some disciples of the holy texts of the Holocaust; what they have to say may not revere the survivor. In *Maus, A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman's depiction of his father, Vladek, is hardly idealized: "In some ways, he's just like the racist caricature of the miserly old Jew," says Art, inside the text of the book, to his step-mother.<sup>10</sup> But I think a more subversive form of narrative is yet to come from these children of survivors. And from the children of perpetrators. And finally, perhaps even from the children of bystanders. Because the subversive narratives that are provoked out of the violences that have been etched on and surround and support their lives, some of which will be purged, tell how a history of violence, of lies, secrets

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<sup>9</sup>Of course, these children are a threat to far more than their parents or families. For a beautifully fictionalized version of the true adventures of a young woman in Germany who wins an award for an essay on "how her village resisted the Nazis" and, learning it didn't, goes on to investigate further, see the German film, *Das Schreckliche Mädchen*, (1990) subtitled in English as *Nasty Girl*, directed by Michael Verhoeven. Also: Ursula Hegi, *Stones from the River*, (New York: Poseidon, 1994), about a society obsessed with secrets. "The habit of silence that traditionally protected family respectability is so strong that people who sent their Jewish neighbors to the camps tell the American war-crime investigators they were "undercover freedom fighters" and no one steps forward to contradict them." Mackey, Mary, "A Town By Secrets Possessed," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 February 1994).

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in "The Light Side of Darkness," *Newsweek*: 22 September 1986, 79.

and silences<sup>11</sup> are not left behind in time or in place, and that those histories live on the surface of the landscape of the lives of those who follow. This is the radical significance of the "poisoning of the well."

I am not free of the condition I describe here. I cannot be certain how far back in human history the habit of denial can be traced...I have found it in the legends surrounding the battle of Troy, and in my own family I have traced it three generations back, to that recent time past when there had been no world wars and my grandparents were young. All that I was taught at home or in school was colored by denial, and thus it became so familiar to me that I did not see it. Only now have I begun to recognize . . . .<sup>12</sup>

It is as if I had been looking at a fishbowl--the glide and flick of the golden scales, the green tip, the bolt of white careening back from the gills; the castles at the bottom, surrounded by pebbles and tiny, intricate fronds of green; the barely disturbed water, the flecks of waste and food, the tranquil bubbles traveling to the surface--and suddenly *I saw the bowl . . . .*<sup>13</sup>

In time, there will be no living survivors, perpetrators *or* bystanders left to tell the stories of the camps and of the conditions that

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<sup>11</sup>Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences*, (New York: Norton & Company, 1979).

<sup>12</sup>Griffin, 3.

<sup>13</sup>Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 17, emphasis added.

preceded and produced them. But the inclusion of the category of bystander to that of perpetrator and of victim means that there are no exemptions for response-ability<sup>14</sup> for the camps. If the children of survivors and perpetrators are marked, then so too the children of bystanders. Is the child of a Nazi less innocent or less marked than the child of a Jew? What of the child of the bystander? All are born into some relation to the eye of the needle.

Who are the privileged innocent? Who is actually rooted to the ground at the safe side of the eye of the needle? What makes some of us stand so fervently there, and why do we study the other so steadily? Does this not function to keep our gaze firmly on *their* contradictions, *their* collaborations, *their* complicities; and, away from our own?

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In the two volumes of *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Spiegelman struggles not only to uncover the history of his father, his mother, *her* suicide, and his brother's death; he seeks to uncover the dimensions of his own burden, his legacy, in the narratives of his family:

My three-page strip, *Maus*, was propelled by a then unarticulated personal need to understand my Survivor parents, who had

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<sup>14</sup>I alter this term when I want to break with common usage and implication of the term "responsibility," charged with the notion of both having the ability to do something considered to be the right thing, and ultimately doing it; I am attempting to stress what would precede such a meaning, that is, the ability to be responsive.

been permanently scarred by "The War" (the phrase of choice among Survivors when I was a kid for what is now tagged the Holocaust), and by an impulse to look dead-on at the root causes of my own deepest fears and nightmares.<sup>15</sup>

Art Spiegelman

The meaning of the shift in text from animals to people on page 100 of Volume I of *Maus*, from his father's story to his own, from his mother's suicide to his own breakdown, is experienced as a reader's "freefall"; it is a freefall from the coherent, chronologized animal-narrative of the father's story to that of the son's legacy.<sup>16</sup> I will return later to this break in the continuity of the text. In many regards, *Maus* is an articulation of the link that I wish to make between legacy and complicity; an argument that hinges on the suffering of the survivors that has been construed as the phenomenon of "survivor's guilt."<sup>17</sup> The following four panels from *Maus: A Survivor's Tale II, And Here My Troubles Began*<sup>18</sup> focus on Art's visit with Pavel, his therapist who is also a survivor, and they are discussing Art's history of difficulty with his father.

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<sup>15</sup>Art Spiegelman, "Maus & Man," *Voice*, 6 June 1989. 21.

<sup>16</sup>Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 100-103.

<sup>17</sup>In some respects, my argument seems to run parallel to that of others, like Elie Weisel, who noted in a televised discussion following the film on nuclear destruction, *The Day After*, that the term *Holocaust* echoes forward in time as well as back, and that "After Auschwitz we are all Jews." This is quoted by Spiegelman in "Maus & Man," 22.

<sup>18</sup>Spiegelman, Art, *Maus II: A Survivors Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*, (New York: Pantheon Books 1991), 44.



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The panels continue on to develop a theme that is significant to Spiegelman; that of whether survival can be linked to luck or to resourcefulness.<sup>20</sup> But on these particular panels, the therapist suggests that perhaps the father feels guilt about surviving and in turn has taken his guilt out on the son, "where it was safe...on the real survivor." The displacement of one's guilt onto a "safe" receptor is a common therapeutic suggestion, and Art responds to it with wariness, by wondering about Pavel's own underlying guilt. Pavel, as therapist, is able to question whether "survivor's guilt" plays a

<sup>19</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 45.

<sup>20</sup>"If only admirable people were shown to have survived, then the implicit moral would have been that only admirable people deserved to survive [...]." Spiegelman, quoted in Lawrence Weschler, "Mighty 'Maus': Art Spiegelman reinvents the comic book in 'Maus'," *Rolling Stone*, 20 November 1986, 148.

part in the tormented family drama for Spiegelman; however, as survivor, he expresses not guilt, but terrible sadness. "Outside" the camps (on the safe side of the eye of the needle), survivor's guilt makes sense, explains the suffering, closes the meaning of it, perhaps as much for survivors as for others. "Inside" the camps (through the eye of the needle), it does not appear to be a simple matter.

The outside world probably thinks of us a grey, uniform, suffering mass of Jews, and knows nothing of the gulfs and abysses and subtle differences that exist between us. They could never hope to understand.<sup>21</sup>

Yes. The specificity of each survival lies at the heart of the testimony of each survivor. But Spiegelman does hope to understand. And beyond that, he is determined to fathom "this presence that had been hanging over my family's life and what it had done to us."<sup>22</sup> A great deal is at stake here for Art, and for Spiegelman.<sup>23</sup> When Art says to the therapist that no matter what he accomplishes, it doesn't seem like much compared to surviving Auschwitz, the therapist points out to him that it was not Art that was *in* Auschwitz; that he lived his life in Rego Park. The therapist asks his patient to recognize the logical. But, when he then goes on

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<sup>21</sup>Etty Hillesum, *ibid.*, 218.

<sup>22</sup>Lawrence Weschler, "Mighty Maus: Art Spiegelman Reinvents the Comic Book in 'Maus'." *Rolling Stone*, 20 November 1986. 108.

<sup>23</sup>I make the same separation here that Spiegelman does throughout the text. The text is a "story within a story," and the author is "a narrator within a narrator."

two frames later to announce to Art that it *is* after all *he* who is the "real survivor," something is signaled. No wonder Art is wary.

What place does the child of the survivor occupy in relation to the eye of the needle? How are they marked by the camps? What hides their tattoos? What stories do they carry in their bellies, not of their parents, but of *themselves*? This is not a matter of the "sins of the father being visited upon their sons," nor is it simply a matter of the "children who somehow survive even the survivors," as announced on the jacket of Volume II. The therapist presents a contradiction, apparently without realizing it: Art wasn't in Auschwitz, yet is nevertheless the *real* survivor?<sup>24</sup> Finally, what does it mean that the therapist suggests to Art that as survivors, his own father may suffer guilt, while he himself suffers "just sadness?"

Significant to these scenes with Art and the therapist-survivor is that both wear *maus*-masks even though both of them are Jews, and as such, would be naturally signified by a *maus*-face. Why do they not face one another, *maus-to-maus*? Art is represented as *maus* minus mask throughout the texts, with two exceptions: when he is shown at his drafting table, working on the drawings for the book, and when he goes to the therapist/survivor. Masks function throughout the two volumes in only one other way, when a Jew "passes" as a

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<sup>24</sup>Although this would be explained by conventional psychoanalysis as it is on the jacket of the book, that it is Art that "survives the survivor," I am arguing against this conventional interpretation (which is only partly valorized by the narrative at this point). The text doesn't ultimately come down on the side of convention here, although it presents it as a possibility.

Pole or a German; they are not used to indicate, however, when a Jew betrays another Jew.<sup>25</sup> He who draws the text (Spiegelman) represents he *of* the text (Art) in two ways. Within the text, within the context of his mission to recover Vladek's testimony, Art is represented as Vladek and all Eastern European Jews are in this text, as *maus*; unmasked and vested, fully grown and chain-smoking, frustrated, angry, moved and ultimately transformed, his father's son, a Jew, *maus*. But at the drawing table or at the therapy couch Art appears as human beneath a *maus*-mask; still vested, sometimes smoking, he grows tiny, feels like crying, is uncertain of his ability to continue his work or to grasp its meanings. Having become small while working on his drawings and coping with the pressures on him by others who wish to proliferate and commodify his work, he visits his shrink. Crawling up onto the adult armchair, a tiny Art speaks with Pavel:



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<sup>25</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus*, 113.

<sup>26</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 45.

This discussion of language's ever impending contamination of meaning as spoken by/through Spiegelman's masking of reflecting, speaking subjects suggests both reflection upon and attempted reconciliation of the fragmented self, and the irresolvable desire for some sort of synthesis.<sup>27</sup>

In Lacanian theory entry into language is necessary to the child unless he or she is to become "sick"; at the same time entry into language inevitably creates a division between the subject of the enunciation and the subject of the enounce, the "I" who speaks and the "I" who is the subject of discourse. The subject is held in place in the discourse by the use of "I," but the "I" of this discourse is always a "stand-in"...a substitute for the "I" who speaks. It is this contradiction in the subject--between the conscious self, which is conscious in so far as it is able to feature in discourse, and the self which is only partially represented there--which constitutes the source of possible change.<sup>28</sup>

Spiegelman's project is at once immense and very private, in spite of any apparent disjunctures between that of the inner life and that of the outer. Or: as Ingmar Bergman has a film character (the actor who plays an aged actor who speaks of the relation of the theatre to the wide world) say in *Fanny and Alexander*, "the Big World and the

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<sup>27</sup>Butler-Evans, Elliott, *Race, Gender, and Desire: Narrative Strategies in the Fiction of Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, (London: Methuen, 1980), 85, quoted in Butler-Evans, 5.

Little World." It is not insignificant that Art becomes tiny in the therapeutic context; and, although psychotherapy infantilizes the patient, the full meaning of his smallness is not contained by this. And certainly, his own childhood is very significant to his private journey, to his inner world. The childhood not spent in the camps. Nevertheless, even though the narratives of the texts are overwhelmingly of his father's story, and even though the father is photographically realized by the end of the volumes,<sup>29</sup> it is Spiegelman who is brought into being through the process of these texts, the production graphically articulated during the masked scenes at the drawing board and at the therapeutic arm chair. The desired synthesis is then perhaps between the "I" who speaks and the "I" who is the subject of that speech. Or is it more than that?

In order for him to engage language in the production of himself, Spiegelman confronts what ultimately forms the mediating power of the text, the problem of figural representation:

. . . it's like trying to tell an epic novel in telegraphic form . . . I have to live those words, to assimilate them . . . Every panel requires that I interrogate my material . . . over and over again.<sup>30</sup>

Spiegelman struggles with the *figural* problem of representing the necessity of *language*. And, even the continual reiteration of the

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<sup>29</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus*, Vol.II, 134.

<sup>30</sup>Weschler, 104.

language in order to bring the tale into being, into image, into the social realm, even then:

. . . loss is inevitable . . . What my father articulated is less than what he went through . . . what I can articulate is less than I can understand. And what readers understand is less than what I can articulate.<sup>31</sup>

This problem of language, which is the problem of loss, suggests very high stakes for Spiegelman if he were to relinquish the desire to enter language. It would mean the abandonment of the self, and more:

[Lacan] believed that the child gains access to language only when it perceives the existence of the father, which allows it to break out of infantile dualisms--self and mother, inside and outside. "Somewhere out there, somewhere else, is my father": this, says Lacan, is the child's inauguration into language, the symbolic order, and the law.<sup>32</sup>

There is something extraordinary about how *Maus* works. As if Spiegelman had said that somewhere out there, somewhere else, is my father, and if I don't go out and find him, I don't exist. Textually, graphically, *Maus* functions powerfully as a story within a story; but as importantly it produces a person within a person through the narrativity. For Spiegelman, his father's tale is his own; if he does

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<sup>31</sup>Spiegelman, Art, quoted by Langer, Lawrence, "A Fable of the Holocaust," *The New York Times Book Review*, 3 November 1991, 35.

<sup>32</sup>Kaplan, Alice, *French Lessons*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 99. We will return to the "infantile dualism of self and mother" later.

not retrieve it, if he does not interpret it, the unretrieved father "out there, somewhere else" will also be himself.

The extremity of the camps themselves makes this imperative so absolute for a child of the survivor. In many respects, the death camps have become an articulation of the representational narrative of "a story within a story." The heart-wrenching pathos of *Maus* lies in its retrospective, historical sense: [Spiegelman], drawing *Maus*, knows that Vladek and Anja are finally as helpless and doomed as mice fleeing cats--but *they* still think that they are people, with the normal human capacity for devising schemes and making bargains.<sup>33</sup> I would submit that this is the same heart-wrenching pathos of much of the testimony of survivors; in order to survive, it was necessary to maintain the sense of normal human capacity. Their testimony reveals a world ruled by death, but also a world of actual living conditions, of *ways of life*, which are the basis and achievement of life in extremity.<sup>34</sup> The manifestation of these strategies was "neither random nor regressive nor amoral,"<sup>35</sup> and they extend from the sublime to the excremental.

In this place it is practically pointless to wash every day in the turbid water of the filthy wash-basins for purposes of cleanliness and health; but it is most important as a symptom

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<sup>33</sup>Adam Gopnik, "Comics and Catastrophe," *The New Republic*, 22 June 1987, 33.

<sup>34</sup>Terrence Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), v.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, v.

of remaining vitality, and necessary as an instrument of moral survival.<sup>36</sup>

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I so wish I could put it all into words. Those two months behind barbed wire have been the two richest and most intense months of my life, in which my highest values were so deeply confirmed. I have learned to love Westerbork.<sup>37</sup>

For we who stand with our eye up to the eye of the needle, it is difficult to fathom how one could wash oneself with foul water permeated by excremental filth and regard it as life-affirming; perhaps even more difficult to fathom the meaning given the camp, and her own life within the camp, as an expression of love by the second victim, one who did not ultimately survive Auschwitz. More than any other, the child of the survivor may feel most immediately compelled to grasp the meanings of these things. It would be the child of the survivor that would most immediately understand themselves as bearing the greatest burden of having been born "into" the camps-as-phantasm, camps which permeate that which is experienced as private and that which is experienced as public; that is, family and culture. It may be more accurate to say that the camps have been born into the belly of that child, in the same way that they have been born into the belly of that culture. The boundaries of the inner and outer landscapes of the child and the

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<sup>36</sup>Levi, Primo, quoted by Des Pres, *ibid.*, 64.

<sup>37</sup>Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983, 174.

culture blur, become inverted, and ultimately come to constitute one another:

In the works of the [French] symbolists, the imagination repudiates conventional reality, skimming into its own fantastic voyages of light and discovery. Here [in the Holocaust literature], the events are so "fantastic" as to strain the resources of fiction; the suspicion of madness is never *in* the poet, as it is in most modern fiction, but in the events to which he bears witness. These selections record the tension between history and art--history as the wanton destructive chaos, art, the creative synthesis of one interpretive imagination.<sup>38</sup>

For this child of survivors, for Spiegelman who draws, the inner and outer landscapes have been inverted<sup>39</sup> as surely as they have been for his survivor father. As his father speaks, Spiegelman writes himself and his father into being. As he draws the camps, he begins to see them.<sup>40</sup> As he sees, he interrogates; and through his "one interpretive imagination," he empties his belly of the camps.

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<sup>38</sup>Ruth Wisse, in the introduction to *Green Aquarium*, by Abraham Sutzkever, (Tel Aviv: Shamgar, 1975), vii., and quoted by Sidra DiKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 23.

<sup>39</sup>Ezrahi, 22. This is suggested by Ezrahi's discussion of how powerfully "the testimonial imperative so controls the artistic impulse that the boundary between the memoir literature and the fiction (the *histoire* as history and as story) seems hardly distinguishable." (23)

<sup>40</sup>Weschler, 104. In interview, Spiegelman says: "I have to live those words, to assimilate them, to turn them into finished business - so that I end up *seeing* them and am then able to convey that vision. Were there tufts of grass, ruts in the path, puddles in the ruts? How tall were the buildings, how many windows, any bars, any lights in the windows, any people? What time of day was it? What was the horizon like?" These are the same kinds of detailed questions that Claude Lanzmann uses to interrogate the survivors in *Shoah*. It is especially powerful when asking specific questions about time of day, number

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An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched begin to rise, or *when the stranger enters the gates, never, thereafter, to be a stranger: the stranger's presence making you the stranger, less to the stranger than to yourself.*

Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self: in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which robes one's nakedness can always be felt, and sometimes, discerned. This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one's robes.<sup>41</sup>

The identity of the survivor infers "guilt" for the simple, obvious, and profound reason that for "the survivor" to exist at all, as an identity as well as a living, breathing person, it is necessary that someone else not survive. The meaning of surviving is contextualized by what it means that others not survive. This is the raw and terrible nakedness of the survivor. In my mind, it is *not* guilt, but the conditional complicity with life that constitutes the pain of survival. Vladek's survival, and his identity as survivor, is stained doubly by

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of vehicles, whether it was raining or not when interrogating perpetrators and bystanders.

<sup>41</sup>James Baldwin, "The Devil Finds Work," *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985*, (New York: St Martin's Press, 1985), 606-607, italics added. Originally published by The Dial Press, 1976.

death, because his beloved Anja, mother of Art, takes her own life in May of 1968.

We are now working our way backwards through the two volumes of *Maus*. By this point in a series of evocations that aim to disrupt temporality, there is a certain coherence. With the narratives of holocaust, in which one is always backing into a story for which the end is too painfully already known, there is something to be said for not striding forward toward that end, but to back away from it towards ourselves.

Spiegelman concludes Volume II of Vladek's story of survival with the moment of Vladek and Anja's reunion after the war, miraculous because Anja had been removed from Auschwitz to Ravensbruck, and they had literally to locate one another again. Vladek's joy at finding Anja is evident, her importance to him manifest throughout, and he tells Art, "More I don't need to tell you. We were both very happy, and lived happy, happy ever after."



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<sup>42</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 136.

This is coherent with everything that Vladek has presented to Art, but profoundly discontinuous with the fact of Anja's suicide some years before. Anja has, affirmed by her own hand, not lived happy, happy ever after. But we do not know why; she appears to us throughout the texts extensively as an apparition, or appendage of Vladek's story, *maus*- like and rather sensitive and frail. In only one other place does she appear, in two forms; in a photograph of herself and Art on holiday at Trojan Lake, N.Y. in 1958 and she is also drawn as a cartoon done by Spiegelman called "Prisoner on the Hell Planet: A Case History." Both of these images are organized by the "Prisoner" cartoon around Spiegelman's own psychotic break at the age of 20, 3 months before Anja's suicide. This cartoon functions as the central moment of the first volume of *Maus* in which the reader is propelled into a "freefall." It is this moment, the interjection of "Prisoner" into *Maus*, which constitutes a momentary and stunning "slip through the eye of the needle." This moment, this device, is the most powerful I have experienced in any form of testimony, art, fiction, of any documentation of the camps. For all the serious discussion of the difficulty of representing the realities of the camps, this unlikely text, this most unlikely form of representation, accomplishes that for which all other forms strive. The inversion of the inner and the outer, both for Spiegelman and for the reader, takes place here. One turns the page from 99 to 100, and finds oneself slipped through the eye of the needle, just as the child of the survivor has found himself.

This moment in the text constitutes the intersection of two critical features of the narrative and of my thesis here. One is this gut-wrenching free-fall, this slip through the eye of the needle, into the interior of the child of the survivor, and thereby into the interior of the camps. This sudden free-fall ends, but not without marking the reader who slips here. The possibility of this "fall," this unsolicited sky-dive, must be facilitated through the juxtaposition of the child's narrative within the survivor's narrative. Vladek's narrative is powerful and moving, draws the non-*maus* reader closer and closer to the eye of the needle, but cannot push her through it. She must turn the page, and find herself fully, cogently interior to the realm of the child in order to take the fall. It is the child who brings us to the history of the parent, to the camps, in a way that marks us, too. I'm not sure it is possible to explicate all the reasons why this should work this way; certainly it has to do with the necessity for the discontinuous to break out the reader from her story-time sleepiness. There are also: Language mediated by image; father mediated by son; past mediated by present; extremity mediated by the mundane. In reading Volume I for the first time, I "fell"; there is no other word for it. Later, it was very exhilarating to discover that Spiegelman had worked towards that idea, because not all readers have, it seems, taken the fall. Perhaps it takes a term of gestation in order to recognize the push to where you've been trying to go for a long time. Perhaps keeping watch by the eye of the needle isn't always safe, and doesn't only produce or precede the cynical. The

free-fall does have something in common with the laughter of angels; it takes over the belly, and spills out all kinds of stuff.

The other critical feature of the text and of my theses, one that screams for attention here, is the absence of Anja and how that absence functions to facilitate Vladek's narrative, and to some extent, Art's as well. In the story ("Prisoner on the Hell Planet") within the story (Vladek's narrative), within the story (Art's mission), there are two frames in which the fact that Anja has killed herself *without leaving a note* is mentioned, once by Art and once by Vladek.



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This concern with the absence of a suicide note is an entirely normal one; but its significance must be taken more broadly from the text that surrounds "Hell Planet." Anja, we learn, has left many notes throughout her life, she was always "writing her diary," and there were notebooks and diaries around the house ever since Art could

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<sup>43</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus*, 100-101.

remember. Anja's diaries from the war, according to Vladek, didn't survive the war. What Art saw, says Vladek, was what "she wrote after: her whole story from the start." When Art first insists that he needs Anja's writings for his book, Vladek starts coughing and changes the subject.<sup>44</sup> Much later, after many efforts by Art fail to uncover these diaries and notebooks, we learn why:



<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 84.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 158-159.

Without Anja's words, the story of survival becomes only Vladek's story. When Art first approaches his father to talk about his life in Poland, and the war, his request to Vladek takes this form, "I want to hear it. Start with Mom . . . "; but this is impossible for Vladek, who must start with himself.<sup>46</sup> As discussions with Vladek progress, Art must continue to prod him to tell him more about Anja. At one point, Vladek says, "Anja? What is to tell? Everywhere I look I'm seeing Anja . . ."<sup>47</sup> Anja, in her own absence, is a significant supportive actor to Vladek, and although there is no question of his abiding affection for her within his narrative, Anja's story would certainly be a different one than Vladek's. In frustration, Art finally asks, "But how did Anja *survive*?" Vladek, if he ever knew the precise details, has not retained his memory of her own survival, but does find an answer for Art; Anja survived because of a Polish woman, a guard who looked after her. When Vladek survives, it is by his own doing, his own "organizing"; when Anja survives, it is by his own doing, or in his absence, by the protection of a Polish guard.

Anja: this is a woman who survived Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbruck, and other camps that Vladek is unable to remember. Transport from one camp to another was often more brutal than the camps themselves. Anja is a woman whose first baby, in the

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<sup>46</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus*, 12. So, what's so unusual about this? Ask a man about anything and he tells you about himself. I assert this even though I can remember a few incidents where it didn't occur. If you're male, you can write yourself out of this assertion; but then how do you know if you have written yourself out because you are self-effacing, and therefore the exception to the rule, or because the assertion applies to you, and so you must extract yourself?

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 103.

protective care of her sister in hiding from the Nazis, was poisoned by this sister who took her own life and the lives of her own two babies and Anja's son, rather than be taken by the Nazis to Auschwitz.<sup>48</sup> In later years, this Anja takes her own life; among survivors, not so rare an act.<sup>49</sup> But within Vladek's story, there is no way to understand the nature of Anja's despair, only that they lived "happy ever after." In order for Vladek's tale to hold the meanings that it does, in order for his identity to hold the meaning that it does, it is necessary that Anja's words be destroyed; at a deeper level, it is necessary that Anja be destroyed, because her survival of the camps would clearly subvert Vladek's narrative. His story depends upon her disappearance, her effacement, and ultimately, her death. In this context, frantic desire for the non-existent suicide note, for her own words regarding her own death, takes on a perverse quality. Her decisions have never counted, her words have not been kept. Anja has been enshrined, and we know little of her, except as a beloved memorial that honors Vladek's own life. Central to Vladek's narrative is that she is his beloved responsibility; this is signified through many scenes in which he has "organized" on her behalf. To have "organized" only on one's own behalf would be an act of self-interest

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<sup>48</sup>It is not insignificant that Vladek, Anja (with Richieu with the sister) were originally in hiding themselves. When Vladek became convinced that being smuggled into Hungary would be the safest decision, a decision which Anja objected to strenuously, they offered their hiding place to a family of three. That family survived intact; Vladek and Anja were betrayed and sent to Auschwitz and Richieu poisoned. Vladek made, by his own narrative, many successful decisions. It is simply not possible to actually "exchange" the situations and be certain that had the three stayed together, hidden in the original place, that they too would have survived. Not possible. But difficult to not do. Anja must have lived with this doubt; so must have Vladek.

<sup>49</sup>Not only among survivors, but among those who study the death camps.

at best; and at worst, mercenary.<sup>50</sup> Anja signifies Vladek's survival and his identity; finally, she represents his humanity.

Perhaps it is the dilemma of autobiography, that "impossible genre, a kind of emblem of deconstruction, where the more you try to confess, the more you lie."<sup>51</sup> Though the camps were evil sites, Vladek was not an evil man. But by reading his narrative as confessional, it becomes possible to see that what is at stake for him is his own absolution, not only for surviving the camps, but for Anja's despair which evidently never subsided. Absolution: The desire for it can exist powerfully within the soul of "an innocent," in this case, the Jew trapped in the camps. Not many Nazis roaming the streets inquiring after it, although their children, some at least, are. For those who are marked by the camps in this way, absolution must be sought, because "[these matters are] similar to pitch, for however one might handle it, even to cast it far from oneself, it sticks nonetheless,

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<sup>50</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 89. To "organize" or "arrange" in the camps would often mean the difference between life and death. To have a piece of cheese instead of a "soup" made of water, cabbage, and woodchips meant that one had "organized," cut a deal, made an arrangement. Another kind of "organizing" was done in order to hide one's family from deportation. There are many examples of "organizing" in Vladek's story; he not only organizes for Anja when she is at Birkenau but also for others. Such alliances would cross national boundaries, but an important form of "organizing" for another was on behalf of those one knew previous to the camps. (For example: see 33-34 of *Maus II*.) When Vladek continues to "organize" or "arrange" in his life in Rego Park and in the Catskills, the hilarity of the scenes are based on the utter inappropriateness and cheapness of his behavior as well as the effect it has on Art and Françoise, Art's wife. That which constitutes savvy and survival in the camps marks, at best, an ungenerous eccentricity outside of them.

<sup>51</sup>Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 99. Kaplan is speaking here of Paul de Man's intellectual questions being rooted in his own experience and pain.

and always soils."<sup>52</sup> In this case, the speaking subject of the survivor does not cast it afar, but recounts it, and in so doing, absolves oneself. This is the hope, the compelling desire, to absolve and to recover oneself. The "dark twins" of the Middle Ages, torture and confession<sup>53</sup> are reunited in the violence of modernity: the camps tormented the Jew, and now extract from him the confession that he must desire, in order to be free:

The confession is a ritual of discourse in which the speaking subject is also the subject of the statement; it is also a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally, a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modification in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Paolo Segneri, quoted by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction*, (New York: Random House, 1978), 19. Although this quote was originally meant to warn to use the "greatest reserve...when dealing with sins against purity," I think it is not so far removed from the point here; namely, the sin of surviving is lodged in the marking of the camp, like pitch that sticks, upon the survivor.

<sup>53</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction*, (New York: Random House, 1978), 59.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 61-62.

The tragedy of Vladek is that he required absolution from all too many sources. From Anja and Art, from himself; even, we can feel in the last frame of Volume II, from little Richieu, the son who died in hiding from the Nazis before he and Anja were deported, before Art was born. And from how many others, we who read can't know. Vladek's story functions both as true and untrue simultaneously. This is the tragedy of Anja, who is absent, and of her narrative, which should, by all that is right and hopeful in the world, be present.

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This simultaneous functioning of Vladek's narrative brings to mind three contingencies: thought, language, and identity.

Thought: the Jewish proverb that says: Man thinks, God laughs.  
Why? Kundera says:

Because man thinks and the truth escapes him. Because the more men think, the more one man's thought diverges from another's. And finally, because man is never what he thinks he is . . . not only the world's truth but also the truth of their own selves slips away from them . . . The *agélaste*...from the Greek . . . it means a man who does not laugh . . . . Never having heard God's laughter, the *agélastes* are convinced that the truth is obvious, that all men necessarily think the same thing, and that they themselves are exactly what they think they are. But it is precisely in losing the certainty of truth and the unanimous agreement of others that man becomes an individual. . . . No peace is

possible between the novelist and the *agélaste* . . . the novel is the imaginary paradise of individuals. It is the territory where no one possess the truth neither Anna nor Karenin, but where everyone has the right to be understood both Anna and Karenin.<sup>55</sup>

In the case of the self telling the story of the self, everyone does not have "the right to be understood"; rather, it is the speaking subject who holds the floor. The more you try to confess, the more you lie; this can apply here, because a man in Vladek's position can only continue to believe that he is just what he thinks he is (or hopes to be) in the absence of contending voices to his own. No contending voices from within the camps, from within his own story, no contending diaries or notebooks. Had Spiegelman been able to speak with Anja, to have read her diaries and notebooks, what would have comprised the texts of *Maus*? We'll never know, and worse, neither will Spiegelman, who has been forcibly compelled to "break out of [the Lancaian] infantile dualisms-self and mother, inside and out":

The fact that he'd destroyed that autobiographical journal of hers meant that the story forcibly became increasingly *his* story, which at first seemed like a terrible, almost fatal, problem. The absence of my mother left me with -- well, not with an anti-hero, but at any rate not a pure hero. But in retrospect that now seems to me one of the strengths of *Maus*. If only admirable people were shown to have survived, then the

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<sup>55</sup>Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 158-159.

implicit moral would have been that only admirable people deserved to survive, as opposed to the fact that people deserved to survive as people. Anyway, I'm left with the story I've got, my shoehorn with which to squeeze myself back into history.<sup>56</sup>

For Spiegelman, the absence of Anja gets resolved by constituting it as the "strength" of the text, one that makes *Vladek* more complex, even if less admirable; this then forwards a perspective on surviving as not signifying a human state of deservedness. Spiegelman is squeezed back into history with the shoehorn of language, the language of the father.

But it is mothers, traditionally, who teach language, who listen and correct, it is mothers who are the first to hear new words. It is mothers who break or heal a child's tongue.<sup>57</sup>

Language: Throughout my reading of the holy and the unholy texts of the holocaust, and as I read literature, theory, critique, and documentation by women and men of color, it grows more and more apparent that semiotic hand-wringing over the "problem of language" and the "loss of meaning" implicit to its engagement is a particular concern of those who imagine themselves on the outside of the camps, on the safe side of the eye of any needle. I grow less and less fascinated with this particular problem of representation, of the lost meanings of language, as it grows more apparent that this loss is

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<sup>56</sup>Spiegelman, interviewed in Weschler, 148.

<sup>57</sup>Kaplan, *Ibid.*, 99.

constituted as more significant to knowledge than the lost narratives of women, to the lost narratives of any silenced peoples. That Anja's absence should constitute the strength of this text while Vladek's experience and articulation, and Art's subsequent figural representation with all its attendant losses, becomes the weakness. This should be unthinkable. The greatest loss of language and knowledge, of meaning and identity, is the systematic destruction, silencing, truncating, suppression, editing, absenting, the exterminating of the languages of female cultures, female consciousness, the stories of survivals and extinguishings of women. Let us see what the problems of representation are when women's narratives have been turning over the graveyards of male documentation, art, testimony, and literature for awhile. The ruptures created, the freefalls and the belly laughs, when women no longer appear as the signifier to male identity, that is, the relation of power and knowledge, will become immensely fascinating to me at that very moment.

#### Identity:

In the same way that the identity of the survivor, and the life that marks it, is bound to the fact of those lives extinguished by violence, so are the categories of perpetrator, victim, and bystander bound. Raul Hilberg, whose documentation of the details of the Holocaust, is humble and graceful at the same time that it is extensive and precise, maintains a clear distinction between these three categories.

In *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, he writes that: "These three groups were distinct from one another and they did not dissolve in their lifetime. Each saw what had happened from its own, special perspective, and each harbored a separate set of attitudes and reactions."<sup>58</sup> Hilberg is driven to keep these three separate and self-contained, and I think rightly so. His recovery of the minute detail of the invention and production of the violence and destruction of the Holocaust takes as its point of departure the following:

In all of my work I have never begun by asking the big questions, because I was always afraid that I would come up with small answers; and I have preferred to address these things which are minutiae or details in order that I might then be able to put together in a gestalt a picture which, if not an explanation, is at least a description, a more full description, of what transpired.<sup>59</sup>

The demeanor of his work is as intelligent, steady and humble as his presence,<sup>60</sup> and he pursues the detail of the case of the Holocaust like the detective who pieces together the puzzle from a lapsed period of time, grounding it with each clue, with each detail that finds its place

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<sup>58</sup>Hilberg, ix.

<sup>59</sup>Lanzmann, *Ibid.*, 70. Hilberg is quoted both in the text and the film.

<sup>60</sup>During his visit as a speaker to UH Manoa in Spring 1989, it was possible to see a stunning seamlessness between the man and the work. As a reader of the work of another (particularly a renowned writer), it is not always the case that the affection and admiration that one holds for the work can be transferred to the one who wrote it. In the presence of Hilberg, it was.

in time. In many respects, it would be difficult to find a commonality between his work and my own concerns. But Hilberg attends to clues, to that which is hidden in plain sight, and for that reason, I have always found his work compelling. His determination to keep segregated the categories is a necessary and respectful one, given that his epistemology is wed so deeply to chronology and to the specificity of detail within temporality. It is interesting then, that Hilberg has written this recent text in modules, so that each is self-contained and can be read in any order. Not a break with time, not a blurring of categories; yet a portrait of each identity preceded by a single characteristic utterance:

"I was never cruel."

--Hermann Göring to prison psychologist  
G. M. Gilbert in Nuremberg, 1946<sup>61</sup>

"But I have always shaved you well."

--The Jewish barber Mania Hirsch-Schechter,  
an inmate of the Czortkow labor camp,  
to the camp commander Paul Thomanek  
on the day of the camp's liquidation,  
June 23, 1943<sup>62</sup>

"He says, it's this way:

if I cut my finger, it doesn't hurt him."

--A translator explaining an answer given to  
Claude Lanzmann by Czeslaw Borowi,  
a Pole who lived near the death camp Treblinka<sup>63</sup>

A single, signifying disquieting utterance from each loci, from each identity within the matrix. Distinguishing between each of these identities is clear; mapping the relation of each to the other, and to

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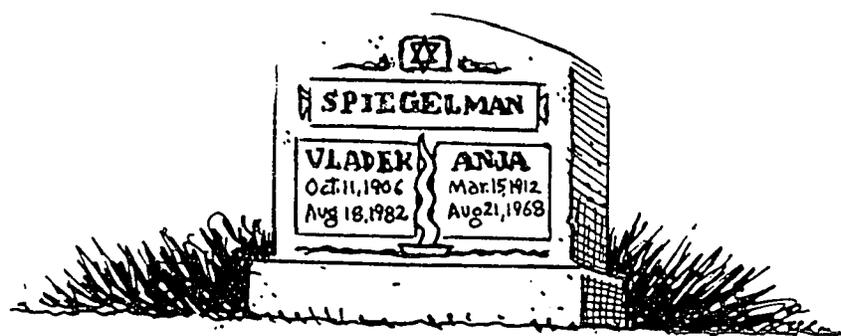
<sup>61</sup>Hilberg, 1.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 193.

power, is an unambiguous and direct path. That power has construed each, marked and sustained a lineage that binds them together, is there for the reading.

But the next generation of this lineage, produced through the phantasms of the camps, these progeny are not pedigree. The child of the survivor, cousin to the child of the bystander and perpetrator, may be first to grasp this, and to be compelled by the implications of it. It may be s/he who most deeply recognizes in regarding one's identity, that one's robes are best worn loose in order to discern and trust one's nakedness. It may be s/he who most acutely feels that in the power to change one's robes (not in confession and absolution) lies an exit from the camps. An exit, not an erasure. Freedom, not forgetting. Deliverance, not salvation. Alone, the transformation of the child of the survivor in *Maus* does not transform the history of the present. The legacies of the perpetrators and the bystanders have still to be rendered accountable.



— art spiegelman — 1978-1991

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<sup>64</sup>Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 136.

## Chapter 6

### The Third Thing

Water is H<sub>2</sub>O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one,  
but there is also a third thing, that makes it water  
and nobody knows what that is . . . <sup>1</sup>

D. H. Lawrence

In his introduction to *Tricks*, Renaud Camus' story of an author who has twenty-five sexual encounters in the course of six months, Roland Barthes says:

Homosexuality shocks less, but continues to be interesting; it is still at that stage of excitation where it provokes what might be called feats of discourse. Speaking of homosexuality permits those who aren't to show how open, liberal, and modern they are, and those who are to bear witness, to assume responsibility, to militate. Everyone gets busy, in different ways, whipping it up.<sup>2</sup>

And in all this froth foaming all over itself, the face of modern nationalism. The image might well suggest the pornographic. No ideology displays in as salient a fashion as fascism the intensely sexualized politics of nationalism. Stand inside the hall of mirrors

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<sup>1</sup>D. H. Lawrence, "The Third Thing," *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*, illustrated by Alice and Martin Provinsen in: *Birds, Beasts & The Third Thing* (New York: Viking Press, 1982).

<sup>2</sup>Roland Barthes, quoted in Gore Vidal, "Pink Triangle and Yellow Star", *Pink Triangle and Yellow Star and Other Essays: 1976 - 1982*. (London: Heinemann), 181.

called sexuality and ask the question: How did it come to matter against whom one rubbed one's body or how that rubbing was performed? A question that follows, then: How is this recruited into service towards the production of the state and to its ideology, nationalism? Finally, by following the logic of this inquiry into gender it becomes possible to ask: What is the metaphysics of nation-building and women-hating?<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson opens his reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism with a brief but direct indication of how the construction of a nation and the construction of a gender might be similar:

in the modern world everyone can, should,  
will 'have' a nationality, as he or she 'has' a  
gender . . . <sup>4</sup>

.....

Homosexuality's referent historically has been the male and how he uses his body and this still constitutes most contemporary public discourse on these matters. These feats of discourse are produced by and reproduce categories of sexual practices, rituals, beliefs and identities. It is possible to belong to the category of hetero- or that of homo-; it is possible to claim, even if not very credibly, both as bi-, or as it was termed historically, a "third sex" by those who

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<sup>3</sup>This is a substitution of the subtitle of an investigation into the historical link between American racism and expansionism: Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980).

<sup>4</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 14.

argued for its authentic place in the hall of mirrors. What is *not* possible is to exist outside a category; Barthes says: "say 'I am' and you will be socially saved." Perhaps. But Gore Vidal suggests that Barthes himself may be taken as a text, one that contradicts his own premise. According to Vidal: "Barthes was much admired in American academe. But then, a few years before his death, Barthes began to write about his same-sex activities; he is now mentioned a bit less than he was in the days before he came out, as they say."<sup>5</sup> Now, Vidal devotes a great deal of writing to the re-scripting of categories. Same-sexers, Jesus Chrusters, Breeders, Heterosexualists, The Redneck Divines, Christ-killers, Genteel Gentile . . . sometimes recruiting a term for his own purposes; other times, making blatant the thinly disguised code of a public discourse of disdain, ridicule, aversion, hatred. Not one for categories of identity, Vidal knows they come loaded, like a gun. Or like a gas chamber. And he presents a (by now) familiar argument:

Although to have sexual relations with a member of one's own sex is a common and natural activity . . . there is no such thing as a homosexualist any more than there is such a thing as a heterosexualist. [Hence the] difficulty with nomenclature.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Vidal, *ibid.*, 181-182. A presentiment, perhaps, to the military's code asserting that stating one is a homosexual constitutes a homosexual act? Does the military find direction here from the unstated code of the intellectual community? Or, perhaps military and academic codes are derivative of the religious, that is, confessional, and of the Freudian, that is, the psychoanalytic.  
<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 175-176.

Vidal challenges "any term as a common identifier of a group of people as incongruent as Frederick the Great, Franklin Pangborn, and Eleanor Roosevelt"<sup>7</sup>, to which we might add Roseanne Barr Arnold, Roy Cohn, and Hillary Rodham Clinton. That sexuality would be, could be: a "timeless, immutable essence"<sup>8</sup>; trans-cultural, trans-historical, an identity signifying a metaphysical dimension rather than a social, political category constituted by power; an act or set of practices that transcend the social construction of meaning(s) in human existence persists. Consider these questions:

Does the "paedarast," the classical Greek adult, married male who periodically enjoys penetrating a male adolescent share *the same sexuality* with the "berdache," the native American (Indian) adult male who from childhood has taken on many aspects of a woman and is regularly penetrated by the adult male to whom he has been married in a public and socially sanctioned ceremony? Does the latter share *the same sexuality* with the New Guinea tribesman and warrior who from the ages of eight to fifteen has been orally inseminated on a daily basis by older youths and who, after years of orally inseminating his juniors, will be married to an adult woman and have children of his own? Does anyone [sic] of these three persons share *the same sexuality* with the modern homosexual?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>8</sup>Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger, *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 4.

<sup>9</sup>David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 43, 46. Quoted in Parker, et al, 4.

By juxtaposing acts of eroticism between males in different temporal and cultural contexts, Halperin, in a series of rhetorical probings designed to provoke the impossibility of trans-historical, trans-cultural sexuality, continues the discursive tradition begun in England and Germany since 1860 by men who would now be considered "gay." Any claim that the categories of homo-, hetero-, or bi- might "actually" be non-existent, that they do not represent any "real" or continuous state(s)-of-being, makes its way backwards through a dense and pervasive undergrowth produced during the 19th century, and that still exists now. I refer here to the time when, at the junctures of psychiatry and jurisprudence, a proliferation of literature on the practices of sodomy, inversion, pederasty, masturbation, and other forms of "sexual deviance" emerged. It is at these junctures that "a new specification of individuals . . . a personage . . . a life form, and a morphology,"<sup>10</sup> the 19th century homosexual, is born. Foucault says: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species."<sup>11</sup> The word itself, *homosexualität*, first appears<sup>12</sup> in an open letter in 1869 from Dr. Károly Mária Benkert to the German Minister of Justice, written against a provision in the penal code of the Second Reich, which included homosexual acts among males to the category

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<sup>10</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1, An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). Foucault submits that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was categorized by Carl von Westphal in an article of 1870.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Prior to Westphal's article.

of crimes.<sup>13</sup> The letter asserted homosexuality to be inborn, not acquired; because he argued that heterosexuality would remain the dominant sexual practice for the majority, the logic followed that even unconditional sexual acceptance and unrestrained freedom of expression of the homosexual minority would not be a threat.<sup>14</sup> That position is still held to be credible in the decisions of the Supreme Court today, but the significance of it at that time was that it marked what was considered to be a humanizing shift from the legal to the medical. What it also marked was a contested territory in the production of knowledge, territory that remained heavily contested in Nazi Germany and to this day in these united states.<sup>15</sup> The shift then from a category of activity to a category of identity can be said to have enabled "the love that dare not speak its name"<sup>16</sup> to begin to become a speaking subject. But the proliferation in the 1860's of

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<sup>13</sup>Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War Against Homosexuals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 30. Paragraph 175, of German national law enacted in 1871, stipulated that "A male who indulges in criminally indecent activities will be punished with jail." Plant notes that this law is coherent with centuries of German legal obsession with sexual practices, and he cites examples.

<sup>14</sup>This position was also supported by Karl Heinrich Ulrich, a German (Benkert was a Hungarian living in Germany for many years), a homosexual, and a lawyer. But the basis of his position ran counter to mainstream medicine; he advanced and developed a notion of the male homosexual as a kind of androgyne, the female soul in a male body. His work was considered erroneous in content, but he is given great credit for moving homosexuality away from the notions of depravity, sin, morbidity, and criminality. He was discursively committed to the science of psychiatry, to homosexuality as identity, and in that regard, is a predecessor to the dominant themes and codes that constitute the present discourse on sexuality and deviance. It is in his work that the initial discursive struggle for territory between law and medicine appears.

<sup>15</sup>Tom Dumm, *united states* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1994. I am making use of a phrase favored by Dumm in his text (these united states) and from the lower-case title of his book, *united states*.

<sup>16</sup>Oscar Wilde, quoted in: John Lauretsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement* (New York: Times Change Press, 1974), 53-54.

legal and medical discourse regarding sexual practices were at the same time producing definitions of "perversities" and "deviance," identities and prohibitions against those who engaged in the practices.<sup>17</sup> The same period in Germany that produced the early homosexual rights movement (1864 - 1935) coincides, and I believe is coherent, with a period bounded at one end by the production of a discourse on homosexuality and the identity of the homosexual, and on the other, by the persecution and extermination of homosexual males by the Nazis. What I allude to here is this: That the same discourse that was to facilitate the liberation of the homosexual male facilitated the targetting of the homosexual male by the Nazis. In and of itself, there is nothing startling about this phenomenon. I want to suggest something more subtle that is embedded both in the history of the early homosexual rights movement and in the phantasms of the fascist warrior; that is, that the many arguments and contentions that existed in the creation of the identity of the homosexual form an under-grid of meaning about masculinity that is replayed in the ambiguities that existed in the constitution of a Nazi national identity and its warrior soldiers (and by extension, in its "red" and "white" women), so stunningly researched and conveyed in the two volumes of Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*.<sup>18</sup> The relation of these two are not by cause and effect but both reflect an obsession

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<sup>17</sup>See: James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexual History of the World War* (New York: Panurge Press, 1934); Max Hodann, *History of Modern Morals*, (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1937).

<sup>18</sup>Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies (Volume 1): Women, Floods, Bodies, History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987); and, *Male Fantasies (Volume 2 Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror)* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989).

with authenticity and masculinity that precedes and accompanies the proliferation of the nation-state since the end of the First World War, its militaries and its imperialisms. Imperialism as examined by Richard Drinnon in *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building*<sup>19</sup> was my first instruction as to how profoundly masculinity and the feminized other drove early "white" "Americans"<sup>20</sup> to destroy the tribes of peoples who inhabited this land. "Westering," in Drinnon's terminology and in the history of his own friends and family as he grew up, involved from the outset and ever after a taking of the land, and a taking of the women; and both of those involved an emasculation of the men called "indian"<sup>21</sup> by the whites called "men."

I grew up on the Pacific slope there, the son of belated pioneers. . . . I can still vividly recall one of [the] stories about homesteading on those dry lands. It pivoted around the popular local pastime that made all "squaws" in the field, except the very old, fair sexual game for mounted ranchers. A twist in the usual upshot of "squaw chasing" came one day, it so happened, when one quick-thinking quarry squatted down and threw sand up into her "private," as Jack always called them, before her ardent pursuer could haul her in with his lariat. The image of the thwarted rider of the purple sage and perhaps

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<sup>19</sup>Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York: Meridian, 1980).

<sup>20</sup>Both "white" and "American" deserve qualifying quotations. The identity of the American and the identity of the white are inextricable. I want to call attention to this through extrication. See my chapter on "History Breaths Us." for fuller treatment.

<sup>21</sup>[sic].

memories of the old days always raised belly laughs . . .

As a boy I shot two of the few remaining native pheasants in the Willamette Valley, just as perhaps a few decades earlier I might have delightedly shot two of the remaining Native Americans.<sup>22</sup>

Drinnon reflects upon the history of the violence called imperialism, and how "all but an extracted sliver" of himself<sup>23</sup> is implicated. And then he sets out to re-write the lie called American History, using documentation of such American celebrities as Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Henry Adams; indian-haters and empire-builders all. Here's a bit of the story that will illuminate the ever-present concern with constructing along with whiteness, maleness; and, its terrible other:

"What shall we do with this man?" McKenney asked Cass, who "answered promptly, '*Make a woman of him.*' And so we did." McKenney commenced the symbolic castration by taking the Indian's knife, breaking it off at the hilt, and placing the handle back in his hand. . . . McKenney made the man strip and put on the petticoat of "an old squaw" . . . Prepared for his execution, the brave was caught off guard by this mortification before an audience of a thousand reds and whites. After he was rushed from the scene of his humiliation, an interpreter caught his first words: "I'd rather

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<sup>22</sup>Drinnon, xviii-xix.

<sup>23</sup>Drinnon, xix. He says, "as a white man I locate myself--all but a painfully extracted sliver of myself--*within* the process under scrutiny. My goal is not to represent, indict, and condemn this common heritage--though judgements are both inevitable and desirable--but to unearth, recall, and respond."

be dead. I am no longer a brave; I'm a WOMAN!" And if this was not exactly what he said, it was what McKenney and Cass wanted to hear.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, imperialism, "American"-style was not always so kind as to be "merely" symbolic. Of course. The ominous will to exterminate was "nestled under [Thomas] Jefferson's philanthropy"<sup>25</sup>; just as certainly as it drove the technology of the Nazi gas chambers, it was the consciously awaited, prepared for, and desired, pursuit of Jeffersonian benevolence. Drinnon's exploration of the mirror image reflection of Monroe's foreign policy and policies on the "indian"<sup>26</sup> leads him to state that: "Both came not . . . from the pen of any one author, Monroe or Jefferson or John Quincy Adams, but were collective creations, expressions of white American nationalism."<sup>27</sup> At the heart of white American nationalism was the creation of the identity of white masculinity. Red Others were pursued to their deaths, and when they didn't die "honorably" as "men," (what this meant was that, "They flew to the thickets and swamps of their female wilderness the way dark inner 'Secrett Corruptions' eluded spiritual authority"<sup>28</sup>), they were exterminated by surrounding the villages and setting fire to all. In the project of extermination of the

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 96.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. Drinnon quotes George Bancroft, "The Extermination of the Pequods," 1834: "The carnage was complete: about six hundred Indians, men, women, and children, perished; most of them in the hideous conflagration. . . . The remnants of the Pequods were pursued into their hiding-places; every wigwam was burned, every settlement was laid waste . . . [thus we have] secured . . . peace. Drinnon, Ibid., 117.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 56.

other, both American and Germany are first cousins. Set Drinnon's work next to Theweleit's, match up the documentation. What appears to set these cousins apart is that the American obsession is with the other without,<sup>29</sup> and the German is an obsession with the other within. But "the fact that the Nazi genocide against the Jews was committed by German speakers, rather than by the rulers of one of the great modern European empires, has helped to obscure the relationship between colonialism and genocide."<sup>30</sup> This obsession that drives extermination is ever a sexualized obsession. It is an obsession that troubles the categories of a male sexuality so rigidly desired--and so desiringly transgressed. By conflating death and sex, through the eroticization of violence, and the inscription of one upon the other, "authentic" masculinity and its transgressions are possessed at once, simultaneously.

.....

Consider this passage:

[with no one] at hand to gaze upon his own, to mark the hideous frown of hate and the more hideous grin of delight, that mingled on, and distorted his visage, as he gloated, snake-like, over that of the chief. As he looked, he drew

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<sup>29</sup>Even if it turns out upon closer scrutiny that this other without, this red man, is all that "the Saints," as Drinnon calls them, fear in themselves, within the context of colonial and imperial violence, and the penetration of the land, westering constructs the "indian" as the other outside.

<sup>30</sup>Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1992), 91. Putting this further into context, he says: ". . . consideration of Germany helps to destabilize the rigid geographical distinction between the imperial world and the colonized world: Germany is within Europe yet has an ambivalent relation to empire, coming late to colonization and eventually seeking empire within Europe."

from its sheath in his girdle his well-worn, but still bright and keen knife,--which he poised in one hand, while feeling, with what seemed extraordinary fearlessness or confidence of his prey, with the other along the sleeper's naked breast, as if regardless how soon he might wake. But Wenonga slept on, though the hand of the white man lay upon his ribs, and rose and fell with the throbs of his warlike heart. The knife took the place of the hand, and one thrust would have driven through the organ that had never beaten with pity or remorse; and that thrust Nathan, quivering through every fibre with nameless joy and exultation, and forgetful of everything but his prey, was about to make.<sup>31</sup>

This is a novel written by a good indian-hater, and the consummation of this eroticized violence of a white man upon a powerful (red) chief was neither long in coming, nor was it unaccompanied by "the wail of a female voice"<sup>32</sup> of a woman who broke in on the two men. Masculine, heterosexual pleasure transferred, conducted, "triangulated"<sup>33</sup> through violence with another man can be fully possessed here, the female wail certifying against what is hidden is plain and bloody sight.

Another scenario from the imaginary of a good fascist warrior:

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<sup>31</sup>Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods or the Jibbenainosay: A Tale of Kentucky* (Philadelphia: 1937). Quoted in: Drinnon, 154.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>33</sup>Terry Castle, "Sylvia Townsend Warner and the counterplot of lesbian fiction," reprinted in Joseph Bristow, editor, *Sexual Sameness: Textual Differences in Lesbian and Gay Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), 133. "The male--female--male erotic triangle remains stable only as long as its single female term is unrelated to any other female term."

She begins to laugh as she had sung, from somewhere deep in her throat: a warbling laugh, a tinkling bell announcing some celebration. He can contain himself no longer. He draws her close, for she belongs to him and he cannot let her go. She does not offer the slightest resistance. Bending her body almost imperceptibly, she glides over to him . . . what else can she do? After all, she belongs to him and her place is with him.

They lie next to each other. She lifts her arms and her dress slips off. Underneath it she is naked. Her nakedness assaults him with a sudden glowing shudder, a gust of wind across a placid lake. He says nothing, but with a jolt his breath rushes into his blood, filling it with pearls of pure, quivering bubbles, a gushing froth, just as the blood of men shot in the lungs leaves them lying yellow and silent like corpses, while the blood spurts endlessly, gurgling and seething at every breath--breath which they heave up, groaning, as if by a block and tackle, the air is so heavy and leaden.<sup>34</sup>

These are long passages; but they need to be so that the "orgiastic delight of violence"<sup>35</sup> can be fully realized. It is not incidental that this passage is taken from a novel entitled *The Nation Awakes*. The above passages are not equivalent, nor do they need be; they implicate different kinds of bodies, differently gendered sexual and racial violence. But both display the phantasms of a freshly forming national masculine identity, deeply wedded to violence and to their

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<sup>34</sup>Franz Schauwecker, *The Nation Awakes (Aufbruch der Nation)* (Berlin: 1929). Quoted in Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 1*, 43.

<sup>35</sup>Drinnon, 155.

own masculinity. In both passages, the female (voice or body) plays the requisite role; her presence there certifies masculinity at its most powerful, that is, at its most deadly. Lest one imagine that these phantasms have passed from our midst, here is current history in the form of a modern American novel with a critical eye towards war, *American Blood*, in which John Nichols opens with the narrative of his primary character, a returning soldier from 'Nam:

it always seemed like an old man's game, and I can actually picture them now, centuries, millenniums of paunchy old geezers, bespangled in gold epaulets and campaign ribbons and medallions, down on their callused knees, and with unspeakable urgency, performing fellatio on the great god of carnage, Mars, until finally their idol comes, filling their mouths with a mixture of blood, maggots, and decaying brains . . . love it or leave it, Gerald Ford.<sup>36</sup>

Nichols didn't forget the importance of triangulating the men and their violence through women; it just doesn't appear in this passage. But situated at dead center of all such texts is the masculine principle of order, and all its transgressions. According to Drinnon, two societies met in colonial New England:

One was unified, visionary, disciplined, and dynamic. The other was divided, self-satisfied, undisciplined, and static. It would be unreasonable to expect that such societies could live side by side indefinitely with no

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<sup>36</sup>John Nichols, *American Blood*, (New York: Random House, 1987), 3-4

penetration of the more fragmented and passive by the more consolidated and active.<sup>37</sup>

We can say that "more than one society" meets within the forming consciousness of the male warrior/pilgrim of imperialist/colonialist; that what the imaginary of that consciousness must do is to relegate all that is not masculinized onto an other, who must then be penetrated. One cannot penetrate oneself into dominion. It requires that an other be present, and if the other that is present is male, it then requires yet another other, one that is female.<sup>38</sup>

I want to refer back now to the passage by Halperin, in which he asks whether the three cases of homosexuality can be said to be trans-cultural or trans-historical, and call attention to what his rhetorical probe fails to take account of, that is, the problematic of gender. What is not asked is whether sexuality can be considered to be trans-gendered. Scripted in plain sight on these provocative questions are the markings of power between males. I speak here of the descriptions and juxtapositions of the sexual practices of other times and cultures, of the function to which the descriptions are put, and the meanings which are possible within modern recognitions of power. The centrality of the male and his sex acts situate the female

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<sup>37</sup>Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). Quoted in Drinnon, 361.

<sup>38</sup>I'm not trying to be funny here. This is not an allusion to Neal Milner's *Dead White Males*, performed in Honolulu in the Spring of 1992. The reason why his script was so funny *and* so difficult to participate in was because it re-enacted the scripted conflicts *literally* on the stage. The production of the play was the production of what it re-presented.

as the signifier of trans-historical, trans-cultural discontinuity. She is "placed" there to make difficult any easy translations across time and space. She "proves" the male (homosexual) point; that sexuality is or can be more diverse, more interesting, and less encumbering than we moderns think. Without her there, the rhetorical probe can't take place. The female never stops being indispensable to male rhetoric, art, philosophy, image, phantasms; but for her, the sanctuary of being in company with the homosexual male extends only as far as the body. The assertion that "homosexual desire consists precisely in a subversion of phallic dominance"<sup>39</sup> is a radical stance for one who is capable of imagining a critique of the phallus. However, from the standpoint of the non-penis'd person,<sup>40</sup> that phallus looks like the maypole around which all the boys are gathered.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 2*, 373. Theweleit proposes that the fascist warriors' "reverence for the hard, upstanding, towering penis is a further sign that they cannot be seen as "homosexuals." He sees the retaining of the phallus as indissoluble signifier as a hetero-male concern. I disagree; this is a concern for all males, it lies at the heart of male hetero-homo struggle. But, it makes sense that for one in Theweleit's critical position in regard to the question of "Homosexuality and the White Terror" (page 306), that is, as a heterosexual son of the white terror of fascism, that he would figure it that way. *Between males*, hetero- and homo-, this critical observation makes sense. Theweleit's work in the section on male homosexuality reads less confidently than other sections, I think for this reason. The female gaze set on the maypole reads it differently.

<sup>40</sup>The source of this phrase is John Stoltenberg, who appears more extensively elsewhere in this text. His phrasing of it is usually inclusive, as in..."we who are penis'd."

<sup>41</sup>Lets try it this way: the displacement of the *phallus* in homosexual acts is proportionate to the placement of the *penis* where it ought not be. This is how it might be said that homosexual desire is the subversion of phallic dominance at the same time that it can be said that the "hard, upstanding, towering penis" is a concern to both hetero- and homo- males. The phallic displacement occurs because the wrong signifier of dominance is present when the penetrated body is male rather than female. Now, this gets trickier when, within the context of homo-social organization, a great deal of pleasure is taken by male- but not homo-identified men from such things as one's relation to one's horse, one's gun, one's fellow warrior, violence towards the enemy (male and

But you know, this available, rhetorical female she's getting really tired of this role. It would seem, in Halperin's examples, that she been been waiting around in New Guinea<sup>42</sup> for herself to become an adult so as to be available for all those boys to get finished ejaculating with each other for years on end, while she has no sexuality or sexual practices of her own. The question of whether "anyone of these three [male] persons share the same sexuality with the modern homosexual" grows less fascinating at the moment when one attempts to think what these signifying women were up to in *the(ir)* meantime. But in considering the sexual(ized) nature of nationalism, or of nation-building, what becomes salient is that the battle over turf (and this is what She always is, covered or bare, bodied or landed) is the struggle between those who are penised over the question of manhood. It is the possession of manhood that is signified by the domination over the feminized by the masculinized, be it land or body, male or female. The desired feminized territory signifies the acquisition and maintenance of manhood, which is equivalent to power. It is in this realm that many male-identified distinctions between the heterosexual and homosexual begin to diminish.<sup>43</sup>

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female)--the possibilities are many. It is here that Theweleit is at his most brilliant.

<sup>42</sup>I recognize that I fail to address the issue of appropriating other cultures here. My sarcastic utilization of these unknown, waiting women in order to express my continually evoked snittiness regarding this *ever-present* persistence in (it seems) every form of argument, derives from at least as much ignorance about their lives as Halperin.

<sup>43</sup>At least, they do for me. They are still violently contested among men, and between hetero- and homo- males.

Given the intense combat over masculinity, over the possession of something called "manhood," it makes sense that one category on the cross-grid of sexuality exists invisibly throughout much of the violent contending. Even in Nazi Germany, lesbian women (aryan, of course) were relatively protected by their invisibility. The revised Paragraph 175 against homosexuality in German law did not ban sexual acts between women.<sup>44</sup> The Nazis, in the building of a national fascist identity, were far more concerned about masculine sexual practices than with female. They appear to have been guided by a still-existing powerful phallogocentric denial; that if there isn't a penis in the room, there can't be any sex going on.<sup>45</sup> This inability to imagine women to act sexually except by design of a male, whether by obligation or by force, not only acts to protect the phantasms in the on-going production of masculinity. That production cannot consider the lesbian female as a player in the contending sexual combat because:

what 'makes' a woman is a personal dependency upon a man . . . lesbian [being] the only concept . . . which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), . . .

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<sup>44</sup>Plant, 114.

<sup>45</sup>Gudrun Hauer, free-lance political writer in Vienna in interview during the fall of 1988 discussed with me the somewhat pathetic, hilarious considerations by Nazi jurists in order to determine whether women having sex together constituted a crime. It was generally decided that having two women touch one another was analogous to bathing another person, and therefore was harmless. The result of this is that lesbian women, or those presumed or accused to be, weren't targetted as were homosexual men. Nevertheless, when those women who *were* sent to a camp were punished or tortured, it involved sexual violence. Of course.

because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman either economically or politically or ideologically.<sup>46</sup>

To which I would add that she is also not understood to be a woman sexually. In using this passage from Wittig, I have intentionally squewed her critique, taking what was in her hands a liberatory argument and bending it to reflect how invisibility of the lesbian body works to de-sexualize her, to construct her as lacking in the very power that she does hold. The irrelevance of the male to the lesbian, in every way articulated by Wittig is threatening; but perhaps the most profound danger that her visibility, her actualization, her real presence in the male imaginary reveals the lies hidden in plain sight in the realm of the sexual; if there *is* sex without a penis in the room, then what's the use of manhood and how do we know we have it? But, more is revealed by asking the question differently. How to maintain the distinction between homoeroticism and homo-sexualism in a masculinist culture if women have a sexuality that is not colonized by male desire, that is not formed entirely around the production of masculinity, and that is not in service as a conduit from male to male, *while simultaneously* maintaining the power to transgress masculine erotic constriction through violence. The lesbian woman is not a homosexual for similar reason that she is not a woman. Historically, the homosexual is not

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<sup>46</sup>Monique Wittig, "One Is Not Born a Woman," *Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations Between Women and Men*, 2nd edition, eds. Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 151-152.

only male, but he is engaged in many of the same dances around the Maypole as the hetero-sexual.

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What *is* a homosexual, anyway? Ask around. See what you get. Ask Roy Cohn, legal counsel to Joe McCarthy, who assisted McCarthy in exposing Communists and homosexuals. Despite his own sexual relations with men, he maintained a lifelong public posture against homosexuality and gay rights.<sup>47</sup> Cohn's denial of his own sexual activities is:

fabulously expressed by Tony Kushner in . . . *Angels in America: Part One, Millennium Approaches*. Kushner's Cohn says . . . "Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council. . . I have sex with men. But unlike nearly every other man of whom this is true, I bring the guy I'm screwing to the White House and Ronald Reagan smiles at us and shakes his hand. Because *what* I am is defined entirely by *who* I am. Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man, Henry, who fucks around with guys."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Dumm, *ibid.*, 146. From Chapter Three, "George Bush, or Sex in the Superior Position." This chapter was sent to me by the author. It also appeared in a developing stage as a seminar at the Department of Political Science at UH in 1986.

<sup>48</sup>Dumm, *Ibid.*, 177, footnote 66, quoted from Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: Part One, Millennium Approaches* (New York: New York Theatre Group, 1993), 45.

Kushner's Cohn knows what Tom Dumm knows as he writes his way through *United States* :

the mirror our Presidents hold up to us, reflecting the men of United States . . . in that mirror we straight men in the superior position see ourselves fucking, fucking each other, and other others. We experience the politics of the passive position to be the negative pole of straight male desire, and the passive position is the one most of us endure at work.<sup>49</sup>

It is remarkable to now have a small cadre of straight men talking straight about the relationship of sex to power. Properly, it cannot be termed a relationship, suggesting two defined activities. Rather, Dumm recommends relinquishing male resistance to this idea: that the achievement of our United States is an ongoing sexual accomplishment. Dumm may write in future chapters<sup>50</sup> in the direction of asking how that specifically finds its way back to the social construction of and reality of the legitimate and metaphoric national fuck; that is, the female. But I think not. He is more concerned with how sex is brought to bear upon the growth of the nation, than with how the growth of the nation is brought to bear upon sex. Homosexual *acts* far more than *identities* inform his work; sexualized power among men far more than between men and women. Tom Dumm is talking to the straight boys about their

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>50</sup>I am currently working from the manuscript of Chapter Three sent to me by the author.

masculine culture. John Stoltenberg, like Vidal, a defier of category and of identity, is working on this:

Gravity just is; we don't have to make it be. Not so the idea of sexual identity. Sexual identity is a political idea. Its force derives entirely from the human effort required to sustain it, and it requires the lifelong, nearly full-time exertion of everybody for its maintenance and verification . . . We very much prefer to believe, instead, that it has a metaphysical existence . . . the idea of one's own sexual identity must be re-created, over and over again, in action and sensation--in doing things that make one feel really male or really female and in not doing things that leave room for doubt . . .

This is the point . . . at which we can see that we are not dealing with anything so superficial as roles, images, or stereotypes, but that in fact we have come face to face with an aspect of our identities even more basic than our corporeality--namely, our faith that there are two sexes and our secret and public desperation to belong to one not the other.<sup>51</sup>

These remarks, taken from a chapter called "Rapist Ethics," frame the inquiry with the question: Why do men rape? Once one absorbs the fundamental argument that the idea of the male sex, like the idea of an Aryan race,<sup>52</sup> is a fabrication, the answer to why men rape appears less fascinating and complex than it ought to be, given the

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<sup>51</sup>John Stoltenberg, "Rapist Ethics," *Refusing To Be A Man: Essays on Sex and Justice* (New York: Penguin, 1989) 10-15.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 29.

pain and fear generated by the raping male. Raping men rape so that all men can have something called Manhood. Like fascism, manhood is an idea that can only exist contingent upon the belief that to be a real man means you get to believe that someone else is not as real.<sup>53</sup> The belief in manhood, like the belief in the aryan, cannot exist apart from force and violence, because the belief itself is violent.

Nationalism is co-contingent with Manhood and with Sexuality. How Sex is constituted has everything to do with how Nation is constituted. Stoltenberg makes explicit how power is made sensate in a world in which the penis is supposed to be hell-bent on penetration.<sup>54</sup> Or, to put a finer point on it, in which penis and penetration constitute the meaning of one another. Particular acts, and the correlated appropriate(d) sensations, provide the requisite certainty of one's own sexual identity. Any sensations, any acts, any unintentionally erotic sensation "experienced in a receptive, communing mode--instead of in an aggressive and controlling and violative mode . . . can shut down [male] sensory systems."<sup>55</sup> This is sex that is conducted such that the man stays Man and the woman stays Woman. According to Stoltenberg, this is the kind of sex men have *in order to have* a manhood.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 204

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 33. For visual reference, look at the film *The Piano*. In the text it is scene 104, 89-90, where Ada is exploring the body of her husband. He is utterly unable to maintain his position.

<sup>56</sup>Emphasis in the original text.

There is a purpose for all this. In order to construct manhood, just as white people construct a white, an aryan, race:

We have to make a lie seem real. It's a very big lie. We each have to do our part. Otherwise the lie will look like the lie that it is. Imagine the enormity of what we each must do to keep the lie alive in each of us. Imagine the awesome challenge we face to make the lie a social fact. It's a lifetime mission for each of us born with a penis: to have sex in such a way that the male sex will seem real.<sup>57</sup>

When Manhood is most threatened, it exerts itself even more vigorously; violence and sex become more deeply inscribed upon one another, more highly eroticized. "Sex in which real men use their penises like weapons in sex . . . *makes the lie indelible.*"<sup>58</sup> Look at Sut Jhally's *Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video*.<sup>59</sup> There is nothing unfamiliar about any of the images collected and collaged here. An hour of viewing MTV confirms the theses of Jhally's work. It becomes evident that the codes of commercial television, advertising *and* programs, are drawn from the same pool of images as MTV. What shocks the literate viewer is that when *not* isolated, when focused upon as Jhalley does, these images become the

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 35-36. Emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup>Sut Jhally, *Dreamworlds: Desire/Sex/Power in Rock Video* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Department of Communication, Center for the Study of Communication, distributed by Facets, 1990).

normalized, naturalized reiteration of the big lie of Manhood. And it's handmaid, the tiny little lie of womanhood: **MANHOOD**/womanhood.

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Mieke Bal opens *Death and Dissymetry* with a quote from Andrea Dworkin:

Men love death. In everything they make, they hollow out a central place for death, let its rancid smell contaminate every dimension of whatever still survives. Men especially love murder. In art they celebrate it, in life they commit it. They embrace murder as if life without it would be devoid of passion, meaning, and action, as if murder were solace, stilling their sobs as they mourn the emptiness and alienation of their lives.<sup>60</sup>

I stack up the texts of *Male Fantasies* and of *American Blood*, and there it is, color-coordinated black and red on white,<sup>61</sup> a compendium of fantasy and atrocity; texts of war, and of desire and maleness, violence and eroticism. And, speaking back to them, *Death*

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<sup>60</sup>Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1.

<sup>61</sup>Theweleit, *Ibid.*, 283. He codes these three colors as "three perceptual identities" of the fascist warrior: "bloody mass" = red; "empty space" = white; melting "blackout" = black. He extends the codes: *Black* is the color of forbidden love between men, of a dance of death in dark, deranged ecstasy--the ecstasy of a physical body overloaded, of mutual recognition in armed combat hand-to-hand . . . *White* is the anti-hybrid, brilliant cold, the shroud of devivification. It is the marble body of the white countess nurse, the womb from which no teeth-gnashing monsters threaten. Whitewash: the *shot* that banishes disorder . . . *Red* is female flesh wallowing in its blood; a reeking mass, severed from the man. Red is a mouth dripping blood--now beaten. Theweleit provides massive documentation to support his discussion on colors.

and *Dissymetry*, "establish[ing] a *countercoherence* . . . which is a deconstruction in its own right but also more than that . . . the reality of gender-bound violence."<sup>62</sup> That countercoherence, the reality and recognition of gender-bound violence, like the recurring train to Auschwitz in *Shoah*, leads to manhood. Depending on the particular text or narrative, this theme travels through one or another male province; through the father (Bal), the fascist warrior (Theweileit), the American liberator (Nichols). The preoccupation with manhood, or historically with manliness,<sup>63</sup> compels both heterosexual and homosexual men into action. It would be more precise to say that it has propelled all penis-ed people into a series of practices (in which each can be seen as literally "practicing" to become, to be, something that is a phantasm, a figment of imagination) that would establish the imagined ownership of "one's" manhood. War is the highest form of this pathetic and obscenely construed desire to form an identity premised upon death. The nation is the imagined community<sup>64</sup> for which one performs (in the same way that men can be said to "practice," they can also be said to "perform") the requisite script.

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<sup>62</sup>Mieke Bal, *Ibid.*, 5. The color codes here? Black and white on a background of a very bright red.

<sup>63</sup>George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985, 23-25. Mosse says: "Manliness drew upon the aristocratic ideal of knighthood. Nevertheless, it was a bourgeois concept. During the wars of the French revolution . . . many middle-class volunteers rushed to the colors, inspired by love of their nation and a desire to prove their manhood. Manliness . . . reinforced the division of labor which was a requisite of bourgeois society not only in economics but in social and sexual life as well." He goes on to situate the homosexual male as the marker of the extent to which the "imperatives of the modern age" demanded rigid distinctions between masculinity and femininity.

<sup>64</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). Reprinted in 1985, 15.

This script that is generated is one that brings into being two coherent phantasms; when inventing something out of nothing, it is a powerful tactic to legitimate the authority of the phantasm.<sup>65</sup> In this case, neither phantasm exists, but the narrative of each legitimates and confirms the other. Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist.<sup>66</sup> Juxtaposed to this imaginary, there is this: The penises exist; the male sex does not.<sup>67</sup> Ultimately, the invention of manhood has been the most effective strategy to keep in operation a "fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings."<sup>68</sup> I wonder as I read Benedict Anderson's reflections why he directs the reader towards the "dying for" and away from the "killing," particularly given what he proceeds to discuss. Perhaps the initial organization of human consciousness to embrace death requires a cultural narrative of manly imperialism; "nations themselves *are* narrations. The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture

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<sup>65</sup>In Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Black and White in Color*, the French priests demonstrate the power of Christianity to the colonized people by producing a bicycle ridden by one of their converts. The technology and the skill to employ it performs a powerful legitimating function in establishing the authority (pathetic as it may appear in the film) of the priests and their Christianity.

<sup>66</sup>Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, (169). Quoted by Benedict Anderson, 15. Emphasis Anderson's.

<sup>67</sup>Stoltenberg, 30.

<sup>68</sup>Benedict Anderson, 16.

and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them."<sup>69</sup>

What are the theme of these narratives, what compels men to songs of death, how do men come to desire them, what constitutes this particular will to power? Theweleit has mapped the most salient site of these narratives of nation, gender, and death in the Freikorps of Nazi Germany:

Nation is the fusion of two antagonistic aspirations within the "heroic man" himself. . . . what the fascist understands by the term "unity" is a state in which oppressor and oppressed are violently combined to form a structure of domination . . . since "unity" rigidly fuses [such things as] "interior" to "exterior," . . . . it protects [the soldier male] from the death of splitting or decomposition. What seems to hold the masculine-soldierly body together is his compulsion to oppress the body of another (or bodies, or the body in his own body). His relation to the bodies he subordinates is one of violence and, in extreme cases, of murder.

The concept of nation can be seen, then, as the most explicit available foundation of male demands for domination.

Nation is the opposite of mass, femininity, equality, sensuous pleasure, desire and revolution.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), xii.

<sup>70</sup>Theweleit, 86-87.

[The] constant goal [of the soldier male] is to avoid the experience of fragmentation by fusing himself into a unity in which he remains on top. Only this can make him whole.<sup>71</sup>

There are many ready to insist that there are different kinds of nations; that the production of the Nazi warrior and Nazi nation would be the extreme version of a bad novel or film about the modern nation state; that what occurs in the political realm can be avoided in the private; that what happens in war can be delineated from what happens during times of "no conflict"; that things are better now than then; and that there really are such things as private safety zones for those who--well, for those who believe in them. One reason why it is possible to engage in such deception is because of the extent to which "political coherence has repressed and subordinated the domestic violence."<sup>72</sup> To contract that further, the scripting of the narratives of gender and of nation has moved continually from the extraterritorial to the visceral, from the masculinized to the feminized, from the body politic to the flesh, with full license and in full violence.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>72</sup>Bal, 242.

## Chapter 7

### History Breathes Us

Those . . . who imagine that history flatters them (as it does, indeed, since they wrote it) are impaled on their history like a butterfly on a pin and become incapable of seeing or changing themselves, or the world.<sup>1</sup>

James Baldwin

We who are white are impaled on our history, and we keep busy disappearing the history of others. We spend inordinate amounts of time and energy demanding absolution for what we do, or permission to continue. We who are women who are white are impaled on a history of slavery that we did not have the authority to create, but which awarded us direct and immediate privileges, then and now. Slavery has created a privileged cage for white women, as colonialism has been. In the representation of the colonies of New Zealand in Jane Campion's film *The Piano*<sup>2</sup> and the family portraits of *A Photographer in the Kingdom: Christian J. Hedemann's Early Images of Hawai'i*<sup>3</sup>, of the haole families who owned or who ran the plantations of Hawai'i, there is the profound bleakness of pathetic efforts to reinstitutionalize the meaning of life according to the homeland of Scotland, or of the colonies of the northeastern

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<sup>1</sup>James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt," *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985), 410.

<sup>2</sup>Jane Campion, *The Piano* (New York: Miramax Books, Hyperion 1993).

<sup>3</sup>Lynn Ann Davis, *A Photographer in the Kingdom: Christian J. Hedemann's Early Images of Hawai'i* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1988).

seaboard. And, in Toni Morrison's explication of Willa Cather's *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, "a troubled, disappointed [white] woman confined to the prison of her defeated flesh, whose social pedestal rests on the sturdy spine of racial degradation; whose privileged gender has *nothing* that elevates it except color."<sup>4</sup> We white women have been impaled on a history that we did not have the authority to create, in which we barely appear, but from which we have nevertheless borne a confined privilege, from which we have had to "gather identity unto ourselves."<sup>5</sup> The gathering of identity unto ourselves continues. It has to continue. Because it is a lie, plastered upon another lie. bell hooks argues:

Slavery in no way altered the hierarchical social status of the white male but it created a new status for the white female. The only way her new status could be maintained was through the constant assertion of her superiority over the black woman and man . . . [it] was in her relationship to the black female slave that the white woman could best assert her power.<sup>6</sup>

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What is a war story? Here is one, told by Audre Lorde:

The AA subway train to Harlem. I clutch my mother's sleeve, her arms full of shopping bags, christmas-heavy. The wet smell of

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<sup>4</sup>Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Harvard Press, Cambridge, 1992), 25-26. Emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>6</sup>hooks, bell, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 136-37.

winter clothes, the train's lurching. My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us - probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes past my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train. Born and bred a New York City child, I quickly slide over to make room for my mother to sit down. No word has been spoken. I'm afraid to say anything to my mother because I don't know what I've done. I look at the sides of my snowpants, secretly. Is there something on them? Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.<sup>7</sup>

Any white person who denies recognition of this story is in such profound denial of their own culture and their own identity that they cannot be said to be socially responsible in any possible context. The

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<sup>7</sup>Audre Lorde, *Audre, Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press Feminist Series, 1984), 147-148.

only bit of space I can write in here for one who insists against this statement is to say that perhaps *this particular story* does not carry the potent meaning that is required to override the political lies of a liberal white racist culture. Perhaps *another story* is required. Perhaps a story of one's own?

Noam Chomsky is asked how he came to see the world as he does, to take the positions that he has on behalf of others.<sup>8</sup> He answers by describing the nature of Jewish intellectual culture and its relation to social action, and he talks about an uncle who operated a kiosk in New York City who had a great influence on him, and then he's asked about "the schoolyard story." To this he responds that this is a personal story unlikely to have meaning to anyone but himself, but he agrees to retell it. He remembers a boy at school who was frequently made fun of by others. One day, a bully from his grade threatens this boy that he is going to go get a bigger bully from a higher grade to beat him up. Chomsky speaks about going up and standing next to the boy for a while, feeling that someone should. But after a while, he becomes very frightened, and he leaves the boy alone. He speaks of the shame he felt, and feels still. What is eloquent about Chomsky's story is that it is both small, and very significant. It may explain his life's work, a series of atonements for having failed another small boy, an absolute sense that one must never abandon another in trouble. But I think the meaning is less theatrical than that. It has to do with what makes Chomsky

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<sup>8</sup>In an interview that appears in: *Manufacturing Consent*, the documentary video on Chomsky's politics and public appearances, 1993.

remarkable; that he did not produce a new story about the event, so that he could more easily live with his own history, that he did not create a lie so that he could forget. That although he failed to stand by his classmate, he was able to stand by his failure, so that he could *remember*. It is here that the link between his story and his work resides. The boy Chomsky made a decision to live in remembrance of truthful stories, even when they reflect poorly on him.

Perhaps a story by Marguerite Duras, from "The Two Ghettos," in which she interviews three survivors; a woman who as a young girl survived the Warsaw Ghetto and uprising, and two Algerian men living in Paris ghettos in the 1960s. In her interview of these survivors, she asks them similar questions regarding four themes of their lives: fear, happiness, work and vengeance. She asks the Algerians: What words define your life?

Terrorized: That says it all . . . Many French people look at us and see the devil. We know that...When we take the Metro home from work and discover that we're the only Algerian in the car. . . .

Among the French people in the car was an old woman who was standing quite close to me, her handbag rubbing up against me. Next to her were two policemen. So I did *what we always do* in such situations: I put both hands in my belt, over my stomach, in plain view, and I turned around. The old woman also turned and moved back in front of me. She did it twice. *I was afraid*. I shoved people without excusing myself. A seat was open and I took it. The old woman wound up next to me

again. Everybody was looking at us. But at the other end of the car there was another old woman who intervened. She said to the first woman, 'I'm watching you. What you're doing is an injustice.'<sup>9</sup>

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Audre Lorde's story means something to me, but not only for the reason that I have seen it occur. I have witnessed, like the old woman in the Metro, people culturally and racially interchangeable with me, in acts of perverse injustice. I have witnessed, and I have gone to stand by someone in trouble. I have witnessed, and watched, unable to move, inept. I have witnessed, and had to leave the room to cry or scream from impotence. I have witnessed, and imagined I was watching something other than injustice. But, I have never witnessed and seen myself in the perpetrator. Not until I read Lorde's story.

This is not about guilt; it is about knowledge. It is about seeing oneself and one's culture, discovering in a brief flash one's history. I saw that I was meant to be the woman in the fur hat. That everything about my culture had prepared me to be her. To whatever extent that her being did not manage to fully take hold of and occupy my body and soul can be taken (minimally) as a hopeful sign that it is possible for the corporative desires and designs of the

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<sup>9</sup>Marguerite Duras, *Outside: Selected Writings*, (London:Fontana Paperbacks, 1987), 124. Emphasis added.

institutions of school, church, family, and neighborhood (and, even the department of transportation) to fail. This assertion is not to claim exemption from deep knowledge of racist beliefs and actions. No. I know what I am meant to think and feel and see when I am with a Black woman and her child on a streetcar, traveling through the East Liberty district of Pittsburgh. I know what all whites know. I have been through serious and abiding training: to keep my purse close to my body (*why anyone would imagine that I at the age of 17 would have been able to prevent anyone who wanted my purse*); to not pick up a comb or brush (*it might have belonged to one of them*); to not get off the streetcar except in the most populated, well-lit areas (*large numbers of them are said to be safer than being alone with one or two*); to not use the public restrooms in these districts (*better to lose control of your bladder before reaching home*); in any district's stores, to not hang my purse on the hooks in the bathroom stall (*they're snatching purses now by a gadget that lifts your purse right off that hook, can you believe it!*); to never, never take a ride with a jitney driver (*not only are they illegal, they have no insurance and they're dangerous*). The scripts and scenes of the training of a white racist appears endless. In most cases, it would not be possible to identify the speaker, because there would have been too many, the message was not always verbal, and perhaps most significantly, the word *they* would always be used to signify *colored*. There was nothing remarkable at all about my training as a racist, except that it was training in the absent. That is, until I began working after high school, there were only *white people* in the neighborhood, the school,

and the streets between. I was raised in an environment that was designed to make invisible the threat, at the same time that it made tangible the fear, of those known as *them*.

*Look at that little girl. Look at the look on her face. She . . . she hates us. She just hates us.*

It was one of those uncomfortable moments when I had the same thought as my mother. I had seen the same girl, the same look. I remember her still, exactly as she sat on her Sunday afternoon porch, with her mother and brother. I was with my mother and brother and father and we were driving through a nearby but unfamiliar neighborhood. There must have been a special reason, because our routes were very steady and regular on Sundays to Grandma's. I was wondering about the look on her face, too. But I didn't like it one bit that my mother and I might have seen the same thing in that little girl. I felt as if I had been caught.<sup>10</sup> However, my mother clearly took this hatred to be a particular *quality*, or a characteristic flaw in the girl (or more likely, I now see, in her race), whereas I was busy looking for a *reason*. People don't just *hate*. There would be a reason, I thought. It might be that we had a car. They were clearly poorer than our family. I thought it likely that they didn't have a car, like our Irish relatives who lived on Coal Street quite nearby this family, and who didn't have as much money as we did either.

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<sup>10</sup>Being schooled Catholic means going through life feeling as if one is about to be caught, or just has been. This sometimes can function as an incisive indicator of reality. More often, it creates a fantasy world in which one imagines one's acts to be immensely significant.

Instead of agreeing or arguing with my mother, both of which were dangerous, I remained silent and thought over this problem. It now appears that I was quite correct. The car *is* significant to this story, but not in the way that I was able to grasp that day. My family had the ability to tool through her family's neighborhood, to gaze out our windows at them, and to wonder at her hatred of us. Inside our car, (where my dad said "*lock your doors,*" and we said "*why,*" and he said "*because I said so*") it was unthinkable that what was read as hatred was also fear, fear *of us*.

We can't afford to think about that, about how much Blacks fear us, about how much reason they have to do so. Howard Beach is the story of what it means for Black men to find themselves needing to stop for gas, or a phone call, or to use a restroom, in a white district. bell hooks has spoken about how the further they traveled into the white district, the more suspect they would appear to white people, who in their own neighborhoods see normal behavior by Blacks to be evidence of guilt. Because of this, the fear of stopping there at all would drive the men further and further into the danger zone, in hopes of getting through without stopping at all.<sup>11</sup> The little girl on her porch in Pittsburgh in 1955 could hate us because we were white and by virtue of that, our hands looked to us clean of all the reasons she might have to feel hate and fear us.

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<sup>11</sup>bell hooks spoke at UH Manoa Campus Center and at the Women's Center in Spring of 1992.

This moment is marked so clearly in my memory because it didn't happen again, or perhaps before. The probability that it would happen was diminished by every effort in white middle-class neighborhoods in the 1950s to avoid it. Considering the lack of explicitly racist behavior and language in this training, it takes on a metaphysical quality. It is quite impossible to identify the infinite details of this crucial training. Certainly, part of it involved a 7-year-long torture and tenure at St. James Catholic School. I only realized as an adult that the reason for my being at St. James had less to do with religion and more to do with protecting me from *them*.<sup>12</sup> But the flaw in the brilliance of having so many institutions doing the training is that it creates contending claims. I now think that it was this very institution that was meant to keep me safe and white that provoked in me a way to resist, although I do not know that this word can be properly used for what I was doing at the time. I think it was just a matter of surviving, and disbelieving the enormous, cruel and obvious lies, the rules, the confessions, the stories, of the Catholic faith and most of its agents, enabled me to do that. Either they're lying or I'm crazy; this dictum helps to sharpen the will. Having learned the art of disbelief in one terrifying and early arena makes more likely that one will apply it in others. Racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, heterosexism and homophobia, every kind of hatred of another, every belief in the Supreme, and its extension the supreme Self, all depend upon a metaphysics of meaning not unlike

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<sup>12</sup>The realization that my parents considered the threat of *them* to be a more terrifying reality than *the nuns and priests* of the 1950's truly, *truly* stunned me when it struck.

the religious. Being asked to believe in that which is counterintuitive to what we see and feel early on can and does produce dependable members to an oppressive social order. It may produce a hermeneutics of mystery. That is, if it is possible to teach a child that those who exhibit cruel behavior towards you mean you well, it is possible thereafter to teach any blessed mystery.

But, it doesn't have "to take" any better than Richard Nixon's early training at Quaker Meeting "took." It may just as well produce a fundamental ability to suspect foul psychic play.

As adults, we are easily fooled because we are so anxious to be fooled. But children are very different. Children, not yet aware that it is dangerous to look too deeply at anything, look at everything, look at each other, and draw their own conclusions.<sup>13</sup>

Baldwin is here speaking of the *danger* that exists for a Black child to believe in the metaphysics of white lies. He says: In order for me to live, I decided very early that some mistake had been made somewhere...if I was a "nigger" in your eyes, there was something about *you*-----there was something *you* needed.<sup>14</sup> When a Black child sees this, and eventually finds the language to say it, the frame of reference is a literal one. That is, Baldwin is speaking about whether or not he lives or dies. When a white child sees this, and eventually finds the language to say it, the frame of reference is a

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<sup>13</sup>James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers," *Ibid.*, 326-327.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 329.

metaphysical one. It is metaphysical because it is concerned with an identity that is based on the lie that whiteness exists. In one respect both Black and white can be said to suffer from the whitening of history, and that is in the death of the spirit. Unrelenting lies asserted by whites about Blackness are the equivalent of lies about whiteness. These lies about Black identity are the equivalent of lies about white identity.

if you are compelled to lie about one aspect of anybody's history, you must lie about it all . . . if you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then *you have done something to yourself*. You are mad.<sup>15</sup>

Here it is. Every fabrication, every fantasy, about the Black slave, about the Black American is the equivalent of a fabrication, a fantasy, about the white American. This is why it can be said that we don't exist, except to the extent that we claim that we do. I do not mean this as some kind of advanced post-modern workshop on the construct of the self. It is the politically defined historical dilemma of the male in respect to the female, of gentile to Jew, of white to black, of hetero to homo; they function like binary constructs kept in orbit only by the gravitational existence of the other. The survival of the lie of dominance depends upon the spiritual death of we who wear white. Within white supremacy, the death of body and soul of the Black is the pathological condition of

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 329. Italics added.

the spiritual death of the white. Within patriarchy, the death of body and soul of the female is the pathological condition of the spiritual death of the male. *This* is the nature of madness.

The white child who wishes to avoid this legacy of madness will find it is very difficult to negotiate white-reality. If you are white and wish to know yourself and therefore your history, the question of where to situate oneself is extremely difficult. Extremely. Here is a person alien to all that has been familiar: family, neighborhood, humor, old friends, potential new friends, of all that might be taken for granted. *Here* is the postmodern workshop of the self, and it is very, very difficult. Nothing stands still. Ever. Because everything that does is dead, its roots poisoned with lies, fabrications, fantasies. Here is the destabilized white subject.

I am comforted by any of these speakings for, to tell you the truth, they make me feel at home. I am living far from where I was born; it has been twenty years since I have lived in that place where folks, Black and white, spoke to each other when they met on the street or in the road . . . The pain, of course, is the other side of this speaking, and the sorrow: when I have only to turn two corners to go back in the basement door of my building, to meet Mr. Boone, the janitor, who doesn't raise his eyes to mine, or his head, when we speak.

I think how I just want to feel at home, where people know me; instead I remember, when I meet Mr. Boone, that home was a place of forced subservience, and I know that my wish is that of an adult wanting to stay a child: to

be known by others, but to know nothing, to feel no responsibility.<sup>16</sup>

I want to jump for joy to read this, the truth telling of it. Minnie Bruce Pratt goes on to describe the process:

Instead, when I walk out in my neighborhood, each speaking-to-another person has become fraught, for me, with the history of race and sex and class; as I walk I have a constant interior discussion with myself, questioning how I acknowledge the presence of another, what I know or don't know about them, and what it means how they acknowledge me. It is an exhausting process, this moving from the experience of the "unknowing majority" (as Maya Angelou called it) into consciousness. It would be a lie to say this process is comforting.<sup>17</sup>

A voice in the wilderness, this. Asking itself: *Am I getting ready to be in the world that now exists?* Telling itself: *I am white. I wear the privilege of whiteness, and the deliberate ignorance of it. I bear the response-ability of the hard work that is required to re-figure its new place(s) in the present world.* Here is the New World, and it exists for the reason that Black Americans<sup>18</sup> have performed

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<sup>16</sup>Minnie Bruce Pratt, "Identity: Skin Blood Heart," in Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt, and Barbara Smith, *Yours In Struggle: Three Feminist Perspectives on Anti-Semitism and Racism* (New York: Long Haul Press, 1984), 11-12.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>18</sup>By focusing on the history of the enslavement of Blacks by whites, I do not mean to diminish the histories of these united states (as Tom Dumm has termed it) that precede, accompany, and follow Black slavery. Racism in "these united states" has been organized around the matrix of Black/white. This organizing principle makes it possible to disappear the violence done to the vast tribal cultures that called this land Mother, done in the name of white civilization.

courageous acts on their own behalf. Many have broken faith with the lies. These acts of truth-telling signal an opportunity to we who wear white; we have been inadvertently given the chance to breathe.<sup>19</sup> If we do not take it, we have only ourselves to blame.

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This leads to the critical and painful question for white women, one that will not go away. If "only a creature despised by history finds history a questionable matter",<sup>20</sup> why do we white women not question the history from which we had to gather identity? American women writers, filmmakers, theorists, artists, who are Black, Asian, and Latina have been capable of doing this in powerful ways. They have found their voice(s) to say what it has meant to be Black, Asian, Latina *and* female, and they have said it in ways that have frequently meant division within their communities, within their race. It has also meant for these women engaging in a larger redemptive process in order to forgive the men within their communities. This process is both political and spiritual, because for the Black woman "to separate [her] self from black men is to allow America the final triumph of division."<sup>21</sup> For Kathleen Collins, Ayoka

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<sup>19</sup>I am not emphasizing the notion proposed by many since Marx that it is the proletariat, the masses, the oppressed that must liberate the master from his oppressiveness. Every courageous break with the lies taken by a Black person has been done for their survival. If it is possible for whites to survive in the face of our past, our history, that form of survival depends entirely upon ourselves and our own work towards it. Nothing less.

<sup>20</sup>Baldwin, *Ibid.*, 410.

<sup>21</sup>David Nicholson, "Conflict and complexity: Film-maker Kathleen Collins," in *Black Film Review*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1986), 17. Cited by Alile Sharon Larkin, "Black

Chenzira, Alile Sharon Larkin, and other Black filmmakers, this question lies at the heart of their work and of their view of the totality of oppression. It is consciousness of the totality of oppression that Larkin finds lacking "in the way that feminists and other progressive whites pursue their own interests at the expense of those . . . subjected to racism."<sup>22</sup> It remains possible for us as white women to be feminist and racist. To put a more exacting point to it, it remains likely.

I stated that the gathering of identity in which white women historically engaged continues today. That it has to continue, because it is a lie plastered upon another lie. The first lie is that white is superior to black. That lie is rooted in the lie that people deserve their history.

one begins to suspect an awful thing: that people believe that they *deserve* their history, and that when they operate on this belief, they perish. But one knows that they can scarcely avoid believing that they deserve it: one's short time on this earth is very mysterious and very dark and very hard.<sup>23</sup>

Here Baldwin speaks of what the Black American finds within the private chamber of the heart. What is it that makes one's short time on this earth very mysterious and very dark and very hard? What

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Women Film-makers Defining Ourselves: Feminism in Our Own Voice," in *Female Spectators: Looking At Film and Television* (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 169.

<sup>22</sup>Larkin, *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>23</sup>Baldwin, *Ibid.*, 411.

does this mean for a Black man who must free himself from a history of slavery and from the lived experience of the lie of white supremacy, and who must further free himself in order to fully love other men?

the artist . . . must actively cultivate . . . the state of being alone. [This] is not . . . a rustic musing beside some silver lake. The aloneness of which I speak is much more like the aloneness of birth or death . . . or the aloneness of love . . . The states of birth, suffering, love and death are extreme states, universal, and inescapable. We all know this, but we would rather not know it.

The artist cannot and must not take anything for granted, but must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides . . . The dangers of being an American artist . . . are produced by our history. They rest on the fact that in order to conquer this continent, the particular aloneness of which I speak . . . could not be permitted . . . this prohibition is typical of all emergent nations . . . in the same way that to become a social human being one modifies and suppresses and, ultimately, without great courage, lies to oneself about all one's interior, uncharted chaos, so have we, as a nation, modified and suppressed and lied about all the darker forces in our history. . . .<sup>24</sup>

I began reading Baldwin's works during the bicentennial of these united states. Artists and writers were featured on television in portraiture, speaking about what the bicentennial meant to them.

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<sup>24</sup>James Baldwin, "The Creative Process," *The Price of the Ticket: The Collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985* (New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985), 315-318.

Although I had not yet heard bell hooks describe film-viewing as an opportunity for white folks to fall in love with themselves all over again, it was nevertheless apparent that here was the opportunity for white America to fall in love with itself all over again. Someone on the Centennial Committee must have been very disappointed to find that not all invited artists would be complicit with the celebratory spirit of the moment. Some of the others made a few well-balanced sounds, suggesting that we might have a ways to go yet, but it was James Baldwin that stood out in sharp relief. I construct from memory what I saw and heard: his stunning face, open with intelligence, with knowing, and he told us bluntly that this was not his celebration for the reason that this has not been his country. Every time his face appeared, I sat watching this reiteration of truth-telling, studying how it looks, feeling its impact on me. He knew things I needed to know. Not only as a white American, but as a white woman raised to the stories of a masculinized white nationalism.

At the other end of the spectrum of nationalistic testimony for the bicentennial was a white American woman, a writer with a name and face not known to me before or since, chanting the grand and reassuring story of white American civilization.

It is one of the most reassuring things. It seems its very basis is that it reassures you that there is a sense to things. Like the fact that children want to hear stories when they go to sleep. I mean not so much that they

want to know this or that, but that they want it as it gives them a security. The story creates a form and the form reassures them so that *you can almost tell them any story--* which you can actually do. So there is something very powerful in stories, something that gives you security and a sense of identity and meaning.<sup>25</sup>

What do we white women find within the private chambers of the heart? What is there about history that we find conducive to our gathered identity? What is there about "our"<sup>26</sup> history that would make us think that we deserved it? What part of history do we "deserve"; what part of it do we not? What is there about it that would make us imagine that history *avored* or *flattered* us, that it didn't *despise* us? If we, as women, did not write the history of white America, how did we come to be impaled upon it? Baldwin views the question of history from the perspective of a Black man who was socialized to believe that he deserved his history and his fate. He proposes that white people fall to the same untenable, tenacious belief, that we deserve our comparative safety, our privilege, our power. In "White Man's Guilt," originally published in *Ebony*, August 1965, Baldwin writes:

They [whites] do not know how this came about; they do not dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal

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<sup>25</sup>Wim Wenders in *Film Quarterly*, quoted by bell hooks in "Representing Whiteness," an essay in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 167. Emphasis added.

<sup>26</sup>Ownership of history is a complex matter for white women. I use the term *our* (contained within quotations) rather than the term "white" here in order to keep that complexity an open question.

confession -- a cry for help and healing . . .  
the black man can scarcely dare to open a  
dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a  
personal confession which fatally contains an  
accusation.<sup>27</sup>

Underlying all of Baldwin's work is the belief that all human beings would wish to be free of whatever binds them. If what binds the white woman is the need for help and healing from her "own" history, then why on this earth do we not seek it? If the history of white America has used us, damaged us, silenced us, made us invisible, why remain loyal to it? Because of the third lie: that America is white.<sup>28</sup> And, as white women, if we are not white, we are not anything at all.

What does this mean? In Baldwin's terms, here is the price of the ticket. For the Black American dreaming of becoming white, the dream is fatal because it refers to something that does not exist. A Black American can never become white; not because of skin color or culture, not because white America could not have existed as it does now without its system of slavery, the ideology of race and the canon of racial superiority, not because slavery was a system of sexual ownership of the female slave that produced contaminated bloodlines. The Black American cannot become white because whiteness itself cannot be said to exist. The privilege of being white can be said to exist. The protection of being white can be said to

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<sup>27</sup>Baldwin, *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>28</sup>Baldwin, *Ibid.*, xiv.

exist. The marking of privilege, protection and power that is whiteness can be said to exist. But whiteness itself has no claim to *authenticity*. The claim to power made by whiteness depends upon this fatal lie. Once exposed, we who are white have no place to go.

Progressive whiteness, then, is constituted around an obscene achievement. As Baldwin puts it: those people who have opted for being white congratulate themselves on their generous ability to return to the slave that freedom which they never had any right to endanger, much less take away.<sup>29</sup> And for this, we expect gratitude. It is an odd phenomenon that progressive and conservative whites share, a belief in this assertion that things are getting better for Blacks. Shallowly embedded in this belief is the peculiar entitlement that although we whites who have not actually raised our right hand to harm a Black woman, man or child may enjoy some kind of pleasure, or credit, from having made this assertion. Who do we think we *are* as we assert this? To what heights can our imaginations be soaring as we speak?

The Irish middle passage was as foul, states Baldwin, as the Black slave's, and as dishonorable on the part of those responsible. But the Irish became white, and although it was at one time common to see job notices in Boston that said "No dogs nor Irish need apply" or to hear the sentiment that "This would be a grand land if only every

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<sup>29</sup>Baldwin, *Ibid.*, xviii.

Irishman would kill a negro, and be hanged for it"<sup>30</sup>, the Irish began rising into whiteness, whereas the African slave began sinking into blackness.

The price the white American paid for his ticket was to become white...this ambition has choked many a human being to death here . . . because the white American has never accepted the real reasons for his journey. I know very well that my ancestors had no desire to come to this place: but neither did the ancestors of the people who became white and who require of my captivity a song. They require of me a song less to celebrate my captivity than to justify their own.<sup>31</sup>

As Morrison poses the problem: "It is important to know what these people were rushing from as it is to know what they were hastening to. What is the invention and development of whiteness *about*, what is it *for*? And why do we white women still believe that it has something good in store for us?"<sup>32</sup> At the heart of the construction of the identity of the American was the question of becoming a new white man, one who could feel "within himself a sense of authority and autonomy he had not known before, a force that flowed from his absolute control over the lives of others, he emerged a

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<sup>30</sup>Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York: New American Library, 1980), 239. Drinnon quotes from the writing of English historian Edward Augustus Freeman.

<sup>31</sup>Baldwin, *ibid.*, xx.

<sup>32</sup>Perhaps it is foolish to ask that question about anything specific at all. It is possible that white women as a class persist most fervently in the belief that white western culture means them well. It appears this tenacious belief is shared by Jews as well.

distinctive new man, a borderland gentleman, a man of property in a raw, half-savage world."<sup>33</sup> Slavery was essential to the construction of this portrait of a free and powerful American male, and every Irish male immigrant (among others) could construct his whiteness, his maleness, his Americanness, against the African slave. Through the same series of codes we white Americans construct ourselves still.

Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny.<sup>34</sup>

What there is in all this for the newly articulated and ever re-asserted white American male is apparent. It is possible to fathom, as one can see in the portraits from the Hedemann family manor on Kauai, that the women imagine themselves as ladies of the manor. The hermeneutic problem here is that *there is no manor*. So, how are these women managing to imagine something so patently, pathetically unreal? With every living breath, it must be painfully obvious that the manor is not what it should be. With every sinking

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<sup>33</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *Voyager to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 492. Cited in Morrison, *ibid.*, 42. For a stunning history and argument regarding the identity of the new white American and patterns of American violence, see Richard Drinnon's *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building*.

<sup>34</sup>Morrison, *ibid.*, 52.

step into the bog,<sup>35</sup> the white colonialist must ever override the evidence: that their identity, in order to exist at all, must be perpetually re-created out of the miserable bog of colonialism; out of slavery, slaughter, land-grabbing, rape, extermination and exploitation of culture, language, land and religion. In order to see a manor in a bog, it takes a great and mighty lot of make-believe.

The price of the ticket for women has been to imagine that the manor has belonged to us. It can properly be said that we have belonged to the manor. This, at long last, is the meaning of what I was told 20 years ago by Inca M. She said: You can always go back to white culture. What a *stunning* thought. I knew she was right. And, I could see that she knew things I needed to know. But we were sitting together in Honolulu, the mythical heartland of cultural diversity (at that time called integration). And I was confused, and told her that though she had just illuminated a great darkness in my thinking, I was yet unable to *feel* like it was something to which I could return. She was patient with me because, I suppose, she saw me trying. It really does take white people a long, *long* time to learn. I mean, here it is 20 years later, and I'm still working on it. I still feel that white culture is not a place I can go back to. Yet, Inca was right, I could go back to the manor, because I belonged to it. There is no formal manumission for white women, the right of reentry stays open to us. Only now does it appear how the stunning reality of white women being able to return to white culture is not

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<sup>35</sup>See: Jane Campion, *The Piano* (New York: Miramax Books, Hyperion, 1993), 33, scene 26.

contradictory to the feeling that I (or we, or some of us) can never return. This is because while we may return to the manor to which we belong, we can never return to a manor which belongs to us. White woman have bought the ticket, and paid the price of the lie that it is "ours." This has obfuscated the arrangement, the economy, of ownership; it is we who belong to *it*. We may enjoy its privileges as long as we do so by holding the space open, against all others, for our men and their children, whom we also believe are ours.<sup>36</sup>

These are the stories with which we have been comforted. These are the stories that exact our loyalty. That move us to feel that we have "security and a sense of identity and of meaning." If we did not believe them, we would act otherwise. We would have to. Or we would do everything possible to believe otherwise so that we could continue to act "as if," to ritualize the stories, so that we can continue to belong to them.

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I wish I knew all the things white women need to now do in order to extract ourselves from this impalement upon white racist history. I do know that before all else it means that we as white women must stop our fear of being alone, of being outside the manor. This is a fear both rational and irrational. It is irrational, because what we now have as "our" history has left us always and deeply alone. Until we are able to confront the continuing pain of that history, we will

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<sup>36</sup>This is why white women must continually reiterate their loyalty to white men.

persist in our loyalties to something that does not have our best interest at heart or in mind. We will continue to be recruited to signify that which needs protection against all that is not white. We will continue to be recruited as evidence against *every* other woman, regardless of race. We will persist in being held captive by the mesmerizing myth of these united states. At the same time that the fear of being alone is irrational, it is also rational because "driving to the heart of every answer and exposing the question the answer hides" is to be left alone to ask oneself questions, because others will not welcome them. As Minnie Bruce Pratt states it: "We don't want to lose the love of the first people who knew us; we don't want to be standing outside the circle of home, with nowhere to go."<sup>37</sup> A white woman interrogating white history and white culture relinquishes forever the pleasure of being a child, because the comforting stories are no longer available to her. Neither are other white women who wish to keep those stories, or little parts of them, because without those stories, they feel they have nothing with which to gather identity. And then, perhaps most devastating, for all its potential, one's own private history dissolves; partly because the privateness of it is revealed to be congruent and complicit with the national, and partly because those who shared that history are not likely to be working hard on the same project of de-covery. On the contrary, the most fervent chant of whites with personal histories of liberal politics is: But What About Me? This is a chant with many verses,

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<sup>37</sup>Pratt, 48.

and if we've been anywhere today, we'll have heard at least one whiney verse.

And yet, if we whites do not interrogate our national and our private stories, if we are unable to see the cohesiveness of private life to national, if we do not point to the clues hidden in plain sight, we will not be equipped to disassemble that which has been constructed metaphysically as mysterious, and that which has been constructed naturally as true. There is a great deal of knowledge available to us already, thanks to those who have broken faith with the canons. We know who, and what, has been and continues to be murdered; we know the instruments of death and denial; we know a lot about who has benefited, and continues to, from it; and, it is now possible to think about why it must re-produce itself. What we have yet to learn is how to stop lying. How to stop taking our pleasure from lies and begin to take it from truth-telling. We must learn to take pleasure elsewhere, not in the eroticized imaginary of racism and sexism and all their attendant miseries. We must expand desire beyond these realms:

to listen for the beauty in the stark truth that someone tells me, that which seems brutal and may terrify me. This listening is one way of finding out how to get to the new place where we all can live and speak-to each other for more than a fragile moment.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Pratt, 14.

As white, we must be silent. As women, we must speak. This is difficult because it is not possible to take *white* and *woman* apart. Yet, this is what we must do. How can we begin to think about this? We can begin by considering what it is that forms the referent in the act of remembering and what it is that forms the referent in the act of forgetting. Marguerite Duras says:

when women write, they translate [from] darkness . . . Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. [Rather than asking whether women can also be ideologues] . . . of course they can . . . But why go over all that? That should go without saying. We should be saying the opposite: can *men* forget everything and join women?

Just as when you are grown up you forget the child you once were. You no longer know anything about that. Men have gotten lost in the same way, whereas women have never known what they were. So they aren't lost. Behind them, there is darkness. Behind men, there is distortion of reality, there are lies . . .

The silence in women is such that anything that falls into it has an enormous reverberation. Whereas in men, this silence no longer exists.<sup>39</sup>

We must stop falling in love over and over again with ourselves, with masculinized/feminized white history; we must re-examine again

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<sup>39</sup>Marguerite Duras from an interview by Susan Husserl-Kapit in *Signs*, Winter, 1975, reprinted in the section entitled "Creations" in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 174-175.

and again, as our capacity grows, our present cognition of what we see in the stories of ourselves. As we learn better what all this means, we can re-script what we imagine as a future, over and over again. This will mean the re-imaging and re-scripting of the fervent belief in past, present and future, in the notion of time that frames patriarchal myth, making it is very difficult to release the lies from their bindings, from the stories that float them.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

### Arcades and Undergrounds

In the era of industrial culture, consciousness exists in a mythic, dream state, against which historical knowledge is the only antidote. But the particular kind of historical knowledge that is needed to free the present from myth is not easily uncovered. Discarded and forgotten, it lies buried within surviving culture, remaining invisible precisely because it was of so little use to those in power.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, and no. My own take on these ruminations by Buck-Morss is that she writes both from the inside and out of Benjamin's own work, artfully and accurately, and with illumination. She has helped me to enter into the imaginary of Benjamin, and he has helped me to figure history. Throughout my journeys through the histories of the holocaust and its legacies, I have found that knowledge(s) has not so much been discarded and forgotten, as it has been unrelentingly and violently buried alive within surviving culture. I have found that it has not been buried so deeply, as it has been buried-in-plain-sight. And, I have found that this has been of tremendous use to those in power, both to have buried it there, and to do everything in their power to keep it there. The persistent, oppressive "doing everything possible to keep it there" then becomes the active, definitive expression of what power means, or "is," in the context of our blessed

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<sup>1</sup>Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), x.

modernity. Benjamin set his gaze upon a world that preceeded and accompanied the phantasms of fascism, and the full expression of those phantasms, the death camps. It is not that his mythical typology of Paris<sup>2</sup> is flawed or lacking; not at all. Rather that, as part of what Benjamin took to be the artifacts, the expressions of, the historical epoch of the industrial, capitalized world, did not yet not fully include the phantasm of the camps.<sup>3</sup> He, like his own angel of history, was looking backward towards a history that was *in the act of embracing* the violence that the camps now re-present in our own phantasms.

A Klee painting [circa: 1920] named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistably propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the power of debris before him

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>3</sup>Strictly speaking, this is not accurate, as the Nazis studied the American camps for "indians" as models before constructing their own. See: Victoria Mudd, *Broken Rainbow*, produced by Mario Floria and Victoria Mudd, 70 min., Direct Cinema, 1985, videocassette.

grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps here is another meaning to be taken from the act of standing at the eye of the needle; transfixed, immobilized, caught still by the face of the lie called progress. To awaken and declare, "Either I'm crazy or they're lying." That "they're" lying is now known; what needs yet faced is that it is we (the "we" that is the speaking subject, the thinking "I," the seeing "eye") who lie, too. Every time we take our pleasure in ignorance, in making disappear another's pain; everytime we are comforted by our moments of privilege, comforted by our *belief* in privilege, by the belief in (our own) *safety* (which can only take meaning in contrast, *in relief*, to other's absence of safety, that is, their danger); each and every time, we move from complicity to collaboration. Such power can only exist with, and by, our collaboration with the will to, and the "will for", privilege in a world of danger (danger, that is, for others). This is the apocalyptic will to power that can only be subverted by "a construction of history that looks backward, rather than forward, at the destruction of material nature as it *has actually taken place*, [thereby providing] dialectical contrast to the futurist myth of historical progress (which can only be sustained by forgetting what had happened)."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), 259-60.

<sup>5</sup>Buck-Morss, 95.

The arcades of nineteenth century Paris were for Benjamin:

[the] precise material replica of the internal consciousness . . . the *unconscious* of the dreaming collective. All of the errors of bourgeois consciousness could be found there (commodity fetishism, reification, the world as "inwardness"), as well as (in fashion, prostitution, gambling) all of its utopian dreams."<sup>6</sup>

Benjamin's world is part of the rubble of our own present, to which has been added the rubble of extremity, the concentrationary universe; and, as his own inner angel of history saw itself seeing that, Benjamin refused her the vision and closed her eyes for his last time. He said, because he was civilized, "I do apologize".<sup>7</sup> He had found the boundaries of his own complicity, and he wished not to cross them. There are other ways to script his suicide, but I have not found any of them to illuminate even one possibility of why. Perhaps his angel began to see the future, and couldn't bear it.

We who believe in Paris believe that no city glitters more brilliantly than She. She is where we wish to go when we can no longer bear the crude violence of masculinized American soil and blood, and all its attendant phantasms. Her "sheltering arcades were the first modern architecture for the public. But they were also the first consumer "dream houses," placed at the service of commodity worship."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 333.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 144.

On an unconscious "dream" level, the new urban-industrialized world had become fully enchanted . . . [and this appeared] prototypically, in the arcades, where "the commodities are suspended and shoved together in such boundless confusion, that [they appear] like images out of the most incoherent dreams."<sup>9</sup>

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We who believe in Paris walk her streets, dreaming ourselves into the moment of our own lives, comforting ourselves as we stroll through the now-seen-ancient arcades, imagining that we are walking through history. That is to say: as we walk we see ourselves alive and present, walking through the safe, enclosed past. Even Hitler believed in Paris, and because he did, Paris survived. He thought: "Wasn't Paris beautiful? But Berlin must be made far more beautiful. In the past I often considered whether we would not have to destroy Paris, but when we are finished in Berlin, Paris will be only a shadow. So why should we destroy it?"<sup>10</sup> Even a fascist dream can include a Paris without having to murder; but only on condition that Paris remain in order to become the shadow of the fascist dream realized in Berlin. Even fascism doesn't destroy

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<sup>9</sup>Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Volume V (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), 993.

<sup>10</sup>Adolf Hitler, cited by Albert Spier [sic], *Inside the Third Reich* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 174. Quoted in Buck-Morss, *ibid.*, 328.

everything; beauty, as a dream or a shadow, can serve the master as well as the evil uglifying reality of the camps.

I make my sacrifice to the reader: it is not only you that must give up all that you cherish. I sacrifice Paris to you on behalf of your own discomfort, immobilization, your desire to keep one last thing for yourself that is free of the fouled fish-bowl of modernity. Paris, like other places, has been fouled by the gaze of Hitler, and he has taken her for his own, but in a way that leaves her for us still. Because he didn't annihilate her, we can still wander intoxicated by her dreamworld, like the peasant in Aragon's *Le Paysan de Paris*,<sup>11</sup> "in the company of . . . muses through the new, natural landscape of commodity fetishes, as his agrarian counterpart of a different era might have wandered through an enchanted forest."<sup>12</sup> We can wander it in the ever-comforting dreamworld of the 19th century arcades, ever-comforting because it is a graceful version and vision of the present, of our crude daily material reality. Or: we can keep mindful as we wander that the arcades constitute the terrestrial dreamworld of modernity that creates as its underside the subterranean dreamworld of the Metro ("the presentiment of helplessness that afflicts the buried, enclosed human animal is comparable to the panic that seizes a calf in an abattoir"<sup>13</sup>); the

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<sup>11</sup>Benjamin, by the way, considered this book in 1934 to be "the best book about Paris." Quoted in Buck-Morss, *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>12</sup> Buck-Morss, 256-257. She quotes Benjamin: The Eiffel Tower appears to him [the peasant] as a giraffe; Sacre Coeur is an ichthyosaurus.

<sup>13</sup>Lawrence Osborne, *Paris Dreambook: An Unconventional Guide to the Splendor and Squalor of the City* (New York, Vintage Books, 1992), 16.

Turkish baths of the Paris Mosque; the rue St. Denis ("the nostalgic wound in the new Paris and one day, with the assistance of the proclivity of the urban mind for fragrant chaos, it will be strong enough to enter into open warfare with the city around it"<sup>14</sup>); and, of course, the Paris Sewers.

Since the beginning of its history, Paris has drawn to it that dubious and pathetic figure, the peasant. . . . Consciously or otherwise, every modern migrant to the City undergoes the inner turbulence of these imaginary peasants. And the peasant, invented over and over again in the evolution of this savage and satirical tradition, becomes a figure as eternal as the fool or the knight. He is, as Aragon said, the subconscious of urban man and therefore the hidden author of his catastrophic dreams.<sup>15</sup>

We might then well imagine Lawrence Osborne as a subterranean version of Walter Benjamin,<sup>16</sup> a seer with bat-eyes of the buried Paris, who reminds the reader cynically that "though murder is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>16</sup> Certainly, he continues in some of the tradition of Benjamin when he orients us to the Metro (p. 14): "And then the advertisements pasted the length of the curved walls within ochre-yellow scrolled frames. . . . But let us say straight away that we are not indignant about it, nor are we moved to noble fury at the thought of the slow but irresistible degradation of our finer instincts by these profit-orientated buffooneries. Quite the contrary: we are in favour of these giant posters being made compulsory by law in all public places, and above all in all Metro stations. They are the outposts of the unconscious in the domain of public transport . . . For example, let us take the coffee ads. . . . every one of them seems prepared to copulate with the consumer. Café Grand-Mère, the Arabica that strokes the drinker's scrotum while raping his epiglottis. Copacabana, the taste of creole thighs and aroused armpits".

undoubtedly an almost infinite subject, the history that you have neatly stored in your frontal lobes could be written, with an effort at elegance, on the back side of a postage stamp."<sup>17</sup> A cultural reverence for murder and mayhem resides in Paris, France as easily as in Paris, Texas. "The 20,000 slaughtered during the Commune are buried hastily under the very pavements where shoppers and bickering lovers amble today, their mouths upturned, their bones sinking continually downwards."<sup>18</sup> And, finally, we who dream ourselves to sleep in Paris are told that we will have to use our imaginations, to close our eyes and think of old postcards<sup>19</sup>, and that in this way, we should be able to recreate the City in our mind's eye.

Or! We who believe in Paris can examine the reels and reels of film that reiterate the script, renovating the inner and outer landscapes of our dreams of Paris. And in all of it, we can look for some sign of hope. We might begin with the 1946 film by Marcel Carné, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, in which everyone's a peasant caught in the carnival of life, in the flow of stories that never conclude, that flow on and on into the streets of Paris. Signified by the carnival swirl, these dreams begin with a hawker outside a tent, announcing and imploring:

Come on in. The truth is here!  
Come and look at her.  
You'll think of her by day,  
You'll dream of her by night,

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 100.

Come inside and see the truth  
unveiled before your very eyes!<sup>20</sup>

And inside? A naked woman, submerged nearly to her shoulders in water and turning slowly on a pedestal; she is holding a mirror in front of herself, her gaze takes in only her own face, a face stunningly beautiful and absolutely still. The hawker in front of the tent had promised that truth would be naked, that the men who entered the tent would see it unveiled before their very eyes; instead, truth turned out to be vain female beauty watching itself impassively, her body obscured by water. Due to this, the men must sometimes be warned to "keep their eyes in their pockets." The desire for submerged truth is very strong in these children of paradise. Astonishingly, as the film proceeds, it manages to keep its own eyes in its pocket, allowing the female signifier of truth to emerge from the water that obscures her (because it obscures her body). She emerges with her own desires intact, with the power of self-knowledge, and most significantly, with the ability to always speak truthfully. As we watch, we see that she is fully aware of the theatre of life, and of all its stories. She recognizes when the curtain is raised, and when it has lowered; she knows there are scripts written, and she is capable of delivering the lines when necessary; she knows the difference between her own story, and the story of another about her. She is as knowledgeable as Sheherazade. She recognizes when power is with her (or belongs to her), and when it is

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<sup>20</sup>Marcel Carné, *Les Enfants du Paradis*, produced by Fred Orain, directed by Marcel Carné. 195 min. Tricolore Films, 1946. Videocassette.

against her (that is, in possession of another). We are surprised to find that the only story that ends in *Les Enfants du Paradis* ends through murder, through the killing of a male who signifies the desire for untruth, the desire for the beautifying lie.

We who read Lawrence Osborne's *Dreambook* were prepared to almost believe that: "There are no exceptions in the City of fantasy: everyone is exactly the same, and after only a minute in the Metro you suddenly realize the fact. The Metro, like dreams and sex, is the great leveller".<sup>21</sup> It is in this respect that Osborne and Benjamin imagine a similar topography of Paris. Benjamin took the "glass-roofed shopping arcades of 19th century as emblem of that epoch's dream of an end to class-based historical strife in a consumerist utopia."<sup>22</sup> "To some extent the Arcades project details the prehistory of the space the [Eastern European, primarily Jewish] immigrants would someday inhabit."<sup>23</sup> The Paris subterranean of Osborne's gaze is the space of the immigrant of the 20th century [Arabs, Africans, East Asians], an undergrowth of humanity bound to the 19th century immigrant by the same epoch of capitalism, now in decay. And from this point of view, Osborne reminds us that from its beginning at the turn of the century, the Metro (as an expression of subterranean dreamworlds) "has been capable of inflicting terror and romance upon its users"<sup>24</sup>, each subterranean station the site of a "special and

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<sup>21</sup>Osborne, *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>22</sup>Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 33.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

particular mythology."<sup>25</sup> In Osborne's *Dreambook*, "the metro is already a giant brain sleeping through decades of history and filled with endless unrepeatable nightmares".<sup>26</sup>

Are we to continue to be the hidden authors of these catastrophic dreams, these unrepeatable nightmares, which are the articulation of a masculinizing murder of culture and of life? Or: shall we take the many possible paths towards the dreams of Sheherazade, who weaves stories without end, which is to say without murder, so that all may live? Is the "image of the globe [to be] nothing more than a figure on which the notion of extinction is being constructed?"<sup>27</sup> Shall we, women and men, remain "immobile . . . in a *silent complaint* against masculinity"?<sup>28</sup> Or shall we take our places as *homo narrans*, moving into a new landscape, for which there is no chorus yet singing?

One reaches an impasse. Every effort fails. At the periphery of vision, the first signs of despair appear. There is no way out. Except perhaps a kind of grace, coming as if unbidden, in the instant when a descent has reached its nadir. The philosopher Simone Weil suggests that at this moment to taste the sweetness of defeat one must surrender. All effort ceases. Something softens in the field.

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid. The founder of the Metro, Fulgence Bienvenue is here quoted by Osborne: "In another age the appearance of the Metro would have given rise to a special and particular mythology."

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>27</sup>Kato, Masahide, "Nuclear Globalism: Traversing Rockets, Satellites, and Nuclear War via the Strategic Gaze", *Alternatives: Social Transformation and Humane Governance*. Vol. 18, N. 3, Summer 1993. 351.

<sup>28</sup>Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 239. Emphasis in original text.

One begins then, in the light of this changed focus, to see a different outline, moving just there, a dot on the horizon. And then suddenly the whole picture has changed. And it is by grace alone that one moves into a new landscape.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 231.

After all, that is, everybody who writes is interested  
in living inside themselves in order to tell what is  
inside themselves. That is why writers have to have  
two countries, the one where they belong  
and the one in which they live really.  
The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves,  
it is not real but it is really there.

Gertrude Stein  
*Paris France, 1940*

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