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DOCUMENTING BARBARISM:  
MEMORY, CULTURE, AND MODERNITY AFTER THE "FINAL SOLUTION"

by

MICHAEL ROTHBERG

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York

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INTRODUCTION:  
DOCUMENTING BARBARISM

"There is no document of culture  
[*Kultur*] which is not at the same time a  
document of barbarism"—Walter  
Benjamin

Writing shortly before his last, unsuccessful attempt to flee the deadly grasp of Nazi Germany, Walter Benjamin glimpsed a deep affinity within Western civilization between barbarism and the creation of culture. Since his death, Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and other writings have become canonical texts within the new movements of cultural studies, not least because of the sensitivity with which they register the effects of the catastrophes of the twentieth century on art, experience, and the body. Observed from the other side of the disaster in which Benjamin himself was caught, however, we contemporary readers might want to pursue a different line of questioning. The questions provoked by reading Benjamin after the Holocaust concern problems of representation and of temporality, memory, and modernity. If the existence of civilization's dark side has become a truism in Benjamin's wake, what can be said about the many works of culture produced since the "Theses" that explicitly attempt to explore barbarism in artistic or philosophical frameworks? What are the politics of documenting barbarism, especially the radical evil of the Holocaust, which Benjamin could only partially know? Are there, or should there be, "limits" to such representation?

In the "Theses," Benjamin presents a challenging version of the modern conception of temporality that is extremely pertinent to study of the

Holocaust. The dominant modern consciousness of time consists of a belief that a qualitatively different future will break with the experiences of the past. But Benjamin, as Jürgen Habermas puts it,

twists the radical future-orientedness that is characteristic of modern times so far back around the axis of the now-time [*Jetztzeit*] that it gets transposed into a yet more radical orientation toward the past. . . . To all past epochs [Benjamin] ascribes a horizon of unfulfilled expectations, and to the future-oriented present he assigns the task of experiencing a corresponding past through remembering, in such a way that we can fulfill its expectations with our weak messianic power. (*Philosophical Discourse* 12, 14)

Benjamin, in other words, was sensitive to the intimate relationship between memory and suffering that the Nazi genocide has since thrown into stark relief. He believed that attention to the injustices of the past was the only possible source of a radically new future. Yet the novelty of the genocide—a partially successful attempt to destroy not just an entire people but also their memory and history—provokes new dilemmas for the arts of remembrance. If the Jewish tradition has always provided anamnestic resources for the confrontation with oppression, has the type and extent of the Holocaust's destruction necessitated the emergence of forms of memory specifically attuned to genocide? How do we evaluate the relationship between culture and barbarism in a postmodern era in which we no longer believe in a messianism that would redeem a wounded past in a utopian present (which Benjamin, somewhat mystically, called the *Jetztzeit*)? What kind of historical memory do genocide and its aftermath demand? What discourses result from the recognition of the Shoah as a crisis within Western modernity?

This dissertation seeks to respond to such questions through an examination of some of the representations and acts of memorialization that have emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust, the Nazi destruction of European Jews. Crossing boundaries of national context, genre, and medium, I

take inspiration from Benjamin's writings in order to explore the conjunction of culture and barbarism in a variety of texts that engage the history and memory of the Holocaust. In Western European and North American contexts, the Nazi genocide has come to be understood as an epochal event that divides the landscape of the twentieth century in two: before and after the "Final Solution." Understanding of history, morality, and politics has changed in the wake of the Holocaust, and contemporary history and theory cannot be understood separately from it. At the same time, the history of National Socialism and the Nazi genocide cannot itself be contemplated outside of contemporary contexts and intervening histories of representation that influence the meanings we give to the events.

For many years there has been a great deal of valuable historical work on the Second World War and the Holocaust, but it is only in the last two decades that extensive cultural criticism of Holocaust representations has emerged. Most of the important works of criticism, including Lawrence Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, Sidra Ezrahi's *By Words Alone*, and Annette Insdorf's *Indelible Shadows*, have exhaustively surveyed the materials available in a particular medium, such as writing or film. These works are both essential general resources and detailed considerations of how artists have grappled with the representational problems posed by the extreme historical experience of the Holocaust. Recently, interdisciplinary studies have appeared that cross over the traditional boundaries of scholarship. Journalist Judith Miller's *One, by One, by One* and James Young's *The Texture of Memory* have been organized according to national context, a strategy that helps to reveal how local conditions and conflicts shape acts of memorialization. By structuring his earlier interdisciplinary study of Holocaust representations, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, around

differences in genre, Young was able to highlight the intersection of the specificities of the Shoah as a historical experience with the generic constraints of different kinds of narrative and artistic form.

In what follows, I draw on both the specific arguments and methodologies of all of these works, as well as others from the emerging field of Holocaust studies. Yet, the diversity of places as well as times in which the Holocaust lives on in postwar cultures has led me to structure my consideration of representations of the Nazi genocide differently from other critics. Instead of reading specific works in isolation, or in relation only to other texts, I demonstrate how such works take part both in larger public discourses concerned with the histories of the Holocaust and modernity and in local, national, and international politics.

In the attempt to get beyond institutionally maintained boundaries of medium, genre, and national context and to reveal the continuing hold of the past on the present, I have drawn upon Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, which is meant to capture the simultaneity of spatial and temporal articulations in cultural practices, and Benjamin's notion of the constellation, which suggests the need for spatialized maps of time. In the chronotope, "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 84). Chronotopes, as I use them here, are never singular "time-places"; they involve the creation of constellations, that is, relationships which the critic's or artist's "own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (Benjamin, *Illuminations* 263). In Benjamin's formulation, events "[become] historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from [them] by thousands of years" (263). The constellation always yokes together at least two time-places: the original event and the later events that

bring it into view. This means that Holocaust representations must be interrogated as the products of specific historical contexts and histories of representation that intervene between the text and the event. The documents of barbarism analyzed here are woven between different "now-times," from the interwar period to the present, and different spatial locations, including physical places such as national memorial sites (the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum), textual spaces such as the unfolding of a comic strip (Art Spiegelman's *Maus*), narrative maps of ethnic and national identity (Marguerite Yourcenar's *Coup de Grâce* and Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock*), and literary—philosophical speculations (the writings of Theodor Adorno and Maurice Blanchot).

The multiple constellations of which these texts consist are grouped around what I'm calling two meta-chronotopes that structure the two parts of this study: "after Auschwitz" and "The Year of the Holocaust." The representations and practices collected under those signs are not meant to be crudely equated, but these chronotopes represent two defining moments of Holocaust discourse and establish a contingent periodization of cultural production. Corresponding roughly to modernist and postmodernist attempts to come to terms with the past, they also facilitate a reconsideration of what modernism and postmodernism might mean in light of the genocide. If "The Year of the Holocaust," a slogan borrowed from a 1993 television news report on contemporary fascination with the Nazi genocide, names an already well-documented movement to Americanize the Holocaust, I suggest that the establishment of "Auschwitz" as a place-holder for the Shoah constitutes a precursor process of Europeanization. This latter discourse, initiated by Adorno, views the event not as specifically German or Jewish, nor as generically universal, but as an indictment of European and Western Christian

capitalist culture. The cultural referents of Adorno's critique tend also to come from the canon of pan-European high modernist literature, if from a small number of selected figures, such as Beckett, Celan, and Kafka. The postmodern dynamic of Americanization that has shifted cultural power away from European intellectual centers and toward Washington, D.C. and Hollywood does not necessarily represent a complete break with the procedures and categories of representation considered by Adorno. As Andreas Huyssen argues, postmodernism should be understood as a "relational" phenomenon, characterized by a refusal of the modernist division between high and mass culture ("Mapping" 236, 249). At their best, the texts of Americanization combine elements of high, middlebrow, and popular culture and involve a subtle reworking of modernist means within a massively mediated postmodern environment.

I apply labels such as Americanization and Europeanization in order to emphasize the *process* through which knowledge of the Holocaust is constructed. Although Europe seems more obviously connected to the genocide than the United States, by virtue of being the site of its occurrence, there is no single link that connects the concept of Europe to that of the Holocaust. The place of the Holocaust in narratives of cultural identity has been constructed retroactively and to different effect in different locations. In Europe, controversy about the Holocaust has led to radical reevaluations of the status of modernity among Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals alike. Recent German and French debates about "revisionism," relativization, and intellectual complicity in fascism have revived the exploration of the legacy of modernity and modernism in the light of the Nazi genocide at the precise moment when a redefinition of the contours of European identity is once again very much at issue.

In the United States, on the other hand, responses to the Holocaust have until recently been central primarily to Jewish Americans and to their questions of identity. Today, however, there is evidence that discourses relating to the Nazi genocide are moving closer to the mainstream of American culture, although not necessarily with the same critical force they carried into the heart of Europe. While Europeanization has tended toward an indictment of the idea of Europe and a recognition of the interweaving of civilization and barbarism, the ongoing process of Americanization is at least in part a means of relegitimizing "American values" in the face of foreign terror. Nevertheless, this opposition is not stable. As I will document in chapters on Art Spiegelman and Philip Roth and on Marguerite Yourcenar, respectively, critical voices can emerge from the heart of American discourses just as appeasement can reside in a certain Cold War version of Europeanization.

In the following introductory pages I explore constellations of history, memory, and the Nazi genocide in two of the key discourses that have shaped understanding of the Shoah. In the first section, I track the emergence of the term "Holocaust" in the United States, and trace its connections to Jewish-American identity formation. This exploration also touches upon the opposition between uniqueness and universality through which many critics have attempted to understand the genocide. In the second section, I summarize some of the debates among scholars about the relationship of the Shoah to the discourses of modernity, and argue that understanding of the Holocaust contributes to a critical reevaluation of the relationship between modernism and postmodernism. Finally, I introduce the "case studies" in which I read various texts in a constellation with two of the meta-chronotopes of Holocaust discourse. When I refer to Holocaust discourses, I include all of the varieties of

literary and artistic representation, philosophical speculation, historical documentation, and political propaganda (among other genres) that take the Nazi genocide as one of their referents. These discourses need not take the Holocaust as their only or primary referent, or aim to depict the events directly. Holocaust discourses are neither unified nor unchanging—to the contrary, they are contradictory and historical—but, at particular moments and in particular places, specific versions come to be canonized or dominant.

Two intertwined components of Holocaust discourses are the name given to the events and the narrative form that structures them. In the case of the term "Holocaust," the bestowal of a name has shaped historical understanding in significant ways. Because of its biblical associations with sacrifice and burnt offering, many critics have objected to the use of "Holocaust" as a mystification of the senselessness of Nazi violence. Likewise, the Hebrew word *sho'ah*, which was one of the first terms used in Palestine during the course of the war, and which has become popular in Europe and the United States since Claude Lanzmann's film of that name, also contains "pious echoes of sin and punishment" (Young, *Writing and Rewriting* 86). Faced with such troublesome choices, some critics propose the more neutral "Nazi genocide" (Lang, *Act and Idea* xxi). But this choice is no less bothersome since its seeming "objectivity" threatens to turn into a means of keeping the horror of the events at a distance. Such a distancing would vaguely suggest the Nazis' own euphemistic phrase, the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question." In order to denaturalize the link between events and the names and discourses through which we inevitably come to know them, I move among a variety of terms, including Holocaust, Shoah, Nazi genocide, Judeocide, etc. I also use "Final Solution" ironically to mark the persistence of Jews and Jewishness beyond the Nazis' genocidal project.

Through such a strategy of naming I do not mean to imply that words can simply be taken up or cast aside at will. The uses of all of these terms have been shaped by specific historical conditions and itineraries and have thus come to be associated with specific "emplotments" of the events of the destruction of European Jews.<sup>1</sup> Emplotments are the necessary narrative constructions of history that inevitably bring with them implicit or explicit moral and political judgments. A case in point is the connection made, especially among Jewish Americans, between the term "Holocaust" and the discourse of uniqueness which asserts that the Nazi destruction of European Jews cannot be compared to other human-made or natural catastrophes. In popularizing the genocide under the name of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel has, at least until recently, been the single greatest proponent of an understanding of the Nazi genocide as unique, unprecedented, and somehow outside of history. At the 1967 conference on "Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future" which was a belated turning point in the Jewish-American intellectual discourse on the destruction of the European Jews, Wiesel stated: "In its power [the Holocaust] even influenced language. Negro quarters are called ghettos; Hiroshima is explained by Auschwitz. . . . Everything today revolves around our Holocaust experience" (288). Here, Wiesel acknowledges that the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust cannot be kept distant from the uniqueness of other histories of suffering; he nonetheless reinscribes the priority of the genocide as a source of analogy. In a famous speech in which he castigated Ronald Reagan for his plans to visit the Bitburg cemetery which includes S.S. graves, Wiesel described the discourse of uniqueness as emerging

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<sup>1</sup> On the importance of "emplotment" to historical representation, see the work of Hayden White and the responses to it in many of the essays collected in Saul Friedlander's edited volume, *Probing the Limits of Representation*.

after the fact: "I have learned that the Holocaust was a unique and uniquely Jewish event—albeit with universal implications. Not all victims were Jews; but all Jews were victims" (*From the Kingdom of Memory* 174). During the late 1980s, in the course of criticizing popular "trivializations" of Holocaust memory, Wiesel extended the discourse of uniqueness and definitively removed the "Final Solution" from the continuum of history and historical understanding: "Auschwitz is something else, always something else. It is a universe outside the universe, a creation that exists parallel to creation. . . . [J]ust as no one could imagine Auschwitz before Auschwitz, no one can now retell Auschwitz after Auschwitz" (*From the Kingdom of Memory* 165-6). Wiesel is certainly right that the Holocaust has served as a metaphor for a range of related and unrelated suffering; in fact, this process has intensified since the end of the Cold War unleashed a new era of nationalist and ethnic terror. And his invocation of *l'univers concentrationnaire*—"a universe outside the universe"—confirms the descriptions of other survivors' accounts, even if some critics have insisted on the ordinariness or banality of that universe.

Ultimately and ironically, however, the dehistoricizing tendencies of Wiesel's employment of "uniqueness" frustrate attempts to grasp the specificity of the Nazi genocide. I propose to begin remedying such problems by historicizing Wiesel's very vocabulary. Performing a genealogy of the term "Holocaust" goes a long way toward revealing the effects of the term's entry into the English language, an entry which Wiesel did not inaugurate but helped to facilitate. It is important to recall in an American context that neither the Nazis nor their victims understood their experience through the concept of the Holocaust. The Nazis used the euphemism of the "Final Solution of the Jewish question" to distance themselves from the horror of their annihilatory practices. The European Jews who fell into their hands had a

long tradition of response to suffering and oppression which provided a vocabulary from which to draw in describing their contemporary troubles. Both the Yiddish *churbm* and the Hebrew *sho'ah* were terms denoting previous catastrophes in Jewish history, which European Jews (and the Jews of the *yishuv*) used even as the massacres were beginning. Drawing on the work of Yehuda Bauer, David Roskies, and Alan Mintz, James Young points out that the choice of vocabulary could have grave consequences depending on whether the historical terms were supposed to be adequate or inadequate to the radically modern events of the Nazi genocide—and thus whether traditional modes of resistance were sufficient in the face of a historically new form of destruction.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of the term "Holocaust" marks a recognition of the inadequacy of earlier models of Jewish catastrophe, but also brings with it a new set of problems.

While Young locates the earliest specific references to the events of the Nazi genocide as "the holocaust" in the late 1950s (87), it is only in the middle and late 1960s that the term becomes a commonly accepted proper name, a canonization signified by the emergence of the capital "H." I would locate that emergence very precisely somewhere between 1966 and 1967, just before the Arab-Israeli war which marked a second, contemporaneous turning point in the identities of American Jews.<sup>3</sup> In the Spring 1967 issue of the magazine *Judaism*, the official publication of the American Jewish Congress, writer

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<sup>2</sup> My discussion of the Jewish names for the Nazi genocide follows James Young's fine synthesis in *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (83-98).

<sup>3</sup> Another defining moment in the emergence of Holocaust consciousness in the United States in the early 1960s was the Eichmann trial—and particularly Hannah Arendt's controversial "report" on it, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (some of those debates are captured in the collection of Arendt's work, *The Jew as Pariah*). While the trial was a first step, it alone did not constitute the canonization of "Holocaust" which took place several years later at the time of the 1967 war.

Richard Fein remarks about the word "Holocaust": "we now have a word, almost poetically O.K., to describe that horror—our intelligence redeems us and stains us at one and the same time." Already, just as the term was being belatedly matched with the historical experience, it provoked a certain unease. As Fein wrote, "even reading about the Holocaust . . . is a strange double experience: we know in our marrow that our fate and self-knowledge are inextricably tied to the haunting, imponderable six million; at the same time we marvel at the distance between our affluent situation and their demise" (Fein 131). This "strange double" relationship to the Holocaust will echo through the Jewish-American Holocaust literature of the next twenty-five years, especially in the work of Philip Roth. In the very next issue of *Judaism*, the symposium on "Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future" was published, featuring Wiesel, George Steiner, Emil Fackenheim, and others. This symposium confirmed the canonization of the term "Holocaust" which Fein informally registered, and set it within a historical vision of discontinuity. As Steven Schwarzschild declared at the beginning of the symposium, "We are saying that a new age has begun" (267). That statement, along with the reference to a "post-Holocaust future," suggested a "strange double" temporality in which the recognition that the Holocaust constituted a break in Western chronology coexisted with the admission that this "new age" had been grasped, and therefore had begun, twenty years late. Only with the emergence of a singular proper name would the genocide be articulated by the American-Jewish community at large in terms of the uniqueness which Wiesel's influential writings and speeches demanded.

However, as Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman argue in a fascinating exploration of the "psychology" of the term "Holocaust," Wiesel's conception of the event's uniqueness is tied to a questionable "spiritualizing" of history

which tends toward the elimination of questions of human agency and responsibility and blocks out the banality and ordinariness of those who took part in Nazi terror (Garber and Zuckerman 202-208). By making repeated analogies between the victims of the Shoah and the biblical story of Abraham's aborted sacrifice of Isaac, Wiesel connects the Holocaust to Jewish specificity or "chosenness," but at the expense of absurdly distancing the events from their embeddedness in the history of modernity. What does it mean to call "Isaac the first survivor of the Holocaust because he survived the first tragedy" (Wiesel, cited in Garber and Zuckerman 203)? Wiesel's strategy of claiming uniqueness ends by obscuring the specificity of the Nazi genocide under the vague category of "tragedy"—a word which, moreover, with its cathartic associations seems to propose a redemptive meaning which simply does not exist for these events. Such an emphasis on uniqueness can lead at the limit to pernicious forms of what Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic*, calls "ethnic absolutism," and has been linked to "a disturbing increase in aggressive demands for Jewish-survival-at-all costs" (Garber and Zuckerman 208-9).

In criticizing Wiesel's mythologization of the genocide as sacrificial "Holocaust," however, Garber and Zuckerman end by simply inverting "uniqueness" and transforming it into a no more satisfactory "universality." Perhaps because they write from a psychological perspective, the authors' notion of the "ordinariness" of the Nazis is not a historical category (as Hannah Arendt's controversial notion of "banality" was), but rather an implicit allusion to an alleged "human nature." By suggesting that Nazi aggression was not especially targeted at Jews *qua* Jews—"The truth is that eleven million people were killed by the Nazis in the concentrations camps"—Garber and Zuckerman turn the Holocaust into "a warning of what can all too

easily happen at any time, at any place, with anyone in the role of victim or victimizer" (208). As surely as in Wiesel's conception, the universalizing of genocide dehistoricizes the Holocaust; but, while Wiesel's understanding seems to ground a nationalist politics, Garber and Zuckerman's worldview is generically liberal, assigning a pluralist responsibility for *potential* acts "at any time, at any place." Yet it is precisely nationalism and liberalism (two intertwined, historically modern phenomena) that, as Barbara Foley argues, the history of the Holocaust ought to put radically into question since the former enacted a policy which the latter was helpless to combat ("Fact, Fiction, Fascism" 348, 360). The failure of the discourses of uniqueness and universality to account, by themselves, for the Holocaust's place in the history of the twentieth century does not entail their rejection *tout court*. Certainly, like any event, the Nazi genocide is a singular occurrence; and, doubtless, as one of the most extreme and rationalized histories of terror, it has significance which goes well beyond its singularity and tends toward the universal.

In a series of meditations on the place of "Auschwitz" in culture and criticism, Theodor Adorno has provided one of the most complex, bifocal readings of the Holocaust as a singular event with universalizing tendencies. If, in his earliest formulations, Adorno came close to a globalizing assertion which indicted "instrumental reason" in general for the genocide, later reworkings of his proposition that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" specified the terrain of destruction as a particularly European space and located cultural production in a specific temporal relation of belatedness to that terrain. Adorno's placement of the Nazi genocide at the limits of the space-time parameters of *modernity* opens up an intermediate field between uniqueness and universality in which the Holocaust has been fruitfully conceptualized.

An understanding of the Nazi genocide as splitting time into "before" and "after" both enables and undermines consideration of Holocaust representations in terms of periodization, contextualization, narrative coherence, and ethical judgment. None of these concepts—which have, in relatively unquestioned ways, grounded the writing of modern history—will be abandoned, but as so many students of the Shoah have argued, they need to be rethought in the light of the Holocaust's very modernity. The belief in a coherent narrative which establishes a linear periodization of the progressive betterment of "mankind" constitutes the faith of and in modernity, the very faith that Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" questions through its critique of the progress of civilization. This narrative grounds, and is in turn grounded by, the belief in and desirability of objective ethical judgments based on the tendential universalization of European contexts. Whether or not this account of modernity has ever corresponded to concrete historical processes, or is in fact desirable, many thinkers have understood the Holocaust as definitively breaking down the modernist illusion.

The Nazi genocide took place, after all, in one of the most "advanced" and "civilized" cultures and was possible only through the application of state of the art bureaucratic and technological innovations—it was, in short, a truly modern event. Yet as Zygmunt Bauman clarifies, the Holocaust's embeddedness in modernity does not mean that modernity is reducible to the Holocaust: "*I propose to treat the Holocaust as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society. . . . Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's sufficient condition; it was, however, most certainly its necessary condition*" (*Modernity and the Holocaust* 12-3). Nor is the Holocaust the only significant challenge to the self-understanding of modernity, or its only "hidden possibility," as Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha, and Alice Jardine, among

others, have argued in discussions of slavery, imperialism, and patriarchal thought, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Dominick LaCapra also emphasizes that the annihilation of European Jews was not only modern, but included sacrificial scapegoating which marked the persistence and return of a longer history of antisemitism (*Representing the Holocaust* 188). These complicating arguments are essential because too closely identifying the Holocaust with modernity or its end would mean reproducing conceptually the very logic of the modern, which as Reinhart Koselleck argues in *Futures Past*, is founded on continuous "clean" breaks from the past. If knowledge of the Holocaust (along with that of the other historical experiences alluded to above) *does* nevertheless place modernity in terminal crisis, then new modes of thinking about history become desirable, although not easily realizable. These modes would need to remain in complicated tension with modern ideals, ideals which are not sufficient, but which, to paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, we cannot not want.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the discourses which have taken up the implications of the crisis in modernity for culture and thought have done so under the sign of the postmodern. But if there has been a "covert" connection between the Holocaust and postmodernism, as LaCapra has suggested (*Representing the Holocaust* xi), there has also been a great deal of unease among scholars of the genocide with some of the implications of postmodern social theory. In his introduction to *Probing the Limits of Representation*, Saul Friedlander considers the

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<sup>4</sup> On these matters, see Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*; Jardine, *Gynesis*. In fact, as these books sometimes demonstrate, there are complex intersections between slavery, imperialism, and patriarchy within the framework of modernity. Gilroy, as well as Richard Rubenstein in *The Cunning of History*, takes up the links between slavery and genocide.

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with Howard Winant, Spivak describes political intervention as "the persistent critique of what one cannot not want" ("Gayatri Spivak" 93). See also the essays collected in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*.

advantages and disadvantages of postmodern modes of representing the Holocaust. He argues that the "extermination of the Jews of Europe" is simultaneously "as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event" and is "an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits'" (2-3). On the one hand, Friedlander suggests, postmodernism's celebration of "ideological ambiguity and aesthetic experimentation," as well as its "openness . . . to what cannot yet be formulated in decisive statements," may help to capture this paradoxical quality of the event (4-5). On the other hand, he concludes, "the equivocation of postmodernism concerning 'reality' and 'truth'—that is, ultimately, its fundamental relativism—confronts any discourse about Nazism and the Shoah with considerable difficulties" (20), since it "runs counter to the need for establishing a stable truth as far as this past is concerned" (5). Other, more positive, although never unqualified, assessments of postmodernism's possible contributions to an understanding of the Holocaust can be found in LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust* and Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects*. My concern, however, is neither simply with the "threat" of postmodernism to the establishment of a historical account of the Shoah, nor with the resources it might provide to such understanding.

Rather, along the lines of Fredric Jameson's argument (*Postmodernism* 1-54), I understand postmodernism as a currently dominant "cultural logic" unavoidable in considering the Holocaust from the vantage point of the present. Even if I do not believe, as Jameson does, that this logic is only a matter of "late capitalism," I consider both postmodernism and late capitalist commodity production to be inextricable from considerations of the Holocaust discourse of the most recent decades. This is not simply a theoretical given, but derives from a reading of representations of the Nazi genocide such as Art

Spiegelman's *Maus* and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. Postmodernism, in my usage, is not a single mode of representation, as Friedlander seems to suggest it is ("Introduction" 4), but is an heuristic starting point for analysis, a periodizing category within which various modes coexist. Thus, both *Maus* and *Schindler's List* could be termed postmodern, but, as the differences between those texts reveal, such a label only begins to tell us what to expect in terms of narrative strategies and the status of history.

More than simply a rejection of modernism and an institution of some radically new project, postmodernist practices have frequently combined modernist forms with pre-, anti-, and non-modernist ones. According to Huysen, these practices have helped "to reopen a set of questions which the modernism gospel of the 1940s and 1950s had largely blocked from view: questions of ornament and metaphor in architecture, figuration and realism in painting, of story and representation in literature" (Huysen, "Mapping" 240). As the recent proliferation of Holocaust texts demonstrates, the eclecticism of postmodernism has had a liberating effect on attempts to represent the genocide, even if some of the products are not always adequate to the task. While modernist responses to the Holocaust, such as those of Adorno, had imposed strict constraints on representation, the return of realism, figuration, and narrative as representational possibilities has produced a number of substantial explorations of the Holocaust in postmodern modes. This return is not simply to the naive beliefs in the correspondence between text and world that preceded modernism and its poststructural theorization. Rather, many of the artists, writers, and film-makers representing the Holocaust today demonstrate an awareness that the high modernist celebration of autonomous art and critique of traditional realism did not put an end to the problems of mimesis so much as substitute another

regime of representation that they held was more realistic in a post-Holocaust world.<sup>6</sup> With the institutionalization of what had once been a resistant modernism and the increasing importance of mass culture in everyday life, the need to transgress the old modernist limits became necessary. Texts such as *Maus* and a museum such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial combine versions of realist narration, postmodern pastiche or technology, and a modernist self-consciousness that interrogates the very act of narrating genocide from a safe American distance.

Just as the modernism/postmodernism framework clarifies the status of the Holocaust in the contemporary world, Holocaust discourse helps to reframe the debate about periodization. One of the primary contributions of historical and cultural analysis of the Holocaust to postmodernism has been the sharpening of the conceptual relationship between the postmodern and the antecedent modern, and between the aesthetic-ideological and the socio-economic dimensions of those categories. As one of the formative events of the twentieth century, the Holocaust has not simply stood between eras as a border marker of the end of modernity. Continually reintroduced in new constellations with events of the last fifty years, the Holocaust has returned as representation and entertainment, as ethical and philosophical problematic, or as the stakes of political controversy. Some versions of Holocaust discourse have also emphasized the continued hold on postmodern society of the modern structures that made the genocide possible. Thus has this quintessentially modern event maintained a persistent presence in the postmodern world.

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<sup>6</sup> For an illuminating overview of debates about mimesis, see Prendergast's *The Order of Mimesis*. Prendergast moves deftly between the two poles which understand mimesis as "a regulative symbolic system for keeping a check on our collective *carte d'identité* or, alternatively, as one of the crucial symbolic forms through which collective sense is forged" (217).

To acknowledge but a few of the ways the Holocaust has inhabited postwar life (in its modern and postmodern manifestations), we have to take account of developments in numerous fields. Psychologists have investigated the trauma passed down from survivors to the second and third generations. Political analysts have observed the Holocaust's relevance to the legitimation and delegitimation of new nation-states such as West Germany and Israel. The literary experiments by Holocaust survivors in genres such as memoir and poetry and the particular problems posed to representation by the genocide have led cultural critics to question the status of aesthetic production in general after the Shoah. Meanwhile, the Holocaust has lent narrative power to other histories of suffering, as evidenced by talk of the "black Holocaust" and Native genocide, and by frequent comparisons between the Nazi genocide and events in Bosnia and Rwanda. Integrating such issues into the study of Holocaust discourse, as I attempt to do, necessitates thinking in terms of shifting constellations that connect different locations in the history and culture of the twentieth century.

In Chapter 1, I chart the significance of Theodor Adorno's response to the Holocaust, a response that consisted significantly of the theorization of an "after Auschwitz" chronotope. This chronotope, which structures Part I of this dissertation, has since come to serve as a point of reference for intellectual evaluations of postwar European culture. Adorno, who was both influenced by and critical of his friend Benjamin's work, continued the exploration of constellations between the past and present from a vantage point on the other side of the most extreme human-made catastrophic event. Benjamin's "Theses," despite their recognition of the depths to which modern society had sunk, also contain a belief in "a *weak* Messianic power," "a spark of hope" (254, 255), which appears in Adorno's postwar writings only in the most inverted,

negated form. As the chapter on Adorno will demonstrate, his philosophical system is characterized, in part, by a repetitive meditation on the status of life "after Auschwitz." In Adorno, the Nazi genocide comes to occupy a force of discontinuity which not only disrupts a progressive understanding of history, but understands that failed progressivism to imply the necessity of a new public discourse about the past. Adorno replaces Benjamin's revolutionary modernist rhetoric of being "man enough to blast open the continuum of history" (262) with a post-Freudian, post-Holocaust emphasis on "coming to terms with" or "working through" the past. While this may confirm the anti-political tendencies that many find in Adorno, it also signals a retrospective meditation on a concrete historical experience that came to occupy a central place in Adorno's thought.

Benjamin's stress on redemption through remembrance has probably contributed more than his idiosyncratic Marxist politics to the elaboration of a model of "working through" genocide.<sup>7</sup> Since the genocidal program included the attempted annihilation of an entire culture and its history—which demonstrates that the Nazis also had an understanding of the dialectic of civilization and barbarism—the traditional bases of possible resistance were significantly eroded at the same time that the need for new resources of memory was created. For that reason, it is difficult to imagine a revolutionary movement of the left that might have emerged out of and after the experience of the Nazi genocide. Attempting to claim such a title, Zionism has frequently set itself up as a negation of the weak Diasporic Jew, the "truth" of whose

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<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas suggests that Benjamin's writings propose an "anamnesic redemption of an injustice"—an "injustice that has already happened and that is seemingly irreversible" except through a "solidarity [that] can only be engendered and made effective by remembering" (*Philosophical Discourse* 14-5).

condition was found in passive victimization at the hands of the Nazis. Yet even Zionism's self-understanding was ultimately shaken by the confrontation with the voices of survivors which emerged during the Eichmann trial.<sup>8</sup> As Adorno's treatment of the genocide and his scandalous comments on "poetry after Auschwitz" imply, and as critic Lawrence Langer has reiterated at length in a variety of works relating to the Holocaust, no transcendence of the events of the "Final Solution" is possible, only the attempt to prevent its recurrence. The present world scene does not suggest the success of that attempt, but does reveal the ongoing necessity of coming to terms with history by opening up a repressed past and working it into a bulwark against modern racial and antisemitic terror.<sup>9</sup>

The reduced vision implied by the change of rhetoric from revolution to working through and also from mastering the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) to coming to terms with it (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*) suggests why the Holocaust might be increasingly articulated with the discourse of postmodernism. By citing Auschwitz as the occasion for the enunciation of a more "minor" vision of social change, Adorno anticipated Lyotard's concept of the decline of the master narratives within the "postmodern condition." No wonder, then, that the latter's treatise on postmodernity should be subtitled *A Report on Knowledge* and thus echo

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<sup>8</sup> For a powerful description of the impact of the trial on Israeli society, see Tom Segev's *The Seventh Million* (323-84).

<sup>9</sup> This sentence plays on three of the possible translations of the German noun *Aufarbeitung* used in the title of Adorno's essay "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?" The title has been translated as "What does coming to terms with the past mean?", but the verb *aufarbeiten* also suggests "opening up" and "working up." It is obviously related to the Freudian notion of *Durcharbeiten*, or "working through." However, Adorno takes the concept out of the analytic situation and into society, and signals this by using a different term.

Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In much of his work since *The Postmodern Condition* (for example, *The Differend* and *Heidegger and "the jews"*), Lyotard has more explicitly conjoined the post-Holocaust and the postmodern and has drawn on Adorno's "after Auschwitz" periodization. This analogizing of two kinds of discontinuity is seductive but ultimately dubious, not least because the "decline of the master narratives" always constitutes another master narrative itself and thus reproduces the modernist logic for which the formulation was supposed to sound the death knell. More troublingly, this residual master narrative frequently allows Lyotard to elide the materiality of Jewishness and antisemitism beneath more general categories of difference, otherness, and forgetting—"Auschwitz" disappears into a generalized map of postmodern geography in a way that Adorno's notion of "Auschwitz" as model of negative dialectics does not permit.<sup>10</sup> Inversely, Adorno's residual modernist aesthetic does not elucidate all of the contradictions of postmodern cultural production which have provided abundant material for contemporary attempts to come to terms with the rift in history.

Chapters 2 and 3, on Maurice Blanchot and Marguerite Yourcenar, complicate the temporality of "after Auschwitz" and refine the notion of working through the past by attempting to account for two very particular itineraries across the discontinuity of the war. The *oeuvres* of Blanchot and Yourcenar represent variegated examples of the difference that the Holocaust can make for literary expression and historical understanding. In their complicated mixtures of blindness and insight they demonstrate the impossibility of making unequivocal judgments about the work of culture in

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<sup>10</sup> On Lyotard's problematic figuration of "the jews," see Susan Shapiro, "Ecriture Judaïque."

the wake of modernity and they demand that the "post" be articulated with some account of the "pre-Holocaust."

In many ways, Blanchot's work provides a model for both the possibilities and risks of working through the past. The author of well over a hundred articles for right-wing and antisemitic French newspapers and journals throughout the 1930s, Blanchot made a fairly abrupt turnabout in the wake of the German occupation in 1940. During the course of the half-century since the war, Blanchot has, with various degrees of explicitness, performed a series of retrospective reworkings of his political engagement. While many critics see his postwar position as a withdrawal from politics and history, I argue that recent publications such as *Après Coup* and *L'Écriture du désastre* prompt a rereading of earlier texts which demonstrates a long term process of coming to terms with a personally and historically odious past. The Blanchot case is remarkable because it illustrates *how* a process of working through at the level of thought and political engagement *can* in fact take place (in contrast, I would argue, to the related Heidegger and de Man "affairs")—but also because it demonstrates that this process will not be complete or without complications. In the case of Blanchot, the danger is that alongside processes of working through will remain forms of acting out or repetition, here in the form of a philosemitism which inverts the values of antisemitism without fully questioning their premises.

Tracking the vagaries of Marguerite Yourcenar's late 1930s novel *Coup de Grâce* provides an example of how *not* to come to terms with the past and illustrates the pressures that subsequent "presents" can exert on historical understanding. Read through the lens of *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit's study of the sexual politics of fascist masculinity, *Coup de Grâce* appears as a stunning, prefigurative theory of fascist subjectivity. Weaving together

nationalism, misogyny, antisemitism, and anticommunism, the novel exposes, through the figure of its narrator Erick von Lhomond, the key ideologies that made the Nazi genocide possible. On the eve of Hitler's "New Order," the novel asks to be read as an indictment of the present. Viewed retrospectively, however, upon its translation into English in 1957, the novel takes on a different hue. At that time Yourcenar appends a preface to the text (without which she stipulates it cannot be henceforth published) which attempts a kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or mastery of the past that is far from the process of working through outlined by Adorno. In its new incarnation, *Coup de Grâce* functions according to the logic of "narrative fetishism" which Eric Santner has discovered in various Holocaust texts: "the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place" ("History beyond the Pleasure Principle" 144). The 1957 preface reinscribes Erick as the text's "clear-sighted" hero, thereby abjecting the Jewish and Communist figures and refashioning the apparent critique of fascism into a Cold War discourse which represses the historical rupture of genocide.

The prematurely "frozen" historical misunderstanding which obscured the Shoah's significance as a challenge to progressive modernity emerged out of a context which included the early years of the Cold War, the founding of the State of Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany, as well as other less ideological processes of forgetting. This historical freeze began to thaw during the course of the 1960s. In rapid succession, the Eichmann trial, the Auschwitz trials, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and the international student uprisings around 1968 provoked a reevaluation of the Nazi genocide and, perhaps more significantly, a broadening of public interest in the events. In the wake of the

'60s, and especially after the 1978 television mini-series *Holocaust*, coming to terms with the past has increasingly taken place in the context of popular culture and mass media. As with the high modernist discourses of Adorno, Blanchot, and Yourcenar, the popular or middlebrow, postmodern-inflected work of Philip Roth, Art Spiegelman, Steven Spielberg, and others contains both troubling and productive approaches to history and memory.

In Part II of this dissertation I will consider the new questions about confronting a temporally and spatially distanced catastrophe which arise as the Holocaust is "Americanized" and the products of the American culture industry are circulated internationally. The last twenty five years have seen a dramatic increase in the presence and intensity of Holocaust discourses in the United States. The historian Peter Novick remarks that the fate of Holocaust memory in the U.S. has been the opposite of what one would usually expect: "The slope of the curve of memory may vary but is just about always downward: most vivid in the immediate aftermath of the events in question, declining with the passage of time. It has been quite otherwise with the Holocaust: virtual silence, apparent social amnesia, for a full generation, then, between the late 1960s and the later 1970s, a Rostovian 'takeoff into self-sustained growth.'" If such a pattern seems to suggest the return of a traumatic repressed, Novick warns against over-eager applications of psychoanalytic categories to social situations and suggests that "we should look at conscious choices as well as subterranean forces; we should consider the changing circumstances, changing perceptions, changing communal needs, and changing American-Jewish self-understanding which led first to the marginalizing, then to the centering of the Holocaust" (Novick, "Holocaust Memory" 159). I would question the implicit voluntarism of this passage, especially the suggestion that American-Jewish consciousness precedes, as

opposed to *emerges with*, the new "centering" of the Holocaust. But Novick is correct to point to changing circumstances, and I would enlarge them to include global—as well as national—political, economic, and cultural factors.

The modernist spatio-temporal coordinates in which historical understanding of the event has heretofore been situated are themselves undergoing a process of mutation due to geopolitical realignments and burgeoning technologies. I use the framework of "The Year of the Holocaust" (a phrase adopted from a 1993 television news report on contemporary fascination with the Nazi genocide) in order to signal the ambivalences of the political, technological, and cultural processes in which the Shoah is now understood. Both chapters of Part II also engage either implicitly or explicitly with the ways that critics and historians have framed the study of Holocaust popular culture and discourse. Although critical of aspects of "low" and "middle" as of "high" culture, I do not assume that any particular genres, registers, or media are intrinsically more appropriate or inappropriate than any others, or that all discourses can be read according to the same protocols.

Amidst the flux of a postmodern media society, most Holocaust scholars have been dubious about the value to historical understanding of the popular cultural productions which, I would argue, are now defining the debates about Holocaust representation in place of the modernist discourse of Adorno. Fears of trivialization, distortion, denial, and worst of all, perverse repetition of the past haunt the writings of a number of the most influential critics, in what amounts to a modernist response to a newly postmodern cultural context. Alvin Rosenfeld, the author of a book on popular images of Hitler, has described the "two versions" of history provided by professional historians and products of popular culture as "rival enterprises," while warning that the latter may provide "a fictional subversion of the historical sense" and lead to "an

incipient rejection of the Holocaust" ("Another Revisionism" 90-1). In his provocative and influential *Reflections of Nazism*, Saul Friedlander traces the emergence of what he calls a "new discourse" on the genocide and Nazism. Looking primarily at films and novels, as well as biographies and histories, Friedlander identifies "the obsession [Nazism] represents for the contemporary imagination" as the sign not of an attempt at understanding, but of a "mute yearning" for what the Nazis offered their supporters: "a particular kind of bondage nourished by the simultaneous desires for absolute submission and total freedom" (19). These contradictory desires are shared by the "new discourse" and the Nazi aesthetic conjunction of kitsch and death, and represent, respectively, "the value put on the order of things as they are, on the one hand, and on death and destruction on the other" (130). The importance of Friedlander's work lies in his foregrounding of the cultural dimensions of Nazism's appeal: "Nazism's attraction lay less in any explicit ideology than in the power of emotions, images, and phantasms" (14). As a nexus of affect, representation, and fantasy (as well as ideologies, knowledges, and other material factors), cultural texts and practices become central to the decoding of fascism. At the same time, however, Friedlander's model tends toward a homogenization of aesthetic production concerning Nazism which erases the differences between works in order to group them under the category of the "new discourse" according to the "criterion of uneasiness" (20). Although his intentions are not censorial, Friedlander's argument tends to call into question the status of texts which, by virtue of their very ambivalence, might provide the best experimental space for the exploration of the powers of fascism and Nazism. In any case, the debate surrounding such examples of the "new discourse" as Syberberg's *Hitler* or Cavani's *The Night Porter* has been somewhat displaced over the last few years by the emergence

of a rather different discourse of Nazism, which I have called "The Year of the Holocaust."

Even those who are somewhat more optimistic about the status of the Shoah in collective memory and understanding than Rosenfeld and Friedlander tend to assert their opinion as holding *despite* the decadence of the popular. Michael Marrus, no less critical of the superficial circulation of images of the Holocaust in mass culture and of its "politicization" by propagandists of all ideological stripes, nonetheless sees cause for hope in the dissemination of professional historical research: "Holocaust history may help counter some of the abuses" of popular and propagandistic culture; "the increasing volume of Holocaust writing, its attendant professionalization as a field of study, and the growing integration of the Holocaust into the general stream of historical understanding contribute substantially to the demystification" of the "Holocaust myth" ("Use and Misuse" 117). This consensus among Holocaust scholars that opposes the science of history to the myths of popular culture comes, ironically, after a generation in which both theoretical and technological currents have tended to unsettle this traditional binary.<sup>11</sup> Certainly, as early as Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—itself composed in the immediate context of Nazism—scientific reason and myth were already considered mutually constitutive. A more full, retrospective knowledge of the "rational" and bureaucratized irrationality of the Holocaust than was available to Horkheimer and Adorno ought to unsettle

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<sup>11</sup> Despite his concerns about the "new discourse," Friedlander does not necessarily subscribe to this opposition as Rosenfeld and Marrus explicitly do. Friedlander includes historical texts in his discussion of the fascination with Nazism, and, in his exchange with Martin Broszat, he expresses doubts about the possibility at present of "normal" historicization of the type called for by Marrus (cf. Broszat and Friedlander, "A Controversy about Historicization").

definitively belief in the opposition between "professionalized" historical knowledge and "mystified" culture.

I do not mean to suggest that I oppose the crucial ongoing historical work which illuminates both the details and general picture of Nazi Germany and other aspects of the war and Holocaust. Yet as the German struggle over the past (the *Historikerstreit*) shows, the discipline of history is not immune to the oscillation between mystification and enlightenment, but is in fact constituted by their constant contact. In the debate surrounding Andreas Hillgruber's *Zweierlei Untergang (Two Kinds of Ruin)*, for instance, the objective establishment of facts was never at issue, but rather the rhetorical modes and the manners of employment with which those facts were framed. Whether Hillgruber's juxtaposition of the Holocaust and the collapse of Germany's eastern front constituted mystification or enlightenment, and whether it did so in the same way as certain remarks of Ernst Nolte, were the source of further arguments which attempted to displace the frontier between "science" and "ideology" in one direction or another.<sup>12</sup> But, although sceptical about professionalized historical knowledge, I would not say that Rosenfeld, Friedlander, and Marrus are wrong to feel uneasy about the manner in which the Nazi genocide is represented in contemporary culture. However, in Chapters 4 and 5 I will consider an increasing number of recent texts and projects which demonstrate that the postmodern cultural context does provide new resources for approaching the problem of historical representation and cognition. These works suggest a transformation of the historical sense, but one which offers possibilities for coming to terms with the past as well as more

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<sup>12</sup> For a balanced, general account of the *Historikerstreit*, see Maier. See also the documents collected in Knowlton and Cates. On Hillgruber in particular, see Perry Anderson's essay "On Employment: Two Kinds of Ruin."

troubling modes of mastering it and thus repressing its continual hold once again.

My discussion in Chapter 4 of Philip Roth and Art Spiegelman concerns the way that Jewish-American identity is constructed in the production of Holocaust discourse and in tension with the differentiation between Israel and the Diaspora and between Jewishness and non-Jewishness. Both Roth and Spiegelman demonstrate an acute awareness of the problems of Holocaust representation first articulated by Adorno with somewhat Biblical undertones; but instead of taking a definitive stand on the question of the "ban on graven images," they incorporate that specifically Jewish anxiety about visual representation into their "imaging" of the Holocaust. Far from the obsessions with the perpetrators detailed by Friedlander, Roth and Spiegelman meditate on and satirize individual and communal survival. Roth's novels and his memoir *Patrimony* do not attempt a direct confrontation with the Holocaust, but the genocide and, in particular, its phantasmatic place in Jewish-American and Israeli life, provide the context in which his characters negotiate identity positions. Roth's narratives are marked not so much by the trauma of the Holocaust, but by the way that trauma has been mediated for generations of Jews who, for historical and geographical reasons, did not experience the event itself.

Such a mediated relationship to the Holocaust—the experience of living in the shadow of an event which was never one's "own"—constitutes the space-time of what Marianne Hirsch has called "post-memory." Although I generalize the concept to include Jews spatially as well as temporally displaced from the event, Hirsch applies the term specifically to children of survivors, such as Art Spiegelman, who threads his own autobiography through a comic-book recounting of his father's Holocaust memories. Spiegelman's *Maus*

constitutes one of the most sophisticated attempts to represent the Holocaust within a popular idiom without resorting to the temptations of "kitsch and death" and without simplifying the conflicts and contradictions of aestheticizing mass murder. Thoroughly American in his mix of '60s rebelliousness and familiarity with the marketplace, Spiegelman at once provides a powerful and moving window onto the European events of the 1930s and 1940s and a sustained interrogation of the distance from which acts of representation necessarily take place. While Roth writes from an unquestioned position of Jewish masculinity and occasionally verges on sentimentality (especially in his portrait of his father), Spiegelman refuses to sanitize the "survival" of his parents and reveals the violence and gender asymmetry that characterize relations among victims and between victims and the generations that follow.

In the final chapter, I consider the culmination of the Americanization of the Nazi genocide in the two most widely discussed cultural interventions in Holocaust memory of recent years: Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The 1993 "events" of the opening of the film and of the museum reflect the cultural logic of "The Year of the Holocaust," a logic I reveal as involving a simultaneous obsession with victimization and with survival, rescue, and liberation. In the dual figures of Oskar Schindler and Itzhak Stern, *Schindler's List* encourages identification both with a "righteous gentile" and an untainted Jewish survivor, and thus avoids the more difficult questions about the lives and values which did not survive the Nazi assault. While I demonstrate how *Schindler's List* plays into, without questioning, a market logic that encourages the creation of an "American" version of Holocaust history, I also engage polemically with Claude Lanzmann, who uses Spielberg's film to put into question the very possibilities

of representing the genocide in a visual medium. Reading Lanzmann's film *Shoah* against the grain of his own writings on the Holocaust, I suggest that the difference between *Shoah* and *Schindler's List* does not turn on the "limits of representation," as he suggests, but on the conditions of production, distribution, and consumption of Holocaust images. After breaking down the stark formalist opposition between the two very different films, I assemble examples of how *Schindler's List* has indeed led to a small entertainment and tourism industry that exploits the Schindler story for financial and symbolic profit.

The Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. draws on a logic of identification similar to that in *Schindler's List* and encourages visitors to adopt, at the same time, the points of view of the U.S. soldiers who liberated some of the concentration camps and of the Jewish (and occasionally other) victims and survivors of the genocide. The museum also situates these identifications within a larger field of cultural and political tensions. Located at the nexus of U.S. political power, the museum inevitably raises questions about the negotiation of U.S. history and about the place of ethnic, racial, and sexual difference within that narrative. While the end result is unlikely to please all interested groups, the most important aspect of the museum's exhibit might be the very history of negotiation which accompanied its planning and which opened the space for questions of representation and difference to be posed. The combination of the museum's deconstructivist architecture and its designers' nuanced structuring of time and space creates a location in which conflicting versions of Holocaust history can converge and in which meditations on representation can emerge. At the same time, however, certain of the museum's artifactual and technological elements promise an unmediated and decontextualized knowledge of history which works against the careful

balance of pedagogical rigor and emotional evocativeness which the structure of the museum's narrative attains.

The variety of genres, discursive strategies, and media of the texts which I consider in the following chapters suggests a few contingent critical theses pertaining to the representation of history in general and to the history of Holocaust representation in particular. As the theoretical writings of Benjamin and Adorno propose, the past—and especially a traumatic past like the Holocaust—is susceptible both to repression through mastery or forgetting and to working through by way of ethically embedded and historically materialist practices. Because of the psychic and political ambivalences produced by traumatic histories, processes of repression and working through frequently coexist (as in Blanchot), while on occasion (as in the case of Yourcenar) a text can facilitate one and then the other in different historical or cultural contexts. In all cases, historical discourses involve complicated spatio-temporal constellations between successive presents and ever-shifting pasts in which the act of representation is always belated and displaced from the scene of its referent. Because of this necessary and enabling gap between sign and referent, I have chosen to take as my object of study not simply the manner in which the Holocaust has been represented, but the constellation which such representations form between historical events and the moment of their enunciation in narrative, image, architectural text, or philosophical proposition.

With each passing year, historical knowledge of the Nazi genocide becomes less and less separable from the history of its representation; coming to terms with the past necessitates coming to terms with the alternate versions of the past which successive eras have constructed. Authentic postures toward the past are the sole province neither of elite, popular, nor mass cultural

realms, although each has its own variable set of rules, limits, and effects. At different historical moments and in different cultural contexts, however, different regimes of representation may assume a predominant status and exert influence beyond the limits of their genre or medium. Thus, for example, Adorno's hypothesis about "poetry after Auschwitz" eventually took on significance in his later texts and in those of his critics which extended the suspicion towards representation into new fields of inquiry; such theoretical formulations have had clear, if often indirect, effect on subsequent artistic practices. Relatedly, cultural practices, such as those grouped under the "new discourse" and "The Year of the Holocaust," have presented both possibilities for and barriers to historical understanding, and should be taken by theorists as pedagogical instances which contribute to the understanding of both history and historical representation. Whether we like how they represent the Holocaust or not, such discourses are not extraneous, but intrinsic to history, since the writing of history cannot rise above the acts of narration and representation that it shares with all texts.

It is the work of the chapters that follow to demonstrate how these general assumptions about representations of the past intersect with what I argue are some of the key transformations currently taking place in Holocaust discourses. Part I turns on the centrality of certain European formulations of the Holocaust, most significantly Adorno's "after Auschwitz" chronotope, which has had the greatest influence of any single statement on debates about Holocaust representation. Part II recognizes that while Adorno's modernist ideas still circulate and exert a tremendous force, they have been overtaken in the 1980s and 1990s by the development of postmodern artistic techniques and critical practices and by a U.S.-dominated global culture. This shift from European to American definition of the problematic of Holocaust

representation (which by no means rules out the many significant European productions) is accompanied by a change in the kinds of identifications which these representations encourage. While a fascination with the perpetrators and the trappings of Nazism was in evidence throughout the 1970s (and as early as Yourcenar's *Coup de Grâce*), today the focus has shifted to survivors and victims, on the one hand, and liberators and rescuers, on the other. The most influential American representations of recent years combine the points of view of survivors/victims and liberators/rescuers in an amalgam that constitutes the new dominant aesthetic approach to the Holocaust. Such an aesthetic seems to correspond to various contradictory discourses and forces at work in the contemporary United States: an obsession with victimization of all kinds; a *fin-de-siècle* fascination with anniversaries and commemoration; a combination of global military supremacy and cultural hegemony with declining economic status; and uncertainty about the role of the liberator in a post-Cold War world where "good" and "evil" no longer correspond to an easy Manichean opposition.

No single explanatory model will be able to answer the question of why fifty years after the "Final Solution" the Nazi genocide continues to exert such a force on cultural, economic, and political spheres. My hope is that continued examination of documents like the ones discussed here will reveal constellations between the barbarism of the Holocaust and the history of postwar culture, constellations which might help break the hold which racial and ethnic terror has maintained before, during, and after Auschwitz.

## Chapter 1

### AFTER ADORNO: CULTURE IN THE WAKE OF CATASTROPHE

#### 1. Introduction: The Politics of Commemoration

In January 1995 a controversy erupted in connection with the fiftieth anniversary commemoration of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Upset that the Polish government seemed to be slighting the specifically Jewish elements of the Nazi extermination at Auschwitz, Jewish leaders and spokespeople, including Elie Wiesel, threatened to boycott the ceremonies. In the end, many Jewish groups attended, but they also organized an alternative ceremony that took place while Polish President Lech Walesa was opening the official Government commemoration with a speech that made no specific mention of Jewish victims (*New York Times*, 27 Jan. 1995: A3). This controversy constitutes one more episode in a half-century history of struggle over the meaning and memory of Auschwitz (and the Nazi genocide for which it often stands in). From debates over the number of victims who died there to the barely veiled antisemitism of Holocaust deniers who claim that no genocide took place to the conflicts over the national, religious, or moral "ownership" of the site, "Auschwitz" has been contested ground since the first Soviet soldiers arrived at the end of January 1945. The recent international focus on the "liberation" has revived the memory wars, which can serve as tools of education, but it has also limited understanding of Auschwitz by framing the narration of the events with the point of view of the victors. When the Soviets entered the camp, they found 7,000 prisoners—all who remained out of the almost one and a half million (of which 90% Jewish) who had passed through

the Auschwitz complex. Many of those "survivors" died *after* liberation. Several days before the Soviets arrived, the Nazis had taken the majority of the surviving 65,000 prisoners on a death march in a perverse effort to maintain control and hide the evidence of atrocity as the war slipped away. Placing these events under the sign of "liberation" says less about the events of the Holocaust than it does about the desire of contemporary cultures to master an elusive past which still echoes in the present.

While recent events highlight the ethnic and national politics of memory and identity, "Auschwitz" has also long been a locus for intellectual debate about what German-Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno called in a 1959 essay "coming to terms with the past." Adorno is very much responsible for the centrality that Auschwitz has had in academic and popular discourses. His proposition that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" amounts—along with Walter Benjamin's related insight that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism"—to the most famous and probably most frequently cited, statement about modern culture in the twentieth century. Adorno's phrase (not even a full sentence in the original German) has been quoted, and just as often misquoted, by writers working in a variety of contexts and disciplines, including philosophy, theology, aesthetics, and literary criticism.<sup>1</sup> Besides the conscious re-writings of Adorno's thought which extend it to fields never mentioned by Adorno; and

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<sup>1</sup> For misquotations, see note 2. Among the many citations, see, for example: in philosophy, Lyotard, *The Differend*, Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*; in theology, Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*; Metz, "Suffering unto God," Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*; in aesthetics, Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*; in literary and cultural criticism, Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, Howe, "Writing and the Holocaust," Steiner, *Language and Silence*, Santner, *Stranded Objects*. Hannah Arendt's writings on anti-semitism were published in German as *Nach Auschwitz*. See also Blanchot's reflections in *Après Coup*. Charlotte Delbo's memoirs were titled *Auschwitz et Après*.

besides the unconscious distortions of his words—"No poetry after Auschwitz," "After Auschwitz, it is no longer possible to write poems"<sup>2</sup>—the phrase has also circulated with even greater ease in the reduced, ever-malleable form: "after Auschwitz." As a two-word sound bite, "after Auschwitz" has become the intellectual equivalent of the political poster slogan "Never Again!"

Without a doubt, Adorno would be horrified to see his own words on the Nazi genocide turned into an academic truism; he would probably also be unsurprised, finding in the commodification of Holocaust discourse one more proof of the power of the late capitalist totality to reproduce itself and to colonize even the seemingly most resistant areas of social life. Yet, Adorno's self-citations and his use of the sound-bite version "nach Auschwitz"—which, translated into the English "after Auschwitz," has an ironically poetic effect—have facilitated the frequency with which the concept has circulated.<sup>3</sup> In this case, it is the repetitions, and not the original, which have attracted the most attention. The most frequent allusions to the "after Auschwitz" proposition which actually cite Adorno refer to works in which Adorno was commenting on his earlier statement. Given this pattern, as well as the infamous difficulty of Adorno's thought, it is not surprising that most commentary on this theme

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<sup>2</sup> The first phrase (or paraphrase) is from George Steiner, *Language and Silence* 53. See discussion in section 2. The second case, from Shoshana Felman's contribution to *Testimony* (33) is slightly more strange. Felman subtly, but significantly, misquotes *Negative Dialectics*—"it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems" (362)—thus detracting from the tentativeness of Adorno's sentence, and adding the question of "possibility," which, as we will see, is a complex one. Nevertheless, on the back cover of *Testimony*, the quotation is the standard, correct one from Adorno's original statement, nowhere cited by Felman or Steiner. There, however, Adorno is referred to as an "Austrian musicologist"!

<sup>3</sup> Gary Weissman pointed out to me the possible poetic seductiveness of the assonance in "after Auschwitz."

has de- and re-contextualized the words, often taking them far from whatever meaning Adorno might have intended.

The interdisciplinary nature of Adorno's writing has, somewhat ironically, left a fragmentary intellectual legacy, reaching diverse groups of readers, both hostile and friendly, in isolated institutional locations. Few of Adorno's commentators who have picked up on his Auschwitz hypothesis have been interested in his system of thinking as a whole; rather, they have been concerned with the implications of the proposition for the study of some aspect of culture in the light of the Nazi genocide. Inversely, those who *have* been concerned with Adorno's philosophical system have tended *not* to assign a central position to "Auschwitz," relating it, at most, to the "larger" issues of his sociological theory, his relation to other members of the Frankfurt School, his unorthodox marxism, or his particular version of dialectics. Nevertheless, this split in critical approaches makes a more bi-focal reading of the significance of the Holocaust in Adornian thought all the more attractive, if no less daunting.

After briefly tracking the way Adorno's proposition has entered the writings of two very different critics (George Steiner and Eric Santner), I will offer a close reading of Adorno's Auschwitz texts and of related works. The primary purpose of such an exercise is not to establish lines of influence or to test the truth-value of the proposition. Instead, I want to bring to view the production of an important cultural category, one which has migrated from the heights of philosophy into the currents of popular intellectual culture. And I want to demonstrate, through an analysis based on Bakhtin's category of the chronotope, how critical and philosophical approaches to the Shoah, even ones which declare its uniqueness, always project a theory of history: whether implicitly or explicitly, such writings position themselves in relation to

debates about the continuities and discontinuities of European modernity. One of Adorno's most important insights is that "after Auschwitz" philosophical categories must become chronotopes—"time-places" that serve as imperfect embodiments of historical events and tendencies. Adorno's focus on "Auschwitz" is not just turned toward the past, but creates a constellation between the past and a series of postwar developments in Germany and to a lesser extent in the United States and the Soviet Union. These developments include the persistence of the very modes of thinking and social organization that made the Holocaust possible. The becoming-historical of thought in Adorno corresponds to an ethical and political imperative to prevent the recurrence of "Auschwitz," an imperative which entails a critical program of public pedagogy and an ongoing engagement with modernity and democracy.

## 2. Rewriting Adorno

Among the rewritings of Adorno, two strategies of interpretation have emerged, one which reads him *à la lettre* and one which takes his words as a jumping off point for even grander claims. Both strategies have produced conflicting evaluations of those interpretations, although the great majority of the literalist critics have rejected Adorno's claim. After all, the production of poetry continues apace with no immediately obvious barbaric side-effects. Adorno has found more sympathetic readers in those who choose to stretch his insights beyond the restricted realm of poetry, as he himself ultimately did. Many, of course, have read Adorno in both ways, combining a particular attention to poetry or language with considerations of other areas of culture which come readily to mind as vulnerable to the catastrophe of genocide. I have chosen to discuss two particular adaptations here, not because they are

necessarily typical of either tendency, but because, even in misreading Adorno, they produce significant variants of his Auschwitz chronotope.

Careful attention to the literal realm of Adorno's proposal (i.e. poetry) does not necessarily result in an Adornian analysis, as the case of George Steiner demonstrates. Adorno's claim has produced sustained reflection by Steiner on the status of poetry and language "after Auschwitz." Steiner, who is probably responsible for the initial impact of the phrase on an English-speaking audience, is one of the few who have taken seriously the effect of Nazi brutality on the writing of poetry. In 1959, and without mentioning Adorno, he diagnosed the German language as not yet free of the contamination produced by years of service to the Third Reich. Steiner impugns not just the human agents of Nazism, but their instruments as well: "the German language was not innocent of the horrors of Nazism. . . . Nazism found in the language precisely what it needed to give voice to its savagery." What it needed, Steiner implies, was precisely the opposite of the language's rich poetic tradition: Hitler "sensed in German another music than that of Goethe, Heine, and Mann; a rasping cadence, half nebulous jargon, half obscenity" (*Language* 99). Even fifteen years after the fall of the Reich, Germany's reconstruction was, as the essay's title maintains, a "Hollow Miracle," because the nation's "language is no longer lived," but propagates "a profound deadness of spirit" (96).

Despite some reconsiderations about the status of contemporary German literature, Steiner reprinted the already controversial essay in his 1967 collection, *Language and Silence*. Despite an extremely wide range of reference, this work on "language, literature, and the inhuman" is premised on the Adornian proposition, and seems to reflect a reading especially of Adorno's *Noten zur Literatur*, which contains his second, better known

pronouncement on Auschwitz. In the preface, Steiner declares, "We come after. We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning" (ix). This paradox—that precisely of the relation of poetry and culture to barbarism—stimulates some of the book's fine insights into the spatial and temporal frameworks in which genocide takes place and in which we who come after approach it. In an essay aptly titled, "Postscript," Steiner defines his project as an attempt "to discover the relations between those done to death and those alive then, and the relations of both to us; to locate, as exactly as record and imagination are able, the measure of unknowing, indifference, complicity, commission which relates the contemporary or survivor to the slain" (157). Steiner draws (imprecisely) on Adorno's chronotope in a macabre illustration of such a relationship between past and present: "'No poetry after Auschwitz,' said Adorno, and Sylvia Plath enacted the underlying meaning of his statement in a manner both histrionic and profoundly sincere" (53).

As these formulations indicate, Steiner considers language not just a transparent, instrumental medium—although "The Hollow Miracle" demonstrates how it can be *instrumentalized*—but part of the historical metabolism of the social. Yet Steiner's view of history is profoundly different from Adorno's, and thus his conceptualizations diverge from the chronotope out of which they were constructed. Steiner's conception of "after" imports an ideology foreign to Adorno, for, unlike Adorno, Steiner presupposes the existence of what he calls "humane literacy": "We come *after*, and that is the nerve of our condition. After the unprecedented ruin of humane values and hopes by the political bestiality of our age" (4). Such a story of decline is far from Adorno's dialectical evaluation of the legacy of the Enlightenment, as I

will argue in the next section. Instead of marking the intimate connection between bourgeois culture and modern terror—explicit in Benjamin and in Adorno's appropriation of him—Steiner laments the latter's emergence at the expense of the former: "The possibility that the political inhumanity of the twentieth century and certain elements of the technological mass-society which has followed on the erosion of European bourgeois values have done injury to language is the underlying theme of this book" (49). Such an idealist understanding of historical change, which places values before material and political determinants, inverts Adorno's thinking. Since at least *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* reading of *The Odyssey*, Adorno has demonstrated the brutality inherent in the tendential hegemony of "bourgeois values." The message of "after Auschwitz" is not one of nostalgia for a glorious culture where language approximated light or music (Steiner, *Language* 41-46), but of the necessity of a new relationship to the future.<sup>4</sup>

If Steiner's account stands or falls on its conception of what comes *before* Auschwitz (which one could contrast, for example, to Adorno's discussion of lyric poetry), other approaches have attempted to move Adorno into a new era "after Auschwitz." In a fascinating study of postwar German film and culture, Eric Santner provides a strong and expansive misreading of

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<sup>4</sup> With *In Bluebeard's Castle* (1971), Steiner appears to be making a somewhat different, perhaps more Adornean, argument. Here he wants to read the inhuman events of the twentieth century, now referred to as the "Thirty Year's War" of 1915-1945, as anticipated by the "ennui" of nineteenth-century culture. However, even in negating the pastoral view of the last century and the more general nostalgia for past "Golden Ages," his writing still preserves the sentiment of decline. Implicit in such phrases as, "undermining European stability," "the dissolution of civilized norms," and "the breakdown of the European order" (22, 25, 29) is the same investment found in *Language and Silence* in the greatness of European culture, even at the same time that that culture's impotence before barbarism is exposed. To get out of this bind, Steiner constructs a "religious" theory of culture, which is particularly un-Adornean in its anachronistic idealism.

the poetry proposition. Santner frames his study, which deals primarily with the mourning and working through of the recent German past, by proposing to investigate the symmetries and asymmetries of the "postwar," "post-Holocaust," and "postmodern" periods. He critically aligns himself with postmodern theory, arguing that it "represent[s] a kind of translation into more global terms of Adorno's famous dictum that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz. After Auschwitz—after this trauma to European modernity—critical theory becomes in large part an ongoing elaboration of a seemingly endless series of 'no longer possibles'" (*Stranded* 8-9). Santner considers aesthetic, political, cognitive, and social practices as part of that iterative chain of what has become impossible: "an inability to tolerate difference, heterogeneity, nonmastery" (9). He thus understands the chronotope of "after Auschwitz" as signifying a fundamental transformation in culture which *displaces* the conditions of, and leading up to, Auschwitz.

Santner follows Alice Jardine in giving an affirmative reading of the "no longer possibles." Jardine writes, "I have preferred to speak of our epoch as one of impossibility, and to call for an *ethics* of impossibility: im-possibility, the antithesis of *posse/potis/pàtis*, the antithesis of that which relies on power, potency, possessors, despots, husbands, masters" (cited in Santner 165n). Santner's (and Jardine's) vision of the post-Holocaust future appears as a kind of mirror of Steiner's nostalgic humanism. If the postmodernists emphasize "difference" as opposed to some mythical common culture, they nevertheless both posit a positive vision of an alternative that has existed or does exist. In this they are equally far from Adorno, who, despite the ambiguous formulations of his texts, allows no direct formulation of culture "after Auschwitz" and proposes no such absolute break in modernity (whether or not it has in fact taken place).

Santner distances himself from some postmodern attempts to collapse the differences between the "post-Holocaust" and the "postmodern" and to ascribe to language the fundamental loss which represents the dark side of the "postmodern condition." But his appropriation of Adorno leaves it unclear whether the "no longer possibles" which he and Jardine enumerate are sketches of an ethical imperative or the actually existing condition of society. If the former, the tendency is certainly not Adornian, but potentially justifiable nonetheless. If the latter, the problem is greater. Santner would need to specify the relation between ideological/theoretical formulations of "difference" and the material conditions in which they take place. Has the Holocaust actually ushered in a society where intolerance and mastery are not possible? where despots and husbands no longer rule? A greater specification of the level of description of the discourse of impossibility is needed in order to attain the kind of insight that can be obtained from reading Adorno in his textual and historical contexts. The question becomes: in what ways does postmodernism break and not break with the condition of modernity which constitutes Adorno's primary focus?

### 3. Adorno on Auschwitz

Adorno's philosophizing takes place in a complicated tension with the modernist chronotope of progress—the belief in a constant movement forward through a homogenous space/time that continuously breaks with the past.<sup>5</sup> From his *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written with Max Horkheimer, to his

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<sup>5</sup> The articulation of modernity as a chronotope consisting of a constant break between the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" can be found in Reinhart Koselleck's *Futures Past*.

*Negative Dialectics*, Adorno simultaneously reveals the lacunae in the progressive vision of history and holds out for more enlightenment, as opposed to an impossible return to the pre-modern.<sup>6</sup> Viewing Adorno's work through the very particular lens of Auschwitz cannot give the complete picture of his, in any case, incredibly diverse work. But, given the status of the Holocaust within debates about modernity, the view opened up by a close, contextual reading of the pertinent texts is not insignificant. Adorno's Auschwitz chronotope is, in fact, a constellation of concepts which reconfigures itself over the course of two decades. It combines elements of aesthetics ("To write poetry"), temporality ("after"), and place ("Auschwitz") with a morally or politically evaluative predicate ("is barbaric"). My reading of Adorno will mobilize all of those categories in an attempt to reconstruct and examine his successive conceptual constellations. Despite the simplistic symmetry implied by the copula ("is"), neither the phrase as a whole, nor its individual particles is transparent, and they all demand interpretation.

A brief consideration of the status of "Auschwitz" serves to unsettle whatever literalist suspicions underlie one's reading of the phrase. As architectural historian Robert-Jan van Pelt has demonstrated, Auschwitz was initially to be the site of a National Socialist "design for utopia": "Himmler insisted that all Poles and Jews would be removed from the area, and that Auschwitz itself would become a 'paradigm of the settlement in the East.'" Only

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<sup>6</sup> In "Cultural Criticism and Society," Adorno writes: "The cultural critic is barred from the insight that the reification of life results not from too much enlightenment but from too little" (24). Considering Adorno's ideas in the light of debates over modernity and postmodernity, Albrecht Wellmer, in *The Persistence of Modernity*, argues for a notion of postmodernity as a "second" or "postmetaphysical modernity": "a modernity without the dream of ultimate reconciliations, but [which] would still preserve the rational, subversive and experimental spirit of modern democracy, modern art, modern science and modern individualism" (viii).

over the course of time, and relatively late in the camp's existence, did Auschwitz become the "dystopia" which we know it as today—although certainly, I would argue, this second moment was already contained in the "utopian" vision of the first (van Pelt, "Site in Search of a Mission" 94, 106). As a Germanization by the occupying power of the Polish town of Oswiecim, the name "Auschwitz" already reveals colonial violence. But it is almost immediately clear that "Auschwitz," a place name, is intended to refer not so much to a place as to an event or events. How else could something come "after" it? The event to which it refers is of course the slaughter by Nazi Germany of an estimated 1.6 million people (of whom 90 percent were Jewish) during the course of four years (1940-1944). The extermination which created Auschwitz's infamy was, for the most part, carried out at Auschwitz II, known as Birkenau, itself the sight of a razed Polish village, Brzezinka (Young, *Texture* 128). In disseminating such a formula, it seems unlikely that Adorno meant to refer only to the effects of the events at Auschwitz, since that particular camp system was one of many created and run by the Nazis. Auschwitz, then, has both metonymic and synecdochic significance in Adorno's phrase; the place-name refers both to events "proximate" to it, and to a totality of events (what we in the United States now conventionally call the Holocaust) of which it is one part.

Pierre Nora's work on "sites of memory" and James Young's crucial consideration of Holocaust memorials as such sites in *The Texture of Memory* remind us that memory is not indigenous to a (rhetorical or literal) place, but must be created through the ongoing intervention of human agents. In the case of Auschwitz, the process of memorialization had already begun by the time of Adorno's first mention of it, when, "[i]n 1947, the Polish parliament declared that the [remains] of the camp would be 'forever preserved as a

memorial to the martyrdom of the Polish nation and other peoples." This incipient nationalization of memory contrasted with another tendency, that of the International Committee of Auschwitz, founded in 1952, to put a socialist spin on the memory preserved there (Young, *Texture* 130). Unlike the efforts of the Polish and Soviet states, the International Committee, other groups of survivors, or variously interested parties, Adorno does not seek to alter the physical topography of Auschwitz. Nevertheless, through his mobilization of the proper name "Auschwitz," he has intervened in Holocaust memory work and has powerfully contributed to the negotiated significance of Auschwitz as a literal and rhetorical site of remembrance.

Much of Adorno's writing during his exile from Nazi Germany in the 1940s concerns the links between modernity, fascism, capitalism, and culture. This is true for the grand theorizing of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (written 1944; published 1947) as for the fragmentary, more personal insights of *Minima Moralia* (written 1944-47; published 1951). These works set the stage for the Auschwitz comments, which appear first in the essay "Cultural Criticism and Society" (written 1949; published in *Prisms*, 1951). This essay does not primarily concern the effects of World War II or the implications of genocide. Adorno dedicates the majority of the essay to a kind of *Aufhebung* of cultural criticism. In good Hegelian marxist fashion, he first demonstrates the implication of such criticism in "sinister, integrated society" (34) and in the culture which "shares the guilt of society" (26); he then argues that cultural criticism can be surpassed by the dialectical critic:

To accept culture as a whole is to deprive it of the ferment which is its very truth—negation. The joyous appropriation of culture harmonizes with a climate of military music and paintings of battle-scenes. What distinguishes dialectical from cultural criticism is that it heightens cultural criticism until the notion of culture is itself negated, fulfilled and surmounted in one. (28)

The dialectical method, for Adorno, entails a double movement back and forth between "the knowledge of society as a totality" and "the specific content of the object" (33). Cultural criticism, on the other hand, either reduces the object to a simplified notion of the social or exalts culture as a source of humane values. Against these tendencies, Adorno respectively castigates vulgar class analysis and insists that, "only insofar as it withdraws from Man, can culture be faithful to man" (30, 23).

If Adorno's stated goal as dialectical critic is "to shed light on an object in itself hermetic by casting a glance at society [and] to present society with the bill which the object does not redeem" (33), what can we make of the intrusion of Auschwitz in the essay's final paragraph? This last passage exemplifies Adorno's characteristic absolutism and puts the Auschwitz phrase in a context not usually considered by cultural critiques of Adorno:

The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation. (34)<sup>7</sup>

As the movement of this passage (and the essay from which it is taken) demonstrates, "Auschwitz" does not stand alone, but is part of a historical process. Adorno assigns Auschwitz a critical position in this history, but less as an autonomous entity than as a *moment*: Auschwitz is "the final stage of the

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<sup>7</sup> The key sentence in German reads, "Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur and Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben" (GS 10.1:30).

dialectic of culture and barbarism." This does not necessarily entail a position on the "uniqueness" of the event, but it does demonstrate what is missing from critics of Adorno who ignore the place of genocide in "society as a totality."

The complicated and ambiguous structure of Adorno's German (as well as the tendency to decontextualize the Auschwitz phrase—a tendency facilitated by its English translation into a separate sentence) reveals the source of the mistaken interpretation that Adorno is declaring Auschwitz the source of poetry's "impossibility." The context reveals that the agent of the impossibility is "absolute reification," the process which "absorb[s] the mind entirely." In this essay at least, Adorno places Auschwitz within his larger critique of modernity and the Enlightenment, which stand behind the movement of reification. Adorno assigns Auschwitz a particular position as the apotheosis of barbarism, but the significance of barbarism emerges from its place in what he sees as its Enlightenment dialectic with culture. The specificity of Nazi barbarism does not rupture, but continues, the strange blend of instrumentally rational means and irrational ends that the Frankfurt School understands as the primary legacy of modernity.

The barbarism or irrationality of "poetry after Auschwitz" is that, against its implicit intentions, it cannot produce knowledge of its own impossible social status. This impossibility is neither technical nor even moral, for Adorno clearly does not see barbarism as the result of individual abilities, actions, or attitudes; it results instead from an objective and objectifying social process which tends toward the liquidation of the individual. As a form of ostensibly free individual expression, the writing of poetry would contribute to that "semblance of freedom [which] makes reflection upon one's own unfreedom incomparably more difficult" (21). That semblance is false since the tendential expansion of capitalist society "integrates" the individual as

well as relatively autonomous spheres such as culture, and unifies them according to the identificatory logic of exchange. In Adorno's reading even marxist theory must change to keep up with the logic of capital since the latter "no longer tolerates even those relatively independent, distinct moments to which the theory of causal dependence of superstructure on base once referred. In the open-air prison which the world is becoming, it is no longer so important to know what depends on what, such is the extent to which everything is one" (34). The dark vision of this passage is self-evident, but it also leaves open possibilities for a less absolutist position. The emphasis on "becoming" is a crucial qualifier to Adorno's totalizing critiques, implying that domination has not yet eliminated all possible resistance. Secondly, the change in relation between base and superstructure signals an increased role for cultural politics since the cultural realm appears no longer derivative of economics. Yet, however other critics or a later Adorno might exploit these openings, in "Cultural Criticism" no such optimism is to be found.

In this essay, experience and expectation collapse into each other, as the mind is "absorbed," creating a surface on which domination plays itself out with deadeningly repetitive blows. Time is reduced to a series of stages whose difference is one of degree but not kind. Meanwhile space suffers a similar iterative demise as the concentration camp replicates itself in the places of public life: the world becomes an "open-air prison." If the citizens of the world do not recognize Auschwitz as the reflection of their lives, that is only, according to Adorno, because terror functions more abstractly outside of the camps through the logic of identity that laid the groundwork for genocide and which has not disappeared. The triumph of exchange value, another name for identity in Adorno, prepared the way for mass murder by rendering human life indifferent and therefore expendable. The two words of "after Auschwitz"

are thus equivocal: they mark the limits of an era, but one which was already on its way and which remains today; and they locate a crisis, but only in order to extend its effects well beyond its original space of experience.

The form that Adorno's reflections take here seems as much a product of Adorno's long exile in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s as it does of the situation in Europe. Adorno's experience of what he called "late capitalism" in the U.S. did not leave him with much belief in the existence of alternatives to the logic of fascism. To the contrary, Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—with its adjacent chapters on the Culture Industry and anti-Semitism—suggests a parallel between American-style monopoly capitalism and Hitlerian National Socialism. Passages in the Culture Industry chapter make those similarities explicit:

"No one must go hungry or thirsty; if anyone does, he's for the concentration camp!" This joke from Hitler's Germany might shine forth as a maxim from above all the portals of the culture industry. . . . Under liberalism the poor were thought to be lazy; now they are automatically objects of suspicion. Anybody who is not provided for outside should be in a concentration camp, or at any rate in the hell of the most degrading work and the slums. (149-50)

Whatever its truth-value (and who can deny its grain of truth in an era of homeless "shelters" and welfare "reform"), Adorno's argument demonstrates the spatio-temporal situatedness of the production of chronotopes (the latter are always produced from within other chronotopes). First, Adorno's writing bears obvious traces of his American location, as his later writings will intervene in a more strictly German context. Secondly, I think it is arguable that such a "comic" comparison could only take place at a moment *before* the camps had been sacralized as sites of ultimate and unspeakable terror—before Auschwitz was "Auschwitz." This is not to say that there was not already consciousness of the camps which Adorno "cites" in creating this phrase, for indeed there were already memoirs, films, and other accounts. But it is to

suggest that the temporal break which we retroactively infer in the phrase "after Auschwitz" had, in 1940s' public consciousness, not yet taken place. The response to, and the form of, some of the texts of the late 1940s (including Adorno's) confirm that the afterlife of an event needs to be periodized as carefully as the event itself. An event alone does not always rupture history; rather, the constellation which that event forms with later events creates the conditions in which epochal discontinuity can be thought.

The tenuous, if not imaginary, quality of the individual and of non-reified production in "administered society" is certainly one of Adorno's great themes, one which he expressed most emphatically in the Culture Industry chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But poetry, to which Adorno refers in this context, presents a particular aesthetic case which should not be immediately subsumed under the general view of culture under late capitalism. In reflecting on the specificity of poetry in Adorno's system we observe the emergence of inconsistencies. In his 1957 essay "On Lyric Poetry and Society" Adorno shows the limits of lyric poetry—"the most fragile thing that exists"—in the attempt "to attain universality through unrestrained individuation" (*Notes* 37, 38). The process of individuation fails, and the lyric cannot remain aloof from the "bustle and commotion" of society, because "the demand that the lyric world be virginal, is itself social in nature. It implies a protest against a social situation that every individual experiences as hostile, alien, cold, oppressive" (37, 39). Poetry cannot actualize its own ideal and stand outside the forces of the rationalized social totality. However, the essay on lyric poetry does not entirely endorse the pessimism about culture evident in the cultural criticism essay because it shows poetry as registering an element of protest. Poetry is not simply an ideological attempt "to falsely present some

particular values as general ones," Adorno warns in 1957; the essence of poems, and other works of art, "consists in giving form to the crucial contradictions in real existence": in direct contradiction to the ideas of ideology critique, "the greatness of works of art . . . give voice to what ideology hides" (39). For Adorno in the late 1950s, poetry has an important mimetic function, one that consists not in reproducing the harmonious narrative of traditional realist forms, but rather in expressing the rifts that realist mimesis represses. The distinction between this revelatory notion of art as expression and the earlier idea that "poetry after Auschwitz" mystifies knowledge of the social points to the existence of a dual theory of poetry in Adorno. When, in a later discussion, Adorno switches from "poetry after Auschwitz" to "lyric poetry after Auschwitz," he also shifts his conception of the aesthetic from that in "Cultural Criticism and Society" to that in "On Lyric Poetry in Society."

Thirteen years after first measuring the possibility of post-Holocaust culture, and after much intervening public debate, Adorno returned to the theme in his essay "Commitment." This work, better known than "Cultural Criticism and Society," criticizes Sartre's then fashionable notion of engaged literature. The Auschwitz section, entitled "The Problem of Suffering" (in one of its English translations) serves as a hinge between a critique of Sartre's and, especially, Brecht's politicized aesthetic and a defense of the "autonomous" art of Kafka and Beckett. Adorno devastatingly reveals the contradictions of Sartre's conception of art, demonstrating that his plays are "bad models of his own existentialism": "they display in their respect for truth the whole administered universe which his philosophy ignores; the lesson we learn from them is one of unfreedom" (304). Adorno similarly exposes the lack of fit between form and content in Brecht's satire of fascism. Brecht trivializes fascism, making it appear "mere hazard, like an accident or crime," so that its

"true horror . . . is conjured away" (308). Adorno is not immune to Brecht's political claims but he remains unimpressed by the political level of the work: "If we take Brecht at his word and make politics the criterion by which to judge his committed theatre, by the same token it proves untrue" (309). Thus far, then, Adorno seems to confirm the aesthetic pessimism we saw in the earlier essay, now extending it beyond bourgeois individualist production into the engaged art of "the people."

The example of Auschwitz reveals a third possibility beyond the antinomy of political/apolitical art. Adorno begins by self-consciously reiterating his earlier claim, now specified as a citational "saying" about *lyric* poetry,<sup>8</sup> and then goes on to complicate (if not contradict) it:

I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature. . . . But [Hans Magnus] Enzensberger's retort also remains true, that literature must resist this verdict, in other words, be such that its mere existence after Auschwitz is not a surrender to cynicism. (312)

The paradoxical situation of art is that this cynicism can be avoided only when kept at bay by a full recognition and remembrance of the horrors of the age. The purpose of art is neither to represent the interests of the proletariat or the individual, nor to grant meaning to abstract humanity, but to remain true to suffering: "The abundance of real suffering tolerates no forgetting. . . . Yet this suffering, what Hegel called consciousness of adversity, also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it" (312). The impossible demand put on art more closely

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<sup>8</sup> In German, this passage begins, "Den Satz, nach Auschwitz noch Lyrik zu schreiben, sei Barberei, möchte ich nicht mildern" (GS 11:422). "Satz" is more neutral than "saying," meaning "sentence" or "phrase," but the sense of self-citation is still present.

resembles the status of lyric poetry in the 1957 essay—the anguished individual expression of social contradictions—than it does the notion of poetry as that which prevents the comprehension of its own impossibility. But, although lyric poetry is mentioned by Adorno, it does not serve as the primary example of post-Auschwitz aesthetics.

"Commitment" mobilizes a different aesthetic in the wake of the catastrophe from that dismissed in "Cultural Criticism and Society" or partially rescued in "Lyric Poetry and Society"—its name is Beckett. For Adorno, Beckett's writings (as well as Kafka's) enact what others only proclaim: "Kafka and Beckett arouse the fear which existentialism merely talks about. By dismantling appearance, they explode from within the art which committed proclamation subjugates from without, and hence only in appearance" (314-15). In these writers—one who proleptically internalized the disaster, the other who retrospectively maintains its absent "presence"—the notion of art's barbarity is not refuted but enacted in order to present the barbarity of the age. This allows them to avoid the more chilling paradox present in "the so-called artistic representation" of historical terror: "When genocide becomes part of the cultural heritage in the themes of committed literature, it becomes easier to continue to play along with the culture which gave birth to murder" (312-13). Representational art creates the possibility for sadistic identification in members of the audience because it contains a surplus of pleasure: "The so-called artistic representation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it" (312). The problem of pleasure is intrinsic to the non-synchronicity of representation—in retrospect, it seems, any historical situation can be mobilized for the enjoyment of the spectator who consumes history at a spatial and temporal distance. Beckett's art, Adorno claims, evades

this problem through its refusal of realist figuration, but one is justified in asking why it too cannot be appropriated by the Culture Industry. This is precisely what happens, according to Jameson, during the transition to postmodernism. Calling Adorno's essay an "anti-political revival of the ideology of modernism," Jameson draws attention to the way that "what was once an oppositional and anti-social phenomenon in the early years of the century, has today become the dominant style of commodity production" ("Reflections" 209). Adorno's defense of high modernism need not be understood uniquely, however, as a transcendental defense of a particular ideology of style. Reading Adorno in context demonstrates the specificity of his intervention in a post-Auschwitz culture, even as it inevitably illustrates the contextual limitations of his political and aesthetic vision.

Adorno makes clear that "autonomous" art's apparent avoidance of social realism should not be confused with ahistoricism. In "Trying to Understand *Endgame*," written contemporaneously with "Commitment," he gives a more complete analysis of Beckett and uses this play to add to the "after Auschwitz" chronotope already under construction in his other essays. Adorno once again contrasts Beckett to existentialism, claiming that "French existentialism had tackled the problem of history. In Beckett, history swallows up existentialism" (*Notes* 244). In its refusal to find any figment of humanity within the post-catastrophic landscape, *Endgame* figures forth "the historical horror of anonymity" (245). The subject, and the subject's historical sense, may have atrophied, but, for Adorno, this is itself a historical process for which Beckett's play serves as a registration of the real. If existentialism "negat[es] precisely the particularity, individuation in time and space, that makes existence existence and not the mere concept of existence," "Beckett poses the decisive antithesis. . . . Instead of omitting what is temporal in

existence—which can be existence only in time—he subtracts from existence what time, the historical tendency, is in reality preparing to get rid of" (246). Beckett's chronotope is thus one of space and time's tendential erasure—not an abstract negation of particularity, but a concrete process affecting "consciousness' power to conceive [history], the power to remember" (247).

This chronotope, while certainly incorporating the temporality of the atomic age, among other factors, has intimate ties with the post-Holocaust era. Hiroshima and Auschwitz combine to transform living into halflife, or better, *afterlife*: "After the Second World War, everything, including a resurrected culture, has been destroyed without realizing it; humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on a rubbish heap that has made even reflection on one's damaged state useless" (244). The emphasis in "Cultural Criticism and Society" was on the extermination camp as the "final stage" of reification owing its existence to the triumph of an instrumental reason unleashed by the Enlightenment and capitalism. This tendential reading of history—itsself a kind of inverted reflection of the concept of progress—is certainly still present, but Adorno's reflections on Beckett put more emphasis on what comes after the "Final Solution," on the survival of the ultimate barbarism into an era premised on reparation or "*Wiedergutmachung*."

Adorno was writing in the wake of a period of post-war reconstruction during which there was an ongoing attempt to normalize and legitimate West German democracy and its "economic miracle"; this could only work through a selective forgetting of the recent past and an instrumentalization of the state's financial reparations to individual Jews and to Israel. According to Johannes von Moltke, West Germany's official "politics of memory" vis à vis the Holocaust and Jews served (and, to a certain extent, continue to serve) as "the

Federal Republic's entry-ticket into the Western alliance" (15).<sup>9</sup> Adorno was dubious about the break with the past that this instrumentalization of memory implied. He went so far as to suggest in 1959 that he "consider[ed] the continued existence of National Socialism *within* democracy potentially more threatening than the continued existence of fascist tendencies *against* democracy" ("Coming to Terms" 115). Bearing the message that all cannot be made good again, Beckett's plays and Adorno's essays intervene in the affirmative postwar cultural politics of Western, and particularly German, society. Adorno finds evidence of the underside of the postwar European "rebirth" in the fate of the characters Nagg and Nell, which represents the hypocrisy of the "welfare system": "*Endgame* prepares us for a state of affairs in which everyone who lifts the lid of the nearest trashcan can expect to find his own parents in it. . . . The Nazis have irrevocably overthrown the taboo on old age. Beckett's trashcans are emblems of the culture rebuilt after Auschwitz" (266-67). The "state of affairs" uncovered by Adorno recalls George Steiner's controversial denunciation of what he termed Germany's "hollow miracle." Steiner, who would a few years later bring Adorno's ideas about Auschwitz to an English-language readership, argued in 1959 that the German language itself was tainted by the afterlife of the Shoah (*Language and Silence* 95-109). Adorno attempts to expose that hollowness from a strategic position within the Federal Republic, but his account of the cultural devastation extends beyond national boundaries, as ultimately does Steiner's.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For the Israeli perspective on the politics of *Wiedergutmachung*, see Tom Segev's *The Seventh Million* (189-252).

<sup>10</sup> See the other essays in *Language and Silence*, written in the early and mid-1960s and clearly influenced by Adorno.

Both of the essays that privilege Beckett's autonomous art—finding in them that to which "has fallen the burden of wordlessly expressing what is barred to politics"—end, unsurprisingly, with a paradox. "Commitment" evokes Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (the model for Benjamin's Angel of History) in order to capture the ambiguity of the chronotope of "after Auschwitz": "The machine angel's enigmatic eyes force the onlooker to try to decide whether he is announcing the culmination of disaster or salvation hidden within it" (318). In the *Endgame* essay, Adorno claims that in Beckett's "imageless image of death . . . the distinction between absolute domination—the hell in which time is completely confined within space, in which absolutely nothing changes any more—and the messianic state in which everything would be in its right place, disappears" (274). Although Adorno's writing often seems to find in this "last absurdity" confirmation for what he calls in *Minima Moralia* his "melancholy science," we might also find in these later essays that science's "standpoint of redemption" (*Minima Moralia* 15, 247).

Perhaps because of the melancholic's refusal to break with a traumatic event, some historical sense is preserved, even if only in the form of the "imageless image" or the "wordless expression." "Trying to Understand *Endgame*" is dedicated, after all, "To S.B., in memory of Paris, Fall 1958" (241; emphasis added). The patently Benjaminian language and themes of these passages raise interesting questions about the relation between Adorno and the author of the "Theses on the Philosophy of History."<sup>11</sup> Most significantly for this project would be the impetus that Adorno takes from the Theses for the construction of a chronotopic constellation between the *Hitlerzeit* and the postwar era which Benjamin never knew. Differentiating historical

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<sup>11</sup> For consideration of Benjamin's influence on Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, see Buck-Morss, *Origins* and Jameson, *Late Marxism* 49-58.

materialism from historicism, Benjamin claims that the former understands historicity as a retrospective quality of events: facts "[become] historical posthumously." The historical materialist "grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' [*Jetztzeit*] which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" ("Theses," *Illuminations* 263). The kind of memory Adorno produces in Beckett's texts is the effect of a constellation connecting Europe and the Federal Republic with its recent past. But while Benjamin is primarily concerned with "blast[ing] open the continuum of history" (262), Adorno's rather different concern here is to exhibit the continuity which underlies a superficially discontinuous German history.

In a famous study from the late 1960s, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich argued that the vast majority of German people had never come to terms with their relationship to the crimes of the Nazi era, but had, instead, repetitively and unconsciously attempted to break entirely with the past: "That so few signs of melancholia or even of mourning are to be seen among the great masses of the population can be attributed only to a collective denial of the past" (cited and discussed in Santner, *Stranded* 4). Adorno anticipated this diagnosis of Germany's "inability to mourn" in his 1959 discussion of working through the past [*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*]. He reads what the Mitscherlichs term "rupture" with the past as a surface phenomenon which indicates a deeper continuity: "This collective narcissism [whereby powerless individuals were gratified through identification with the whole] was grievously damaged by the collapse of the Hitler regime; a damage which, however, occurred in the realm of simple fact, without each individual becoming conscious of it and thereby getting over it" ("Coming to Terms" 122; also cited in Santner 5).

In his writings from the late '50s and early '60s, we see Adorno refining and reshaping the conception of Auschwitz first mentioned in "Cultural Criticism." Here he is concerned with the production and reception of culture in a context where rupture and continuity coexist—where, in other words, layers of different conceptions of space and time can cluster around a single name, Auschwitz. He writes from *within* a situation in which the historicity of Auschwitz has not yet settled into a "fact." Rather, it floats within certain institutionally determined parameters, as a fact in the making and thus as one of the means and the stakes of various political negotiations. His concern is obviously not with the individual psychology of Germans but with objective "conditions over which [the majority of people] have no control, thereby keeping this majority in a condition of political immaturity [*Unmündigkeit*]" ("Coming to Terms" 124; see also "Erziehung"). To combat such immaturity he recognizes the need to wage a battle over the construction of chronotopes, hence his championing of forms of cultural production, such as that of Beckett, which represent contemporary history as the persistence of dark forces from the recent past. Adorno considers such a historical vision necessary to the opening of alternative futures and not a retreat into defeatism. In his late writings, Adorno will continue this discussion in the realm of metaphilosophical discourse, emphasizing the austere pedagogical and theoretical praxis necessary for truly activating what Benjamin called the Messianic potential of the present.

While I have pointed to a break or shift in Adorno's thinking between the first two moments of his continuing "after Auschwitz" discourse, the historical period which encompasses those two moments does not so much witness a break as mark the development of Germany's postwar

reconstruction. Adorno's second reiteration of "poetry after Auschwitz," on the other hand, does not break radically with his thinking in "Commitment," but it was published in a cultural context where the significance of the events of the Second World War was in the process of transforming itself radically. Because of the different emotional and historical forces unleashed by the Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961, the Auschwitz trials in the mid-'60s, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and the 1968 international student revolts, the '60s saw a rapid and uneven development of "Holocaust consciousness."<sup>12</sup> The belated emergence of this historical consciousness varied according to national context, as well as more local and psychological factors, but it remains a social fact that, somewhere in that decade, "Auschwitz" took on a new significance. The repetition of "after Auschwitz" by Adorno and his followers such as George Steiner both reflects this emergence and helped to shape it.

Adorno's testimony to the persistence of historical memory in unlikely cultural locations (i.e. the writings of Beckett) makes clear that the near-silence and imagelessness of art after Auschwitz should not be confused with actual silence or with a ban on representation *tout court*. "Not even silence gets us out of the circle" of culture and barbarism after Auschwitz, Adorno writes in *Negative Dialectics*. "In silence we simply use the state of objective truth to rationalize our subjective incapacity, once more degrading truth into a lie" (367). Here, Adorno preempts the reading of his proposition that implies that because the horror of the annihilation of the Jews cannot be perfectly imitated or reproduced according to the ideals of a naive realism (as if anything could be), all artistic representation should cease. Adorno disallows

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<sup>12</sup> See the essays collected in Saul Friedlander's *Memory, History; and the Extermination of the European Jews* for insights into the growth of Holocaust memory in different national contexts. For the United States context in particular, see Novick.

evidence of the subject's incapacity to represent total horror as grounds for the abdication of art. Such a negative aesthetic of silence, he argues, would only be functionally motivated by the desire "to rationalize" its own predestined failure. But this would be no refusal of the administered society which made Auschwitz possible since "to instrumentalize art is to undercut the opposition art mounts against instrumentalism" (*Aesthetic Theory* 442). Art's role is its "afunctionality," and thus its success lies in its very failure (although not *any* failure). Hence the *proximity* to silence of the art Adorno values. This proximity is not an abdication but an articulation of suffering. Adorno finds this quality in the poetry of Paul Celan, whom he compares to Beckett on the basis of a common "anorganic" writing practice: "[Celan's] poetry is permeated by a sense of shame stemming from the fact that art is unable either to experience or to sublimate suffering. Celan's poems articulate unspeakable horror by being silent, thus turning their truth content into a negative quality" (*Aesthetic Theory* 311, 444). Such an assessment of Celan in Adorno's final work takes on added significance given that the original statement about poetry after Auschwitz is considered in popular mythology a pointed rejoinder to the former's "Todesfuge" (see Rosenfeld, *Double* 13).

After the disavowal in postmodernism of the "great divide," as Andreas Huyssen calls it, between high and mass culture, Adorno has frequently been criticized for his conception of the aesthetic realm autonomous from the social (Huyssen, "Mapping" 249). Yet Adorno's comments about art after Auschwitz demonstrate his understanding of the social content of the "silent" aesthetic. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno echoes his comments in "Commitment" and goes on to suggest links between art and historical understanding: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer

write poems." He then immediately renders this recantation ambiguous: "But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living" (362-63).<sup>13</sup> This last thought brings Adorno's philosophy to the edge of the abyss, but it is only in this position that he finds the resources for a thoroughgoing negation of *what is*. The guilt of surviving the Final Solution, Adorno suggests in this emotionally charged passage, "is irreconcilable with living," but it "is what compels us to philosophize" (364). This passage anticipates psychological insights about what has come to be known as "survivor's guilt," and it also points us toward the social framework in which this condition's symptoms became readable. The surprising *personal* quality which Adorno's writing exhibits testifies to a *social* context in which, during and after the Eichmann trial, survivors were beginning to be recognized as a group that had been silently haunted by a particular set of experiences and expectations about life "after Auschwitz."

In this light, it is interesting to compare the reflections in *Negative Dialectics* with the famous Eichmann testimony of Holocaust novelist Yehiel De-Nur (whose pen-name, Ka-Tzetnik, is derived from the German acronym for concentration camp). Before literally collapsing on the stand, in "one of the most dramatic moments in the country's history," according to an Israeli journalist (Segev, *Seventh* 4), De-Nur described his experience of the camps in words which Adorno's formulation echoes: "Time there was different from what is here on earth. . . . And the inhabitants of that planet had no names. . . . They were not born there nor did anyone give birth. Even their breathing was

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<sup>13</sup> The German makes it clear that the "could" and the "can" of these sentences refers not to an ability, but an ethical principle: ". . . darum mag falsch gewesen sein, nach Auschwitz ließe kein Gedicht mehr sich schreiben . . . ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse, ob vollends es dürfe. . ." (GS 6:355). The verbs "lassen" and "dürfen" used here denote "allowance" and "permission."

regulated by the laws of another nature. They did not live, nor did they die, in accordance with the laws of this world" (cited in Segev 3). These words could come from Adorno's description of the universe of a Beckett play. This public enunciation of an "Auschwitz" chronotope, from someone who, unlike Adorno, had been at its center, contributed to the climate in which an "after Auschwitz" chronotope could also be spoken. Only beginning in the '60s could survivors and others who come after begin to bring their respective experiences and expectations to bear on each other in the public sphere. Such a delayed "event" (or the doubling of the event in its working through) also necessitates reflection on the pre-existing modes of reflection; Adorno's late work attempts to bring theory into line with the cultural confrontation with trauma and the attempts at the work of mourning happening all around him.

Thus, the "after Auschwitz" context forces a recognition that philosophy itself has been transformed by the material forces of history which led to the Shoah; in fact, it forces that very materialism of history "upon metaphysics." Such a process makes for some rather ironic philosophical actors: "a new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself" (365). This mutation of philosophy, however, should not be seen simplistically as the symptom of a complete historical break which would install a radically new chronotope in Western culture, although much of the rhetoric of "after Auschwitz" would seem to imply this. As Adorno makes clear in a radio broadcast from the same year as *Negative Dialectics*, the categorical imperative not to repeat Auschwitz—here considered as the primary goal of education—is necessary precisely because such a break has *not* taken place. In "Erziehung nach Auschwitz" [Education after Auschwitz] Adorno encourages the attempt to build consciousness of the links between civilization and barbarism for the

very reason that "the fundamental structure of society and its members, which brought it on, are today the same" [*die Grundstruktur der Gesellschaft und damit ihrer Angehörigen, die es dahin gebracht haben, heute die gleichen sind*]. Adorno locates the roots of genocide in the development of modern nationalism, and inscribes its potential in a "societal tendency" [*gesellschaftlichen Tendenz*] which cannot be separated from the "great tendencies of progress, of Enlightenment" [*großen Tendenz des Fortschritts, der Aufklärung*].

While in "Cultural Criticism and Society" Adorno seemed to subscribe to a notion of history as the inverse of progress—a theoretical position which appeared to leave no room for the possible redirection of social tendencies—in his later work he mobilizes a more complex view of history, but one which at first glance seems even gloomier. In *Negative Dialectics* he at once negates and affirms different notions of the kind of universal history implicit in the notion of Auschwitz as a "stage" in a process of reification: "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb." The domination of nature and humanity—epitomized in the Nazi genocide and the threat of nuclear annihilation—"is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history. . . . History is the unity of continuity and discontinuity" (320). In order to provoke a liberating discontinuity which would not be irrational chaos, it will not do to locate a parallel or parasitic progress alongside or within the universal history of barbarism. For Adorno, thought's resistance to universality comes not from a celebration of difference (what he would call the non-identical) as in much poststructuralism, but rather from a refusal to rationalize or grant meaning to that which already exists. Thus, while the desirability of universality is denied, its stranglehold on history is

not. Adorno replaces the affirmation of difference in the present with an appeal to a version of "the theological ban on images" that defers the emergence of difference to a post-totalitarian world which has not yet arrived. Echoing his assessment of Celan and Beckett, Adorno holds that "Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity" (207). Here the aesthetic and the political are shown to possess a similar critical engagement with the present. There are clear links between the ban on articulating Utopia and on Celan's imageless image and Beckett's wordless expression. The latter are the artistic and discursive correlates of Utopia in a theory that doubles historical time, asserting the coexistence of a "linear" regression and a discontinuous hope which can only be voiced through determined and determinate negation.

Adorno does not propose this theory *as* "universal history," but as the product, once again, *of* history. Philosophy becomes materialist because "after Auschwitz there is no word tinged from on high, not even a theological one, that has any right to exist unless it underwent a transformation" (ND 367). The philosophy of history responds to material forces, as well. If Adorno ascribes the overarching lines of force to the tendential history of capitalism, he reserves a particular place for Auschwitz:

But the capitalist system's increasingly integrative trend, the fact that its elements entwine into a more and more total context of functions, is precisely what makes the old question about the cause—as opposed to the constellation—more and more precarious. We need no epistemological critique to make us pursue constellations; the search for them is forced upon us by the real course of history. (ND 166)

Drawing attention to the chronotopic dimensions of the Benjaminian constellation in this passage, Fredric Jameson observes "the way in which Adorno here uses the spatiality of the figure of the constellation to argue explicitly against 'linear causality,' but in the name of history itself" (*Late*

*Marxism* 59). The paradox is that this spatialization of historical understanding is, in some way, the product of the movements of a more "progressive," "linear" history: the "increasingly integrative trend" of capitalism and Enlightenment. The Nazis were, Adorno sometimes implies, the agents of the qualitative transformation whereby history reached a new spatialized stage. The exemplary space of this stage is the concentration, or more accurately, extermination camp: "Genocide is the absolute integration. It is on its way wherever men are leveled off—'polished off,' as the German military called it—until one exterminates them literally, as deviations from the concept of their total nullity. Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death" (ND 362). In Adorno, the language of "identity," of "levelling," is directly connected with the domination of exchange value which capitalism sets in place. Thus Auschwitz is at once an "effect" of reification and the ultimate fulfillment of its tendency to eliminate particularity, in this case the particularity of those human beings not integrated into the Aryan "race."

The name that Adorno gives in *Negative Dialectics* for this relationship that Auschwitz has with the social totality is the "model." The third part of that work is divided into three sections, which Adorno names "models of negative dialectics," and the last, "Meditations on Metaphysics," includes his most extensive reflections on Auschwitz. Adorno's explanation of what he means by "models" is crucial to understanding how the Holocaust intersects with his thought:

They are not examples; they do not simply elucidate general reflections. Guiding into the substantive realm, they seek simultaneously to do justice to the topical intention of what has initially, of necessity, been generally treated—as opposed to the use of examples which Plato introduced and philosophy repeated ever since: as matters of indifference in themselves. The models are to make plain what negative dialectics is and to bring it into the realm of reality, in line with its own concept. (xx)

The prominence given to Auschwitz in Adorno's critique of metaphysics makes it almost a model among models. In *The Differend* Jean-François Lyotard chooses the "after Auschwitz" model as his designation for "an 'experience' of language that brings speculative discourse to a halt." Such a view of the stakes of Adorno's text derives from an understanding of the model as "the name for a kind of experience where dialectics would encounter a non-negatable negative [*un négatif non niable*], and would abide in the impossibility of redoubling that negative into a 'result'" (no. 152). Lyotard quite correctly reads Adorno's meditations as a critique of Hegelian dialectics in which the negation of the negation produces an affirmative result. When this experience or encounter with that which cannot be raised up into a positive term takes the form of the Auschwitz event, it results in a shift in the horizon of expectation. The Holocaust leaves a permanent wound in the self-conception of humanity that cannot be overcome, but can at best be prevented from reoccurring.<sup>14</sup> Hence Lyotard insists that what results from this event is a lack of result, and Adorno emphasizes the meaninglessness of the event, and thus seeks to shelter it from "committed" or sentimental works of art.

Despite its lack of affirmative result or meaning, the form of the "model" event must henceforth be factored into philosophical discourse as the becoming-temporal of thought. In opening his "Meditations on Metaphysics," Adorno declared, "We cannot say any more that the immutable is truth, and that the mobile, transitory is appearance. The mutual indifference of

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<sup>14</sup> In a famous passage from one of his *Historikerstreit* interventions, Habermas wrote: "There [in Auschwitz] something happened, that up to now nobody considered as even possible. There one touched on something which represents the deep layer of solidarity among all that wears a human face; notwithstanding all the usual acts of beastliness of human history, the integrity of this common layer had been taken for granted. . . . Auschwitz has changed the basis for the continuity of the conditions of life within history" (cited in Friedlander, "Introduction" 3).

temporality and eternal ideas is no longer tenable" (ND 361). After Auschwitz, culture—the avowed realm of "eternal ideas"—is folded back into barbarism and the corrosive passage of time. The production of the model is an attempt to think from a place no longer determined by anti-materialist idealism. As the ultimate instance of modern culture's definitive subordination to barbarism, as the rationalized production of death, Auschwitz not only models the model, it casts a retroactive judgment on the ideology of Enlightenment with its trust in reason and the sanctity of culture. This rejection of the optimistic chronotope of progressive reason does not entail that Adorno abandon reason for the delirium of the irrational since he does not place his hopes in the progressive narrative. Instead, through a reworking of philosophical form in the light of the catastrophe, Adorno attempts to wrench reason free from its instrumental determinations.

Thus, the concept of the model necessitates a new form of philosophical representation. Adorno borrows the concept of the model, Jameson suggests, from music, and specifically from Schönberg's serialism. In twelve-tone composition the model is "the raw material of a specific composition . . . the particular order and configuration of the twelve notes of the scale which, chosen and arranged in advance, *becomes* the composition, in so far as this last is 'nothing more' than an elaborate series of variations and permutations . . . of that starting point" (*Late Marxism* 61). The significance of Jameson's understanding of the model, and that which opposes it to the tenor of Lyotard's post-marxist argument, is that in this musical reading the model is revealed as that fragment which already contains the totality within it. Jameson's wording, however, is somewhat ambiguous, and seems to imply that the relationship between the model and the totality (the composition) is one of

what Althusser termed "expressive causality."<sup>15</sup> The relationship between part and whole in Jameson's musical metaphor seems too simple, a combinatorial logic where the part immediately generates the whole.

Jameson's Hegelian reading does not properly account for the process of "structural causality" which Adorno's account of the model seems to suggest. In this case, we do not simply derive Auschwitz from a history which moves externally to it (as we would in a mechanistic deduction); we grasp that history through the necessary mediation of Auschwitz. But the process is not mere induction either, since Auschwitz does not "generate" or "reflect" the totality of the history of modernity. Yet had it not "taken place," the history to be grasped would clearly not be the same. After Auschwitz, modernity and Shoah need to be read in light of each other; our understanding of each is mediated by the other. The model is not a matter of indifference, as is the example in speculative thought, nor is it simply an element in a permutational series. The manner in which thought can arrive at some understanding of that which the model models is less direct. As Adorno wrote about "the essay as form," "the essay has to cause the totality to be illuminated in a *partial* feature, whether the feature be chosen or merely happened upon, without asserting the presence of the totality" (emphasis added). From his account of the essay, we can presume that Adorno's use of the model is not an attempt to be "systematic," as Jameson's metaphor suggests, but rather has the "characteristic of an intention groping its way" (*Notes* 16). The non-assertive, almost blind illumination of essayistic thought is once again the "imageless

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<sup>15</sup> Jameson's apparent "mistake" is ironic given that he popularized Althusser's critique of "expressive causality," and championing of "structural causality" in *The Political Unconscious* (cf. esp. 23-58). For Althusser's development of these ideas see "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in *For Marx* (87-128) and *Reading Capital*.

image," and *its* model is autonomous art. With the selection of "poetry after Auschwitz" as the partial feature through which to illuminate the Holocaust and its relation to modernity, Adorno preserves a tension between part and whole that maintains both the power of the modern totality and the truth content of its various local expressions.

We can now grasp something of the temporality and location of "after Auschwitz" as Adorno employs it in his late works. In fact, the famous opening line of *Negative Dialectics*—"Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed" (3)—expresses the defunct temporality of lifeless survival which the "experience" of Auschwitz inaugurates, according to the text's final "Meditations on Metaphysics." And the place of this thought is revealed as that constricted zone of nearly annihilated expectation, the death camp: "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps—a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban. What is, he says, is like a concentration camp. At one time he speaks of a lifelong death penalty" (380-381). If, in Beckett, the concentration camp is the "unnamable," in Adorno the camp (Auschwitz) is the repetitively invoked name for something else which must be grasped in a situation of indirect illumination.

That something else is, strangely enough, the yearning for utopia, that which has no-place. Faced with the "lifelong death penalty," Beckett's writing

seems stoical but is full of inaudible cries that things should be different. Such nihilism implies the contrary of identification with nothingness. To Beckett, as to the Gnostics, the created world is radically evil, and its negation is the chance of another world that is not yet. As long as the world is as it is, all pictures of reconciliation, peace, and quiet resemble the picture of death.  
(381)

The significance of positing "another world that is not yet" derives not from any positive qualities of that world (which fall under the image ban), but from

the coexistence of an alternative chronotope—the *concept* of another space and time—in a field where the replacement of experience with integrated, administered consciousness obliterates expectation and hope. Elsewhere, Adorno formulates this concept in terms of the indexicality of the chronotope: "utopia is essentially in the determined negation . . . of that which merely is, and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points at the same time to what should be" (Bloch, *Utopian Function* 12). In Bakhtin's formulation the indexical function pointed backwards toward the event—thus underlining representation's belatedness in relation to that event. In Adorno the necessity of coming after the catastrophe coexists with an anticipatory temporality. The construction of the chronotope blocks the event itself but in so doing casts a shadow whose outline registers utopia. If we always come *after* the event in Adorno's thought (both historically and epistemologically), we are also always *too early* to grasp it. We live in a world where reconciliation has not yet taken place and thus has not yet provided the standpoint from which to view the event from outside the flow of "damaged life." The repeated citation of Auschwitz is an attempt to make one's way through that flux, to provide a temporary map of the historical present as the means to a future that would install a break with the conditions which nurtured fascism.

In a sense we return to Adorno's initial phrasing of "after Auschwitz" where he castigated poetry for blocking knowledge of the "radically evil" social totality. Now, however, we see that some poetic practices (e.g. Celan's, Beckett's) and Adorno's writings on poetry seek, through their direct or indirect invocation of Auschwitz, to block a positive comprehension of what, after Auschwitz, can only be known negatively. Only by avoiding "faded positivities" can writing avoid "conspiring with all extant malice, and eventually with the destructive principle itself" (ND 381). The repeated

performance of the terrifying chronotope, "after Auschwitz," holds a place for a time not yet emergent.

#### 4. Conclusion: After Adorno

If the space and time "after Auschwitz" occupies some middle zone between past and future events which defy representation, its own substance remains conceptual, which is not to say imaginary. After Adorno one cannot conceive of genocide in quite the same fashion. But when or what is "after Adorno"? Irving Howe remarked, quite correctly, that it is difficult "to think of another area of literary discourse in which a single writer has exerted so strong, if diffused, an influence as Theodor Adorno has on discussions of literature and the Holocaust" ("Writing" 178). Yet Howe also realized, as did Adorno, that the "speculation that human consciousness could no longer be what it had previously been" after Auschwitz was unfortunately not true (198). We can certainly explain this latter fact in marxist terms, arguing that a change of consciousness could only follow a change in the material organization of society—this is precisely Adorno's critique of post-war European culture. But the former remark on Adorno's influence reasserts the question of consciousness and intellectual intervention, while it suggests that that intervention should lie elsewhere than in "speculations" on consciousness.

If Adorno is correct in *Negative Dialectics*, speculation must give way to dialectical materialist analysis in the wake of Auschwitz. One consequence of this proposition would be the need to take into account the material effects of philosophizing. Instead of seeking in Adorno the reflection of a historical break called "Auschwitz" we might understand him as producing a series of

concepts (in the form of chronotopes) which retroactively pose the possibility of a break, at the same time that they illuminate the eternal return of the same in those places which have not yet worked through the Auschwitz model.

Thought "alone" cannot alter history but, in citing and resignifying a discursive chain (such as that connecting Auschwitz to "Auschwitz"), it can keep the past present and the future open. The production of concepts also helps structure the field out of which the agency to alter the spatio-temporal parameters of the present must emerge.

As Howe implies, the major influence of Adorno's Auschwitz chronotope has taken place in aesthetic realms. This must be taken for its negative as well as its positive implications. Adorno provides complex, contradictory, and frequently misunderstood concepts for evaluating "Holocaust art." Despite those discouraging adjectives, various interpretations of Adorno continue to structure critical response to such art in the present, and even when Adorno's name is not mentioned (or even known). One potentially positive effect of my reading of Adorno would be to shift this terrain from what remains a primarily *moralizing* discourse to a *materialist* and *ethical* critique. Instead of evaluating a work's "decorum" according to principles assumed to adhere in the event itself, we can recognize our ambiguous distance from the event, and inquire into the relationship a work establishes between the past it mobilizes and its contemporary context. Reading Adorno's works as interventions in concrete situations meant to produce effects deprives them of their oracular quality, but also increases their relevance and their usefulness in the present.

It is equally true, however, that the particular way in which Adorno's thought structures the field of possibilities limits the kinds of interventions that he would promote. Adorno's aesthetics remain, as Jameson points out,

strictly modernist.<sup>16</sup> Since modernism no longer represents a challenge to quiescent ideologies, a more properly postmodernist critique would offer a crucial reconsideration of mass culture. In particular, a full-blown consumer society demands an acknowledgment of the status of the Holocaust commodity. In the midst of postmodernism's proliferation of aesthetic techniques new kinds of historical art are taking shape. Some postmodern works, such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, challenge the assumptions about the necessary "autonomy" of art after Auschwitz which have emerged from Adorno's (albeit critical) reception, even as they recognize the risks of commodification.

Equally limiting to the project of confronting the historical legacy of genocide is the way in which Adorno focuses primarily on aesthetic objects, even as he refers them back to the conditions of their production. This is of course ironic since his initial statement of the problematic seems deliberately anti-aesthetic. Adorno's subsequent reformulations, and most of his writings, refine the status of the aesthetic, granting authentic or autonomous art a role of absolute importance in articulating a critique of capitalist society. But the wholesale substitution of reflective and aesthetic practice for other forms of praxis hardly seems justifiable on political or theoretical grounds.

This is not all there is, however, in late Adorno. If the ethico-political call to arms after Auschwitz derives from the necessity of preventing its recurrence, then the pedagogical moment that sometimes surfaces in Adorno's writings and, especially, speeches and radio talks ought to be kept in mind. In those more obviously conjunctural interventions, Adorno stresses the concept of education to maturity, "Erziehung zur Mündigkeit." In sketching this notion

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<sup>16</sup> See also Zuidervaart's extensive critique of Adorno's aesthetics for a useful discussion of its strengths and weaknesses. Zuidervaart is also quite critical of Jameson's theory of postmodernism, although this section of his book is less convincing to me.

of "democratic" or "mature political pedagogy," Adorno not only leaves the autonomy of the aesthetic realm but suggests a project of "public enlightenment" whose formulation and actualization remain today as critical as they do unfinished ("Coming to Terms" 124-129). Ultimately, this relocation of the confrontation with Auschwitz in the public sphere of democratic education may be as great a contribution to the process of coming to terms with the past as the more famous reflections on representation. In fact, the lively debates surrounding many recent films, literary and historical texts, memorials, and museums seem to indicate a renewed interest in historical understanding that has been spurred precisely by controversies about representation. Viewed retrospectively from the vantage point of such debates, Adorno's contribution is all the more impressive; he brought together the questions of Holocaust representation and education at a moment when they had not yet been fully articulated.

## Chapter 2

MAURICE BLANCHOT'S WAR:  
A/WAKE "AFTER AUSCHWITZ"

"Comme un guetteur qui n'est pas là que pour veiller, se maintenir en éveil, attendre par une attention active où s'exprime moins le souci de soi-même que le souci des autres."  
—Maurice Blanchot, "Les intellectuels en question"

## 1. Writing the Disaster

In a discussion of Claude Lanzmann's documentary film, *Shoah*, Shoshana Felman makes a strong claim about the lack of relationship between the French language and the Nazi Genocide. Commenting on the fact that the film's interviews take place in many languages, but never in French (Lanzmann's native tongue), Felman writes:

The palpable foreignness of the film's tongues is emblematic of the radical foreignness of the experience of the Holocaust, not merely to us, but even to its own participants. . . . It is a metaphor of the film that its language is a language of translation, and, as such, is doubly foreign: that the occurrence, on the one hand, happens in a language foreign to the language of the film, but also, that the significance of the occurrence can only be articulated in a language foreign to the language(s) of the occurrence. (*Testimony* 212)

Felman's "metaphorical" reading of the question of translation in *Shoah* collapses two different levels in the relationship between language and the event. If, at an epistemological level, it *may* make sense to speak of the event's

"radical foreignness" to linguistic representation, at the level of social practice, language-use and language-users produce the event, even if the product exceeds their grasp. Such is the lesson that Maurice Blanchot finds in Robert Antelme's camp memoir, *L'espèce humaine*. Like Felman, Blanchot believes that understanding of the Holocaust lies at the limits of linguistic representation, but he also emphasizes that the racial terror of genocide works through human instruments, including language, and can therefore be grasped "lucidly" by its victims. Precisely at the moment of the "limit experience" of horror, human agency and understanding reassert themselves: "man, crushed by the universe, must know that in the last instance it is not the universe but man alone who kills him. . . . 'Our horror, our stupor,' Antelme states, 'was our lucidity'" (IC 131-32).<sup>1</sup> Language's essential foreignness to the occurrence does not negate the essential responsibility for the event of certain of its users. In the case of the Shoah, the institution of the French language served admirably well as an instrument of genocide, even if it did not initiate that genocide and even if it also served some as an instrument of resistance. Certainly, French was not "foreign to the occurrence" when French police rounded up Jews in events such as the infamous "rafle du Vel d'Hiv," or when the Vichy government drafted its overly enthusiastic racial legislation. The fact that only 2,500 out of 75,000 deported French Jews returned from the concentration camps probably has more to do with this

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<sup>1</sup> "[E]crasé par l'univers, l'homme doit savoir qu'en dernier ressort ce n'est pas l'univers, c'est l'homme seul qui le tue. . . . 'Notre horreur, notre stupeur, dit Antelme, était notre lucidité'" (EI 194).

purported foreignness than does the epistemological puzzle of writing the Event.<sup>2</sup>

The works of Maurice Blanchot provide a fascinating lens through which to establish both the epistemological and political importance of the Holocaust in a French context. Yet, as much as Blanchot's writings on Antelme, on Auschwitz, and on the "writing of the disaster" help us to grasp the simultaneous estrangement and implication of language and terror, his bibliography also presents its own challenges to that understanding. One of the most important and influential, although least understood, writers and thinkers of the amorphous movement known in the United States as French poststructuralism, Blanchot was also one of the leading lights of the quasi-fascist French "Jeune Droite" during the 1930s. In political and literary writings for such journals as *Réaction*, *Combat* and *L'Insurgé*, Blanchot shared the pages with extreme nationalist figures, including Robert Brasillach, Thierry Maulnier, Maurice Bardèche, and Pierre Andreu. These articles, which number in the hundreds, represent a significant right-wing political engagement, one made all the more mysterious by Blanchot's sudden ideological reversal after the Nazi occupation of France. If Blanchot's own political line was never pro-Nazi, as that of some of his colleagues was, it nevertheless clearly illustrates the 1930s mix of antisemitism, extreme nationalism, and opposition to democracy, capitalism, and communism that historian Jean-Louis Loubet del Bayle has termed "non-conformism." On the other hand, Blanchot's social and political commitments since the war have

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<sup>2</sup> These numbers can be found in Annette Wieviorka's study of early French accounts of the extermination camps ("Jewish Identity" 139). For a complete account, see Marrus and Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews*.

been ethically impeccable, including opposition to the Algerian War, a role in the May 1968 uprising, a vigilant critique of antisemitism, a distinctly philosemitic philosophy, and intellectual friendships with the most prominent contemporary French Jewish thinkers.

The complexity of the Blanchot case is redoubled by another biographical factor, his well-known withdrawal from public after the war (given up briefly during May '68), as well as by the deliberate, but productive, obscurity of many of his writings since then. Blanchot's withdrawal and his radically impersonal public persona include an almost total silence about his own past, even as his work has come, over the years, to engage more and more directly with the significance and status of the Nazi genocide. In *L'Écriture du désastre* (1980) and *Après Coup* (1983), Blanchot's meditations on the Shoah take on increased gravity, although explicit discussion of the implications of the genocide occur as early as *L'Entretien infini* (1969) and *L'Amitié* (1973). Blanchot's case is thus significantly different from the more well known one of Paul de Man. While their early writings bear some resemblance, de Man's later work does not integrate the disaster the way that Blanchot's writings do. Not only do these latter texts constitute one of the major efforts to "think" the Holocaust, they also suggest a rereading of Blanchot's entire *oeuvre*. In this reconsideration, the silently passed-over right-wing journalism suddenly assumes a central position and even the so-called apolitical texts of the 1940s and 1950s appear as determinate political responses to a troubling history. The knowledge which arises from a consideration of the late texts with those from the '30s and '40s concerns the ethical and political stakes of writing, reading, and remembrance. In this process of rereading, however, the early texts

cannot be allowed to disappear behind the more palatable, post-'68 philosophical reflections, as they do in much Blanchot criticism.

Where Jeffrey Mehlman, one of the few critics to pursue the "missing" texts, finds in Blanchot's pre- and post-Occupation work a continuity in the guise of a break with the past, I see a critical political and theoretical rupture premised on an inability to overcome the past. The impossibility of making history and politics disappear displaces part of the ethical bind back onto Blanchot's critics, creating an imperative to reexamine that about which Blanchot himself remains silent. In doing so, sympathetic critics cannot hesitate also to suggest the unsavory after-effects which shadow Blanchot's texts: in order to speak with Blanchot in the "entretien infini" we must sometimes speak against him. Preserving the memory of Blanchot's engagement with the *Jeune Droite* within any consideration of the more valuable later writings prevents ahistorical and antipolitical misreadings of Blanchot's significance to postwar thought. That significance concerns, above all, the temporality and the ethics of the "post," that is, the relationship between past and present (and future), between before and after. Blanchot hints enigmatically at that relationship when he paraphrases Adorno in *Après Coup*: "A quelque date qu'il puisse être écrit, tout récit désormais sera d'avant Auschwitz" (99) [No matter when it is written, every narrative [récit] from now on will be from before Auschwitz (VC 69)]. The discontinuous temporality which this peculiar phrase figures forth also reasserts the question of language, tacking writing to history at three points: the paradigmatic event of the past (Auschwitz), the now (the *date*) of the story, and some open ended conception of the future (*désormais*). If language and occurrence are

essentially foreign to each other, they nevertheless encounter each other everywhere, establishing now complicity, now community.

## 2. Critical Silences

Most critics have maintained a respectful silence with respect to Blanchot's right-wing political journalism of the 1930s, and only a few have taken seriously his texts of those years. Writing in the mid-1980s, Steven Ungar challenged Blanchot critics to read this multi-dimensional oeuvre "within history" and posed a series of questions for future research: "Is the political venture a master key on which the later fiction and criticism are somewhat dependent? Do the early writings explain or account for inconsistencies and gaps? Or should they instead be added to the existing body of his writings without special consideration? . . . . How much does the political supplement enrich our understanding of Blanchot's place in literary modernity? ("Paulhan before Blanchot" 79, 78). In the ten years since Ungar posed these crucial questions there has *not* been a thoroughgoing reevaluation of Blanchot's career along those lines among the growing number of Blanchot scholars; in fact, the first major work has been done by Ungar himself in his 1995 book *Scandal and Aftereffect*. This is all the more surprising given the intensive interest paid during the last years to the Heidegger and de Man "cases" and to the status of historical memory, particularly as it relates to issues of nationalism, fascism, and genocide. Indeed, the first full length study of Blanchot in English, published in 1994, manages to survey at length both the fictional and non-fictional postwar writings, but makes no mention at all of the political or literary critical

writings of the '30s.<sup>3</sup> Many of those critics who do allude to Blanchot's prewar political positions tend to assert their irrelevance to contemporary investigation, thus unwittingly contributing to processes of historical forgetting which, at the limit, take far uglier forms.<sup>4</sup>

Given this critical situation, it is quite ironic that Allan Stoekl begins a recent (and valuable) critique of Blanchot's postwar discourse on Jewishness by remarking, "Much has already been written on Maurice Blanchot's writing of the 1930s" ("Blanchot, Violence" 133). As evidence of this writing's "well known" status, Stoekl is only able to cite one essay by Mehlman and Ungar's then-forthcoming book. Such a preemptive strategy allows him to continue to discuss the postwar texts without specific reference to those essays. Such a methodology distorts a reading of the place of Jewishness in Blanchot (which does not mean that Stoekl's reading is wrong, just that it needs to be complicated). Indeed, most of the works which substantially address the question of Blanchot's politics pre-date Ungar's call to action. There are occasional references to Blanchot's role in the French right in such historical studies as Sternhell's *Ni Droite Ni Gauche* and Loubet del Bayle's *Les Non-conformistes des années 30*,<sup>5</sup> but the most exhaustive theoretical account of his

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<sup>3</sup> The example I have in mind here is John Gregg's *Maurice Blanchot*, but this text is typical of the mainstream of Blanchot studies.

<sup>4</sup> For two different examples of this kind of political erasure in critical works of unquestionable importance, see Londyn (*Maurice Blanchot* 13) and Shaviri ("Complicity and Forgetting" 828).

<sup>5</sup> Sternhell and Loubet del Bayle do not paint the same picture of the era, by any means, but their accounts complement each other. Loubet del Bayle evenhandedly accounts for the tenuous ideological unity which characterized the diverse non-conformist movements. Sternhell is more tendentious in unhesitatingly characterizing the groups as fascist, but he provides a crucial account of the role antisemitism played in forging their coherence. Loubet del Bayle downplays this aspect of non-conformism, one important for this study

early political positions (before Ungar's book) can be found in a long essay by Mike Holland and Patrick Rousseau, "Topographie-parcours d'une (contre-) révolution." Holland and Rousseau trace the context and itinerary of Blanchot's ideology, placing him in line with a Maurrasian heritage of anti-semitic nationalism. They demonstrate the logical contradictions which resulted from the German threat, thus explaining at a formal level, which is not entirely satisfactory, the reason for his abrupt abandonment of his '30s positions. By not considering these early works in the light of later writings, Holland and Rousseau reproduce the notion of a "clean break" which cannot address the persistence of motifs and elements from the '30s into the post-Occupation era.

The most significant study which attempts to connect Blanchot's political writings with his postwar literary influence is Jeffrey Mehlman's "Blanchot at *Combat*: Of Literature and Terror" in *Legacies of Antisemitism in France*. Instead of foregrounding Maurras, Mehlman stresses the connection, through Bernanos, to Drumont, the late nineteenth-century author of the massive, best-selling diatribe *La France juive*. In considering Blanchot's approving reflections on Montherlant's collaboration-marked *Solstice du Juin* in *Faux Pas* (1943), Mehlman suggests disturbing continuities between the pre- and post-Occupation writings.<sup>6</sup> While Holland and Rousseau emphasize the

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and one which radically alters the sense of the movements as soon as it enters into the mix. See, for example, Loubet del Bayle's "Une Tentative de Renouveau," in which he chronicles the non-conformists' view of the crisis in civilization without once mentioning the pivotal mobilizing role of antisemitic rhetoric in their theories. The interlocking discourses of crisis and Jewishness will reappear in my discussion of Blanchot's political writings.

<sup>6</sup> Allan Stoekl provides a somewhat different reading of Blanchot's text on Montherlant, commenting that "Blanchot holds Montherlant to a more rigorous silencing than the one Montherlant would perform on himself in his politically naive and garrulous self-portrait" (*Politics, Writing, Mutilation* 32).

internal contradictions, and ultimate logical impossibility, of the revolutionary thought of the *Jeune Droite*, Mehlman places the emphasis on external contingencies; he argues that the Occupation and Nazi genocide radically transformed the French intellectual landscape, creating a break after which the currency of prewar antisemitism became untenable. However, instead of finding Blanchot working through his right-wing engagements in his wartime writings (i.e. after his political break), Mehlman sees a mirrored reversal where the embarrassing past is "liquidated" and antisemitism becomes philosemitism without transforming the structure of the theoretical apparatus. Mehlman wrote his essay on Blanchot before the appearance of *L'Écriture du désastre* and *Après Coup*, both of which serve to alter retrospectively the relationship between Blanchot's pre- and postwar writings. These two texts of the 1980s do not disprove Mehlman's assertions, which are convincing as long as they remain historically situated in the early postwar period, but they complicate the relationship between Blanchot's antagonistic personae, and they allow for a less pessimistic appraisal of French literary and philosophical modernity than the one underwritten by Mehlman's account.

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Stoekl does suggest, however, that certain key political questions (and questions about politics) are "beyond the reach of Blanchot's novelistic or critical practice," and that "the specificities of political defiances and dilemmas" should not and could not under any circumstances be "stripped away" (36, 35). Despite this imperative, Stoekl's own text suffers from a certain stripping of specificity; after raising the question of the relationship between Blanchot's "rightist articles" and his "hermetic works of fiction and Heideggerian criticism" (22), he provides no account or analysis of the early writings, thus leaving the mistaken impression that they are transparent and missing an opportunity to explore the specificity of the later works in light of the early ones.

Steven Ungar's *Scandal and Aftereffect: Blanchot and France since 1930*

significantly alters the critical landscape and should effect a major displacement in the ways that Blanchot is read in the coming years. Ungar both extends the Blanchot corpus, so that the dozens of articles from the 1930s can no longer be ignored, and he inquires into the logic of *Nachträglichkeit* (which he translates as "aftereffect") in order to explain the scandalous return of interwar and wartime texts which has disrupted previous understandings of literary modernity. At the same time that he acknowledges the significance of Blanchot's postwar political transformation, Ungar (not unlike Mehlman) argues that "the post-1958 writings contained enough traces of abject dissidence to question the common belief that Blanchot emerged from the war as though converted" (135). Ungar's project is to reveal how Blanchot's various "disclosures" of the fascist past are in fact double-edged, and serve both to "reveal and hide" his own involvement in that history (136).

Although absolutely convinced of the importance of Ungar's work for the reevaluation of Blanchot and modernity, I nevertheless have several interrelated problems with his approach: [1] Ungar puts too much stress on the formal pattern of "dissidence," a kind of structural stylistics which allows him to compare, for example, a 1986 critique of apartheid with the 1930s antisemitic rhetoric without taking into account the radically different contexts and objects of the two polemics. [2] While he demonstrates the ambivalences of Blanchot's postwar reassessments of fascism and antisemitism, Ungar seems at times to desire a "full disclosure" (136) or confession on Blanchot's part (although at other times he writes that one should not "project accountability directly onto the figure of the individual" [164]). But, as Henry Rousso and Eric Conan have recently argued, the point should not be to put the Vichy and pre-

Vichy periods on trial in order to denounce them summarily, but rather to increase understanding of the periods. Given that the offending texts are already known, it is not entirely clear to me what a personal avowal of responsibility on Blanchot's part would add to these processes. [3] The stress on disclosure is in part based on Ungar's reading of *Nachträglichkeit* as aftereffect or return of the repressed (2); hence, according to this logic, what is not avowed returns in displaced form. Because this return is especially pertinent to the processing of traumatic experiences, aftereffect plays an important role in Blanchot's consideration of Auschwitz. But Blanchot himself (following Lacan) also transforms Freud's term, using the French *après coup* specifically in relation to the interwar period in order to connote not just a carrying forward of a repressed past into the future, but a retrospective and reevaluative return from the present to the past. Thus, despite the lack of full disclosure, a process of working through is significantly at play in Blanchot's later texts, especially those which address (in personal and non-personal ways) the underlying events and ideologies at issue. [4] Because of this double movement of *Nachträglichkeit*, a reading of Blanchot which moves back and forth across the war is necessary to capture the full position of his work in French literary and philosophical modernity. Ungar makes some of these moves, but, because of the groundbreaking nature of his archival work, he chooses to focus on the 1930s at the expense of texts such as *Après Coup* and *L'Écriture du désastre*. When read in dialogue with the early journalism, however, these latter, speculative texts provide more access to the past than the genre of confession would, and thus already enrich the understanding of the interwar and immediate postwar periods and of Blanchot's place in them. [5] The dialogic approach, which I attempt here, contradicts the received

opposition in Blanchot criticism that Ungar reproduces between "the binding of literature and politics in Blanchot's articles in *Le Rempart, Combat*, and *L'Insurgé* [and] the postwar conception of literary space from which history and politics were more or less elided" (169). The reading of Blanchot that follows from these methodological principles, which I have developed in relation to Ungar because he provides the most complete consideration of the '30s texts, serves neither as condemnation of nor apology for Blanchot. I share Ungar's desire to rehistoricize the work of a writer who has too frequently been removed from history and politics. Because Blanchot's writing already contains meditation on the political and the historical with respect to the Holocaust, it serves as a better model than, say, Heidegger and de Man for coming to terms with the past.

### 3. First and Last Words

The structure of the brief collection, *Après Coup*, suggests the difficulty of establishing the time of Blanchot's writings, but also points toward the importance of history, and particularly the history of Nazi genocide, in the postwar Blanchot. The book consists of three pieces—two short stories and one philosophical reflection musing on the stories. The stories were both written in the mid-1930s, but only published together well after the war in 1951 as *Le Ressassment éternel*. One of the texts, "Le dernier mot," was, according to Blanchot, not "destiné à la publication." Nevertheless, he sought to publish it in 1947 in a literary series which, he claims ironically, no sooner reached its last word and stopped appearing (AC 92). In the 1983 edition, the two stories from before (and after?) the war are joined by the short retrospective essay,

"Après Coup." United in one book despite and perhaps because of their radically discontinuous provenance, these texts have much to say about the continuity and discontinuity of history. They also suggest, albeit allegorically, modes of reading and reconsidering the specificity of Blanchot's political journalism of the 1930s. The strategies of rereading that emerge from Blanchot's later work stand in opposition to the lack of tools for historically specific reading provided by the later Paul de Man.

Written in 1935-36, but abortively published a dozen years later, the disappearing story, "Le Dernier Mot," is also concerned primarily with disappearance. Well before his own exit from public life, Blanchot uses the short story to stage the evacuation of the speaking/writing "I." Since this "last word" proved ironically to be a work of initiation for what would become a career of disappearances (because of both Blanchot's withdrawal and the ceaseless negations of his writing), it helps to consider Blanchot's life/work in terms of different genres of disappearance. I will propose here that two significant versions exist, just as Kristin Ross has found in Blanchot two versions of the everyday. While Ross's schema turns around the break initiated by May '68, my own pivots around the centrality of Auschwitz (although this is not unrelated to the *changement d'époque* postulated by Blanchot in the late '60s). The turning in Blanchot is not simply from activism to *écriture*, as Mehlman implies—"a dream of *action française* gives way to the infinite passivity . . . of *l'espace littéraire*" ("Blanchot at Combat" 13). At stake, rather, is the ethical status of the subject and its relationship to history.

Illustrative of the first version of disappearance, the first person narration of "Le Dernier Mot" briefly recounts the wanderings of an "I" through a landscape in which language has lost its links with authority:

"Since the watchword was done away with,' I said, 'reading is free. If you think I talk without knowing what I'm saying, you are within your rights. I'm only one voice among many'" (VC 47).<sup>7</sup> In keeping with the reactionary rhetoric of the era "Le Dernier Mot" demonstrates how, when the hierarchy of voices is levelled, discourse floats free of "proper" names and the legitimacy of law enters into crisis. After being assigned and resisting the positions of teacher and judge, the narrator of this early story comes at last to a tower—the Tower of Babel, Blanchot will tell us. There he meets a man who claims to be its owner [*propriétaire*]; although an apocalyptic storm rages outside, the owner claims his tower will never crumble. Of course it does, but before even this can happen Blanchot "disappears" his narrator, seeming to imply by this move the impossibility of narration in a post-deluvian world where the signifier has become unstuck from the signified. These are the crucial sentences, in which we witness the destruction of the witness and the owner:

because I treated him as master, I chained him to his sovereignty. And we were bound together in such a way that for him to become who he was again, he had to say to me: 'I'm laughing at you because I'm no more than a beast,' but with that confession my adoration became twice as great, and in the end there was nothing left but a sad animal, watched over by a servant who swatted away the flies. A ray of sunlight, erect like a stone, enclosed both of them in an illusion of eternity. They blissfully sank into repose. (VC 54)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Depuis qu'on a supprimé le mot d'ordre, dis-je, la lecture est libre. Si vous jugez que je parle sans savoir ce que je dis, vous resterez dans votre droit. Je ne suis qu'une voix parmi les autres" (AC 68)

<sup>8</sup> "[E]n le prenant pour maître, je l'enchaînai à sa souveraineté. Et nous fûmes liés de telle sorte qu'il se vit obligé, pour redevenir lui-même, de me dire: "je te berne, car je ne suis qu'une bête," mais, sur cet aveu, je redoublai d'adoration et, à la fin, il n'y eut plus l'un auprès de l'autre qu'un triste animal gardé par un serviteur qui en écartait les mouches. Un rayon de soleil, dressé comme une pierre, les enfermait tous deux dans une illusion d'éternité. Ils jouissaient béatement du repos" (AC 80).

The narrator's "I," first metamorphosing into the apparent metaphor of the animal and servant, disappears for good in the next line which syntactically and semantically objectifies both male characters and renders them speechless. Moments later, we approach the fatal silence which resides in the last word. In the story's final, truncated exchange, one of Blanchot's ubiquitous female characters asks the transformed "propriétaire," "ne sentez-vous pas que le sol nous manque?" and he responds silently: "il la rassura par sa tranquillité, et, quand la chute de la tour les précipita au-dehors, ils tombèrent tous trois sans dire un mot" (AC 81) [But he reassured her with his calmness, and when the tower collapsed and threw them outside, all three of them fell without saying a word (55)].

Such a narrative leads me to ask, as Blanchot did of the writings of Bataille in the eponymous last essay of *L'amitié*, "'Qui fut le sujet de cette expérience?'" [Who was the subject of that experience?] But, as Blanchot remarks, the form of that question already delimits the answer: "En substituant au 'Je' fermé et unique l'ouverture d'un 'Qui?' sans réponse" [In substituting the opening of a "who?" without answer for the closed and unique "I"], we participate in the becoming-impersonal of language, a process "sans relâche" in which we grasp our own subjectivity as "l'être inconnu et glissant d'un 'Qui?' indéfini" [the unknown and slippery being of an indefinite "who?"] (A 328). However, as nicely as Blanchot's theorization of the subject *sous rature* would at first glance seem to fit "Le Dernier Mot," written thirty-five years earlier, the short story fails in at least one crucial place to fulfill the guidelines Blanchot set for impersonalization: it ends. This motif of impersonalization and disappearance is marked retrospectively in "Après Coup" as politically ambivalent. The texts which Blanchot will go on to write,

*Thomas l'Obscur* crucial among them, emerge out of this realization that the disappearance initiated by his early story requires a movement "sans relâche," an avoidance of foreclosure—of actually arriving at "the last word"—which in Blanchot becomes linked with the most serious ethical and political errors. This also explains why, in fact, the "I" does not disappear from Blanchot's writing, and instead remains under constant interrogation in his essays as well as his récits, which, in Geoffrey Hartman's words, attack "the notion of the sincere and even of the authorial 'I'" (101). Blanchot's writings from after what he called the "absolute" personal and historical divide of the Second World War (A 128-29) repeat this movement from the initial temptation of disappearance to a second version: the disappearance of the possibility of total disappearance.

The situatedness of this transformation in proximity to the war is precisely what makes the mode of disappearance more than an abstract linguistic game, as it looks from the decontextualized vantagepoint common to most Blanchot criticism. The moment at which Blanchot was writing "Le dernier mot" (1935-36) was also, we recall, the moment at which he was writing regularly for journals of the "young right" like *L'Insurgé* and *Combat*. While his published political commitments go back to the beginning of the 1930s, the writings for these latter journals took place after the 1933 break in right-wing ideology. According to Holland and Rousseau, the coming to power of Hitler, and the belated experience of the world financial crisis in France, made 1933 the year when the calls for conservative spiritual renewal became demands for revolutionary nationalist insurrection (23-29). Blanchot's writings from the first years after the 1933 turning point are relatively scarce, but upon the rise of Léon Blum's Popular Front, he turned to the pages

of *Combat* and *L'Insurgé* with a vengeance. These anti-communist and anti-semitic articles also presented "increasingly strident calls to acts of violence against the regime" of Léon Blum (Mehlman 10): "Léon Blum, vous étiez prévenu" [Léon Blum, you were warned] was the threatening title of one jointly authored statement in *L'Insurgé* (11 [24 March 1937]: 3), while another of Blanchot's articles saw some small hope in a group of workers carrying signs that read "Blum à mort" ("Préparons la vengeance," *L'Insurgé* 11 [24 March 1937]).

In order to read essays such as these and such as those, in some ways analogous, of Paul de Man at *Le Soir*, it helps to meditate on what separates us—the *déchirement*, in Blanchot's words—as contemporary North American readers from the cultures out of which these writings emerged. Jeffrey Mehlman suggests that the "pivot" of any study of French antisemitism must be "Hitler's liquidation of antisemitism as a tenable option for a French intellectual" (*Legacies* 3). Before the Second World War, antisemitism was not the sole province of reactionaries, but, as Zeev Sternhell's work shows, served as one of the relays through which some socialist and communist writers passed over to the radical right (*Neither Right* 40). Against this historical background of the engaged intellectual, whether left or right, we must differentiate our own institutional locations. In an important essay on the de Man "scandal," Alice Kaplan reminds us that North American critics have traditionally tended to "view any political involvement with art as exotic and aberrant" while "European critics . . . have traditionally had a declared political identity linked to their intellectual one." In other words, for Blanchot as for de Man, "it is entirely misleading to think that because he was to become a unique and original critic, his wartime activities were themselves a unique

phenomenon" ("Paul de Man" 279, 267). And, thus, our readings of prewar and occupation writings should be "ultimately less dependent on any category of intentionality than on the sustaining effects of a cultural *milieu* that at times seems—or seemed—anti-Jewish in its essence" (Mehlman, *Legacies* 3).

Yet, given Blanchot's and de Man's very different postwar relationship to the writings of their youth (Blanchot was in fact several years older than de Man at the time of their respective right-wing engagements), the notion of *milieu* cannot fully explain either writer. In the case of Blanchot, the offending articles are more offensive than those of de Man (although they are not, strictly speaking, collaborationist) and bespeak a more serious ideological engagement, but the writing of Blanchot in the wake of the disaster more explicitly comes to terms with the intellectual and political challenge of the genocide than anything in de Man. The interest of comparing de Man and Blanchot probably derives more from their related postwar influence in French and American literary circles than their somewhat different positions in the '30s and during the war. Nonetheless, they superficially share a certain aesthetic theory in their early criticism. Considering the relationship of the early thought of each critic to their later work illuminates the divergent itineraries which were possible in traversing the void of the war. As such, this brief comparison also suggests the need to reassess the contemporary moment in terms of its inherited version of modernity. As with the question of Blanchot's relationship to pre- and postwar politics, the contrast turns on the question of whether a rupture is established or continuity preserved.

Consistent with his postwar positions, de Man's *Le Soir* essays attempt to extricate literature and culture from politics, even as his own cultural production was at its most *engagé*. De Man's review of Robert Brasillach's *Notre*

*Avant-Guerre* illustrates this, as he praises Brasillach's evocation of prewar culture, and gently castigates his political commentaries (such as the infamous description of the 1934 Nuremberg rallies): "on sent qu'il s'égare dans un domaine qui n'est pas le sien" [one feels he is losing his way in a domain which is not his own]. In order to understand the prewar period, writes de Man, "il faut séparer nettement ses aspects politiques et ses aspects artistiques ou culturels" [it is necessary clearly to separate its political aspects from its artistic or cultural aspects] (12 August 1941: 2). Such a position allows him to minimize the significance of the war as a potential rupture when he comes to consider "La littérature française devant les événements" [French literature before the events] (20 January 1942: 2). In that article, he praises the quiescence of Montherlant, Drieu la Rochelle, and other collaborationists because of its salutary aesthetic correlates:

From a purely artistic point of view, that attitude proves itself fruitful and productive, since it quarters literature in a clearly limited domain in which it enjoys complete liberty. That attitude thus brings about no change in questions of style since it does not impede normal developments. In fact, there is thus no gap between the French literature from before and from after the campaign of 1940, and the reader will not at any moment be disoriented by an unusual manner of writing.<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, de Man's language could be seen as working against itself in this passage, with the verb "cantonner" signifying both the act of division separating the war from literature and the return of the war into literature insofar as "cantonner" applies to the quartering of soldiers. The war metaphor

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<sup>9</sup> "D'un point de vue purement artistique, cette attitude s'avère féconde et productive, puisqu'elle cantonne la littérature dans un domaine nettement limité dans lequel elle jouit d'une entière liberté. Elle n'entraîne donc pas de changement dans les problèmes du style dont elle n'entrave pas les évolutions normales. En fait, il n'y a donc pas de rupture de continuité entre la littérature française d'avant et d'après la campagne de 1940, et le lecteur ne sera à aucun moment désorienté par une manière d'écrire qui ne lui est pas habituelle."

ironically points to the vanity of de Man's project: an attempt to cut himself off from the political context—to which he owes his position in the first place—through a fetishistic denial of the rupture of the Occupation. The ambivalence of this position reveals itself in the notion of complete liberty being available in an admittedly limited domain, an attitude all too salutary to the repression of the *everyday, journalistic collaboration* to which (regardless of his "true" ideological beliefs) he had succumbed. Although de Man could have known nothing of the specifics of the "Final Solution," his infamous *Le Soir* essay, "Les Juifs dans la Littérature actuelle" ([4 March 1941: 10], written before the Wannsee Conference), makes it clear that, in his thinking at the time, even the disappearance of the Jews from Europe would not have ruptured the happy continuity and "normal development" of Western culture.

While de Man's post-Holocaust attitudes towards Jews and towards Nazism are not at stake—for the simple, but troublesome, reason that no explicit published analysis exists—we can demonstrate the persistence of certain of his ideas about the relationship of culture to history and politics during and after the war. Unlike Blanchot, de Man develops no significant account of "being-towards-the-past," but, rather, everywhere puts into question the possibility of witness and testimony. In the present context, the following passage from his well-known essay on Blanchot illustrates the continuity in de Man's thought and the limits of his brilliant contribution to postwar literary culture. In general, the surgical separation of culture from the complexities of history and, in particular, the avoidance of the Second World War in an account of Blanchot's place in modernity neither does justice to the contemporary cultural scene nor to Blanchot's own role in it. According to the later de Man, writing in 1966, Blanchot is:

an intensely private figure, who has kept his personal affairs strictly to himself and whose pronouncements on public issues, literary or political, have been very scarce. . . . A sizeable group of readers have followed his essays, often appearing in the form of topical bookreviews in various journals none of which is particularly esoteric or avant-garde: *Journal des débats*, *Critique*, and more recently in *La Nouvelle revue française*. (*Blindness and Insight* 61)

This passage resonates only too obviously with its author's own career.<sup>10</sup> The blatant contradictoriness of these sentences—the implicit idea, for example, that topical bookreviews do not constitute pronouncements on public literary issues—seeks to displace the evacuation of those public *political* issues which Blanchot did address, both from the right and from the left, both before and after the war. (De Man also leaves out any mention of *L'Insurgé*, *Combat*, or other political journals.) In his effort to purge the aesthetic of the political and the public, de Man sounds what Kaplan calls the one consistent note of his career as journalist and critic ("Paul de Man"), and misreads the significance of the silences in Blanchot's writing.

The forgetting of Blanchot's prewar writings by later critics such as de Man detracts even from the purely literary analysis (whatever that would mean) of his works, since it was in *L'Insurgé* that Blanchot began writing

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<sup>10</sup> It also resonates with other, unsatisfactory accounts of Blanchot's career. Typical of these problematic attempts at forgetting are those found in the capsule biography given by Blanchot's publishers at the beginning of *Thomas l'Obscur*. There, we find no mention of his political writings, although we learn that "ses premières contributions littéraires sont des textes pour des revues: *Journal des débats*, *L'insurgé* et *Aux écoutes*" (T n.p.n.). The biography goes on to note that "En 1940, alors qu'il est sans ressource et parle parfaitement l'allemand, il refuse catégoriquement de collaborer avec l'occupant." As this sentence indicates but cannot say, this refusal only takes on significance in light of Blanchot's previous writings. Such an omission is not unique in the French context, as any reader of similar air-brushed biographies in the novels of Céline will note.

regular literary columns.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, a common logic operates across genres in Blanchot's fiction, criticism, and polemic during the 1930s. In "De la révolution à la littérature" [From revolution to literature] (*L'Insurgé* 1 [13 January 1937]: 3), a short essay which may be his first programmatic statement on the relationship of literature to politics, Blanchot at first glance seems to describe an aesthetic not dissimilar to that of de Man. Blanchot carefully separates his conception from anything resembling the *littérature engagée* of whatever political hue, but then he suggests the necessity to explore the links which de Man simply banishes from consideration: "Criticism which escapes on principle from the indelicate infiltrations of the party spirit, which is the opposite of the critical spirit, cannot escape from a question which is essential and which leads it to wonder whether, at a moment when the revolution is desirable, there are not some affinities to be recognized between the idea of revolution and literary values."<sup>12</sup> This essential question of the desired

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<sup>11</sup> A bibliography of Blanchot's writings for *L'Insurgé* can be found in *Gramma* 5 (1976). This issue and the previous one (3/4 [1976]) are both dedicated to Blanchot, and contain extensive bibliographies of his writings from before and after the war, as well as the excellent account of his political thinking by Holland and Rousseau. There are also reprints of various political texts, again both from before and after, and many important critical studies, including Derrida's "Pas" (reprinted in *Parages*). Unfortunately, these issues are rare and hard to come by, especially in the United States. This may be one of the reasons these early texts remain underdiscussed.

Both *L'Insurgé* and *Combat* are available on microfilm at the Bibliothèque Nationale, the former in the Salle des Périodiques, the latter in the main reading room. *L'Insurgé* was co-founded by Thierry Maulnier, the editor of *Combat*, who also wrote a weekly column for the paper. It was published every week from 13 January 1937 until 27 October 1937. At the time it stopped publishing, the journal claimed to have 20,000 readers, including 2,000 subscribers. The stoppage was for "political reasons," the editors asserted in a front page editorial of that last issue, in order to enlarge the field of their political action and continue their wholesale opposition to the "dégénération politique de la nation française."

<sup>12</sup> "La critique qui échappe par principe aux infiltrations indélicates de l'esprit de parti parce qu'il est le contraire de l'esprit critique ne peut pas

revolution puts some distance between the young Blanchot and the young de Man, although, to be sure, Blanchot's answer is far from straightforward. Blanchot distances himself from those political aesthetics which would put literature at the service of a revolution, "même véritable" [even a true one], or of a style politics valuing only the shock of the new. De Man would make similar arguments in *Le Soir*, even as his collaborationist articles were at the service of a very particular revolution. But, unlike de Man, Blanchot formulates an explicit (although not necessarily less contradictory) answer to the question of literature and revolution, one which turns (in well nigh Bloomian terms) on the notion of the great work's intrinsic will-to-power:

What is more important is the oppositional force which is expressed in the work itself. This force is measured by the power which a work has to suppress other works or to abolish a part of ordinary reality, as well as by the power to call into existence new works which are as strong, or stronger than it, or to determine a superior reality. What also counts is the force of resistance which the author opposed to his work by the ease and license which he has refused to the work, the instincts which he has mastered, and the rigor by which he submits it to him.<sup>13</sup>

In the majority of the following issues of *L'Insurgé*, Blanchot's literary column, "Les Lectures de l'Insurgé," in which he explored the autonomous "force" and "power" of various works, ran parallel to his strictly political columns. Despite his theoretical attempt to separate aesthetics from "vulgar"

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échapper à une question qui lui est essentielle et qui la conduit à se demander si, dans un temps où la révolution est souhaitable, il n'y a pas quelques affinités à reconnaître entre la notion de révolution et les valeurs littéraires."

<sup>13</sup> "Ce qui importe davantage, c'est la force d'opposition qui s'est exprimée dans l'oeuvre même et qui est mesurée par le pouvoir qu'elle a de supprimer d'autres oeuvres ou d'abolir une part du réel ordinaire, ainsi que par le pouvoir d'appeler à l'existence de nouvelles oeuvres, aussi fortes, plus fortes qu'elle ou de déterminer une réalité supérieure. Ce qui compte aussi, c'est la force de résistance que l'auteur a opposée à son oeuvre par les facilités et les licences qu'il lui a refusées, les instincts qu'il a maîtrisés, la rigueur par laquelle il se l'est soumise."

political positions, the rhetoric of "De la révolution à la littérature" does not depart from his non-conformist analysis of France's political situation under the Popular Front.

Just as Blanchot's literary program turns on the opposition between strong and weak works, his view of the contemporary status of French politics opposes an ideal, forceful Nation with the actual, decadent State.<sup>14</sup> Blanchot (like his colleagues) tends to figure the weakness of the State through the "foreign" body of its Jewish leader, Léon Blum—hence, the mobilizing role of antisemitic insinuation in these texts. The "decomposition" of the country's "rotten system" is frequently linked to the "anti-French ends" supposedly supported by Blum. Because the State's leader represents the interests of "a foreign race," one must "distinguish the Blum government from the politics of France, the regime from the nation" [distinguer le gouvernement Blum de la politique de la France, le régime de la nation] ("Nous, les complices de Blum . . .," *L'Insurgé* 2 [20 January 1937]: 4). What Blum lacks is that from which literature also derives its "perfection"—force and the heritage of civilization, with the latter being conceived in quasi-biological terms: "He is the interlocuter whom no one fears because he never speaks of force, but only of disarmament; . . . the adversary whom no one respects because he has not even inherited the civilization he is supposed to defend" ("Blum, notre chance de salut. . ." 3 [27 January 1937]).<sup>15</sup> Just as "De la révolution" proposes that great

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<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between France and the State/Nation opposition in Blanchot and '30s discourse, see Holland and Rousseau 29-34. For other contexts in which fascist discourse mobilizes this binary, see Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* and Hartnett 73-74.

<sup>15</sup> "Il est l'interlocuteur qu'on ne craint pas parce qu'il ne parle jamais de la force, mais du désarmement; . . . l'adversaire qu'on ne respecte pas parce qu'il n'est même pas l'héritier de la civilisation qu'il devrait défendre."

works of literature must contain an "oppositional force" able to "suppress other works," the political columns suggest that "at the moment, the only way to save our country is by demolishing it in that which best represents its abjection" ("M. Delbos a raison," *L'Insurgé* 15 [14 April 1937]: 4).<sup>16</sup> Holland and Rousseau argue that this contradiction between Nation and State accounts for Blanchot's ultimate break with the right since it "is revealed as impossible to maintain in the face of Hitler's unsupportable nationalism and because the nationalist state is incapable of installing itself."<sup>17</sup> However, I do not see this logical impossibility as a sign of "*la perte de la révolution*" [the loss of the revolution] (34-5), but precisely as an ideological strategy in the waging of the right-wing nationalist revolution. Desperate and often hysterical as the rhetoric seems, we should not minimize the possible role such ideas played in setting the stage both for direct collaboration and for the racist politics of Vichy. Blanchot saw France's crisis as authorization for an abandonment of faith in democracy. The "passivité fondamentale" of the State can only be righted by a violent, anti-democratic *coup* (see "La France condamnée à avoir tort," *L'Insurgé* 18 [12 May 1937]: 4). It would not be long before an even greater crisis would reveal the depths of France's weakness and a regime

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In "De la révolution," Blanchot had already suggested that "quelques-uns des grands ouvrages classiques accomplissent aujourd'hui leur dessein en nous préparant un univers où les grandes oeuvres soient à nouveau concevables et en nous apportant non pas un héritage tout fait, mais les raisons, l'espoir et la force de rassembler notre héritage personnel, de devenir notre propres héritiers."

<sup>16</sup> "[L]e seul moyen présentement de sauver notre pays est de l'abattre dans ce qui représente le mieux son abjection."

<sup>17</sup> "[S]e révèle impossible à tenir face à un nationalisme hitlérien insoutenable et à un état national impuissant à s'instaurer."

would rise up to answer Blanchot's call in *L'Insurgé* and reunite the State and Nation.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. Après (le) Coup

My analyses of "Le Dernier Mot" and the *Insurgé* writings, as well as Blanchot's comments on his early stories, suggest that Blanchot's political and literary/critical texts from the 1930s took the form of two parallel tracks with a common deep structure. Premised on the decadence of the present—the loss of authority staged in "Le Dernier Mot," the "passivity" and "weakness" of the French State and its corrupted culture—these writings propose a forceful and definitive solution to the civilizational crisis: some literary works will need to be abolished by the power of the new culture; some politicians will have to disappear ("Blum à mort"). In what ways can Blanchot be said to break with the form, as well as the content, of that thought? It helps to witness again the terms of the political writings, so as to grasp more clearly their determinate negation (as Adorno might say) elsewhere in Blanchot's oeuvre. That negation also demonstrates the implicit politics of Blanchot's later writings. He does not, as most critics suggest, "correct" or "liquidate" (according to one's degree of sympathy) his political errors by separating literature once and for all from politics, but rather, he works through those errors by combining the aesthetic and the political in a new syncretism. Starting perhaps with *Thomas l'Obscur*,

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<sup>18</sup> Blanchot is reported to have served for a few months as the literary director of *Jeune France*, part of the Vichy government's cultural apparatus. That was his last known right-wing commitment. Other reports have him already changing sides as early as 1938 (see Pliskin, "Levinas" 96).

Blanchot's writing of the last fifty years questions not only the terror, but also the very terms of writing such as the following, from April 1936:

The shameful Sarraut government, which seems to have received the mission of humiliating France as it had not been humiliated in twenty-five years, has driven this disorder to a pitch. . . . It began by hearing the appeals of unfettered revolutionaries and Jews, whose theological furor demanded against Hitler all possible sanctions immediately. . . . Nothing could be as perfidious as that propaganda for national honor, executed by foreigners suspected by the offices of the Quai d'Orsay, to precipitate young Frenchmen, in the name of Moscow or Israel, into an immediate conflict. (cited and translated in Mehlman 11)<sup>19</sup>

Other writings by Blanchot in *Combat* propose a solution to this "shameful state": "It is necessary that [the] revolution be violent because one does not tap a people as enervated as our own for the strength and passions appropriate to a regeneration through measures of decency, but through a series of bloody shocks, a storm that will overwhelm—and thus awaken—it" (cited and translated in Mehlman 11).<sup>20</sup> Unlike the storm that Thomas experiences at the beginning of the 1950 récit (T 10), there is no sense, in these journalistic texts, of a "calm" at the heart of the tempest—the space of contemplation and reading, the "pur intervalle" of friendship (A 328)—which would always contradict the apocalyptic finality of Blanchot's political rhetoric in *Combat*. His postwar

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<sup>19</sup> "L'indigne gouvernement Sarraut, qui semble avoir reçu la mission d'humilier la France, comme elle ne l'a pas été depuis vingt-cinq ans, a porté ce désordre à son comble. . . . Il a commencé par entendre l'appel des révolutionnaires et des Juifs déchaînés dont fureur théologique exigeait contre Hitler toutes les sanctions tout de suite. . . . On n'a rien vu d'aussi perfide que cette propogande d'honneur national faite par des étrangers suspects dans les bureaux du quai d'Orsay pour précipiter les jeunes Français, au nom de Moscou ou au nom d'Israël, dans un conflit immédiat" ("Après le coup de force germanique," *Combat* 4 [April 1936]).

<sup>20</sup> "Il est nécessaire que cette révolution soit violente, parce qu'on ne tire pas d'un peuple aussi aveuli que le nôtre les forces et les passions propres à une rénovation par des mesures décentes, mais par des secousses sanglantes, par un orage qui le bouleversera afin de l'éveiller" ("Le Terrorisme, méthode de salut public," *Combat* 7 [July 1936]).

writing practice, in which the author is considered as a "path" between the "not yet" and the "no longer" (AC 86), suggests a temporality utterly foreign to the "bloody shocks" [*secousses sanglantes*] that punctuate the depiction of fascist revolution.

It is no accident that the article from which I took the long anti-semitic quotation above was titled, "Après le coup de force germanique," and that Blanchot titled his reflections on his early stories and on Auschwitz, "Après Coup." Although Blanchot does not mention his political writings there, his comments on the "silent decision" in the stories, and his assessment that "tout récit désormais sera d'avant Auschwitz" (AC 99), ask to be read as a displaced critique of the apocalyptic political narrative of a nationalistic new order to which he temporarily decided to subscribe.<sup>21</sup> What the *Combat* and *Insurgé* articles share with the two formative stories is a belief that the last word can arrive—in the form of revolution, apocalypse, or disappearance. The project which *Thomas l'Obscur* inaugurates works to forestall that end, even in recognizing that it has also always already arrived, and that the calm at the eye of the storm is also the silence of a past destruction: "il y avait un silence et un calme qui laissait penser que tout déjà était détruit" (T 10). I would not know how to measure the extent to which the irreality of Blanchot's texts

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21 It might be interesting to compare Blanchot's words to Heidegger's "decisionism" in his lectures between 1936 and 1940 on Nietzsche, the lectures which Heidegger claims staged "a confrontation with National Socialism." See David Farrell Krell's "Introduction to the Paperback Edition" of Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche*. Heidegger writes, for example, that "thinking in the grand style is genuine action, indeed, action in its most powerful—though most silent—form," and that "that which is to come is precisely a matter for decision" (cited in Krell xv). This is clearly not the place for a discussion of the relationship between Heidegger's political commitments and his thinking, but such a discussion is part of the framework of any discussion of Blanchot's and poststructuralism's relationship to politics.

derives from this historical rupture that produces a new writing subject out of the ruins of the old. What is sure, however, is the extent to which Blanchot's own writing works against attempts to separate his historical experience as a writing subject at the heart of a political storm from his later, more "aesthetic" work. In its contrast to the violent teleology of the early writings, with their continual movement toward the disaster, the "always already" of the destruction in later Blanchot presupposes that a rupture has occurred in civilization as in his own work. However, as a further consideration of "Après Coup" illustrates, that divide is not one which would permit a break with the already broken past. Any attempt to flee from or toward the disaster ignores its claim on the present.

In that 1983 afterword to the re-publication of "Le Dernier Mot" and "L'Idylle," Blanchot explicitly contrasts the failure of "ces textes innocents où retentissaient les présages meurtriers des temps futurs" [these innocent stories that resound with murderous echoes of the future] to *Thomas l'Obscur*:

(it would be dishonest to forget that, at the same time or in the meantime, I was writing *Thomas the Obscure*, which was perhaps about the same thing, but precisely did not have done with it and, on the contrary, encountered in the search for annihilation (absence) the impossibility of escaping being (presence)—which was not even a contradiction in fact, but the demand of an endlessness that is unhappy even in dying). In the sense, the story was an attempt to short circuit the other book that was being written, in order to overcome that endlessness and reach a silent decision, reach it through a more linear narrative that was nevertheless painfully complex. (VC 63)<sup>22</sup>

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22 "[I]l serait malhonnête d'oublier que, dans le même temps ou en entretemps, j'écrivais *Thomas l'Obscur*, qui avait peut-être le même propos, mais précisément n'en finissait pas et, au contraire, rencontrait dans la recherche de l'anéantissement (l'absence) l'impossibilité d'échapper à l'être (la présence)—ce qui, à la vérité, n'était même pas une contradiction, mais l'exigence d'une perpétuité malheureuse dans le mourir même). En ce sens, le récit fut une tentative pour court-circuiter l'autre livre en cours, afin de surmonter l'interminable et d'arriver, par une narration plus linéaire, pourtant péniblement complexe, à une décision silencieuse" (AC 92).

Blanchot is of course discussing the original 1941 version of *Thomas*, which itself has, in some sense, disappeared in turn behind the second, 1950 version. In the words of Jean Starobinski, the images of the first version "n'étaient offertes que pour disparaître" [were offered only in order to disappear] (502). The fact that Blanchot felt the need to write a second version, and to speculate in its prefatory note on the "infinity of possible variants" for all texts, indicates how closely *Thomas* is linked with his aesthetic of (non)disappearance.

"Après Coup," as the previous citation illustrates, connects this aesthetic explicitly with ethics and politics. If the stories take place in a murderous future tense (*les présages meurtriers des temps futurs*), the essay attempts to establish an ethical means of writing in the past tense. In its title, and in its methodology, "Après Coup" makes reference to the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (translated in French as *après coup*), in which events of the past repeat themselves, but are simultaneously restructured from the perspective of the present. *Nachträglichkeit*, especially as used by Blanchot, bears a double, condensed temporal structure in which repetition and retrospection combine. Although such a temporality could be understood as pertinent to an understanding of consciousness generally, the *après coup* applies particularly, as Anne Tomiche demonstrates, to events or scenes of a traumatic nature ("Rephrasing" 51). According to Lacan's restructuring of Freud, in this act of "remémoration, c'est-à-dire d'histoire," "it is not a question of reality, but of truth, because the effect of full speech is to reorder past contingencies by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes

them present" (*Ecrits: A Selection* 48).<sup>23</sup> Lacan defines this act of reordering—"this assumption of his history by the subject, in so far as it is constituted by the speech addressed to the other" (*Ecrits: A Selection* 48)<sup>24</sup>—as an ethical act which founds the psychoanalytic method.

Two possible divergences emerge between Lacan's definition and Blanchot's practice of the *après coup*. First of all, in his reordering, Blanchot does not fully and explicitly "assume his history"; rather, he maintains a reserve about his political writings, alluding to them only through the displaced reference to the two short stories. This leaves open the possibility that, insofar as it appears to repress certain *histoires*, the return of the past in discourse also opens up the possibility for an acting out or return of the repressed.<sup>25</sup> The second divergence complicates the first. It is not at all clear that Blanchot seeks to give past contingencies "the sense of necessities to come"; or, if he does, he attempts to mark out two separate necessary histories, one which would imply some kind of partial responsibility for genocide, the other which would suggest the genealogy of his later resistance. On the one hand, he remarks on the way the stories do disturbingly foreshadow the "concentrationary universe," but, on the other hand, he also attempts to bring to light an alternate history, symbolized by *Thomas l'Obscur*, which was on the point of emergence. It is the peculiarity of Blanchot's career that both of these

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<sup>23</sup> "[I]l ne s'agit pas . . . de réalité, mais de vérité, parce que c'est l'effet d'une parole pleine de réordonner les contingences passées en leur donnant le sens des nécessités à venir, telles que les constitue le peu de liberté où le sujet les fait présentes" (*Ecrits* I 133).

<sup>24</sup> "[C]ette assumption par le sujet de son histoire, en tant qu'elle est constituée par la parole adressée à l'autre" (*Ecrits* I 134).

<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Sylvère Lotringer for pointing this possibility out to me.

constructions of history are necessary in that both describe with some accuracy his political trajectory.

Blanchot's disavowal of the possibility of total disappearance, but also of pure presence, accounts for the traumatic nature of his discourse. The trauma is in neither the original scene (his right-wing commitments, Auschwitz), nor in the scene of recollection (the refusal of the past to disappear), but rather "the trauma is in the sequence of the two scenes and in their linkage." The very act of memory "functions as a source of traumatic energy," even as it provides the only means of working through the trauma and interrupting its repetition. Yet, according to certain contemporary re-readings of Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, there is something which eludes memory: the initial traumatic scene which produces affect but no representation of the event itself (Tomiche, "Rephrasing" 51, 53). Blanchot's reworking of Freud has precisely to do with this traumatic void and its effects on time and narrative. Blanchot hollows out the event, not in order to minimize its importance but indeed to heighten its effects. Drawing on Adorno, Blanchot gives the name of Auschwitz to that occurrence which, on the one hand, eludes representation, and, on the other, marks all subsequent acts of representation and, indeed, alters the historicity of representation:

That is why, in my opinion—and in a way different from the one that led Adorno to decide with absolute correctness—I will say there can be no fiction-narrative [*récit-fiction*] about Auschwitz (I am alluding to *Sophie's Choice*). The need to bear witness is the obligation of a testimony that can only be given—and given only in the singularity of each individual—by the impossible witnesses—the witnesses of the impossible—; . . . No matter when it is written, every narrative [*récit*] from now on will be from before Auschwitz. (VC 68-9; translation modified)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> "C'est pourquoi, à mon sens, et d'une autre manière que l'a, du reste, avec la plus grande raison, décidé Adorno, je dirai qu'il ne peut pas y avoir de récit-fiction d'Auschwitz (je fais allusion au *Choix de Sophie*). La nécessité de

In this passage, Blanchot provides two different readings of Adorno's famous proposition that "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (itself repeated in different contexts and with different nuances). First, Blanchot asserts Auschwitz's resistance to fictional mimesis and the very different impossibility of survivor testimony: "toute narration, voire, toute poésie, aient perdu l'assise sur laquelle s'élèverait un langage autre" (98) [all narration, even all poetry, has lost the foundation on which another language could be raised (68)]. This assertion, however extreme, does not go beyond the many paraphrases of Adorno which have proliferated since the 1960s, particularly after its popularization by George Steiner.

Recognizing that narrative will proceed even without foundation—"L'oubli sans doute fait son oeuvre et permet qu'il soit fait oeuvre encore" (98) [Forgetfulness no doubt does its work and allows for works to be made again (68)]—Blanchot next evokes an other temporality to account for this untimely survival. In this reading, Auschwitz affects not just postwar culture, but history in a far broader sense ("No matter when it is written"). Auschwitz does indeed rupture history's continuity, but not simply in order to divide it into two, symmetrical pieces, before and after. The world "after Auschwitz" becomes a kind of palimpsest in which pre-Holocaust traces continue to exist in the post-narrative world as so many reminders of what has been destroyed. This anachronous remainder recalls the impossibility of disappearance (l'impossibilité d'échapper à l'être) which defines the key concept of *sur-vival* in Blanchot: "some have survived, but there *sur-vival* (*sur-vie*) is no longer

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témoigner est l'obligation d'un témoignage que seuls pourraient apporter, chacun dans sa singularité, les impossibles témoins—témoins de l'impossible—; . . . A quelque date qu'il puisse être écrit, tout récit désormais sera d'avant Auschwitz" (AC 98-99).

life, it is the break from living affirmation, the attestation that the good that is life (not narcissistic life, but life for others) has undergone the decisive blow that leaves nothing intact" (68; translation modified).<sup>27</sup> The fact that nothing has been left intact does not mean that nothing has been left. The comfort of oblivion is not an option, even if the traumatic kernel of the catastrophe cannot be represented. As one critic has written, "We are marked by events, bound to them and compelled to acknowledge them, precisely to the extent that we cannot recover them, cannot preserve them, cannot remedy them. Irremediability, or loss, is what implicates us" (Shaviro, "Complicity" 829).

Blanchot's revision of the *après coup* reverses the temporal vectors of trauma. Instead of a condensed, centripetal relationship between the present and the past moment of the trauma, Blanchot's version is centrifugal: time recedes on either side of the present, running backwards toward and beyond Auschwitz and floundering in repetition and rupture "from now on." In addition, the relationship to the other [autrui], which Lacan notes as the foundation of the psychoanalytic approach to trauma, is shattered; "La vie continue peut-être" [Perhaps life continues], but not "la vie pour autrui" [life for others] (AC 99, 98; VC 69, 68). For Blanchot, it is not a question of psychoanalytic method, but of the conditions in which narrative and speech

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<sup>27</sup> "[C]ertains ont survécu, mais leur sur-vie n'est plus la vie, est la rupture d'avec l'affirmation vivante, l'attestation que ce bien qu'est la vie (la vie non pas narcissique, mais pour autrui) a subi l'atteinte décisive qui ne laisse plus rien intact" (AC 98).

On sur-vival, see Jacques Derrida's essay on (?) Blanchot, "Living on: Border Lines," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, 75-176. Derrida writes there of "the story, the narrative, of 'Living On' as differance, with an *a*, between archeology and eschatology, as differance *in* apocalypse" (94). This essay and three others touching on Blanchot were collected by Derrida in French in his book, *Parages*. See "Pas" in that collection, for a reading of the doubleness of the "pas."

can take place. Thus, the logic of Blanchot's claim implies, working through the past is ultimately impossible because the trauma is forever being displaced into the future and the narrative means for coming to terms with the event merely testify to a failure to come to terms ("every narrative will be from before Auschwitz"). Yet, working through the past is also required, since the "non-presence of the past, its irrecoverability, is equally its failure to be altogether absent" (Shaviro, "Complicity" 829). This necessity of the return of the repressed which the *après coup* marks reveals, even as it hides, the fact that what is at stake is not only Auschwitz, but indeed something from before it: Blanchot's anti-semitic engagement and whatever indirect and almost incalculably minor role it had in setting the stage for genocide. However small this role was, it cannot, dictates Blanchot's theory, disappear.

##### 5. From Now On

There is an odd, supplemental word in Blanchot's phrasing of the relationship between narrative and Auschwitz, one which further complicates the notion of the present in Blanchot: *désormais*, from now on. What function does this word play in the proposition? Referring to the moment of enunciation of "Après Coup" (1983), it would seem to bear no connection to the question of Auschwitz. Indeed, the question of why, at this particular moment Blanchot would begin again to speak of Auschwitz is somewhat obscure, although the mention of *Sophie's Choice* and the proximity to the broadcast of the *Holocaust* television series suggests that Blanchot may be responding to a new level of commodification of Shoah narratives. At a more general level, the *désormais* self-reflexively signals the importance of the non-contemporaneity

of all events, of their tendency to be understood only retrospectively (*après coup*). This is indeed the theme of Blanchot's dialogical essay from *L'Entretien infini*, "Sur un changement d'époque: l'exigence du retour" [On a Change of Epoch: The Exigency of Return]. In that essay, Blanchot theorizes why, if an event is to come to represent an epochal change, it can only do so retroactively when, at a later moment, someone says, "from now on, things will not be the same." As one of Blanchot's interlocuters suggests, "The fact of our belonging to this moment at which a change of epoch, if there is one, is being accomplished also takes hold of the certain knowledge that would want to determine it."<sup>28</sup> The other participant in the fictional dialogue develops the point, quoting Nietzsche: "The greatest events and thoughts are comprehended last; the generations that are contemporaneous with them do not experience such events—they live right past them" (IC 264).<sup>29</sup> As with trauma, it is neither the event itself nor the moment of its remembrance which is sufficient to break the continuity of time, but the connection established between those moments, the yoking of the present to a time which, nevertheless, cannot be found anew (as in Proust's *temps retrouvé*). The "from now on" of Blanchot's "Après Coup" signifies that at some point (or series of points) we have become contemporaries of the Holocaust.

Theorizing Auschwitz in terms of the non-contemporaneous *désormais* provides a map for re-reading Blanchot's postwar work, where the past

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<sup>28</sup> "Le fait d'appartenir à ce moment où s'accomplit un changement d'époque (s'il y en a), s'empare aussi de savoir certain qui voudrait le déterminer" (EI 394).

<sup>29</sup> "Les événements les plus grandes et les pensées les plus grandes ne sont intelligibles qu'à la longue; les générations qui leur sont contemporaines ne vivent pas ces événements: elles vivent à côté" (EI 394).

remains but in radically different form. The notion of the "from now on" means that time is not divided in two, with a void (Auschwitz) at the center, but that successive moments establish different relationships to that past as the void propagates itself in a series of uncomprehending presents. The change of era is still figured as a storm (as in the 1930s), but now it has "une force discrète" [a discrete force] and the words which carry it to us, *pace* Nietzsche, are "the most silent" (EI 394; IC 264, translation modified). Blanchot constantly, although silently, recalls his *faux pas* as a member of the *Jeune Droite* by repeating concepts from those writings, but shifting their significance 180°. Thus in Blanchot's postwar metaphors, force becomes discrete, the tempest falls silent, disappearance fails to disappear, and passivity metamorphoses from a sign of decadence to a valued resistance to terror. A rupture has occurred (unlike in de Man), but the past is not therefore liquidated. Tracking the significance of silence and death, and their relation to each other in Blanchot's postwar writings allows us to trace the fault lines of his survival.

Not surprisingly, silence and its links with genocide have been a major preoccupation of Holocaust discourse. In an influential discussion of historical revisionism and the Nazi concentration camps in *The Differend*, Lyotard notes at least four possible meanings to the silences of camp survivors in the face of questioning about their experiences:

The survivors remain silent, and it can be understood 1) that the situation in question (the case) is not the addressee's business...or 2) that it never took place (this is what Faurisson [the revisionist] understands); or 3) that there is nothing to say about it (the situation is senseless, inexpressible); or 4) that it is not the survivors' business to be talking about it. . . . Or, several of these negations together. (No. 26)

How do we analyze the silences of Blanchot and de Man, not survivors of the camps but of a certain self-imposed, other-directed written violence?

Commenting upon the relationship between de Man's wartime writings and his later criticism, Shoshana Felman argues that his silence about the *Le Soir* writings falls roughly into Lyotard's third category, the silence of the inexpressible:

Incorporating the silence of the witness who has returned mute into his very writing, de Man's entire work and his later theories bear implicit witness to the Holocaust, not as its (impossible and failed) narrator (a narrator-journalist whom the war had dispossessed of his own voice) but as a witness to the very blindness of his own, and others', witness, a firsthand witness to the Holocaust's historical disintegration of the witness. (139)

Felman later suggests (201n) that such an analysis of the "radical—and inescapable—*complicity*" of all acts of witness could equally well apply to Blanchot's work. I find a danger however in eliding the differences, not only between the different types of silence (as in de Man's reading of Blanchot as a non-political thinker), but between the different subjects of those silences. And, in fact, Felman's larger project in *Testimony*, contradicts her apologetic stance toward de Man and Blanchot, insofar as it is concerned with the witness's "utterly unique and irreplaceable topographical *position* with respect to an occurrence" (206). To group collaborators of whatever degree of commitment with concentration camp survivors under the abstraction of "the Holocaust's historical disintegration of the witness" reifies this disintegration, stripping it of the collective agency which lies behind it. "Complicity" and "implicit witness" are terms too vague to capture the significant postwar divergence in Blanchot's and de Man's attitudes toward the relations of language to history.

I would locate the important difference that emerges between de Man and Blanchot—despite the similarity in their use of the trope of chiasmus, which *does* bear witness to a certain crisis in witnessing—in Blanchot's refusal

of de Man's generative opposition between the historical and the literary. The work around the question of the Second World War which culminates in *L'écriture du désastre* provokes a re-reading of early works such as *Thomas l'Obscur* and *L'Arrêt de mort* in a way which nothing in de Man's oeuvre can. The weight of absent bodies haunts Blanchot's postwar writings, registering itself long before "Auschwitz" became the rhetorical place in which a historical rupture was located. At a moment in the 1940s when Adorno was speaking of the "Final Solution" as a "stage" in the dialectic of Enlightenment, and when even French-Jewish survivors were reluctant to express the particularity of their experience as Jews (Wieviorka, "Jewish Identity"), certain texts by Blanchot already anticipate the singularity with which the Holocaust would come to be described. At the same time, those texts rigorously refuse to name the event, preserving a sometimes troubling vagueness toward historical specificity—what Ungar calls a lack of "full disclosure" (*Scandal* 136)—whose ambivalent effects need to be kept in mind.

Reading retrospectively by the dim light of the disaster helps to explain the aura of irreality, of deathlessness in Blanchot's récits, as it explains the importance he ascribes to the failure of his early stories, to the terrible fact that they end, somehow, too smoothly. Death by extermination rewrites death and demands that writing itself be re-formed. Lyotard theorizes what we also experience in *Thomas l'Obscur*, that "sacrifice is not available to the deportee, nor for that reason accession to an immortal, collective name. . . . The individual name must be killed (whence the use of serial numbers), and the collective name (Jew) must also be killed in such a way that no one bearing this name might remain which could take the deportee's death into itself and eternalize it. This death must therefore be killed, and that is what is worse

than death" (No. 157). Killing death. This paradox plays itself out in Blanchot's writing. In *Thomas*, we read of Anne's dying, during which:

The doctor bent over her and thought that she was dying according to the laws of death, not perceiving that she had already reached that instant when, in her, the laws were dying. She made an imperceptible motion; no one understood that she was floundering in the instant when death, destroying everything, might also destroy the possibility of annihilation. (TiO 84-85)<sup>30</sup>

After the *déchirement* of genocide, not only the possibility of the philosopher's "beautiful death" disappears, but of any death as resolution. Mass death destroys not just the individual, but individual death, death according to the laws. The death of death, of course, does not leave life in its wake, but rather lifeless survival.

A passage from the 1950 version of *Thomas* (present in almost identical form in the 1941 version) will illustrate the way history and literature are implicated in what I have called the second version of disappearance, a mode described by Ann Smock as the moment when "everything has disappeared [and] disappearance, the disappearance of everything, appears" (9). Late in the récit, when Anne has performed the impossible and died, Thomas speaks for the only time in an extended monologue using first-person narration. Thomas remembers writing on a wall "'Je pense, donc je ne suis pas,'" a slogan which causes a strange vision to rise before him:

In the midst of an immense countryside, a flaming lens received the dispersed rays of the sun and, by those fires, became conscious of itself as a monstrous I, not at the points at which it received them, but at the point at which it projected and united

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<sup>30</sup> "Le médecin se pencha et crut qu'elle mourait selon les lois de la mort, ne voyant pas qu'elle était déjà parvenue à l'instant où en elle les lois mouraient. Elle eut un mouvement imperceptible, personne ne comprit qu'elle se débattait dans l'instant où la mort, détruisant tout, pouvait aussi détruire la possibilité de l'anéantissement" (T 96).

them in a single beam [un faisceau unique]. . . . [T]he entire universe became a flame at the point at which the lens touched it; and the lens did not leave it until it was destroyed. Nevertheless, I perceived that this mirror was like a living animal consumed by its own fire. (99)<sup>31</sup>

This imaginary machine—at once human and animal, subject and object of destruction, life force and death blow—subsequently begins to speak and thus displaces, but does not eradicate the "I" of Thomas in the remainder of his monologue. Such a passage, and I could have chosen many others even in this same short text, enacts the appearance of disappearance, presenting a figure for the subject unable to disappear because the forces of total destruction have gone so far as to destroy their own ability to destroy totally. It does not seem accidental to me that this subject-machine is described at one point as a "faisceau," a word connected etymologically to "fascism," for it is precisely the fascist as subject of a total violence which is radically put into question here. At first glance, the scene described also seems to be a kind of holocaust—literally a total consumption by fire or a burnt offering—or, in Blanchot's words in *L'écriture du désastre*, the "événement absolu de l'histoire . . . cette toute-brûlure où toute l'histoire s'est embrasée" (80) [*the absolute event of history . . . that utter-burn where all history took fire* (WD 47)]. This latter definition of the holocaust contradicts the auspicious de-absolutizing of destruction characteristic of the passage from *Thomas* and of the second version of disappearance in general. The absolutizing of "The Holocaust"

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<sup>31</sup> Au milieu d'une immense campagne, une loupe flamboyante recevait les rayons dispersés du soleil et, par ces feux, elle prenait conscience d'elle-même comme d'un moi monstrueux, non pas aux points où elle les recevait, mais au point où elle les projetait et les unissait en un faisceau unique.... [L']univers entier se faisait flamme au point où elle le touchait; elle ne le quittait que détruit. Cependant, je m'aperçus que ce miroir était comme un animal vivant consumé par ses propres feux" (114-15).

represents a troublesome philosemitic temptation in Blanchot's postwar thinking because it places Jewish experience before that of others and because it momentarily forgets that there is no "last word" in destruction and that even Jews may be its agents. Even in *L'écriture du désastre*, however, the notion of the "absolute" is more often in question than affirmed; the hints of philosemitism, for which Mehlman takes Blanchot to task, are limited and eclipsed by the ethics and politics developed in the wake of May '68.

#### 6. The Persistence of the Death-World and the Ethics of Waking

Aspects of Blanchot's postwar writing, in which he considers the paradoxes of total destruction, are illuminated by philosopher Edith Wyschogrod's critique of the phenomenological concept of the life-world, which she evaluates according to the example of the death-world of the Nazi genocide. Under ordinary circumstances, the human life-world has three components: an inanimate base, a vital world of movement, temporal flux, and inner experience; and an "ethical dimension in which other persons are apprehended as centers of value" ("Concentration Camps" 328). Wyschogrod argues that:

At the vital level of the life-world . . . the concentration camp succeeded in suppressing the primordial modes of man's being in the world. . . . For the life-world now and in the future includes in collective experience and shared history the death-world of the camp. *Once the death-world has existed it continues to exist, in the mode of eternity, as it were, for it becomes part of the sediment that is the irrevocable past.* (335; author's emphasis)

This destruction of the vital life-world is part of what constitutes survival in passages like the previous one from *Thomas l'Obscur*: the mutual contamination of life and death. In Wyschogrod's words, "Life perdures but the

life-world ceases to exist" (328). However, in neither Blanchot's works nor Wyschogrod's speculations does the persistence of death within life mark the complete eradication of the life-world. The Nazi's totalizing desires were foiled: "while the modes of significance were destroyed by the camp system at the vital level of existence, this collapse of meaning did not come about at the ethical level in the manner intended by the camp's executioners. . . . [S]o long as and wherever the other is recognized as a node of value the ethical level of the life-world is continued" (337-38). The recognition of the other, which in Wyschogrod's thinking owes much to the work of Lévinas, is an important element of many post-Holocaust writings because the latter inevitably raise the problem of mourning and memorialization, two processes that seek to establish a relationship to an absent other.

The many confrontations with the opacity of the other staged in Blanchot's récits indicate a similar ethical obsession. *L'Arrêt de mort* (1948) is, for example, a remarkable literary enactment of the situation described by Wyschogrod, the overlap of the post-Holocaust persistence of the death-world with the survival of the ethical dimension. For the purposes of this essay, the section of that work which interests me most is the opening half of the book in which the narrator describes the strange (non-)events surrounding the fatal sickness of his friend "J." The impossibility of death—itself a symptom of the permanent incursion of death into the life-world—is an experience which unites the narrator and his subject: "Her doctor had told me that he considered her dead since 1936. It is true that that same doctor, who had cared for me several times, also told me one day: 'Since you should have been dead for two years, everything that remains for you to live is surplus.' He had just granted

me six months of survival, and that was seven years ago."<sup>32</sup> This common problem of survival which the narrator and J. share—"something much worse" than death—confirms what the scriptural similarity between "Je" and "J." already suggests: J. is one of the many uncanny doubles who haunt Blanchot's texts. If, as Freud argues, the double is often an uncanny figure marking a site of repression, to what return of the repressed does this double, J., testify?

It is frequently remarked in the extensive critical literature on *L'Arrêt de mort* that Blanchot parallels the descriptions of J.'s endless dying with historical references to the events of Munich in 1938. In Kristin Ross's words, for example, "The rhythm of her struggle is the rhythm of political crisis: episodic, punctuated by frequent dramatic turning points, triumphs and reversals. The rhetoric of war and combat dominates the description of her relationship to her illness" ("Two Versions" 32). Ross reads the historical allusions as signs of a struggle between private and public horror in which "[t]he narrator . . . borrows the gravity of the historical only to use it as a weapon against the historical; he uses it to triumph over it by alluding to a far worse eventuality" (34). This reading of the text is convincing, as is the suggestion that this récit foreshadows the politicization of the everyday which emerges in *L'Entretien infini*. I would suggest, however, once again the value of rereading *L'arrêt de mort* in the light of Blanchot's actual activities during the period which the text concerns. Barely occluded by the doubling and displacement between the narrator and J., and between public and private

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32 "Son médecin m'avait dit d'elle qu'il la tenait pour morte depuis 1936. Il est vrai que ce même médecin, qui m'a soigné quelque temps, m'a dit aussi un jour: 'Comme vous devriez être mort depuis deux ans, tout ce qui vous reste à vivre est en surnombre.' Il venait de m'octroyer six mois de survie et il y a de cela sept ans" (13-14).

suffering are the same events hidden and revealed by Blanchot's *après coup* consideration of his early stories. For indeed, to paraphrase Ross, the rhetoric of *Combat* is at stake in this text. Up until just a few months before the late 1938 capitulation to Hitler which the Munich events signify, Blanchot's own writing in *Combat* and *L'Insurgé*, although never pro-Nazi, took a decidedly ambivalent stance. In a short article entitled "Le chantage à l'antihitlerisme" [The Anti-Hitler Blackmail], Blanchot admits that Germany represents "le péril le plus grand" [the greatest peril] for France, but, at the same time declares: "It is truly shameful to see so many Frenchmen lose their composure when Hitler is mentioned, and to fear appearing less patriotic than the communists if they don't condemn Germany severely enough" (*L'Insurgé* 22 [9 June 1937]).<sup>33</sup> Throughout Blanchot's '30s journalism, the German "peril" is consistently downplayed in the interests of a fanatical anti-communism meant to set the stage for a toppling of France's democratic government.

If the sickness of J. in *L'Arrêt de mort* is metonymically associated with the fatal diplomacy of Munich, and if that connection points back toward Blanchot's own discourse of those "sinister" days (AM 23), what is the position of the récit's narrator in relation to that network of associations? The narrator literally brings J. back from the dead—"cette jeune fille qui était morte, à mon appel revint à la vie" (52)—ensuring the survival of her living death and completing a story of failed disappearance. Between those events of 1938 and their recounting in this narrative nine years later, the narrator tells us, he had attempted other times to write the story and to do away with it once and for

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<sup>33</sup> "Il est vraiment honteux de voir tant de Français perdre tout sang-froid quand on leur parle d'Hitler et craindre, en ne s'exprimant pas assez sévèrement sur l'Allemagne, de paraître moins patriotes que les communistes."

all. These multiple writings represent so many attempts *après coup* to come to terms with events of which the narrator seems only partially to grasp the significance:

If I wrote books, it is because I hoped by those books to put an end to all of that. If I wrote novels, the novels were born in the moment when the words began to retreat before the truth. I am not scared of the truth. I do not fear divulging a secret. But words, up until now, have been weaker and craftier than I would have wanted. That craftiness, I know, is a warning. It would be more noble to leave the truth in peace. . . . But, presently, I hope to finish with it soon.<sup>34</sup>

Given Blanchot's many postwar critical and theoretical texts, not to mention the very enigmatic structure of this récit, the narrator's desire for closure can only be understood ironically. A great deal of the text concerns the narrator's absence from the events which ostensibly concern him and the absence of meaning in the encounters at which he is, in some sense, present. It is precisely "this non-presence, this absence of relation [that] weighs so heavily upon" the narrator (Shaviro, "Complicity" 829). And it is in the oscillation which the previous passage charts between a sense that the truth is lacking from language and a need to testify despite the inevitable failure that a new model of witnessing emerges.

The narrator's relationship to J. (and thus to the events which led to the war that intervenes between the story and the narrator's discourse) represents a variation on the Orphic theme dear to Blanchot. According to Blanchot's reading of that myth, Orpheus's gaze inscribes the double

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<sup>34</sup> "Si j'ai écrit des livres, c'est que j'ai espéré par des livres mettre fin à tout cela. Si j'ai écrit des romans, les romans sont nés au moment où les mots ont commencé de reculer devant la vérité. Je n'ai pas peur de la vérité. Je ne crains pas de livrer un secret. Mais les mots, jusqu'à maintenant, ont été plus faibles et plus rusés que je n'aurais voulu. Cette ruse, je le sais, est un avertissement. Il serait plus noble de laisser la vérité en paix. . . . Mais, à présent, j'espère en finir bientôt" (7).

movement of the creation of the work of art: "it links inspiration to *desire*. It introduces into concern for the work the movement of *unconcern* in which the work is sacrificed: the work's ultimate law is broken; the work is betrayed in favor of Eurydice, in favor of the shade" (SL 175). In the breaking of the work's law, in Orpheus's gaze, "the work can surpass itself, be united with its origin and consecrated in impossibility" (174). In *L'Arrêt de mort*, however, the narrator's gaze does not kill J., but, to the contrary, brings her back to life. Upon entering the room of the dead J. in order to observe her body, the narrator is struck by the withered look of her hands, "so weak because of the immense combat that that great soul had waged alone."<sup>35</sup> Moved by the marks of combat, the narrator recounts, in a passage that resembles *Thomas's* doctor at Anne's bedside: "I bent over her and called her, with a strong voice, by her first name; and at that moment a kind of breath emerged from her still clasped mouth."<sup>36</sup> This resurrection, stimulated by voice and gaze, would seem to reverse the Orpheus story, except that the life/light to which J./Eurydice is brought back is one of "nocturnal obscurity" in which "living in her [is] the plenitude of her death" (SL 172). In the récit, the result of the gaze and voice of the work is not death, but that "quelque chose de plus grave" which the refusal of the events to disappear represents. If the typical Orpheus/Eurydice story exiles the feminine in order to create a masculine work founded on feminine absence, this retelling asserts the impossibility of making the

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<sup>35</sup> "[S]i faibles pour l'immense combat qu'avait livré, toute seule, cette grande âme" (35).

<sup>36</sup> "Je me penchai sur elle, je l'appelai à haute voix, d'une voix forte, par son prénom; et aussitôt . . . une sorte de souffle sortit de sa bouche encore serrée" (36).

feminine disappear, and links this preservation of an asymmetrical sexual difference to the ethics of historical understanding.<sup>37</sup>

While in *L'Arrêt de mort*, and in Blanchot's other récits and early novels, this ethics of the gaze remains historically abstract, Blanchot's later, more explicitly philosophical work prompts the type of rereading I have proposed. *L'Arrêt de mort* certainly foreshadows, as Kristin Ross argues, the *changement d'époque* which Blanchot concretized and theorized in *L'Entretien infini*. Because of that foreshadowing, it is necessary to keep in mind Blanchot's reflections in that latter text on the deferred action and belated contemporaneity of events; 1968 was not simply a turning point because of the social upheavals for which the month of May serves as shorthand. It was also the moment when a constellation emerged—including a variety of only partially understood sociological, psychological, and political reasons—that retroactively changed the meaning of the Holocaust. At that late date, Blanchot, and many others in France and throughout European and North American cultures, began to experience the full effects of a genocide which had occurred twenty-five years earlier. Even if references to the Holocaust remain relatively few in Blanchot's writing of the late '60s, he had already grasped an important general dynamic of historical periodization: its basis in the belated coming together of seemingly unlike times and places in a

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<sup>37</sup> See Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's "Gendered Transactions" for a critique of "Orphic creation" in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. Drawing on the model provided by Klaus Theweleit, Hirsch and Spitzer understand the Orphic paradigm as one in which masculine culture attempts to "bypass the generativity of women," using them as intermediaries on the way to a form of reproduction between men (15). I do not deny this less savory aspect of the Orpheus model; indeed, I find it at many places in Blanchot's work. However, in this instance, and in light of the other aspects of Blanchot's historical and biographical context, *L'Arrêt de mort's* revision seems to be working through the myth in order to demonstrate its impossibility and its danger.

constellation. Another decade would pass before the effects registered at the end of the 1960s would reach their culmination in Blanchot's thought with the publication of *Après Coup* and *L'écriture du désastre*. If the former text illuminates the break in time produced by the unrepresentable Shoah, the latter text outlines a difficult strategy for confronting that catastrophe which goes beyond regression into the certainties of total disappearance and beyond the potentially apologetic recognition of inevitable complicity.

Throughout Blanchot's meditations on Auschwitz, Robert Antelme's memoir of the camps, *L'espèce humaine*, occupies a privileged place. I find it significant that Blanchot chooses Antelme, a political prisoner of the Nazis, and not a Jewish memoirist of the camps, such as Primo Levi. This choice demonstrates again the extent of Blanchot's witness to his own past actions and inactions since, although he could never have been a Jewish victim, he could have been in the position of Antelme, deported as an active member of the Resistance. Blanchot's writings on Antelme are, then, another "après coup," another way of keeping watch over past mistakes which continue to reawaken the critic from an uneasy sleep. Hence, the strange resonance of the passage in his 1984 essay, "Les intellectuels en question," where he finds the cause of intellectuals exemplified in the wartime "defense of an innocent Jew: that which justified their writing, knowledge, and thought. The strangeness of their intervention is that it was collective yet it exalted the singular" (8).<sup>38</sup> Like so many of his compatriots Blanchot's own wartime activities are mired in obscurity, with indications both of temporary collaboration with Vichy and of

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<sup>38</sup> "[D]éfense d'un juif innocent": "ce qui les justifiait d'écrire, de savoir et de penser. L'étrangeté de leur intervention est que celle-ci fut collective, alors que leur exigence exaltait la singularité."

life-saving actions on behalf of his friend, Emmanuel Lévinas and his family. The complexity, which the previous citation suggests, of coexisting imperatives towards collectivity and singularity—towards politics and ethics, in other words—is expressed in the juxtaposition (in the section on "L'Indestructible" in *L'Entretien infini*) between the chapters on "Etre juif" and on *L'espèce humaine*.<sup>39</sup> These adjacent essays testify to the need for an ethics of the singular—for Lévinas's "l'exigence de l'étrangeté" [the demand of the foreign] (EI 189)—but also (and less often glimpsed in Blanchot) for a collective response of the type in which Antelme was involved.<sup>40</sup> Antelme, Blanchot writes, helps us to see "[t]hat man can be destroyed . . . but that because of and despite this, and in this very movement, man remains [reste] indestructible" (IC 130; translation modified).<sup>41</sup> This indestructibility of "man" is not a form of humanism on Blanchot's part, but a statement of the witness's ceaseless responsibility to confront movements of destruction.

In a passage on Antelme in *L'écriture du désastre* Blanchot brings to fruition the theory of witnessing first suggested in early writings such as

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<sup>39</sup> See Stoekl, "Blanchot, Violence, and the Disaster," for a less sympathetic reading of the essay "Etre juif." Stoekl is rightly troubled to find there certain inverted evaluations of the antisemitic portrait of Jews. But, placed within the larger project of Blanchot's "coming to terms with the past," and read alongside the Antelme essay, the considerations on Jewishness appear as part of an ethico-political stance which radically puts antisemitism and fascism into question.

<sup>40</sup> Other than Blanchot's reference to this important Resistance figure, many of his references to the collectivity of the political turn on the experience of May '68 (which I hope I have demonstrated is not separable from the question of the Shoah for Blanchot). For this rethinking of communism and community, see *L'Entretien infini* (especially the prefatory note) and *La Communauté inavouable*, as well as the postwar political essays collected in the *Gramma* issues dedicated to Blanchot.

<sup>41</sup> "[Q]ue l'homme puisse être détruit . . . mais que malgré cela et à cause de cela, en ce mouvement même, l'homme reste l'indestructible" (EI 192).

*Thomas l'Obscur* and *L'Arrêt de mort. L'espèce humaine* inspires there a meditation on hunger in the death camps in which Blanchot locates the critic "after Auschwitz" in a state of terminal waking (both awake and at the wake of history). Speculating on the gaze which accompanies the ultimate starvation, Blanchot initially suggests, would allow the critic momentarily to glimpse some absolute knowledge: "with this gaze which is a last gaze, bread is given us as bread. . . . In this ultimate moment when dying is exchanged for the life of bread, . . . need—in need—also dies as simple need. And it exalts, it glorifies—by making it into something inhuman (withdrawn from all satisfaction)—the need of bread which has become an empty absolute where henceforth we can all only ever lose ourselves." Stopping at this point would leave a troubling exaltation of suffering. But Blanchot immediately contradicts this tendency; the "last gaze," like the "last word," proves to be an ethical mirage. The critic's desire for *consummation*—for transcendence of the human in the nothingness of the "absolu vide"—runs up against the silencing voices of the survivors. Blanchot defines the responsibility which arises from the encounter with those voices in a passage which rhetorically resembles that of the almost-all-consuming fire in *Thomas*:

the danger (here) of words in their theoretical insignificance is perhaps that they claim to evoke the annihilation where all sinks always, without hearing the "be silent" addressed to those who have known only partially, or from a distance the interruption of history. And yet to watch and to wake, to keep the ceaseless vigil over the immeasurable absence is necessary, for what took up again from this end (Israel, all of us) is marked by this end, from which we cannot come to the end of waking again. (WD 84)<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> "[L]e danger (ici) des mots dans leur insignifiante théorique, c'est peut-être de prétendre évoquer l'anéantissement où tout sombre toujours, sans entendre le "taisez-vous" adressé à ceux qui n'ont connu que de loin ou partiellement l'interruption de l'histoire. Cependant, veiller sur l'absence démesurée, il le faut, il le faut sans cesse, parce que ce qui a recommencé à partir de cette fin

This passage moves two steps beyond the search for self-annihilation in the empty absolute. When confronted with their implication in the disaster, and after receiving the commandment of silence, most people, including some of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century, would seem to stop. Blanchot, on the other hand, proposes a necessary second step (a "pas," and thus also a negation) which contradicts the silence of the first step, and therefore must be introduced with "cependant" (a word whose second syllable echoes the "pas"). Blanchot adds the vigil, the watching over (*veiller*), to the tasks confronting the critic in the wake of the disaster; as in my epigraph, the intellectual becomes a lookout in the care, not of the self, but of others. The ceaselessness of this watch radically reimagines the Orphic gaze and suggests an inability to break definitively from the past: the "end" of the interruption of history also serves as a negative origin for the survival of everyone. All living is living on—the impossibility of death, of disappearance; the persistence of presence, of the "last word" which ceaselessly repeats itself even when its author would prefer not to recognize his own guilty authorship. Re-publication of the early stories ("Le Dernier Mot" and "L'Idylle") becomes a political act that de Man, committed only to silence and to the inevitability of complicity, could never perform. The ceaselessness of the wake in Blanchot takes place in a double temporal frame, that of the enigmatic pronouncement that "all narratives from now on will be from before Auschwitz." The insomniac witness is at once yoked to the disaster which has already occurred and watchful over its contemporary and future reappearances.

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(Israël, nous tous), est marqué de cette fin avec laquelle nous n'en finissons pas de nous réveiller" (ED 134).

## Chapter 3

## YOURCENAR'S MALE FANTASIES, THEWELEIT'S COUP

"Fantasy is on the side of reality."  
—Slavoj Žižek

## 1. Documents of Barbarism

In developing the concept of aesthetic production "after Auschwitz," Adorno attempted to mark both the continuities in material conditions which link pre- and post-Holocaust Europe and the necessity for new forms of consciousness, politics, and economic organization in the wake of modern genocide. The career of Maurice Blanchot offers both a theoretical refinement of the ethical and temporal dimensions of Adorno's thought and a practical working out in a specific, but changing, European context of the consequences of taking "Auschwitz" as central to any narrative of twentieth-century Western culture. Blanchot's highly idiosyncratic "coming to terms with the past" is no "mastery" of the past (a highly dubious enterprise in any case), but it represents a productive engagement with a disturbing history, an engagement made more significant in comparison to the meager responses of many other intellectuals under comparable circumstances (Heidegger, de Man).

While the ambiguities of the Heidegger and de Man cases have been amply debated in a variety of public forums, much work remains to be done in

reading European intellectuals in relation to the discontinuity which the Holocaust represents. Marguerite Yourcenar's novel *Coup de Grâce* provides an opportunity for one such reading, but one which differs enormously from the reading of Blanchot, and which is thus not necessarily emblematic of a movement within modern European letters. The interest of such a reading derives from the intersection of the work's and the author's specificity with the broader historical forces of fascism and antisemitism at issue in the representations discussed here. Writing in 1982, in *Reflections of Nazism*, Saul Friedlander placed *Coup de Grâce* within an aesthetic tradition which he maintains was "the bedrock of Nazi aesthetics as well as the new evocation of Nazism" (27). Friedlander suggests in passing that this narrative of a right-wing mercenary juxtaposes kitsch and death in an antimodern modernism characteristic of fascism and of a range of representations of fascism. As a vivid and horrifying depiction of a hegemonic style of masculinity, Yourcenar's novel also provides the occasion for a consideration and a critique of the gender and sexual politics of "documenting barbarism," a project which has been formulated most influentially in recent years by Klaus Theweleit in *Male Fantasies*. Finally, I will argue that besides constituting an example of Friedlander's "new discourse of Nazism" *avant la lettre*, the publication history of *Coup de Grâce* demonstrates the extent to which postwar conditions do not simply foster a repetition of Nazi aesthetics, but shape texts to fit other ends.

With the significant exceptions of Friedlander's passing mention of *Coup de Grâce* and an important essay by Elaine Marks, Yourcenar has not been situated in a critical fashion in relation to questions of fascism and antisemitism. Indeed, to the contrary, in his 1993 introduction to a special

*PMLA* cluster on "Literature and the Idea of Europe," Timothy J. Reiss cites Yourcenar as one of the "writers who foster a spirit that counters the historical and ever-present dark side of economic and political forces" (27). My reading of *Coup de Grâce* (like Elaine Marks's) situates Yourcenar specifically on that "dark side," and I do so by considering her novel in relation to a particular strand of dark Euro-American history "after Auschwitz": the Cold War. As evidence of Yourcenar's alleged contribution to a new "affirmative idea" (25) of Europe which breaks with the traditions of cultural nationalism and totalitarian destruction, Reiss cites a specific text which he reads as antifascist and Yourcenar's general sensitivity to the specificities of place and time. In drawing the lesson from Yourcenar that "no future can ignore the past with impunity," Reiss refers to her "scathing 1940 review of Anne Lindbergh's pro-Nazi *Wave of the Future*" (27). Reiss's particular choice demonstrates no particular sensitivity to the lessons of the past since the review in question represents a shockingly ambivalent essay—one which, in any case, was never published until after her death and thus cannot be said to have advanced the antifascist cause one iota no matter how "scathing" it might be. True, Yourcenar calls the Nazi's "barbaric dogmatism" (not their barbarism!) "the most irrefutable appearance of evil." But, on the other hand, she claims that "nobody can contest that there is beauty in the passionate exaltation of the young Nazi," and that Hitler is "in sum a man like any other," and thus must have "some more or less hidden virtues" (*En pèlerin* 61; my translation). After the *Reichspogromnacht* [*Kristallnacht*] of November 1938, after the invasion of Poland in 1939, such sentiments are neither "irrefutable" nor open to "affirmation" in the new Europe.

Equally troubling are Reiss's remarks on the "profound respect for and understanding of other cultures" in Yourcenar's portrait of Hadrian in *Memoirs of Hadrian*. Reiss claims Hadrian as one of those "who have begun to grasp the complexity of context and to recognize that cultural artifacts live within a particular contextual complexity," and who may thus use such "generosity of soul" "to think themselves into another's culture, society, and mind" (17, 26). As in Yourcenar's Lindbergh review and, I will argue, in *Coup de Grâce*, the "contextual complexity" Reiss finds in her Hadrian produces its own elisions, whose illumination is fundamental to understanding "Literature and the Idea of Europe." Far from a singularly generous soul, Hadrian was also a conquering power who "forbade the practice of Judaism on pain of death" (Fackenheim, *To Mend the World* 328). Drawing on Yourcenar's Hadrian as an example of how "one gets a sense of others' histories . . . only by dwelling in them" (Reiss 16) demonstrates not a sensitivity to complexity but rather a blindness to how ideologies which connect "dwelling" to exclusive claims to cultural knowledge tend toward the barbaric. Until the torture, suppression, and murder of Europe's "internal other" are acknowledged as central to European documents of culture (the "idea of Europe"), the notion that "Auschwitz" marks an opportunity for retroactively working through historical trauma will be meaningless.

Reiss's portrait of Yourcenar, and indeed the dominant portrait of her, demands complication through a return to the concepts in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History." Reversing the terms of Benjamin's thesis, I want to ask if every document of barbarism is also a document of culture. In considering Yourcenar's *Coup de Grâce* (written very shortly before Benjamin's theses) and Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, I want to draw

attention to the risks involved in the task of documenting barbarism, risks which persist and take on new forms "after Auschwitz."<sup>1</sup> Theweleit's literary historical project takes seriously the fictions and fantasies of the men of the *Freikorps*—proto-Nazi bands of German soldiers for whom World War I never really ended—in order to demonstrate in frightening detail how barbaric desire resides "on the side of reality." Yourcenar's novel recounts the sordid adventures of one fictional *Freikorps* soldier during the unrest following the end of the First World War and the Russian Revolution. Yourcenar provides the kind of subjective "document" that Theweleit demands that we comprehend in order to understand and combat the reality of fascism as it lives on beyond the interwar period of its germination.

Yet after a generation or more of post-structuralism we know that no documentation (just as no documentary) can document any historical or psychological situation innocently. Such questions are immediately mediated, which is to say, ideological. To document barbarism is to risk the purity of one's own position as the speaking subject of "culture." My initial question about culture and barbarism thus becomes: What are the politics of documenting fascism? And—given the specificity of the texts at issue here—

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the novel given in the text in English will be from the English translation. The novel was originally translated into English in 1957. When I refer to the French version I will be quoting from a later edition of Yourcenar's novel: *Alexis ou le Traité du Vain Combat suivi de Le Coup de Grâce*. This edition contains the 1962 preface reprinted in the English edition and crucial to my reading of the novel. Throughout, I will intersperse sections of the French text whenever the language differs significantly from the English or when I am paying particular attention to specific word use. As I hope my reading demonstrates, I am less interested in establishing an "authentic" text than in revealing the specificities of the different versions and editions of *Le Coup de Grâce*.

Theweleit's work was originally published in Germany in 1977 and 1978.

what are the *sexual* politics of fascism and its critique?<sup>2</sup> I will explore these questions by reading Yourcenar's and Theweleit's texts together and historically situating them in their sites of production in order to glimpse the politics of their representation (or lack of representation) of politics.

My study, which proposes to look back at the immediate aftermath of World War I in Europe through the lens of a work of fiction, arises out of contemporary concerns about this "return of the repressed," and out of questions about the historical genealogy of those contemporary concerns. The era which both *Coup de Grâce* and *Male Fantasies* document mirrors our own, serving as an imaginary double through and against which we in the contemporary West might attempt to define ourselves. The recently concluded First World War had done more to unsettle European politics than to grant closure to the struggles of its various nations and ethnic groups. Arno Mayer has described this moment following the Versailles Peace Conference as "reflect[ing] the intersection of the ending of a gigantic military conflict with the opening of a universal international civil war" (vii). The two works I am considering here take us inside the experience of this terrible historical moment. The landscape which Yourcenar's (anti)hero, Erick von Lhomond, and Theweleit's *Freikorps* occupy seems to consist solely of roving bands of soldiers torturing, killing, and slogging their way through mud and snow. But, as historian Claudia Koonz suggests about Weimar Germany, we must consider this culture dialectically, identifying its possibilities as well as its ominous tendencies; she suggest writing the history of the era with "a retrospective double vision that encompasses both the prospect of emancipation and

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2 The work of Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi remains among the most provocative on this topic.

progress . . . and the etiology of a disreputable and insignificant movement which spread, undetected, through the body politic and was diagnosed only after it could not be halted" (21). I will argue that, for all their perspicacity, the stories which both Yourcenar and Theweleit construct retroactively about their subjects show us predominantly the latter side of this dialectic between emancipation and terror. While this surprising univocality might derive from the polemical nature of these texts within their original, intended contexts, by shifting the terrain and exploring the linguistic and spatio-temporal translations of these texts, we begin to grasp their politics at a deeper level—a politics which is all the more troubling given the persistence of fascism "after Auschwitz."

## 2. The Powers of Desire

Klaus Theweleit's two-volume study of the novels and memoirs of the fascist and proto-Nazi *Freikorps* soldiers was originally published in Germany in 1977, but translated into English only in 1987 and 1989. In its original context, Theweleit's work challenged German citizens' pre-1960 refusal to accept responsibility for their role in the recent Nazi past, and it grew out of a movement of students obsessed with their parents' guilt and with the psychology of fascism and authoritarianism. *Male Fantasies* also responded to what Theweleit understood as a shortcoming in the dominant marxist models of fascism provided by the Frankfurt School: an inability to acknowledge the reality of fascist fantasy and to understand the attraction of fascist violence.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Anson Rabinbach and Jessica Benjamin's foreward to Volume II for a discussion of Theweleit and the Frankfurt School (xii).

Although *Male Fantasies* was written with the belief that the authoritarian structures of contemporary German society carried with them the possibility of fascist renewal, there was no explicit Nazi mobilization during the era in which Theweleit wrote.

*Male Fantasies* appeared in English, however, on the cusp of the neo-nationalist era, during a rebirth of fascist street violence and amid a series of scandals which caused cultural workers to confront the politically suspect pasts of some of their intellectual forbears. In 1987, Victor Farias published *Heidegger and Nazism* in France (it was translated into English two years later), causing a furor among latter day Heideggerians and deconstructionists with his claims that the German philosopher was significantly more implicated in fascism than had previously been popularly believed. Also in 1987, scholars discovered that Yale literary critic Paul de Man had written a number of articles for a collaborationist newspaper in Nazi-occupied Belgium during World War II.<sup>4</sup> My concern here is neither to defend nor to indict Heidegger, de Man, or the philosophies with which they are associated, but rather to outline the conjuncture in which Theweleit's study of fascist subjectivity was introduced into American discourse. The Heidegger and de Man cases testify not only to a "crisis in witnessing" brought about by the experience of fascism and genocide, as Shoshana Felman has argued about de Man (Felman and Laub 120-164), but are also witnesses to a crisis of nationalism which irrupted on the world stage shortly after their unearthing in the late 1980s. Theweleit's work (and its translation into English at the same moment as the Heidegger and de Man cases attained public attention) also

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<sup>4</sup> For documents pertaining to the de Man case, see Paul de Man, *Wartime Journalism* and Hamacher, *Responses*. See also chapter 2.

anticipated the political upheavals of national and ethnic violence with which the world continues to struggle vainly.

While crises in ethnic and national identity obviously constitute part of Theweleit's landscape, upheaval in the realms of gender and sexual identities have also invigorated his intellectual project. Thus, we ought to situate Theweleit's endeavor in specifically feminist contexts. Although not explicitly acknowledged in the text, Theweleit wrote *Male Fantasies* during a decade of intensive feminist activism in West Germany. Starting with the founding of the Action Council for Women's Liberation in 1968 and the first national women's conference (of the new movement) in March 1971, and continuing through the establishment of women's centers and battered women's shelters during the rest of the decade, the issues of violence, gender, and sexuality addressed by Theweleit were brought into public discourse and consciousness by the Autonomous Women's Movement. From the mid-1970s, theoretical work from France also began to influence German feminists, along with the theoretical-stylistics of Irigaray's and Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which Theweleit's "flowing" style often seems to be approximating.<sup>5</sup> In Alice Kaplan's words, "the authority he substitutes for the fascist one is female" ("Theweleit" 160).<sup>6</sup> Given this context, it is not surprising that Theweleit would be welcomed by many feminists upon his text's translation into English. Both volumes of his work, for instance, were prefaced with essays by prominent feminists

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5 This history of German feminism is taken from Altbach. Besides this helpful introductory essay, her volume also contains ample documentation from the movement.

6 Kaplan also situates her reading of Theweleit within the context of the de Man and Heidegger "scandals." Her suggestive analysis considers *Male Fantasies* alongside Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Duras and Renais' *Hiroshima mon amour*.

(Barbara Ehrenreich, for the first volume, and Jessica Benjamin, with Anson Rabinbach, for the second). At the same moment, the issue of "men in feminism" was also coming to attention in the English-speaking world, and Theweleit's text, I will argue, illustrates some of the benefits and many of the pitfalls of that troubled subject-position.<sup>7</sup>

We can best arrive at an understanding of Theweleit's problematic relationship to feminism if we first understand his explicit debts to a certain version of psychoanalysis. His approach to the subjectivity of the soldier males derives not from Freud or Lacan, but from Deleuze and Guattari's heterodox *Anti-Oedipus*, published in the early 1970s. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the Oedipal structure is not a human universal, as Freud and some anthropologists have attempted to demonstrate, but rather a determinate social relation enforced from above (Theweleit, I, 210). In the anti-Oedipal model, the concept of unlimited desire displaces Oedipus as the universal upon which the theorists found their model. The anti-oedipal model privileges neither the father nor the phallus (II, 175), but rather the subject's relation to its own desiring-production.

Theweleit understands drives within the body to produce revolutionary streams of desire. The soldier represses not the specific desires themselves, but the fact that he produces them: "he subjects the unconscious itself . . . to repression" (II, 6). According to Margaret Mahler's research on psychotic children (another model upon which Theweleit draws), this repression effects a "progressive displacement of libido . . . from inside the body . . . to the

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7 For documents from this debate, see Jardine and Smith. Theweleit's work is cited as an example of "engendered male criticism" in the bibliography of Boone and Cadden.

periphery of the body" (II, 216). The communists, workers, women, and Jews who haunt the soldier male threaten the boundaries of his body because they embody the liberation of the very desiring-production which he has repressed (II, 7). Julia Kristeva's writings on the "abject" emphasize this same anxiety over the boundaries of the body which she also finds in both "borderline" psychotic patients and in fascist writing, such as that of Céline.

But if we can always rely on Kristeva to find "*jouissance*" in the experience of limits, Theweleit's warrior is in fact an ascetic subject, and what he produces is not bliss, but death (I, 216). The *Freikorps* sees itself engaging in "a battle against everything that constitutes enjoyment and pleasure" (II, 7). Theweleit understands antisemitism as deriving not primarily from anticapitalist sentiments about Jews as exploiters, but "instead [from] a coupling of 'Jewishness' with a 'contagious' desire for a better life" (8-9). Given the micro-politics of his theory of fascism, Theweleit probably would not want to admit it, yet this unveiling of asceticism does not differ enormously from Adorno's analysis of antisemitism.<sup>8</sup> Adorno implicitly links antisemitism to the workings of the capitalist Culture Industry by explaining both phenomena as (in Fredric Jameson's words) "negative embodiments of the deeper *ressentiment* generated by class society itself" toward the "promise of social and personal happiness" which both Jews and art represent (*Late Marxism* 154). The most significant difference is that Adorno's analysis explains asceticism as a social fact, while for Theweleit it derives from psychological structures.

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<sup>8</sup> See the final two chapters of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* for an analysis of the capitalist culture industry and of anti-semitism which links these two phenomena on the basis of a critique of instrumental reason.

According to this psychoanalytic model, the very tenuousness of the soldier male's ego, the fact that he is "not yet fully born" (II, 213), requires him to establish "maintenance mechanisms" as a prop to identity. The soldier male's ego comes not from identification with the father, as in the Oedipal model, but, rather, through punishment. The fascist "must acquire an enveloping 'ego' from the outside," but his only experience of the outside comes through acts of violence, first perpetrated against himself, and later against others. As Theweleit paraphrases Freud, "Where pain is, there 'I' shall be" (II, 164). In military drills and beatings, the soldier's body submits to "the pain principle," which reorganizes his fragmented drives and organs into a bodily whole bounded by skin which is quite literally becoming thick beneath the blows of the whip (II, 150, 144). Such a process of ego constitution guarantees that, in the face of the ostensibly liberated and threatening other, this subject will only be able to ensure "his own survival, his self-preservation and self-regeneration" through "the act of killing" or other expressions of violence.

In Theweleit's account, the threatening other is almost always female, and fascism in fact derives from the relations between the sexes established by a transhistorical patriarchy. His methodology seeks to "trace a straight line from the witch to the seductive Jewish woman" (I, 79). Fascism represents, then, not a break with traditional gender relations, but an extreme example of the norm, "the tip of the patriarchal iceberg" (I, 171). When killing women, or fantasizing about killing them, the soldier male also expresses hatred of his own self as patriarchy has formed it. He must "dam up" the feminized, interior drives of his body: "When a fascist male went into combat against erotic, 'flowing,' nonsubjugated women, he was also fighting his own unconscious,

his own desiring-production" (I, 434). The soldier's permanent state of war against communists, women, and Jews tenuously props up his ego, just as the permanent war economy enables the survival of capitalism, although at the cost of deferring the liberation of desire.

Since the ego of the fascist is not a given, but an external imposition, it best fixes itself in external structures, such as the army or youth organization. In Germany these institutions in part derived significance from historical circumstances. With the nationalist hysteria of the beginning of World War I (also documented by Modris Eksteins [55-64]), "the soldierly core of the army . . . became nation, and leader of the people" (II, 81). With the mortifying defeat of 1918, and the truly external imposition of Weimar democracy (see Koonz, chapter 2), "the key to [the nation's] rebirth was the arming of the *Freikorps* against the Republic" (II, 81). The true Nation, a roving band of assassins, saw itself as shaping the People out of an amorphous mass, all in the name of the Führer. But at the same time, "the army, high culture, race, nation, Germany—all of these appear to function as a second, tightly armored body enveloping [the soldier male's] own body armor" (II, 84). For Theweleit, the social and the psychological mutually constitute each other, although, in the last instance, the process starts with the attempt to establish the borders of the body.

Taking off from Deleuze and Guattari, Theweleit derives two basic social structures which he defines as fascist and revolutionary, respectively: the molar mass and the molecular masses (II, 3, 75). According to Theweleit, Deleuze and Guattari define the molecular as a fluid, always changing multiplicity, while the molar mass channels the flow of desiring production into rigid organizational structures overlooked by a Führer or leader. These

two structures probably coexist under "normal" circumstances; for "the soldier male, however, the two appear strictly antithetical . . . . [H]is bodily interior (the molecular ordering of the unconscious) is incarcerated by an incarcerating body armor (the molar arrangement of domination), and the two are irreconcilably opposed, one subject to the other" (II, 75). In fact, Deleuze and Guattari's elaboration of the molar/molecular model is considerably more subtle than Theweleit's appropriation, and does not privilege the molecular over the molar in absolute terms. They claim, for example that "every politics is simultaneously a *macropolitics* and a *micropolitics*," and that fascism, in particular, "is inseparable from a proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, *before* beginning to resonate together in the National Socialist State" (*Plateaus* 213-214).<sup>9</sup> Theweleit's celebration of the molecular and his allergy to molar form ultimately hinders his ability to propose concrete alternatives to the fascist social organization.

But, despite such theoretical simplifications, Theweleit's critique of the left's attempts to understand fascism, which follows from this distinction between the molar and the molecular, puts forward theses which are valuable in a local context. According to his argument, the old left inevitably reproduced the same "molar" organizational structures as did the fascists, therefore blocking and channelling the potentially revolutionary flows of desire. By calling the language of the fascists whom Theweleit reads "irrational, insane, lacking in substance," leftists missed the point of such

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9 To be fair, this text entitled "1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity" was published in 1980, after Theweleit had completed his work, but the complexity expressed here by Deleuze and Guattari typifies their work—if not always that of their followers.

discourse: that "what the texts [of the soldier males] have most clearly demonstrated is a refusal by fascism to relinquish desire—desire in the form of the demand that 'blood must flow,' desire in its most profound distortion" (II, 188-89). The refusal to relinquish desire (also the source of Lacan's ethics) does not constitute fascism—to the contrary, the source of fascism's violence comes from the coexistence of overflowing desire with structures of containment. Fascism reterritorializes desire's revolutionary power by repressing the subject's own production and projecting it onto the Other. If the left continues to ignore the power of emotions and cannot learn "that there might be pleasure in liberation, pleasure in new connections, pleasure in the unleashing of new streams" (189), fascism will continue to grip the masses.

Fascism recognizes the powers of desire, and redirects them from serving the purposes of liberation to serving those of domination. Fascism interpellates the People in the name of desire, and then channels this force into hatred and nation-building. The truly revolutionary subject—the schizo—in the truly revolutionary molecular mass, will never cede its desire, and will never have desire constrained by a hierarchical social organization, such as the totalitarian state. Because of the contradictions of fascism (its ultimate reterritorialization of the desire it unleashes), it produces a psychotic and paranoid subject. This "persecuted persecutor" can today be found among supporters of white supremacy, armed militias, and "family values" in the United States and among antisemites in European countries without Jews.

### 3. Fascist Confessions

The psychotic subject which Theweleit derives from the writings of *Freikorps* soldiers and other proto-Nazis finds a remarkable expression in Yourcenar's *Coup de Grâce*. Her depiction of Erick von Lhomond foreshadows many of the theoretical precepts which Theweleit develops in coming to terms with fascism forty years later. Von Lhomond represents an almost pure example of the warrior-male as it developed during the epoch of the *Freikorpsman*. The narrator who frames Erick's story describes him as "one of those men who were too young to have done more than brush with danger, but who were transformed into soldiers of fortune by Europe's post-war disorders, and by their incapacity for satisfaction or resignation, either one" (4). Although a soldier of fortune ought in principle to be less "ideological" than the nationalist groups of *Male Fantasies*, in fact Erick signs on only with reactionary causes: fighting the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War and siding with Franco in Spain.

As with the soldier-males, Erick can only give form to the social and psychological "disorders" of his era by joining with the repressive state apparatus as, in one or another of its forms, it wages permanent war against "the enemy." Erick describes his first military experience—the defeat of 1918—as a losing battle with bodily and political boundaries:

the time came when I had to slip over the border to report for military training. . . . I took my first drill under sergeants weakened from dysentery and hunger. . . . Some of my drillmates were agreeable enough, and were already launched upon the wild freedom of the postwar era to come. Two months more and I should have been used to stop the gap which the Allied artillery had made in our ranks, and should at this very moment, perhaps, be peacefully amalgamated to French soil. (15)

Although Erick preserves his own life, the defeat confronts him with "a totally empty future" (16). Erick's military training follows from a desire, a movement

across a border, which should be reterritorialized by his "first drill" [*mon entraînement* (144)]. However, since the sergeants cannot control the boundaries of their own bodies, they have dysentery [*les maux de ventre*], they cannot tame "the wild freedom" [*le grand chahut* (145)] which will therefore reign during the years of Weimar emancipation. Since Erick has not been used to "stop the gap" [*remplir une brèche* (145)], and the gap has not been stopped, his first experience with the military does not fully accomplish his disciplining and subjection. Even though he appears to laud his drillmates' freedom, he cannot acknowledge the desiring production within his body—the way it wants to "slip over the border" [*faufiler à travers la frontière* (144)]—rather, he winds up feeling "hollow" and "empty."

Only in the Russian Civil War does Erick find his place and develop what Theweleit calls a "body-armor" which is full, but contained: "The fullest ten months of my life were passed in a command in that godforsaken district where even the names . . . meant nothing" (7-8). Erick's position in the army comforts him by inserting him in a rigid hierarchical machine; although he commands, he is in turn commanded: "Once swept into the Baltic imbroglio I tried only to be a useful wheel in the whole machine, and to play as rarely as possible the role of crushed finger" (10) [*d'y jouer le plus souvent le rôle de la roue de métal, et le moins possible celui du doigt écrasé* (140)]. This odd, bodily metaphor follows close on the heels of a description of torture, which, although projected onto the "Mongol traditions" of "the Reds" [*les bourreaux rousses* (139)], divulges what is at stake in Erick's self-construction. (Theweleit includes images of Soviets "orientalized" by Nazi propaganda: cf. II, 270). Coyle taking pleasure in his description of the "Chinese Hand" [*le supplice de la main chinoise* (139)], Erick recounts that the unfortunate "victim was slapped

with the skin of his own hand stripped from him while he was alive" (8-9). He reminds us that such stories "harden the auditor that much more" [*durcir chez l'auditeur quelques fibres de plus* (139)], clearly revealing the connections between torture, the military machine, the armored soldier, and the experience of the body's boundaries.

If Erick takes a certain "idle excitement" in the telling of such details and in his soldiering experiences generally, these would seem to be the only pleasures in his life. Like the *Freikorps* adherents, Erick ascetically denies his own desire, instead projecting it onto the female other and hinting at, but ultimately repressing, a homosexual subplot. Beneath the triangular, if not strictly Oedipal structure which Erick applies to the characters' relations, we sense that the flow of desire between Erick, Sophie, and Conrad is polymorphous and fluid. In order to take himself out of the flow of sexual drives the narrator uses two strategies: he attempts to turn all interpersonal relations into family ones, and he repeatedly insists on his own utter lack of desire in the face of the other's overflowing want.

When Erick brings his command back to Kratovitsy for the first time, he is greeted by Sophie: "in the first excitement of our return she had kissed me warmly [*à pleines lèvres*], and I could not help thinking, with a shade of melancholy, that that was my first kiss from a young girl, and that I had never had a sister [*et que mon père ne m'avait pas donné de soeur*]. So of course, in so far as was possible, I made a sister of Sophie [*j'adoptai Sophie* (152)]" (24). The surprising insincerity of the "of course" [*bien entendu*] gives it away; faced with the unfamiliarity of desire evoked by Sophie's passionate kiss, Erick can do nothing but transcode his emotion to an ostensibly safe arena, the family. (He also refers to her boyishness, asserting that she could be "a brother to her

brother" (30).) In a moment of particularly twisted logic, he attempts to explain Sophie's alleged desire by way of the family:

I seemed just made to fulfill the aspirations of an immature girl confined, up to that time, to the company of a few dull brutes of no consequence and the most seductive of brothers; nor had Nature seemed to endow her with the slightest inclination towards incest. But perhaps even incest figured here, for memory's magic transformed me, in her eyes, into an elder brother. (33)

The breathtaking contradictions of this passage demonstrate that Erick will go to any length to avoid what would appear the most obvious explanations of desire. Perhaps desire is not normalizable in *Coup de Grâce*; just beneath the surface it flows indiscriminately without respect for social categories such as gender or kinship, but overtly it must be denied. Like Theweleit's soldiers, Erick "familializes" the erotic and eroticizes the family (I, 152).

Erick also goes out of his way to emphasize the fraternal nature of his eroticized relationship with that "most seductive of brothers," Conrad. Not only did they leave "identical footprints on the sand" (12) during their youthful frolics, but their "physical make-up" was similar right down to the requisite "shade of blue in [their] eyes" (14).<sup>10</sup> Naturally, "the country folk took [them] for brothers, a simple solution for those who have no conception of ardent friendship" (14); although the precise name of this ardent friendship remains unspoken, Erick is pleased at the familial alibi provided by their homologous physiques. Such insinuations add erotic resonance to Erick's assertion that although "there was no lack of girls" during their youth, he "treated all such fancies [*engouements*] with scorn" (13).

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10 The French is less specific here. Their eyes do not share the marker of Aryan identity; they simply have "*la même nuance d'yeux*" (143).

Homoeroticism, according to Theweleit, served certain purposes among the Nazis: it was "simultaneously prohibited and commanded," punished and held as a reward for initiation into the power elite (II, 339). Before the purge of the openly homosexual SA commander, Ernst Rohm, in 1934, a homosexual tendency existed within Nazism, and can be seen in the writings of Hans Bluher, author of *The Role of Eroticism in Male Society* (II, 138—Volume I refers to Bluher as Ernst). Since Conrad drops out of focus almost entirely after the first few pages of the novel, we could read Erick's relationship with Conrad as mimicking the tendential repression of homosexuality during the course of German fascism's rise and fall. But, regardless of the historical parallel in Nazi Germany (the full examination of which would take us beyond the scope of this chapter), *Coup de Grâce* bears out Craig Owens's more general assertion that a common "legal and medical apparatus" produces both homophobia and misogyny (219).<sup>11</sup>

The novel suggests that this commonality finds its most obvious expression in anti-sex ideology. In turning away from homoeroticism, Erick certainly does not turn toward heterosexuality. Like the rest of the soldier males, he experiences either a "lack of inclination" or "disgust" and "aversion" (54) vis-à-vis sexuality. Almost the only sympathy evinced by Erick for Sophie comes when he senses a "lack of inclination" on her side: "Here before me was a Sonia indignant [*une enfant outragée* (154)—another familial metaphor] at the slightest suspicion of desire, and everything in me which differentiates me from mere women-chasers, for whom any girl is a windfall, could not but

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11 Owens also explicitly refutes Macciocchi's assertion that "the Nazi community is made by homosexual brothers who exclude the woman and valorize the brother" (223).

approve her despair" (27). Immediately afterward he learns of her rape by a Lithuanian sergeant: "now that she was sullied, her experience bordered on my own [*souillée, son expérience avoisinait la mienne*], and the episode of the sergeant made a queer parallel [*équilibrerait bizarrement* (155)] with my unique and revolting visit to a brothel in Brussels" (28). In Erick's "queer" logic, the "parallel" equates not the prostitute's experience, but Erick's voluntary visit with Sophie's involuntary violation. In an attempt to repress his own "queer parallel" with Conrad through a trip to the brothel, Erick also belittles female sexual exploitation and represses female sexual agency.<sup>12</sup>

As the novel progresses, and the idealistic homosocial world recedes behind the more realistic homosocial world of war, Erick's misogyny overflows across the page. To describe the horrors of Sophie and other women, Erick draws on classical images of threatening women, also found in *Freikorps* discourse (cf. II, 4-6). Sophie's hair in curlers "made her look like Medusa, serpent-crowned" [*une Méduse coiffé de serpents* (173)], and the "humble cafe singer" he picks up in Riga ends up clinging to him "with the tenacity of an octopus" [*une tenacité de poulpe* (175)] (52, 55). In the former case, the simple evocation of femininity (the curlers) threatens, and in the latter, the equation of femininity with insatiable desire provokes a similar dread. Later, the one time Erick kisses Sophie on the lips, he finds that his "ecstasy changed into horror" almost immediately, and he remembers a starfish [*cette étoile de mer*] that his mother had forced into his hand, "almost provoking convulsions in

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12 Clearly, the notion of the "queer parallel" upon which I am playing here is specific to the English text, but as a choice for translation, it remains significant. The translators are, after all, two women living and working together during a period when "queer" and not "gay" or "lesbian" was probably the dominant term of self-identification for homosexuals. See Delany's memoir of this period for a discussion of these identity issues.

[him]" (76-7).<sup>13</sup> If these confrontations with the tentacles of the feminine evoke something beyond "hatred or terror" in Erick, they also form the basis of his self-conception. As Freud describes it, "the sight of the Medusa's head makes the spectator stiff with terror," but this bodily erection ultimately offers him "consolation," for it reminds him that he, at least, has a penis (SE 28: 273). The fascist subject similarly uses the revolting female to remind him of his hard, military body. But both Freud and the soldier males may, according to Theweleit, be producing a similar repression in their confrontation with the Medusa's head. What Theweleit finds significant in this symbol is not the woman's castration, emphasized by Freud as the antinomy of male "stiffness," but *her ability to castrate*: "It is in no sense, as Freud thinks, the castrated genitals of the mother that she displays as a deterrent; it is the symbol . . . of man's fear of her uncastrated, horrifying sexual potency" (I, 201). In Theweleit's view, then, the hardness of the male body is always much more tenuous than either Freud or the soldiers would want to admit; hence the need to expel Sophie from the scene.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, only when Sophie has left Kratovitsy can Erick regain the imaginary fusion of his early days of homosociality: "Our ever diminishing group was returning to the great traditions of austerity and manly courage [*courage viril*]; Kratovitsy was becoming again what it had been in times supposedly gone by, an outpost of the Teutonic Order, a frontier fortress of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword [*un poste de l'Ordre Teutonique, une citadelle*

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13 Elaine Marks also draws attention to the connections between these passages. I will return to her important essay.

14 See Hertz for a more developed consideration of how "questions of sexual difference, of perception and of politics are rapidly brought into relation" (27) around the figure of the Medusa's head.

*avancée de Chevaliers Porte-Glaives* (226)]." This "ideal of happiness" reminds him of his childhood (123-24). The casting out of the "Red woman," the Communist sympathizer, turns the men's bodies into a fortress, an outpost, a borderline experience of ascetic and racial purity. In what Theweleit calls the "troop-machine," "new body-totalities are formed," as the parts of individual soldiers re-fuse into "other totality formations between men, such as the 'nation'" (II, 154-55). Since the re-establishment of the Teutonic nation is constructed on the absence and demonization of Sophie, *Coup de Grâce* confirms in this specific instance Theweleit's overly general (and thus problematic) assertion that "racism must be seen as patriarchal domination in its most intense form" (II, 77).

But the absent woman, since they have projected her from out of the flood of their own desiring production, continually threatens to expose the frailty of these soldiers "clad in armor" [*à l'intérieure d'une armure* (227)]. Only the tenuous totality of the troop-machine protects them from being "lionized by women" [*livrées . . . aux femmes*] and "subject to certain insidious dissolution, like the loathsome decay of iris . . . [which] die miserably in their own sticky secretion [*la gluante agonie*], in marked contrast to the slow, heroic drying of the rose [*le dessèchement héroïques des roses* (227)]" (125). But, since the troop-machine "is the front," a permanent war-machine, it must continually transgress and reterritorialize its borders (II, 155). The attempt to keep his mechanized body dry leads the fascist to wade in blood, the "sticky secretion" of the enemy; only by killing, by actually moving through corpses which serve as so many Medusa's heads, can the fascist confirm the "hardness" and dryness [*dessèchement*] of his own body.

In the end, Erick's hatred of women, of communism, of everything which threatens property and his proper body, must culminate in a slaughter. Erick rediscovers Sophie "in the middle of flooded land" [*en plein terrain inondé* (234)], where several soldiers had already drowned (136). For the soldier males, communism and the sexuality of women both seem "to be a kind of ocean that surges onward in waves, inundating and engulfing" (I, 229). It is ironic, then, and perhaps ultimately troubling to Erick's narrative strategy, that his murder of Sophie turns his own past into pure flow, cut off from solid ground: "The disappearance of Conrad's sister would at least liquidate [*liquiderait*] my youth for good, and would cut the last bridge between that country and me" (147, translation modified; see French version, 243). Sophie, a reminder of his own internal drives, creates "a kind of sickening fury in the pit of [his] stomach that made [him] say 'all the better' for her death" (146). But before he actually kills her, Erick literally de-faces her: "The first shot did no more than tear open the face" (150). As Paul de Man has provocatively argued, one of the primary structures of language may concern the trope of prosopoeia, a "giving face" to subjects which also "de-faces" them by subjecting them to the impersonal machine of language ("Autobiography" 930). De Man discusses de-facement as an attribute of autobiography, and indeed de-facement figures importantly in the ways de Man's own life has come to be understood; here, however, the narrator, Erick, de-faces the narrative's object, Sophie. Thus, the narrative shifts the uncertainty at the heart of its own enunciation (its own potential de-facement) onto the scapegoated woman, who now becomes a repository for fears not only about femininity and communism, but about the slippage of language itself. But language, in any post-Lacanian context, immediately entails questions of

desire. It becomes clear that in killing Sophie, Erick is killing more than just "woman." As he approaches her with his gun, he "clung to the thought that [he] had wanted to put an end to Conrad [*j'avais désiré achever Conrad* (245)], and that this was the same thing" (150). In killing Conrad and Sophie simultaneously, he kills desiring-production itself, the whole tangled web of drives which unconsciously saturates all of the social relations represented in the novel.

But Erick cannot simply kill desire once, and it demands constant vigilance; hence, his own retelling of the story—"the interminable confession which he was making, in reality, to no one but himself" (5). Instead of coming to consciousness of his polymorphous drives, he attempts to fix them through one final projection onto Sophie: "One is always trapped, somehow, in dealing with women" (151). For Erick, however, being trapped is the condition of his paranoid subjectivity; the real "disorder" lies in the repression of the entire unconscious. This repression amounts, in Theweleit's terms, to the fascist mode of production, an "antiproduction" whose goal is "the transformation of life into death" (I, 216).

#### 4. Naive Readers and Amateur Antisemites

The above reading derives from an application of the theoretical apparatus provided by Theweleit to the text of Yourcenar's novel. *Coup de Grâce* lends itself to such a reading, given Erick's resemblance to the *Freikorps* warriors. Since Yourcenar initially published the novel in France in 1939, just before the beginning of World War II, and just before she left Europe for the

United States, it would have been hard for contemporary readers not to understand it as a novelistic indictment of fascism, even if according to Friedlander it also obviously displays a disturbing fascination with the "kitsch and death" of fascist iconography. When we consider the prefatory material the author appends to her American editions of the novel, an entirely different reading emerges—one inflected by the conditions of post-Holocaust politics but not by the ethical demands of Adorno's formulations. Although the gloss that Yourcenar gives to her novel in and after 1957 initially appears diametrically opposed to Theweleit's critique of fascism, I will show that they actually share certain precepts.

In 1957, Yourcenar published the novel in English, translating it "in Collaboration" with her companion, Grace Frick (to cite the title page). At this time, she affixes a curious foreword to the story, which, in a later edition, expands into an even more curious preface dated 1962.<sup>15</sup> The preface attempts to forestall any reading that does not accept Erick as the "clear sighted" "hero" of the novel. She claims that the narrative depicts not a sadist, as "a naive reader might make . . . of Erick," but rather "a human being . . . looking squarely upon his own life." In claiming to depict what Derrida would call a subject self-consciously present to himself, Yourcenar attempts to solidify her own authority to dictate the terms of her text at a moment in literary history when the author is, if not dead, at least withering away.

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15 I have not been able to locate the 1957 foreword in French, but the 1962 preface is, as I noted above, affixed to the 1971 French edition. Contradictions exist between these two documents, neither of which (in the English versions) are given page numbers: she claims to have written the novel in 1939; in the second she says 1938; she claims to have heard the story directly from "Erick"; in the second she says it came from one of his friends.

But the stakes are not strictly literary, as Yourcenar's own language reveals. Her preface demands "strict collaboration from the reader" [*la collaboration du lecteur* (130)]; we must not "mistake [Erick] for a professional anti-Semite" [*un antisemite professionnel* (131)]. The reader must collaborate in wiping out the traces of fascist collaboration. Yourcenar's plea for a vigilant forgetting, for the power that comes with ignorance, occurs just around the moment when the "Holocaust" first comes into public consciousness (but not with that specific name until later in the 1960s); that is, when the "professional anti-Semites" have regained their amateur status, which they will secretly cherish until the late 1980s when they will once again "go professional."

1957 is also the year when, in France, Céline publishes *D'un château l'autre*, his novelistic attempt to produce collaborationist-readers who will help erase his guilt. In a manner similar to Yourcenar, Céline both rewrites the past and, in a radio interview from that same year, claims that his work has only aesthetic, and not political, significance: he is merely "a stylist."<sup>16</sup> If Yourcenar's novel can so easily be read as a critique of fascism, why, outside of personal predilection, would Yourcenar want to use the same strategy as Céline, whose antisemitism could never be "mistaken" by even a "naive" reader? As Elaine Marks argues in an extremely perceptive consideration of the relations between the preface and the novel, Yourcenar "naturalizes" antisemitism and links it to the sadistic and sexist acts which the text details (212, 217). Marks also places the novel in the context of Céline's 1937

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16 The radio interview is with Albert Zbinden and was broadcast July 25, 1957 on Radio-Lausanne. I am grateful to Alice Y. Kaplan for supplying me with a tape of this interview.

antisemitic pamphlet, *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, claiming that "it is impossible . . . not to implicate the author" of *Coup de Grâce* in antisemitism (212).

While I am in complete agreement with Marks, I would also claim that Yourcenar's collaborationist strategy has another agenda, particular to the postwar era. The late 1950s and early 1960s in Yourcenar's adopted home, the United States, were a time of fierce ideological containment characterized in part by the polarity of the Cold War and by claims that, in fact, we had reached "the end of ideology." Consonant with the anti-political politics of the time Yourcenar stresses that in telling Erick's story she has "tried to show that particular intimacy or affinity which is stronger than either conflicts of political allegiances or physical passions [*la passion charnelle* (133)]." She explicitly represses desire, which, for Theweleit, would include precisely what this formulation precludes—passion and politics. Instead of reading politics or passion into the novel, we should look to its value as a "psychological" or "human . . . document" [*un document humain* (134)]. Thus, according to this authority, "*Coup de Grâce* does not aim at exalting or discrediting any one group or class, any country or party" [French version, 134].

But why not discredit fascism? The answer, again, slips out of the otherwise rigidly-controlled language. In the 1957 cloth edition, Yourcenar phrases her apologia this way: "In the present state of the world, and in view of the conflicting attitudes of our day, the author wishes to stress the fact that this account is not intended to defend or discredit any particular group or party." Underneath this seemingly balanced sentence lurks the problem. If we were to discredit Erick and fascism, we would have to accept Sophie, and thus, communism as the only textually available heroines of the anti-fascist

struggle. Given "the present state of the world" and "the conflicting attitudes" of Cold War politics, given rabid anti-communism in other words, such an option becomes untenable for Yourcenar. In the two decades after its initial publication, *Coup de Grâce* took on new meanings its author could not control. Her depoliticizing reassertion of authority amounts to a retrospective undermining of what once had been a potentially liberating text.

As is almost always the case, appeals to "human" meaning tend to exclude women. Ironically, this happens in *Coup de Grâce* at the very moment when a woman enters the text: in the establishment of a pact between the female author and reader. In her preface, Yourcenar repeats what Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey has found to be Erick's relation to Sophie. Both author and "hero" "retrieve [themselves] from exile," and establish their authority, by "ingesting" Sophie (382). Yourcenar manages this by first portraying Sophie only through Erick's narrative, and then, more seriously, by portraying this portrait as the product of a "clear-sighted" narrator, not the sadist we sophisticated readers know him to be.

## 5. More Male Fantasies

If Yourcenar opposes human psychology to politics, and in so doing exiles women from the social realm, Theweleit unifies psychology and politics, claiming that desiring-production and material production are one (I, 323). But, despite his obvious intentions, Theweleit also banishes women and, ultimately, the social itself from his study. Although he succeeds in conveying the intimate thoughts of his subjects, Theweleit fares less well in establishing

the context of their literary output. Thewleit's very considerable contribution to the understanding of fascism—that it is a form of reality production, that we must "feel" its utopian pull—ends by limiting his discussion. Just as does *Coup de Grâce*, Thewleit constantly evokes women, but he never takes them seriously as anything but effects of male fantasies.

If, as he claims, "a specific male-female (patriarchal) relation might belong at the center of our examination of fascism," not much can be gained by understanding these relations as simply expressing the "sexuality of the oppressor and the oppressed" (I, 227, 221). Women have no place in Thewleit's history (which he attempts to extend to all of Western history), except as either victims or possessors of some vague, emancipatory "nature." The "male-female" relationship which Thewleit promises to unpack, turns out to be simply a "male-male" relationship in which women are "malleable" and passive. In this, he proves himself no different from most historians, who "have not defined women's support for Nazi Germany as a historical problem" (Koonz 4), and have thus reinforced the appearance of the lack of female agency throughout history. Despite the misogyny of the *Freikorps* and later the Nazis, women supported them out of "conviction, opportunism, and active choice. Far from being helpless or even innocent, women made possible a murderous state in the name of concerns they defined as motherly" (Koonz 4-5). One of Thewleit's great accomplishments lies in his demonstration that the soldier males were neither insane nor irrational; yet, because he does not discuss how and why women helped create, as well as resist, the culture which produced fascism, he seems to relegate women to that very realm of irrationality.

What *Male Fantasies* lacks is not a consideration of the "reality" of women's agency, where reality would be opposed to the fantasies of the soldier males, but rather an analysis of the discursive context in which the soldiers announced and acted upon their desires—a context which also included the writings and actions of women. Women did produce texts during this period, and a real counter-discourse would consider these female fantasies alongside more traditional, male documents. The few places where Theweleit promises to reveal "the actual behavior of those women" (I, 138) whom the soldier's depict end in yet more male fantasies. Take, for example, the "Aside on Proletarian Reality, Proletarian Woman and Man of the Left" (138-171). Although Theweleit cites one or two primary sources by women, practically the only ones in either volume, he ends up using these pages to discredit marxism by revealing that proletarian men and communist theorists were almost as misogynistic as the *Freikorps* troops. Similarly, after asserting that the oppressive male ego could not evolve "without the (admittedly enforced) cooperation of women themselves" (I, 301), Theweleit launches a 150-page history of the world which is unorthodox in everything except its refusal to acknowledge women as political agents or subjects of their own desires.

Although Theweleit wields a politicized psychoanalysis as his subjects wield a bayonet, his analysis falls more on the side of the psyche than the political. He understands the fascists' permanent state of war as "a function of the body of these men" (I, 192) and as "the ultimate form of male sexuality at odds with itself" (II, 84). Since his view of social formations—any social formation—derives from his study of the patriarchal male body, he reproduces the *Freikorps* dystopia of a society without women. Like Yourcenar, he ingests possible female subjectivities in order to armor his own theoretical

construction of men as the sole social agents. He cannot conceive that even under patriarchy both men and women actively construct society, although not to their equal satisfaction.<sup>17</sup> He cannot see, therefore, that to take society apart will entail not an asocial explosion of desiring-production, but a dismantling from within received identities and positions.

Although I would not in any way claim that Theweleit, like Yourcenar, collaborates with fascism and patriarchy, his figurations of women are idealized—"Female chauvinism is a contradiction in terms" (II, 87)—and his only solutions remain utopian: "The pathway to a nonfascist life is marked out a little further by every act of lovemaking in which the participants touch neither as images nor as bearers of *names* defined by the social" (II, 104). This may sound like the early 1970s love-in which it is. But such an equation between fascism and the symbolic and social orders suggests an untenable notion of sexuality and a dangerous paucity of political options. The idea that "participants" could confront each other without bearing names derived from the social order not only ignores the last century of humanities and social scientific thinking, it misses the subversiveness built into acts of naming. According to some contemporary feminists, sexuality that foregrounds social roles and names erodes the foundations of patriarchy much more effectively than appeals to some natural, extra-discursive realm.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, as Theweleit himself writes elsewhere, it is precisely men, such as the soldier males, with fragmented ego-structures who seek to transcend the social realm and "want a contact with the opposite sex—or perhaps simply access to

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17 For the contradictory forms of female subjectivity and agency in the Germany of this era, see the essays collected in Bridenthal, et al.

18 I am thinking for example of Judith Butler's discussion of butch-femme sexuality(122-24).

sexuality itself—which cannot be *named*" (I, 205; see also 284). This contradiction in Theweleit's text results from the privileging of desiring-production as a ubiquitous and quasi-natural force.

But desire is culturally specific and neither organic nor natural. It is produced by social formations, by the very barriers which Theweleit would exile from his utopian model. We who today are facing a renewal of nationalism and fascism need to be very careful about understanding the social formations that produce such structures of desire; only by acknowledging the materiality of desire can we begin to construct alternative social formations which will oppose fascism and patriarchy. Since, in the end, all such barriers to the free flow of desire are equally oppressive in Theweleit's model, he cannot distinguish between capitalism, fascism, and communism, and he cannot propose an alternative.

While all existing hegemonic social formations may be the same in upholding patriarchal relations, patriarchy cannot be said uniquely to determine fascism, even if it provides its ground. According to Maria-Antonietta Macciocchi, fascism builds on a particular religious articulation of patriarchy: "the seizure of power by fascism and nazism uses as levers the martyred, baneful, and necrophiliac femininity of the widows and mothers of men killed in the first world war, and the femininity of Woman as Reproducer of the Species" (68). Macciocchi also makes clear that we cannot explain patriarchy without acknowledging women's agency in simultaneously upholding it and resisting the establishment of its barriers. Both Theweleit and Yourcenar (despite herself) have succeeded in documenting barbarism; but they will not be able to explain it until they break with psychologizing models that eliminate the interplay of phantasmic bodies with social

formations. For bodies and fantasies are social formations, but social formations are not bodies, and they are definitely not fantasies. The personal is political, but the political is always more than personal.

Anti-political posturing—whether in the name of humanism and aesthetics or anarchy—constitutes the common deep structure from which Yourcenar's and Theweleit's superficially different projects unfold. Their interrogation of fascist sexuality and their cross-gender identifications (a woman speaking as/for a soldier; a man writing like a feminist) are not ultimately subversive, but they lead us to further questions about theory and methodology. Perhaps one of the tasks for the critique of fascism in this era of resurgent nationalisms and proliferating sexualities remains the search for methodologies which understand history not as simply "incoherent" and "unstable," but—to paraphrase Benjamin—as a present-day struggle over the future with forces from the past. As long as misogyny and homophobia meet only a depoliticized and anti-sexual resistance, a fascist return-of-the-repressed will continue to inhabit all male fantasies.

Close readings of Yourcenar's and Theweleit's texts demonstrate the multiplicity of space/time conjunctures which constitute the "after Auschwitz" era. Literary and theoretical texts are not just products of a specific context, but circulate within unforeseen and unforeseeable historical moments, moments which are also inseparable from various unevenly "remembered" and relevant pasts. This simultaneous continuity and discontinuity which mark all attempts to represent the Holocaust after the "Final Solution" is one of the lessons of both Adorno's and Blanchot's grappling with the Judeocide. Yet, if the Holocaust certainly haunts Yourcenar's text—both in its premonitions of

genocidal violence and in the author's *après coup* rereading—that authorial preface is witness to the erasure of "Auschwitz" as a significant marker during a certain period of postwar history. Although Adorno and others had already theorized the centrality of the Holocaust to any consideration of European modernity, and although many survivors had already testified to the singularity of the Nazi death camps, the imperatives of the Cold War in the 1950s made possible the apologetic reading of fascism found in Yourcenar's comments on her novel. But this novel does not just provide a window on that one era of postwar life; as an early example of the ambivalent fetishization of fascist aesthetics diagnosed by Friedlander, *Coup de Grâce* partakes of a discourse on Nazism which came to dominate many Holocaust representations through the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Theweleit's historical and theoretical work provides crucial subjective access to the fascist mentality and thus, like Yourcenar's novel, brings readers closer to the discourse that Friedlander approaches from the outside. But as Friedlander might suggest, in so doing Theweleit also reproduces the exclusion of women and "the feminine" which founds *Freikorps* subjectivity. The failure of Theweleit to break from, and provide viable alternatives to, the model of masculinity which he critiques signals the seductive powers of fascist aesthetics and discourse.

In the following chapters, I document alternative approaches to the Holocaust's unprecedented barbarism, ones which focus more on survival, victimization, and liberation than on the perpetrators. This is not meant to indicate that the "kitsch and death" fascination has disappeared, since part of its power lies in its resiliency and recurrence. However, while fascism increasingly exerts its power at the level of everyday politics, its grip on

aesthetics seems to have waned, at least for the moment. This may be one of the results of a related shift in cultural power from Europe to the United States. If Europe was the site of production for most of the texts of Friedlander's new discourse, the last fifteen years have seen the United States emerge as the origin for many of the major Holocaust-related texts. This realignment has brought with it significant changes in the genres of Holocaust discourse, as the modernisms of Adorno, Blanchot, and Yourcenar give way to a new cultural dominant in the diverse postmodernisms of Roth, Spiegelman, Spielberg, and the United States Holocaust Museum. The implications of these shifts in aesthetics and cultural power constitute the subject of my exploration of "The Year of the Holocaust."

Part II:  
"THE YEAR OF THE HOLOCAUST"

INTRODUCTION

"There's no business like *Shoah* business."—Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock*

"Tonight, America remembers the Holocaust." With those words, ABC's late-night new show, *Nightline*, introduced a December 28, 1993 segment on the contemporary fascination with the events of the Nazi genocide. Drawing attention to "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia, to the growth of the neo-Nazi movement in Germany, and to the crowds lining up for Steven Spielberg's hit film, *Schindler's List*, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, *Nightline* declared 1993 "The Year of the Holocaust." Why, fifty years after the most intensive period of extermination of Jews in the camps of eastern Europe, does the Holocaust still prove worthy of network television coverage? What could the current American and European obsession with the memory and history of those events possibly mean at a moment when diagnoses of collective amnesia by postmodern theorists also abound? Finally, what do different texts and sites of mass cultural memory, such as *Nightline*, *Schindler's List*, and the Holocaust Museum, tell us about the contemporary status of Holocaust memory and representation?

The *Nightline* show helps to clarify the transformation of the currency of the Holocaust in mass culture presently taking place, since it demonstrated aspects of an emergent sophistication in considering the politics of Holocaust memory, even as it blatantly (and unsurprisingly) sensationalized the topic in an effort to hold on to a fickle late-night audience. The show began by self-

consciously foregrounding the contemporary conditions in which a fascination with this particular history has developed. While an authoritative voice-over narrative introduced the program by recounting contemporary "echoes" of the Holocaust—"ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia, resurgent neo-nazism and fascism in Germany and throughout Europe—newsreel footage contributed affect and power to the narrative by illustrating it with shots of battles in the former Yugoslavia and neo-Nazi street fighting. After this preface had established, through visual and verbal means, the contemporaneity of the Nazi genocide, *Nightline* declared, with the typical immodesty of television, "Tonight, America remembers the Holocaust." Following a commercial break, the program host drew attention to the popularity of Spielberg's film and to the unanticipated success of the museum, which had opened the previous spring. This popularity was contextualized further with reference to the alleged growth of a Holocaust denial movement and to the fifty-year after-shock of Holocaust memory. With the declaration that this was indeed "The Year of the Holocaust," the program's guests were introduced. These talking heads included the director of the museum Jeshajahu Weinberg, noted Jewish feminist Letty Cottin Pogrebin, author William Styron, and journalist Leon Wieseltier. For the remainder of the show, and in between further commercial interruptions, these experts traded alternately cynical and hopeful, well and less well informed, evaluations of the contemporary status of ethnic politics and Holocaust memory.

On the most immediate level, the chronotope suggested by this television news program harnesses the past to the present. In almost direct opposition to the "after Auschwitz" chronotopes constructed by Adorno and Blanchot, which—diverse as they might be—assume that the past maintains an unredeemed claim on the present and future, "The Year of the Holocaust"

collapses a historical event into the present. As the content of the show makes clear, this slogan does not refer to 1942, when Heydrich announced the Final Solution to fellow Nazi leaders at the Wannsee Conference; nor does it refer to the eleven month period between March 1942 and February 1943 when, according to historians, over fifty percent of Jews who would die in the Holocaust were exterminated (Browning, *Ordinary Men* xv). The writers at *Nightline* had something else in mind; it is, after all, a show about *current events*. According to the logic of the show's introduction and contextualization (which is not necessarily wrong), the contemporaneity of the Holocaust lies in both its potential repetition in the genocidal war in Bosnia and in the active consumption of its images and history by the public. From the perspective of Blanchot or Adorno, these two historical novelties would, ironically, spell the end of the ethical force and historical depth of thinking in terms of an "after Auschwitz" era. Living in "The Year of the Holocaust" means blindly repeating the past or consuming horror via simulation.

*Nightline* was not alone among major organs of the media in perceiving a Benjaminian "constellation" between past events and the current events in Bosnia (and elsewhere). Earlier in 1993, *The New York Times* "Week in Review" juxtaposed famous images of Nazi terror in the Warsaw Ghetto with a Reuters photograph of a Serbian soldier executing a Muslim man (25 April 1993, Section 4, p.1). The accompanying article by John Darnton was titled "Does the World Still Recognize a Holocaust?," while the photo captions—"Ever Again" and "Echoes of Butchery"—provide an implicit indictment, if not of memory, at least of memory's consequences. Within the article Darnton points to another particularity of the televisual chronotope, one which the newspaper also enacts despite significant differences of medium. He writes,

Not for a half century has the world witnessed events in Europe that have stirred such an agonizing echo of past horrors. The

television footage of houses reduced to rubble, the bombed-out churches and mosques, the lined-up bodies and mass graves—they all evoke the flickering black-and-white newsreels of World War II. The words "genocide," "massacre," "holocaust," "civilian bombing" and "ethnic cleansing" haunt everyday speech and stir up guilt-ridden memories like smoke rising from a crematorium. (Section 4, p. 1)

Darnton's series of evocative words raises problems more complicated than he intends and expose not just the way the present echoes the past, but the discontinuities which constitute history: for example, "ethnic cleansing" does not echo the past, but can be used to figure the past through the present, since it is a word invented to describe the current situation in ex-Yugoslavia; "genocide" was the word coined during the Second World War to account for the ongoing destruction of European Jews, but "holocaust" was applied retrospectively to the genocide, although it had been used earlier, in French, to describe World War I. The layered history inscribed in language complicates attempts at facile periodization.

At the same time, the very real echoes to which Darnton alludes should not cover up the differences between historical moments, especially with respect to the media through which the events have become known. Comparing the flow of color video footage to the "flickering" of black-and-white film serves as a perfect metaphor for the differences in historical perception (e.g., the possible chronotopes) enabled by different modes of communication. Film images of the Holocaust—not just of the destruction of the war, but of a people—were not available to the public during the war, and, although they were shown immediately after the liberation of the death camps in newsreels and propaganda films, they still provoked a shock when Alain Resnais used some of them in his 1956 film *Nuit et Brouillard*.<sup>1</sup> There was, in

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<sup>1</sup> Margaretha von Trotta's 1981 film *Die bleierne Zeit* (*Marianne and Juliane*) represents the shock of Resnais's film in a scene where her main characters react with horror to a screening of *Nuit et Brouillard* during their childhood.

fact, significant knowledge of the Nazi genocide as it was taking place, but its images did not, for the most part, circulate in the public sphere since the Germans strictly forbid the production of such images. By contrast, the immediacy of video and the realities of global communication in the postwar world have increasingly saturated the news with evidence of destruction and genocide.<sup>2</sup> It was the coexistence of ethnic violence and historical knowledge of the Nazi genocide with the actuality of video technology and an increasingly integrated global communications industry—the CNN-effect—which made 1993 the year the world/America recognized/remembered, or at least watched, a new Holocaust.

As the allusion to television in *The New York Times* (itself a major player in global media) makes clear, the chronotope constructed by ABC's news show cannot be described simply by reference to the content of the program—the declarations made and images shown—although it is also crucial. Rather, in this case, the medium is preponderant in the chronotope's determination. The televisual medium of broadcasting coordinates the program's temporal claims with an appropriate "space," and thus answers the

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Immediately after the war, many Germans saw a documentary, *Die Todesmühlen* (*The Death Mills*, 1945), produced by the U.S. Office of Military Government about the concentration camps. As von Trotta's film demonstrates in its powerful depiction of left-wing terrorism and the authoritarian German Christian family in the wake of the Holocaust, the assimilation and working through of the Nazi period has been uneven and sporadic.

<sup>2</sup> In *The Holocaust in History* (157-164), Michael Marrus summarizes the debates about the amount of knowledge bystanders had during the Nazi genocide. He draws on a distinction made by Yehuda Bauer between "information" and "knowledge," suggesting that although much information circulated about mass killings in Poland and elsewhere, this was only the first stage in a difficult process of establishing knowledge of the events. The situation in Bosnia is different in part because the Holocaust established a precedent for genocide which renders "disbelief" of such information less likely. The "immediacy" of images of Bosnian concentration camps—however partial the story they tell—derives ironically from their visual similarity to images from the Nazi camps which circulated after the fact.

questions: where is it "the year of the Holocaust" and how does America remember "tonight"? The work of Raymond Williams on television as a form of broadcasting helps to clarify the specificity of the medium. Unlike, say, film, television (or radio) has not developed as a form of communication to a massed audience, but rather to individual viewers (or small groups). This is not intrinsic to the technology, and indeed, Williams points out, in Nazi Germany "the Party organised compulsory public listening groups and the [radio] receivers were in the streets" (*Television* 24). Williams describes the "broadcasting model" of television which has developed in most capitalist countries as possessing a "deep contradiction" between "centralised transmission and privatised reception" (*Television* 30). This contradiction underpins and legitimates *Nightline's* otherwise preposterous claims about the relationship of one television program to national memory. The centralization of the broadcast, along with its dispersed reception, enables "America" to become, at some "virtual" level, the space which *Nightline* occupies; furthermore, the simultaneity of electronic broadcasting ensures that, if "memory" is declared the activity which the program promotes, then, yes, "tonight," America remembers.

But why does America remember *the Holocaust*, and what does memory mean when it is only authorized for one night before being replaced by some more pressing problem? In analyzing the content of television, Williams determined that "[i]n all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organization [of programming], and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow." Since flow also characterizes the sequence of video imagery (as opposed to the frames-per-second of film), Williams was able to claim that "[t]his phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a

cultural form" (86). It is obvious upon recalling the synopsis of the show from December 28, 1993 that "planned flow" characterizes the programming of the Holocaust. The program creates a sequence in which contemporary and historical events are linked to advertised consumer products, other media representations (such as *Schindler's List*), and expert commentary. The associative position that the Holocaust occupies within this sequence is reinforced by the relationship between this show, all the other editions of *Nightline*, all the shows on ABC, and, indeed, on the other networks from which viewers may, with the push of a button, choose. "Tonight," in other words, refers to a particular moment which can only be singled out with difficulty from the overall flow of television. Television, as it has developed, fundamentally alters the kind of chronotope through which an event can be grasped. As Williams writes,

In all communications systems before broadcasting the essential items were discrete. A book or a pamphlet was taken and read as a specific item. A meeting occurred at a particular date and place. A play was performed in a particular theatre at a set hour. The difference in broadcasting is not only that these events, or events resembling them, are available inside the home, by the operation of a switch. It is that the real programme that is offered is a *sequence* or set of alternative sequences of these and other similar events, which are then available in a single dimension and in a single operation. (87)

Within the possibilities and constraints of the televisual medium (both its technology and its social organization) the "uniqueness" so much a part of most understandings of the Holocaust is radically undermined at the same time that knowledge of the event reaches a vast audience. To represent the Holocaust as one element in a "set of sequences" does not so much relativize the event as dissolve it in the flow of networks and channels. Even the dramatic declaration of "The Year of the Holocaust," which seems to establish a link of remembrance between the past and a substantial duration in the present, is only the citation of a fixed code ("The Year of the . . . ") whose meaning is not

the durability of memory but its ephemeral quality in the public sphere. If, for example, 1992 was "The Year of the Woman" in the national elections, by 1994 the phrase had certainly lost all significance. While network television can tolerate a variety of spatio-temporal configurations, the sequential model of fast cutting and sound bite analysis exemplified by the *Nightline* segment is certainly the dominant mode of news programming—a mode in which memory of the Holocaust does not stand much chance to emerge or persist in its specificity. Ironically, however, other "texts" which share aspects of *Nightline's* logic may make a more lasting contribution to knowledge of the Nazi genocide.

In the final two chapters, I will consider the significance of recent attempts to popularize and "Americanize" understanding of the Holocaust by situating them within the framework of "The Year of the Holocaust," a framework which implies the conjuncture of new communications technologies, conflictual contemporary politics, the mass-marketing of genocide, and the obsession with traumatic memories. Moving between genres, media, and discourses I will chart the contours of the Holocaust's intensified presence in contemporary culture. This fascination and obsession with the memory and aftereffects of a series of events now "celebrating" their fiftieth anniversary is not the same as the "new discourse" of Nazism provocatively explored and critiqued by Saul Friedlander in *Reflections of Nazism*. Writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Friedlander argued that although political and socioeconomic conditions had changed drastically from the interwar period, aspects of the psychological dimension of Nazism persisted after the war, and started to reemerge in culture produced from the late 1960s on: "Nazism's attraction lay less in any explicit ideology than in the

power of emotions, images, and phantasms" (14). Such a formulation was crucial to the emerging cultural studies of fascism and the Holocaust because it brought the question of representation to the fore. However, Friedlander's "criterion of uneasiness" (20), by which he grouped texts into the "new discourse," tended also to homogenize a variety of different approaches and to imply the existence of objective limits to representation which ought not to be transgressed but which were never substantiated. Friedlander, in short, simultaneously opened up the study of popular cultural representations of the Holocaust and Nazism and sought to police the production of such representations.

In any case, whether or not Friedlander was correct that films such as *Lili Marleen*, *The Damned*, and *Hitler: A Film from Germany* represent a troubling and dangerous flirtation with the attractions of Nazism, they certainly suggest a libidinal investment in the trappings and aesthetics of National Socialism, an investment which a decade or two later already seems dated. Such an ambivalent mode of "coming to terms" with history may not have fully disappeared, but from the vantage point of the present, it no longer constitutes the dominant engagement with the Nazi past (despite the growth of the various European neo-Nazi movements). This does not imply that the demons have been exorcised, but rather that the historical conditions of the imagination of the past are in the process of shifting. Many contemporary representations focus a simultaneous identification with the victims and "liberators" (usually, but not always, represented as American or embodying American ideals). The "styles or atmospheres" of Philip Roth's novels, Art Spiegelman's comic strips, Steven Spielberg's blockbuster film *Schindler's List*, or the permanent exhibit of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum share hardly at all in the "modes of fascination with kitsch and death" which

Friedlander details in *Reflections of Nazism* (22). Rather, they shift the terrain of Holocaust discourse into an American imaginative space/time peopled by victims/survivors and heroes/liberators (however ironized these figures are in Roth and Spiegelman and regardless of where the stories actually take place). This new "new discourse" indicates and corresponds to a shift in global cultural power from the European-dominated discourses of the critical theorists to the hegemony of American popular culture, all in an era in which the power of the United States is at once uncontested and on the decline.

## Chapter 4

Reading Jewish:  
Philip Roth, Art Spiegelman, and Holocaust Post-Memory

"'He's dying, he's dying.' *Look at him.*  
Tell them over there. *You saw it. Don't*  
*forget*'. . . 'Remember this, remember  
this.'"—Jan Karski in *Shoah*

## 1. Holocaust Pornography

In the final comic set-piece of Philip Roth's novelistic memoir about his father, *Patrimony: A True Story*, Herman Roth attempts to cajole his author-son into helping one of his card-playing buddies from the Y get his memoirs of World War II published. Philip is understandably resistant—especially as his father has regularly asked him over the years to aid other aspiring authors of books about home mortgages or annuity funds. Of course, a book about the Holocaust is different, and Philip even admits that he has taught Holocaust memoirs and briefly knew Primo Levi.

The invocation of Levi and the description of his suicide hardly foreshadow a comic scene. Indeed, Philip wonders

if Primo Levi and Walter Herrmann [his father's friend] could possibly have met at Auschwitz. They would have been about the same age and able to understand each other in German—thinking that it might improve his chances of surviving, Primo had worked hard at Auschwitz to learn the language of the Master Race. In what way did Walter account for *his* survival? What had *he* learned? However amateurish or simply written the book, I expected something like that to be its subject. (212)

But Walter's subject and the lesson he learned in Nazi Germany turn out to be quite different. In fact, they turn out to be comic and even obscene. According to Walter, he was "the only man left in Berlin," and his memoirs are the graphic depictions of his sexual exploits with the women who hid him, quite a twist on the usual tales of heroism and betrayal. "My book is not a book like Elie Wiesel writes," Walter honestly remarks. "I couldn't write such a tragic book. Until the camps, I had a very happy war" (212-13). What with Katrina and Helen and Barbara, Walter's war was more a multiple orgasm than the greatest tragedy of human history.

This odd episode at the end of *Patrimony* suggests that there might be something *pornographic* about making images and ultimately commodities out of the Holocaust. It is as if the fundamental obscenity of the events themselves cannot be represented without a pornographic contamination of the person doing the representing. Walter seems to grasp this truth unconsciously and displaces it into farce; this is perhaps the flip side of Levi's, and many other survivors', ultimately tragic inability to redeem their experience by representing to themselves the meaning of the camps. We gain insight into this irony and angst about the decorum of representing destruction by considering it as a particularly, although not uniquely, Jewish question. Well before what has come to be known as "the Holocaust," certain aspects of the debate surrounding the Nazi genocide and the question of representation were foregrounded in Jewish discourse. The examples of Roth and Art Spiegelman demonstrate how a Biblically mandated suspicion of idolatry and image-making, as well as a cultural claim to being the "people of the book," come to constitute specifically Jewish parameters, or at least "themes," of even secular Jewish writing. Although, as Daniel Boyarin has argued, there is a greater

degree of complexity toward the image in the Jewish tradition than popular interpretations of the "ban on graven images" imply, this very anxiety about the proper place of visual representation enriches the work of Roth and Spiegelman.<sup>1</sup>

The framework of "The Year of the Holocaust" reworks this preexisting relationship to representation by inserting it into a context in which both the Holocaust and its mass-cultural depiction are inescapable for Jewish-American writers and artists. The conflicting impulses for and against representation "after Auschwitz," as well as the ethical risk which accompanies the circulation of images and texts in a capitalist economy, structure Roth's writing and Spiegelman's comic-book memoir *Maus* in their responses to the Holocaust. However, instead of taking these conflicts as a cause for silence in the face of a distant catastrophe, both Roth and Spiegelman work from within the contradictions of their situation in the American-Jewish diaspora. Spiegelman's work partakes of what Marianne Hirsch, in an effort to define the specificity of the lives of survivors' children, has called "the aesthetic of post-memory" ("Family Pictures" 27). Post-memory occupies a position between the personal experience of memory proper and the impersonal "objectivity" of history (8). Although Roth does not belong to this generation, the intersections of his writing with the Holocaust demonstrate the extent to which the post-memory predicament has come to be shared (albeit with crucial psychic and historical differences) by Jewish Americans more

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<sup>1</sup> In a subtle consideration of the complexities of Jewish relations to the image, Boyarin demystifies the "commonplace of critical discourse that Judaism is the religion in which God is heard but not seen" (532). His essay has implications that go beyond this religious context and are important to secular Jewish representations as well.

broadly. The cultural logic of post-memory thus provides the field in which both Roth and Spiegelman engage with Holocaust.

Their situational self-consciousness as both linked to and distant from the Holocaust—which I would propose as a working definition for collective post-memory—allows them simultaneously to transgress and to uphold the ethical injunctions related to acts of representation “after Auschwitz.” In this provocative practice, they follow different paths: in his fiction and memoir, Roth frequently returns to the uses and abuses of the Holocaust but does not attempt to represent the genocide as such; in relating the narrative of his parents’ Holocaust experiences, Spiegelman creates comic-book images of Auschwitz but constantly and critically reflects on his process of creation. The work of both artists also suggests gendered dimensions of Jewish identity and Holocaust survival, exposing consciously or unconsciously the dynamics at work in the elaborations of Jewish masculinity. In *de-absolutizing* Jewish identity and the experience of the Holocaust, Roth and Spiegelman displace, but do not negate, the place of the Nazi genocide in contemporary culture. Knowledge of the event is revealed as the product of ongoing acts of representation which inevitably juxtapose it with other historical and personal traumas and with seemingly irrelevant concerns, sometimes pressing, sometimes trivial.

## 2. Operation Holocaust: Philip Roth and Jewish-American Identity

The coming together of Roth’s self-consciousness about representation in general and his tragi-comic recognition of the inevitable contamination of representing the Holocaust can be glimpsed throughout much of his fiction. It

culminates in the metafictional pyrotechnics of *Operation Shylock*, a text published in 1993 during "The Year of the Holocaust." In *Shylock*, Roth returns to material already present in *The Ghost Writer* (1979) and *Patrimony* (1991) and recontextualizes it, situating American Holocaust representation (including his own) in a particular historical geography.

*The Ghost Writer*—published one year after the *Holocaust* mini-series had almost single-handedly set in motion the media deluge of interest in the Judeocide—marks Roth's first significant engagement with the representation of the Nazi genocide. Here, Roth engages with the Holocaust as "archetype" (in James Young's phrase from *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*) and reveals both this archetype's phantasmatic presence in Jewish-American life and its absurd distance from the banalities of that life. The paradoxical position of the Holocaust was already parodied in *Portnoy's Complaint* where Alex's mother pronounces the word "*Hamburgers*" with the same bitterness "as she might say *Hitler*" (33), as if to suggest the equal threat to Jewishness of *goyische* cuisine and Nazi genocide. While Alex Portnoy remains an unrepentant, if conflicted, self-hating representative of "the culture of the Diaspora" (265), his alter-ego from Roth's later work, Nathan Zuckerman, attempts to mobilize the fantasy of the Holocaust as a means of modulating that self-hatred.

In *The Ghost Writer*, Nathan Zuckerman's fantasy of marrying Anne Frank serves as a means of occupying a Jewish-American identity satisfactory both to his parents and to his sense of vocation as a writer. The premise of this short novel is that Nathan, a promising young writer, is suffering the wrath of his family for having written a short autobiographical story that is "bad for the Jews." Although the transgression involves the revelation of family secrets, the shame is a public one, and involves the image of the Jew in the

Christian imaginary. As Nathan's father complains, "your story, as far as Gentiles are concerned, is about one thing and one thing only. . . . It is about kikes. Kikes and their love of money. That is all our good Christian friends will see, I guarantee you" (*Zuckerman Bound* 57). Since his son refuses to renounce his story, Nathan's father asks an esteemed, if self-righteous, judge to appeal to Nathan's sense of obligation and responsibility for his maligned people. The judge writes to Nathan and includes a questionnaire to spark his moral self-interrogation which poses questions such as, "Can you honestly say that there is anything in your short story that would not warm the heart of a Julius Streicher or a Joseph Goebbels?" (63). As an antidote to Nathan's self-hatred, the Judge Wapter suggests a dose of mid-1950s Holocaust culture: "If you have not yet seen the Broadway production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, I strongly advise you to do so. Mrs. Wapter and I were in the audience on opening night; we wish that Nathan Zuckerman could have been with us to benefit from that unforgettable experience" (62). It is this therapeutic and sentimental version of "Holocaust memory" that Roth works against in constructing Nathan's Anne Frank fantasy.

The moral authority that Nathan's parents and Judge Wapter evoke involves a confusion between the situation of the Jewish victims of Europe and the Jews situated, more or less comfortably, in the United States. In response to his mother's accusations of immodesty, Nathan points out the absurdity of the judge's position:

"The Big Three, Mama! Streicher, Goebbels, and your son! What about the judge's humility? Where's his modesty?"  
 "He only meant that what happened to the Jews—"  
 "In Europe—not in Newark! We are not the wretched of Belsen! We were not the victims of that crime!" (64)

But, since the foundational paranoia of his parents' Jewish identity cannot be so easily exorcised, Nathan ends up caught in the same structure of delusion. He imaginatively brings Anne Frank, the icon of Jewish innocence, to America "in the flesh"—and not just in the theatrical version favored by the Wapters. In Nathan's late-night fantasy, the mysterious Amy, assistant and lover of Nathan's idol, the great writer E.I. Lonoff, becomes Anne Frank. Having survived against all odds, Anne makes her way to America and Lonoff, where she assumes the identity of Amy. When "her" diary and then play appear, she contemplates coming out of the closet, but moved by the powerful emotions her story produces in bourgeois theater-goers, Amy decides, "I knew I couldn't [reveal myself] when I heard that woman scream 'Oh, no.' I knew then what's been true all along: . . . I have to be dead to everyone" (75). The paradox of Anne/Amy's victimization/redemption provides another figure for Jewish Americans' relationship to the Holocaust, and provides the fantasy space for Nathan's comic resolution to his identity crisis—he'll marry Anne Frank! "'Married? But so fast? Nathan, is she Jewish?'" 'Yes, she is.' 'But who is she?' 'Anne Frank'" (95). In revealing the Holocaust's "usefulness" to the establishment of politically correct Jewish identities, *The Ghost Writer* exposes one aspect of the "new new discourse" on Judeocide, the ambivalent focus on survival and death which corresponds to Jewish Americans' ambiguous position as a "well-off" minority with a deeply tragic and not very distant history.

The desacralizing of the Holocaust in an American context—implicit in *The Ghost Writer's* parody of sentimental constructions of Jewishness—is both present and partially forgotten in *Patrimony*, a text which also alludes to another novel from the Zuckerman series. Although the Nazi genocide itself is

peripheral to his memoir, the Holocaust's legacies form the background of *Patrimony* against which Roth frames the story of his father's losing battle with cancer. Roth uses metaphors which call upon both timeless Jewish themes of memory and survivorship and historically specific evocations of the Nazis. Despite the father's obstinate "survivor" mentality, Herman's tumor, Roth writes, "would in the end be as merciless as a blind mass of anything on the march" (136). This Nazi-like image resonates uncannily with a passage from Roth's novel, *The Anatomy Lesson*. Here, Roth describes not his father's actual death, but an imagined version of his mother's death (a death which in reality, we know from the chronology of *Patrimony*, must have prompted *The Anatomy Lesson*). But the categories of reality and imagination become here—as everywhere in Roth's writing—hopelessly confused, since the fictional version *anticipates* the memoir. Nathan Zuckerman's mother develops a brain tumor in this 1983 novel, as Herman Roth will a few years later. Admitted into the hospital for the second time, Zuckerman's mother

was able to recognize her neurologist when he came by the room, but when he asked if she would write her name for him on a piece of paper, she took the pen from his hand and instead of "Selma" wrote the word "Holocaust," perfectly spelled. This was in Miami Beach in 1970, inscribed by a woman whose writings otherwise consisted of recipes on index cards, several thousand thank-you notes, and a voluminous file of knitting instructions. Zuckerman was pretty sure that before that morning she'd never even spoken the word aloud. (269)

The carefully situated Jewish mother's death serves here as a metaphor for the emergence in the Jewish community of a new understanding of "the Holocaust" in the late 1960s, an understanding which testified to the spatially and temporally displaced effect on Jewish-American identity of the extermination of European Jewry (even, or especially, for Jews comfortably situated "in Miami Beach in 1970"). The association of Holocaust and tumor,

forged by Roth in *The Anatomy Lesson*, reappears in *Patrimony*, a memoir which further measures the health of the collective and individual Jewish body.

*Patrimony's* last line, and most frequently repeated motif, is a slogan often applied to the Nazi genocide: "You must not forget anything" (238). This line, which so closely echoes my epigraph (some lines taken from Claude Lanzmann's film, *Shoah*), also occurs in the passage where Philip gives his father a bath and pays special attention to the signifier of Jewish manhood (a passage which repeats similar reflections from *Portnoy's Complaint*):

I looked at his penis. I don't believe I'd seen it since I was a small boy, and back then I used to think it was quite big. It turned out that I had been right. It was thick and substantial and the one bodily part that didn't look old....I looked at it intently, as though for the first time, and waited on the thoughts. But there weren't any more, except my reminding myself to fix it in my memory for when he was dead....*You must not forget anything.*

Here, the phallic law of the father takes on the particularly Jewish imperative to "remember everything accurately" (177), a commandment metonymically linked to the contemplation of the one "substantial" organ of his father's body which resists the deterioration of time. In *The Anatomy Lesson* Roth had already connected the deterioration caused by cancer with a maternal evisceration (of body and language). In *Patrimony*—despite the holocaust of cancer and the cancer of the Holocaust—the Jewish communal body survives in and through the memory of the solidity of the father: his "substantial" penis and his "vernacular" speech, with "all its durable force" (181).

The power and ultimately the sentimentality of Roth's portrait arise from his manner of combining traditional Jewish motifs of survival, memory, and the law with a subtle evocation of the Holocaust in order to depict a particular Jewish life in the diaspora. Roth's text simultaneously exposes the

potential for pornographic kitsch in his account of Walter Herrmann, and then draws upon a kind of emotional kitsch in the depiction of his father. Such a paradoxical stance constitutes a particular, and in this case gendered, configuration of contemporary Jewish-American identity—one in which the abuses of the Holocaust have been made manifest by years of trivialization, but in which the Holocaust still serves as the dominant metaphor for collective and individual Jewish survival.

In his most recent Holocaust-related novel, *Operation Shylock*, Roth expands the scope of his critique beyond the more intimate accounts of Holocaust memory in *The Ghost Writer* and *Patrimony*. Although published in "The Year of the Holocaust," *Operation Shylock* disrupts the surface flux characteristic of *Nightline's* presentation by constructing an alternative topography of Holocaust memory. If *Nightline* promises 30 minutes of late-night fame for every historical event, Roth subjects such modes of publicity to a biting satire which lays bare the always tendentious rhetorical sites in which Jewishness and genocide intersect. *Operation Shylock* is a meta-fictional "confession" which, from opening "Preface" to closing "Note to the Reader," acts out the old paradox whereby the final claim that "This confession is false" (399) radically destabilizes the entire text, including that final claim. In interviews, Roth has even asserted the veracity of the most unbelievable element of *Shylock*—the secret and undisclosed mission the narrator undertakes for Israeli intelligence. Reviewers and reporters have been understandably suspicious of this claim, seeing it as Roth's own sly engagement with the "PR" machine. Esther Fein of *The New York Times* wrote of Roth's claim, "It is an ingenious performance, as if Mr. Roth means to extend the theme of 'Operation Shylock' . . . from the pages of his book into a

book-tour interview" (9 March 1993: C18). Instead of seeking an answer to this strange literary mystery—"Was He a Spy or Wasn't He?", as *Newsweek* wondered (22 March 1994: 71)—I will argue that the uncertainty has a determinate historical significance. The oscillation between fact and fiction, which the text and Roth's claims about it set into motion, bisects other unstable binary oppositions, many of which focus on questions of individual and collective identity. At the intersection of these paradoxes of genre and identity in *Shylock*, the Holocaust's uniqueness gives way to a *Nightline*-like sequence, but one which does not collapse history into a depthless present. Instead of turning the Holocaust into pornography or the ticket to authentic and "politically correct" American Jewishness, Roth, in *Shylock*, continues the exploration of how memory and identity coalesce and come undone in the wake of genocide.

*Operation Shylock* is the story of what happens when the writer Philip Roth discovers that someone posing as him in Israel is attending the trial of alleged Treblinka guard John Demjanjuk and espousing in the media a theory of Diasporism, which encourages Ashkenazi Jews to re-emigrate from Israel back to their European homelands. Philip, still recovering from a psychotic bout with the drug Halcion, is already planning a trip to Israel to interview Holocaust survivor and novelist Aharon Appelfeld for *The New York Times*. Against his wife's reasonable recommendation that he simply contact his lawyer or the Israeli police, Philip decides to investigate the impostor himself, whom he names, in an attempt to reappropriate his stolen identity, Moishe Pipik (or Moses Bellybutton). Philip's pursuit of Pipik turns out to be at once a form of self-conscious navel gazing and a path into a tangled conspiracy involving, it would seem, PLO agents, Israeli intelligence operatives,

recovering anti-Semites, and various other eccentrics of uncertain provenance. At the end, in the episode alluded to above, Philip agrees to go undercover in a Mossad operation code-named "Shylock," although the details of his actions are, for "security reasons," removed.

As this all too brief synopsis makes clear, *Operation Shylock* is not a representation of the Holocaust; yet the text probes Holocaust memory at different levels, mapping Jewish-American identity across these modes of remembrance. At the level of plot, *Shylock* turns on the importance of Philip's and Pipik's attendance at the Demjanjuk trial. This contemporary legal staging of the Holocaust calls upon its epoch-making ancestor, the Eichmann trial, an event which first brought the continued suffering of Holocaust survivors into a public space. Formally, the text incorporates, *en abîme*, Roth's *New York Times* conversations with Aharon Appelfeld about representing the Holocaust; it also includes allusions to various other Holocaust texts, including Roth's own *Ghost Writer* and Saul Bellow's *The Bellarosa Connection*. And, as a novel of ideas, Roth simultaneously espouses and ridicules a post-Holocaust philosophy of Diasporism, which insists that a second Holocaust can only be averted through a reversal of Zionism and a reoccupation of Europe.

Most significantly for my purposes, Roth's interrogation of identity consists of what Nancy K. Miller (rewriting Adrienne Rich in *Getting Personal*) calls a "poetics of location," a process in which he places his Jewish-American narrator at a determinate distance from the Holocaust. Roth carefully sets his novel at various temporal and spatial crossroads. He makes a point of telling the reader that upon arriving in Jerusalem, Philip stayed not in his usual guest house, but "at the American Colony, a hotel staffed by Arabs and situated at the other end of Jerusalem, virtually on the pre-1968

borderline between Jordanian Jerusalem and Israeli Jerusalem" (51). The historical resonance of this location is reinforced by the restricted time and place in which most of the novel takes place:

It felt like a May afternoon, warm, breezy, lullingly serene, even though it was January of 1988 and we happened to be only a few hundred yards from where Israeli soldiers had teargassed a rock-throwing mob of young Arab boys just the day before. Demjanjuk was on trial for murdering close to a million Jews at Treblinka, Arabs were rising up against the Jewish authorities all over the Occupied Territories, and yet from where I was seated amid the shrubbery, between a lemon tree and an orange tree, the world could not have seemed any more enticing. (88-9)

By inscribing history into a hotel courtyard, Roth creates a site of memory in which a series of temporal turning points—the Holocaust, the occupation of the West Bank, the beginnings of the intifada—ambiguously and allegorically structures a geographical locale and an ethnic identity.<sup>2</sup> Philip's particular American Jewishness is determined, this setting implies, both by his implication in the aftermath of the Holocaust and in the crises of Zionism *and* by his comfortable, tourist's remove from them. At the same time, he is caught between Demjanjuk and Arafat, and is sitting safely between two fruit trees. That is, between two fruit trees and opposite Jinx Possesski, a buxom Polish-American recovering anti-Semite, the "tantalizing layer cake of female excitement" who is in fact at this moment responsible for Philip's feeling of well-being. As enticing *shiksa*, Jinx excessively embodies a gendered vision of an Edenic non-Jewish America. Her tempting location amidst the fruit trees demonstrates not only the archetypal masculinism of Roth's investigation of Jewishness (there are no significant Jewish female characters in the novel),

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<sup>2</sup> The importance of the intifada is reinforced since the events have been set at the uprising's origins, a year earlier than Roth has claimed the events "really" happened.

but the extent to which space and time are always articulated with other kinds of categories, including gender and ethnicity.<sup>3</sup>

In *Shylock*, "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (to re-cite Bakhtin's description of the chronotope), as Roth triangulates his novel's setting between the Holocaust and different historical moments in the State of Israel and the state of American Jewry. How does Roth's narrativization of this map complicate the novel's space/time configuration? The split subject who emerges from *Shylock's* multidimensional map ought to be fractured along so many faultlines that identity no longer coheres, but in fact it is in incoherence that this American Holocaust Jew's identity has been formed. The forward movement of the narrative is driven by a series of encounters between Philip and his doubles, thus rendering identity either repetitive or sequential. Jinx, for example, narrates her life as a "tale of lifelong servitude and serial transformations" (244), but, in fact, her life history serves the narrator's tale through the conventional titillation her sexual metamorphoses offer. Philip's encounters with Demjanjuk and Appelfeld, on the other hand, raise the question of identity specifically in relation to the Holocaust.

Demjanjuk's case turns around several types of identity crisis which link the slipperiness of identity to the facticity of fascism. Sitting opposite the accused mass murderer in a Jerusalem courtroom, where he has come to find the impostor "Philip Roth," known as "Pipik," Philip finds his own identity

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<sup>3</sup> Much of Roth's writing—at least from *Portnoy's Complaint* through *Operation Shylock*—can be seen as confirming for Jewish "ethnicity" Paul Gilroy's insight (which draws on Stuart Hall) that "gender is the modality in which race is lived" (*Black Atlantic* 85). Thus, Roth's different configurations of gender will necessarily correspond to different (aspects of) Jewish identities, most of which are coded masculine.

unsettled: "when, after sorting out the dozen or so figures on the raised platform at the front of the courtroom, I realized which one was the accused, not only did my double cease to exist, but, for the time being, so did I. There he was. *There he was*" (59-60). Initially overwhelmed by the singular presence of Demjanjuk, Philip soon begins to ponder the questions of identity and identification which have constituted that strange trial. If Demjanjuk is Ivan the Terrible, then how to explain his overwhelmingly normal Americanness, the way in which he "lived sequentially . . . two seemingly antipodal, mutually excluding lives" (63)? If he is not Ivan the Terrible, then how to account for the series of eye-witness identifications by Treblinka survivors? In either case, everyday assumptions about the continuity and coherence of identity, memory, and testimony break down. But are the issues raised by the Demjanjuk trial simply a metaphor for Philip's identity crisis or is that crisis in part produced by the issues of Holocaust memory and testimony indexed by the identification controversy? Given the triangulated rhetorical map of Jewish-American identity which Roth constructs, this question may be unresolvable.

The problem is complicated further by the presence of Aharon Appelfeld in the text. Demjanjuk is not so much a character in *Operation Shylock* as he is part of an event (his trial) which locates the story in space and time. But Appelfeld, the survivor and Israeli author of Holocaust novels such as *Badenheim 1939*, is one of Philip's key interlocutors. His presence links the question of identity and the status of the Holocaust to the meta-fictional paradoxes of the text. The discussions of Appelfeld's novels which Roth includes in occasional long indented paragraphs are taken from a published interview. They constitute "real" dialogue with a "real" Holocaust survivor. As such, they stand in marked contrast to Philip's conversations with

other characters, which consist primarily of endless monologues, and which self-consciously parody a multi-perspectival Dostoyevskyan novel. In the published discussion, Roth characterizes Appelfeld's novels as "depict[ing] the harshest reality and the most extreme form of suffering" (85)—about as far as you can get from *Goodbye, Columbus* or *Portnoy's Complaint*.

These dialogues about the reality of fictions of extreme suffering are, in turn, embedded in a comic novel masquerading as reality; Appelfeld's "realness," in other words, lies at the center of what Philip (fictionally) calls "these fictions about the fictions of the self-divided" (115). This proliferation of generic levels evokes what Gérard Genette, writing about Proust, called a "whirligig": "an endless discussion between a reading of the novel as fiction and a reading of the same novel as autobiography" (cited in de Man, "Autobiography" 921). Paul de Man used Genette's insight to suggest that autobiography is "a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" ("Autobiography" 921). In *Shylock*, Appelfeld's "presence" facilitates the text's "autobiographical moment." This is ironic, since, for de Man, the "specular moment" which constitutes the autobiographical reading "is not primarily a situation or an event that can be located in a history, but that is the manifestation, on the level of the referent, of a linguistic structure" (922). The suggestion that that moment—in this case, the citation of a published interview with a Holocaust survivor—might be primarily a linguistic event radically throws into question the attempt to historicize the Holocaust just as surely as it renders the Holocaust's uniqueness part of an omnipresent structure. Much of the discourse of the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust derives from the experience and autobiography of those who passed through the Nazi assault. Writing about Chaim Kaplan, who left a diary of the Warsaw Ghetto but

did not survive it, George Steiner comments, "metaphysically an absolute uniqueness passes from the store of human resources" when such a person dies (*Reader* 253-4). Within the whirligig of poststructuralist criticism, the "absolute uniqueness" of "experience" and "autobiography" have been destabilized, but must they be dehistoricized? Appelfeld himself comes close to de Man's formulation when, in conversation with Roth, he claims, "the Jewish experience in the Second World War was not 'historical.'" But Roth shows how this lack of historical consciousness *is* historical: "dehistoricizing the events and blurring the background, you[r novels] probably approximate the disorientation felt by people who were unaware that they were on the brink of a cataclysm" (*Shylock* 84).

Appelfeld's "uniqueness" and "realness" as a survivor constitute an alternative Jewish identity which deserves further consideration. But, at least in *Shylock*, those qualities are not there primarily as signifiers of Holocaust authenticity. Rather, they anchor Philip's identity, which is what is truly at stake, but only through a mediating process of differentiation. Roth specifically contrasts Appelfeld's experience to Philip's: "Hiding as a child from his murderers in the Ukrainian woods while I was still on a Newark playground playing fly-catcher's-up had clearly made him less of a stranger than I to life in its more immoderate manifestations" (111). That there is a parasitic relationship between Appelfeld's authenticity and Philip's American exceptionalism emerges when the "real" (fictional) Philip Roth is confronted with the "fake" (fictional) Philip Roth. When the impostor asks, "Why should you converse with Aharon Appelfeld . . . and not with me!", Philip answers by meditating on their "drastically *bifurcated* legacy":

Because . . . of Aharon's and my distinctly radical *twoness*. . . .  
 [B]ecause we are anything *but* the duplicates that everyone is  
 supposed to believe you and me to be; . . . because each recognizes  
 in the other the Jewish man he is *not*; because of the all but  
 incompatible orientations that shape our very different lives and  
 very different books and that result from *antithetical* twentieth-  
 century Jewish biographies. (200-1)

The "radical twoness" of these figures doubles the radical twoness of the text's generic instability, understood by de Man as a fundamental linguistic structure. Appelfeld's realness, which derives both from his status as a historical figure and his status as a survivor, contrasts to Philip's ambiguous and "antithetical" realness, as the narrator in a fictional text and as the possessor of an autobiography which resembles the author's in its "playground" safety.

The entire text follows from the presence of the impostor Pipik, and the initial doubling of the proper name, Philip Roth. The narrative generated by this improper repetition is riddled with further historical doublings which act out Marx's insight from the *Eighteenth Brumaire*: history occurs twice, "the first time as tragedy; the second as farce" (*Selected Writings* 300). Besides the account of the Demjanjuk trial as a pale imitation of Eichmann in Jerusalem, there is the strange appearance in *Shylock* of a fictional version of the diary of Leon Klinghoffer—the Jewish-American man killed in the PLO's Achille Lauro hijacking. Used as a ploy to recruit Philip for the Mossad, Klinghoffer's diary is meant by Roth as a farcical repetition of Anne Frank's diary (and in this sense it is also a self-parody of *The Ghost Writer*). Filled with accounts of the weather, accommodations, and sight-seeing from his previous cruises, Klinghoffer's diary demonstrates the banality of American-Jewish normalization, but also its deadly connection to Middle Eastern politics. The contrast between Klinghoffer's middle class American travelogue and Anne

Frank's girl's-eye view of occupied Europe could not be more stark, except of course that both diarists meet a fate which has everything to do with their ethnic identity. History may be farce, but it is still history.

With the proliferation of references to texts and characters real and fantastic, we remain stranded between fiction and non-fiction. This ambiguity about the text's genre needs to be factored back into the map of Jewish-American identity, which I charted above, and reintroduced into the question about the rhetorical status of the Holocaust in *Operation Shylock*. Philip's twoness, his antithetical biography, is the narrative equivalent of his spatial location at a determinate distance from the events which surround him in Israel and which echo the genocidal history of the Holocaust. Do Israel's conflicts with the Palestinians have the same status for an American Jew as for an Israeli one? Is the Holocaust real for Philip as it is real for Appelfeld?

Since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and the canonization of the Holocaust's uniqueness, Jewish Americans of all political stripes—Zionist, anti-Zionist, and critical Zionist—have recognized Israel and the Holocaust as the twin poles of their identity formation. In "The Year of the Holocaust," various media, including print, television, film, literature, and museums, have suggested that the Holocaust is as "real" to contemporary Americans as it ever has been. Steven Spielberg's film, *Schindler's List*—to give another contemporary example—attempted to simulate the experience of the genocide by filming at the gates of Auschwitz and by miming the codes of newsreel footage (see next chapter). *Operation Shylock* tells a different story by interrogating the narratives which have anchored American Jews to the Holocaust, and by judging their status ambiguously authentic and undecidably real. Roth's "confession" highlights the multiple mediations through which the Holocaust

is known and parodies all attempts at direct knowledge; it thus *increases* our distance from the events of the genocide in order to block the kind of identification which Spielberg encourages. The spatial and temporal location in which *Shylock* leaves readers is not Philip's illusory Edenic setting, but rather the anxious position of living in the shadow of an event known only from a remove, an event so constitutive of Jewish-American identity that its potential repetition and the disappearance of such a possibility are equally threatening.

The Holocaust is an irreducible metaphor in *Operation Shylock*. That is, it is both a part of the plot and figurative in its presence. Just as Philip Roth's name cannot remain unique in his own text, the Holocaust cannot remain unique for Americans. *Shylock* suggests that in the post-intifada, post-Cold War world, ethnic struggle and potential genocide create too much pressure to maintain the rhetoric of uniqueness, although they do not override the memory which links the Holocaust to the bodies, living and dead, of all Jews, even those raised on the playgrounds of Newark, New Jersey.

### 3. "We Were Talking Jewish": Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

"Sometimes it almost seems that 'the Holocaust' is a corporation headed by Elie Wiesel, who defends his patents with articles in the Arts and Leisure section of the *Sunday Times*."—Philip Lopate, "Resistance to the Holocaust"

"I resist becoming the Elie Wiesel of the comic book."—Art Spiegelman, "A Conversation with Art Spiegelman"

In moving from Philip Roth to Art Spiegelman—that is, from the comic to the comic book—the motifs of survival and suffering become radically reconfigured even as the subjects of that survival and suffering (the overbearing fathers, the rebellious sons) seem so similar. Within the context of the ban on graven images and the "mystique" of the text—from which Roth derives both his pornographic ironization and his narrative sentimentalization—the two volumes of Art Spiegelman's "survivor's tale," *Maus*, come as a particular shock. Spiegelman transgresses the sacredness of Auschwitz by depicting in comic strip images his survivor father's suffering and by refusing to sentimentalize the survivor. A phrase from Roth's memoir actually suits Spiegelman's depiction of his father, Vladek, better than it does that of Herman: "what goes into survival isn't always pretty" (*Patrimony* 126). While Spiegelman is no Walter Herrmann-esque comic pornographer of the Holocaust, his use of coded animal identities for the ethnic and national groups he depicts certainly strikes readers at first as somewhat "obscene." Spiegelman even admits that going into a comic book store is "a little like going into a porno store" ("Conversation"). But the power and originality of Spiegelman's effort derive quite specifically from this shock of obscenity which demands that we confront "the Holocaust" as visual representation, as one more commodity in the American culture industry.

For Jewish readers, the challenge of *Maus* will likely be even harder to assimilate since the experience (and the memory) of the Holocaust, even for those of us who know it only at a distance, remains, fifty years later, one of the defining moments of Jewish-American identity. Although the situation is beginning to change, Jewish identity remains relatively undertheorized, if overrepresented, in contemporary culture and criticism. Those of us who

occupy Jewish subject-positions thus come to the task of what that most Talmudic of antisemites, Céline, has called "reading Jewish" with an impoverished set of tools which might help us to examine our being-in-America.<sup>4</sup> In this discussion of *Maus* I will pursue a double-edged strategy, demystifying Céline's assumption of an essential Jewishness while at the same time demonstrating how Spiegelman brings a secular Jewish interpretive specificity to his rendering of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> *Maus* assists us in the intellectual and political task of theorizing Jewishness because, even if it rarely addresses Jewish identity directly, it does tell us at least as much about the contemporary situation of Jews in the North American diaspora as about "the Holocaust." Or rather, it meditates as much on the production of the concept of "the Holocaust" and of the concept of Jewishness as it does on Nazi inhumanity. In its acknowledgment of and entanglement in the marketplace, *Maus* contributes to and intervenes in what I have been calling "The Year of the Holocaust." As a comic book, *Maus* mobilizes the latter's sequential logic, but, like *Operation Shylock*, it draws a multidimensional historical map which cannot be reduced to the "presentism" of *Nightline's* narrative.

*Maus* critiques popular productions of Jewishness and the Holocaust not from a safe distance, but from within, in an accessible vernacular form. In his

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4 In a 1937 anti-Semitic pamphlet, Céline wrote, "J'espère qu'à présent vous savez lire 'juif.'" This sentence is cited in Kaplan, *Relevé* 25.

5 Apart from work cited elsewhere in this chapter, two critics stand out for their theoretical sophistication in attempting to understand the Holocaust and Jewishness in an American context. On the Holocaust, see Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* and *The Texture of Memory*. On Jewish identity, see Jonathan Boyarin, *Storm From Paradise*. See also my review essay of Boyarin, "Sites of Memory, Sites of Forgetting."

"goodbye to *Maus*" comments published in *Tikkun*, Spiegelman worries that his books "may also have given people an easy way to deal with the Holocaust, to feel that they've 'wrapped it up'" ("Saying" 44-45). While the texts' very commodity-form participates in the marketing of the Holocaust (*Maus* and *Maus II* were first "wrapped up" together in boxed sets in the 1991 pre-Hanukkah/Christmas season), they also simultaneously resist this "wrapping up." As Robert Storr notes in his program notes to the *Maus* exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, Spiegelman creates a visual pun on the back cover of *Maus II* which connects the stripes of his father's prison uniform with the stripes of the jacket's bar code. The text's very "wrapping" asks the reader to consider its implication in a system of economic entrapment. The self-conscious irony of this parallel between imprisonment and commodity production marks one of the many places where Spiegelman rebels against the terms of his success; such cleverness, however, reminds us that this very rebellion constitutes a large part of the artist's appeal. This paradox, which is foregrounded everywhere in *Maus*, can be read as a comment not only on the status of memory and history in capitalist culture, but also on recent debates about the possibility and desirability of representing the Nazi genocide.

Among the last *Maus* images, which Spiegelman contributed to *Tikkun*, two in particular stand out as emblematic of the dangers which the artist recognizes in mass-marketing death. In the first, Spiegelman draws his characteristic "Maus" self-portrait standing in front of a smiling Mickey Mouse background and gazing mournfully at a "real" mouse which he cups in his hands. The uneasy coexistence of three levels of representation in the same pictorial space literalizes the artist's position: backed by the industry, but

everywhere confronted with the detritus of the real. In the second drawing, the artist sits in front of a static-filled TV screen and plays with his baby daughter, who is holding a Mickey Mouse doll; mouse corpses hang, silhouetted in the background, from nooses. This drawing transposes a frame from *Maus I* (84) in which Spiegelman depicts his family (Vladek, Anja, and the soon to be dead, Richieu) before a backdrop of Jews hung by the Germans in a Polish ghetto. This transposition, along with the drawing of the three mice, illustrates an aspect of repetition compulsion which the work as a whole enacts. The Nazi violence lives on, with the survivor son just as much the subject and object of the terror as his father.

Spiegelman's self-portrait on the jacket flap of *Maus II* also delineates this tension inherent in the relationships between the artist, his historical sources, his representational universe, and his public artworks.<sup>6</sup> Wearing a mouse mask, Spiegelman sits at his desk with *Raw* and *Maus* posters behind him and a Nazi prison guard outside the window. One morbid detail stands out: the picture reveals Art's ubiquitous cigarettes as "Cremo" brand. On page 70 of the second volume we find the key to this deadly pun when Vladek refers to the crematorium as a "cremo building." Such black humor implies that with every cigarette, with every image—and Spiegelman seems both to smoke and to draw relentlessly—he does not just represent the Holocaust, he literally brings it back to life (which is to say, death). Taken together, these disturbing portraits figure forth *Maus's* strange relationship to the ashes of the real: simultaneously haunted by the inadequacy of representation in the face of the

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<sup>6</sup> See also Marianne Hirsch's discussion of this self-portrait.

catastrophe of history and overconscious of the all-too-real materiality representations take on through the intervention of the culture industry.

The impossibility of satisfactorily specifying the genre of *Maus* expresses this representational paradox. After *Maus II* came out Spiegelman requested that his book be moved from the fiction to the non-fiction best sellers' list; but, a few years earlier, in an introduction to a collection of "comix" from *Raw*, the magazine he edits with his wife, Françoise Mouly, Spiegelman remarks that he has been at work on his "comic-book novel, *Maus*" (Spiegelman and Mouly 7). While perhaps merely an artist's whim, I read this seeming contradiction as grounded in the specificity of the problem of representing the Holocaust, an event taken as at once *paradigmatic* of human potential for evil and as a truly *singular* expression of that potential which frustrates and ought to forbid all comparison with other events.

In the wake of this singular universal, fiction and fictionalization have seemed at times irrelevant, if not sacrilegious, and at other times the only modes for imagining the unimaginable. On the one hand, critics such as Theodor Adorno, Maurice Blanchot, Berel Lang, and Claude Lanzmann have questioned the place of poetry, fiction, and the image "after Auschwitz."<sup>7</sup> Although their positions are extremely complex and varied, these critics have frequently been understood as proscribing artistic representations in the face of the need for testimonial and witnessing. On the other hand, the historical trauma of the Nazi genocide also *de-realizes* human experience, and thus creates a need for fiction. Accounts of the death camps in memoirs never fail

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<sup>7</sup> On Adorno and Blanchot, see chapters 1 and 2, respectively. See also Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide* 144-45. On Lang, see White 44-48. On Lanzmann, see the next chapter.

to document the fictional, oneiric aura which confronts the newly-arrived prisoner.<sup>8</sup> By situating a non-fictional story in a highly mediated, unreal, "comic" space, Spiegelman captures the hyper-intensity of Auschwitz: at once, more real than real and more impossible than impossible.

Yet, *Maus* also replies to the debates about representation in ways which go beyond formalist subversion of generic categories and which indeed shift the terrain of the debate onto the cultural conditions, possibilities, and constraints of Holocaust representation (thus displacing the frequently prescriptive epistemologies and ontologies of the debate set by Adorno, Blanchot, and Lang). Spiegelman frankly recognizes the inevitable commodification of culture, even the culture of trauma, in "The Year of the Holocaust." In *Maus's* multi-media marketing (through magazines, exhibitions, the broadcast media, and now a CD-ROM version), as well as through its generic identity as a (non)fiction comic strip, Spiegelman's project refuses the autonomous modernist notions of culture which ultimately ground the Adornean position. His handling of the Holocaust denies the existence of an autonomous realm in which theoretical issues can be debated without reference to the material bases of their production. He heretically reinserts the Holocaust into the political realm by highlighting its necessary imbrication in the public sphere and in commodity production.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* and Antelme, *L'espèce humaine*.

"My parents survived hell and moved to the suburbs."—Art Spiegelman (sketch for *Maus*)

As a primarily visual artist, Spiegelman challenges dominant representations of the Holocaust by *drawing* attention to the pornographic effect of graven images within a Mickey Mouse industry dedicated to mechanical reproduction in the name of profit. But, *Maus* also operates significantly on the level of text and, in doing so, takes part in the discursive production of contemporary Jewish identity. Spiegelman makes analogies between image and text "grammar," and claims that, unlike most of his projects, *Maus* is "a comic book driven by the word" ("Conversation"). This "word" can only refer to the words of the father which Spiegelman renders not as mystical text but as fractured speech—what Roth calls, in the case of his father, "the vernacular" (*Patrimony* 181). As he makes clear in both volumes, Spiegelman created this comic book by taping Vladek's voice as he recounted his life, and then transcribing the events with accompanying pictures into *Maus*. He makes a particular point of describing the pains he went to in order to ensure the "authenticity" of Vladek's transcribed voice. Many readers have testified that much of the power of *Maus* comes from the heavily accented cadences—the shtetl-effect—of Vladek's narrative.<sup>9</sup> Spiegelman's staging of an exhibit on the making of *Maus* at the Museum of Modern Art, complete with the actual tapes of Vladek from which he worked, has, for most people, tended to reinforce this aura of documentary realism.

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9 Alice Y. Kaplan, wrote, for example: "Spiegelman gets the voice right, he gets the order of words right, he manages to capture the intonations of Eastern Europe spoken by Queens" ("Theweleit" 155).

However, in a perceptive discussion of *Maus* and the MOMA exhibit, Nancy Miller has pointed to the illusion which grounds this version of realism:

What surprised me when I listened to the tape was an odd disjunction between the quality of the voice and the inflections rendered in the panels. For while Vladek *on tape* regularly misuses prepositions—"I have seen on my own eyes," "they were shooting to prisoners," [and] mangles idioms...the total *aural* effect, unlike the typically tortured *visualized* prose of the dialogue in the comic balloons, is one of extraordinary fluency. ("Cartoons" 51)

A particularly good example of Spiegelman's unconscious tendency to *overdo* his father's accent comes in a passage, featured in the exhibit and broadcast on *Talk of the Nation*, in which Vladek recounts the shooting of a prisoner, a shooting which reminds him of having seen a neighbor shoot a rabid dog. In the book, Art has Vladek say, "How amazing it is that a human being reacts the same like this neighbor's dog" (II, 82). But on tape, Vladek says simply and *grammatically*, "How amazing it is that a human being is like a dog." This passage also contradicts Spiegelman's assertion that the changes he made were dictated by the necessity of condensing Vladek's speech, since in this case he adds words. For related reasons of affect, Spiegelman occasionally alters Vladek's words to keep up with the changing language habits of contemporary English-speaking Jews, as when he renders his father's phrase "We were talking Jewish..." as "We spoke Yiddish..." (I, 150); this subtle semantic gentrification registers the uneasiness at the heart of Jewish identities, as well as their susceptibility to change over time.<sup>10</sup>

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10 The evidence for this alteration comes from the exhibit, "Art Spiegelman: The Road to *Maus*," at the Galerie St. Etienne, November 17, 1992-January 9, 1993. The phrase, "talking Jewish," was one I heard my grandmother use, but which makes me (and, I would guess, Spiegelman) uncomfortable to hear. I suspect that the Jewish/Yiddish difference figures a generational divide.

Spiegelman is right: the power of *Maus* does derive from his father's words and evocative accent. But a close analysis of these words demonstrates the artist's reconstruction of a marked dialect. In *Jewish Self-Hatred*, Sander Gilman discusses the perception of Jews as possessing a "hidden" and devalued language of ethnic difference called, appropriately enough for Spiegelman's work, "*mauscheln*." Gilman quotes "Hitler's racial mentor, Julius Streicher" for his description of this perceived "hidden language of the Jews": "Speech takes place with a racially determined intonation: *Mauscheln*. The Hebrews speak German in a unique, singing manner. One can recognize Jews and Jewesses immediately by their language, without having seen them" (312). Arguably, an element of self-hatred exists in Spiegelman's careful "mauscheln-izing" of *Maus*, displaced into aggression against the vernacular of the father. But another reading of the linguistic manipulations of the book, analogous to my reading of the images and the animal motif, would emphasize the irony, conscious or not, which uses caricature to unsettle assumptions about the "naturalness" of identities. Self-hatred and, more obviously, aggression against the father would then become not so much qualities of the work as two of its significant themes.

The source-tape of the passage from *Maus II* about the shooting of the prisoner/neighbor's dog carries another level of significance for an understanding of the verbal narration of the story. As John Hockenberry remarks to Spiegelman after playing the segment of tape on NPR, during Vladek's telling of the story the barking of dogs can be easily heard in the background ("Conversation"). Nobody, including Vladek I would guess, could definitively say whether the dogs simply triggered the memory of the association between the prisoner and the dog in Vladek's mind, or, more

radically, whether the association derived from the present circumstances of the narration. But, in either case, this example points to the importance of the moment of *enunciation* in the construction of a narrative.<sup>11</sup> This narratological insight is not simply a truism of literary analysis; *Maus* everywhere thematizes the constitutive relationship between the present and different moments of the past. The importance of this temporal structure emerges in various facets of the work: in the constant movement between the tense interviews between father and son and the unrolling of the Holocaust story; in the second volume's insistent self-reflexivity and thematization of writer's block; and in Spiegelman's practice—in exhibit and interview—of revealing the process of "making *Maus*." With the production of a CD-ROM version entitled *The Complete Maus*—including sketches, source tapes, photographs, and other paraphernalia—Spiegelman's project has become fully conversant with the techniques of "The Year of the Holocaust." The *Maus* story now takes place in the non-linear sequential space of contemporary computer technology and poses challenges to the singular place of narration which anchors the traditional act of witness. Not simply a work of memory or a testimony bound for some archive of Holocaust documentation, *Maus* actively intervenes in a changing present, questioning the status of "memory," "testimony," and "Holocaust," even as it makes use of them.

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11 Maurice Anthony Samuels, in a very fine unpublished essay, makes a similar point about the interplay between past and present in *Maus*, and reads Art as "a parody of the traditional historian in what amounts to a parody of realist historiographic methods" (49-50).

"Pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics."—Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*

Thus far I have not differentiated between the two volumes of *Maus*, but Spiegelman's style clearly changes during the course of the thirteen years of his work on this project. While both volumes focus on the interplay of the past in the present and the present in the past, as Spiegelman has remarked ("Conversation"), *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History* concentrates more on the woundedness and wounding of the familial body, as its title suggests. Because Spiegelman wrote much of *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* in the wake of widespread popular acclaim, the second volume explicitly interrogates its own status in the public sphere, reflexively commenting on its production and interrogating the staging of "the Holocaust." But, given the serial nature of their publication in *Raw* over the course of many years, both volumes of *Maus* resist such easy binaries: the form and content of the comic strip's unfolding put into question the propriety of present/past and private/public distinctions.

*Maus I*, among its many functions, serves to catalogue "the Jew's body," an important concept in emergent Jewish theorizing which has been elaborated most fully by Sander Gilman in his book of that name.<sup>12</sup> In focusing on multifarious "representations and the reflection of these representations in the world of those who stereotype as well as those who are stereotyped" (*Jew's Body* 1), Gilman draws attention to the constitutive character of "difference," a category which need not succumb to the kind of

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12 Despite anatomizing a wide range of texts on Jewish themes, Gilman surprisingly makes no mention in *The Jew's Body* of Spiegelman or *Maus*.

binary ossification *Maus* resists. Spiegelman, like Gilman, anatomizes various Jewish bodies, including his parents' bodies and his own; he draws attention to feet (20, 83), eyes (40), hands (51), the beard (65), and the voice (throughout). Subtly, but perhaps decisively different are the Jewish/mouse noses, understood in contrast to the upturned snouts of the Polish pigs. When Vladek and Anja walk as fugitives through Sosnowiec, Spiegelman shows them hiding their noses by wearing pig masks (as he himself will later don a mouse mask). But while Vladek is able confidently to feign Polishness, Anja's body leaks Jewishness, her mouse tail drags behind her and signals the limits of her *goyische* drag: "Anja—her appearance—you could see more easy she was Jewish" (136).

The emphasis on the body and its difference, as all commentators have noted, reinscribes the same essential ethnic differences which drove the Nazi war machine. But this discourse on the body is fundamentally destabilized by the more pressing truth about the Jewish body under Nazism which haunts Spiegelman's story: its disappearance. Richieu's and Anja's absence and, by analogy, the absence of the millions of (Jewish and gay and Roma, etc.) victims, underlies Spiegelman's aesthetic choice of grappling with the Holocaust as an impossible visual text. Spiegelman's story does not seek, however, to flatten out analogous differences into a morality tale of universalist pluralism, but draws its power from negativity: an intimacy with death, pain, and loss motivates *Maus's* memory work.

In the first volume, the multiply-disappeared story of Art's mother, Anja, constitutes the primary wound around which the story turns, and points

to an almost erased narrative of Jewish gender relations.<sup>13</sup> Anja's story is absent for three reasons, all significant: her original diaries from Poland were lost in the war (indicating the immediate destruction at the hands of the Nazis) [I, 84]; Anja herself cannot tell her own story because she committed suicide twenty-three years after the war (indicating the unassimilable damage to the "survivors"); and Vladek later threw out her notebooks, in which she probably reconstructed her diaries (indicating the legacy of violence reproduced in some "survivors"). *Maus I* builds toward the revelation of Vladek's crime against Anja and memory, which Art names "murder" (159). Anja's suicide and Vladek's inability to mourn her death radically upset the notion of "survival" which ordinarily legitimates the Holocaust memoir; as Art puts it, "in some ways [Vladek] *didn't* survive" (II, 90). I do not think it would be an exaggeration to read this first volume as an attempt to occupy, or speak from, the impossible position of the mother's suicide; in this, Spiegelman's project resembles Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, which attempts "less to narrate history than to *reverse the suicide*" of many of its potential sources (Felman and Laub 216).

Spiegelman cannot literally reverse his mother's suicide, but he does question representations of Jewish women in his careful tracing of Anja's absent place of enunciation. Such a strategy takes on further significance given the relative lack of attention paid in dominant culture to the specific bodies and lives of Jewish women, a fact which emerges in the contrast between *Maus* and the respective academic and literary discourses of Sander Gilman and Philip Roth. In *The Jew's Body*, Gilman writes that "full-length

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13 See Nancy Miller's and Marianne Hirsch's articles for readings of Anja's absence which have influenced my own.

studies of the actual roles of Jewish women in this world of representations [of the body] and their own complex responses are certainly needed and in fact such studies at present are in the planning or writing stages by a number of feminist critics." Gilman goes on to assert, however, that his own work "has generally focused on the nature of the male Jew and his representation in the culture of the West; it is *this* representation which I believe lies at the very heart of Western Jew-hatred" (5). Gilman points to the importance of the circumcised penis as an index of Jewishness, but, given the tendency of the last couple of generations of North Americans of all religions to circumcise their male children, perhaps this particular symbolic structure is waning. I don't find it unreasonable to assume, for example, that in a book dedicated to "the Jew's body," Orthodox women's shaved heads or the ubiquitous Jewish mother's body would merit chapters.<sup>14</sup>

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14 In her 1992 performance piece about the struggles in Crown Heights between Hasidic Jews and Caribbean and African Americans, "Fires in the Mirror," Anna Deveare Smith included a perceptive monologue on Hasidic women's wigs which she immediately contrasted with the Rev. Al Sharpton discussing his "James Brown" coiffure.

I do not mean to imply that circumcision and the wearing of wigs are parallel phenomena, since only the former derives from a Biblical injunction and since it holds more fully for different types of Jews (although Gilman does point out that assimilated German Jews in the nineteenth century questioned the need for circumcision [*Jew's Body* 91]). Rather, I think more emphasis needs to be placed on the *heterogeneity* of Jewish bodies across various lines of socio-sexual demarcation: not "the Jew's body," then, but Jewish bodies. A full treatment of this question of Jewish women's bodies in *Maus* would need to consider the role of Art's wife, Françoise, and Mala, Vladek's second wife, both of whose marginalization is not always treated as self-consciously as the question of Anja (see Hirsch on this topic).

A broader account of gender politics in Spiegelman's work would also take into account his recent, controversial Valentine's Day cover for *The New Yorker* (February 15, 1993), which featured a painting of a Hasidic man kissing a black woman. A fairly direct reference to the same tensions explored by Smith in her performance, this "Valentine card" succeeded only in enraging black and Jewish communities. Spiegelman's avowedly utopian wish that "West Indians and Hasidic Jews . . . could somehow just 'kiss and make up'" ("Editors' Note" 6) was directed at racial tensions but did not take account of the

Spiegelman, like Gilman, implicitly acknowledges the "need" for inquiry concerning the Jewish woman's body. But Spiegelman goes further in structuring his story around just such a lack, and in repeatedly drawing attention to the gendered *violence* which has produced this empty space in his family history: Art's mother has had her voice forcibly removed by Vladek's stubborn annihilation of her diaries. The fictional and non-fictional writings of Philip Roth, which also mobilize family stories and historical motifs to reconfigure Jewish-American identity, similarly foreground the gender asymmetry of those very stories. But—unlike Spiegelman's portrait of Anja—Roth renders his fictional mother, Selma Zuckerman, as essentially and eternally without language: her writing, for example, is belittled as consisting only of recipes, thank-you notes, and knitting instructions. In *Patrimony*, he depicts his real mother not as a producer of language but as an archive; this "quietly efficient" woman was "the repository of our family past, the historian of our childhood and growing up" (36). There are, in the memoir, suggestions of a kind of patriarchal violence analogous to that enacted by Vladek—Bessie Roth's "once spirited, housewifely independence had been all but extinguished by [Herman's] anxious, overbearing bossiness"—but, unlike Anja, Bessie is never granted an autonomous voice which transcends the domestic sphere. Although she presided within what Roth calls "her single-handed

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intersection of race with gender and sexuality. The image of a white man with a black woman connotes a whole history of sexual exploitation grounded in racial domination, while, on the other hand, a Hasidic man (as Spiegelman does acknowledge) is forbidden from touching a non-Jewish woman. With respect to the present context, I would also note the (not) accidental erasure of the Jewish woman (as well as the presumably threatening black man) from this vision of reconciliation. The scenario effectively points to an ambiguity of Jewish "ethnicity": Jews will, depending on the context, appear as white, as other than white, or as both simultaneously (as here).

establishment of a first-class domestic-management and mothering company" (37), the mother's restriction to this limited space by a patriarchal Jewish culture never becomes thematized since *Patrimony*, as its title suggests, is first and foremost the story of "the male line, unimpaired and happy, ascending from nascency to maturity" (230). The mother is notably absent from (although one wonders if she has taken) the family photograph which inspires this last formulation and which adorns *Patrimony's* cover.

Both Roth and Spiegelman present narratives in which a certain version of history, the family, and the Holocaust implicitly disappears with the mother in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Selma Zuckerman dies after substituting "Holocaust" for her own name; Bessie Roth, the family "repository" and "historian" is "extinguished" upon Herman's retirement in the mid '60s; and Anja takes her Holocaust testimony to the grave in 1968. In their wake, the history of the family and the "race" devolves into the hands of what Paul Breines, in a recent attempt to characterize post-'60s Jewish maleness, has called a "tough Jew." These three "tough" figures—Nathan, Herman Roth, Vladek—are all equally well described by what Roth calls "obsessive stubbornness" (*Patrimony* 36). The quality is indeed ambiguous, seeming to provide at once the means for survival in difficult situations (whether historical or medical) and the resources for self- and other-directed violence in domestic and public spheres. While Roth's writing certainly produces ambivalent feelings about the "tough Jew," only Spiegelman foregrounds the ways in which this new Jewish subject has emerged through the repression (in two senses) of Jewish women's bodies and texts and the ways in which it can initiate new tales of violence.

The insertion in *Maus I* of the previously published "Prisoner on the Hell Planet"—the story of Anja's death—not only presents an expressionist stylistic rupture with the rest of the work, but reopens the wound of the mother's suicide by documenting the "raw" desperation of the twenty-year old Art. We should not read "Prisoner," however, as a less mediated expression of angst, despite its "human" characters and the reality-effect of the inserted 1958 photograph of Anja and Art. Rather, the "presence" of the maternal body here vainly attempts to compensate for what, many years later, remain the unmournable losses of Anja's suicide and of the years of psychic and political suffering which her life represents for Art. "Prisoner" draws attention to itself as at once *in excess* of the rest of *Maus*—a "realistic" supplement framed in black—and *less than* the mother (and the history) it seeks to resuscitate. With artist's signature and date (1972) following the last frame, "Prisoner" also complicates *Maus's* moment of enunciation—it simultaneously stands apart temporally and spatially from the rest of the work and is yet integrated into it. Like Art in this segment and throughout *Maus*, "Prisoner" cannot hide its difference from the totality of the family romance, but nor can it fully separate from the mother's story.

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By highlighting, once again, the complexity of the time of enunciation in *Maus*, "Prisoner" points to the possibility of reading the work as part of a historical process which Spiegelman has focalized through the family, but which opens into questions of public culture and politics. The moment of Anja's suicide—May 1968—serves as a touchstone for the counter-cultural

rebellion which obviously informs Spiegelman's work. In the same year that "Prisoner" appeared in an underground comics magazine, for example, Spiegelman edited an (explicitly) pornographic and psychedelic book of quotations, *Whole Grains*. This book, dedicated to his mother, foreshadows some of the irreverence, eclecticism, and black humor of *Maus* (and even contains the quotation by Beckett which Art brings up in volume II, 45—see below), but, it serves more as a marker of the cultural material of Spiegelman's life/career than as a developmental stage on the road to his masterpiece. The '60s cemented Spiegelman's identity as an artist, putting him in touch, through the underground comics scene, with other "damned intellectuals"; in *Maus* and in the pages of *Raw*, he continues this tradition of underground comics-with-a-message, even after "what had seemed like a revolution simply deflated into a lifestyle" (Spiegelman and Mouly 6).<sup>15</sup>

Besides constituting a moment of general cultural upheaval, the late 1960s inaugurated a new era for Jews in North America, one which would provide the sociological setting in which and against which Spiegelman would create *Maus*. Around this time "the Holocaust" took on its central articulated importance in Jewish life—and it did so in a particular context. As Jewish liberation theologian Marc Ellis writes,

it is in light of the 1967 war that Jews articulated for the first time both the extent of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust and the significance of Jewish empowerment in Israel. Before 1967, neither was central to Jewish consciousness; the Jewish community carried on with a haunting memory of the European experience and a charitable attitude toward the fledgling state. After the war, both Holocaust and Israel are seen as central

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15 For an essay which situates *Maus* within a tradition of Jewish comics, see Buhle. For a consideration of *Maus* as part of the emergent genre of the comic-novel, see Orvell.

points around which the boundaries of Jewish commitment are defined. (3)

For Ellis, it is imperative that Jewish people of conscience pass beyond the now problematic dialectic of innocence and redemption which poses all Jews as innocent victims and sees the state of Israel as a messianic redemption.

Theology, indeed all discourse, which partakes of the innocence/redemption dialectic ultimately serves as a legitimating apparatus for Jewish chauvinism and for the Jewish state, since, within its terms, we cannot acknowledge Jews as themselves victimizers, either as individuals or as a collective.

Spiegelman's *Maus* operates precisely in this troubled space "beyond innocence and redemption." The Jewish subjects he produces are certainly not innocent (they're barely likable), nor have they found redemption in Rego Park, the Catskills, Soho, or indeed anywhere. The depiction of Vladek—a survivor—as a purveyor of violence in his own home, especially against his second wife, Mala, raises the crucial question about how a people with such a long history of suffering (one which continues to the present) can in turn become agents of violence and torture.<sup>16</sup> While neither volume of this comic strip addresses the question of Israel/Palestine (except for one ironic aside—II, 42), in an interview Spiegelman makes a rather interesting comment which I believe invites this contextualization. During the discussion of *Maus* on NPR, Spiegelman alludes to the newscast which had opened the show. The top three stories, he notes, were on Pat Buchanan, South Africa, and an Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in which Israeli tanks crushed UN peace-keeping vehicles. Spiegelman calls these three disturbing news-stories evidence of the

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16 For information of Israeli torture in the Occupied Territories, see the report by the Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem.

"constant reverb" of the past into the present which *Maus* seeks to illuminate, "if you dig my drift." The drift is that for post-1967 diasporic and Israeli Jewish communities any text which explicitly challenges sentimental renderings of the Holocaust also implicitly challenges that tragedy's dialectical double—the legitimacy of Israeli incursions into Arab land.<sup>17</sup>

In the United States today, for Jews to speak out against the policies of the state of Israel, or to question the uses to which the Holocaust has been put, almost guarantees them unofficial excommunication from the Jewish community.<sup>18</sup> Although it carefully and provocatively explores the specificity of different generations of Jewish-American identity, *Maus* does not explicitly raise the question of American Jews' relation to the policies of Israel. To do so would have been (in my opinion) to lose the mass audience so important to the book's effect among Jews and non-Jews. Revealing Jewish racism against African Americans, as Spiegelman does (II, 98-100), falls within the mainstream realm of possibility. The contrast between that scene's inclusion and the absence of a consideration of mainstream Jewish-American support for repressive Israeli policies indicates the presence of a politically mandated, if unconscious, limit to representation.

In any case, the true strength of Spiegelman's critique comes from his presentation of a people situated "beyond innocence and redemption," in that

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17 For a memoir by a Palestinian living in Lebanon which movingly addresses this latter side of the dialectic (among other issues), see Makdisi.

18 Unfortunately, this seems to remain true even after the recent mutual recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. I would hypothesize that this event will in the long run produce major changes in the parameters of Jewish identity configurations; however, it remains too early to tell what those realignments will look like (or what the political ramifications of this flawed agreement will be for Palestinians).

implausible ethical space which Jews must occupy in relation to their troubled history. In this sense, I believe, Spiegelman avoids what Edward Said has justly called "a *trahison des clerics* of massive proportions," the "silence, indifference, or pleas of ignorance and non-involvement [on the part of Jewish intellectuals which] perpetuate the sufferings of [the Palestinian] people who have not deserved such a long agony" (xxi). To remember genocide without abusing its memory, to confront Jewish violence while acknowledging the ever-present filter of self-hatred—these are the difficult intellectual tasks which mark the mine-field of identity explored in *Maus* through the "lowbrow" medium of comics.

*Maus* as a whole works through the de-sacralizing and secularization of Jewish experience, but the second volume, in particular, marks a further crisis in Jewish identity. Through a staging of his own anguish at the success of the first volume, Spiegelman interrogates the ambivalent concept of Jewish power, especially the cultural capital won through the re-presentation of the Holocaust. Spiegelman condenses in one frame (which has attracted the attention of nearly all commentators) the various forces which unsettlingly intersect in *Maus*.

At the bottom of the first page of the chapter "Auschwitz (Time flies)" (II, 41), Spiegelman draws Art seated at his drawing board on top of a pile of mouse corpses. Outside his window stands the concentration camp guard tower which also figures in his "about the author" self-portrait; around the man in the mouse mask buzz the "time flies." Art's thought-bubbles read, "At least fifteen foreign editions [of *Maus*] are coming out. I've gotten 4 serious offers to turn my book into a T.V. special or movie. (I don't wanna.) In May 1968 my mother killed herself. (She left no note.) Lately I've been feeling depressed."

Meanwhile, a voice-off—revealed in the next frame as a camera crew—calls ambiguously, "Alright Mr. Spiegelman...We're ready to shoot!" Among other meanings hovering, like the flies, in this frame, the overlay of positions and temporalities communicates an important fact about anti-semitism: its effects persist across time and situation; someone is always "ready to shoot," even when no Nazis are visible and the media is under your control.

But the successful, avant-gardist artist has another difficulty to confront: his own implication in the scene. Who, after all, is responsible for the corpses at Art's feet, this frame asks? Art's guilt and depression, as thematized here, arise from his inability to make his mother reappear or the corpses (past and present) disappear. Instead, he finds himself unwillingly positioned as a willing victim of the culture industry. This industry—against which Spiegelman constantly defines himself—underwent its own crisis in the years between the publication of the two volumes of *Maus*. Articles proliferated on the deterioration of American publishing, and Spiegelman's own publisher, Pantheon, underwent a change in direction which caused an uproar among intellectuals concerned about the disappearance of non-mainstream work. In *Maus II*, Art finds that he can only actively resist such commodification through the contradictory gesture of directly addressing his audience, and thus assuring that his success—based in the first place on such self-consciousness—will continue. Art's subsequent conversation with his shrink, Paul Pavel (who died in 1992), carries this double bind to its logical (in)conclusion. Pavel, a survivor, wonders whether, since "the victims who died can never tell THEIR side of the story . . . maybe it's better not to have any more stories." Art agrees and cites the aforementioned Beckett quotation—"Uh-huh. Samuel Beckett once said: 'Every word is like an unnecessary stain on

silence and nothingness"—but then realizes the bind: "On the other hand, he SAID it" (II, 45).

The impossibility of staying silent—which Spiegelman's ceaseless work on *Maus* embodies—entails what Marianne Hirsch, following psychiatrist Dori Laub, has called "the aesthetic of the testimonial chain—an aesthetic that is indistinguishable from documentary" ("Family Pictures" 26) and that calls the reader into the story. The most striking example of this process, as Hirsch notes, comes at the end of the second volume when Spiegelman includes a photograph of his father taken just after his escape from the Nazis. This picture, sent to Anja as proof of his survival, was taken under strange circumstances: "I passed once a photo place what had a *camp* uniform—a new and clean one—to make *souvenir* photos" (II, 134). This photo, which could have been taken of anyone, survivor or not, "dangerously relativizes the identity of the survivor" (Hirsch 25). Taken out of the context of Vladek's message to Anja, it also marks the becoming-kitsch of the Holocaust. Thanks to the miracle of mechanical reproduction anybody can be a survivor! Philip Roth draws on a similar iconography, but, at least in *Patrimony*, he leaves out Spiegelman's self-conscious ironization. Roth seeks to wrap his father simultaneously in the uniforms of sentimentality and "tough" Jewish survivorhood, a strategy which, we have seen, works through the abjection, or at least forgetting, of the mother's experience.

Spiegelman's relationship to the photograph is more complicated. He clearly recognizes the sentimental tradition it inaugurates, *but he also has to use it*: "I need that photo in my book," he exclaims (134). In a gesture worthy of Beckett, *Maus* "stains" the "clean" uniform of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust; it reveals the impure basis of all Auschwitz *souvenirs*. Spiegelman

"needs" to offer us this uniform because it figures the act of reading: for those living "after Auschwitz" (even those who, like Vladek and Anja, lived *through* Auschwitz), the uniform provides a kind of access, albeit highly mediated, to the events themselves. As a "site of memory" the photograph—and by extension the book which contains it—creates the space of identification which Spiegelman relies on for affective and artistic success.

But identifications are always multiple, unforeseeable, and tinged with repudiation; readers are at least as likely to refuse to empathize with Vladek and instead to occupy Art's trademark vest—offered as a souvenir by an entrepreneuring "dog" (II, 42). The vest, as opposed to the uniform, represents the power and risk of writing (and drawing): the ability and the need of those raised in what Hirsch calls "post-memory" (8) to reconfigure their parents' stories without escaping either their failure to revive the dead or their recuperation by a dominant non-Jewish culture. Between the vest and the uniform, *Maus* unravels as "a survivor's tale" of "crystalline ambiguity."<sup>19</sup> Spiegelman demonstrates how "the Holocaust" ultimately resists representation, but he uses this knowledge as authorization for *multiplying* the forms of portraiture. In this mongrelized, high-brow/low-brow animal tale, ethnic and familial identities hover between a painful present and an even more painful past, between futile documentary and effective fiction. Simultaneously reproducing and recasting Holocaust history, *Maus* partakes of the melancholy pleasures of reading, writing, and talking "Jewish."

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<sup>19</sup> Spiegelman claims that the phrase "crystalline ambiguity" was his favorite description by a critic of *Maus* ("Conversation"). The only other place I've seen the phrase is in Spiegelman's own comments in *Tikkun*, where it appears unattributed. Talk about taking self-reflexivity seriously!

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While Spiegelman actually risks "Holocaust pornography" and creates images of Auschwitz, Roth interrogates the circulation of such images in different cultural locales (Jewish and non-Jewish, American and Israeli) without actually attempting to represent the Holocaust. But, despite their obvious differences of experience and style, Spiegelman and Roth both provide maps for locating the Holocaust in an age of post-memory. Employing the techniques and technologies of postmodern culture, they reframe the questions of imaging and representing the Holocaust posed first in a modernist mode by Adorno and Blanchot. In adopting ironic and popular idioms for their narratives, Spiegelman and Roth do not simply dispense with the injunctions of their philosophical forbears. Rather, they incorporate an interrogation of the limits of representation into the form and content of their work.

"Postmodernism," as used by the post-memory generation, consequently refers not to a definitive break with modernist aesthetics and ideologies, but to a reworking of their contradictions from a different cultural location. This cultural shift parallels the relationship between the "after Auschwitz" era and the histories which led up to it. In the "after after Auschwitz" moment, the Holocaust is not just the occasion for ethical and political evaluations of modernity, but also part of a larger mediascape in which entertainment, pedagogy, and ethnic/national identity politics form an inseparable—but rapidly fluctuating and contested—sequence of images and ideas. At no point is this new era of cultural flux more visible than in "The Year of the Holocaust" proper, with the opening of *Schindler's List* and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

## Chapter 5

"Touch an Event to Begin":  
Americanizing the Holocaust

Despite the potential for trivialization, "The Year of the Holocaust" provides a suggestive frame for beginning to understand the contemporary uses of the Nazi genocide. Yet as the serious ironies of Roth and Spiegelman demonstrate, the particular configuration offered by *Nightline* in no way determines or even indicates what all of those uses will look like. My subsequent discussions of *Schindler's List* and the Holocaust Museum will further elucidate the complexities and contradictions at the heart of the current dominant Holocaust discourse. The framework of "The Year of the Holocaust" suggests several parameters for the following discussion: the predominance of media and information technologies; the hegemonic position of American media in a global media environment; the "sequencing" of the Shoah in various media publics with other genocides and histories of oppression, as well as with other images and commodities of a postmodern consumer culture; the simultaneous desires for immediacy and decorum in the field of Holocaust representation.

In producing meaning between some or all of these poles, artifacts of "The Year of the Holocaust" such as *Schindler's List* and the museum remain in tension with the modernist aesthetics and politics of Adorno and Blanchot; at the same time they signal the eclipse of certain distinctions between different realms of culture, economics, and politics which the latter writers maintain. The space-time coordinates of the "after Auschwitz" chronotope in which Adorno and Blanchot perform their thought-experiments no longer constrain representation as they once did. But this is true because to a significant extent

they have been absorbed into contemporary culture, as the tensions inherent in Roth's and Spiegelman's critical uses of Holocaust "pornography" and "comix" make clear. This absorption signals both the "success" of Adorno's formulation and the dispersion of its power. As the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust becomes more difficult to maintain in a media-saturated culture, the Holocaust itself begins to function differently within the competing narratives of European and American history. No longer simply a challenge to European modernity, the Holocaust is now beginning to function as an anchor of American modernity, part and parcel of postmodern culture and economics, central to the political landscape of global political power.

### 1. *Schindler's List*

When Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* was released in December 1993 the Holocaust Memorial Museum had already been open for several months, but as *Nightline* demonstrated, these two different genres of phenomena contributed to each other's renown by becoming linked as part of a greater public event: the Holocaust's resurgent currency. Like the Memorial Museum, the film was conceived and received as a site of (moral and political) memory and a lesson in history simultaneously. As an incipient cultural monument, *Schindler's List* attracted responses of a quasi-ritual cast, with praise for, and citation of, the film coming to stand in for memorialization of the genocide itself. In his *New Yorker* review, for example, Terrence Rafferty suggested that Spielberg's symbolic act had a more than arbitrary relationship to Schindler's life-saving one: "The sheer unexpectedness of Spielberg's rigorous refusal to simplify his protagonist's motives seems to connect him, in a minor but distinct way, to Schindler himself" (129). Meanwhile, politicians,

educators, and activists were quick to seize upon the cinematically mediated heroism of Schindler in the face of Nazi antisemitism and annihilation as a history lesson for contemporary Americans. Thus, in New Jersey, Governor Christine Whitman proposed mandatory screenings of the film in order to promote "understanding" among students thought to be at the center of black-Jewish conflict. And in New York City, the Jewish Ad-Hoc Committee on Bosnia (JACOB) used the crowds lining up to see the film as an opportunity to pass out leaflets calling for action in the name of Holocaust memory to stop the Serbian genocide of Muslims in Bosnia.

These political, pedagogic, material, and semiotic practices to which Spielberg's film gave rise—and coverage of the film preceded its completion and extended well beyond its long and popular first run—demonstrate the degree to which the film was truly more of an event than a text. But while an understanding of the *Schindler's List* phenomenon necessitates the crossing of boundaries between media, genres, and disciplines, the film also deserves a more textual analysis. At the formal level, it is interesting to compare it to Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*, a film which, according to intellectual publicity (not least by Lanzmann himself), set new standards for austerity in Holocaust representation, and thus created a measure for previous and future representations. In responding to *Schindler's List*, Lanzmann took on the role of border guard and declared Spielberg's film inadequate to its subject matter. He thus protected the place of his own "sacred" film in the canon of Holocaust representation.<sup>1</sup> Such a critical move only reproduces what Miriam Hansen

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<sup>1</sup> For a disturbing description of *Shoah* as "a sacred film," see Elisabeth Huppert, "Voir (*Shoah*)" (*Au Sujet de Shoah* 152). Lanzmann's own descriptions of his film often come close to this theological hyperbole, as when he describes it as an "incarnation" of knowledge of the Holocaust (see, for example, *Au Sujet de Shoah* 282).

has called the "impasse" in theories of representation "after Auschwitz": the opposition of modernism to popular culture ("*Schindler's List* is not *Shoah*"). Contrary to Lanzmann's polemical attempt to differentiate himself from Spielberg's efforts, I find similar rhetorical claims to realism enunciated by both directors and their critics, as well as related attempts to create a mimetic correspondence between text and event, albeit with very different effects. The deconstruction of the opposition between these products of high- and popular-culture does not do away with their differences, but shifts the debate away from the representability of Auschwitz toward the uneven conditions of cultural production and reception.

Whatever the formal similarities and differences between the two films—and certainly the latter outweigh the former—they occupy structurally different positions within the interlocking state, civic, and financial spheres. *Schindler's List* not only embodies but also makes available a network of political, economic, and cultural meanings and practices which draw on, but extend well beyond, the film text and the novel on which it was based. As an "inspiring" entertainment commodity marketed within the global capitalist economy, *Schindler's List* has naturally circulated more extensively than Lanzmann's self-consciously difficult marathon and differently from the circumscribed public space of the Holocaust Museum (although computer links take it into the evolving realm of cyberspace). The combination of *Schindler's* moral and economic logics has produced effects and events which extend "The Year of the Holocaust" into profane realms not imaginable in relation to *Shoah*. Is this just another example of trivialization, as Lanzmann and other high-brow critics maintain? Or does the dissemination of *Schindler's List* help more people to "never forget"? The present cultural status of the Holocaust in the United States ensures that the answer to both questions is probably

affirmative. The Holocaust has an unignorable "presence" in contemporary reality, but the relationship between that media-based appearance and the absent past toward which it gestures is subject to debate and negotiation.

This uncertainty in the relationship between appearance and historical reality in the context into which *Schindler's List* entered echoes a tension already at work in the source text for Spielberg's film, Thomas Keneally's novel, originally called *Schindler's Ark*. Keneally's work is a documentary, or non-fiction novel, a genre which Barbara Foley has argued is particularly suited to depictions of the Nazi genocide ("Fact, Fiction, Fascism"). In a presumably unconscious slip, the copyright page of the recent edition of the novel includes the standard novelistic disclaimer: "This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental." While so ordinary as to almost escape notice, such a statement jars with the "Author's Note" which opens the novel. The note is attributed to "Tom Keneally," as if to assure us, by way of its informality, of its sincerity. Here, Keneally details his *modus operandi*, how he based his story on oral and written testimonies "enriched by a visit, in the company of Leopold Pfefferberg [one of the survivors], to locations that figure prominently in the book" (9). The overall historical truth of the Schindler story is not in question, although the discrepancy between the disclaimer and the note suggest the typically postmodern ploy whereby increasing testimony to authenticity only increases the story's aura of unverifiability and inauthenticity (as happens in *Operation Shylock*). Keneally solves this problem of ambiguity inherent in his project (regardless of the disclaimer) by appealing to precedent and by recasting the

contradiction as a felicitous opportunity: "To use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story is a course that has frequently been followed in modern writing. It is the one I choose to follow here—both because the novelist's craft is the only one I can lay claim to, and because the novel's techniques seem suited for a character of such ambiguity and magnitude as Oskar." Recognizing that the notions of "craft" and "technique" immediately raise questions about factuality, Keneally goes on to assure us that he has "attempted, however, to avoid all fiction, since fiction would debase the record, and to distinguish between reality and the myths which are likely to attach themselves to a man of Oskar's stature" (10). Keneally displaces the problems inherent in writing of the instability of genres onto the "ambiguity" of "Oskar"—once again using the informality of the first-name to signify authenticity, but here the authenticity of someone who is already "novelistic" and "mythic." Perhaps the lesson of this prefatory material is to reveal the rhetorical strategies which *equally* underwrite both fictional and non-fictional texts. By their nature, these strategies (of which the novel includes examples of both) leave a margin of uncertainty which, given the history of understandings of Holocaust aesthetics, serves as a particularly troubling and fascinating pole of attraction.

While the preface reveals the general rhetoricity of documentation, it ultimately leaves its own particular rhetoric unexamined. The problem here is not of the blurring of the fiction/fact border, but that precisely in relying on factual testimonies Keneally misses the "truth" of the events he attempts to describe. Many reviewers of the film adaptation complained that Spielberg erased the individuality of the Jews in his movie, depicting them primarily as a group and bestowing upon them all of the stereotypes of antisemitic propaganda. Lawrence Langer was one of the few critics who defended this

aesthetic choice as faithful to history, reminding us that Nazi policy worked at the level of the collective and discouraged the singling out of individual Jews (*Admitting the Holocaust* 9). In any case, the same complaint cannot be made about the novel which works according to a somewhat different logic. In fact, Keneally balances his free indirect discourse between Schindler and a relatively well-differentiated Jewish "cast of characters." The disquieting quality of Keneally's depiction of Jews has other grounds. By basing his novel predominantly on a faulty interpretation of survivor testimony, Keneally imposes a false teleology on the events.<sup>2</sup> Simply put: No Jewish character whose consciousness the narrative enters (even at the third-person distance) ever dies. Again and again the "Schindler Jews" are put into life-threatening circumstances only to be saved by "a special and startling deliverance" (152). The point is not that these all but unfathomable stories are not true—the least familiarity with the irrational rationality of the Holocaust confirms their likelihood—but that they couldn't not be true, based as they are on a certain reading of *survivor* testimony.

At the limit, Keneally's depiction of these survivors borders on the grotesque. In a passage describing the liquidation of the Cracow ghetto, Keneally's original source, Leopold Pfefferberg, finds himself coming upon "a pile of victims. They lay, some of them, with their heads split open, their limbs

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<sup>2</sup> My point is not that survivor memoirs necessarily impose a false teleology of survival. The most powerful memoirs work against this omnipresent possibility by employing a variety of narrative means. For instance, in Robert Antelme's *L'espèce humaine* and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz* the narratives do not culminate in the expected joy of liberation, but in an increasingly dark view of the "concentrationary universe." (The invented title of the later English editions of Levi's book works against the narrative itself.) In Charlotte Delbo's *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, the possibility of such a celebratory conclusion is foreclosed entirely by the text's fragmentary anti-narrative of vignettes and expressionist images. Keneally's use of testimony to affirm "survival" is thus not fictional, but it does not correspond to the majority of memoirs either.

twisted. . . . Somehow it did not occur to Pfefferberg to look for the bodies of his wife and the [family whom she was to hide with]. He sensed why he had been placed there. He believed unshakably in better years to come, years of just tribunals. He had that sense of being a witness which Schindler had experienced on the hill beyond Rekawka" (184). The narrative brutally objectifies the victims, rendering them as a "pile" of body parts; this is more an effect of the novel's strategy than of Nazi dehumanization since the author carefully avoids identifying any of these bodies, and assures us that Pfefferberg's wife could not be included. As depicted by Keneally, the survivor's thoughts verge on the triumphalist, exalting his calling ("why he had been placed there") and his optimism in the face of an unredeemable mass murder. The passage also implies that justice *would* ultimately come, a piety contradicted by subsequent judicial history and by the magnitude of a crime for which proper atonement is all but unimaginable.<sup>3</sup> This is a perverse parody of the often expressed desire of the persecuted to survive *in order* to witness. Moshe the Beadle in Elie Wiesel's *Night* does not return from the killing fields to the village because he senses "better years to come," but rather worse ones (*Night Trilogy* 13-17). In the logic of Keneally's novel, even the tattoo, the symbol of the permanent wound inflicted upon the survivors, takes on an inverted significance: "Henry Rosner arrived first. He too stood at the wire, his left arm bared and raised. 'The tattoo,' he called in triumph" (328).

The novel *Schindler's List* leaves out the most important aspects of the Jewish experience of the Holocaust and all but erases the genocide, replacing them with "deliverance" and heroism, adjectives not even appropriate to a

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<sup>3</sup> See Jean Améry's essay "Resentments" in *At the Mind's Limits* for a blistering attack on the possibility of justice for the Holocaust survivor.

profound understanding of the survivor testimony on which it is based.<sup>4</sup> If the first problem with Keneally's depiction of Jews is *which* Jews he portrays, the second is *how*, in the majority of cases, he portrays them. Here, the novel and film converge, as demonstrated by use in the 1993 edition of the novel of cover art taken from the film's publicity posters—the "List" superimposed over a strong hand and forearm lifting up a smaller, more childlike hand.

Reminiscent of the Sistine Chapel creation scene, the poster for *E.T.*, or a Bennetton advertisement, this visualization captures both Keneally's and Spielberg's attitudes toward Schindler. The Jews are infantilized (almost bestialized in the novel's original "ark" logic) in the service of the German's heroization, if not deification. As the novel quotes a survivor, "He was our father, he was our mother, he was our only faith" (330). Only long after the war, when Schindler's life had become a series of marital and business failures, can "Oskar's children . . . become his parents" (397). Schindler's gender and generational crossing—from man to woman, from father to son—contributes to the sense of divinity Keneally creates around him: "If the man was wrong, if he lightly used his powers of passing on conviction, then there was no God and no humanity, no bread, no succor" (92). Or, more coyly but explicitly: "It is not too fantastic to say that he desired [the Jews] with some of the absolute passion that characterized the exposed and flaming heart of the Jesus which hung on Emilie's wall. Since this narrative has tried to avoid the canonization of the *Herr Direktor*, the idea of the sensual Oskar as the desirer of souls has to be proved" (350). The distance from *Herr Direktor* to *der Herr* [the Lord] is, it would seem, not so far. By canonizing the "good German," infantilizing the survivors, and then remembering them at the expense of the

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<sup>4</sup> For a rigorous consideration of survivor testimony, see Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*.

dead, Keneally's *Schindler's List* confirms the insight which a temporarily infantilized Art gets from his analyst in *Maus*: "It's as if life equals winning so death equals losing" (II 45).

The movie poster adds the slogan "The list is life" to the picture used on the book cover and thus establishes an equation crucial to the film's narrative. In this image the list names are superimposed, tattoo-like on both the childlike "survivor's" arm and the strong "saviour's" arm; once again, the mark of entry into the death world of the extermination camp is inverted and recast as "life." In addition the tattoo marks both arms, linking them and annulling their difference, even as the vertical image hierarchizes the strong over the weak. The film's script assigns the famous lines, "The list is an absolute good. The list is life," to Stern instead of Keneally's anonymous narrator (cf. 290). In the book, Stern plays no visible role in the list's construction, and in fact, the list goes through various emendations as positions are bought, sold, and traded by Goldberg, a member of the Jewish police (and a figure amply represented by Spielberg, although not in this capacity). After the men are mistakenly sent to Gross-Rosen, the list is lost and then reconstituted somewhat differently by Goldberg. The women, as shown in the film, end up first at Auschwitz, where they in fact stayed for several weeks; although Keneally is vague on this point, it is virtually impossible that precisely the same 300 women, without losses or exchanges, could have returned from Auschwitz to Schindler's factory in Brinnlitz. The point is that the film, even more than the novel, erases the randomness of the list and replaces it with *continuity*. A traditional film narrative demands recognizable and consistent characterization and a rational connection between characters' behavior and their fate. The events of the Nazi genocide, as represented even by the exceptional story of the "list," do not

fulfill those narrative demands. The Holocaust also renders the notion of an "absolute good" nonsensical. Absolute good cannot exist in a context where survival is arbitrary and death the rule: the list also conjures up the non-list, uninterrupted genocide. The maintenance of continuity in Spielberg's version sutures the gap between "film character" and "Holocaust survivor," preserving the narrative logic of identification proper to classical Hollywood cinema.<sup>5</sup> The film has been rightly criticized for reducing the Jews to antisemitic stereotypes; this stereotyping also contributes to the maintenance of character which the force of the law of genre demands, and this has major implications for the kind of story that can be told.

The inclusion of Stern at the genesis of the list culminates a process, typical to film adaptations of novels, which constructs individual characters through composite portraits. Stern, who plays a much smaller role in the novel, takes on some of the attributes of other Jewish characters, such as Schindler's other "business associate" Bankier, and even of the dissident Nazi Titsch, who in fact composed the list with Schindler. In constructing Stern—the most individualized Jewish figure, along with the much abused Helen Hirsch—as a kind of collective subject Spielberg might have activated the power of the testimonial, a genre which channels a collective experience through an individual voice. In the field of Holocaust literature, testimonial memoirs by writers such as Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, David Rousset, and Charlotte Delbo have given expression to the systematic specificities of the Nazi concentration and extermination camp universe. But, as the scene in which Stern is saved from deportation illustrates, Spielberg, like Keneally, has

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<sup>5</sup> In this light, it is surprising that Lawrence Langer, one of the most stringent critics of Holocaust representations, should argue that, "With few exceptions, director Steven Spielberg resists the temptation to let old values invade new terror" (*Admitting the Holocaust* 9).

another project. When Schindler discovers that his accountant has "mistakenly" been put on a list of people to be deported from the ghetto, he rushes to the train station to extract him. While Spielberg demonstrates, through irony, that Schindler's motives at this point are primarily selfish, he nonetheless reproduces the idea that only a mistake could have sent Stern to the cattle cars. Set off against crowds of anonymous prisoners, the individuated Stern emerges as a grateful and relieved survivor, while the forgotten masses go, not mistakenly, but intentionally to their (unrepresented, off screen) deaths. In the narrative's logic, the survival of Stern is essential since he mirrors and upholds Schindler's accomplishments, giving them an interpersonal (i.e., "ethical") authenticity. What Keneally calls a "tender connection" between the two men is confirmed in the movie by Stern's presentation to Schindler, on behalf of the survivors, of a gold ring (fashioned from gold extracted from another character's tooth). This homosocial ritual culminates the "purification rites" for Schindler, who has been partially sullied by his (opportunistic) homosocial bonds with Amon Goeth and other Nazi leaders.

The scene of Stern's near-deportation indicates a more general ambivalence about the centrality of bureaucratic murder in the Nazi genocide. The film oscillates between the implicit acknowledgment of mass death and its disavowal or distancing through the focus on the exceptional paths of the featured characters. The scenes of the women at Auschwitz focus the dilemmas of representing the Holocaust. As has been reported, Spielberg, in his quest for site-specific authenticity, wanted to film within Auschwitz, but was discouraged from doing so by the World Jewish Congress. A compromise was worked out in which Spielberg chose to film outside the camp, reconstructing

the interior of the camp and using the front of the entryway as the back.<sup>6</sup> The arrival of the train carrying the women onto the (reconstructed) unloading ramp is an effective impressionistic evocation of the "night and fog" of Auschwitz, even if the *real* SS guardhouse in the background of the scene actually ends up looking like a stage set. Complete with dogs (albeit muzzled), dramatic lighting-effects, a haunting musical theme which contrasts sharply with the rest of the soundtrack, and impersonal camera angles emphasizing the camp's chaos, this sequence captures some facets of the "concentrationary universe" not because of the authenticity of the location or the testimony on which it is based, but because it employs to maximum effect the special effects of the cinematic medium. Spielberg's stylization of Nazi terror is equally present in the clearing of the Cracow ghetto, which also cites documentary conventions and incorporates them into the fictional world of the feature film. Significantly, these are the only two sequences in which the collective and impersonal (if not the bureaucratic) nature of that terror is represented.

It would be easy to condemn Spielberg's "aestheticization of politics" (*pace* Benjamin) by contrasting it to the starker aesthetic of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985)—and this is indeed what Lanzmann does in an essay on *Schindler's List* which appeared in *Le Monde* upon the film's opening in France in March 1994. As its title suggests, Lanzmann's intervention, "Holocauste, la représentation impossible," concerns what Saul Friedlander has called "the limits of representation." The notion that representation of certain aspects of the Holocaust entails constraints particular to this event is not new, and goes back to the dominant reading of Adorno on "poetry after Auschwitz," a reading which tends to limit a full reading of Adorno's texts. In the case of

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<sup>6</sup> See Gary Weissman, "A Fantasy of Witnessing," for an analysis of the filming process and its media coverage.

Lanzmann, the notion of representational limits proves contradictory, imprecise, authoritarian, and ill-suited to describing the heterogeneity of modes of Holocaust representation. Lanzmann begins by challenging the view dominant in the United States that Spielberg has captured "la vérité historique" [historical truth] (I). He defines the problem as one of a lack of correspondence between the film's symbolic act and the historical events represented: "It's the whole problem of the image and of representation. Nothing which happened resembles that, even if everything appears authentic" (VII).<sup>7</sup> While the failure of the correspondence theory of meaning is a commonplace in contemporary semiotics, Lanzmann's theory of representation is inconsistent. On the one hand, he demands historical authenticity; hence, he accuses Spielberg of overall distortion, but praises him for including a scene in a Cracow pharmacy which he himself has seen and which therefore really exists (I)! On the other hand, historical authenticity is not what Lanzmann really demands, and his argument extends beyond the terms in which his critique of Spielberg is couched.

Lanzmann suggests in a provocative hypothetical example that there is something radically anti-historical about his position. First, he establishes the uniqueness of the Holocaust as a function of its unrepresentability in a phrase which he reproduces word for word (without citation) from his 1979 article "De l'Holocauste à *Holocauste*" (*Au Sujet de Shoah* 309): "The Holocaust is unique first of all in that it erects around itself, in a circle of flames, a limit which cannot be breached because a certain absolute is intransmissible: to claim to do so is to make oneself guilty of the most serious sort of transgression. Fiction is a transgression; I profoundly think that there is an interdiction of

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<sup>7</sup> "C'est tout le problème de l'image, et tout le problème de représentation. Rien de ce . . . qui s'est passé se ressemblait à ça, même si tout paraît authentique."

representation."<sup>8</sup> Based on this understanding of interdiction, he criticizes Spielberg's attempts to recreate Auschwitz (and almost film a gas chamber) and argues that such "reconstruction" is equivalent to a process of historical falsification ("reconstruire, c'est, d'une certaine façon, fabriquer des archives" [VII]). He then shifts away from *Schindler's List* and into a tangential, disconcerting example: "if I had found a film—a secret film because it was strictly forbidden—made by an SS man showing how 3,000 Jews—men, women, and children—died together, asphyxiated in the gas chamber of Crematorium 2 at Auschwitz; if I had found that, not only would I not have shown it, I would have destroyed it. I am not capable of saying why. It goes without saying" (VII).<sup>9</sup> The argument here goes well beyond "fictional" or mimetic representation, and targets the image itself. In this part of his argument, Lanzmann allows no distinction between various degrees of mediation, so that the hypothetical documentary footage has no priority over "reconstruction." But what history could proceed without documenting and reconstructing the events which it takes as its object? Why would the Holocaust represent a particularly unrepresentable event? And why should visual representation in particular be singled out as problematic?

Lanzmann does not provide answers for any of these questions, but rather confuses matters further by eliding the difference between the

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<sup>8</sup> "L'Holocauste est d'abord unique en ceci qu'il édifie autour de lui, en un cercle de flamme, la limite à ne pas franchir parce qu'un certain absolu est intransmissible: prétendre le faire, c'est se rendre coupable de la transgression la plus grave. La fiction est une transgression, je pense profondément qu'il y a un interdit de la représentation."

<sup>9</sup> "[S]i j'avais trouvé un film existant—un film secret parce que c'était strictement interdit—tourné par un SS et montrant comment 3, 000 juifs, hommes, femmes, enfants, mouraient ensemble, asphyxiés dans une chambre à gaz du crématoire 2 d'Auschwitz, si j'avais trouvé cela, non seulement je ne l'aurais pas montré, mais je l'aurais détruit. Je ne suis pas capable de dire pourquoi. Ça va de soi."

uniqueness of the Holocaust and the uniqueness of his own act of representation, *Shoah*, which he puts forward as a qualitatively different solution to the "impossible" problem of representation. The movement in Lanzmann's argument from the circle of fire to the fabrication of archives to their destruction remains unexamined, and while his argument derives explicitly from a certain understanding of the ban on graven images, the rhetoric of destruction by fire cannot but create an uneasy echo of Nazi book burnings and crematoria and of the *Nazi's own* injunction against filming the genocide. Lanzmann's text activates the *Bilderverbot* [the ban on graven images] by providing a problematic paraphrase of Adorno's "poetry after Auschwitz" proposition (itself a secular version of the ban): "I truly thought, with humility and pride, that there was a before and an after *Shoah*, and that after *Shoah* a certain number of things could no longer be done. Now Spielberg has done them" (VII).<sup>10</sup> Lanzmann's paraphrase is unintentionally ironic (but also typical) in that the substitution of his film for the event itself (Auschwitz) reproduces exactly the logic which he detests in the reception of *Schindler's List*, and which is typified by Rafferty's review. Nevertheless, *Shoah* received the very same type of reception. In an "authorized" collection of essays and interviews pertaining to Lanzmann's film, *Au Sujet de Shoah*, the film and the event often intermingle; frequently, the film title is not italicized, as in the very book title, creating confusion about whether genocide or film is at issue.

It is, in fact, this confusion between historical events and their representations (and between different meanings of representation)—a

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<sup>10</sup> "Je pensais vraiment avec humilité et orgueil qu'il y avait un avant et un après *Shoah*, et je pensais qu'après *Shoah* un certain nombre de choses ne pouvaient plus être faites. Or Spielberg l'a fait."

confusion promulgated by both Spielberg and Lanzmann and by many of their critics—that leads to absolutist positions on "representation." If representations have the power to displace historical events completely, then perhaps interdiction is a necessary stance. But if the event is radically cut off from representation and yet representation is an unavoidable fact of all modalities of communication, then interdiction amounts to a destruction of the historical archive. Despite the risks of distortion and displacement, representations of all sorts—including documentary footage, historical documentation, fictional and non-fictional narratives, etc.—remain the only access to historical events. No preconceived evaluation of which media are appropriate or inappropriate (i.e., the image) to a particular event can come to terms either with representation, history, or the event they both seek to capture. While the discourse surrounding the films bears this point out, perhaps it is more interesting at this point to show how *Schindler's List* and *Shoah* themselves almost converge—how, in fact, questions of representation cannot be expunged from the attempt to understand the Nazi genocide.

Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half hour documentary consists of an extensive series of interviews (selected from hundreds of hours of film) with perpetrators, victims, and bystanders of the "Final Solution." Focusing exclusively on testimony and memory—with the exception of his conversations with political scientist Raul Hilberg and his readings of two written documents—Lanzmann forgoes the typical use of newsreel and archival footage (used to dramatic effect in documentaries such as Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* and Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*). But in several fascinating sequences *Shoah* does perform a reenactment of the type he complains about in Spielberg. Lanzmann's documentary also stages an entry into Auschwitz, even if the terms of its representation are quite different from

those in *Schindler's List*. While Philip Müller, one of the few survivors of the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando* provides a voice-off narration of his arrival in the camp, Lanzmann's camera traces his path through the present-day memorial camp. This sequence differs dramatically from Lanzmann's usual technique of contrasting the horror stories of the survivors with repetitive, slow tracking shots of the quiet and empty contemporary sites of memory (or oblivion). While the latter shots are impersonal, those accompanying Müller are presented as subjective through the use of a steadily moving hand-held camera and an itinerary that closely matches that of the narrative. The camera shows us the chimney as Müller mentions noticing it, and then circles around the crematorium before entering it through a back doorway. Once inside, it continues to follow Müller's narration, turning quickly in reaction to twists in the story and mimicking his implied gaze. The camera surprisingly mimes the conventions of a thriller or horror film in which one character is being stalked and observed from the perspective of a pursuer. In fact, Lanzmann has been cited as describing *Shoah* as "at moments a crime film . . . [on the mode of] a criminal investigation" (Felman and Laub 256n).

In an equally strange sequence, Müller describes the layout of the gas chamber/crematorium complex two times: the first description, narrated in a descriptive mode, is accompanied by footage which follows Müller's narration by using a plaster model of the crematorium, complete with bodies, on display at the Auschwitz Museum; the second describes the complex from the point of view of the doomed while the hand-held camera moves through the ruins of buildings at Auschwitz-Birkenau. As the camera reaches the gas chamber, the narrative changes and takes the perspective of the Nazis. We only hear Müller's evocation of what happened within the chambers after the camera has cut back to the witness and the distanced scene of the testimony's

enunciation. The gas chamber scene represents both the telos of the narrative and that which cannot be represented or evoked visually, except from the outside. These sequences in no way make, or were meant to make, viewers think they were "there"—as the self-conscious use of the model and the ruins as "stage sets" demonstrates. Yet Lanzmann's camerawork is not simply a parody of any attempt to represent the universe of Auschwitz, since it enhances the power of sequences which concern some of the most unknown and extreme aspects of extermination. It is the contrast and the shifts between the "imitative" sequences and the non-"fictionalizing" context of the rest of the film which prevents viewers from reading the former shots as part of a "realist" mimetic universe, a fact which suggests the shifting contingency of generic categories and complicates the question of representation.

What is being stalked in such scenes is history, or perhaps more accurately, in Felman's words: "new possibilities of understanding history, . . . new pragmatic *acts* of historicizing history's erasures" (Felman and Laub 253). But *how* historical understanding is being stalked is also crucial—the atypical camerawork indicates a visual-aesthetic dimension too-often overlooked by critics, like Felman, whose emphasis falls on the word. As a *Sonderkommando* member with a much too intimate knowledge of the production of death, Müller's testimony is particularly suited to an exploration of the possibilities for understanding and representing industrialized murder. In an interview with *Le Nouvel observateur* at the time of the publication of Jean-Claude Pressac's *Les Crématoires d'Auschwitz*—the book by the former denier which "proved" the existence of the gas chambers—Lanzmann cites Müller's testimony in *Shoah* as having described "in minute detail" [avec une minutie extrême] virtually everything unearthed by Pressac. Referring to another survivor, Lanzmann states: "I prefer the tears of the barber of Treblinka in

*Shoah* to the Pressac document on the gas detectors. His tears and his choked words are the very mark of truth: there is more truth in them than any material 'proof.'"<sup>11</sup> In his critique of Pressac, Lanzmann points to two aspects of his film which correspond to two poles of a decades-long debate about Holocaust representations (initiated perhaps by Adorno's comments on "poetry after Auschwitz"). As summarized by Gertrud Koch in an important essay on *Shoah*, these poles correspond to a "premodern aesthetic" committed to the communication of meaning and "a modernist aesthetic which aims at expression rather than communication" ("Aesthetic Transformation" 17). Müller's testimony *communicates* "in minute detail," claims Lanzmann, while the barber's *expresses* affect (tears) and the inability to communicate (his choked words).

In fact, as Koch argues, Lanzmann's aesthetic goes beyond this binary by providing a "montage of space and time"—the Bakhtinian chronotope—which "irritate[s] our realistic sense of spatiotemporal certainty: the presence of an absence in the imagination of the past is bound up with the concreteness of images of present-day locations" (21-22). In other words, in refusing to accompany narratives of annihilation with images of the past, but instead insisting on the anachronous image of the present Lanzmann creates "the most extreme discrepancy between what there is to see and the imagination (*Vorstellung*) triggered by that seen" (23). For Koch, this syncretism of "indifference" and "horror" signals "an aesthetic transformation of the experience of the annihilation," a hybrid aesthetic form which eludes the problems of realism and modernism (23, 24). But the hand-held camera which

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<sup>11</sup> "Je préfère les larmes du coiffeur de Treblinka dans "Shoah" au document Pressac sur les détecteurs de gaz. Ses larmes and sa parole étranglée sont le sceau même du vrai: il y a là plus de vérité que dans n'importe quelle "preuve" matérielle" ("Auschwitz: Enquête" 49).

explores the gas-chambers and crematoria cuts across the realist/modernist debate in another, more disturbing way which is not fully acknowledged by Koch. It seems to indicate a mute desire for a confirmation of horror beyond historical documentation, expressive affect, or the "presence of an absence"—a confirmation proper to artistic form.

In *Schindler's List*, Spielberg also approaches this aesthetic limit in the controversial sequence in Auschwitz where the women have their hair cut and are sent to the showers. Playing on the spectator's knowledge of the processes leading to gassing—which comes both from testimony, such as that alluded to above in *Shoah*, and from an earlier scene in which a character reported the rumors of this scenario—Spielberg painfully draws out the tension of the women's uncertain fate in a scene whose pornographic essence has the least to do with the masses of naked bodies. As in the entry into Auschwitz proper, the music changes dramatically—this time from the Auschwitz orchestral theme to a lone violin—when the women appear in what appears to be the antechamber of death. As the women are herded into the showers, the camera takes the perspective of one of the prisoners, simultaneously creating identification and enhancing the chaos of the scene. Once in the shower room, however, the camera pulls back; as the door slams shut, the camera appears at a peep-hole, suggesting an entirely different identificatory position. The camera then returns to the shower room and moves between a bird's-eye view and more subjective angles, as the music swells and the women are given a reprieve from death. The camera's movement inside/outside and above/within the scene of death indicates contrary desires to "testify" from within an impossible space and to distance the film from what has been judged socially unrepresentable.

In this ambivalence, *Schindler's List* does not differ from *Shoah's* occasional attempts to heighten the effect of the evocation of the gas chambers and crematoria with different imitative, but estranged, practices (using a model, using subjective camera shots). Where it does differ crucially is in the affect it produces in the spectator. By maintaining an unbridgeable gap between testimony and "being-there," Lanzmann marks the desire for the real without arousing the suspicion that he might attempt to simulate it. By using dramatic tension to arouse uncertainty, Spielberg displaces the horror from the actual (unrepresented) experience of the gas chambers to the fear that he might actually transgress the socially constructed line drawn around representations of mass murder. While *Shoah's* ambivalent, shifting modes of representation of the killing sites suggest that the transgression of taboo resides in the Nazis' social and historical actions and the deathworld of the gas chambers and crematoria which they created, *Schindler's List* shifts the question of transgression to the field of representation, even as it ultimately retreats from crossing the line to a "tasteful" distance. Instead, Spielberg chooses to indicate the gas chambers through more traditional means, by repeatedly following the gaze of the women as they watch others descend into the real gas chambers and "emerge" through the smokestack. The similar "aestheticization" and the dissimilar effects of that process which *Shoah* and *Schindler's List* bring to the representation of Auschwitz bear out Koch's useful clarification: "the various patterns of meaning inscribed in the representations of the death camps cannot be distinguished according to literary forms or genres. Just as purely autobiographical, documentary literature is not free of the compulsion to search for meaning, aesthetically wrought works like Paul Celan's do not necessarily lapse into affirmative idealization because of their aesthetic stylization" (17).

There is one moment when *Schindler's List* might, arguably, be performing the same act of spatiotemporal disorientation as *Shoah* does in those scenes of "reenactment" in which the past comes to haunt the present. At the end of the narrative when the war has ended and Schindler has fled, Spielberg breaks out of the diegetic frame of the narrative and momentarily disrupts spectator identification by presenting the "real" "Schindler Jews" alongside their fictional representatives. This uneasy coexistence of presentation and representation indicates an attempt to displace the realism/modernism opposition through a piously postmodern reflexivity. However, the sequence ultimately contributes to a process, found also in Keneally's novel, in which the appeal to a surplus of reality—actual testimony or actual bodies—unwittingly fictionalizes the real. The sequence begins with the liberation of the Brinnlitz factory by a lone Soviet soldier on a horse. When asked by Stern and the others which direction they should head in now that they are "free," the soldier warns: "Don't go east. That's for sure. They hate you there. I wouldn't go west either, if I were you." Faced with this seemingly impossible dilemma, the former prisoners ask where they can get food. The soldier gestures toward the horizon and asks, "Isn't that a town over there?" At this moment, the literal becomes metaphorical and a way out is proposed, as the scene changes and the Jews are pictured coming over a ridge in what the music suggests must be Israel. After shots which reveal the story's "dénouement"—Goeth's execution, Schindler's business failures—in classical Hollywood "non-fiction" style, an even more dramatic transformation takes place. The last captions describing Schindler's postwar canonization appear: "In 1958, he was declared a righteous person by the council of the Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, and invited to plant a tree in the Avenue of the Righteous. It grows there still." As the final sentence appears on the screen, the actors are

seen coming over the hill and then suddenly the film shifts from black and white to color and the actors are replaced by "The Schindler Jews today." In the final pre-credit scene, the lead actors accompany the survivors they portrayed in the film, as together they place stones, according to Jewish ritual, on the Israeli gravesite of Oskar Schindler.

This sequence overlays a series of binary oppositions: black and white/color, past/present, diegesis/reality, actor/survivor, Europe/Israel. This ending offers both a surplus of reality meant to supplement and confirm the realism of the film's narrative and a syncretism of fiction and reality which destabilizes both the real and the fictional. In the former supplementary mode, *Schindler's List* repeats a gesture seen in other Holocaust films, most notably Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa*, and in other historical, non-fiction features, such as Spike Lee's *Malcolm X*, which ended with various celebrities and ordinary people proclaiming "I am Malcolm X." In Spielberg's film, as in Holland's (where the living prototype of the protagonist appears at the end on his kibbutz), the site of the real is Israel, where both films locate the survivors. In associating Israel with the foundation of its narrative project, *Schindler's List* is again not far from *Shoah*. According to Felman, the "finding" of Chelmno survivor Simon Srebnik in Israel "is *the finding of the film itself*": "the discovery of Israel as the place where, on the one hand, the remnants of the extinguished European Jewery [sic] could gather (find each other), and where, on the other hand, Lanzmann, coming from outside, can for the first time look inside and discover the reality of the Jews" (255, 254). In her description of Lanzmann's discovery of a Jewish identity beyond the terms of the Sartrean existentialist analysis of the "Jewish question," Felman anticipates much of the discourse which accompanied *Schindler's List* about Spielberg's "born-again" Jewishness. For both directors, the cinematic project

involves the construction of a diasporic Jewish identity in relation to the events of the Holocaust, but grounded in the "reality of the Jews," that is, Israel. Israel, as a presumed site of "realness"—an originary site of testimony in *Shoah* and the endpoint or telos for both films—provides the supplement which allows the directors, in their very different ways, to broach the problem of representing the Holocaust and, particularly in *Schindler*, to cross over the breach between diegesis and reality, between "inauthentic" American Jew and survivor.

At the same time that the mise-en-scène of the survivors at the end of a Hollywood film seeks to provide a historical grounding where it is perceived to be needed, the simultaneous inclusion of the actors produces an ambiguous mixing of representational worlds, which again has its correlate in Lanzmann's scenes of reenactment (i.e. the barbershop scene). This scene of actors hand-in-hand with survivors was probably meant to signify the intimate connection between the film and the history of the Holocaust—the film's fidelity to the real and to the individual survivors, and through them to the unnamed millions of victims to whom the film is dedicated. But the real cannot be produced, only its effect; the more vigorously representation tries to assert its unmediated nature, the more it piles effect upon effect. In this case, it is not the presence of the survivors as such which produces the vertiginous, if momentary, effect, since their presence has been announced by a variety of conventional means, from the shift into color to the text identifying them as "the Schindler Jews today." Rather, it is the return of the actors into the historical space of a contemporary Jerusalem cemetery which unsettles the relationship between the film and the real. The porousness of the boundaries between narrative and history *within* the film may be intended to enhance the confusion between the film as a whole and the history which is its

referent, but instead it reduces the survivors to non-speaking extras in their own lives.

The privileging of the exceptional survivors at the expense of the majority who had no means of escape ends by traducing the survivors themselves. The implied narrative trajectory from handsome actor to dignified survivor disallows the actual voices of the survivors, because their stories might disrupt the seamlessness with which Spielberg has constructed his narrative of the Holocaust and its aftermath. No sense of the psychic or physical cost of survival—which is unavoidable in, for example, oral testimony—disrupts the pious graveyard finale. This ambivalence at the heart of the new discourse of survival opens the possibility for dubious interventions. Even Lanzmann, who generally makes no effort to spare any of his witnesses the opportunity to display their scars, may be unable to avoid rewriting certain survivor testimonies. In a note to *Holocaust Testimonies*, Lawrence Langer reports that Filip Müller, whose narratives chart the terrain of the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz in *Shoah, stammers*, and that Lanzmann edited out his speech impediment (210n). If true, this would add another layer of meaning to Lanzmann's act of coupling Müller's testimony with hand-held camerawork on location. In those sequences, breaks in the soundtrack of the narrative are "audible" (a kind of absent presence) and, if Langer were correct, would represent not just an attempt to synchronize the voice and setting (as in realist films), but an effort to eliminate the traumatic effect of the voice. In smoothing over narrative ruptures, Lanzmann rejoins Spielberg, who smooths out potential survivor testimonies and the complications they would add to his story of redemption. Both films would then display elements of what Eric Santner in "History beyond the Pleasure

Principle" calls "narrative fetishism": the desire to cover over trauma and rupture with continuity.

Although *Schindler's List* and *Shoah* share certain representational techniques and, to some extent, each manipulates survivors and survivor testimony, they nevertheless do so to different effect. *Schindler's List* reconstructs the sites of death not in order to re-present bureaucratic murder, but as the pretext for a story which, exceptionally, eludes death: the reconstructed Auschwitz and "showers" are mere props, not because they are "simulations" but because they only serve as a backdrop for the survival story of the "Schindler Jews." Hence, the palatability of Spielberg's sets as sites for "memory tourism." *Shoah*, on the other hand, revisits the extermination sites in order to find a metaphor for the persistence of death and the conditions for mass murder in a world which still, unbelievably, looks innocent: as Simon Srebnik says upon returning to Chelmno in a passage at the beginning of *Shoah* which determines how the contemporary images of the extermination sites should be read: "It was always this peaceful here. Always. When they burned two thousand people—Jews—every day, it was just as peaceful" (6). Lanzmann's re-presentation of the extermination camps works because it demonstrates that the camps never were what we thought they were. He replaces the almost comforting other-worldliness of the "concentrationary universe" with a more "banal" proposal: genocide took place in ordinary villages under the watchful eyes of ordinary villagers. For that reason, it is eminently representable, especially in shots which seem to show nothing unusual. In Lanzmann's own words, written after his first research trip to Poland: "there is no need in Poland to reconstruct the Holocaust or to strain one's imagination; the Holocaust lets itself be seen immediately in the

permanent and perennial sites."<sup>12</sup> The Poles and Poland in Lanzmann's film stand in for the nonsynchronous elements of the Holocaust, which Ernst Bloch, in "Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics," connected with fascism several years before the genocide, and which contrast to the technologically modern elements of the Holocaust (which Lanzmann also shows). In his belief that he can read Poland "immediately," without mediation, Lanzmann no doubt reproduces an anti-Polish discourse of primitivism and displaces blame away from the German center of the Holocaust's instigation. But, above all, the Polish scenes authorize Lanzmann's particular mode of representing the past *in and through* the present because "a voyage to Poland is first and foremost a voyage in time" ["un voyage en Pologne est d'abord et surtout un voyage dans le temps" (*Au Sujet de Shoah* 213)]. While Lanzmann's account of Poland is historically and politically simplistic, if not misleading, it is necessary to his project because it grounds his representational practices in a way analogous to Spielberg's reconstruction of Auschwitz and his "on location" filming.

Once the all but untenable absolutist position that Auschwitz cannot be represented has been given up, then the possibility of multiple points of view and multiple constructions must be entertained; as Berel Lang put it, "No single representation, in effect, without the possibility of another" ("Representation of Limits" 300). If both films (and many others) "represent the Holocaust," why should Lanzmann express such resentment over Spielberg's not altogether successful attempt? The fact remains that, pluralist

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<sup>12</sup> "[N]ul besoin en Pologne de reconstruire l'Holocauste ou de s'efforcer à l'imagination, l'Holocauste se donne immédiatement à voir à travers la permanence et la pérennité des lieux."

bromides to the contrary, not all representations are equal. While *Shoah* was indeed warmly received by mainstream critics and had success in commercial runs in the United States, no possibility exists for a nine-and-a-half hour documentary by a French intellectual to compete with a feature film, albeit a long one on an unpleasant subject by Hollywood's leading director. The struggle between *Schindler's List* and *Shoah* for control over the Holocaust's "image"—staged primarily, it should be noted, by Lanzmann himself and other middle-brow and high-brow critics—derives in part from the misguided totalizing ambitions of each film to tell the "definitive" story of the Nazi genocide, but it also reflects the current asymmetry of globalized communications. As the 1993 GATT controversy in France over the import of Hollywood films and American culture demonstrated, economics and culture are inextricable from each other and mutually determining under the conditions of late capitalism. Because of the cultural and economic power of the United States culture industry—which French cultural producers brought into renewed focus in the GATT battle—*Schindler's List* was able to sweep the globe, creating a situation in which all that many people around the world will know about the Holocaust is the marginal story of a microscopically minor element of its history. At the same time, however, the success of Spielberg's film contributes to the possibility (and indeed the desire) for more knowledge about and more representations of the Shoah (and probably more screenings of *Shoah*, too, as Miriam Hansen has suggested). These tensions between the popularizing reach of American culture and the strictures of European cultural critique constitute the present state of the dialectics of Holocaust representation.

The effects of the asymmetry between Lanzmann's and Spielberg's films are foregrounded by considering the circulation and consumption of

Holocaust-related images, services, and products which resulted from the publicity surrounding *Schindler's List*. Unlike *Shoah*, *Schindler's List* also takes part directly in a larger dynamic of Holocaust commodification, both as a quintessential example of Hollywood "product," and as the source of some bizarre product "tie-ins." Interestingly, the film's music has been one of the most popular elements for appropriation, perhaps because it provides a way to evoke the film's dark subject without too literally re-presenting it—the "ban on graven (Holocaust) images" is obeyed, while the capital associated with its imaging is accrued. On March 9, 1995, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall hosted a concert called "Sound Tracks II: Great Music from the Movies." Hosted by Jeffrey Lyons and Michael Medved of *Sneak Previews* fame, an advertising brochure promised that audiences could hear the Little Orchestra Society perform selections from *Sunset Boulevard*, *Citizen Kane*, *Now, Voyager*, and "John Williams' haunting music from *Schindler's List*." It is precisely the possibility of fetishizing elements of *Schindler's List* (i.e., the soundtrack album, the stellar performance) which constitutes its continuity with the canon of classical Hollywood cinema and its discontinuity from the soundtrack-less *Shoah*.

A month before the Lincoln Center concert, at the World Professional Figure Skating Championships, no fewer than two skaters performed to that same "haunting" soundtrack—a soundtrack, it should be pointed out, which seemed to suit the aesthetics of figure skating quite nicely. American Paul Wylie donned a concentrationary gray outfit with Hebrew letters stitched into the back and performed a routine that included what the announcers described as a "controversial Nazi salute." The section of the soundtrack which Wylie chose for the beginning of his routine was from the scene in which the Schindler women are presumed to be about to enter the gas chambers, but

which turn out to be simply showers. In appropriating horror for the purposes of entertainment, Wylie was not far from the logic of the film itself, in which, in the "gas chamber" sequence, the horror turns out to be only a citation of horror for the purposes of suspense and narrative complexity. Sporting Holocaust drag earned Wylie the top score for artistic merit among the male competitors.

Yet more symbolically tangled was the German skater Katarina Witt's performance, which employed a different segment of the soundtrack. According to the alternating male and female accounts of NBC's announcers, Witt was "very much aware of the symbolism of a German skating to the *Schindler's List* music." "She plays the role of the little girl in the red coat in the movie. . . . Alive. . . . All grown up." Flashing her "trademark smile," Witt, according to the announcers, "delivered a message": "She told me that her generation is younger and different, but should never forget the Holocaust. She made that statement tonight." While obviously well-meaning (as was Witt's tribute to the people of Sarajevo at the 1994 Olympics), the "symbolism" and "message" of her performance were, at best, ambiguous. In a Holocaust film focused more on "life" than on the millions of innocent victims of Nazi bureaucratic murder, the "little girl in red" sequence was a synecdoche, albeit kitsch, for those victims. By portraying even that character as "alive" and "all grown up," Witt unwittingly negates the "truth-content" of the fiction, displacing history through a second order re-presentation. Combined with her self-presentation as "younger and different," Witt's "statement" uses fictional Holocaust signifiers (the music, the red outfit) to effect a double removal of the Holocaust from memory: contemporary Germans are far from the genocide, she implies, and by virtue of this distance, are empowered to reverse its course. In this scenario (as mediated through its television coverage), the new

German generation takes the place of the murdered Jewish one, donning its clothes, listening to its music, rewriting its history. "Younger" Germans identify *as* German by identifying *with* Jewish victims, thus implicitly claiming a victim identity vis-à-vis the shadow of the past, while hiding that victimization through the fantasy of (the little girl's) survival.<sup>13</sup>

In Witt's and Wylie's self-serving, if well-intended, philosemitism, it is tempting, if somewhat cynical, to read a mirrored version of Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of antisemitism: "The purpose of the Fascist formula, the ritual discipline, the uniforms, and the whole apparatus, which is at first sight irrational, is to allow mimetic behavior. The carefully thought out symbols (which are proper to every counterrevolutionary movement), the skulls and disguises, the barbaric drum beats, the monotonous repetition of words and gestures, are simply the organized imitation of magic practices, the mimesis of mimesis" (DoE 184-5). Except for Wylie's momentary miming of the Nazi salute, the performances are as far from fascist formulae and Nazi symbols as one could be. Yet in ritually re-presenting a representation of the symbols and uniforms of the victims, the skaters fall into a logic similar to the one the critical theorists associate with fascism, even as they evacuate its links with barbarism. We are, once again, both close to and far from Friedlander's "new discourse," Sontag's "fascinating fascism," or Rosenfeld's "return of the

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<sup>13</sup> A similar dynamic is probably at work in the cult status surrounding Anne Frank (which obviously extends beyond Germany). Identifying with Frank facilitates the emergence of a certain kind of adolescent identity which simultaneously normalizes the Holocaust victim and adds pathos to ordinary teenage angst. In a recent tribute to Frank in a Presbyterian church in New York City, publicizing the new "definitive" edition of her diary, the diary's publisher, Doubleday, gave out blank diaries inscribed with Anne Frank's name to all in attendance. The blank pages of "My Diary" seek to elicit identification with the victim, but create a strong ambivalence, not least because of this "gift's" links to the implied (necrophiliac) consumption of her posthumous book.

Führer" (*Imagining Hitler* 1-12)—all analyses which convincingly point to a continued obsession with the seductions of power and sadism. The "return of the girl in red," however, indicates a parallel discourse of victimization and survival which is finding a willing audience in the United States and in parts of Europe.

While Spielberg's film has inspired some to imagine the return or the resurrection of Europe's murdered Jewish population (an act with distinctly Christian undertones), it has inspired others to return to the sites of destruction themselves, and thus to take part in what James Young calls "memory tourism." A recent *New York Times* Travel section article entitled "Remembering Poland's Jews" claims that "'Schindler's List' and the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz have reawakened interest in the country's Holocaust sites." Complete with a list of travel agencies and accommodations, but not (tastefully?) places to eat or drink, the article describes a tour which author Ruth Ellen Gruber took to some of these "Holocaust sites":

In a shiny German-built minivan, on a sparkling clear day last summer, we drove down a road in Cracow, Poland, paved with Jewish gravestones. The stones were fake—and I knew it: just concrete casts of real tombstones, they led into a fenced enclosure of crumbling barracks and rusting barbed wire that were also, I knew, simply stage sets. My knowledge, however, did little to dispel my acute uneasiness. Three other tourists and I were on a guided tour of sites related to Steven Spielberg's movie "Schindler's List." . . . For nearly two hours we followed in the footsteps of both Oskar Schindler and Mr. Spielberg, sometimes tangled in a disconcerting mixture of celluloid and reality. (8)

When Holocaust sites come to include movie sets, we have definitely entered into the realm of what Gary Weissman, rewriting Barthes, calls "the *special effect* of the real" ("Fantasy of Witnessing" 300). Weissman's analysis of the film's pre-publicity remains valid for the post-film tie-ins: "In representations of the Holocaust and Nazism, a fascination with the blurring

of borders between fact and fiction, real and simulation, and the present and the past competes with an interest in the Holocaust itself" (296). Gruber's "acute uneasiness" can be read as that *frisson* which results not so much from driving over desecrated gravestones as from taking part in a memorial act which puts into question the distinctions between the opposing terms which Weissman enumerates and which constitute the poles which memory must maintain. In this way, and more than through chronological accident, *Schindler's List* takes part in and helps to produce "The Year of the Holocaust": that strange combination of the Holocaust's omnipresence and its evacuation, whether through "the mimesis of mimesis" or the substitution of the (present) reality of the appearance for the non-appearance of the (past) reality.

## 2. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

By combining artifacts, simulations and replications, and state of the art technology, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. takes part in the same dynamic as *Schindler's List*. But it also creates solutions which do not simply reproduce the debates which set Spielberg against Lanzmann in an agonistic popular/modernist struggle. The USHMM consists of the most complex and, with all likelihood, the most lasting of the cultural phenomena collected under the "Year of the Holocaust" rubric. Although it opened in April of 1993, the museum's particular engagement with the present struggle over the history and appearance of the past represents the outcome of a fifteen year process involving political, intellectual, moral, and aesthetic negotiation. As a very specific kind of "text," the "memorial museum" calls for

a methodology of reading which combines historical genealogy, phenomenological description, anthropological observation, political critique, and literary and art criticism. Because the museum collects so many elements into one unstable whole and thus demands an impossibly heterogeneous critical practice to engage with it, we should not expect it to yield a singular meaning or significance, especially within a constantly changing cultural context. Like other sites of memory and knowledge production, the USHMM functions necessarily and (in part) intentionally as a place in which to observe what James Young calls the "activity of memory, by which artifacts of ages past are invigorated by the present moment, even as they condition our understanding of the world around us" (*Texture of Memory* 14-5). In narrating and interpreting some aspects of the museum's "activity of memory," we can distinguish the overlap of at least four interrelated levels: the museum's background (the commissioning and planning), its physical site (a combination of geography, architecture, and design), the exhibit contents (including questions of narrative, technology, and cultural identity), and the museum's reception (by popular, mass media, and intellectual publics). The USHMM is simultaneously a very particular and ambivalent Holocaust representation and a two-tiered pedagogical machine: it produces historical knowledge and emotional-subjective identifications at the same time that it embodies in its architecture and narrative a spatio-temporal map of the Nazi genocide.

Although a search for the museum's origins would have to consider a number of tangential phenomena extending all the way back to the Second World War, if not beyond (some of which I have already discussed), the usual place to start such a discussion would be with the founding by President Jimmy

Carter in 1978 of the President's Commission on the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> This presidential act took place in a highly politicized context involving concern on the part of Jewish Americans over Carter's sale of military equipment to Saudi Arabia, a sale perceived to threaten the security of Israel. This political context intersected with a cultural environment in which, with the televising of the *Holocaust* mini-series, interest in the Shoah was building among Jews and non-Jews alike. The fortuitous coming together of the historical-cultural and the contemporary political—the Commission as a response to a political crisis—could only take place because of the links which had already been established in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war between the Holocaust and Israel. Within a year of its founding, the Commission's chair Elie Wiesel had drafted a series of proposals which called for the establishment of a museum and a "'living' monument." While those proposals have been implemented, another recommendation was rejected for political reasons: "the group urged that a Committee on Conscience of prominent citizens be established to sound an alarm whenever and wherever human rights were violated," but the State Department and the "human rights" President rejected that proposal as potentially disruptive of, and embarrassing to, the U.S. government's business as usual (Miller 227).

As the President's Commission gave way to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and the concrete planning and design of the museum got under way, political controversies both internal and external helped to shape the project.

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<sup>14</sup> A fascinating discussion of the museum's development in the context of Jewish-American memory and identity politics can be found in Judith Miller's *One, by One, by One* (220-275). A book-length history of the museum entitled *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* is forthcoming from Edward Linenthal. My discussion of this history is based primarily on Miller's book and on Linenthal's review essay "The Boundaries of Memory."

The external contests over memory and memorialization included Ronald Reagan's infamous Bitburg excursion (cf. Hartman, *Bitburg*)—at which time Wiesel asked the entire Council to resign—and architect James Ingo Freed's struggles with the institutionalized aesthetics of Washington's Fine Arts Commission—which limited the degree to which the museum could provide "critiques of the monumental Washington front" (cf. Freed 90). Various nation-states also attempted, with mixed results, to influence what the museum included and what it excluded. Thus, the German government's desire to see the success of the *Bundesrepublik* honored as a bulwark against fascism was not fulfilled, but Turkey succeeded in discouraging extensive consideration of the Armenian genocide, and the U.S. State Department successfully lobbied against provoking contemporary action through allusion to the ongoing Bosnian massacre.<sup>15</sup> Within the Memorial Council, disagreements ranged from global questions involving the overall shape of the exhibit's narrative to local decisions about which items to display. One controversy which has already received a great deal of attention concerned what to do with nine kilograms of human hair sent from the State Museum of Auschwitz (Linenthal, "Boundaries of Memory" 421-5; Ryback, "Evidence of Evil"). The hair had been cut from the heads of victims just before or after they were gassed in order to be used in German industries. Although the Council originally voted to include the hair as material evidence of the ghastly extremes which Nazi "rationality" took, opposition from many survivors and others resulted in a photograph replacing the actual hair in the museum's permanent exhibit. All of these

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<sup>15</sup> The German example is discussed in Linenthal, "Boundaries of Memory" (427). Linenthal discussed the other examples in a presentation at the third Lessons and Legacies conference on 24 October 1994 at Dartmouth. At that time, Linenthal described these incidents as examples of "burdensome" or "hypocritical public memory."

matters are part of the museum's memory work and reveal the competing interests and perspectives involved in the production of Holocaust memory and representation. This history continues to echo in the ultimate form of the museum's exhibits and programs. Nevertheless, that final structure cannot be read only from a historical perspective, since it is continually reactivated in the present through the reception and modification of its finished form.

In considering the completed museum, one of its most salient and determining qualities is its location. In tune with its origins in a Presidential decree, the Holocaust Museum is situated in a politically overdetermined site just off Washington's Mall. It is thus almost literally in the shadow of the Washington and Jefferson Monuments, and just a few hundred yards away from the various components of the Smithsonian's national museum complex. In such a situation, the USHMM has become an unlikely blockbuster tourist attraction, filled to capacity with visitors from school trips and tour buses. The crowds lining up to learn about the Nazi destruction of the European Jews thus represent not so much the expected ethnic identity politics of the contemporary United States, but rather the political economy of tourism in the nation's capital. Most, although certainly not all, are white, and seem to come from middle-class Middle America. The result of the "official Washington" site and the government imprimatur seems to be the integration of the Holocaust Museum, if not the Holocaust itself, into the fabric of American historical memory.

This process of partial "assimilation" has been named "Americanization" by the director of the museum's Research Institute, Michael Berenbaum. Embracing Americanization as the best means of importing historical knowledge of events in which Americans have been involved in a variety of

ways, yet which remain primarily European, may be inevitable but it is also risky. In an interview with journalist Philip Gourevitch, Berenbaum described what he intends by this term: "In America . . . we recast the story of the Holocaust to teach fundamental American values. . . . For example—when America is at its best—pluralism, democracy, restraint on government, the inalienable rights of individuals, the inability of government to enter into freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and so forth" (Gourevitch, "Behold Now Behemoth" 56). Gourevitch, in his thoroughgoing dismissal of the museum as just another "theme park," remains doubtful as to the relevance and efficacy of such a program, even as he subscribes to the very values enumerated by Berenbaum. Despite attempted Americanization, Gourevitch writes, "The fact remains, however, that the Holocaust was a European event, and that even at its utter worst, America has been a place where the Holocaust—a program of genocidal extermination mandated and implemented by every organ of a nation-state—has never entered the realm of possibility. . . . To suggest that there are meaningful comparisons can only distort our already feeble understanding of European history and—worse—obscure our perception of current American reality" (56). While Gourevitch is correct to question the efficacy of comparison, by suggesting that "denouncing evil is a far cry from doing good" (57), his own understanding of American history might surprise African Americans, Native Americans, and victims of the American war in Indochina (not to mention American refugees and survivors of Nazi Germany). In the light of the legacies of slavery, Native genocide, and other state-sponsored American crimes—regardless of whether they "equal" the Holocaust—Gourevitch's complaints about the museum seem close to those of the various governments who correctly sensed the political impact such a historical museum could have in the present. The history of the

Holocaust Museum demonstrates, in other words, that Americanization need not satisfy all of the champions of American values, but remains a contested process.

In any case, the version of Americanization actualized by the museum does not necessarily bear out Gourevitch's fear that the museum will function as "a therapeutic mass-cultural experience" (57) or Berenbaum's hope that it will serve as a site of democratic pedagogy. Neither of those poles capture the complexity of the USHMM, which "Americanizes" the Holocaust in a significantly different way from that found in *Schindler's List* (although the film has also been described and used in terms of therapy and pedagogy). The latter can be considered American both by virtue of its optimistic narrative and hero, whom *Le Monde* termed an "ambiguous champion of 'free enterprise'" (3 March 1994: 1; my translation), and its status as entertainment (which facilitated the various product "tie-ins"). The USHMM Americanizes the Holocaust in more contradictory fashion: it simultaneously brings the Holocaust closer to the history of the United States and brings Americans closer to the history of the genocide (which could just as easily be described as "de-Americanization"). These two processes are themselves ambiguous, but never does the museum provide the kind of exceptional "happy ending" that the film does, and never does the museum's "user friendliness" decay to the status of entertainment or object of perverse fascination (which does not discount that such reactions are still conceivable). The presence of a film of survivor testimony at the end of the permanent exhibit makes a sharp contrast to the end of *Schindler's List*, where the survivors are presented but not allowed to represent themselves.

This major event in European history is assimilated to the official version of American heritage primarily through a stress on the role of the

United States Army in liberating some of the concentrations camps and defeating Nazi Germany. School groups and tours who enter through the 15th Street entrance pass through Dwight D. Eisenhower Plaza, dedicated in honor of the General and the allied forces. An engraved stone reads, "Victorious in battle, they brought the Third Reich to an end, encountered its concentrations camps, liberated the survivors and bore witness to the Holocaust." On the exterior walls of the Hall of Remembrance which bounds the plaza are engraved quotations from Eisenhower and Presidents Bush and Reagan. The effect of this first introduction is to place the Holocaust squarely within U.S. military and political history, if not without irony, given Reagan's Bitburg offense and the more relevant historical fact that allied forces were by no means fighting to "liberate survivors" or "bear witness" to an event which had not yet been named and which the allies' leaders had effectively ignored. Entering through the main 14th Street entrance produces more or less the same effect through the juxtaposition of a quotation from President Clinton with flags representing the American army units which had liberated camps.<sup>16</sup>

The permanent exhibit itself is framed by a similar rhetoric of American liberation. Upon entering the elevators which carry visitors to the fourth floor where the exhibit begins, attention is focused through the use of a video monitor. When the doors close and the sound and images begin, everyday conversations tend to be silenced quickly and replaced by a hushed and serious demeanor which lasts, more or less, throughout the exhibit visit. As the monitor displays footage of the first encounters of the American army with the camps, an American soldier recounts his experience of this discovery:

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<sup>16</sup> Only more knowledgeable visitors would probably recall that the Soviet Army liberated the most famous extermination camps, such as Auschwitz—a historical detail which Spielberg, to his credit, does not distort.

"Sick, dying, starved people. . . . Such a sight as that, you . . . you can't imagine it. You, you just . . . things like that don't happen" (transcribed in Linenthal, "Boundaries of Memory" 407). The stuttering, incomplete sentences register and "translate" an unprecedented encounter which, it is subtly implied, the visitors are also about to have. As the GI's testimony ends, the elevator doors immediately spring open in front of a large photo of American soldiers standing over the charred remains of camp prisoners. In an adjacent video screen a soldier enters the frame and proceeds to observe and photograph victims who never made it out of the last cattle cars. These first minutes of the visit provide a powerful grid through which the remainder of the visit (which has taken most visitors more than three hours) will be understood. They introduce the power of the video/film and photographic image, upon which much of the exhibit relies, and they focus this image through the gaze of American soldiers. Even if later components of the museum will significantly complicate this identification with the "liberators" by drawing attention to the government's less than consistently righteous response to the Shoah (e.g., the *St. Louis* refugee fiasco, the failure to bomb Auschwitz), the overall impression of the United States as a past and future bulwark against fascism and injustice persists, and indeed, given the location of the museum, could do nothing else.

Nevertheless, the question of which notion of "Americanness" to incorporate into the Holocaust remains. In the final pages of his already classic study of Holocaust memorials, *The Texture of Memory*, James Young writes of the museum that "the visitors' experience will begin appropriately with America's first direct Holocaust experience—through the eyes of the American GIs who liberated Buchenwald and Dachau" (345). If Americanization is perhaps inevitable, it is by no means obvious that the only "appropriate" form it will take is through the equation of Americanness with

the American army. Given the status of the United States as a land of immigrants, a significant number of whom are either survivors of the Holocaust, as Young also remarks, or relatives of survivors and victims, not to mention perpetrators and bystanders, a significantly different point of view could have been established for the narrative that follows. Acknowledging from the beginning the Americanness of exile and suffering, and not just liberation—both outside of and within the United States—would have revealed a range of identifications well beyond that with the military. Such an alternative strategy might have fulfilled in a more "appropriate" way the dialectic of Jewish uniqueness and moral universality which characterizes the museum's overt mission. In short, whether Americanization is condemned or condoned, it needs to be recognized as an open-ended possibility, as subject to negotiation as "democracy" itself.

It is one of the peculiarities of the museum that this previous process of identification with the victors is experienced almost simultaneously with a countervailing force: identification with the victims. Even as visitors are held rapt by the video/voice over of liberation in the elevator they are also being definitively removed from American "soil." The elevator, as the museum's architect and designer have emphasized, is the most dramatic of a series of design strategies meant to leave present-day Washington behind. Besides being a celebration of contemporary democratic society, the museum is also a time-machine which transports its visitors to another place in history. When visitors emerge from the elevator they have also been encouraged to assume—in a distanced way—a new identity. In one of the museum's controversial "experiential" ploys, one which has also undergone several emendations, visitors choose an identity card which bears the story of an individual Holocaust victim. Originally, the only information which the card originally

contained concerned the "character's" prewar life; visitors were given identities which matched their gender and age. At various points, corresponding to turning points in the exhibit's historical narrative, a computer could be used to update the story. Because of technical difficulties, the computer aspect was dropped. During an intermediate stage, visitors simply chose a card which revealed the life story of a victim. Currently, the cards have been redesigned as small booklets in order to preserve the narrative development of the original plan. Whether or not visitors actually use the cards as intended and form some kind of temporary identifications will vary—personally, I was not drawn in—but the cards certainly contribute to making what Young calls "a victim-imagined museum" (344). The doubled identifications which result from the layering of Americanness with victimization parallel those of *Schindler's List* in which the triumphal narrative of survival and rescue proposes two distinct characters for identification (Stern and Schindler), as well as a more distanced acknowledgment of the death of the "others."

As visitors are drawn into the museum's narrative, these two "suggested" points of view begin inevitably to come into conversation, if not conflict, with the cultural identities (ethnic, national, sexual. . .) visitors already carry with them. As the accounts of Miller and Linenthal indicate, the negotiation between competing claims of victimization vis-à-vis both the Nazi period (homosexuals, Poles, Roma. . .) and other histories of oppression (Armenians, African and Native Americans. . .) presented the exhibit's organizers with some of their most difficult challenges. The narrative they constructed in order to "solve" these tensions simultaneously places Jews at the center of a hierarchy of victims and renders them abstract by representing them only in the context of Nazi power. The combination of stratification and

abstraction allows "American" identifications with the victims at the same time that it does not upset the "American" ideals of the liberators.

While the overarching narrative follows the persecution and extermination of Jews, twists and side-bars are added to account for the multiple "Enemies of the State." A certain lack of resolution regarding the place of these enemies unsettles the linearity of the consideration of Jews in the Holocaust. Admirable efforts are made to "personalize" the Nazi's Jewish victims—both through the identity cards and through the most effective design feature, Yaffa Eliach's stunning tower of photos from the shtetl of Ejszyski. Visitors receive mixed messages about the specificity of the other victims, however. While, for example, the Roma ("gypsies") are first grouped generically with homosexuals, political prisoners, and Jehovah's Witnesses, we later read that "their fate closely paralleled that of the Jews" and indeed many text panels describe the effects of Nazi policy on "Jews and Roma." Visitors are left uncertain whether the hierarchy which places Jews "above" Roma is a function of a qualitative difference in Nazi policy and ideology or of the quantity of victims. In that first section on "Enemies of the State," a video monitor "personalizes" the victims to an extent by identifying successive groups of others. Later, however, in the most visible display of non-Jewish "enemies," located just after visitors pass through an actual railroad car, a wall of mug shots is accompanied with a text which deprives such victims of their specificity: "These images of prisoners include political dissidents, Roma (Gypsies), homosexuals, Soviet prisoners of war, and criminals." The ambivalence of the representation of non-Jewish victims—is their suffering also unique?—no doubt expresses the outcome of conflictual planning sessions as well as the complex realities of World War II history. The point is not that the museum's narrative is wrong or could have been done better, but that it

structures response without determining it. The very lack of resolution in the treatment of the "mosaic of victims" leaves openings for other interventions, either within or beyond the walls of the museum. Thus, lesbian and gay activists could use the opening of the museum as the occasion for a vigil and rally meant to call attention to histories of homophobic violence, and African and Native Americans could point to the representation of Jewish history as evidence that it was time to represent their own particular American histories. While the very holes and contradictions in the museum's narrative and its relation to U.S. history in general sometimes generate such "radical democratic" initiatives, it is equally possible that they could generate *ressentiment*. Indeed, every time I left the museum I did not have to go far before I saw some antisemitic manifestation, usually in the form of swastika graffiti.

Besides the framing devices which establish point of view by interpellating visitors as "Americans" and "victims," identification is also motivated or blocked by contradictions between and within the form and content of the museum's narrative. After the proleptic and ambiguous confrontation with "liberation," visitors are taken through a condensed, primarily linear, chronology of the Third Reich, from the seizure of power to the end of the war. The histories on either side of the 1933-45 period are deliberately downplayed. On the one side, the centuries of Jewish history in Europe are reduced to approximately four uninformative sentences and a series of unexplained images (first on video screens, later in two powerful photography series); meanwhile, the histories of Christian antisemitism and German nationalism, two of the sources of Nazi ideology, are missing from the main narrative, although they are covered in two optional and somewhat simpleminded films. On the contemporary side, the final space of the exhibit

provides images and texts dealing with the founding of Israel and emigration to the United States, but these postwar narratives are literally overshadowed by the presence in the same space of a large screen on which survivor testimony is continuously projected. Although the testimonies deal disproportionately with the themes of rescue and resistance, thus reprising elements of the final floor of the exhibit, they also inevitably return visitors to the narratives of the "Final Solution." When one woman survivor recounts her escape from Sobibor as having entailed "hopping on dead bodies," and another describes a death march in which "I saw girls breaking off their [frozen] toes like twigs," any happy resolution and triumphal overtones (pace *Schindler's List*) are undercut. The survivor testimonies provide a fitting culmination to the emotional component of the museum's project by confronting whatever identifications viewers have made with the victims and liberators with the terrible evidence of the persistence of trauma. They do not, however, make up for the lack of historical contextualization. The Nazi genocide is in no way mythified or mystified by the museum's narrative. Yet the foreshortened historical optic gives the mistaken impression that the event's uniqueness lies in its separation from the rest of history, not in its singular conjuncture of "*factors by themselves quite ordinary and common*" (Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* xiii).

The compactness of the narrative "story" is complicated by the "discourse" of the exhibit's design. The path of the visit consists of twists and turns, which provide occasional glimpses forward and backward in "time," while the visitors' space itself is constricted and narrow, causing frequent crowding throughout the three floors of the exhibit and constraining visitors to keep moving forward. The exhibit designers also effectively exploit Freed's deconstructivist architecture by foregrounding the asymmetries of the

building and its bridges and glass panels which prevent the enclosure of "proper" spaces. The exhibit thus spatializes time in a very particular way, rendering history visible as a complex layering of residual, dominant, and emergent traces which suggest but do not dictate connections between different moments. This layering inflects the understanding of historical time as aftereffect and retrospection found in Blanchot: on the one hand, the (re)visiting of spaces already glimpsed allows an "after the fact" reevaluation of the place of the past in the narrative which has led up to that present; on the other hand, the possibility of seeing ahead in time which the twisting, porous design enables suggests that things could have been different if emergent tendencies had been grasped in the past. The exhibit's layout also captures the geography of the Holocaust's terrible simultaneity in which bystanders and future victims stood by in apathy or ignorance as murder proceeded in neighboring towns or nations. In this dual insistence on necessity and contingency, the design synthesizes the two dominant schools of interpretation of the development of the "Final Solution": the meanderings of the functionalist "twisted road" to Auschwitz and the inevitable progression of the intentionalist "straight path" (cf. Marrus, *Holocaust in History* 31-54). The intentionalists' belief that Hitler's career "reflect[s] a consistent murderous objective" (Marrus 34-5) is communicated through the "flashback" from liberation to the origins of the Third Reich, which inscribes the memory of the narrative's conclusion back into its origins, and through the pressure exerted by the crowd to keep moving forward through the exhibit. At the same time, the functionalists' "picture of the Third Reich as a maze of competing power groups, rival bureaucracies, forceful personalities, and diametrically opposed interests" (Marrus 40) is materialized in the non-linear design of the exhibition space and the discontinuity of many of its images and artifacts. This

dialectical understanding of history as a composite of agency and structure recalls the binary identifications with the liberators and the victims posited by the narrative's point of view.

The narrative structure of the permanent exhibit reveals the museum's character as two-fold: both a pedagogical tool for the dissemination of historical knowledge and a site of identifications meant to guide and evoke emotional responses based on personal "interaction" with the various "characters" in the story. Non-narrative elements—in particular the use of technology and the presence of artifacts and almost-authentic castings—also contribute to the pedagogical/experiential functioning of the museum. Cognizant of the Holocaust's challenge to celebration of the instrumental rationality of modernity, the museum's conceivers saw a possibility to intervene in "America's infatuation with technology, so predominant in other museums and memorials on the Mall. 'While the Air and Space Museum glorified the wondrous capabilities of technological know-how, the Holocaust museum will reveal the dark side of technology,' Michael Berenbaum said of his museum" (Miller, *One, by One* 234). Despite this intention, video and computer technologies play important roles in the museum, even if their use is restrained compared to the high-tech Hollywood version of Holocaust history enshrined at Los Angeles' Museum of Tolerance. Indeed, Judith Miller reports, the computer system in the USHMM's Wexner Learning Center has been designed by someone who created a similar system for the Israeli Defense Forces (265). The computers, which are located both in the Learning Center and at strategic points in the permanent exhibit (usually involving American responses to the genocide), complement the "modernist" historical narrative with the non-linear mode of knowledge particular to postmodern information technologies.

The Learning Center allows visitors to deepen their knowledge of particular aspects of the Nazi genocide by accessing encyclopedia articles, photographs, video and film clips, maps, and music, all available via computer. The computer's database (which is constantly being expanded and refined) is structured by the logic of hypermedia linkages. After choosing an initial topic, date, or keyword, users can follow up on other highlighted terms and pursue different themes through the use of different media: life in the ghetto might be illustrated by a Yiddish song, a personal anecdote, or a scholarly essay. Such a system provides an accessible means of producing different kinds of knowledge in the same technological "space"—that gained by the reading of "scientific" texts and that experienced through listening to survivor testimony. However, the multiplicity of paths which hypermedia allows through the computer database undermines certain aspects of historical understanding which the "chronotope" of the exhibit narrative creates. The connections between time and causality disappear as the pursuit of the highlighted terms in one article can lead to entirely different locations. Having selected the "Aftermath" menu option, for example, I was disconcerted to find that I was soon reading about conditions in the Warsaw Ghetto. As opposed to being dictated by some connection to historical conditions, there is a large degree of arbitrariness and whim in the movement between eras, events, and types of evidence. Perspective on spatio-temporal location breaks down as the hypermedia system promotes an illusory simultaneity of times and places. The predominance of sequencing and flow over constrained movement through time and space (as found in the exhibit narrative) produces a contradiction between the ease with which information is accessed and the difficulty with which such information can be assimilated and understood.

The computers located at particular points in the course of the permanent exhibit serve a somewhat different purpose since they are keyed to particular aspects of Holocaust history, usually American responses to the events in Europe. But, as with the use of technology in the Learning Center, they also ultimately and ironically facilitate an erroneous belief that knowledge can bypass mediation. Here, a menu is presented and a message provocatively reads, "Touch an Event to Begin." This suggestion of tactile links to knowledge connects technology to the museum's other experiential and sense-based strategies of pedagogy. The idea that one can "touch" an event which happened fifty years ago on another continent is implicit in the use of artifacts and castings. When visitors walk through a railroad car which transported Jews to their deaths, furtively touch part of the Birkenau barracks, or smell the rotting abandoned shoes of victims, a different kind of experience emerges from that produced by the reading of texts and the observation of videos and photographs (although these can also have bodily effects). If the conspicuous presence of "authentic" artifacts sometimes feels like a defensive move against highly visible Holocaust deniers (and one which to a degree stays within the logic of "proof" of those deniers), visitors I observed also demonstrate a desire for such tactile connection. In one temporary exhibit on the museum's lower level of painted tiles documenting the responses of school children who had visited the museum, other young visitors were drawn to run their fingers over the texture of the tiles (as I was also). In the special "walk-in" section designed for those too young for the main exhibit, "Remembering the Children: Daniel's Story," an emphasis is also put on touching the reconstructed house, ghetto, and concentration camp of the fictional Daniel. Children are invited to look under Daniel's bed, open windows to see "outside," and listen in as joyful, but ghostly, prewar voices

echo in the house's kitchen. As a pedagogical tool for reaching children, such tactile and sense-based methods may be most effective, but, especially in the main exhibit, they are also potentially misleading in the ease with which they allow contemporary visitors to "touch" the event.

In a short essay concerning visitor response to the Holocaust Museum, one of the museum's most vocal critics, Philip Gourevitch, observed that visitors' "diverse reactions reflect the beliefs and attitudes they brought to the museum as much as anything they discovered within its walls." Diagnosing current interest in the Holocaust as one of many "fashions in popular history," Gourevitch argued pessimistically that "the Holocaust Museum provides a rhetorical exercise in bearing witness to dehumanization and mass murder from a seemingly safe distance" ("What They Saw" 45). The omnipresence of "subjective" (mis)readings of history by museum visitors is, of course, a sociological truism, and indeed, "The Year of the Holocaust" represents a fashion, even if one which has already lasted well beyond its fifteen minutes of fame. But while the museum never forces visitors beyond the "safe distance" of the spectator, rhetorical exercises in witnessing should not be underestimated. This is true not simply because even the most authentic acts of witnessing are inevitably rhetorical, but because they derive their potential power from that fact. Rhetorical dimensions of testimony and memorialization are essential to pedagogy and the expansion of historical knowledge in the same way that representations are. Gourevitch is content to accept only "one certain lesson" from the Holocaust: "that it happened" ("Behold Now Behemoth" 62). But testimony and certain acts of representation do more than give us "the facts"; they demand a change in our understanding of what is

accepted history. Although its lessons are not comforting, the Holocaust did more than just "happen"; it emerged, it persisted, it persists.

The inevitability of rhetoric, representation, and mediation does not entail the erosion of judgment or the collapse of truth—even in "The Year of the Holocaust," when historical understanding seems to be undergoing a significant mutation. *Shoah* surpasses *Schindler's List* in its contribution to understanding the Holocaust not because it is less rhetorical but because it more rigorously searches for a form commensurate with the Holocaust's destruction of already existing forms and because it foregrounds the mediations inherent in its acts of representation; in that, it is supremely rhetorical. The Holocaust Museum is not just a "theme park" or another of Washington's celebrations of Americanism because it literally twists the materials of its construction into a new shape, thus registering the real in a spatio-temporal choreography of unexpected subtlety. At the same time, the museum appeals to, creates, and sometimes satisfies desires for immediacy and identification which often conflict with its historical architectonics. Certainly no "text"—and no museum, feature film, or epic documentary—can embody the contradictory contents of history in a wholly coherent form. We need to articulate options that submit neither to the fallacy that representing the Holocaust could mean replacing a lived reality with a belated aesthetic nor to the defeatism that claims to rest content with knowing "that it happened." As caretakers of post-memory in a decidedly unredeemed landscape, no resource, be it fictional, rhetorical, or visual, can be spared.

## CONCLUSION

After the "Final Solution":  
From the "Jewish Question" to Jewish Questioning

"We are not 'the woman question' asked by somebody else; we are the women who ask the questions."—Adrienne Rich, "Notes toward a Politics of Location"

"Tu te tais, j'étais. Tu parles, je suis."—Edmond Jabès, *Le livre des questions*

One of the most powerful moments during a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington comes in a transitional section between exhibition floors dealing with the genocide itself and reactions to it, including resistance, liberation, rescue, and the aftermath. In this in-between space are collected artifacts and images of artifacts which in their dumb materiality speak loudly about the human lives that they indicate only obliquely. Here is found the wall-length photograph of hair from Auschwitz, human remains which aroused one of the most bitter disputes of the museum's planning. Also present is a poignant piles of shoes left by the Nazi's victims; the shoes emit a sour smell of passed time which adds another affective dimension to the sensory experience offered by the museum. There is a spare metal truck frame, which looks at first like the support for a missing exhibit, until you realize that this is the Majdanek "roast" on which the murdered were burned in lieu of a crematorium oven. The incompleteness of these artifacts is the point; they all gesture toward the absent and unrecoverable bodies of the dead.

Another exhibit in the same area points to the way that unrecoverable absence is inscribed on the bodies of survivors. A collection of photographs taken at a 1991 gathering of survivors in Los Angeles shows the tattooed arms which marked the Nazi's efforts to dehumanize their victims. On the one hand, the photographs, which show only arms, emphasize the success of that genocidal program by fragmenting the survivors' bodies and displaying the indelible sign of suffering. On the other hand, the collection of images represents an actually existing collective of survivors, an indication both of some survivors' defiant agency and of the persistence of Jewish community after the "Final Solution." In no way do the photographs propose a transcendence of the Holocaust: an adjacent group portrait shows four survivors from Salonika displaying their tattoos and staring at the camera with unredeemable expressions of anger and sorrow. Here, more than anywhere in the museum, including the final oral testimony section, the survivors return the gaze of Holocaust tourists and pilgrims. Their message is easy to read, yet unassimilable to "normal" everyday life: viewers are reminded that they were not *there*, but that the survivors live on, carrying their unredeemed experiences into the post-Holocaust era. The all-too-present tattoo marks another absence, another asymmetry between past and present: the gap between the survivors and the post-memory generation which is now drawn to their experience.

In her two-page short story, "Three Days and a Question," Grace Paley interrogates the absences of victimized bodies and the gaps in communication between the victimized and the privileged that the museum's exhibits suggest. Drawing on the status of the Holocaust in the United States as both a metaphor for suffering and a specific historical experience, Paley succinctly raises many of the questions of representation which have occupied me throughout

this dissertation. The Holocaust-as-event is less present in this brief text than in most of the documents of barbarism I have considered, but the vitality of its memory generates the sequence of three vignettes which constitute the story's associative narrative. Paley takes part in the "Year of the Holocaust" discourse by creating a sequence between qualitatively different historical experiences, but the effect is not a flattening or relativization of suffering; rather, her historical contextualizations make the question of genocide *more* real for her readers.

The passage of "Three Days" in which Holocaust memory is at stake is worth quoting at length. Paley's story begins here:

On the first day I joined a demonstration opposing the arrest in Israel of members of Yesh Gvul, Israeli soldiers who had refused to serve in the occupied territories. Yesh Gvul means: *There is a Limit.*

TV cameras and an anchorwoman arrived and *New York Times* stringers with their narrow journalism notebooks. What do you think? the anchorwoman asked. What do you think, she asked a woman passer by—a woman about my age.

Anti-Semites, the woman said quietly.

The anchorwoman said, But they're Jewish.

Anti-Semites, the woman said a little louder.

What? One of our demonstrators stepped up to her. Are you crazy? How can you . . . Listen what we're saying.

Rotten anti-Semites—all of you.

What? What What the man shouted. How you dare to say that—all of us Jews. Me, he said. He pulled up his shirtsleeves. Me? You call me? You look. He held out his arm. Look at this.

I'm not looking, she screamed.

You look at my number, what they did to me. My arm . . . you have no right.

Anti-Semite, she said between her teeth. Israel hater.

No, no he said, you fool. My arm—you're afraid to look . . . my arm . . . my arm. (*Long Walks* n.p.)

Through the figure of the exposed arm Paley links this confrontation with two further encounters: one with a young homeless man whose arm is covered with Kaposi Sarcoma lesions, one with a Haitian cab driver who holds his arm up to the narrator and asks, à propos of U.S. refugee policy, "You tell me—this skin, this black skin—why? Why you hate this skin so much?" Having narrated

these three encounters, Paley asks in the text's final lines: "Those gestures, those arms, the three consecutive days thrown like a formal net over the barest unchanged accidental facts. How? Why? In order to become—probably—in this city one story told."

In this story the tattooed arm of the Holocaust survivor holds a special place, not only as the initiating gesture of the series, but as the possessor of an already metaphorical charge. I don't mean simply the Holocaust's archetypal narrative of suffering, which has become, in its extremity, a source of analogy for other histories. Rather, the revelatory self-exposure of the survivor provides a first analogy between Jewish suffering and Jewish-inflicted suffering, which grounds and authorizes the metonymical chain constructed with the segments on AIDS and racism. "There is a Limit" is the name of the group for which the demonstrators rally, a name which in its Israeli context refers to a geographical and moral topography, and which, in this story, comes to refer as well to the boundaries of ethnic identity and figuration. If, on the one hand, the notion of the limit signals a refusal to move beyond certain pre-established borders, on the other hand, the survivor's gesture implies the mutual implication of limits and their transgressions. In response to the passer-by's slur—"Rotten anti-Semites—the man bears his arm, thus claiming the authority to speak from a Jewish subject position about Jews and their responsibilities. The survivor reappropriates the essentializing inscription on the surface of his body, claiming the Jewishness which the Nazis once demonized, but he simultaneously transcends the limits of that identity as it has been institutionalized by an uncritically Zionist American-Jewish leadership. There is a moral limit to what humans ought do to each other, but it can only be established through the transgression of a limited ethnic identity always at risk of absolutization. Yet, the story proposes, the

ethics of that transgression are not founded on a refusal of identity—that refusal is shown to be impossible in each of the three vignettes because of the essentializing (but not essential) inscription on the body of racial, ethnic, and medical codes. The story's working out of an "anti-anti-essentialist" notion of ethnic identity is the place from which an ethics honoring difference emerges.<sup>1</sup>

Like Philip Roth in *Operation Shylock* or Art Spiegelman in *Maus*, Paley, in "Three Days and a Question," interrogates the narrator's identity as surely as she does various collective identities. Although the generic status of this story is never specified, Paley is easily recognized as a character since she carefully includes herself and her collaborator, artist Vera Williams, in each vignette. The passer-by, she writes, is "a woman about my age." The sight of the homeless young man causes both the narrator and her friend Vera to see him from a certain perspective: "Separately, Vera and I think: A boy—only a boy. Mothers after all, our common trade for more than thirty years." Paley is not appealing to an essential notion of feminine and motherly compassion, as her contrast to the unsympathetic passer-by and her comment about parenting as a "trade" make clear. Nevertheless, she, like Roth and Spiegelman, genders her construction of Jewish-American identity. In *Operation Shylock*, for instance, Philip's determinate distance from the Holocaust and the oppression of Palestinians leaves him seated with a sexy shiksa in the Garden of Eden, eating,

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<sup>1</sup> "Anti-anti-essentialism" is theorized by Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic* and demonstrated throughout his readings of black cultures in *Small Acts* and *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. Gilroy writes that anti-anti-essentialism "sees racialized subjectivity as the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from them" (*Black Atlantic* 102). Although this applies equally well to ethnic identities—and indeed may throw into question the opposition between "race" and ethnicity—the medicalization of identity clearly poses other problems for theory. Paley is close in her formulation of ethics to Levinas's linkage of ethical imperatives and the human face, and to R. Radhakrishnan's insight into the intertwining of ethics and ethnics.

he tells us, from the "tree of fiction" (219). There is a powerful truth to Roth's comic portrait of Jewish-American masculinity, but Paley's narrator is elsewhere, inhabiting a blighted urban setting of conflict and disease. The references to mothering create a different sense of narrative time than in Roth's metafiction, not the repetition of doubling, but the ethically implicated difference of generations, a difference exploited for other effects in *Maus*. The women's relationship to the boy complements the relationship between the survivor and the absent Jewish and Palestinian boys he is defending and between each segment of the story. This ethical, generational bond is explicitly not biological or familial, but rather, discursive, in so far as it involves the simultaneous recognition, in a rhetorical space, of difference and of the responsibilities which hold *across* differences.

In foregrounding the temporal difference of generations, as well as ethnic and racial differences, Paley rejoins Benjamin, who took it as an ethical imperative to attempt to "wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. . . . Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious" ("Theses," *Illuminations* 255). Multiple generations are at stake in Paley's story: in attempting to act justly in an unjust world, the survivor claims his identity not only in the name of the future, but also in memory of the dead. Performing an *après coup* intervention worthy of Blanchot, the survivor declares in his recognition of differences among Jews that, from now on, the "purity" of identity and narrative is situated before Auschwitz. The assumedly Jewish passer-by, on the other hand, can only maintain her "traditional" sense of Jewishness by not acknowledging the tattoo on the survivor's arm and thus repressing the challenge of the Holocaust to all conventional identities.

Through this contrast, Paley suggests (like Adorno and Blanchot before her) that after Auschwitz an ethical demand ought to link the present to the past, the self to the other, and different histories of oppression to each other in such a way that coming to terms with the past necessitates coming to terms with the present in a public setting.

The rhetorical analogizing of identities and locations suggested by "Three Days" works in the interests of both solidarity and singularity, or in the terms of Holocaust discourse, universality and uniqueness. Nowhere does Paley suggest an equation between the Holocaust, the struggle for Palestinian self-determination, AIDS, and the Haitian refugee situation. In this sense, she provides a recasting of Adorno's injunction concerning Holocaust representation: to equate histories of suffering after Auschwitz would be barbaric. But it is in the very marking of differences that literature can play a role. Instead of drawing on the interdictions of the second commandment to ground her approach to the Holocaust, as Adorno does, Paley draws on another, equally demanding but more affirmative, Jewish tradition: the ethics of questioning. Her story can be read as belonging to the tradition of the Passover *Haggadah* which asks, Why is this night different from all other nights? As all writers and artists who approach the Holocaust are forced at some point to ask, Why and how is this suffering different from all others? Why and how is it similar?

Paley does not provide direct answers of course, but she suggests the importance of the place of enunciation of narratives in constituting their differences. Just as the museum exhibit on tattoos depicted survivors gathered in the multiply diasporic setting of Los Angeles, where they simultaneously mourned and made the best of their displaced condition, Paley situates her survivor in an American setting, but one which might also be international—

in front of the Israeli embassy or the United Nations. Portraying a survivor who is also a kind of liberator or rescuer in his role as activist, Paley joins the recent American Holocaust texts, such as *Schindler's List* and the museum, which have combined those roles as well. But Paley's rescuer is neither a business man nor a soldier, and thus her portrait brushes conventional notions of Americanness against the grain. At the same time, he refuses to take a position with the helpless mass of survivors; in stepping forward to confront injustice he assumes the agency that contemporary obsessions with victimization and infantilizing representations like *Schindler's List* would deny him. "Three Days and a Question" demonstrates, as do many elements of the Holocaust Museum, that the Holocaust is already part of United States history, and that considering the genocide in an American framework is not necessarily a matter of trivialization.

Nevertheless, Paley is cognizant of what constitutes the dominant space of late twentieth-century America, and so she stages her ethnic ethics in front of the media—remember the reporter with her "narrow" notebook whose question prompts the confrontation. Television cameras and newspaper reporters, present also in *Operation Shylock*, in Art's confrontation with his success in *Maus*, and in the uses and abuses of *Schindler's List*, bring us back to *Nightline* and the year America remembered the Holocaust. The presence of the mass and broadcast media in those various texts demands an acknowledgment of the modes of publicity which are simultaneously essential to ethics in a postmodern world and disruptive of the face-to-face encounter which has traditionally grounded the ethical. The texts of Americanization follow *Nightline* in linking the issues raised by the Holocaust with a variety of contemporary political dilemmas. They do not, for the most part, yield to the format of flux which dissolves the event into the smooth surface of

entertainment. Rather, they bring unlike elements together as a means of disrupting commonplace notions about what constitutes events and identities. In so doing, they show themselves to be heirs to the project of public enlightenment which Adorno outlined in "What Does Coming to Terms With the Past Mean?" While a comic book version of the Holocaust or a national memorial museum would not have been assimilable to Adorno's vision, such projects nevertheless contribute to a working through of a collectively disastrous past and thus suggest new orientations toward the future.

Grappling with the cultural implications of the Holocaust necessitates, in part, rethinking the continuities and discontinuities of history. In its elegant brevity Paley's story links the two halves of my project: the ethical imperative to conceptualize culture "after Auschwitz" and the acknowledgment that culture, like barbarism, has been transformed by the techniques and technologies which contributed to "The Year of the Holocaust." It would be as wrong to establish a radical break between those two modes of coming to terms with the past as it would be to equate them. The periodization of culture is more complicated and needs to be thought according to Foucault's notion of discontinuity, which "divides up the field of which it is the effect" (*Archeology of Knowledge* 9). Foucault's use of the concept of discontinuity is at odds with the traditional historical notion of progressive and discrete stages of development for a number of reasons. It emphasizes that discontinuity results from "a deliberate operation on the part of the historian," "assumes a specific form and function according to the field and to the level to which it is assigned," and "enables the historian to individualize different domains but can be established only by comparing those domains" (8-9). In the *Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault's model for discontinuity is the event of the statement,

which he wants to restore to "the specificity of its occurrence" (28). This formulation is both enabling and potentially reductive. On the one hand, it foregrounds the human agency involved in the discursive production of events; this holds true both in history and in historical writing. On the other hand, it implies that events are reducible to a linguistic model of discourse analysis; Foucault summarizes his project as a description of "the relations between statements" (31). A preponderant emphasis on the discursive could end up obscuring the historian's own location as the product, not just the producer, of historical forces, all of which cannot be reduced to "statements." Thus, for example, Foucault's stress on the discontinuities of history may be itself, in some unexplored way, a response to traumatic events of the twentieth century such as the Holocaust, the First World War, and the ongoing process of decolonization—all of which have been central to contemporary French culture, but which find almost no explicit place in Foucault's analyses.

Theorizing discontinuous periodization according to Benjamin's concept of the constellation, instead of according to Foucault's linguistic model, would bring back the explosive power of events without sacrificing the insight into the formative function of discourse. According to this model, the act of periodization would always include at least two moments of discontinuity: the moment of writing and that of the targeted event. The consciousness of discontinuity often emerges belatedly, when contemporary conditions create a new constellation and encourage, for whatever reasons, a retrospective reevaluation of the past. Thus, for example, the 1960s have returned again and again throughout this study as a nodal point in the transformation of Holocaust memory. But even that moment had different significance for social groups occupying different locations. For many Jewish communities around the world, 1967 was a year when many believed that Israel was on the verge of

annihilation. This fear prompted a surge of interest in the Holocaust, which seemed like a possible model or warning for the present. For young people across the globe, the late '60s had a more affirmative meaning, as a time of revolt against parental and state authority. This also created echoes of the Nazi genocide in Germany, where students challenged their parents' silence about the war, and in France, where deportation of student activist Daniel Cohn-Bendit led to the slogan, "We are all German Jews." The height of the Cold War in the 1950s, on the other hand, had not provided the conditions for such a historical judgment as (West) Germany quickly changed from being the enemy to being an ally in the fight against Communism. All of these constellations—both the Cold War ones that discouraged attention from being paid to the Holocaust and the 1960s ones that helped canonize it as *the* event of the century—are visible today because the 1980s and 1990s have once again moved the memory of the Shoah to a prominent place in the public sphere.

Given the shifting constellations according to which history is written, it is not surprising that the place the Holocaust holds in contemporary reevaluations of modernity is itself paradoxical. As Mark Anderson succinctly summarizes: "What initially seemed to defy all reason, to be unthinkable and unimaginable, 'beyond' the limits of or inappropriate for representation, has in fact become a central historical, aesthetic, even metaphysical category for thinking about and making sense of the recent past" ("The 'Impossibility of Poetry'" 3). Although Anderson is addressing the discourse of the French Heideggerians, the transformation he describes also captures something of the difference between the European modernist and American postmodernist Holocaust discourses I have considered. How can the Holocaust's relationship to modernism and postmodernism be thought according to the theory of constellations and discontinuities?

In Andreas Huyssen's terms, "the question of historical continuity or discontinuity simply cannot be adequately discussed in terms of . . . an either/or dichotomy" ("Mapping" 236). Dominick LaCapra thus oversimplifies when he claims that the Holocaust "often functions as a more or less covert point of rupture between the modern and the postmodern," even if he is correct that the genocide "has been both repressed and 'canonized' in the recent past" (*Representing the Holocaust* xi). Part of the problem lies in the lack of clarity about the distinctions between "the modern," "modernity," and "modernism" (as well as among and between the corresponding postmodern terms). The contrast between, say, Adorno and Spiegelman demonstrates that there are both modernist and postmodernist ways of coming to terms with the Shoah's challenge to modernity (where "post/modernist" refers to an aesthetic-ideological level and "modernity" to the configuration of cultural, economic, and political forces of modernization that provides the modernist aesthetic's "environment" and the Holocaust's causal nexus). Yourcenar and Spielberg, on the other hand, ultimately illustrate the possibilities of modern and postmodern affirmations of modernity. Benjamin's and Foucault's insistence on the different fields and levels in and at which discontinuities operate helps us to understand how discourses of the Nazi genocide could migrate between such contradictory positions.

Despite ambivalences and continuities, the sense of a rupture persists. But where is it located? The Holocaust has not in itself produced an aesthetic transformation since modernism's institutional ascent dates from the immediate postwar period. Even less has it challenged the forces of bureaucratic organization and racist violence that combined fatally during the Nazi period. In other words, it almost certainly is not *the event* of the Holocaust that is the covert break between the modern and the postmodern.

But yet *the discourse* around that event and the constellations that have been formed with it pose some of the most radical challenges to complacent celebrations of either modernity or postmodernity. While Holocaust discourse does not provide the unique field in which post/modernism's discontinuity is registered—discourse about de/colonization would certainly provide another—it does consist of a relatively undertheorized domain for the purveyors of theory.

It proves fruitful to articulate the Holocaust and Holocaust discourse with post/modernity and the discourse of post/modernism because studying the Nazi genocide in such a way does not simply repeat the terms of the already tired debates about postmodernism. Tracing the movements within the writings of Adorno, Blanchot, and Yourcenar and between those writers and the American artists of "The Year of the Holocaust" reveals multiple lines of continuity as well as lacunae, contradictions and reversals, inventions and interventions. Reflecting on what it would mean to produce culture "after Auschwitz" reintroduces ethics into the debate about periodization in the form of the imperative to think the new from a location both implicated in and displaced from the Jewish catastrophe. Within this agonizing imperative a variety of paths opens up. Some of the itineraries I sketched in Part I include: Adorno's movement from a reading of the Holocaust as just another "stage" in the dialectic of enlightenment to a grasping of the specific implications of the genocide for thought and public practice; Blanchot's fifty-year long attempt to come to terms with his right-wing political engagement, an attempt both profound and occasionally troubling; and Yourcenar's disturbing reversal of her portrait of fascist subjectivity according to a post-Holocaust, Cold War imperative far from Adorno's vision of life "after Auschwitz."

While all of those writers might contest the progressive, bureaucratic, homogenizing tendencies of modernity (if, perhaps, only unconsciously in the

case of Yourcenar), they do so from within variously modernist aesthetics that privilege expressionism, ambivalence, or artistic autonomy. Meanwhile, in proper high culture fashion, they set themselves against realist narrative, popular culture, and the marketplace. At a certain moment, some modernist practices not only appeared to express the historical truth of the post-Holocaust era—as Adorno's brilliant reading of Beckett illustrates—they also carried an oppositional force that challenged the self-satisfaction of the economic miracle and bourgeois conservatism of the conformist 1950s. Yet ultimately, their elitist hostility toward mass culture facilitated their incorporation into conservative ideologies. Modernist techniques of defamiliarization became all too familiar.

In the texts and practices considered under the rubric of "The Year of the Holocaust," the division between high and popular culture no longer obtains. Roth, Spiegelman, and Spielberg all incorporate modernist aesthetics into their works, but by combining them with the materials at hand of mass culture, they produce hybrid forms of what Miriam Hansen has called "popular modernism." The U.S. Holocaust Museum similarly fuses populist accessibility and emotive power, postmodern architecture and design, and a compact modernist historical narrative. As Huyssen argues, "[s]uch multiple fracturing of the memory of the Holocaust . . . has to be seen in its politically and culturally enabling aspects, as a potential antidote to the freezing of memory in the one traumatic image" ("Monument and Memory" 258). These documents all acknowledge the ability of commodification to saturate at once Hollywood realism *and* self-reflexive narrative, memory tourism *and* Holocaust memorialization. But they also demonstrate the benefit of working within the spheres of publicity that the market opens up. In their frank recognition of the hyper-commodified condition of postmodernity, they extend Adorno's call

for a pedagogy of public enlightenment into the proliferating zones of engagement that constitute the postmodern.

The recent omnipresence of the history and memory of the destruction of the European Jews in the social text of First World postmodernism registers the survival of incomplete theoretical and practical tasks into the post-Cold War new world order. Holocaust postmodernism simultaneously maintains the ideals of the incomplete project of modernity, exposes the latter's necessary failures, and looks to the stylistic novelty of postmodernism for clues as to how to fulfill and transfigure the modern. The postmodern arts of memory practiced by Roth, Spiegelman, the USHMM, and sometimes *Schindler's List*, take their place among other new forms of remembrance, from video testimony to computer memory banks and Internet resources. Yet as long as they maintain a critical edge toward this "progress" in the technologies of memory, they also keep alive the modernist project of ethical critique honed in response to the Shoah by Adorno and Blanchot.

The deadly persistence of religious, racial, and ethnic hatred continues to haunt the present, as do the specters of genocide and economic decline. Demonstrating in intimate detail what it means to live in the wake of catastrophes, "Three Days and a Question" brings the overarching problems of periodization and cultural practice back to the level of everyday life. In working out from the Holocaust in the direction of other histories of oppression, such as that of Haitians, Paley contributes to an ongoing dialogue among diasporic groups and what Paul Gilroy calls "other consciousnesses of affliction." Gilroy, who works out from the black experience of slavery toward the Jewish experience of genocide, summarizes what that discussion might concern: "some of the pivotal themes . . . are the relationship between rationalities and racisms, the repudiation of the ideology of progress by the

racially subordinated who have lubricated its wheels with their unfree labour, the similar patters of social remembrance found among Jews and blacks and the effects of protracted familiarity with ineffable, sublime terror on the development of a political (anti)aesthetics" (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 215). There are no guarantees that the analogies pursued by Paley and Gilroy will satisfy all who participate in the dialogue, a dialogue that always takes place under unequal conditions. But given the global warming of the nationalist climate, the risk of anti-anti-essentialism may have to be taken. In these years of the Holocaust, the genocide lives on in the bodies of survivors and the minds of the comfortable, even as its reality reappears on city streets everywhere.

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