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Tracing the Holocaust: Experiments in Late Twentieth-Century Art and Literature

by

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Abstract

"Tracing the Holocaust: Experiments in Late Twentieth-Century Art and Literature" explores the vexed relationship between experimental aesthetics and historical trauma. As an interdisciplinary project, it addresses a number of visual and literary forms including conceptual art, photography, architecture, fiction and memoir. Although the historical event is a central point of reference, the dissertation does not focus on strictly realist and/or eyewitness accounts of the genocide but considers work that is cryptic, fragmented, and meta-historical. A central argument of the project is that experimental representations succeed because they force us to move beyond the familiar outlines of conventional and often formulaic structures. The uncertainty as well as the engagement required of us in this process of moving towards unfamiliar and uncomfortable terrain is the work's real value. The methodology guiding this project is an uneasy mix of materialism, post-structuralism and trauma theory. What this makes possible is an engagement with history and aesthetic experimentation as mutually constitutive rather than discreet fields of inquiry and representation.

Chapter 1 reevaluates the work of French artist Christian Boltanski in light of recent theoretical writing on humour and the Holocaust; it also addresses the relationship between childhood, historical trauma and representation. Chapter 2 traces the complex ways in which Canadian novelist Sharon Riis uses the Holocaust as a paradigmatic traumatic event through which to read the genocide of Canada's First Nations. Chapter 3 reads the memoirs of Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras and Sarah Kofman as examples of traumatic realism, arguing

that, through the topographical imposition of Holocaust onto the city of Paris, these memoirs represent the historical event as a legacy that is both imperative and impossible to read. The issues surrounding identity and ethics are two of the most insistent concerns of the texts examined here. Therefore, the questions central to the project include: What is the relationship between heroism and humour in the context of historical trauma? What are the markings of a post-Holocaust sensibility? a post-Holocaust subjectivity? And finally, what are the ethical implications of imaginative representations that forego epistemological and ontological certainty in favour of an affective *un*knowing?

Preface

This dissertation is not *about* the Holocaust. Neither is it about literary or visual texts that represent the Holocaust in conventionally historical ways. Instead, this project represents my own engagement with texts, images, and installations that, to borrow a term from Christian Boltanski, come *after* the Holocaust. The distinction suggested by this simple shift in prepositions—*about* and *after*—is absolutely central to every one of the texts discussed in the introduction and chapters that follow. Rather than approach the Holocaust as a properly historical event that is both meaningful and safely relegated to the past, the writers and artists I've included here explore the legacy of the Holocaust—its aftermath—as it continues into the present. In doing so, they challenge epistemological and pedagogical claims, claims linking knowledge and deterrence, that so often attend both academic and popular discussions of genocide.

The vexed relationship between the Holocaust's *after*math and aesthetic representation can be traced back to Theodor Adorno. In "Cultural Criticism and Society" (1955), Adorno concludes his critique of post-war cultural criticism with a paragraph that contains what has become his most famous dictum: "To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (34). Widely cited, though most often out of context, this single sentence has been used to discredit writers and artists deemed guilty of privileging form over content and aesthetic appreciation over moral or pedagogical certainty. What we lose sight of, with this very literal application of Adorno's statement, is the focus, and therefore the actual object, of his critique.

Writing against the assumed sovereignty of the cultural critic, Adorno is trying to warn us of the dangers of an intellectual practice that fetishizes both the work of art and the "notion of culture as such" (23).

Central to Adorno's critique of what he identifies, elsewhere, as the culture industry,[1] is the ideological connection between the critic as sovereign, culture as fetish, and the contemporary notion of the private life: "Culture has become ideological not only as the quintessence of subjectively devised manifestations of the objective mind, but even more as the sphere of private life. The illusory importance and autonomy of private life conceals the fact that private life drags on only as the appendage of the social process" (30). To counter the illusion that a private life—or a work of art—exists in isolation from the social process, Adorno outlines a dialectical practice of cultural criticism that would permit us to sacrifice logic, cohesion, and disciplinary decorum in order to foreground the complex relationship between the work of art and society: "Dialectics cannot, therefore, permit an insistence on logical neatness to encroach on its right to go from one *genus* to another, to shed light on an object in itself hermetic by casting a glance at society, to present society with the bill which the object does not redeem" (33). Writing against the "self-satisfied contemplation" that so often compromises the practice of critical intelligence (34), Adorno advocates a form of cultural criticism that is also, necessarily, a "social physiognomy" (30). Writing against what he sees as the dangerous reification of critical intelligence, he advocates, instead, radical acts of critical spontaneity: "Theory, not even that which is true, is safe

from perversion into delusion once it has renounced a spontaneous relation to the object" (33).

Ten years after the publication of "Cultural Criticism and Society" Adorno returned to the relation between poetry and barbarism. In "Commitment" (1965), an essay on, among other things, political commitment and aesthetic experimentation, Adorno repeats his original assertion almost verbatim: "I have no wish to soften the saying that to write *lyric* poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (188, emphasis added). By drawing an explicit connection between *lyric* poetry and barbarism, Adorno once again foregrounds the relationship between a work of art and the society within which that work is produced, especially as this relationship is concealed by the ideological construction of the autonomous or private life of the subject. The lyric, a "brief *subjective* poem strongly marked by imagination, melody, and emotion, and *creating a single unified impression*" (Holman and Harmon 273, emphasis added), is set up here in opposition to works that Adorno identifies as committed art, "in the proper sense" (1965 180).

In "Cultural Criticism and Society," Adorno introduced the committed work of art as the "successful work" which, when read according to his dialectical method, does not resolve "objective contradictions into a spurious harmony" but instead "expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure" (1955 32). What is striking about this description of the successful work of art—especially given the ubiquitous *mis*applications of his statement about poetry after Auschwitz—is the way in which it privileges experimentation over convention, and ambiguity over

certainty. In "Commitment," Adorno argues that political commitment should not be understood as either intention or the explicit delineation of a program of social change. Committed art is not instrumental; it "is not intended to generate ameliorative measures, legislative acts or practical institutions" but works, instead, "at the level of fundamental attitudes" (1965 180). In opposition to "artistic representations of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts" (1965 189)—representations produced by artists who inadvertently exploit the suffering of victims by turning this suffering into products designed for consumption by the very world that produced it in the first place—the committed work of art does not act upon the world, but gestures towards a practice from which it is itself excluded:

> Even in the most sublimated work of art there is a hidden 'it should be otherwise'. When a work is merely itself and no other thing, as in a pure pseudo-scientific construction, it becomes bad art—literally pre-artistic. The moment of true volition, however, is mediated through nothing other than the form of the work itself, whose crystallization becomes an analogy of that other condition which should be. As eminently constructed and produced objects, works of art, including literary ones, point to a practice from which they abstain: the creation of a just life. (1965 194)

What I am most interested in, in terms of my own project, is this "moment of true volition." Adorno understands the work of art as that through which the world *as it should be* is made visible as alternatives that undermine a total system of culture that appears increasingly seamless and whole. The process of mediation

through which this moment is made possible is "not a compromise between commitment and autonomy, nor a sort of mixture of advanced formal elements with an intellectual content inspired by genuinely or supposedly progressive politics" (1965 194). The committed work of art is successful precisely because it functions as neither knowledge nor pedagogy: "The notion of a 'message' in art, even when politically radical, already accommodates the world: the stance of the lecturer conceals a clandestine entente with the listeners, who could only be rescued from deception by refusing it (1965 193).

Given our current critical fascination with the role of affect in interpretation, Adorno's refusal of an exclusively intellectual response to suffering seems uncannily prescient.[2] Near the end of "Commitment," he argues that "the content of works of art is never the amount of intellect pumped into them: if anything, it is the opposite" (1965 194). In *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951), written while he was living in exile in the United States during and just after the war, Adorno states the case more bluntly: "The assumption that thought profits from the decay of the emotions, or even that it remains unaffected, is itself an expression of the process of stupefaction" (122).

Affect, as both expressed *within* and elicited *by* the work of art after Auschwitz, functions as the central paradox of "Commitment." At the same time as the act of writing poetry is barbaric, it is also imperative. In response to his own questions about whether "any art now has a right to exist" (1965 188), Adorno answers that the continued existence of works of art marks our refusal to "surrender to cynicism" (1965 188). In spite of his unequivocal rejection of lyric

poetry, he maintains that suffering "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 being betrayed by it" (1965 188). At the end of *Minima Moralia*, he makes an even more explicit reference to redemption. In "Finale," the text's last aphorism, Adorno argues that philosophy, like art, is instrumental in only a very limited sense; it cannot create a just life, but extends, instead, the possibility of hope: "The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption" (247). The value of philosophy, like that of the successful work of art, is its capacity to show the world as it should be without ever losing sight of the world *as it is*: "Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light" (247).

While still in the early stages of this project, I found Adorno's assertion that the work of art provides suffering with both a voice and some form of consolation *itself* a consolation. However, my understanding of his assertion was limited by my own desire, to a large extent unconscious, to find meaning in the suffering of those subjected to the Nazis' genocidal program. Through the process of actually writing this dissertation, I have come to understand Adorno's paradoxical recourse to redemption as a refusal of such meaning. Even if the function of post-Holocaust art and philosophy is to console, this process of consolation is neither

strictly a comfort nor a resolution. It is, at best, an incitement to move forward in the aftermath of adversity.

As Leo Bersani argues in *The Culture of Redemption* (1990), Adorno's appeal to the redemptory potential of art and philosophy is at the same time an admission of its impossibility (54). In his discussion of the final section of *Minima Moralia*, Bersani highlights Adorno's insistence that knowledge both *exists beyond* and *belongs to* the world. According to Bersani, Adorno

> noted the 'utterly impossible' nature of any philosophy because it 'presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indulgence it seeks to escape.' (Bersani 54)

Like Adorno, Bersani exposes the ways in which notions like authority and subjectivity are used to reify the work of art as that which is either entirely separate from the world, or capable of acting directly upon it. Writing against the assumption that "a certain repetition of experience in art repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience," he maintains "that such apparently acceptable views of art's beneficently reconstructive function in culture depend on a devaluation of historical experience and of art" (1). Like Adorno's critique of "the private life" as an ideological construct, Bersani's argument is motivated by a desire to render visible the constitutive link between the autonomous subject, the work of art as object, and the exercise (or abuse) of power. Writing about works

of art with what Adorno would describe as spontaneity, Bersani practices a method of engagement that relies on a "conceptual mobility" that "can perhaps be best located in a move from the somewhat limited vocabulary of redemption to the theoretical centering of the question of authoritative selfhood" (3). Bersani justifies this move through his conviction that "the culture of redemption itself depends on even more fundamental assumptions about authoritative identities, about identity as authority" (3).

In order to take apart these assumptions, Bersani situates *The Culture of Redemption* within the larger context of his own critical writing. Although this body of work can be distinguished from Adorno's through its explicit focus on sexuality, Bersani, like Adorno, challenges the authority of the cultural critic through a approach that appeals to both ethics and affect. It is through his elaboration of this process, I would argue, that he establishes a critical affinity:

> The self is a practical convenience; promoted to the status of an ethical ideal, it is a sanction for violence. If sexuality is socially dysfunctional in that it brings people together only to plunge them into a self-shattering and solipsistic jouissance that drives them apart [...] it can also be thought of as our primary hygienic practice of nonviolence, and even as a kind of biological protection against our continuously renewed efforts to disguise and to exercise the tyranny of the self in the prestigious form of legitimate cultural authority. To trace some of the narcissistic retreats and intensities of literature may at least help us to think of art, and teach us to want an art, unavailable for any such legitimizing plots. (4)

While Bersani's focus on sexuality might seem out of place in the preface to a dissertation about art after Auschwitz, I would argue that, as a form of engagement, the sexual encounter described above echoes Adorno's appeal in *Minima Moralia* for philosophy to be undertaken as a material, even visceral practice of nonviolence: "To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought" (Adorno, 1951 247).

It is neither my intention nor my desire to assume what Adorno has derided as "the stance of the lecturer." What I hope to achieve here is both more difficult and, given the institutional function of the dissertation as a performance of disciplinary mastery and critical authority, more risky. Like Bersani, I am interested in an art that renders itself unavailable to the legitimizing plots of a culture industry that privileges critical authority—what Adorno identifies as the reification of mind—over a spontaneous or affective response. The artists and writers I discuss in this project focus on the issues of identity and authority, and attempt to foreground the relationship between certain forms of selfhood and social violence. The texts discussed below are committed works of art in the sense that they make possible moments of "true volition" without expounding an explicitly political message or initiating a program of social change. Christian Boltanski, Sharon Riis, Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras, and Sarah Kofman have produced texts that, through "the form of the work itself" function as "an analogy of that other condition that should be" (Adorno, 1965 194); the rifts and crevices of the world after Auschwitz are neither covered over, nor reified

through the imposition of a fixed system of correspondences that render them inherently meaningful. Instead, these works foreground the relationship between the work of art and the social world and, in so doing, force us to question authority in all its guises. They are neither exemplary nor redemptory instances of Holocaust representation; their success, I will argue, inheres in the ways with which they invite idiosyncratic forms of critical engagement. In our encounters with these texts we must, each of us, find our own way.

In *Arts of Impoverishment* (1993), a text written with Ulysse Dutoit, Leo Bersani asks: "*Is there a nonsadistic type of movement?* Is there a mode of circulation—within the work of art and in our relation to it—different from the moves of an appropriating consciousness?" (6). In answer to these questions, Bersani and Dutoit issue a call for forms of creative and critical engagement that resist the familiar pleasures of mastery in favour of a kind of ontological freefall: "Let us try to imagine a form of political and cultural resistance and renewal consistent with self-divesture and the renunciation of authority" (9). However, even they admit that their approach is "difficult to think about, even more difficult to imagine in concrete political terms" (9), because of its rejection of instrumentality and its insistence on *dis*orientation. In what reads like a counter-intuitive move, they argue that the critical "impotence" (9) of this approach is precisely its value: "To be lost or disseminated in a space that cannot be dominated, and to register attentively *how relations are affected* by a shattered ego's displacements within that space, may at least begin to reverse or arrest the

devastating effects of a view of space as an appropriable collection of objects and human subjects" (9).

In an attempt to remain open to the work of art, to respond with spontaneity and feeling as well as intellect, my approach, like Bersani's, is based on a conceptual mobility. An uneasy mix of post-structuralism, materialism and trauma theory, my methodology is dialectical in the sense that it takes part in a larger conversation about the ethics of representation in the context of historical trauma. I want to make it clear from the outset, however, that my engagement with these experiments is not structured as a form of sustained free-association. Neither is it an attempt to reduce the work of art, in a set or predetermined way, to fit the theoretical parameters of a specific approach or method. Instead, I have tried to strike a balance between a hermeneutic or analytic approach, and an openness to spontaneous enquiry that is more in keeping with a heuristic method. While I am aware of a certain risk in attempting this balance, I am convinced that this mobility has allowed me to engage with the works I've brought together here with an integrity that would have been compromised by a more rigorously disciplined methodology. By choosing to not repress my intuitive response to these works of art, I've left myself to open to an experience of uncertainty and disorientation. In doing so, I am putting faith in the proposition with which Bersani and Dutoit conclude their discussion of the relationship between art and authority: "But there is nothing to be lost in foundering with the notion of getting lost, and there is even something exhilarating in the idea of a joyful self-dismissal giving birth to a new kind of power" (9).

[1] See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York: Continuum, 1993. (Originally published as Dialektik der Aufklarung, 1944.)

[2]See, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003), Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2003, and Jill Bennett. *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2005.

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Introduction

I: Setting the Scene

> We have only gotten as far as a vague, apparently inexplicable, end-of-the-century melancholy.
>
> Jean-François Lyotard, "Ticket to a New Decor"

In the last twenty years, the Holocaust has been subject to rigorous—even obsessive— aesthetic, historical, and philosophical attention. In several recent texts, an analysis of this renewed engagement has been used to frame discussions of the event itself as well as its ubiquitous and often controversial representations. This frame is usually constructed as a historical outline, and delivered as a self-reflexive narrative acknowledging a very particular set of historical and disciplinary constraints. Very often, the narrative opens with an anecdote declaring the identity of the author which, in turn, serves to justify the work undertaken in the text as a whole.

In the first part of this introduction, I discuss several versions of the act of self-reflexive framing that has become a tacit prerequisite for academics dealing with issues surrounding the representation of historical trauma. These texts are part of a larger contemporary conversation about the Holocaust. As such, they provide a theoretical context for the arguments I develop throughout this project. They also provide evidence of something Susan Rubin Suleiman calls the "autobiographical imperative." Although she uses this phrase to describe the languaging practices—reading and writing—integral to the art of autobiography proper, she also suggests that everything we do as academics contains an element of self-reflection and expression: "Just as it has been claimed that all writing, even the driest of critical

studies, is in some way autobiographical, so it can be claimed that all reading is" (1994 200).

In certain instances, the impulse to contextualize an interest in a particularly contentious field goes beyond the desire to outline the relation/distinction between intellectual and autobiographical investment. The need to justify the motivations involved in reading and writing about the Holocaust is evident in each of the texts discussed below. These texts are not exceptions; it would be almost impossible to find a recent book-length work on the Holocaust that did not include at least a few paragraphs about the author's personal investment in the historical events being explored. Very often there is a degree of ambivalence or anxiety manifest in these self-reflexive moments. What I'm interested in is whether these reflections succeed in moving beyond the often rigid processes of identification and identity politics that have emerged as central to Holocaust studies. I believe that the possibility of such movement is necessary for those of us who remain caught—in some cases willfully—within the limits of Lyotard's end-of-the-century melancholy.

In *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (1990), American scholar Eric Santner opens with a preface describing an uncomfortable second encounter with a German family he'd known years before as an exchange student. The conflict concerns a Star of David that Ralf, the family's teenage son, wears on a chain around his neck. When Santner asks about the significance of the star to the teenager, a non-Jew, he is confronted by Ralf's mother who argues that the pendant has no underlying political or historical

meaning for her son. His girlfriend bought it in Israel as a souvenir, and gave it to him as a gift. End of story.

The mother makes it clear that she will not tolerate her son being held accountable to Santner—"an American and a Jew" (x)—for events that took place years before he was born. However, her response conveys more to Santner than she perhaps intends; her anger, her defensiveness, and her denial all function as symptoms of the as yet unresolved trauma of the Holocaust manifest in an ordinary contemporary German family.[1] Santner uses the encounter to bridge the personal and the political, following this anecdote with a concise account of West Germany's political climate, circa 1986.

The controversies, scandals, and public debates over the representation of German national identity and, more specifically, over the ways that the Holocaust marking this identity should figure within these representations, provides Santner with a set of symptoms—a pathology—on which to focus his analysis. Reagan's conflation of German soldiers with Holocaust victims in his commemorative speech at Bitburg in 1985,[2] the series of public conflicts over the relation between German historiography and the Holocaust known as the *Historikerstreit* in 1986, and Philipp Jenniger's resignation as the speaker of the West German Parliament, after celebrating "the enthusiams and passions that moved so many Germans to support National Socialism" in a "speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the *Kristallnacht*" in 1988 (Santner xi), are all evidence of a failure, on the part of the German people, to work through the events of the Second World War. Santner argues that these often volatile conflicts over the issue of representation

are the result of Germany's refusal to take collective responsibility, and can therefore be read as symptoms of its failure to properly mourn.[3]

In Ernst van Alphen's *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (1997), the author's motivations are rendered even more personal because the individual context is also a formative one. Unlike Santner, van Alphen was exposed, as a child, to a distinctly European perspective on the Second World War and its aftermath. Growing up in Holland in the two decades following the war, he remembers being bombarded with images of and information about the Holocaust. He describes the process and the effects of this commemoration as follows:

> As someone born in the Netherlands in 1958 into a non-Jewish family, who passed through primary and high school in the 1960's and 1970's in the same country, I had the memory of the Holocaust drummed into my mind. Or rather, the Dutch school system and representations in the media tried to do so. But they failed to have the required effect. I was bored to death by all the stories and images of that war, which were held out to me "officially" as moral warnings. (1)

Like Santner's Ralf, the adolescent van Alphen refuses to admit that the Holocaust is in any way relevant to his own life. The adult van Alphen then goes on to suggest that while teenage rebellion might go some way in accounting for this refusal, the real culprit was the didactic and unimaginative presentation of the information to which he was subjected: "war and Holocaust narratives were dull to me, almost dulled me, as a young child because they were told in such a way

that I was not allowed to have my own response to them" (2). In a surprising twist, he admits to a desire that, given the concerns of his own study, is almost unthinkable: "Fleeting, idiosyncratic identifications I might have with perpetrators instead of with victims were prohibited by official framings; hence were impossible. The narration of the past had no moral ambiguities; moral positions were fixed" (2). One of the most striking features of this "confession," is the resentment he seems to harbour about being denied these identifications.

In the end, however, van Alphen is captivated by the Holocaust imaginatively as well as literally. Given his rejection of the documentary impulse, it is perhaps not surprising that, as an art critic and historian, he finds it easier to respond to what he identifies as imaginative representations of the Holocaust. However, as his personal account moves beyond both childhood experience and academic investment, he makes an admission that places him within a physical enclosure haunted by the very history he had spent so much of his youth denying. In the closing paragraphs of his introduction, van Alphen designates his own home "a guilty house" (14). Designed and built by Harry Elte, a Jewish architect who was deported to Theresienstadt in 1943, the house provides van Alphen with a visceral reference to the Holocaust, without testimony or witness, that allows him his own response to events: "I try to make myself at home by giving the memory of the Holocaust a place. Specifically, I assign it a place within this house, by rethinking the concepts of the uncanny and the sublime, characteristics that, in the history of the arts and literature, are usually invested in the spatial dimension" (15). The house is bigger and more encompassing than a necklace; its historical, political,

and cultural significance cannot, presumably, be ignored. However, and perhaps most importantly, this *guilty* house provides van Alphen with an "authentic" scene from which to articulate his position—both personal and political—in the crisis over representing an event that is still, for many, considered unrepresentable.

In *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (1999), James Berger makes the Holocaust the primary focus in his survey of post-apocalyptic thinking. Writing against the dangerous pull of a millennial fatalism, Berger declares himself "more concerned with history than with prophecy" (xii). His commitment to the *post*-apocalyptic allows him to focus on the ways in which the Holocaust continues to haunt us even after it has been designated the end, the unspeakable horror described by its architects as the *Final Solution.* Like Santner, Berger links his analysis to political events such as Reagan's controversial and revisionist performance at Bitburg. Like van Alphen, he frames the Holocaust as an event that, although unrelentingly commemorated, nevertheless functions as "the apocalypse in history that we are living after and that symptomatically permeates our culture" (Berger xiv). Finally, like both Santner and van Alphen, he gives his engagement with the Holocaust a personal twist.

> When I was nine or ten or maybe eleven (sometime between 1963 and 1965), I drew swastikas on my sneakers. It is hard to remember exactly why. They were fun to draw, getting the angles just right and putting it skewed so that the top line came down diagonally, the shape looking like some swirling razor pinwheel. Of course, I knew what the symbol represented: the Nazis, Nazi Germany, our enemies in the Second World

> War. And there was something else, but it did not seem relevant; a lot of dead bodies, it had something to do with being a Jew. But it did not quite register. We did not talk about it in my family or at temple. I knew about being slaves in Egypt—that came up every Passover. But the Nazis had no connection with my identity as a Jew, an identity I resisted because of boring services and Hebrew classes and its general irrelevance to my life as an American boy. (63)

The focus of each of these accounts is an adolescent male who refuses to identify with or feel any real compassion for victims of the Holocaust. While the self-reflexive turn enacted in these narratives is not uncommon in cultural studies, I find the confessional tone of two of the three authors cited here disturbing. Both van Alphen and Berger admit to having identified with Germans rather than Jews. In other words, they were attracted to those they perceived as the agents rather than the victims of genocide. It is almost as if, in acting out their childhood identifications textually, these now grown men can somehow come clean. The texts following these confessions are meant to register as instances of working through the aftermath of the event, and therefore as narratives of the process of coming to terms with those initial and "inappropriate" responses.

Although I'd read both of these texts before I'd even begun writing the dissertation, I returned to them as the first step in what I thought of as a relatively straightforward exercise. I wanted examples of the self-reflexive turn that I could then use to justify the decision *not* to stage a similar turn of my own. However, certain details began to nag at me; through the process of actively working

through my response to these accounts (and what I viewed as their failure), I began to understand the critical value of multiple and conflicting forms of self-reflection. As a result, I've gone back on my earlier decision. However, before I identify the details of my own investment in the Holocaust, I want to return to Berger and van Alphen and attempt to explain what it was in *their* accounts specifically that prompted this change of mind. I will follow this discussion with a close reading of several excerpts that address the issues surrounding identity, identification, and transference by critic and historian Dominick LaCapra. By demonstrating what is at stake in the scene of identification, LaCapra's texts serve as a critical segue between Berger and van Alphen's accounts and my own. My purpose here is not to judge these writers as being "improperly" reflexive; instead, I'm trying to foreground the ethical dilemmas specific to the autobiographical turn in Holocaust studies, while at the same time making the case that such a turn is imperative.

The most significant difference between Berger's text and van Alphen's is the fact that Berger identifies as Jewish while van Alphen does not. Paradoxically, what this difference led me to ask were not questions about culture, ethnicity, or religion, but questions about gender. What role does gender play in these accounts? Can we read these scenes of identification as adolescent versions of the move to cohesion and inviolability that Lacan outlines in his essay on the mirror-stage? In what ways do they differ from that earlier scene in which the infant (male, in Lacan's account) undergoes that first (albeit illusory) taste of autonomy while viewing himself within the enabling limits of the mirror's frame? Did

Berger and van Alphen identify with Germans rather than Jews because of a desire to recognize themselves as being marked as masculine in very particular ways? Finally, in what ways does this disclosure of adolescent *méconnaissance* justify a sustained intellectual engagement with the aesthetics and politics of Holocaust representation?

Dominick LaCapra has noted that the tendency to identify, to provide a personal context for the intellectual project, is characteristic of Holocaust Studies. In his now canonical text, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994), he discusses the subject-positions of academics engaged with the Holocaust, as well as the biases that result from these positions, in terms of transference:

> The Holocaust presents the historian with transference in the most traumatic form conceivable—but in a form that will vary with the difference in subject-position of the analyst. Whether the historian or analyst is a survivor, a relative of survivors, a former Nazi, a former collaborator, a relative of former Nazis or collaborators, a younger Jew or German distanced from more immediate contact with survival, participation, or collaboration, or a relative "outsider" to these problems will make a difference even in the meaning of statements that may be formally identical. (46)

He goes on to suggest that certain statements made by a non-Jew with no direct experience of the Holocaust sound ridiculous when uttered *as if* in the voice of a survivor. What is interesting to me is the *way* in which he identifies as one of the

"outsiders" referred to above. Without any direct experience of the Holocaust, LaCapra has nevertheless become an authority on issues of representation surrounding this event. However, rather than identify his own investments or cathexes and thereby conform to the process of conscious identification he describes (prescribes) above, he owns up to his subject-position in an uncharacteristically oblique and ambiguous manner:

> Certain statements or even entire orientations may seem appropriate for someone in a given subject-position but not in others. (It would, for example, be ridiculous if I tried to assume the voice of Elie Wiesel or of Saul Friedlander. There is also a sense in which I have no right to these voices. There is also a sense in which, experiencing a lack of viable voice, I am constrained to resort to quotation and commentary more often than I otherwise might be.) (46)

It is not unimportant that his moment of (albeit negative) identification is bracketed off from the body of the text. With the language of disclosure unavailable to him, he is subject to a rhetoric of constraint. The parentheses render this constraint tangible. His voice is necessarily muted because it is not, by virtue of his subject-position, *viable*. What is ironic about this passage is that it occurs early on in a text that wrestles with issues of voice, representation, and investment from beginning to end. Moreover, LaCapra himself is not averse to functioning as a kind of gatekeeper. While he admits that "it is more possible to indicate what has not worked than to legislate what approach must be taken in trying to write or speak about the Holocaust" (47), he argues eloquently, here and

elsewhere, for various kinds of protocol to be observed by those engaged in an analysis of the Holocaust.

In *Memory after Auschwitz*, published four years later, LaCapra has this to say:

> Just as history goes beyond or falls short of memory, so memory has a comparable relation to history. There may be aspects of memory that have no place in history, for example, aspects of my personal life that do not bear on—and may even be diversionary, tendentious, or irrelevant with respect to—certain issues. For this reason, the turn to the anecdote and autobiography must be carefully motivated if it is not to be dubious. (21-22)

LaCapra follows this caution with a potentially dubious thumbnail sketch detailing his own proximity to the Holocaust—he tells the story of a childhood spent in New York, a story of a Catholic "Sabbath goy" in a neighbourhood of Jews, many of whom were "undoubtedly Jewish émigrés from Nazi-controlled areas of Europe" (22). He then complicates this self-reflexive turn with a footnote stating "that the study of the Holocaust has now passed beyond the confines of Jewish studies or a sector of German studies and has become a problem of general concern. One need provide no autobiographical or other particular motivation to account for one's interest in it, and the important consideration is what results from that interest" (22 n14)..

LaCapra's bracketing off of authorial subjectivity/voice—as footnote or parenthetical aside—has interesting implications for Holocaust studies in general, and for my own project in particular. By identifying as a Sabbath goy, LaCapra

constructs an "authentic" identity for himself as someone interested in the Jewish experience of the Holocaust. However, by acknowledging that this identity is tentative, the text performatively addresses the identity contests specific to Holocaust studies. While LaCapra acknowledges that it is no longer necessary to provide evidence of an autobiographically grounded investment, he does so only after setting the scene of his own origins and motivations.

Like LaCapra, I am an outsider to the problems of survival, participation and collaboration specific to the Holocaust. I am neither a survivor, nor a child of survivors; I am neither a perpetrator, nor a child of perpetrators. Because my identity is predicated on a *lack* of personal experience, my interest in the Holocaust must be justified, instead, by the work itself. This does not mean, however, that all my investments are either objective or academic. Like the personal narratives supplied by Berger and van Alphen, the story with which I would explain my emotional investment in the Holocaust neither justifies nor authenticates the work I've undertaken here; it's a story I'm therefore reluctant to share. However, as I argue in the preface, the forms of post-Holocaust representation I've chosen as primary texts succeed because they elicit an affective as well as an intellectual response. I also argue that my approach to the works themselves is an attempt to balance analysis with discovery, critical engagement with spontaneity. To refuse to acknowledge the autobiographical imperative would not make the work undertaken here any more valid; it would simply render those less appropriate forms of identification invisible. More

importantly, it does nothing to change their power over my thinking, or their influence over this project as a whole.

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I bought my first copy of Susan Sontag's *On Photography* while in my early twenties. I didn't go to university out of high school; however, I still read widely. Then, as now, I was interested in art, literature, criticism, and cultural theory. Sontag was an ideal choice, and *On Photography*, with its extended critique of representation, a revelation. Reading it today, the text seems dated; her critique of photography as a means of objectifying living beings and manipulating reality no longer has the force it did when I first encountered it twenty-five years ago. Nevertheless, the story of her awakening to the power of the photograph never fails to move me. It is through this story that I recognized and learned to tell my own.

In the first chapter of *On Photography*, Sontag tells of being confronted by Holocaust atrocities for the first time. Walking into a bookstore in Santa Monica in July 1945, the then twelve-year-old Sontag discovered a book of photographs of prisoners in Bergen-Belsen and Dachau: "When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying" (20). Through her exposure to these images, Sontag's world was forever changed. As if to underline the uniqueness of the Holocaust as seen from the perspective of her barely adolescent

self, she divided her life into two phases: the before and after of this chance visual encounter.

The first time I read this passage I was thrown back to a time and place that was both like and unlike Sontag's Santa Monica bookstore. When I was five years old, I lived with my mother and three sisters in a basement apartment in Calgary. My father had left us the year before, and my mother was trying to make a life without him. It wasn't easy. At five, I was the eldest of her four children. She had no access to childcare, few job skills, and was struggling on her own with the effects of what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder, the result of severe beatings that began the moment she accepted my father's proposal.

In my memory we are seated together in the cramped living room in front of a secondhand black-and-white television set. The program we are watching has ended. Because we have only one channel, we simply wait for the next program to begin. The grainy documentary footage shows piles of corpses being bulldozed into mass graves; it shows bodies lying in filth, and people who look like walking corpses. As familiar as these images are to me now, I divide my life, like Sontag, into the before and after of this viewing. What we do *not* share, however, are the reasons behind this division.

Realizing that the footage represented something that had actually happened, I asked for some explanation. To make its meaning clear to a five-year-old child, my mother used a tactic that was both misleading and uncannily effective: she told me that the people in the documentary footage had been murdered for having black hair and brown eyes. Her explanation is my first memory of intellectual

revelation. Looking into my mother's brown eyes as she offered her version of history, I made the connection—through a process of the most profound misrecognition—between the large-scale violence of the Holocaust and the beatings that had been a regular feature of my mother's life.

Where Berger and van Alphen identified with the perpetrators, I'd learned to identify with the victims. However, even at the age of five, I was not naive enough to believe that my mother belonged to the world depicted in that footage. I'm not suggesting that my mother's experience of domestic abuse is in any way analogous to an experience of the camps. Neither am I advocating the practice of "victimology" that Mark Seltzer argues is an increasingly familiar feature of "wound culture." What I learned through that uncanny first encounter with the world "outside," is that there are forms of violence as meaningless as they are pervasive. I've since learned that it is difficult—often impossible—to come to terms with the effects of this violence through a form of instrumental agency and a sense of righteous moral purpose. My experience has taught me that the struggle to be righteous and whole is more often an accommodation to the world than it is a means of resisting it. Identifying with victims rather than perpetrators is not a more ethical choice. It's not any less fixed, or any less overdetermined by questions of gender, than the identities assumed by Berger and van Alphen. While I do not think it's possible to throw off the psychic traces of this moment of misrecognition, my growing awareness of these traces has made it possible for me to identify a personal investment in specific concerns, as these are explored in Holocaust representation.

Like Adorno, I believe that a work of art is not successful if it can be reduced to a set of programmatic functions. The works of art I've selected for this project are committed in what Adorno describes as the "proper sense." They succeed because they force us to engage with both the work itself and the world that is its context. In every chapter of this dissertation I deal with texts that give me the "right to go from one *genus* to another, to shed light on an object in itself hermetic by casting a glance at society" (Adorno, 1955 33). Fragmented, porous, hermetic, opaque, these works succeed because they compel me to respond to the events of the Holocaust, and to the legacy of its aftermath, without allowing me the illusion that, with the right methodology, I could gain access to meaning as both an authoritative epistemology (this is what I know), and a form of ontological security (this is who I am *because* I know it).

Given the details of my self-reflexive turn, it is no coincidence that the works discussed below engage with the issues surrounding identity, identification, and misrecognition, that they represent—often in contradictory ways—the complex relationship between domestic and public forms of violence, and that they deploy the figure of home as a site of violence as well as a form of shelter. Like Bersani and Dutoit, I am interested in the "*problematics of space*" (5) as this is manifest in theme, metaphor, aesthetic innovation, and critical engagement. Bersani and Dutoit argue that "the work connects to the world by initiating within itself the uncertain tracing (the appearing and the disappearing of boundaries). It provides a formal model of how human beings find themselves through a process of misrecognition" (7). This very serious game of hide-and-seek allows us to

experience the connections being traced *as* they appear and dissolve. Instead of practicing a form of criticism that fixes the boundaries between work and world, we are invited to circulate—*nonsadistically*—within and across these boundaries; our dissemination within the work is a form of resistance.

Demonstrating how this dynamic might function within the context of Holocaust atrocity, Bersani and Dutoit turn to Alain Resnais's 1955 film, *Night and Fog*. Literally pieced together from original colour footage, German news footage, clips from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, and still photographs, *Night and Fog* engages with the problematics of space as both "actual" topography (the concentration camp) and formal innovation (the film as a visual palimpsest of past and present moments that are kept in tension, rather than resolved through chronological narrative). According to Bersani and Dutoit, the film is a work of art that illustrates "the political potential of this participatory mobility. History can be neither remembered nor documented. Resnais forces us to 'remember' images from our personal and collective past as part of a self-discovery *now*" (7).

•

Christian Boltanski, Sharon Riis, Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras, and Sarah Kofman do not depict the events of the Holocaust in a direct way. Boltanski and Riis belong to the generation born immediately after the Holocaust. Their work is not testimonial in the strictest sense of the term; although they incorporate acts of witnessing into their post-Holocaust representations, they are almost obsessively invested in taking apart stable or fixed identities. One effect of their shared

deconstructive bent is the radical destabilization of both the subject and properly historical accounts of the Holocaust. Surprisingly, although Perec, Duras, and Kofman lived through the events of the Second World War, their memoirs also actively undermine the fixed identity and the "true" story. All three writers provide fragmented and even contradictory accounts of their experiences in France during the Nazi occupation, leaving it to the reader to determine the truth of each account.

The significance of my title, therefore, is twofold. First, *Tracing the Holocaust* refers to the in- and occasional mis- direction of my primary texts, as outlined above. Second, because of the dense and often oblique nature of historical reference in these works, it also refers to my own acts of tracing or tracking the Holocaust through forms of engagement that do not rely on chronological narrative and empirical description. I am *not* suggesting that we no longer need narrative or historical accounts of this event. What I want to argue, however, is that the experiments I've brought together here provide a necessary supplement to such accounts, making possible new affective and critical responses to the disaster.

II: The Trace

> My desire is not to entrap you in the book and its painful content but rather to enable you to witness it and engage with it and its struggle with the history of the Holocaust. There is no end to the questions. There is no end to the need for engagement. And when we feel the need to depart, we

> leave through the door marked "exit," always aware that the narrative continues to be written after our departure.
>
> Vivian Patraka
>
> In this language I tried, during those years and the years after, to write poems: in order to speak, to orient myself, to find out where I was, where I was going, to chart my reality.
>
> Paul Celan, "Bremen Speech"[4]

Like poet and Holocaust survivor Paul Celan, Vivian Patraka figures engagement with the Holocaust as movement, a journey producing questions which are very often left unanswered. And yet this epigraph from her work is a fitting introduction to the writing of Paul Celan for reasons that go beyond this figuration. In *Spectacular Suffering* (1999), Patraka explores theatrical representations of the Holocaust though a conceptual framework she calls the Holocaust performative. Influenced by the work of Judith Butler, Patraka applies the concepts of repetition and reiteration to the Holocaust performance. However, because she feels that "there is little place for the material history and its determinations in Butler's account" (6), she extends the theory by introducing *accountability* into the mix: "'subversion' and 'transgression' (which the term 'performative' frequently connotes) of discursive conventions are complicated and problematized by the Holocaust. As a result, in the Holocaust performative, play is limited by accountability" (7). It is important to note that in order to resist the disciplinary role so often associated with those who raise the question of ethics Patraka is careful to distinguish between accountability and censure:

> By accountability I don't mean normative gate-keeping about what can and cannot be included in discussions of the Holocaust, what is and is not allowed to be shown, by whom and to whom. I mean rather an acknowledgment that representation, artistic and critical, is always a site of struggle between history and its representations, between desire and loss, and between the unmanageable and the manageable. Accountability is not the same as reverentiality: accountability leaves room for critical inquiry, for debate, and risks being more invitational to other scholars. (7-8)

One concept central to Patraka's own engagement with the Holocaust is *goneness*. A neologism, goneness is used in place of the more conventional term, absence, "because it more completely reflects the definitiveness, the starkness, and the magnitude of this particular genocide by dictating the scope of what and who has been violently lost, including succeeding generations that cannot be" (4). Citing drama critic and theorist Elin Diamond, Patraka argues that performativity is an investigation of the tension "between a doing (a repetition of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpretations)" (qtd. in Patraka 6). However, as with Butler's work, Diamond's terms are then *re*-articulated to meet the needs of the Holocaust performative: "In relation to that particular genocide, I identify the thing done as *the thing gone* (and not just categories and conventions)" (6-7; emphasis in original). Goneness, in other words, is a force (paradoxically, a void) demanding iteration:

> It is the goneness of the Holocaust that produces the simultaneous profusion of discourses and understandings; the goneness is what opens up, what spurs, what unleashes the perpetual desire to do, to make, to rethink the Holocaust. I suggest that the theory of the Holocaust and its goneness shifts the balance between the performative "doing" and "thing done": that is, the absoluteness of the thing done weighs heavily on any doing of the Holocaust performative. The Holocaust performative acknowledges that there is nothing to say to goneness and yet we continue to try and mark it, say it, identify it, and memorialize the loss over and over. (7)

While Patraka admits that this incessant memorialization is both inevitable and necessary, she also registers a sense of danger. Because the "performative negotiates the terrain between discourse and its material effects" reiteration and performativity produce "a reality that is in some sense new" (6). In terms of the Holocaust, however, the constitution of a new reality is always charged with the potential for indifference and revisionism, as "the constant iteration against the pressure of a palpable loss" also generates "denial, resistance, appropriation, trivialization, and misrecognition" (7).

In "A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy and Denial," historian Charles Maier voices a similar concern. In response to his own question: "Can there be too much memory?" (136), he supplies his audience not with answers, but with a lecture on the differences between memory and history, and with a caution about the dangerous seductiveness of a post-Holocaust melancholy. Critical of the current intellectual fascination with memory, he likens those

afflicted with this fascination to pleasure seekers, addicts, and finally, in this next passage, to cancer patients infected through their exposure to a radioactive postmodernism:

> Causal analysis is replaced by representation. The belief that society might play a causal role in historical outcomes gives way to the belief that politics is discourse and symbol and can hardly be explained by any reference outside itself. First social classes and then individuals have been decentered and dissolved in this causal opaqueness. Agency thus dissipates in a sea of discourse; and only the self-enclosed system of symbolic activity can be described, like some serpent swallowing its own tail....With the *metastasis* of discourse, the *metastasis* of memory was bound to occur as well: indeed, memory, we can claim, has become the discourse that replaces history. (141-42, emphasis added)

Maier makes a distinction between the "sweet" melancholy of Wordsworth and Goethe and the psychic aftermath of the Holocaust (139), reserving his most severe criticisms for that "most egregious branch of what might be called the memory industry, that is Holocaust commemoration" (143). Where history is "discordant and plural" memory is singular and unverifiable; where historians are faced with the reconstruction of causal sequences, the "oracles of memory, the mouths that speak for the dead, actually celebrate the anti-historical component of memory; they claim that memories retrieve experiences that must remain ineffable" (143). Finally, and this seems to be the crux of Maier's critique, where historians provide analysis, a means of working through and moving beyond

historical trauma, memory is concerned only with suffering and victimization: "Since the objective is not causal sequencing but access to vivid and intense past experiences, collective memories tend to focus not on the long history of an ethnic people but on their most painful incidents of victimization" (144). As he states even more directly in the next paragraph: "Is not the real lesson of the Holocaust museum—or of Yad Vashem in Israel, the national shrine to which every visitor is immediately taken—that the group sponsoring the museum has suffered incredibly and wants recognition of the fact" (145).

Patraka shares Maier's critical take on the sites of Holocaust commemoration listed above. However, her readings of these sites, as well as of the performances that constitute the bulk of her study, avoid the sarcasm and the reductive generalizations characteristic of Maier's essay. More importantly, her commitment to goneness as both a conceptual category and an experience of "unmanageability" bars her from assuming the either/or positionality Maier seems to expect from his audience. History and memory are not antagonists. This is not to say that there aren't conflicts arising from their difference. However, as Patraka conveys through her description of the Hall of Testimony at the Beit Hashoah in Los Angeles, in a history marked by such extreme loss, memory is essential precisely because it is impossible:

> This hall is at the end of the Holocaust section, and made of concrete, with concrete benches and raised video monitors encased in concrete. It is a big, cold, windowless room, suggestive of a bunker or a crematorium. Holocaust survivor testimony and the words of those who did not survive

play on the monitors. Between showings of individual narratives, cantorial voices sing. The voices are full of sorrow that cannot be managed, full of the weight of a history that cannot be absorbed, absences that can never be filled, contradictions that can never be resolved. (131)

•

In "Memory Shot Through With Holes," French writer Henri Raczymow opens with the following disclaimer: "My place here is somewhat paradoxical. I am supposed to speak, yet I have nothing to say. No lesson to teach, no advice to give, no message to deliver, no strategies to propose" (98). Speaking at a colloquium of Jewish writers held at the Sorbonne in January 1986, Raczymow addresses the question of identity, specifically Jewish identity, with a formulation that anticipates Patraka's neologic *goneness*: "My Jewish identity was not nothing, it was *nothingness*, a kind of entity in itself, with its own weight, values, stylistic possibilities, contours, colors, moorings" (99). Discussing the legacy of Judaism in contemporary France, he suggests that the fragments available to him—of Yiddish, for example—"do not equal a legacy, but merely a remnant, the 'next-to-nothing' that remains of what was lost. It is the proof or the mark of the loss—its trace. So a trace remains. In turn, we can lose the trace. Lose loss itself. Lose, if you will, the feeling of loss. And dissolve into nothing" (100).

Writing is the technique by which Raczymow maintains the legibility of this trace. Wary of the nostalgic desire to recover a past before the Holocaust, a past unavailable to third-generation Polish Jews living in France, he surveys his own work and realizes that he has nevertheless attempted to fulfill that desire. He

likens the process of writing *Contes d'evil et d'oubli* (1979), a novel he describes as his first "Jewish" book (102), to a journey or quest: "At the end of the 1970s, I made a voyage. I did not know then that I was not the only one. It was an imaginary voyage. I went to Poland, to the Jewish Poland that my grandparents had left. From this imaginary trip—I have never set foot in Poland—I brought back a short book in which I attempted to explore the 'next-to-nothing' in my own memory" (100). This exploration "devoid of memory, without content, beyond exile" (100) is a testament to the ineffable that Maier characterizes as a waste of words. In Raczymow's version, however, the ineffable is itself a profound expression of goneness: "The unsaid, the untransmitted, the silence about the past were themselves eloquent" (100).

Contes d'evil et d'oubli is followed by a second "Jewish" text: *Un cris sans voix* (1985), is "a portrayal of the place of immigration, the Parisian Jewish quarter of Belleville in the 1950s" (102). When read together, these two novels represent "the before and after" of Auschwitz, functioning as a "parenthesis" within "whose center lay silence" (102). They represent, in other words, a history "shot through with holes" (102, 103). Raczymow concludes his presentation on memory and writing with the following lines: "Out of the impossibility of recapturing the past, some forge the very meaning of their writing, well aware of how ridiculous the pursuit of the impossible is" (105).

•

Paul Celan spent the last twenty-five years of his life in pursuit of this impossibility. The two selections that I want to focus on here are acceptance

speeches, public addresses within which Celan self-consciously performs the roles of poet and survivor. In each of these speeches, as in Raczymow's "Memory Shot Through with Holes," the trope of mobility, of travel and departure, is deployed within a very specific historical context. Sharing Vivian Patraka's commitment to material history, Celan nevertheless maintains a complex and even vexed relationship to language. The mandate here, too, is accountability. It is important to note, however, that play, while limited, is an absolutely crucial aspect of Celan's engagement.

Opening his 1958 Bremen address with a lesson on the relationship between the German verbs to think (*denken*) and to thank (*danken*), Celan accepts the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen by inviting his audience to enter into "the semantic fields of memory and devotion" that link his past to their shared present (33). By the second paragraph of the address, these seemingly abstract fields are transformed into a landscape that is both material and textual, a landscape familiar yet circled about by detours:

> The region from which I come to you—with what detours! but then, is there such a thing as a detour?—will be unfamiliar to most of you. It is the home of many of the Hasidic stories which Martin Buber has retold in German. It was—if I may flesh out this topographical sketch with a few details which are coming back to me from a great distance—it was a landscape where both people and books lived. (33)

Like Raczymow, Celan describes an integral relation between history as experienced by real people and the texts written by and about these people. The

landscape being traversed is necessarily both literal and figurative. Celan's biographer Joel Felstiner insists that the interruptions and elisions in the Bremen speech are not simply stylistic but performative, enacting the relation between language and the flesh-and-blood participants of history: "Self-interruption and understatement veil a grief at origins brutally effaced. The actual 'detour' in Celan's sentence covers not only his own migrations but his parents' deportations" (114).

One of the most striking features of this address, especially given the cultural context supplied by Raczymow above, is Celan's reference to details of a past accessible to him only from a great distance. Like Raczymow, he attempts the impossible task of recapturing a past that has been erased. However, unlike Raczymow, he has direct experience of that past. Paradoxically, this experience is made tangible by its absence, referred to *in passing* as a series of unspecified detours.

However inadequate language might appear in the post-Holocaust moment of Celan's Bremen address, it emerges as the one sure thing to travel through the devastation with him:

> Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, 'enriched' by it all. (34)

Ulrich Baer has argued that Celan's poetry "testif[ies] to the destruction of historical, linguistic, psychological and cultural frames of reference during the Shoah" (20). What is remarkable is Celan's unequivocal commitment to language—that ostensible medium of referentiality—in the aftermath of this destruction. Celan's suggestion that language has been enriched by the catastrophe is almost inexplicable. It is as if he is attempting, in a manner both subtle and calculated, to shock his audience into accepting language and, by extension, poetry, as a primal defense against the dehumanizing horrors of genocide.

In "The Meridian" (1960), Celan revisits the impossible by staging a return to his "own place of origin" (54). Orphaned and cast adrift, he traces this journey over the topography of childhood:

> I am looking for all this with my imprecise, because nervous, finger on a map—a child's map, I must admit.
>
> None of these places can be found. They do not exist. But I know where they ought to exist, especially now, and . . . I find something else. (54)

Doomed from the outset, Celan never reaches a destination that is also, in many ways, his point of departure. However, as his address reaches its conclusion it becomes obvious that arriving at this destination is beside the point. It is the process of reaching, of writing, that circling between past and present, that is the real purpose of his address. What Celan discovers, and why he maintains his commitment to language, is the experience of connection. "Ladies and gentlemen,

I find something which consoles me a bit for having walked this impossible road in your presence, this road of the impossible. I find the connective, which, like the poem, leads to encounters" (54).

In his essay on Paul Celan, Emmanuel Levinas is attentive to the circling repetitions of the return, and to the adventure of the encounter: "But the surprise of that adventure in which the *I* dedicates himself to the other in the non-place, is the return. Not return as a response to the one who is called, but by the circularity of this movement that does not turn back, the circularity of this perfect trajectory, this meridian that, in its finality without end, describes the poem" (44). In "The Meridian" this circuit between self and other, this energy of the encounter, echoes or mirrors an interior circle: "Poetry is perhaps this: an *Atemwende*, a turning of our breath" (Celan 47). The sense of adventure, the impulse to make contact with the unknown, is not limited to encounters in the world outside the self. Celan's turning breath also marks the affirmative acknowledgement of a post-traumatic subjectivity. The goneness Vivian Patraka identifies as integral to the Holocaust performative can be identified here as a gap or fissure in the experience and conception of self, *as well as* an understanding of the space between oneself and an other. The parallel trajectories, the encounter without, and the encounter—or turning breath—within, are the space of potential connection and dialogue. Identified by Levinas as a non-place, the space of the encounter is not a point of origin, but, in Celan's words "paths from a voice to a listening You, natural paths, outlines for existence perhaps, for projecting ourselves into the search for ourselves . . . A kind of homecoming" (Celan 53).

III: *en route*

> A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on a shoreline of the heart. In this way, too, poems are *en route*: they are headed toward.
>
> Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality.
>
> Paul Celan, "Bremen Speech"

One way to understand *Tracing the Holocaust* is as a performance of critical reciprocity. Motivated by what I felt was a constitutive relation between the Holocaust and post-war experiments in art and literature, I wanted to explore the ways in which these experiments themselves "theorize" the events that they (often obliquely) represent. I am writing, therefore, towards some "semblance of parity and reciprocity" (Rogoff 8) that exposes the influence of historical trauma on aesthetic form, while at the same time highlighting the ways in which formal experimentation produces alternative understandings of the historical event. Rather than limit my focus to questions of aesthetic innovation, I view form as an integral component of "material history and its determinations" (Patraka 6). Rather than impose a teleological relationship between the Holocaust and post-war aesthetics, I investigate, instead, the ways in which contemporary experiments in art and literature trouble and very often enhance our understanding of history.

Because I wanted to avoid practicing what Rogoff calls "a form of knowledge territorialization" (8), I had to devise a method that would allow me to move from outside the work of art in order to circulate—in Bersani's words—within it. I also thought it *prudent* (though I'm aware of how contradictory this might sound given everything I've said up to this point) to situate this practice of circulation within the critical traditions of my own discipline (English). I have therefore adopted what might be best described as a hybrid critical method: a fusion of hermeneutics (an analysis of text that relies on logic manifest as forms of sequential linking), and heuretics (a more open-ended process of discovery and invention).

I am, admittedly, taking liberties with these two "opposed" interpretive traditions. By hermeneutics I am not referring to a method of analysis that seeks to fix the meaning of a work of art through the faithful reconstruction of its historical context. Instead, I am following the lead of Wolfgang Iser who, in "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach" (1972), outlines a method that is "virtually hermeneutic" (446). According to this method, *contingent* meanings are produced through a dialectical negotiation between the text and each reader: "The text provokes certain expectations which in turn we project onto the text in such a way that we reduce the polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation in keeping with the expectations aroused, thus extracting an *individual configurative meaning*" (446, emphasis added). Iser argues that within this version of the hermeneutic method, "it is the very incompleteness" of the text "that gives it its productive value" (446).

In the context of Holocaust representation, the term "invention" might be read as being dangerously synonymous with "revision." The heuretic method I'm invoking as the other (better) half of my approach, is not a method of historical revision. Instead, it is a practice that enables the critic to engage in interpretive acts of discovery, a practice that goes at least one step further than the dialectical negotiation outlined by Iser above. In "The Heuretics of Deconstruction" (1994), Gregory Ulmer introduces his explicitly Derridean method as a means of thinking otherwise: "Derrida suggests that it is possible to think and write otherwise. Other than what? Other than critique; other than hermeneutics. But this other is not unheard of. It has a name: 'heuretics'—'The branch of logic which treats the art of discovery or invention,' says the Oxford English Dictionary (OED)" (80). As if anticipating Rogoff's appeal for a critical practice of disciplinary deterritorialization, Ulmer asserts that to "do heuretics is to cross the discourses of art and theory" (81).

What alerted me to the potential of heuretics for my own project is Ulmer's demonstration of his method. Near the end of the essay he embarks on a heuretic engagement with Boltanski's *Detective*, a massive installation that incorporates "every photograph from all issues" of the French crime magazine *Detective*, "published in 1972 and 1973" (91). Drawing an associative link between these images and the "anonymous victims" of the Holocaust, Ulmer argues that Boltanski's "'compositions' are not meant as 'art,' but something else having to do with the problematic relationship between the public and private sphere" (92). The piece itself is heuretic. Ulmer describes it as,

> a product of popular culture, whose operations of sublating the documents of family life (snapshots) into the mythology of crime narrative are part of the purpose of the work to expose, and then to continue the circulation in its own turn, by a collage process, remotivating the doubly found images to resonate with another set of meanings, more critical, or more reflective, with quite different overtones. (93-4)

Having identified the theoretical practice implicit in *Detective*, Ulmer goes on to connect Boltanski's work—again, through association rather than formal logic—to the music of Brian Eno, and to Lyotard's notion of the *differend.* It is through this process of linking that he is able to trace a mobile relationship between the work of art and the world. Identifying *Detective* as an "event score," Ulmer understands its value in terms that are reminiscent of the successful, sublimated work of art in Adorno's "Commitment." The hidden 'it should be otherwise' in Ulmer's formulation is revealed by Boltanski's practice of "filling the silence of knowledge with the materials of everyday life, in the way that art has always been able to work without concept, as Brian Eno says, to 'give us a feel' for the new organizational structures that are needed in a world of which Auschwitz and the differend are just symptoms. (94-5)

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In spite of the fact that I've situated this project (albeit strategically) within a specific discipline, *Tracing the Holocaust* poses something of a disciplinary challenge. Rather than limit my analysis to a single genre or medium, I explore a variety of visual and literary forms, including installations, photography, fiction,

and memoir. In contrast to the usual privileging of eyewitness and/or realist accounts of the genocide, I focus on cryptic, fragmented, and even obscure representations of both the Holocaust and its painful legacy. I believe that one of the reasons experimental representations of trauma work is that they force us to move beyond the familiar outlines of conventional and often formulaic structures. It is this uncertainty, as well as the engagement required of us in the process of moving towards unfamiliar and very often uncomfortable terrain, that is the real value of the work explored here.

My primary texts are personal choices; they are pieces that have moved, excited, and sometimes even confounded me. They are also provocative. Simultaneously resisting and eliciting interpretation, they are sites of contest, material expressions of conflicts specific to Holocaust studies. Finally, in spite of differences in location and medium, these works represent a debate, within the arts themselves, over issues of representation and accountability. As if in response to Celan's call for an "approachable reality," these artists return to the past and attempt to address the legacy of the Holocaust without simply relegating the horrors of that traumatic history *to* the past. There is movement towards and away from the atrocities of the war that might be read, in the spirit of Celan, as a movement along and across a series of meridians: between past and present, between autobiography and history, between the domestic and the public, and between life and death.

The structure of the project is modeled on Celan's notion of the *Atemwende*, or turning breath. The most direct representations of the Holocaust are the subject of

my first and last chapters. In terms of the actual topography of the Holocaust, this structure allows me to open and close with representations that focus on the events of the war and its aftermath as these are played out on European ground. In Chapter 1, I explore the work of Christian Boltanski, the son of a survivor and one of the leading practitioners of post-Holocaust art in contemporary France. In Chapter 3, I bring together three memoirs about life in France during the Nazi occupation. Georges Perec, Marguerite Duras and Sarah Kofman experienced this occupation in very different ways, and from very different positions. However, their accounts are linked through their evocation of an occupied Paris. My opening and closing chapters frame—and therefore, in a sense, circle—a discussion of the Holocaust's legacy as it is played out elsewhere. In Chapter 2, my focus shifts from Europe to the unlikely domestic spaces of rural Alberta represented by Sharon Riis, whose novels link the traumatic historical experience of Canada's First Nations with the genocide of European Jewry. At the centre of this dissertation then, is an evocation of the Holocaust staged within a space that I identify as home.

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In the first two sections of Chapter 1, I reevaluate the work of Christian Boltanski in light of recent theoretical writing on the function of humour in Holocaust representation. I follow this with a discussion of specific works that serve as an "event score" through which to explore the history of anti-Semitism in France, as this history was played out in psychiatry (hysteria) and the theatre (cabaret). I am especially interested in the ways in which Boltanski assumes

contradictory subject-positions and mobilizes anti-Semitic stereotypes as a means of working through the legacy of the Holocaust. In the two final sections of this chapter, I address the relationship between childhood, photography and historical trauma. Through the reenactment of autobiographical family scenes in his *Comic Sketches*, Boltanski focuses on the domestic space as a site within which the psychic effects of the Holocaust are transmitted from one generation to the next. Through his deployment of a photograph of French schoolchildren dressed in Purim costumes, taken in 1939, he traces the boundaries between the work of art (a series of mounted, modified and frustratingly opaque images of children) and the world, while at the same time inviting us to view the celebration of Purim, with and against the historical record, as a form of political resistance.

In Chapter 2, I deal with the legacy of the Holocaust as it is experienced from a distance. This chapter traces the complex and often contradictory ways in which Sharon Riis deploys the Holocaust as a paradigmatic event through which to read the genocide of Canada's First Nations peoples. In her novels, the Holocaust is discernible, but only indirectly. Registered as a psychic trace and reiterated as a sequence of oblique references, the Holocaust is both a discrete event and a secondary trauma that forces a confrontation with that earlier and more local catastrophe. Riis's first novel deals with the relationship between Canada's colonial history and the Holocaust less explicitly than her second. However, these two traumas—linked, I will argue, through the operations of belatedness—are at the centre of each text. Riis attempts to undo the damage of traumatic histories by forging connections between individuals that push them beyond their physical,

emotional and psychic limits. As a means of working through the effects of historical trauma, Riis's method does not provide a practical program; however, her radical refiguration of home, and of difference, provides us with a model for moving forward into a world that "should be otherwise."

In the final chapter, I look at works by three French writers who, through very different strategies, managed to survive the German Occupation. Georges Perec and Sarah Kofman experienced the war as children. In order to save her son, Perec's mother arranged for him to stay with an aunt and uncle in the unoccupied zone. However, she was unable to get out of Paris herself, and was deported to Auschwitz. Although Perec has written a book-length memoir about these years, I've chosen a shorter text, "The Rue Vilin," that recounts a series of visits he made to his family's home in Paris almost three decades after the war. Following her husband's arrest and deportation, Kofman's mother arranged for her children to stay in safe houses outside the city. Unwilling to be separated from her mother, Kofman remained in Paris, in hiding, throughout the occupation. *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* is an account of her journey into hiding; it is also describes the dissolution of her identity as the beloved youngest child of an Orthodox Jewish family, and her assumption of a new identity through her conversion into a Catholic schoolgirl. Unlike both Perec and Kofman, Duras lived through the war years as an adult; her memoir does not address the loss of a parent, but of a spouse. She and her husband, Robert Antelme, were active members of the French Resistance. Her memoir, published in French as *La Douleur*, begins at the

end of the war, and documents the struggles she faces while waiting for Antelme's return from Dachau.

What these texts have in common is a process of working through traumatic memory undertaken as a movement through the streets of the city itself. The recreation of Paris as a palimpsest of past and present moments operates as a thematic as well as a structural principle. Gathered together as a constellation of memory, these memory-works by Perec, Kofman and Duras challenge the notion of selfhood as "an ethical ideal" (Bersani 4), by affirming, instead, the impossibility and the imperative of constructing an inheritance.

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[1] The term ordinary is itself a point of contention within Holocaust Studies. Used by Christopher Browning in *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Batallion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993) it signals Browning's focus on the human as opposed to demonic dimensions of those identified as perpetrators of the Holocaust. Without apologizing for the members of the batallion specifically, or perpetrators in general, Browning focuses on the choices made by these men in light of cultural, social and economic factors specific to Poland and Germany during the war.

Daniel Goldhagen's bestselling and controversial book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996), uses the term in a manner counter to Browning's thesis, arguing that anti-Semitism had been an intrinsic aspect of German culture for centuries preceding the war. In Goldhagen's text, the term ordinary is used ironically, designating all perpetrators inherently sadistic, and all Germans monstrous. One major concern for critics of the Browning and Goldhagen texts are the implications of these conflicting theses with regard to issues such as agency and responsibility. If, as in Browning's book, the perpetrators are human, they can be held responsible for their actions. If, by contrast, they are monstrous, their actions can too easily be rendered inevitable, and as a result, the issues of responsibility, agency, volition are rendered moot. For a careful reading of Goldhagen's text and the critical controversy that attended its publication, see A. D. Moses' "Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics." *History and Theory* 37.2 (1998): 194-219.

[2] For a concise account of the events referred to as Bitburg (Reagan's decision to "honor a German military cemetery at Bitburg, having previously declined to visit a concentration camp memorial site" and his refusal to distinguish "between the fallen German soldiers and the murdered Jews" in his commemorative speech), as well as a thoughtful analysis of aftermath of these actions, see Geoffrey Hartman's "Bitburg," reprinted in *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1996), pages 60-71.

[3] My references to events serve to supply a context rather than delineate a proper history. For a more careful analysis of the conflicts of this period see Dominick LaCapra's discussion of the *Historikerstreit*, in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994), pages 43-67. He reworks his analysis in the chapter entitled "Revisiting the Historians' Debate: Mourning and Genocide" in *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998), pages 43-72. The psychoanalytic readings provided by LaCapra in both texts make his work a companionable supplement to Santner.

[4] This is an abbreviated title; the full title of this speech is "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen." See Works Cited for the complete reference.

Chapter 1

Yes, We Have No Boltanskis

> Liss quotes the director of the Holocaust Museum as stating emphatically that the museum "is not a Boltanski"—a "Boltanski" being a work in which history is both deception and obsession, simultaneously kitsch and deeply profound.
>
> Marita Sturken

In a review essay in *Afterimage: The Journal of Media Arts and Cultural Criticism* (1999), Marita Sturken rehearses the issues surrounding the aesthetic representation of historical trauma by focusing on several critical texts about artists whose work references the Holocaust. In this chapter I discuss two of these texts as points of entry into the debates over representation that are invoked in virtually all of the criticism available on French artist Christian Boltanksi.[1] At issue in each text is the question of historical accuracy, and the willingness—or, in Boltanski's case, the unwillingness—of artists to comply with what Sturken describes as the "stringent moral codes" governing representations of the Holocaust (10).

Until recently, Boltanski was seen by many as a con man set loose in the field of post/Holocaust art.[2] In Ernst van Alphen's *Caught by History: Holocaust Effects in Contemporary Art, Literature, and Theory* (1997), and Andrea Liss's *Trespassing Through Shadows: Memory, Photography, and the Holocaust* (1998), the accusations leveled by Boltanski's harsher critics are acknowledged and, to varying degrees, challenged. Ernst van Alphen attempts to counter the artist's

bad-boy reputation. The Boltanski discussed in *Caught by History* produces art that is both subtle and fundamentally subversive, art that demonstrates historical (and by extension, political) engagement even when it is referential in only the most oblique ways. The historical reference van Alphen reads into every one of Boltanski's pieces, even those that are about something else, is the Holocaust. By limiting this work to its *Holocaust-effects*, he is able to construct a stable reading of Boltanski's diverse oeuvre. More importantly, by supplying his audience with a comprehensive reading, van Alphen is able to champion Boltanski as a heroic figure whose work consistently challenges conservative prescriptions against experimental representations of the Holocaust.

Andrea Liss's account of Boltanski's work is both more measured and more openly skeptical. She prefaces her own readings of specific installations with a brief survey of negative reviews in order to locate Boltanski's project more rigorously within contemporary theoretical and ethical debates. While she shares van Alphen's view of Boltanski as a vanguard, she is less willing to celebrate the work as a necessarily subversive or corrective rendering of history in general and of the Holocaust more specifically. However, when she juxtaposes his installations with the images and artifacts housed in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D. C., even Liss concedes that, for all his irreverence, Boltanski is better able to communicate loss in a complex and potentially less dehumanizing way than the museum's graphic display of mass murder.

In both of these critical texts Boltanski appears willfully playful. In van Alphen's book, Boltanski's games are described as being childlike (169); in Liss's, the artist is ambivalently identified as a trickster or clown (39). Willing to play around with history, refusing to submit to the injunction against non-realist or non-mimetic representations of genocide, Boltanski challenges decades of moral as well as aesthetic convention. His experimental deployment of the Holocaust, elaborated on, at length, in interviews, has been read by certain critics as an offensive not only against taste, but against ethics and accountability. Therefore, in the first two sections of this chapter I explore the controversies surrounding Boltanski's aesthetic experiments by looking at criticism that constructs the artist as either a hero or a clown. These sections, entitled "Huckster or Hero?" and "Holocaust Laughter," address questions about form (does an "experimental" aesthetic necessarily signify a form of heroism?), as well as concerns about instrumentality (how do the seemingly antithetical positions of comic and hero play out in late twentieth-century representations of the Holocaust? does humour function as a means of overcoming adversity, or is it a means of dealing with the effects of adversity without providing an escape?). To put these questions more bluntly, what—if anything—is the value of cultural practices that fall into a category defined by Terrence des Pres as Holocaust Laughter?

In the chapter's third section, "Cabaret after Auschwitz," I trace a link between Boltanski's cabaret-style performances and the history of cabaret in both nineteenth-century France and Germany under National Socialism. Taking

elements of his own life and twisting them—in terms of both form and content—Boltanski has developed what might be best understood as a type of parodic autobiographical method. Linking his own biography with the historical and, as I will argue, political practice of cabaret, Boltanski plays with the issues surrounding identity and identity politics that are at the forefront of so much of his work. In this section, therefore, I focus on the ways in which Boltanski mobilizes certain stereotypes of Jewishness—even while modeling himself on the non-Jewish German cabaret performer Karl Valentin—as a means of challenging dangerously narrow and often anti-Semitic preconceptions about Jewish identity.

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Boltanski's career as an artist began almost as if in response to his early experiences of anti-Semitism. Made to feel different from other children he began to withdraw from social interactions at school; he dropped out at age eleven and was taught at home by his mother and brother. There he took up drawing and, after being encouraged by his family, very quickly turned to painting. [3] Even in this early work Boltanski demonstrated a concern with what American critic Lynn Gumpert describes as the "existential conundrums" that galvanized French intellectuals in the decades following the war. As a teenager he was interested in representing not only death, but mass death and collective trauma. In a very early painting completed in 1961, *L'Entrée des Turcs à Van* (The Entry of the Turks into Van)[4], he depicted the 1915 Turkish massacre of Armenians (Figure 1).

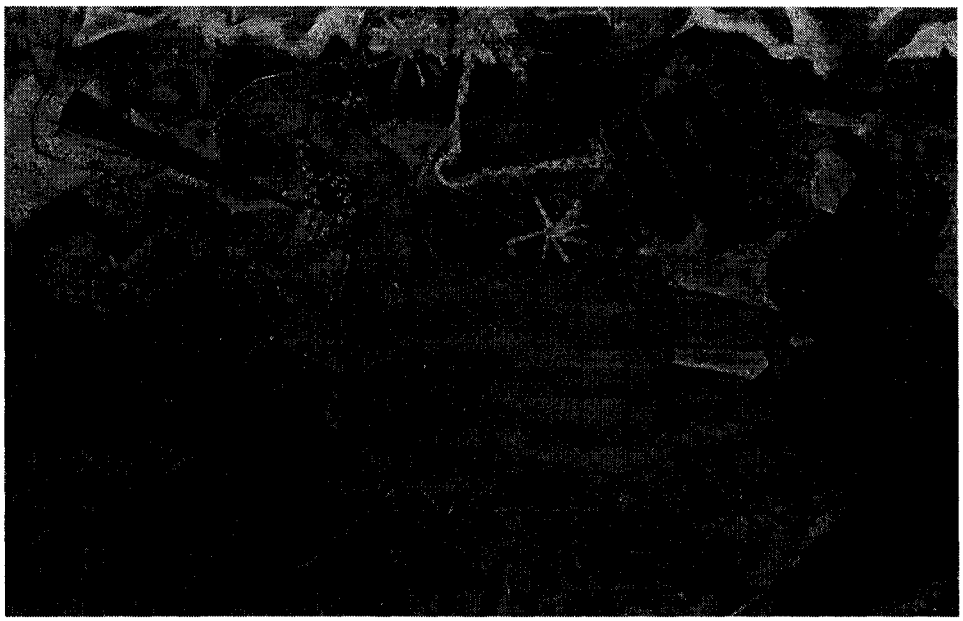

Figure 1—*The Entry of Turks into Van* (1961). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 19.

Described by Gumpert as a "Panoramic scene of mass confusion and disaster" (18), the painting is executed in rich colours on a large piece of plywood. Owing more to Chagall than to avant-garde artists such as Joseph Beuys, whom he would later choose to emulate, this painting is often cited as Boltanski's first serious work. It also supports his repeated claims that, despite his subsequent experiments with form, he is first and foremost a painter.

Boltanski came of age during the tumultuous intellectual and political scene of the late 1960s. In her recent essay, "Christian Boltanski's Memory Images: Remaking French Museums in the Aftermath of '68" (2004), Rebecca DeRoo argues that, because of the "personal and everyday materials incorporated into Boltanski's work," it "came to be promoted as a powerful solution to the problem of how to address the demands for democratic art and museums" (219). Interestingly, DeRoo points out that Boltanski did not participate in the protests

and demonstrations that led to demands for more "accessible and inclusive" (DeRoo 219) cultural institutions, and argues that—in spite of his absence from the barricades—Boltanski owes much of his early commercial success to the civil unrest that made these "democratic" demands audible. There's a certain irony, then, to the fact that his first solo exhibition, *La vie impossible de Christian Boltanski* (The Impossible Life of Christian Boltanski), opened in May of 1968. The work included in this exhibition marks a departure from the representational style of his early paintings. *The Impossible Life of Christian Boltanski* had many of the hallmarks of his later installations. There were life-sized dolls hanging in the lobby, and a film, whose title was also the title of the exhibition, projected onto a back wall of the movie theatre that housed the show. However, despite the documentary promise of the film's title, the life of the artist was not illuminated, but reenacted in a style that is signature Boltanski: "this movie employed live actors in a surreal setting interacting with crude dolls" (Gumpert 19). This combination of the grotesque and the surreal is reflected in other films of the same period, such as *L'Homme qui tousse* (The Man Who Coughs), an amateur production depicting a single actor in a confined space coughing repeatedly and vomiting blood.

Over the next few years Boltanski's work became less self-consciously grotesque. In both solo and group exhibitions in the late 1960s and early 1970s Boltanski played with the idea of repetition and reproduction, creating installations that had more in common with the "happenings" of the American art scene, than the traditional art world of Paris. In these shows, Boltanski would

repeat the same action (burying and digging up a thousand pink sticks in the garden of the American Center in Paris), or create multiples of the same object (creating three thousand balls of clay, carving nine hundred cubes of sugar) that he would then recycle in various installations. These repetitions betray an obsessive concern with process over product, and an aesthetic commitment to the banal, to the everyday, over art that aspired to be transcendent or enlightening.

This concern with everyday life found its way into the various media that Boltanski used throughout the 1970s. In the artist's books Boltanski produced as an integral part of his exhibitions, he documented his life using photographs as visual evidence, while at the same time collating and framing these photo-documents in ways that undermined the truth of this evidence. In *Reconstitution des gestes effectués par Christian Boltanski entre 1948 et 1954* (Reconstruction of Gestures Made by Christian Boltanski between 1948 and 1954), he compiled and labelled photographs of his adult self performing gestures he'd ostensibly performed as a child. These images, which include pictures of an adult Boltanski sliding down a banister (Figure 2), or returning home from class with a French

Figures 2 and 3—details from *Reconstruction of Gestures by Christian Boltanski between 1948 and 1954* (1970). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanksi.* Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 28.

schoolboy's satchel in hand (Figure 3), are disturbing precisely because they blur the distinction between adult and child. The gap between childhood and adulthood is paradoxically foregrounded by this conflation, which is at once canny (in terms of its execution) and uncanny (in terms of its effects). In *10 Portraits photographiques de Christian Boltanski,1946-1964* (10 Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski, 1946-1964), he illustrated his growth from childhood through to adolescence using portraits of children other than himself (Figure 4). The fact that these children are so obviously not Boltanski (the pictures are not even of the same child, but of several very different children) anticipates concerns that Boltanski will return to throughout his career.

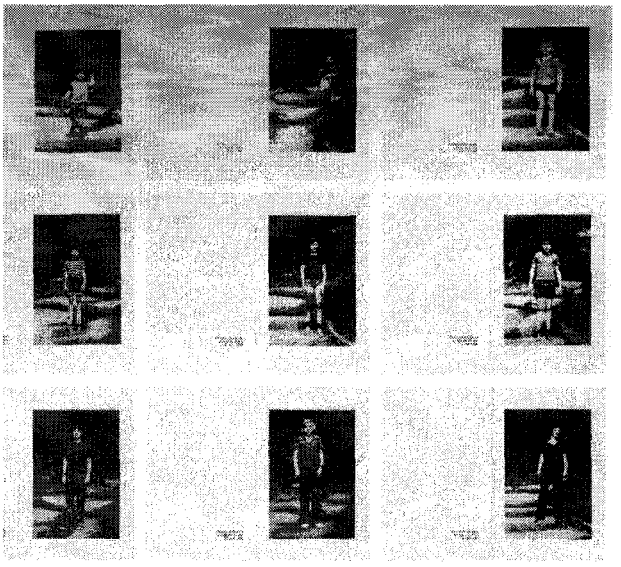

Figure 4—detail from *10 Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski 1946-1964* (1972). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 153.

Childhood is a central preoccupation in Boltanski's work. When asked about his own childhood in interviews, he has often remarked that, having performed it so often, he no longer even remembers it. In the chapter's fourth section, "Childhood Photographs," I try to get at the ways in which this investment in—and renunciation of—childhood is linked to the historical coordinates of Boltanski's own biography (born in France, to a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, at the end of the World War II). I am especially interested in his seeming obsession with images of children who would have been his contemporaries, had they not been victims of the Holocaust. From his *Saynètes comiques* (Comic Sketches) (1974), cabaret-inspired performances of his life with parents traumatized by the events of the war, through to a series of installations collectively referred to as *Leçons de ténèbres* (Lessons of Darkness) (1985-88), within which he modifies and recycles photographs of Jewish children from Western Europe taken just before the war, Boltanski connects the personal and the historical—what did happen with what might have happened—through the complex deployment of the child as both subject and object.

In "*Purimspiel*," the chapter's conclusion, I reevaluate the third installation of Boltanski's *Lessons of Darkness*, "The Festival of Purim," in light of religious and historical readings of both the biblical story of Purim and the changing rituals of this story's celebration during both the war, and the post-war period. The source photograph of French schoolchildren that Boltanski recycles in this piece makes explicit reference to the history of Jewish children in France during World War II; the installation based on this photograph is marked—in some very

interesting ways—by its failure to represent these children. By focusing on Boltanski's decidedly ambiguous deployment of the child and his linking of the child to humour and genocide—often both, simultaneously—I attempt to force his Holocaust representations to speak beyond the silenced voices of the children contained within them. And, through attention to gesture, ritual, and composition, I outline the ways in which Boltanski invites us, if we are vigilant, to engage with the difficult legacy of an historical trauma that he neither simplifies nor resolves.

To read the Holocaust into Boltanski's work is not, by any means, a new approach. However, by writing about this work in terms that challenge such familiar oppositions as good/bad, documentary/fiction, and history/memory I hope to produce a reading that both addresses and moves beyond the *moral* conundrums so often associated with Boltanski's Holocaust representations. By framing my own analysis with criticism by Ernst van Alphen and Andrea Liss—two very different approaches to and evaluations of Boltanski's work—I engage with pieces such as the *Comic Sketches* and *Lessons of Darkness* as sites of critical conflict that continue to be productive even into the twenty-first century.

I: Huckster or Hero?

> Born in Paris in 1944, this wry trickster, who can, by turns, be merry and morbid—often both at the same time—has produced a substantial oeuvre out of such insubstantial materials as newspaper clippings, bare light bulbs, rusty biscuit tins, found snapshots, flickering shadows, and used clothing.
>
> Lynn Gumpert

In *Caught by History*, Ernst van Alphen celebrates Boltanski as a leading proponent of something he calls the *Holocaust-effect*. In a chapter entitled "Deadly Historians: Christian Boltanski's Intervention in Holocaust Historiography," van Alphen focuses on the ways in which Boltanski manipulates historical materials to create works that function "consistently as archival products" (96). Although Boltanski uses archival photographs, objects, and historical documents, the work is never simply mimetic or directly referential. Avoiding the moral imperative van Alphen sees as plaguing Holocaust studies—an imperative articulated as a call for realist and sacralizing representations of the genocide[5]—Boltanski plays with the tension between aesthetics and documentation to produce a Holocaust-effect:

> It is important to realize that the last two ways in which Boltanski evokes the Holocaust—by reminding us of photographs and lists made at the time as documentation—are not based on reference per se. He produces what I call a "Holocaust-effect" by means of a reenactment of principles that in a sense define the Holocaust—a radical emptying out of subjectivity as a road leading to the wholesale destruction of a people: genocide. The reenactment of these principles and the Holocaust-effect they produce is, however, not at all confined to the works in which Boltanski addresses the Holocaust head on. His ability to produce the Holocaust-effect even in works that do not deal with that event in a direct—that is, referential—way defines not only his style but also the engagement with the debate on modes of representation that his art embraces. (99)

In "Deadly Historians," van Alphen is anxious to counter any impression of Boltanski as "an utterly docile artist, giving in readily to the moral imperative of discussions about Holocaust representations" (96).[6] Rather than fall prey to what van Alphen identifies as a necessarily flawed belief in the accuracy of testimony and historical document, Boltanski "challenges" a belief in the veracity of these forms of Holocaust representation (103). What makes this effort heroic, according to van Alphen, is that this work is produced as a challenge to the privileging of truth, of reference, even in the face of an inherently coercive moral injunction to preserve history in a recognizably realist format:

> Boltanski deconstructs the promise of the photographic portrait of providing an exact, faithful correspondence to a historical or living reality. One is confronted, rather, with the split between the signifier and the signified or, worse, with the disappearance of the signified altogether. Provocatively and consistently, his works succeed in failing to provide living realities that correspond with the represented persons. (112)

While van Alphen provides a concise and insightful analysis of Boltanski's historical interventions, his construction of the artist as heroic adversary is less convincing. What is exciting about Boltanski's work is the way in which he incorporates elements of the everyday, of material history, even while rendering them only partially legible. It's the *tension* between the article or document and its resistance to interpretation within Boltanski's deployment of it that makes the work radical. However, while this tension could produce criticism that engages with both history and art, van Alphen uses it as a platform from which to celebrate

what other less appreciative critics have viewed as Boltanski's sleights of hand. Van Alphen tries to argue that, by introducing the Holocaust as reference into his aesthetic experiments, Boltanski heroically refuses to observe the rules governing Holocaust representations. In other words, the inclusion of historical reference, when used to rupture rather than confirm a strictly historical (realist) representation, is in itself radical.

I agree with van Alphen that Boltanski's work challenges what is too often an unexamined belief in the indexical or transparent truth of photographs by reworking these photographs so that their indexical authority is undermined. However, to celebrate this shift as necessarily heroic is to hearken back to an outmoded notion of aesthetic autonomy. Van Alphen's evaluation of Boltanski's work as heroic depends upon a modernist conception of the "true" artist as being somehow beyond the influence of those forces that might warp or censor his or her vision. At the same time, and in what seems like a contradictory move, van Alphen also champions Boltanski for his incorporation of elements of the historical and the everyday. It seems as if van Alphen wants it both ways; he asserts Boltanski's autonomy by focusing on precisely those practices that, during the 1960s and 70s, were meant to function as a critique of modernist notions of autonomy.

This seeming contradiction is indicative of what Alex Potts identifies as an under-theorized point of contact between modernist and neo-avant-garde understandings of the relationship between the artist and the world:

> The differences between the modernist privileging of artistic autonomy in the immediate post-war period and the apparent negation of autonomy in avant-garde or neo-avant-garde 'art into life' initiatives of 1950s and 1960s are thus best understood not as a stark duality, but rather as involving two different formations of autonomy, each necessarily precarious and potentially compromised. (46)

Where Potts attempts—with the help of Adorno—to deconstruct the oppositions upon which the history of aesthetic autonomy in the twentieth century depends, van Alphen conflates these oppositions with little or no reflection. Potts argues that we "have now reached a point, however, where the post-modern, or avantgarde, or neo-avantgarde critiques of autonomy have lost much of their edge" as "the prospect of escaping from a relatively autonomous arena of art into a radically heteronymous world of the everyday" no longer seems "particularly radical or exciting" (43). What van Alphen seems to be arguing is that in Boltanski's work this introduction of the everyday is once again made radical through repeated references, both explicit and implicit, to the Holocaust. He invests Boltanski's work with a type of agency or heroism that seems to run counter to the "radical" effects associated with the introduction of properly historical elements. According to this reading, the introduction of these elements demonstrates Boltanski's autonomy precisely because it disrupts a certain decorum or protocol demanded by those van Alphen identifies as the gatekeepers of Holocaust studies.

I will discuss van Alphen's misrepresentation of these "gatekeepers" later on in the chapter. What I want to focus on here are the limitations of the heroic stance in the context of Boltanski's Holocaust representations. The artist's own extensive critique of the notion of a fully present or sovereign subject, together with his complex investments in history and autobiography, constitutes the most obvious challenge to van Alphen's thesis. While a "radical emptying out of subjectivity" is one of the most frequently noted effects of Boltanski's performances and installations, van Alphen's claim that, through this "emptying out" the artist is reenacting principles that necessarily lead to genocide, is never elaborated but, like so many of his assertions, simply stated and then accepted as self-evident. While he seems to be arguing that Boltanski stages this evacuation as a means of representing the Holocaust itself, the meaning of these performances is less stable than his totalizing thesis suggests. Van Alphen's focus on the form of Boltanski's photographic and sculptural installations, which he sets up almost in opposition to their content, allows for only a very limited understanding of the ways in which referentiality is both challenged by the work and central to it. Although it is true that Boltanski effectively resists certain formal, disciplinary and generic constraints—both in the art world, and in the field of Holocaust studies—the instrumental heroism with which van Alphen endows this resistance reduces the work to an obstinate and ultimately tautological challenge to the idea of constraint itself.

The hero is, by definition, an active agent. As most critics are quick to point out, Boltanski has spent the majority of his career actively challenging

conventional understandings of both agency and selfhood. In answer to a question posed in an interview with Tamar Garb (1997), Boltanski articulates his understanding of the relationship between art and subjectivity as follows: "I really think I am nobody. If you work as an artist, you destroy yourself. The more you work, the less you exist; and each time you do an interview part of yourself disappears. It seems awful, but it can also be a good thing, since it is easier to make art than to live. It's a choice one makes" (8). Probing further, Garb pushes him on the question of agency specifically: "But there is always an agent involved in the manipulations of self-effacement or display. Is there a puppeteer pulling the strings?" Boltanski responds with the following disclaimer:

> In my early work I pretended to speak about my childhood, yet my real childhood disappeared. I have lied about it so often that I no longer have a real memory of this time, and my childhood has become, for me, some kind of universal childhood. Not a real one. Everything you do is pretence. My life is about making stories. I travel a lot; I'm like some kind of travelling circus clown. (8)

Even allowing for a certain degree of disingenuous play in Boltanski's answer, the disparity between van Alphen's depiction of the avant-garde artist heroically resisting the constraints of a moribund realism and Boltanski's figure of the circus clown should not go unnoted. The provocative juxtaposition of heroism and comedy—in visual art, film, and literature about the Holocaust—has been a concern for critics for at least two decades. However, the contradictory roles of hero and clown have been subject to intense scholarly and popular attention

recently, following the release of Roberto Benigni's controversial and award-winning film *Life is Beautiful* (1997).[7]

II: Holocaust Laughter

Sander Gilman's essay, "Is Life Beautiful? Can the Shoah be Funny? Some Thoughts on Recent and Older Films" (2000), addresses the issue of humour and the Holocaust in the wake of the controversies generated by Benigni's slapstick-inflected depiction of the camp universe. In his introduction to the essay Gilman asks: "Why is it that, if humor does have a function in ameliorating the effects of the Shoah, we are so very uncomfortable imagining laughter in the context of the Shoah? Indeed, can there be anything funny about representing the Holocaust?" (285). Paying particular attention to the effects of historicization and interpretation, he goes on to ask:

> How much does the redefinition of the horrors of World War II (after 1945) into the central position of the Jewish Shoah (by the 1970s) preclude or enable laughter to be imagined as a possible effect of representation? And how much does the presupposition of the image of the Jew as the comic and as the victim enable or preclude Jewish or non-Jewish uses of laughter in making representations of the Shoah publicly acceptable? (285)

Boltanski addresses precisely these kinds of questions when he discusses the "post-Holocaust" nature of his work. In spite of the fact that his Jewish father survived the war in Paris by hiding in the family cellar, he does not claim any kind of proprietary relationship to the catastrophic events Gilman describes as having been redefined, "by the 1970s" as the "Jewish Shoah." [8] Although

Boltanski acknowledges that the Jewish experience of World War II was unique and that the events of the Holocaust have influenced both his life and his work, he does not capitalize on his family's experiences by framing this work as an authentic or experiential response to history. Instead, he consistently undermines the stability of such notions as authenticity, identity, community, and history: "I did a big piece in Vienna last year called *Menschlich* in which I used 1,300 photos of people I have used in my work. They included Nazis, Spanish killers, French victims, Jewish people, etc. I mixed all of them: they no longer had identities" (Garb 26). After declaring in this same interview that: "I never speak directly about the Holocaust in my work, but of course my work comes after the Holocaust" (Garb 19), Boltanski makes a provocative statement that has been widely quoted and criticized. Admitting that he works like a crook or "a bad travelling preacher" (30), Boltanski justifies his often heavy-handed representations as a means of making connection:

> That's what I try to do, touch people in a very direct way. It's true that sometimes I use very heavy things to do this—and the *Dead Swiss* is a good example. But, then again, it is a way of speaking to people. I chose the Swiss because they have no history. *It would be awful and disgusting to make a piece using dead Jews*—or dead Germans for that matter. (Garb 30, emphasis added)

In "Traces of the Dead" (1999), artist and critic Carol Rosen argues that Boltanski's sense of humour is not merely provocative, but symptomatic of an obsession: "Boltanski's preoccupation with death, be it inspired by fear,

fascination, or horror, is also revealed in his ironic sense of humour" (33). In other words, Boltanski's story about the genesis of the *Dead Swiss* is more than glib rhetoric; it's simultaneously funny, terrible, and true.

The installation itself is comprised of 2,580 black and white photographs taken from the obituary pages of a Swiss newspaper and affixed to metal boxes (Figure 5). According to French art critic Didier Semin, given the right context,

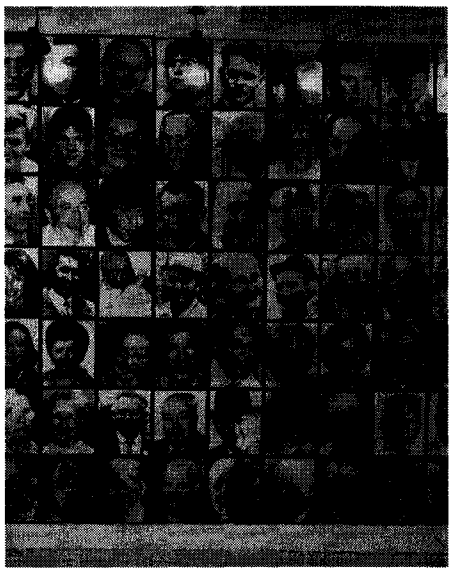

Figure 5—detail from *Reserve: Dead Swiss* (1990). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 144.

even the title of the work is humourous: "It is almost impossible in France, and perhaps elsewhere as well, to hear *Reserve: Dead Swiss* without bursting out in laughter: as if the Swiss were not suffering subjects worthy of pity and compassion, were not mortals" (85). Semin goes on to suggest that national differences between neighbouring countries, "the Swiss and the Belgians for the French, the Canadians for the Americans, etc." (85), are often a harmless source of amusement. However, one effect of Boltanski's work is that, by eliciting

laughter at the expense of a particular group, he confronts his audience with their own culpability: "The 'Swiss' is an abstraction that one uses at will to act as the victim of expiatory sarcasms; there isn't a real individual behind it. When you find yourself laughing at the phrase 'dead Swiss', you suddenly shiver to realize that not so long ago the phrase 'dead Jew' was an abstraction as well" (Semin 85).

As a joke, Boltanski's comment about dead Swiss, Germans, and Jews violates what Terrence des Pres identifies as one of the most rigidly enforced prescripts of Holocaust studies: "The Holocaust shall be approached as a solemn or even sacred event, with a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure its enormity or dishonor its dead" (217). In "Holocaust Laughter?" (1988), des Pres argues that texts about the Holocaust written in a "tradition of high seriousness" (220) produce a kind of weariness, while humour provides a necessary antidote. Although he focuses primarily on literary texts, his analysis of genre as a means of resisting tradition is relevant to any discussion of the Holocaust that focuses on experimental representation:

> The mimetic mode is proper to high seriousness because tragedy celebrates the mystery of what comes to pass. The antimimetic mode is proper to comedy because the comic spirit ridicules what comes to pass. Laughter revolts (and from the perspective of lament appears revolting). The works I have cited have enacted this resistance; they refuse to take the Holocaust on its own crushing terms, even though [they] depend for their foundation upon sharp memory of actual events. (220)

Reading Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque together with work by such disparate writers and artists as Tadeusz Borowski, Leslie Epstein, and Art Spiegelman, des Pres argues that humour is a more effective means of representing the Holocaust in its aftermath because it enables both artist and audience to move beyond despair: "Our knowledge of history is not denied, but displaced, and we discover the capacity to go forward with, so to speak, a foot in both worlds" (221). There is a kind of liberating energy inherent to the comic enterprise. Every one of the texts des Pres identifies as comic offers its audience respite from reality even as it forces them to enter into an imaginative engagement with the atrocities of the *Final Solution*: "human beings do not live by reality alone, or even chiefly. And it is this willful displacement, this shrewd mockery of the real in serious works of art, that we might call Holocaust laughter" (228).

In an essay on Marcel Ophuls's documentary film, *Hotel Terminus: The Life and Times of Klaus Barbie* (2002), Susan Rubin Suleiman argues that humour, even in a documentary film about the infamous "butcher of Lyons," challenges the viewer to engage with the history of the Holocaust in France in ways that are both discomfiting and productive. The jarring juxtaposition of interviews, staged (and failed) encounters with Barbie's associates, film clips, and musical soundtracks, produces what Suleiman calls a "dialectical montage" (523). Although the viewer "is kept off balance" by Ophuls's rapid and very often incongruous juxtapositions, she is also forced—by Ophuls's own particular brand of "*interactive documentary*"—into playing a rather serious game: "The brilliance of Ophuls's editing lies in its capacity to pose uncomfortable questions for the

viewer—or, to put it another way, its capacity to force the viewer into uncomfortable subject-positions in relation to the material" (523).

Focusing on the issues of humour and laughter (as opposed to the destabilizing effects of play), Suleiman cites a passage from an essay by Ophuls written the same year his film was released:

> In a 1988 essay titled "The Sorrow and the Laughter," Ophuls tells the story of a woman he once met in London, whom he employed to dub one of his films into English. She was a survivor of several Nazi and Soviet concentration camps, and "between takes she would tell me of her own experiences. . . Most of her stories turned out to be uproariously funny, I'm sorry to say." (529)

Following this excerpt with the comment, "But of course, he is not sorry at all" (529), Suleiman reiterates the point made by both Gilman and Rosen: Humour is one of the ways survivors, witnesses and, eventually, secondary witnesses deal with the horrors of genocide. Or, as Terrence des Pres argues about the texts he's chosen: "As comic works of art, or works of art including a comic element, they afford us laughter's benefit without betraying convictions. In these ways they foster resilience and are life-reclaiming" (232).[9]

The argument I'm trying to make here is a familiar one: Humour provides primary as well as secondary witnesses to trauma with a necessary, because life-affirming, distance from atrocity. However, humour can also produce something more subversive than distance and affirmation. Given Gilman's questions about why we are "so very uncomfortable imagining laughter in the context of the

Shoah" (285), and Ophuls's self-reflexive elaboration of his own methods of "investigative sarcasm" (qtd. in Suleiman 529), humour is not simply a means of rendering engagement with the Holocaust tolerable. It can be used to bring viewers as well as producers into an affective and therefore uncomfortable proximity with the historical events being represented. Sander Gilman does not, for example, take issue with Roberto Benigni's use of recognizably slapstick conventions in his depiction of life in a concentration camp. What bothers him is the comfort viewers experience at the film's conclusion, as well as the misleading conflation of hero and clown in the lead character of Guido. Humour, in Benigni's staging of the Holocaust, does not simply lessen the suffering of those incarcerated in the camps, it saves lives: "Benigni's laughter is proof that whatever else will happen the promise of the film, the rescue of the child, must take place. Our expectations are fulfilled, and we feel good about our laughter" (Gilman 304).

Unlike Ophuls's film, *Life is Beautiful* takes viewers through the devastation and, after a traditionally Aristotelian moment of catharsis, lets them resume their lives comforted by the reunion of mother and child made possible by the tragic self-sacrifice of Guido, the film's heroic Jewish clown. What Gilman does take issue with, then, are the ways in which Benigni aligns the ameliorative effects of humour with a form of instrumental heroism. "Benigni can select a mode of evoking laughter as long as he ties it to the heroic. And the heroic, in this case, must be a success. No laughter can result if, by the conclusion of the film, not only the father, but also the child (and his mother) were dead" (305). Gilman's

criticism of Benigni's film echoes des Pres's analysis of the tension between comedy and heroism. While des Pres sees comedy as a more effective means of communicating the horrors of the Holocaust than tragedy, never, in his analysis of laughter in the aftermath of genocide, does he suggest that the world could be saved by the humour eliciting that laughter. Instead, by privileging the comic over the heroic, he issues a powerful indictment: "Humanity at large is at fault in a world where *no one is a hero*, and therefore a world in which to laugh is as good as, and possibly wiser than to weep" (232, emphasis added).

In *Life is Beautiful* there is little conflict between the comic and the heroic. We can feel good about our laughter because, in spite of Guido's death, all ends well. It is as if the political and individual conflicts depicted in the film become inconsequential once the war is over. The murder of the film's Jewish protagonist is meaningful because his death makes possible the survival of his non-Jewish wife and their son. Mother and son are reunited by American soldiers who have rescued the child from a labour camp that has been abandoned by Nazis fleeing the Allies. The redemptory impact of this conclusion undermines the potentially subversive work of the film. Not only does Benigni provoke both tears and laughter, his character's burlesque response to incarceration—translating work orders into a game of hide-and-seek, imitating guards, marching through the camp dressed in makeshift drag—is, literally, his son's salvation. The horrors of the Holocaust come to a "natural" end in a maternal embrace that takes place in a sun-drenched pastoral landscape. This idyllic conclusion effectively forecloses any reality beyond the happy ending.[10]

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Christian Boltanski was born into the post-idyllic aftermath that Benigni's film conveniently elides. Like the child in *Life is Beautiful*, Boltanski is the son of a Jewish father and a Christian mother. Although he was not born until the end of the war, he experienced firsthand the anti-Semitism that made French collaboration in the Holocaust possible. He describes this experience in an interview with Démosthènes Davvetas cited by Lynn Gumpert: "I remember the years just after the war, when anti-Semitism was still strong in France, 'feeling . . . different from the others.' I fell into such a state of withdrawal that at age eleven I not only had no friends and felt useless, but I quit school too" (18).[11]

Because Boltanski is notorious for the creative license with which he literally re-presents the details of his childhood (several of his early works are either creative re-enactments of childhood experiences, or archival evidence—using false documents such as photos of other children—of these experiences), I am not suggesting that we simply take his word as the truth. Although there are references in the material generated by and about Boltanski that corroborate his experience of pre-pubescent alienation, his biography is not the issue. What *is* relevant here are the ways in which he links humour and anti-Semitism, suggesting that laughter is a means of coping with the role of victim. In other words, Boltanski's take on post-Holocaust humour can be read as a practitioner's response to the concerns posed by Sander Gilman when he asks whether public laughter is enabled or precluded by the "the image of the Jew as the comic and as the victim" (285).

In a written work entitled "What They Remember" (1990), Boltanski compiles a list of fictionalized comments about himself made by friends and acquaintances. Although the material in the piece is autobiographical, its structure is similar to the "memory" texts penned by Georges Perec, an experimental French writer who lost both of his parents to the Holocaust. In a description of his working method that Boltanski almost certainly has borrowed,[12] Perec himself gives credit for this structure to the American writer Joe Brainard:

> I'm at my work table, in a café, an airport or a train, and I try to recover some quite unimportant event, commonplace, out-of-date, but which will set something going the moment I recover it. In a way, the initial idea wasn't mine but I've incorporated it totally. It was Joe Barnard's [sic], an American poet who wrote *I Remember*, a disguised autobiography in actual fact but organized around micro-memories. ("The Work of Memory," Perec 127)

In *Je me souviens*, Perec "attempts to recover elements that form part of the texture of everyday life and that it may well be that you didn't notice" (127). Through his attention to small details—"food, or sport, or politics, a song, a subject of the 'holiday souvenirs' kind" (127)—he "deconsecrat[es]" personal memory by "replacing it in its collectivity" (128). This very literal act of re-membering challenges the limits of the strictly autobio-graphical, because the material of these micro-memories is shared: "It works like a sort of appeal to memory because it's something that is shared. It's very different from

autobiography, from the exploration of your own prominent occluded memories. It's a book that starts out from a common memory, a collective memory" (128).

In Boltanski's version of Perec's reworking of Brainard's method, this appeal to memory is performed at an even greater distance from the autobiographical. In "What They Remember," the memories are not (ostensibly) Boltanski's own, but are attributed to a series of unidentified others. In contrast to Perec's *Je me souviens*, in "What They Remember," the positions of subject (the one who remembers) and object (the detail being remembered) are reversed, as the object motivating this collective memory is Boltanski himself. However, like Perec, Boltanski organizes events and details in a series of disjointed micro-memories, rather than according to any obvious chronology. In keeping with the lateral structure of Perec's memory texts—and in contrast to the apparently haphazard structure of the piece—each of the entries in "What They Remember" is numbered, suggesting a kind of structural logic, even though none is immediately discernible.

Boltanski's calculated use of parataxis in this piece creates a sense of cumulative (as opposed to revelatory) knowledge. The details of each remembrance link up, in a lateral way, with previous as well as subsequent statements, and thus gain significance through discontinuous repetition. In number 20, for example, a schoolmate is credited with saying: "We must have been in the same sixth-grade class together, and I remember him as a slightly dirty little boy with frizzy black hair and an old navy-blue coat, none of us had any contact with him, we used to call him the little rabbi" (134).[13] The description in

this passage is echoed in a later selection. The reference to Boltanski as *little*, associated with Jewishness in number 20, is associated, in number 37, with comedy: "He was a little man, you know, like Charlie Chaplin in his early films—the 'little fellow'"(136).

In number 35, the speaker locates Boltanski's early work within a specific comic tradition: "My favourite is the piece he calls *Comic Sketches*, these are small sketches in the tradition of Eastern European cabaret shows, which are part funny and part sad, he also made a video called *Die Laughing*, where his laughter turns into crying and vice versa" (135-6). Here, a connection is established between comedy—identified in "What They Remember" as Jewish comedy—and tragedy. There is also an explicit relationship between laughter and death (as opposed to laughter and survival). Although Boltanski shares Roberto Benigni's fascination with the physical comedy of performers like Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, his own comic responses to trauma function neither as a salve nor as a form of salvation. Instead, they serve as irritants. Like Marcel Ophuls's film on Klaus Barbie, Boltanski's humorous sketches, reenactments, and jokes force his audience into conflicting and often uncomfortable subject positions without recourse to fixed moral or ethical resolutions. The reference to cabaret only serves to reinforce the discomfort that is so often a part of Boltanski's comic productions.

III: Cabaret after Auschwitz

The connection between cabaret and Boltanski's *Comic Sketches* made by the unidentified speaker in Boltanski's faux-eulogy is especially interesting in light of the historical relationship between nineteenth-century popular French theatre and psychoanalysis. In "From Charcot to Charlot: Unconscious Imitation and Spectatorship in French Cabaret and Early Cinema" (2001), Rae Beth Gordon establishes a link between the gestures characteristic of early French cabaret and the clinical symptoms of hysteria: "Experimental psychology, clinical observations, and psychiatric theory in late nineteenth-century France furnished the Parisian cabaret and early film with a new repertoire of movements, grimaces, tics, and gestures" (515). The relationship between hysteria and aesthetics was, according to Gordon, one of mutual influence. If the psychiatric practices of the late nineteenth century provided performers with the mechanistic gestures of their art, the cabaret itself functioned as a popular venue for the dissemination of information about these newly diagnosed pathologies: "The artistic representation and popular spectacle of the body as a collection of nervous tics, dislocations, and mechanical reflexes, with the accompanying implications of medical pathology began in the cabaret" (524). The imitation of symptoms associated with epilepsy and hysteria reportedly produced peculiar effects, offering little in the way of comfort or solace: "Movement in the performance style of the cabaret, like that of early French film comedy, was, as I've said, *directed* toward the production of shock [...] an electric jolt is communicated by the performer to the spectator" (527). The atmosphere in the theatre, as a result of the "internal repetition of

nervous, convulsive, mechanical movement in spectators" was characterized, by the popular press of the period, as "pathological" (Gordon 527-28).

In *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (1999), art critic Juliet Steyn points out that "by the end of the nineteenth century, it was commonly accepted that Jews were more prone to hysteria than other 'races'" (15). While this view was promoted by professionals working in the burgeoning fields of psychology and psychoanalysis, Steyn draws a distinction between those who believed that this tendency was physiological, and those who thought that it was the result of external social pressures and therefore—at least to some extent—constructed:

> Charcot argued that this tendency was because of a 'weakening' to the 'nervous system' due, he thought, to endogamous marriages. Lombroso accepted the general thesis that the Jews were particularly prone to mental illness. He, however, differed from Charcot in his interpretation of the causes. He advanced the theory that they were due to the 'residual effects of persecution', which in his view constituted Jewish identity. In other words, Jewish identity in the nineteenth century became a psychological quality. (15)

I am wary of making insupportable claims about intention (I don't know if Boltanski is aware of the theories of Charcot[14] and Lombroso, or how much he knows about the social history of European cabaret). However, I would argue that the influence of cabaret is evident not only in Boltanski's appropriation of style or gesture, but in the ways, through this act of appropriation, he manages to self-consciously embody a volatile nexus that includes comedy, theories of mental

illness, and anti-Semitic constructions of Jewishness. The neurotic obsessions of his early work (the formation of three thousand clay balls, the carving of nine hundred sugar cubes, the unearthing of one thousand pink sticks), his description of himself—through the appropriated voices of unnamed friends and acquaintances—as both "a little man...like Charlie Chaplin" and "the little rabbi," and his explicit imitation of cabaret performance suggest, when read together, that Boltanski is playing, very seriously, with psychological constructions of identity that simultaneously challenge and reinscribe nineteenth- and twentieth-century stereotypes of Jewishness.

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In 1974, Boltanski's work shifted from an obsessive focus on death to an ostensibly new fixation: comedy. In what Didier Semin describes as a self-reflexive move, Boltanski turned from the solemnity of his previous installation—a collection of objects that once belonged to a now deceased woman from Bois-Colombes, on display at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain in Paris in October of 1974—by focusing "his critique on himself" (63). Mounted at the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster, Boltanski's next exhibition, entitled "Affiches—Accessoires—Décors, documents photographiques" (Posters-Props-Sets, Photographic Documents), "was loosely based on the museum devoted to Karl Valentin, a celebrated German comedian of the twenties and thirties. In it he displayed all the posters, props and accessories of a clown dubbed Christian Boltanski who, it was suggested, had died" (Gumpert 46). Included in the show were the sets and props that Boltanski used in a series entitled *Comic Sketches*. In

these sketches, Boltanski photographed himself dressed in what Gumpert describes as a "serviceable but inelegant suit" (figure 6), while performing scenes from his own life with only the most rudimentary props and costume changes: "he would merely add a paper flower to his hat when playing his mother or roll up his pants and pull his jacket over his head when he was acting the part of 'Little Christian'" (Gumpert 48).

Figure 6—*Comic Sketches: An Overheard Conversation* (1974). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. London: Phaidon Press, 1997, p.134.

In spite of Didier Semin's claim that the focus of the work had shifted, the sketches betray a preoccupation with family conflict and even trauma. A focus on death was reintroduced in a second series produced in that same year, entitled *Pretend Deaths for Fun*. Dressed in the same suit, Boltanski performed a before-and-after sequence of parodic suicide attempts. In the first shot of "The Drowning," for example, he is photographed with a large boulder tied around his neck (figure 7).

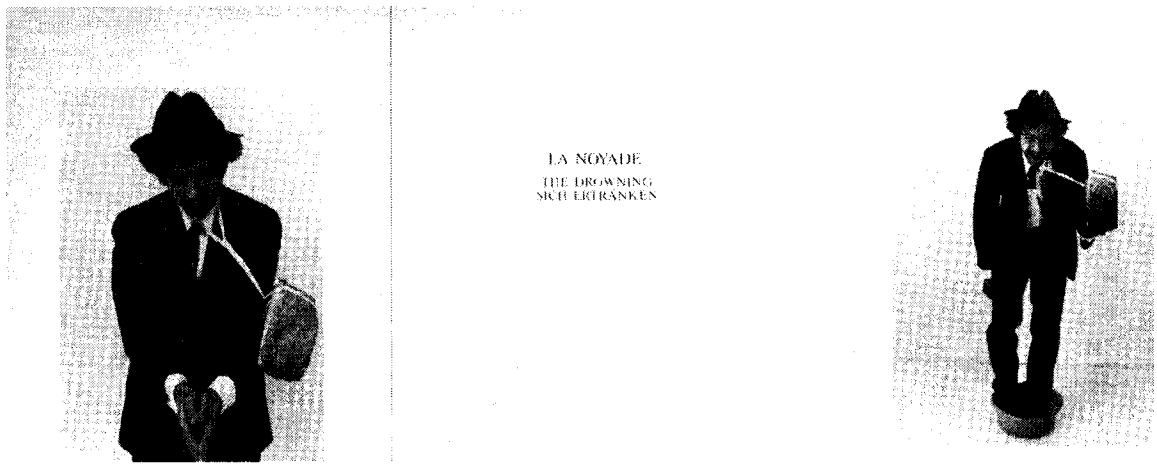

Figure 7—*Pretend Deaths for Fun: The Drowning* (1974). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p.53.

In the second, "the camera pulls back to reveal him grinning sheepishly and pointing to the basin he is standing in as he effortlessly holds the apparently styrofoam boulder aloft" (Gumpert 51). Like the comic representations of the Holocaust referred to by des Pres, Gilman, and Ophuls, these sketches demonstrate how "the whimsical and playful side of Boltanski's art coexists alongside its darker overtones." What makes these sketches work is "their unsettling ability to make us wince and chuckle at the same time" (Gumpert 52).

If we accept Ernst van Alphen's thesis that all of Boltanski's work produces a Holocaust-effect, these early documented performances fit neatly within the paradigm of holocaust laughter des Pres outlines in his 1988 essay. Boltanski allows his audience to look at death by providing them with a certain degree of distance from it. However, there is something going on in these pieces that pushes them beyond the limits of Holocaust humour as tentatively delineated by des Pres. The juxtaposition of trauma and laughter allows for distance from the Holocaust while at the same time goading the audience into thinking beyond the mixed

response that Gumpert so neatly summarizes as a "wince and chuckle." Boltanski's insistence that his performances, installations and publications are not *about*, but come *after*, the Holocaust is central to the argument I want to make concerning the function of his work. The relationship between death, comedy, and the post-Holocaust Jew is, as Sander Gilman has pointed out, particularly vexed. In Boltanski's sketches, the emotional distance made possible by laughter is subsequently compromised by our discomfort at demonstrating inappropriate forms of affect. This irresolvable tension—between humour and trauma, and between trauma and its aftermath—is what makes Boltanski's work haunting. The question that must be asked is whether this is art that initiates the work of mourning, or whether, as some critics argue, as an evocation of pathos, it generates nothing more than melancholic sentimentality.

If, as Juliet Steyn has argued, Jewish identity was configured as a psychological quality in the late nineteenth century, how would this identity be reconfigured now, over one hundred years later? Can we read Boltanski's early work, with its references to hysteria, burlesque, and tragi-comedy, as a performance of a late twentieth-century, postmodern, post-Holocaust identity? Is Boltanski being ironic? Parodic? Can the pathologies manifest in his work—obsessive compulsion, autism, hysteria—be read as representations of a psychic reality beyond consciousness, of experiences specific to those generations born *after* the war?

In *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Cinema* (1990) Eric Santner defines the relation of symptoms to mourning as follows:

"Symptoms, as Freud has taught, are traces of another, unconscious reality that haunts one's conscious reality like a revenant being. In the present context, they would be the traces of knowledge denied, of deeds left undone, of eyes averted from pain, of shades drawn" (Santner 152-53). For the second and third generations, these traces comprise a legacy left by the war's participants who are themselves unable to work through the trauma of the Holocaust; as such, they are often available to the children of both survivors and perpetrators only in "the faces and bodies of the parents" (152). Arguing that there is an "archive of symptoms and parapraxes that bear witness to what could have been but was not," Santner invites postwar generations to construct an alternative legacy by "reading the 'documents' of the elders"—their symptoms—for evidence of "a historical opportunity that was left unrealized but that still remains available as a sort of energy potential that continues to dwell in history" (153).

Santner's alternative legacy has nothing in common with revisionist reconstructions of the Holocaust. Instead, he argues that if postwar generations want to work through the trauma of the Holocaust, they must read their parents' histories for signs of rupture and resistance, even if these possibilities were ignored during the war itself:

> By searching out these signs of a history that might-have-been in the documents of their own lineage, the postwar generations can begin to mourn these lost opportunities without disavowing their ancestry. These generations may yet be able to unearth new resources of identification out of the unconscious layers of the history into which they were born. (153)

Although Santner focuses on postwar generations in what was formerly West Germany, the strategies he identifies as a method for working through the unresolved social, political, and psychic residue left by that war are relevant to my own discussion of a French artist with a Jewish survivor father in several very important ways. In the paragraphs that follow, I link Santner's call for an alternative legacy to Boltanski's experimental aesthetic by shifting from Rae Beth Gordon's focus on the psychological dynamics of nineteenth-century French cabaret to the social and political realities of German cabaret during the Nazi era.

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In the 1930s, the cabaret performed a very specific function in German society. In contrast to the conservative influence of dramatic theatre companies, the cabarets offered an exciting blend of entertainment and critique. The combination of social commentary and variety show proved almost irresistible; according to art historian Peter Jelavich, an "urban desire for fragmented forms of diversion, a demand for sensuous modes of entertainment, and a local tradition of biting wit combined to give it form. Although it was to face numerous commercial and political obstacles, once born, Berlin cabaret could not be contained" (1993 35). One obstacle that cabaret was unable to overcome, however, was National Socialism. Because of its focus on social as well as political themes, the cabaret was targeted by Joseph Goebbels, Berlin's most high-ranking Nazi official and president of the Reich Culture Chamber, as corrupt and degenerative. Denouncing cabaret as a "totally Jewish affair," Goebbels entered into a campaign

to "cleanse Berlin's cultural scene, which he considered a cesspool of 'decadent,' 'Bolshevik,' and 'Jewish' culture" (1993 230).

As a result of this campaign, Jews were no longer allowed to perform on public stages. Those who could leave Germany did so. Only those fortunate enough to make their way to England and the United States were able to escape persecution. Jewish performers who remained in Germany, or only got as far away as France, Austria or Holland, faced increasingly extreme reprisals and, in many cases, incarceration. Like Benigni's camp clown in *Life is Beautiful*, these actors and musicians performed their routines in the concentration camps. However, unlike the instrumental heroism that Benigni gives Guido's antics, the emancipatory power of these performances is less clear:

> In the concentration camps at Westerbork and Theresienstadt/Terezín some of Berlin's most famous entertainers put on shows for their fellow Jewish prisoners. Cabaret had always lacked a firm purpose, and in these 'transit' camps that were way stations to Auschwitz, the performers and the audience asked the most agonizing questions about the value of their art. (Jelavich, 1993 7)

Similar questions can be asked of Boltanski's cabaret-inspired sketches. Performing events from his family's history while in the guise of a clown, Boltanski parodies his parents' lives. The shabby suit, the rudimentary props, and the exaggerated mannerisms can all be read, within the intersecting fields of psychoanalysis, cabaret, and the Holocaust that I've brought together here, as instances of "acting out." The ostracism Boltanski experienced as a Jewish child

in postwar France might provide some motivation for this potentially melancholic staging of childhood trauma; an acting out of the anti-Semitic typecasting to which he bears a distanced testimony in "What They Remember." However, another and perhaps more productive way to read these performances is as an act of resistance to the code of silence about the Holocaust observed in France after the war. If we return to the series of images in the *Comic Sketches* referred to above and reconsider them using Santner's analysis of the embodied archive of symptoms manifest in post-war German families, Boltanski's sketches no longer read as a neurotic individual response but as a historical and even political statement about the war and its aftermath.

In "An Overheard Conversation" (Figure 6), Boltanski assumes the position of voyeur peering through a keyhole into his parents' bedroom. Over the course of four scenes, "Little Christian" witnesses his mother's sadness, his father's admonition, and his mother's tears. Boltanski takes on each of the three roles in turn. Acting as both the parents and the child, Boltanski stages the survival of two generations, bringing humour and pathos to the experience of alienation revealed in the interview with Tamar Garb that I quoted from earlier. If we read the *Comic Sketches* as an exploration of the traumatic effects of the Holocaust, they can be understood to function in at least two ways. The series stages the effects of a historical trauma as these get played out behind closed doors; at the same time, it disrupts the tacitly enforced silence and invisibility of the Jewish survivor in post-war French society by making these effects public in a work of art.

Boltanski's child witness does not avert his eyes from the suffering of his parents; the closed door—suggestive of his father's hiding place during the war—is a shade drawn between the traumatic past and traces of that past still unresolved in the child's present. Catching a glimpse of his parents' symptoms through the keyhole of that door, the child is left without an explanation for the suffering to which he is a surreptitious, and therefore, to some extent, guilty witness. Whether he is able to process his parents' crisis is contingent upon him developing a context for what he has seen.

One very productive approach for untangling the complex transmission of traumatic historical consciousness being "documented" in this sketch is through Judith Butler's recent writing on ethics. In the essay "Precarious Life," Butler returns to Emmanuel Levinas's notion of the "face" and pushes it beyond the very narrow physical definition to which it is so often confined. Rather than limit the value of the "face of the other" to a notion of speech (the face speaks because the mouth speaks), Butler suggests that the Levinasian term "the 'face' operates as a catachresis: 'face' describes the human back, the craning of the neck, the raising of the shoulder blades" (133). By witnessing and documenting the physical symptoms of his parents, Boltanski captures something specific to the transmission of historical trauma from one generation to the next; it is through witnessing the bodies of survivor parents—as opposed to some dangerously quasi-genetic form of historical memory—that the second generation inherits their painful legacy. One of the most interesting aspects of this model of transmission is the fact that it does not reduce signification to linguistic utterance:

> The face is to be found in the back and the neck, but it is not quite a face. The sounds that come from or through the face are agonized, suffering. So we can see already that the "face" seems to consist in a series of displacements such that a face is figured as a back which, in turn, is figured as a scene of agonized vocalization. And though there are many names strung in a row here, they end with a figure for what cannot be named, an utterance that is not, strictly speaking, linguistic. (Butler 133)

Like the children of German perpetrators discussed in Santner's work, the children of Jewish survivors, like Boltanski, inherit a history that is often impossible to process or "work through." Gumpert states that Boltanski has compared the process of making art to the "often slow, laborious process of psychoanalysis" (96); she follows this statement with a comment about Boltanski's reluctance to identify as Jewish. Despite the fact that "the topic of France's cooperation and collaboration with the Nazis had not been avoided at home by his family, as it generally was in French society" (Gumpert 99), Boltanski did not openly admit to being Jewish until the mid 1980s. Only then, was he "able to come to grips with the genocide of European Jewry and his own Jewish heritage" (Gumpert 97). I would argue that the analogy drawn between art and psychoanalysis, when read together with Boltanski's ambivalent acknowledgement of what Gumpert describes as his "Jewish heritage," provides a tentative context for the oblique and even ambiguous representation of his parents' experience in early works like *Comic Sketches*.

In her most recent book, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (2004), Eva Hoffman explores the experience of the children of Jewish survivors through a narrative that is part memoir, part literary survey, part philosophical meditation. In order to better understand her own experience, Hoffman juxtaposes personal memories with accounts—oral as well as written, testimony as well as literature—of others from her generation. Although, as James E. Young notes, "Hoffman is properly skeptical of the notion that actual trauma can be transmitted across generations" (13), she nevertheless produces a tentative model for understanding the complex dynamics of such transmissions.

While Eric Santner's study provided me with a paradigm for the psychic transmission of historical trauma from one generation to the next, his focus on a German as opposed to a Jewish post-war legacy left me with questions about the relatively easy fit between his analysis of the post-war German psyche and Boltanski's work. In an interesting turn, Hoffman's text justifies my use of Santner here because, although she writes about Jewish experience, her understanding of the modes of psychic transmission is, in many ways, analogous to his. Like the Germans in Santner's *Stranded Objects*, the children of Jewish survivors have an intimate relationship to genocide. Their knowledge of events does not consist of memories proper, but is transmitted by parents in an inevitable, repetitive, and often indecipherable psychic register:

> It is no exaggeration to say that I have spent much of my life struggling with this compressed cluster of facts. They were transmitted to me as my

> first knowledge, a sort of supercondensed pellet of primal information—the kind from which everything else grows, or explodes, or follows, and which it takes a lifetime to unpack and decode. (Hoffman 6)

Like Santner, Hoffman points to the bodies of the parents, their behaviour (or symptoms), and their unavoidable physical proximity, as defining aspects of this transmission. The "felt traces of a historical event" (Hoffman 5) are experienced, initially, not as a memory being passed on, but as a physical exchange: "Nor was it exactly memories that were expressed at first by the survivors themselves. Rather, it was something both more potent and less lucid; something closer to enactment of experience, to emanation or sometimes nearly embodiments of psychic matter" (6-7). Finally, like Boltanski's *Comic Sketches*, this expression of inchoate memory takes place within the privacy of the domestic space:

> It is increasingly clear that the myth of survivors' muteness, of a blank, blanket silence, was largely a misconception....they spoke—how could they help it?—to their immediate intimates, to spouses and siblings, and yes, to their children. There, they spoke in the language of family—a form of expression that is both more direct and more ruthless than social or public speech. (9)

In "An Overhead Conversation" the parallels between Boltanski's staged autobiography and Hoffman's account of her own family are striking. The survivors' memories are passed down, almost exclusively, within the confines of the home. However, rather than a functioning as a sanctuary from a chaotic (and, in Boltanski's case, an overtly anti-Semitic) public world, the home is the stage

for a profoundly unsettling mode of communication. Like Boltanski's father, Hoffman's parents survived the war in hiding. Therefore, the space of the home and the embodied memory of surviving in captivity under the constant fear of discovery are inextricably linked in the domestic experience of the children of these survivors. As Hoffman explains, the experience is neither nurturing nor reassuring:

> But in our small apartment, it was a chaos of emotion that emerged from their words rather than any coherent narration. Or rather, the emotion, direct and tormented, was enacted through the words, the form of their utterances. The memories—no, not memories but emanations—of wartime experiences kept erupting in flashes of imagery; in abrupt, fragmented phrases; in repetitious, broken refrains. They kept manifesting themselves with a frightening immediacy in that most private and potent of family languages—the language of the body. (9)

Hoffman's examination of the emotional and psychological dynamics of her family makes possible a reading of Boltanski's autobiographical works that avoids pat Freudian routines. In contrast to art critic Donald Kuspit, who reads Boltanski's work as representing "a particularly Jewish melancholy" (257) that is, ultimately, sexual in nature,[15] Hoffman reads the family scene as a forum within which embodied memories are enacted and passed on with the possibility that, in the second generation, they might be worked through.

By demonstrating an acute awareness of the experience of his survivor parents, Christian Boltanski assumes a role that Israeli psychiatrist Dina Wardi identifies

as the "memorial candle." Noting that, "one of the characteristic features of survivors' families is the placing of the role of scapegoat on one of the children" (30), Wardi makes the case that these children have responsibilities not usually associated with the conventional scapegoat. In an analysis based on her clinical experience with these children as adults, Wardi has identified the responsibilities of the "memorial candle" as follows: "Not only must they fill an enormous emotional void, but they must also construct the continuation of the entire family history all by themselves, and thus create a hidden connection with the objects that have perished in the Holocaust" (30).

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Given the definition of the Jewish comic developed in "What They Remember," and the oblique representation of the war's aftermath in *Comic Sketches*, it is clear that Boltanski uses humour to represent as well as conceal an intimate relationship to the Holocaust. Like cabaret performers in Berlin during the Nazi era, Boltanski also uses comedy as a way of both representing and resisting the repressive forces that shaped, through violence, his parents' identities. Humour allows him to define himself as something more mobile, something less dangerously fixed, than "Jew," "artist," and "victim."

As Goebbels noted, many of Berlin's cabaret directors, performers, and audience members were Jewish. While it might seem paradoxical, Jewish jokes were very often a well-received component of an evening's performance. Jelavich suggests that these jokes had an emancipatory function, and explains their success by summarizing the arguments made in Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the*

Unconscious (1905): "The pleasure derived from joking resulted from the fact that it lifted repression, be it internal or external, in a public context (that is, in the presence of the joker's audience)" (1993 33). In Nazi Germany, humour was a means of getting back what had been taken from both comedian and audience by forces beyond their control. For cabaret performers under strict surveillance, what had been lost was "of course, the freedom of thinking, speaking, or acting as one desired" (33).

According to Lisa Appignanesi, Karl Valentin—the German performer upon whom Boltanski based his "Posters-Props-Sets" in 1974—detested Hitler's policies. However, his political views were "never overtly evident in his sketches" (153). Like Boltanski's *Comic Sketches*, Valentin's performances avoided political critique by focusing, instead, on the quotidian details of urban life. He had a unique style, and was admired by Bertolt Brecht for his "estranged or alienated thinking process, which propelled the audience into seeing the ordinary in a new light" (Appignanesi 153). As Jelavich points out in his chapter on the cabaret under National Socialism, Valentin was able to please Jewish members of the audience as well as those sympathetic to Nazism. Even Goebbels, after attending a cabaret performance in 1930 where Karl Valentin performed, stated that he "liked the famous (and non-Jewish) comedian from Munich" (1999 230). This appreciation did not last the duration of the war, however. Although Valentin's humour did not focus on political themes, "the overall tone of his acts was enough to label him an 'enemy of Nazism'" (Appignanesi 153). Although accounts vary—Appignanesi states that he was not permitted to perform, while

Laurence Senelick argues that he "imposed his own ban on performing, making only occasional radio appearances" (249-50)—Valentin's absence from the stage during the later years of the Nazi period is evidence of the perceived danger posed by even those performers who did not include explicitly political material in their routines.[16]

According to the model of an alternative legacy proposed by Santner, one could argue that Christian Boltanski has "unearthed," in Karl Valentin, a new resource for identification. Boltanski's mobilization of the stereotype of the Jewish comic, together with his emulation of one of cabaret's greatest (non-Jewish) performers, can be read as an attempt to make his audience see ordinary or conventional postwar identities in a new light. By refusing to limit himself to one identity (Gentile or Jew) exclusively, he resists the "racial" taxonomies enforced by the Nazis during their Occupation of France. More importantly, Boltanski challenges his audience to reconsider these identity categories through an affective rather than a rational process.

Although her memoir is a more direct account of the dilemma of identification faced by the children of survivors, Eva Hoffman makes an explicit connection between second-generation Germans and Jews. Rather than continue the legacy of Nazism by defining herself, and her history, as distinct from that of the Germans of her generation, she states that "Germans born after the war, I began to gradually realize, are my true historical counterpoint. We have had to struggle, from our antithetical positions, with the very same past" (118). It is interesting that Hoffman defines her "gradual" understanding of her relationship to this

"contrapuntal 'second generation'" (118), as "an avenue to interest and even fascination" (118). Like Boltanski, Hoffman understands her individual investment in the history of Germans and Jews in terms that suggest the primacy of affect over reason. Moreover, the complex process of identification represented in Hoffman's memoir and Boltanski's sketches suggests that the desire to make post-Holocaust identities stable or fixed is no longer appropriate, or even possible.

In *Caught by History*, Ernst van Alphen argues that the critical aversion to Boltanski, within Holocaust studies in particular, is a response to his refusal to present the facts of the Holocaust within acceptable forms. In an almost zealous attempt to resurrect Boltanski as a radical historian impervious to disciplinary constraints, van Alphen ignores the complex identifications that humour makes possible in the artist's work. In order to make his argument convincing, van Alphen misrepresents scholars who have re-contextualized the role of laughter in representations of the Holocaust. In an effort to discredit Terrence des Pres, for example, van Alphen takes the object of des Pres's critique (the generic restrictions imposed on artists and writers who engage with the Holocaust) and argues that this is des Pres's own agenda: "When I use expressions like the 'moral imperative' of Holocaust studies, I am not exaggerating or being oversensitive. Terrence des Pres, for one, has formulated prescriptions for 'respectable' Holocaust studies in all seriousness. Appropriating the voice of God in his use of the 'genre' of the Commandments, he dictates" (94). The fact that des Pres is outlining a series of "commandments" that he then counters at every turn is simply lost on van Alphen. Van Alphen's own limited polemic demands that he

set up a false dichotomy between Holocaust scholars and the artists he himself wishes to champion. Both the artists and the scholars risk being reduced to caricatures as a result of this rhetorical strategy.

IV: Childhood Photographs

In Andrea Liss's *Trespassing Through Shadows*, Boltanski's role within the field of Holocaust representation is still that of *agent provocateur*. Noting his trajectory from "conceptualist trickster toying with and effacing his and everybody's autobiographies" to "an artist of ethical stature whose ambivalence about documents, truths, and illusions could somehow be resolved through his own melancholy flirtations with history" (39), Liss confines her analysis to Boltanski's photographic installations of the middle to late 80s. Resisting the totalizing arguments favoured by van Alphen, she presents a carefully constructed and complex analysis of the work, thereby opening it up to rigourous critical engagement. After quoting at length from a series of reviews condemning Boltanski, Liss insists that she isn't out to discredit the artist. Her intention is to make clear the risks involved when Boltanski's "strategic ambivalence" is applied to the events of the Holocaust:

> I do not set out to curtail the possibility of reading his work as a harboring of Holocaust memory. Rather, I introduce some of the criticisms of his work to point out the dilemmas and the possibilities it raises about eliciting feigned pathos and risking turning specific historical meaning into nostalgia to provocatively engage the past with the present and to implicate the contemporary viewer. (41)

Liss opens her discussion of Boltanski's work with the negative comparison referred to in the epigraph from Sturken with which I opened this chapter: "'This is not a Boltanski,' I remember Martin Smith emphatically assuring me as he described the museum's plans for what was then alternately referred to as the Shtetl Wall and the Tower of Faces" (39). Smith, the former director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's permanent exhibition program, is a documentary filmmaker. Like Boltanski, he sees photography as a medium that can be deployed, with great affect, to convey the traumatic history of the twentieth century; unlike Boltanski, Smith is professionally invested in preserving the link between a fixed Truth and the documentary impulse. Because the museum's original mandate was to institute a dynamic multi-media approach to the Holocaust, Smith's "past work with photographs and film footage as documents and storytelling harmonized well with the museum's goals" (Liss 15). Despite threats to their funding, the museum's directors insisted on providing graphic representations of the death camps. Not wanting to sanitize this depiction in any way, photographs became the medium through which the horrors of the camps were both authenticated and made tangible.

The museum's Tower of Faces provides a conceptual counterpoint to what Liss describes as the directors' "unflinching approach" to the Holocaust. The tower itself is a column-like space "covered from top to bottom with 1,032 photographs of former residents of the small shtetl town of Ejszyszki taken between 1890 and 1941" (26). Located near Vilna, this community "known for its Talmudic academy and rich cultural life" (26) had existed for nine hundred

years before its destruction during the war. However, the traumatic events leading to the destruction of Ejszyszki are not visible in the archival documents themselves. Instead, the visitors are exposed to the loss signified by these photographs indirectly. Unlike the museum's "complex displays of dehumanization" (27), the Tower of Faces:

> is remarkable because it is the only space in the museum that implicitly rather than explicitly addresses the genocide. It pictures people fully integrated into the activities of a community run by consensus rather than the most violent of force, where the said and the not-said of the everyday of peoples' lives address the viewer rather than a confrontation with images that strip away any possibility of identification between the photographed and the viewer. (27-29)

Liss concludes her discussion of the Tower of Faces by describing it as "a fluctuating memorial rather than as a stable and self-assured monument" (36). The shift from the Holocaust Memorial Museum, in Liss's second chapter, to Boltanski's photographic installations, in her third chapter, is mediated by this open-ended segue addressing the dynamic relationship between monument, memory, and identity. The link to Boltanski as a subject who is himself understood in terms of the tension between fluctuating and stable definitions is established early on in her third chapter, when Liss questions the discrepancy between his explicit negotiation of his "public persona" (40), and the totalizing ends to which critics render this persona stable. Liss criticizes Lynn Gumpert, the first critic to champion Boltanski's work in the United States, for her "wholesale

acceptance of Boltanski as an authentic self" (40). Liss's criticism of Donald Kuspit is even more damning. She describes him as "Boltanski's easiest dupe," while acknowledging that his "cavalier response" (he doesn't read the photographic installations of the 1980s as historical evidence) is an "almost welcome relief from the all-too-trusting accolades about Boltanski" (49). What Liss herself calls into question is the efficacy of Boltanski's overdetermined representations of the Holocaust as historical documents: "The artist's maneuvers would seem to delegitimize the photographic project of evidence within the larger arena of history" (41).

Liss follows this caution with a close reading of what is perhaps Boltanski's most famous installation. *Lessons of Darkness* (1985-1988) is a three-part work that recycles photographs of Jewish children "reproduced from the everyday archives of grammar school group portraits and high school yearbooks" (Liss 41). Taken before the war, these photographs, like the portraits that make up the Tower of Faces, provide evidence of the daily lives of Jewish communities in Europe before the Nazis' rise to power. Rather than confirm Smith's insistence that there is *no* equivalence between the Tower of Faces and Boltanski's work, Liss argues instead, that "[s]imilar to the Tower of Faces, Boltanski's installations refute the strategy of facile identification between the viewer and the memory pictured" (43). She also claims that, in its refusal to reproduce images of these children as victims of the Nazis' murderous policies, "Boltanski's methodology challenges the documentary photograph's ability to function as an authentic document" (45).

According to Liss, in *Lessons of Darkness*, Boltanski stages a connection between the figure of the child and the historical trauma of the Holocaust through images that trace rather than represent the history they evoke. It is this conflation of the referential with the barely legible that renders the photographs at once historical and archetypal (figure 8).

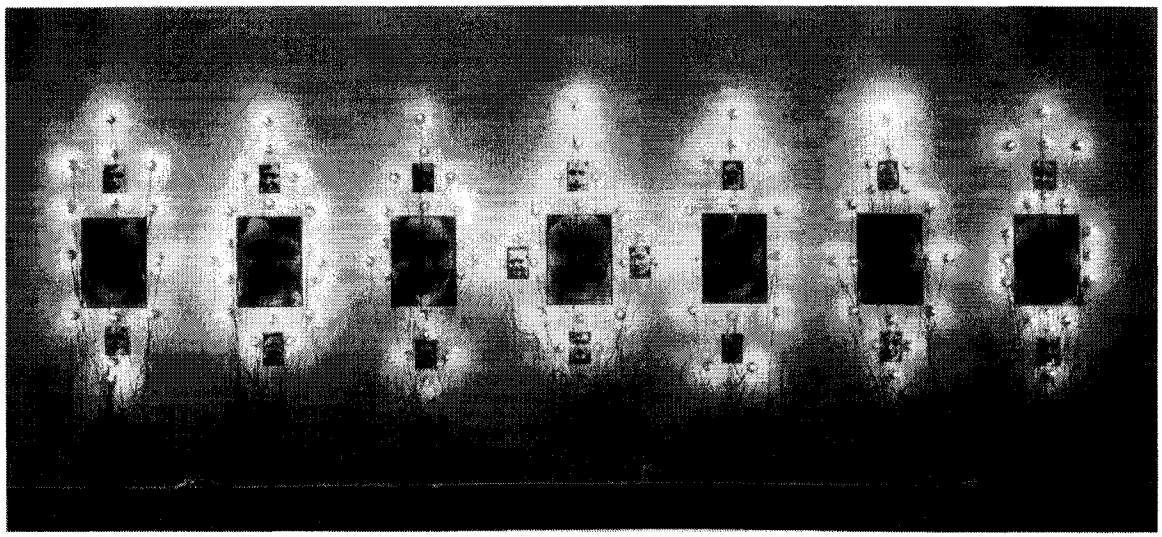

Figure 8—detail from *Lessons of Darkness* (1987). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. London: Phaidon, 1997, p. 12.

Quoting from an article on Boltanski by Nancy Marmer, Liss reinforces her own double reading of *Lessons* as a series that addresses both the historical trauma of the Holocaust *and* the universal tragedy of lost childhood:

> In the "Lessons of Darkness," [Boltanski] explores the photo's ability to also function as a trace of large historical events, and as a trope for tragedy. It is possible, at one level, to read these works as homages to the last generation of nameless children who were the innocent victims of the Nazi's final solution—to see them as metonyms for Auschwitz or Treblinka. . . . But Boltanski's impoverished extra-church, secular-cum-

> sanctified icons can also be seen more generically as requiems for the adult's inevitably lost childhood. (Marmer, qtd. in Liss 40)

Central to both Marmer's and Liss's arguments is the way Boltanski's recirculation of images—which he "reshoots in varying degrees of legibility" (41), and then recycles within various installations—reduces the specificity of the event to something generic. The ambiguity that results from this process of blurring makes the work simultaneously effective and dangerous. While Boltanski's strategy allows him to picture "victims outside of the traditional documentary photographic rhetoric of victimology" (Liss 44), it also makes room for interpretative uncertainty: "Boltanski's opaque and imploring faces simultaneously embrace and evade the promise of readymade remembrance and evidence. The faces of children and young adults, presumed to have been destroyed in the Final Solution, that he appropriates refuse to enact retrospective documentary gazes" (Liss 48).

However, one could argue that the mixed messages produced by these recycled images of childhood are as much an effect of the medium of photography as they are an effect of Boltanski's manipulation of the Holocaust as historical referent. In an essay on the relationship between the child and photography, Lindsay Smith argues that the invention of photography and nineteenth-century constructions of childhood are not only coeval, but are constitutively linked through a modern investment in empiricism and categorization:

> The medium of photography and the developmental category of childhood, as we have come to understand it, emerged concurrently, developing alongside one another in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was in the second half of that century that childhood became the object of scientific investigation as the camera became a major instrument of classification more generally. Initially interrelated in a number of ways, the photographic medium and a concept of childhood sustain a particular connection. (2)

Smith demonstrates how this connection is sustained into the twenty-first century by examining pictures of children who are the perpetrators of violence as well as of those who are its victims. One of the reasons why she shifts her focus away from the child as victim to the child as perpetrator is to foreground how a certain concept of the child and the medium of photography have remained conjoined because of a nostalgic desire for access to a state of lost innocence that the photographs of children provide us. For the adult who views the child as a representative of the past and, in the process, identifies with that child, the photograph provides a nostalgic link between the past and the present. Only rarely does this identification extend into thoughts about the future; in other words, only rarely does it extend into thoughts about real children:

> If we accept that a modern concept of childhood and a concept of photography as a medium of modernity share an historical period of development then it follows that they require for their meaning not simply a notion of nostalgia, but also a very particular relationship to futurity. It is

not that for the adult the idea of retrieving a lost childhood is unimportant but that, in simply tracing a narrative trajectory in a backward direction, we have neglected to think about the future; those odd effects performed upon temporality by photographs of children. (Smith 4)

Figure 9—detail from *The 62 Members of the Mickey Mouse Club 1955*. Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p. 37.

Smith's analysis of the construction of childhood and the invention of photography as evidence of a particularly modern investment in classification supports Liss's reading of the double or contradictory message of much of Boltanski's work. The images that Boltanski seems most drawn to are of children who belong to specific organizations or institutions. From *Les 62 membres du Club Mickey en 1955* (1972), a documentary installation based on Boltanski's grainy photographs of amateur portraits of fan club members taken from a Mickey Mouse Club magazine (Figure 9), to the recycled portraits of Jewish students in

French and German schools in the late 1930s that make up the *Lessons of Darkness*, Boltanski's children are all in some way defined by affiliation. While the Mickey Mouse fan club serves as a foil to the groups of unwitting children in the school photographs, a sense of loss, an uncanny awareness of some as yet unknown horror, does seem to inform all of this work.

The relationship between modes of classification, lost innocence, and futurity outlined by Smith is relevant to Boltanski's *Lessons of Darkness* for two reasons. First, there is what Ernst van Alphen has described as the Holocaust-effects of Boltanski's installations, which remind us of the "photographs and lists" produced by the Nazis "as documentation" (99). In *Lessons*, Boltanski draws an unnerving parallel between the Nazis' documentation of prisoners entering concentration camps and the classification of children achieved through the more benign taxonomies of the school portrait. Second, there is a link between these modes of photographic classification and the *impossibility* of a future. In her essay, Smith calls for an expansion of the narrative trajectory elicited by photographs of children to include a future as well as a past (thereby counteracting the nostalgia that an adult's identification with a photographed child almost inevitably produces). This is especially complicated with the children represented in *Lessons,* as the Holocaust always already intrudes upon the retrospective specular fantasy of childhood in a very particular way. The nostalgic circuit between past and present facilitated by Boltanski's images is disrupted by the likelihood that the children pictured are without a future. It is virtually impossible to resist Smith's challenge to think forward when regarding *Lessons of Darkness*.

However, to fully accept this challenge means we are not only denied the solace of an ahistorical nostalgia; we are confronted with a narrative that reads—to return to Raczymow's metaphor quoted in the introduction to this dissertation—as a history "shot through with holes" (102).

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In the end, because of the incomplete history suggested by Boltanski's manipulation and recirculation of these everyday photographs, Andrea Liss remains skeptical about their value as historical representations. Despite her relatively positive appraisal of *Lessons of Darkness*, she remains uncomfortable with what she perceives as "a feigned pathos and an uneasy nostalgia" permeating the work (52), and argues that Boltanski's post-Holocaust installations should remain within the cultural arena for which they were (however ambiguously) designed: the art gallery. According to Liss, any historical value this work may have inheres in the anxieties that it produces. In response to the final installation in the series, "The Festival of Purim," she argues that the images are so loaded with psychic and emotional baggage that they "taunt the viewer" (43). Referring to the original group portrait of Jewish children in France in 1939 from which Boltanski recycled his blurred individual images (Figure 10), Liss laments that the "photograph from which Boltanski worked, showing [the children] dressed up in costumes and indulging in merrymaking, may well document the last time they celebrated any holiday" (43).

Figure 10—Photograph of a Purim Celebration at a Jewish School in France, 1939. Reprinted from Christian Boltanski's *Reserves: La fête de Pourim.* Basel: Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, 1999. n.p.

V: *Purimspiel*

The holiday being celebrated in Boltanski's source photograph is not—in the context of the Nazis' rise to power in Germany and their subsequent occupation of France—just any holiday. The celebration of Purim in Europe was given considerable political weight immediately before, during, and after the war. And, like the German cabaret of the late 1930s and early 1940s, can be viewed as a scene of repression as well as a site of resistance.

Based on the biblical story of Esther, the Festival of Purim celebrates the triumph of disasporic Jews over forces that threaten to destroy them. The Book of Esther tells the story of how Persian Jews, living in exile in the city of Shushan during the fifth century B.C.E., destroyed the villain who had planned their genocide. During this period, Persia was a hotbed of intrigue and conspiracy. Esther, a young Jewish woman, is chosen to replace the Vashti, the disobedient former wife of King Ahasuerus. The selection process is long, but Esther manages to win out over the many other candidates; in accordance with her Uncle

Mordecai's advice, she never discloses that she is Jewish. In order to protect his niece, Mordecai remains close to Ahasuerus's palace. From his position at the palace gates, he hears of a plot to overthrow the king and manages to get the information to Esther before the plan is carried out.

In spite of the fact that he saves the king, Mordecai is not recognized for his actions. Instead, because of his refusal to bow down before Haman, the king's second-in-command, he ends up being marked for death. In order to destroy any grassroots support that Mordecai might have within the widespread disasporic community of Jews throughout Persia (Ahasuerus ruled 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia), Haman masterminds a plan to destroy all the Jews, and gets the king to sanction the genocide. Mordecai, hearing of this, alerts his niece and tells her that she must convince the king to call off this attack.

Through her ingenuity, Esther is able to inform the king of her uncle's earlier actions, while at the same time exploiting Haman's ambition and vanity in order to get him to set himself up as the king's enemy. As grateful for her loyalty as he is in thrall to her beauty, the king promises Esther anything she wants. She asks to have Haman's plans overturned, requests permission for Jews in the Persian empire to be allowed to carry weapons and defend themselves, and calls for the execution of Haman and his ten sons. In the end, Mordecai assumes Haman's position as second-in-command to the king, and Jews throughout the provinces conquer their would-be executioners.

Throughout Jewish history, the story of Esther has been reread and retold with what Grayzel describes as "undiminished interest" (3). Although there have

always been doubts about the historicity of the story, once the Book of Esther was accepted as part of the biblical canon by the Men of the Great Assembly (circa 500-300 B.C.E.), the festival itself "grew more important with every passing generation" (Grayzel 7). In *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi describes innovations on earlier Purim festivities, known as the "Second Purims" of the medieval period, that were "instituted in Jewish communities the world over to commemorate deliverance from some danger or persecution" (46) These included festivals in Muslim Spain to celebrate the victory of the forces of the Kingdom of Granada, whose vizier was a Hebrew poet, scholar, and statesman in 1038, and in the city of Narbonne in Southern France, where an anti-Jewish riot was subdued by the city's governor in 1236.

Within the biblical canon, the Book of Esther is unique because there are no direct references to god, nor is there a single injunction to prayer. These omissions are interpreted in various and contradictory ways. Talmudic scholar Joseph B. Soloveitchik reads them as characteristic of the nonprophetic age "described as *Hester Panim*, where God seems to have hidden his Presence" (9). In other words, God is not absent, but simply "directs the action from the sidelines, from the shadows, without the glaring spotlights to pinpoint his involvement" (9). Although Esther's ingenuity is acknowledged, Soloveitchik maintains that God "engineered the whole production—not by direct instructions as in the prophetic era, but through the more delicate and subtle channels of the human mind" (13).

Because "the truth of the original story has in more recent times been called in to question" (Grayzel 3), other more secular readings of the Book of Esther focus on the human agency of Mordecai and Esther, and on the allegorical possibilities that the story affords to any community suffering at the hands of another that is more powerful. This reading is confirmed by Israeli scholar Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, when she states that the ritual play performed as part of this festival (and which the children in the photograph Boltanski uses as his source text are dressed to perform) is not a response to "a real historical event, but rather to a set of cultural paradigms and conventions" (4):

> Rewriting history as a gesture of self-empowerment is at the heart of the text that has become the centerpiece of the festival of Purim: through official missives and counter-missives, Haman's plot to kill the Jews of Shushan turns on him and on the people who had been recruited to carry out the massacre. Celebrating the aborted catastrophe, defeat turned into triumph, the Jewish world is officially turned topsy-turvy (*nahafokh-hu*) for one day each year and saints and villains become interchangeable. (Ezrahi 4)

Ezrahi's summary of the story clearly identifies the draw of this particular holiday for an artist with Boltanski's interests and ambivalences. Within this world turned upside-down, the identities of killers and victims, of Jews and their oppressors, is reversed. In a sentence that could just as easily be a summary of Boltanski's installation, Ezrahi argues that the Biblical text functions as a "segue from the

lamentational-epic to the comic mode" (4), and concludes that "the book of *Esther*, as captured in its performative rituals, never lost its status as parody" (4).

Once Hitler was elected, the political relevance of the Book of Esther quickly became evident to Europe's twentieth-century Jewish communities. Even assimilated Jews were attracted to the emancipatory potential of the ritual observances and Purim plays. Quoting a Berlin rabbi of that period, Elliott Horowitz describes how,

> in the synagogues, especially those of Europe, many Jews were at the same time rediscovering forgotten forms of Purim festivity that, although once considered indecorous, were suddenly taking on new meaning. Joachim Prinz (1970:235), the former Berlin rabbi, recalled how, in the years after 1933, "people came by the thousands to the synagogue to listen to the story of Esther," which "became the story of our own lives." To those relatively assimilated Jews, the *Megilla*, read in Hebrew and then translated, "suddenly made sense," for "it was quite clear that Haman meant Hitler." (11)

Hitler himself was quick to understand the power—and therefore the threat—inherent to the festival's staging of the reversal of power and an alternative ending to anti-Semitic persecution. In "March 1941, following the Nazi occupation of Poland, Adolf Hitler not only banned the reading of Esther and noisemaking at the mention of Haman, but also ordered that all synagogues be barred and closed for the day of Purim" (Horowitz 45). The Nazi leader was clearly aware of the story's allegorical relevance to his own plans for a Final Solution to Europe's

"Jewish problem." In a section of *The Purim Anthology* (1949) titled "Purim Curiosities," Philip Goodman includes an excerpt from a story in the *New York Times* published January 31, 1944, in which Hitler is quoted as saying, "if the Nazis went down in defeat, the Jews would celebrate a 'second triumphant Purim'" (Goodman 375).

After his defeat, Hitler's prophecy did, in fact, come to pass. In an uncanny parallel to the cabaret performances that took place in concentration camps at the start of the war, Purim plays were performed in the camps set up for displaced persons once the war had ended. In an essay accompanying the exhibition catalogue *Purim: The Face and The Mask*, Toby Blum-Dobkin describes the Purim festival her father organized in a displaced persons camp in Landsberg in 1946. In addition to such traditional rituals as "the reading of the Megillah, school performances, organizational banquets, and literary parodies, the Jews of Landsberg" introduced a twist on the traditional Purim celebration, in the form of a "carnival" (53). The irony of the setting was not lost on the festival's organizers. During the war, the town of Landsberg was the site of an army camp. More importantly, the site of this "second triumphant Purim" provided survivors with a material as well as a symbolic ground from which to claim a victory over Hitler and his racist philosophies: the Landsberg prison was where Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* in 1924. In addition to the innovation of a Jewish carnival, with "masks, and carriages, and costumed people, the hanging of Hitler instead of Haman, and so forth" (53) (Figure 11), a special event was announced in the camp newspaper:

At 6 p.m. a folk celebration will take place at the sports field. Hitler's *Mein Kampf* will be symbolically burned! In 1943 Hitler declared that the Jews of Europe will never again celebrate Purim!

Friends: Sunday you will show that in the town where Hitler wrote his "Kampf" Jews will celebrate the great Purim (5706) [1946], the Purim of Hitler's defeat, the Purim of work. (54)

Figure 11—Celebration of Purim. Landsberg, 1946. Reprinted from *Purim: The Face and the Mask.* Ed. Shifra Epstein. New York: Yeshiva University Museum, 1979, p. 59.

Given the number of Jewish survivors in France—of the 76,000 French Jews that were deported, only 3 percent returned (Marrus and Paxton xi)—it is unlikely that any of the children depicted in Boltanski's "Festival of Purim" were still alive in 1946 to celebrate the great Purim of Hitler's defeat. Taken in 1939, the original photograph captures an event in their lives that took place before the Germans had occupied France (perhaps even before the children were aware of the dangers they

faced). What Liss refers to as the false pathos of these recycled images is the effect produced by the knowledge that the fate of these children is anathema to the celebration of any sort of triumph. However, where Liss focuses on affect alone, critical engagement with the "Festival of Purim" necessarily involves both affect *and* intellect. The images of these children are, as Liss rightly points out, loaded. However, Boltanski's choice of Purim—as a nominally religious observance based on the only book in the Old Testament that does not mention God, as a communal celebration associated with noise, food and alcohol, as a story that "quite stunningly imagines a different denouement" to persecution (Ezrahi 4)—signals that the installation is more than a base or manipulative appeal to melancholic sentimentality.

In "The Festival of Purim," as in every installment of the *Lessons of Darkness*, Boltanski displays the blurred photographs of Jewish children as if they were religious icons; they are mounted on makeshift altars and illuminated by candles or metal lamps (Figure 12). That the meaning of these images remains unstable is the result, according to Nancy Marmer, of Boltanski's "ambiguous and ambivalent method" (qtd. in Liss 40). His refusal to maintain a properly documentary approach to history, his incessant deconstruction of religious, national, and ethnic identities, and his ambivalent acknowledgement of his own "Jewish heritage" culminate in a work that provides fertile ground for critics, but very few certainties. Marmer maintains that,

> in addition to their more generic nostalgic function, these readymade photo-works should also sustain entirely opposite and much colder

readings—as, for example, modern parodies of the Christian's memento mori, or as icy warnings from a nihilistic and efficient maker of vanitas symbols. They may even be taken as self-consciously morbid celebrations of, rather than laments for, the idea of death, and as perverse preservations of fetishistic relics of the dead. (Marmer, qtd. in Liss 40)

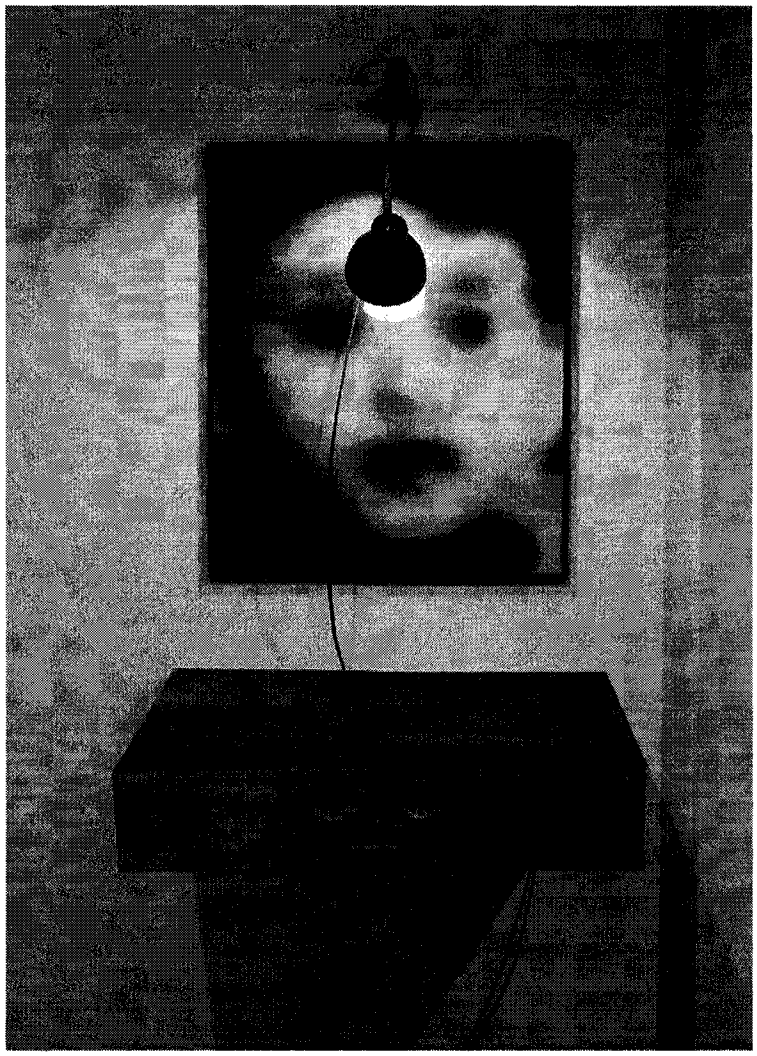

Figure 12—detail from *Reserves: The Purim Holiday* (1989). Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. Ed. Lynn Gumpert. Paris: Flammarion, 1994, p.111.

The Christian references identified in Marmer's less generous second reading of *Lessons* foreground Boltanski's continued refusal to limit his work to the representation of a single identity, a single faith, a single history. However, the fact that he mixes his religious signifiers does not necessarily mean he is engaged in an aesthetic practice of cultural relativism. Instead, it could signify an implicit acknowledgement that lines between sides are never absolute, and that careful attention to the ways these lines do not always hold is itself a historical as well as a political act. As a representation of everyday life in France in the late 1930s, the original photograph from which Boltanski developed "The Festival of Purim" depicts children of the Jewish Diaspora occupying complex and, as the war gets closer to home, increasingly incommensurable subject positions. According to Daniel Boyarin, the conflict staged here between national and cultural identities is the real significance of Purim, as "Purim is the holiday of Diaspora" (2), and

> Diaspora, as a concept and as a historical phenomenon, disrupts and threatens cultural practices of nationalism as well as disciplinary practices in the cultural sciences, which assume a unitary culture more or less bounded in space. Diaspora—dispersed cultural identity—invented by the Jews, has become a privileged model for postmodern identity theory even when not acknowledged as such. (3)

What Andrea Liss identifies as the failure of Boltanski's representations—"its feigned pathos and uneasy nostalgia"—might be better understood as a necessary effect of what Boyarin defines as "postmodern identity theory." To represent these children—in both senses of the term—would be to fix them as knowable,

and thereby render their meaning as fully legible. One way that Boltanski undermines the fixity of the photographic representation—as well as his own role as someone who "represents" others—is by cropping, magnifying and blurring the faces of the children that he isolates from his source images. These representations are, as a result, rendered ambiguous, unsuitable as properly historical documents, and therefore marked, in a certain way, by failure. It is through this will-to-failure, I would argue, that Boltanski demonstrates an ethical turn. In her extended meditation on Levinas, Butler makes postmodern theories of identity matter by foregrounding this disjunction between the human and its representation as the paradox of ethical representation:

> For Levinas, then, the human is not *represented* by the face. Rather, the human is indirectly affirmed in that very disjunction that makes representation impossible, and this disjunction is conveyed in the impossible representation. For representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must *show* its failure. There is something unrepresentable that we nevertheless seek to represent, and that paradox must be retained in the representation we give.
>
> (Butler 144)

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In his regular column for *The New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik tells a version of the Purim story that provides a counter-balance to the negative analyses of Boltanski's work levelled by critics like Marmer and Liss. When asked by the Jewish Museum to tell the story of Esther at its 2001 Purim ball, Gopnik's first

response was that "there must have been some kind of mistake" (124). Confident in his ability to produce laughter in any audience, the mistake Gopnik refers to in the opening paragraph is, as it turns out, his own: "I thought the Jewish Museum was making a mistake about the date of Purim" (124). Opening with his ignorance about all things Jewish—"Isn't that the one in the fall?" (124) — Gopnik tells the story of the evolution of his own religious practice, as an urban and secular Jew, from ignorance to a form of reluctant observance. Limited to the King James Version of The Book of Esther, the only copy he owns, Gopnik constructs a comedy routine out of his horror at the gory details of the Biblical narrative. "Obviously it was necessary to read past the impaling of Haman's sons, the ethnic pogroms, to some larger purpose—otherwise there would not be Purimspiels and happy Purim balls—but I did not know how to do it. I saw impaled Iranians where I needed to see a fly doing the backstroke in the soup" (126). After several days he is still at a loss about how to make the story funny, and gets sent by a friend to a rabbi. Rabbi Schorsch, in response to Gopnik's plea for clarification, mumbles, "It's a spoof, a burlesque really" (130). When he realizes that the only text Gopnik has at his disposal is a Christian Bible, he offers a summary of the Torah:

> You see, Scripture, the Bible, one of the remarkable things about it is that it contains a chapter about every form of human experience. There's a book of laws and a book of love songs. A book of exile and a book of homecoming. A skeptical and despairing book in Job, and an optimistic and sheltering book in the Psalms. Esther is the comic book, it's a book for court Jews, with a fairy-tale burlesque spirit. (130)

The rabbi's very simple redaction results in an epiphany for Gopnik which, in turn, produced something like a secondary epiphany for me. Rabbi Schorsch's description of the Book of Esther as "the godless comic book of Jews in the city, and how they struggle to do the righteous thing" (130), gives some sense of the cultural and historical awareness necessary to properly evaluate Boltanski's reworking of this particular school photograph. The children whose images circulate in "The Festival of Purim" are the children "of Jews in the city." The contradictory pressures of observance and assimilation suggest, in this context, a very complex definition of Jewishness. It is a definition that juxtaposes humour, as a form of parodic agency, with powerlessness, and hope with an acknowledgement of violence and suffering. Although the children who posed for this photograph in their Jewish school in France in 1939 did not, presumably, survive, the ironic gestures of their observance function in much the same way as Terrence des Pres' holocaust laughter. Looking at these children with the full knowledge of what faces them, but with an appreciation of the spirit of celebration that they share, "our knowledge of history is not denied, but displaced, and we can go forward with, so to speak, a foot in both worlds" (des Pres 221).

This trope of disjunction or displacement is central to Mieke Bal's essay on photography published in a recent issue of the Canadian journal *Mosaic* (December 2004). Bal echoes Judith Butler's suggestion that an ethical representation of the human is necessarily marked by failure. Cautioning her readers against the dangers of the "identity surveillance" (4) inherent to representational portraiture, Bal advocates strategies that "are shrewd and

intellectually, as well as affectively, effective; strategies which would establish a less easily appropriating, condoning, and exploitative—and more critical—visual engagement with such photographs" (4). Writing against the "mobilization of portraiture as a soldier for individualism" (7), she privileges, instead, the "impossibility of portraiture" (17). It is this impossibility that marks the ethical turn in Boltanski's Holocaust representations. The absence of any kind of instrumental heroism in "The Festival of Purim" supports my reading of the work as an ethical—as opposed to either naively optimistic or opportunistic—response to the Holocaust in its aftermath. He does not give us images of children that can be neatly folded into simple narratives of victimhood or heroism. Refusing to underplay the traumatic implications of his source photograph by framing these children as heroes, Boltanski, through his choice of Purim specifically, does grant these children a form of agency that is associated with humour, and thereby renders them something more than victims.[17]

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After his stint as a Purimspieler, Adam Gopnik admits that, while he was "not strangely exhilarated" by his experience, he did "find something significant in the Book of Esther" (131). Likening the experience to "any other exposure to an ancient, irrational belief-culture" (131), he tries to define what was "particularly Jewish" about his performance as Purimspieler. The world picture he outlines is remarkably similar to the those constructed by Boltanski. Offering an unorthodox definition of Judaism as the faith "that sustains the most encompassing of practices, from Moses to Henny Youngman, from Esther to Sammy Davis, Jr."

Gopnik suggests that Judaism manages to sustain this diversity because "anything ancient and oppressed must be adaptable" (131).

In an essay on the Book of Esther, Mieke Bal reiterates Gopnik's understanding of Judaism as an encompassing practice. She concludes her essay with the observation that chance, agency, and writing in the Book of Esther continue to have political as well as historical implications.

> It would be an ironic misreading of the mirror of Esther to see the scroll as reflecting only the history of the Jews and one of their festivals. By reading it as a text about reading/writing, however, one is invited to reflect upon all the issues implicated in it: upon gender, power, and the state; genocide and otherness; submission and agency—in short, upon history. (Bal, "Lots" 113)

Gopnik closes his essay by reaffirming the secular identity with which he opened. His Jewishness is defined, in terms very similar to Bal's reading of the Book of Esther, as a process of belonging best understood through the metaphor of reading: "At least for a certain kind of court Jew, being Jewish remains not an exercise in reading in or reading past but just in reading on, in continuing to turn the pages. The pages have been weird and varied enough in the past to be weird and varied enough in the future, and there is no telling who will shine in them" (Gopnik 131).

Gopnik's tentative commitment to Judaism is an acknowledgement that his choices, like those of the Jews of Shushan, are based on a sense of cultural inheritance as well as expediency: "we are thinking of joining the synagogue we

can see from our window, in part because we want to, in part because there's an excellent nursery school there for our daughter. That is the kind of thing Jews do in Persia" (131). The description of his daughter with which he concludes the essay stages, in a deceptively simple way, the political message that Mieke Bal argues is the real meaning of the Book of Esther. It is also a moving reminder of the oppression of European Jews under Hitler's rule, as well as of their resilience when faced with the threat of extreme and inexplicable violence: "I gave the silver grogger to the baby, who holds it at the window and shakes it in warning when she sees a dog. I believe that she now has the first things a Jewish girl in exile needs: a window to see from and a rattle to shake" (131).

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[1] Critics tend to focus on what Andrea Liss identifies as the "strategic ambivalence" of Boltanski's Holocaust-inspired installations. In turn, they very often express their own ambivalence about Boltanski's strategies. See, for example, Janis Bergman-Carton's "Christian Boltanski's *Derniéres Années*: The History of Violence and the Violence of History," *History and Memory* 13.1 (2001): 3-18. While Bergman-Carton takes critics Michael Newman and Abigail Solomon-Godeau to task for relying on a "strangely untroubled notion of history" when discussing Boltanski's work, she concludes by arguing that Boltanski represents the Holocaust through evasion rather than historicization. In "Mythologies of the Photograph," included in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997, 59-70), Nancy M. Shawcross criticizes Boltanski because she feels that he "insinuates that the dead remain nothing more than the fictitious pictures derived from what is left behind either in photographs or in possessions" (68). Shawcross remains ambivalent about what she sees as the "luxury of invention" Boltanski brings to his photographic installations (69), and suggests that other artists, most notably Maxine Hong Kingston, are denied this luxury.

[2] It is interesting to note that in the context of *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, the exhibition recently mounted at the Jewish Museum in New York (March 17—September 30, 2002), Boltanski has undergone something of a reappraisal. Critics of the show refer, almost nostalgically, to Boltanski's Holocaust works as demonstrating artistry, restraint, and ethos. See the catalogue, *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*. Ed. Norman L. Kleeblatt. New Brunswick, New York, and London: Rutgers UP, 2001.These same critics express dismay over the in-your-face deployment of Nazi imagery practiced by the new generation of artists represented in the exhibition.

[3] The details of Boltanski's career are taken from two sources: Lynn Gumpert's monograph, *Christian Boltanski* published by Flammarion (1994), and the monograph published by Phaidon, also titled *Christian Boltanski* (1997). See my Works Cited for the full references.

[4] Throughout the chapter I introduce each work by its French title, followed by an English translation in parentheses. After this first reference, I refer to each work using the English title.

[5] In less than two pages, van Alphen summarily dismisses the efficacy of sacred and/or properly historical responses to the Holocaust. After raising and then "[s]etting aside the question of the Holocaust as a sacred event" (94), van Alphen argues that the "pressure exercised by and on Holocaust studies" forces authors and artists to "model themselves in the image of the archivist or the historian— in short, in the image of those professionals whose task it is to inventory facts and reconstruct them in the correct time and place" (94-95). And in case his reader misses the point, he goes on to characterize the archivist—a role that he feels is unjustly privileged within Holocaust studies—as one who "*merely* catalogs the events" (95, emphasis added).

[6] Having used the phrase "moral imperative" just two pages earlier, van Alphen betrays his interest in this alleged focus in Holocaust studies as an anxiety. His subsequent misrepresentation of scholars like Terrence des Pres only serves to further highlight this interest or investment. It is as if he's using Boltanski as an instrument with which to take down those he feels wield a suspect moral authority over Holocaust studies as a field of inquiry.

[7] See Gilman's essay for a comprehensive list of reviews of and commentary about the film.

[8] France is a special case. For decades the Holocaust was referred to, euphemistically, as "the disaster." After Liberation, non-Jewish French citizens were reluctant to acknowledge the role they had played in facilitating the deportation and execution of over 70,000 of their Jewish compatriots. Immediately following the war, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote about this tacit denial in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, (published in France in 1946; published in English by Schocken Books in 1948). Marguerite Duras's discussion of the silence surrounding French collaboration in her memoir, *The War* (originally published in French in 1985; published in English by Pantheon in 1986), echoes Sartre's critique of postwar French attitudes to the role French citizens played in the genocide. Canadian historian Erna Paris examines the differences in France's response to the trial of the former top-ranking Nazi, Klaus Barbie, and the trial of French administrator Maurice Papon. While French citizens were, for the most part, eager to see Barbie ("the butcher of Lyons") brought to trial in 1985, they were less eager to see one of their own, Maurice Papon, accused and convicted of similar crimes. See *Unhealed Wounds: France and the Klaus Barbie Affair*. New York: Grove Press, 1985, and "Through a Glass Darkly," in *Long Shadows*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2000. 74-121.

[9] Ophuls's "The Sorrow and the Laughter" was published the same year as des Pres's "Holocaust Laughter?" (des Pres delivered his essay as a conference paper in 1987; it was then published, posthumously, in 1988). Both pieces precede Benigni's film by a decade and are, therefore, prescient rejoinders to those who would like to safeguard the limits and taboos challenged here by both the filmmaker and the academic.

[10] One could argue that this "happy ending" is necessary for the film to fulfill its generic requirements. I would counter this argument by suggesting that Benigni achieves an 'appropriate' comic resolution—the romantic union of the film's protagonists—in the middle of the film, when he has Guido marry his gentile "princess." The comedy is then interrupted—both historically and structurally—by Mussolini's willing participation in Hitler's *final solution*. Once Guido and little Giosue are arrested, the traditionally comic elements of the film are, in terms of generic convention, foreclosed. If, as Frye has argued, "the theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it" (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 43), the film does not function as a romantic comedy. This leaves the question of whether we should read *Life Is Beautiful* as an ironic comedy (which would allow us to accept, unproblematically, its 'joyous' resolution). According to Frye, ironic comedy "brings us to the figure of the scapegoat ritual and the nightmare dream, the human symbol that concentrates our fears and hate." However, he goes on to argue that: "We pass the boundary of art when this symbol becomes existential, as it does in the black man of a lynching, the Jew of a pogrom, the old woman of a witch hunt" (45). Because of the historical specificity of Benigni's clown/scapegoat, the film crosses, according to Frye's schema, the boundary of art. A comic resolution to the existential dilemma, while comforting, is not equal to the horror and devastation of the catastrophe faced by the Jews Guido is constructed to represent, and therefore risks trivializing the both event and the experience of Guido's historical counterparts.

[11] The interview was published in *Flash Art* [International Edition], no. 124 (October-November 1985), p. 82.

[12] The link between Boltanski and Perec is, admittedly, speculative; however, the connection I'm making here is reinforced by the fact that Boltanski chose excerpts from two of Perec's texts—*Je me souviens* (I Remember) and *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (W or The Memory of Childhood)—to accompany images of installations included in the Phaidon monograph on Boltanski edited by Didier Semin.

[13] In the Phaidon monograph, the version of "What They Remember" is a reprint of the translation included in Lynn Gumpert's earlier monograph on the artist published by Flammarion. It is included there as one in a series of "Texts and Interviews," translated by Francis Cowper. Although I have tried to locate the original French copy of the piece, it does not appear to be available. In 2001, however, Boltanski's German press published *La Vie Impossible.* This more recent artist's book, bound in grey archive-folder paper, is a collection of images Boltanski has used throughout his career. These images look, on the page, as if they have been pasted together in the style of a scrapbook. Printed on vellum, the images alternate with black pages (like the sheets of an old-fashioned photo album) upon which are printed three versions—in French, German and English—of each entry from "What They Remember." Although the statements are not numbered and the English translation does, in places, differ from Cowper's version in Gumpert's text, this new publication is, as far as one can tell, faithful to the "original" French version of Boltanski's text. This provides me with more support for my reading of the significance of the repetition of "little," as the word "petit" is used in the racialized diminutive "the little rabbi" and in the comparison made between Boltanski and Chaplin: "On a dû faire la septième ensemble, je me souviens de lui comme d'un petit garçon un peu sale avec des cheveux noirs crépus et un vieux manteau bleu marine, on n'avait que très peu de contact avec lui, on l'appelait *le petit rabbin*"; "C'était un petit homme vous savez c'est comme cela que s'appelle Charles Chaplin dans les premiers films de Charlot ‹‹*le petit homme*››." (n.p., emphasis added) *La Vie Impossible.* Koln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig, 2001.

[14] For an extended analysis of Charcot's ambiguously anti-Semitic theories, see Jan Goldstein's "The Wandering Jew and the Problem of Psychiatric Anti-semitism in Fin-de-Siècle France." *Journal of Contemporary History* 20 (1985): 521-552.

[15] Because I don't want to give more space to Kuspit's analysis than it deserves, I'm not dealing with his interpretations in any depth here. I do think it important, however, to acknowledge his dangerously reductive reading of the domestic scene represented in Boltanski's photographs. In addition, the artistic license he takes with the biographical details of the Boltanski's experience of the war seems to undermine the argument he hopes to make: "But there is more to the gloom. Boltanski was born on September 6, 1944, the day Paris was liberated. (His middle name is Liberté, in memory of that day.) His parents must have copulated to produce him. I submit that unconsciously—a basement territory also—he fantasized that they copulated in the gloom of the basement. The gloom is haze in which this primal scene is fantasized. It is the nakedness of mother and father in their 'monstrous' act, a confused blur of nakedness which hides as much as it reveals. Boltanski already possessed his Catholic mother—he lived with her upstairs—but not his father, who lived in the basement. His photographs reflect a so-called negative Oedipus complex." (258)

[16] Although I was able to find source material on Valentin's life and career written in English, most of the available materials are in German. And, as I've noted, there are contradictory accounts of why he left the German cabaret stage during the war. However, I did find a very interesting reference to Valentin where I least expected one. Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 1999), is a philosophical meditation on the ethical and political significance of Auschwitz. Interrogating the work of such thinkers as Aristotle, Derrida, Heidegger, Lyotard, and Levinas, and referring to canonical texts by survivors Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, the book is appropriately short on levity. However, in an almost offhand reference in the second chapter, Agamben quotes Karl Valentin: "Certainly, even the executioners had to bear what they should not have had (and, at times, wanted to bear); but, according to Karl Valentin's profound witticism, in every case 'they did not feel up to being capable of it.' This is why they remained 'humans'; they did not experience the inhuman" (78). Nowhere does Agamben explain who Valentin is; nor does he supply a full reference for the witticism. What he does supply, however, is support for Boltanski's recuperation

of Valentin as a 'role' model, and for my own reading of the function of humour, and, more specifically, cabaret, as a potential source of resistance to genocide.

[17] After writing the conclusion to this essay I came across a (buried) reference to Gopnik's review of Boltanski's first American exhibition—an early version of the *Lessons of Darkness* (1989). When faced with the possibility that this review could undo everything I wanted to accomplish in the last section of this chapter, I was reluctant to read it. To my relief, Gopnik's reading of the show mirrored, in important ways, my own. To quote from the review: "the[se images] are moving as a consequence of our knowledge of the fate of their subjects: probably gone, but not certainly. There is some atom of decency in this, something reticent and unexploitative—some refusal of obvious emotion—that permits the reader to look and think without feeling only the reflexive emotions of shame and rage. . . . Like so many artists and writers now, Boltanski takes as the model for his art the doomed archeological dig—the search for knowledge that ends up in paradox, enigmas, and failure" (111). "The Art World: Lost and Found." *New Yorker* 20 Feb. 1989: 107-111.

Chapter 2

Domesticating the Holocaust: Belatedness, Fantasy, and Genocide in the Novels of Sharon Riis

> "Europe : Jew :: America : Indian?" The question mark is not coy. Are the relations really that closely comparable—between two empires, on one hand, and two peoples within those empires, both repressed to the point of genocide, on the other hand—that they could be reduced to such a neat, schematic rendering?
>
> Jonathan Boyarin, "Europe's Indian, America's Jew"

In December 2002 David Ahenakew, the former chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN), publicly defended the Holocaust. Speaking to a conference on Native healthcare, Ahenakew celebrated Hitler's efforts to "clean up the world."[1] Clarifying his comments to a reporter for the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, he made his position on the genocide of European Jewry as unequivocal as possible. After describing Jews as a "disease" he offered a crude summary of Hitler's rise to power: "That's how Hitler came in. He was going to make damn sure that the Jews didn't take over Germany or Europe. That's why he fried six million of those guys, you know" (qtd. in Anderssen A1). While he must have realized that he was courting controversy, Ahenakew could not have foreseen—and probably would not have welcomed[2]—the ways in which his tirade initiated a formal alliance between First Nations and Jewish communities in Canada. In the immediate aftermath of the event, Keith Landy, then president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, pointed to a

historical parallel between the two communities that Ahenakew had willfully ignored. "This is really vile speech. Before I realized who this was, I thought it was someone who was totally ignorant and had no knowledge of history and the kind of suffering our respective peoples have had to endure" (qtd. in Perreaux AO1).

The acknowledgement of a shared history of oppression marked the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between the two communities. In December 2002, the Canadian Jewish Congress called for a hate-crimes investigation (Anderssen A1); however, just one month later, the leaders of B'nai Brith Canada proposed an alternative to criminal proceedings by inviting Ahenakew to "participate in healing and sentencing circles" (Schmidt A01). A process which would, if successful, effect a reconciliation, the healing and sentencing circles were sought as a means to restoring "balance and harmony" through face-to-face communication: "the offender speaks directly with victims. In this case, it could mean Holocaust survivors and Jewish leaders" (Schmidt A01).

The rhetoric of a shared history was also taken up by leaders of Native organizations. Matthew Coon Come, the National Chief of the AFN, and Perry Bellegarde, the AFN representative in Saskatchewan, both spoke out against Ahenakew's comments. They also accepted an invitation from B'nai Brith to travel to Israel with a group of First Nations educators. Rev. Raymond McLean of Manitoba's Fairford First Nation, the leader of this mission, describes the parallels between Israel's Jews and Canada's First Nations as follows: "When you take a land and an identity from a people, they become suppressed. As a result of wrongs

perpetrated and allowed to happen to our people by the government of Canada, we are in danger of losing forever our languages. We must preserve our heritage as Israel has" (Glover A02).

If Israel were to function as a model state, as McLean seems to think it should, what would be the lesson that it teaches? McLean does not acknowledge the violence by which Israel has preserved its (in this instance, singular) heritage; he chooses, instead, to identify with Israelis rather than Palestinians because of a spurious religious affinity. "McLean said that he relates to the Jews more than the Palestinians, because of the shared biblical connections in the Jewish and Pentecostal faiths" (Glover A02). Although he claims to support peace and "is willing to listen to all sides" (Glover A02), his identification with Israel betrays a tacit belief that the preservation of cultural identity is contingent upon the autonomy of the nation-state. In other words, even as McLean distinguishes himself from Ahenakew by identifying *with* rather than *against* Jews, his support for a nation-state constituted and maintained through strategies of exclusion bears an uncanny resemblance to Ahenakew's defense of a Germany threatened by Jews.

I am not suggesting that there's a kind of fixed analogical relation between Israel and Nazi Germany. Although parallels between these two states have been drawn by critics from a range of national and "ethnic" perspectives, I do not mean to suggest that their complex histories and domestic policies are interchangeable. Neither am I trying to force McLean into an unwilling—or unwitting—alliance with Ahenakew; his comments are in no way as hateful as or as incendiary.

However, McLean's transparent conflation of Holocaust victims with the state of Israel, together with his support for Israel's domestic policies, suggests that not all of the lessons learned from the Ahenakew controversy include a recognition of the rights of those whose culture, language and territorial claims are denied or suppressed by the nation-state. Instead, McLean's comments demonstrate the ways in which an oversimplification of the relationship between "Jews" and "Indians"—the "neat, schematic rendering" that Boyarin warns against in the epigraph to this chapter—is politically suspect if it is used to secure the authority of any nation to determine who belongs, and where. The policies—both tacit and formal—by which wrongs have been perpetrated against the First Nations by the Canadian government are in many ways the same as the policies by which Israel preserves its heritage. The vocabulary McLean uses to identify the bond between Israel and Canada's First Nations glosses over these similarities.

In her 1994 Clarendon Lecture on Israel included in *States of Fantasy* (1996), Jacqueline Rose argues that the messianic view of Israel as "singular, one, redeemed for all time" is a way of "filling and staking out not just a territory but the historic, repeated uncertainty of national self-definition" (30). As a means of managing a legacy of dispossession and genocide, the model Israel provides of a singular nation with its heritage intact is a reassuring fantasy. However, the fact that this fantasy necessarily excludes those who have been similarly oppressed within the nation's borders is evidence of the constitutive dangers posed by the illusion of unity. In *Ephemeral Territories: Representing Nation, Home and Identity in Canada* (2003), Erin Manning argues that the vocabulary of nation is

itself both a cause and an effect of such exclusions: "The vocabulary of nation can be understood as the structuring of a language that produces the distinction between qualified and unqualified bodies, where qualification within the identity and territory of the nation presupposes an attachment to the nation in its linguistic, cultural and political incarnations" (xv).

According to Manning, the ideological and often repressive strategies of exclusion practiced by the nation-state are reflected in, and reinforced by, the structures that house individuals within the nation itself. Like Rose, Manning argues that these structures, designed to secure a sense of identity and belonging, very often function at the level of the unconscious: "even as many of us provisionally assume a political stance that refutes nationalism, we often design our homes to mirror the exclusionary aspects of the nation's mandate on belonging" (xvi). For Manning, then, the home functions on at least two levels. It "provides not only a tangible example of how we perpetuate the vocabulary of nation in our daily utterances, it offers also a visceral instance of our desire for attachment and security" (xvii).

In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996), Jacques Derrida examines the relationship between the nation-state and the home through the figure of the archive. Unlike Rose and Manning, however, he introduces gender as an important feature of this relationship. Opening with the injunction—"Let us not begin at the beginning, nor even at the archive" (1)—he offers, instead, an etymological history: "the meaning of 'archive,' its only meaning, comes to it from the Greek *arkheion:* initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence

of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, those who commanded" (2). According to this definition, the relationship between *archive* and *domicile* is not merely linguistic, but a manifestation of traditional and gendered power dynamics. Power is understood here as hermeneutic authority. Countering the misconception that he is uninterested in anything "outside" the text, Derrida links this notion of hermeneutic authority to political power: "The archons are first of all the documents' guardians. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives" (2).

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The novels of Sharon Riis constitute both a literary and philosophical challenge to the laws and conventions governing the archives. Riis's houses are destroyed before our eyes as we negotiate the twists and fissures of her fragmented narratives. What I want to argue is that the motivation for these narratives is precisely to effect this destruction. In *The True Story of Ida Johnson* (1976) and *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone* (1989), the motif of house, or home, functions on several levels. In the first novel, the house is a prison. For the woman confined within its walls there are two options: break free or die. The novel's protagonist chooses freedom, but with a vengeance that is manifest as the worst sort of violence; Ida murders her husband and children and burns their trailer to the ground.

Riis has Ida tell her own story. It is an account filled with lies, holes, and spaces, an account that does not conform to the teleological conventions of a life

story. After killing her family, Ida makes her way across Canada, accepting menial work as a waitress and a chambermaid. Although her options are limited by her lack of training or experience, her independence and physical mobility nevertheless upset the hierarchical distinctions necessary to the circulation of power outlined by Derrida above. Once mobile, Ida becomes a liminal figure inhabiting spaces that lie beyond the reach of Derrida's "superior magistrates." Risking homelessness, Ida rejects the reassuring fantasy of identity and belonging that Rose and Manning assert is integral to the maintenance of the nation-state. Speaking otherwise from the positions or occupations allotted her, she subverts the authority of patriarchal scripts which represent woman as mother, as matter, and as whore.

At the centre of the novel is an unlikely friendship between Ida, described by Margaret Atwood as a "flat-footed waitress"[3] and Lucy, an aboriginal woman who attended school in Ida's hometown of Longview, Alberta when both women were children. After only a few months in Longview, Lucy returns to the reserve. Somehow, though we are never given access to the circumstances of her mobility, the adult Lucy travels across Canada, and then makes her way across Europe. Riis mediates the difference between North American Aboriginal and European Jew through this enigmatic figure. Mobile, resilient, and very nearly mute Lucy is depicted as a contemporary nomad. The fact that she identifies as a Jew makes the link between "Jew" and "Indian" explicit; however, this connection is established through a complex rather than schematic rendering. Riis does not reduce the shared legacy of genocide to a neat pattern of equivalences, but represents it

obliquely through a series of contradictory references that force us to question rather than simply accept the connections being made.

The violence of *The True Story of Ida Johnson* is reformulated in Riis's second novel. In *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone* (1989), Riis extends her critique of power beyond the predominantly feminist concerns of her first novel. Although the action of *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone* takes place within the home, the violence is no longer so narrowly domestic. Once again, Riis establishes a relation between space, narrative authority, and power. The narrative is a first-person account of an unexpected *ménage à trois* between Rosalie, a public health nurse, Josef Przysieszny, a Polish immigrant who lives in an isolated cabin just outside Rosalie's jurisdiction, and Wanda, a civil servant who lands on Josef's doorstep in the middle of a blizzard. Paradoxically, with the move from outside to inside Riis is better able to expose the racial and sexual violence of Canada's colonial history. Through a series of shared fantasies the novel's three characters are forced to experience, firsthand, the historical violence of both the Holocaust and the genocide of Canada's aboriginal peoples.

Although Northern Alberta provides a geographical location for the action, the novel's characters move beyond the walls of Josef's cabin and enter into the world(s) of the past. Transported into other bodies, into other places and historical periods, Rosalie, Josef, and Wanda act out instances of historical trauma without ever leaving the one-room cabin to which they're confined. However, their alternate identities and experiences are not freely chosen; the characters are thrown into these dreamlike fantasy-states without warning and against their will.

The fantasies themselves make the relationship between the domestic and public spheres tangible by blurring the distinction between personal and historical experience. By acting out scenes of historical violence, Riis's characters are forced to take individual responsibility for events that exceed the private or personal. It is as if by working through this communal experience of fantasy, they can come to terms with the legacy they've inherited from the state to which they belong. This is because, as Jacqueline Rose argues in her introduction to *States of Fantasy*, fantasy is not "antagonistic to social reality; it is its precondition or psychic glue" (3).

•

In Chapter 1 I discussed the ways in which the transmission of historical trauma from one generation to the next takes place within the closed and often claustrophobic space of the family home. In his *Comic Sketches*, Boltanski reconstructs the scene of this cross-generational haunting with both ambivalence and humour, thereby undermining the rigid identity politics that were central to the Nazis' program of genocide. In "Domesticating the Holocaust" I explore a similar conjunction between domestic space, historical violence, and identity. Although references to the Holocaust are less explicit in Riis's work, the legacy of historical trauma, a legacy which exceeds the temporal and geographical borders of any single nation, informs virtually every aspect of her characters' lives. Any desire for attachment or security is undermined by the intense emotional and physical bonds between characters whose lives, had they been properly contained within their respective enclosures, would never have overlapped.

In the first section of this chapter I open with a discussion of *The True Story of Ida Johnson* read through Luce Irigaray's analysis of space and gender in her essay "Sexual Difference" (1984). Focusing on the character of Ida Johnson and, more specifically, on the violence of her failed marriage, I examine the ways in which Riis deconstructs the dynamic of mobility and confinement central to Irigaray's exposé of traditional Western sexual dynamics. I then shift my focus to the transition from a domestic space exemplified by the traditionally conceived archive, or *oikos*, to an alternative and more fluid conception of space suggested by the relationship between Ida Johnson and her childhood friend, Lucy George. Neither Ida nor Lucy fits the ideological profile of what Erin Manning identifies as a "qualified body." Lucy's complex racial and sexual identity and Ida's murderous response to marriage and motherhood place both women outside the bounds of nation in its ideal, or fantasmatic, state. However, the sympathy with which Riis represents these characters makes it impossible for us to condemn them. Instead, the shared and ultimately unstable spaces created by their friendship exist as an alternative to the secure territories of the nation-state and the family home.

My discussion of *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone* expands upon the paradigms used in the analysis of Ida and Lucy's story. I am interested in the way Riis rewrites Canada's history of genocide retroactively, through the more recent (though geographically more distant) events of the Holocaust. While Riis is careful never to simply conflate the two events, she is more attentive to the details of their difference in this second novel. In this section I focus on Riis's use of

fantasy—hallucinatory scenes involving time travel, gender reversals, and linguistic shifts—to show how individual identity and cultural memory are necessarily imbricated. My analysis of the work of fantasy will not be limited to its psychic and affective registers. Instead, I will explore the ways in which the processes of acting out and working through are contingent upon corporeal engagement. It is through the carnal encounter that Riis's characters confront the traumatic histories that construct their differences as fixed, secure, unequivocal. However, it is through their acts of erotic generosity that these limits are breached, and alternative forms of community are imagined.

I: Burning Down the House

> Indeed, in an extraordinary array of contexts, space is conceived of as a woman. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the 'bounded' spatial entities which are seen as the context of, and for, human habitation: the world, the nation, regions, cities and the home.
>
> Sue Best, "Sexualizing Space"

The MLA Bibliography lists only three citations under the subject category of Sharon Riis. Two of these listings are essays published seven years apart, while the remaining citation is an interview. The essays, by feminist critics Jeanne Perreault and Donna E. Smyth, focus on the deployment of space in *The True Story of Ida Johnson*. However, neither writer focuses on the space(s) within which the events of the narrative occur. They are concerned, instead, with Riis's use of *textual* space, with the ways in which the text alternates between type and white space upon the page: "Watson's *The Double Hook* and Sharon Riis' *The*

True Story of Ida Johnson are short, 'open' narrative structures which use visual space as a necessary part of the text and so involve the reader/interpreter in a world of visual signs designed to break traditional logic and linear sequential patterns" (Smyth 129). While Perreault goes further than Smyth, identifying space as the conceptual distance between characters as well as the textual and/or narrative gap between anecdotes recalled by Ida at the café in Claresholm, the terms of her analysis are vague, impressionistic: "The empty space is full of shadows, elusive ghosts of voices not identified, and heard, not told; nevertheless, these absences make a positive rather than negative force in the novel" (271).

For anyone who has read the novel, however, Perreault's response more than adequately conveys the hallucinatory nature of Ida's story. Dedicated "*to the careful reader*" (7), the narrative unfolds like a riddle. Having accepted a stranger's request to tell the story of her life for twenty bucks, Ida enters into an agreement to tell the truth. In truth, however, her response to the request is ambivalent: "'Sure thing honey.' Whatever gets you off, she thought" (29). What is interesting about this response is the discrepancy between what is said and what is suggested. Ida appears to care little for the stranger, an enigmatic wanderer named Luke. Nevertheless, his request launches her into a direct and surprisingly unflattering account of her life. According to Perreault, the tone with which this tale is told says as much about Ida's character as it does about the events themselves: "She rarely asks herself why she did what she did, what consequences it had, nor what use she made of it mentally or emotionally. A flat and cool recalling takes place, devoid of the expected or assumed 'feminine' responses.

The way she tells her story, however, reveals the connections she makes and exposes the lines of her thought" (272).

The tension between thought and action, between appearance and reality, between persona and subjectivity is made explicit during an intervention by an anonymous and seemingly omniscient narrator. Ida's story appears to follow a maze-like pattern of questioning which, because it is not transcribed within the text, remains unavailable to the novel's readers. There is a sense that the questions are being framed by someone who knows her, someone who can see past the coarse skin, stocky body and working-class dialect to the "real" Ida, a woman with the unnerving ability to confound all expectation:

> A less astute onlooker might feel sorry for you Ida, might think you were a local girl tied somehow, forever, to that small armpit of a no-town where I found you working as a waitress. But I knew you'd made it in your own particular way. You'd dismissed your past, most of it; the future was of no concern at all. There were no loose ends for you. Christ girl, you amaze even me. (21)

•

Ida's true story begins with a traumatic experience: "It's my first memory this. I must've been four" (30). Through this childhood memory we witness Ida fall into a hole dug very much like a grave:

> I must've fallen six feet into that hole. Once the noise passed it wasn't so bad there and I started looking around. The bones didn't scare me—I'd seen cow skulls before for instance—but I didn't like the dark so I tried

> moving the thing into the light from the hole but it began to whimper and when I dropped it at that it crumbled away to nothing. Like chalk I thought. I wasn't so much afraid as terrible sad and I started to cry but something warm and cold both came out of the dark around me close like a friend and I was glad. When Mr. Hindle and my Dad found me they were more mad than anything that I hadn't called out when I heard them yelling for me but actually I didn't hear them though they never thought to believe me. (30-31)

The circumstances leading up to Ida's fall give the episode mythic status. While on a fishing trip with her parents, Ida sets off on her own to explore. She spies a garter snake and, rather than run from it, decides to catch it. Like Eve in the Garden of Eden, she is led by the snake to a place beyond what is acceptable or familiar; it is this curiosity that precipitates her fall. "I followed it through the long grass up a small hill actually where I found some very neat piles of rocks. I always thought at that time that I was the first to be anywhere when I was by myself or even to do anything but I knew with those rocks that someone had been ahead of me there" (31). Unlike Eve, she is not the first to have walked across this landscape. Although the piles of rocks are never identified, it is obvious that they are ritual markers of an existence preceding her own. Through a comparison between the bones in the pit and cows' skulls Ida implies that the remains she has discovered are human. The fact that they have both a voice and a tactile presence suggests that this burial ground is still inhabited or haunted by something animate with which Ida makes contact.

This memory is therefore also a record of Ida's first contact with an unidentified but comforting force that accompanies her throughout her life. Her initial feelings of fear are replaced with sadness, and this sadness is overcome once the presence within the grave makes itself felt as a sensation that Ida interprets as friendship. It is this sensation that stays with her, in spite of her father's anger. As an adult, Ida is able to translate her child experience of the grave into a space of wordless communion. The lessons that she learns there—that she is not alone, that she need not fear the physical and metaphysical structures that only appear to contain her—resurface once she's unhappily married with children. What I want to argue is that this memory functions paradigmatically, as a representation of the operations of containment and resistance reiterated throughout the course of the novel. Every one of the female characters in *The True Story of Ida Johnson* finds herself, without exception, trapped, enclosed, constrained against her will. What distinguishes Ida from the others, with the possible exception of her childhood friend Lucy George, is her unique ability to inhabit each successive enclosure in ways contrary to the intentions of its male guardians or, to refer back to Derrida, its magistrates.

In "Sexual Difference," Luce Irigaray argues that the confinement of woman within the home is the means by which man, as the guardian of Western metaphysics, contains his (albeit repressed) terror of female omnipotence. According to this model of sexual difference woman is reduced, through an economy of the singular or self-same, to a function. As a mirror, she provides a reflection of wholeness to her male counterpart, and thus reaffirms his (false)

sense of autonomy, or selfhood. It is because of this specular function that woman needs to be controlled, because without her, man is nothing:

> [Woman] remains inseparable from the work or act of man, notably in so far as he defines her, and creates his own identity through her, or, correlatively, through this determination of her being. If in spite of all this, woman continues to exist, she continually undoes his work, distinguishing herself from either envelope or thing, and creating an endless interval, game, agitation, or non-limit which destroys the perspectives and limits of this world. But, for fear of leaving her a subject-life of her own, which would entail him sometimes being her locus and her thing, in a dynamic inter-subjective process, man remains within a master-slave dialectic. He is ultimately the slave of a God on whom he bestows the qualities of an absolute master. He is secretly a slave to the power of the mother woman, which he subdues or destroys. (122)

Ida first encounters the master-slave dialectic in the example set by her parents. Although Ida's father is given an active role in the narrative, her mother is virtually absent. This difference confirms Irigaray's thesis that woman is traditionally denied her own place, her own dimensions, in order to fulfill the demands of the only "real" subject of heterosexual marriage, her husband. The disparity here is something more than the difference between appearance and reality. Ida's mother conforms to her keeper's expectations until she *becomes* the persona she has been forced to *assume*:

> Ida's parents appeared to be simple unassuming people; but none are that. They were excessively secretive: Ole fundamentally so, Esther more than likely through marriage and the consequent adaption [sic] of her personality to that of her keeper. Her essential manner, hidden away in some private cupboard of memory and fantasy for none to see, became secretive. Her face was dead though neither wooden nor gloomy. It held no clues. (32)

During their courtship, Ida and her husband Derek observe the conventions of sexual difference modeled by the previous generation: "Derek Campbell's subjugation of Ida was not deliberately harmful. He thought he loved her and the rest followed. At any rate the particulars of LOVE circa Longview 1960 indicate so" (60). Like her mother before her, Ida succumbs to the often inexplicable demands of her man: "It was like he wanted me to be a fucking nun or something though he sure as hell made me do a few things that even a fucking nun wouldn't be caught doing. [...] But I got used to it. I got used to being a quiet sort of person till I couldn't remember not being so" (61). Once married, Ida's alienation only increases. Confined to their trailer, she is rendered immobile, static, property: "When we got married it was fairly dull. I was fairly lonely there as Derek didn't like hanging around with just me so he'd go off somewhere and I'd watch the TV and eat" (59). The hierarchical distinctions between husband and wife reduce Ida to the status of an object through which Derek is able to constitute himself as subject. Irigaray describes the process as one of delineation, pointing out that,

although illusory, these distinctions have effects that are material and historical, as well as philosophical:

> If, traditionally, in the role of mother, woman represents a sense of *place* for a man, such a limit means that she becomes a *thing*, undergoing certain optional changes from one historical epoch to another. She finds herself defined as a thing. Moreover, the mother woman is also used as a kind of envelope by man in order to help him set limits to things. The *relationship between the envelope and the things* represents one of the aporia, if not the aporia, of Aristotelianism and the philosophical systems which are derived from it. (122)

In my introduction to this chapter, I suggested that what makes Ida unique is her ability to negotiate a way out. Derek, oblivious to her special qualities, remains oblivious, also, to the danger that Ida poses. According to Irigaray, the binary structure of sexual difference in Western thought "makes women dangerously all-powerful in relation to men" (123). Irigaray's notion of aporia—the space between the envelope and things—provides the threshold through which a woman like Ida might make her escape. The danger "arises notably through the suppression of intervals (or enter-vals), the entry and exit which the envelope provides for both parties" (Irigaray 123-24). Or, as Riis's anonymous narrator suggests: "Imagery left to cramp inside the mind self-destructs. It explodes or, more probably, expires" (63). In Ida's case, the trailer explodes before she does; its destruction emerges as perhaps the most significant event in her biography. Reiterated at least three times during the novel's 126 pages, this explosion

functions as the mechanism with which Riis pries apart the tradition of confinement to which every one of her female characters is subjected. By the third version, the one given to Luke, Ida is determined to tell the truth. The deaths of Derek and the children are not the result of an inexplicable accident. Ida has murdered them:

> I went inside for the bread knife and put it back for the meat cleaver. I killed him first. Quick. Not a sound. A clean clean perfect clean slice down through the throat past the throat through the neck not quite through. Clean. And his blood so red and thick I didn't know. I kissed him. Blood thick in my mouth and my nose, in my hair. Thick and red and good. The babies. Clean quick slice slice like a butcher. I'm a butcher. Everything red and clear as a bell. (67)

As Irigaray has suggested, the suppression of intervals achieved through the imposition of a "visible limit or shelter [...] risks imprisoning or murdering the other unless a door is left open" (123). Fortunately for Ida, she always manages to keep one step ahead of the game. Rather than allow herself to be sacrificed to the banal violence of the domestic enclosure, she forces her way out through an enter-val of her own construction: "I turned the gas on. I had a shower and set my hair. I did a manicure under the dryer. Clean nightgown white and crisp and cool. Derek's coat, matches and a pack of players in the pocket. Outside I lit a smoke and threw it in through the door. The sky was red and clear as a bell" (67).

Despite the extreme violence of Ida's escape, I would argue that this fire is—within the alternative framework of Riis's feminist imaginary[4]—both affirmative

and productive. In terms of the philosophical paradigms I am bringing to bear on Riis's work, the fire functions as a bridge between Irigaray's spatial analysis of the heterosexual relation and Derrida's critique of architecture as a central metaphor of Western metaphysics. In his discussion of Derrida's 1987 publication *Cinders*, Mark Wigley argues that fire does not simply destroy; it is another means of making or building:

> Derrida's text moves relentlessly, seemingly inevitably, toward the image, taken from astory by Virginia Woolf, of empowered women neither rebuilding the patriarchal university on an old plan nor constructing an entirely different one but setting fire to the traditional architecture and dancing around it as it burns. The cinders that haunt Derrida's texts turn out to be those of a building. More precisely, it is a house. [...] The force of Derrida's text comes from suggesting that the cinders are not simply produced by the burning down of a structure. The cinders are the possibility of the house. It is the fire that builds. (165)

In his introduction to the English edition of *Cinders*, Ned Lukacher reminds us of the link between the cinder as a visible or material trace, and what Derrida identifies, through Hegel, as the sonorous qualities of burning. According to Lukacher, the "smoldering ashes of another materiality ring from within the tonalities of a material language: within the idioms of language burn the remains of something other than a singular idiom, the cinders of a still lost and unreadable genealogy" (3). In *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, Ida associates the destruction of her family with a ringing: "Everything red and clear as a bell" (67). This ringing is

resonant with Derrida's deconstruction of Hegel's notion of the *Klang*: "For Hegel *Klang* names the initial ringing at the beginning of time, the sound of the first burning, the sound of the fire as it rushes from absolute space into the relative space of universal creation" (Lukacher 3). Derrida himself states that this sounding, this trace, marks the place of something that no longer is: "If a place is itself surrounded by fire (falls finally to ash, into a cinder tomb), it no longer is. Cinder remains, cinder there is, which we can translate: the cinder is not, is not what is. It remains *from* what is not, in order to recall at the delicate, charred bottom of itself only non-being or non-presence" (*Cinders* 39).

The cinders of Ida's married life constitute a remainder which, in her story as told to Luke, is translated into a narrative of rebirth "without" as Derrida says "the Phoenix" (37). In a 1991 interview with Jack Robinson, Sharon Riis describes Ida as a woman who "clouds over at puberty and responds to life as though all you can do is react to it" (130). With her incineration of the trailer, Ida achieves both clarity and agency. Riis seems to echo Irigaray when she states, in the same interview that while this destruction is an admittedly extreme antidote to Ida's "cockeyed notion of entrapment," because of the limitations of Ida's world, "only by destroying her present life can she create a new persona" (130). In order to protect herself from the suspicion of others Ida does not dare—like Woolf's arsonists—to dance around the trailer as it burns; she does, however, embrace the freedom that this destruction makes possible:

> But the thing was how I felt. It's a terrible thing losing your family like that then feeling so good right after but I don't know I'm just telling you there's

no point in lying is there? I never did one thing that I, myself, didn't decide. For months and months I just did what I wanted. Yeah I still remember that. I still remember how fantastic that was. (69)

Of course this sense of absolute liberation can't last forever, and Ida eventually returns to some semblance of the life she led before the fire. When asked by her anonymous interlocutor, "Why did it end?" Ida answers, "I don't know. It just passed and I had to go home. I don't know why that either but I had to go home in the end" (60). It is in the sense of this return that Ida's narrative is one of rebirth *sans* phoenix. Once she returns home she is still faced with limitations in terms of both gender and class; she has, however, managed to escape the constraints that were specific to her marriage with Derek. She has managed, in other words, to disrupt the specular circuit between herself (as object) and Derek (as subject), that seemed to be a prerequisite for romantic love in that time and place: rural Alberta during the 1960s. Having freed herself from the economy of the self-same that Irigaray argues is characteristic of the heterosexual union, Ida introduces difference into sexual relation; rather than accept her function as Derek's reflection, centre, home, she forges a space for herself from the rubble.

Ida's most important relationship is with her childhood friend Lucy George; with this relationship, Riis moves beyond Irigaray's vision of sexual difference as the recognition of the interval between self and other as figured by Man and Woman. Irigaray's call for an alternative economy of sexual difference finds its complement in Derrida's reworking of the cinder as trace; ironically, it's Derrida who argues for a more radical form of gender indeterminacy: "cinders [...] change

sex, they re-cinder themselves, they androgynocide themselves" (61). Although it takes a while, Ida's return to a home without husband or children gives her a chance to reunite with Lucy and, through this reunion, enact a very different form of homecoming. In terms of a more fluid relation between a gendered self and an other, the trailer's explosion thus inaugurates a re-figuration of space which Riis traces through to the end of the novel. It marks what Irigaray describes as the "transition to a new age [which] in turn necessitates a new perception and a new conception of *time and space*, our *occupation of place*, and *the different envelopes known as identity*" (120).

Riis moves beyond Irigaray's analysis of constraint in yet another way, by focusing on difference understood in terms of race as well as gender. The trailer's destruction does not simply mark a shift in gender dynamics; it makes room for an alternative racial dynamic. As evidence of "something other than a singular idiom," and as the remains of "a still lost and unreadable genealogy" (Lukacher 3), the trailer's cinders are linked, metonymically, to Ida's first traumatic memory. When four-year-old Ida accidentally falls into the pit she does not feel fear, but sadness. Curious about the bones interred there, she wants to move them into the light, to try to read them. The unnamed presence connected to these remains resists exposure by whimpering. In response to this wordless cry Ida drops the bones, which then "crumbled away to nothing. Like chalk I thought" (30). This disintegration anticipates the connection Derrida makes between cinders and the ash-like remains of the human body. For both Riis and Derrida, this link is made without recourse to a human voice understood as full presence. The cinders are

what remains of an other who precedes us, but they are a trace only: "the urn of language is so fragile. It crumbles and immediately you blow into the dust of words which are the cinder itself" (*Cinders* 53).

Those who precede Ida are the aboriginal others of Canada's genocidal history. The crumbling bones buried within the pit-like crypt and the smoldering remains of Ida's family home foreground the violence by which difference is both denied and introduced into the historical account. What Ida is introduced to within the pit, and to which she returns once she's burned her family's trailer to the ground, are the traces of something Lukacher describes, via Derrida, as a lost and therefore unreadable genealogy. That Ida first encounters—and to some extent deciphers—the cryptic genealogy of this other while still a child suggests that such a bond is only possible for those who have not yet embraced the illusion of autonomy required of the "fully present" subject. Although she has made her requisite entry into the symbolic through the acquisition of language, her experience of the grave takes place in a register that exceeds or perhaps even precedes the linguistic. It is an experience Ida describes in sensual rather than cognitive terms: "something warm and cold both came out of the dark around me like a close friend and I was glad" (31).

A similarly benevolent presence greets Ida on the night she kills her family. Before she carries out the murders—before she even realizes that she is about to commit them—Ida is restless. She hears her name repeated over and over, and is sure that somebody is calling to her from outside the trailer. When she leaves the trailer to check whether anyone is actually there, she becomes frightened.

However, and in an experience that mirrors her sense of being comforted within the pit, once she's outside the home she shares with her husband and children her negative emotions are overcome by a feeling of well-being, and she is finally able to act: "The black scared me and the wind and the sounds I couldn't see. Then suddenly everything still and clear, lifting like a fog. I went inside for the bread knife and put it back for the meat cleaver" (67).

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Even the most careful reader might miss the presence of a second voice that accompanies each account of the fire. In the first version we listen in on a discussion between two disembodied voices. In response to questioning about why she was outside at four a.m. Ida responds: "Well I really think somebody *was* there" (11). In the second version the narrative is told in the third-person: "There was no one there but she sensed otherwise and went right out into the dark. There was a terrific blast and the trailer was a ball of flame. Somebody said "Don't cry Ida" but she didn't understand because she wasn't crying" (65). In the third version Ida reassumes narrative control, and the second voice or presence is given a name. "I went outside thinking I heard someone call. Well, I don't know what with the wind. Still, somebody calling me. Ida. Ida. Like a whisper so it's stupid to think. In all that wind who could hear a whisper? I thought it was Lucy" (67).

Lucy George was Ida's friend when both women were children. Taken off the Reserve to receive an accelerated education in town—she's placed two years ahead of other children her age—Lucy spends only two months in any kind of

physical proximity to Ida. However, these months prove to be the most formative of both their lives:

> Every now and then somebody raises a finger to the claustrophobia of fate and wins. Lucy George was one. The Indian Affairs man, Cliff McKay, took her out of the Reservation School and put her into the grade four at Longview Elementary when she was seven. After two months she had the good sense to return home though everyone mumbled "just like an Indian" and took personal offense at her ingratitude. She disappeared from the Reserve itself a couple of years later and nobody gave her a second thought except Ida. (23)

Like Ida, Lucy resists any effort to contain her. However, the forces against which she must battle are more oppressive in both degree and kind: "Even as a small child Lucy understood the inherent limitations of her own circumstance. She was female, poor, and Indian in a male, material, white world" (49). Lacking Ida's "racial" privilege Lucy directs the negative psychic effects of her resistance inwards rather than outwards, which means they take an even greater toll. Although she does not stick around to see what life in Canada has to offer, her escape, unlike Ida's, reads more like exile than liberation. Riis's list of Lucy's destinations describes the movements of a character who is in search of something that can't be found: "Lucy left the Reserve for Port Moody, Basel, Athabasca, Coeur d'Alene, Sault Ste. Marie, London, Wenatchee, Port-au-Prince, Scotsguard, Kamloops, Ramnes, Röcken, Thunder Bay, Fort St. John, Hollywood, Prague, Milos, Lloydminster, Munich..." (52).

Riis first establishes a link between "Jews" and "Indians" through the fact—as well as the details—of Lucy's mobility. Although the stereotype of the "wandering Jew" is admittedly heavy-handed, the route Lucy maps out with her zigzagging itinerary represents a world picture less fixed than the one produced through the coercive fantasy of the sovereign nation-state. This alternate world picture also exists in contrast to those models of confinement that have facilitated genocide: the concentration camp and the Reservation. However, just because Lucy resists confinement does not mean she is able to avoid being viewed and interpellated as Other in every one of the places she visits. Jonathan Boyarin describes the tension between integration and domination experienced by the minority subject as follows: "The question of how 'minorities' are exploited and excluded in the reproduction of domination is inseparable from the various conceptions they and the dominant group form of their integrability into the state" (30). Travelling to places as far away as Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Greece, Lucy finds employment in occupations as diverse as "a deckhand, a mother's help, a dancer, a cook, a hooker, a cashier, a movie star, a cowboy" and "a clown" (52). However, while her adventures signify her resistance to the conventions that would restrict her movement both as a woman and as a Native person, they do not seem to bring her any sort of satisfaction. In every extended scene on her journey (by extended, I mean scenes that are longer than one paragraph), she is represented as a solitary figure; in every instance she's recognized as an outsider rather than a member of the community.

In the previous chapter I traced the influence of Jews within German cabaret during both the Weimar period and the early years of the Third Reich. Like Christian Boltanski, Sharon Riis references this history in an attempt to represent traumatic experience with humour rather than pathos. She also introduces this history into Lucy's life story in order to undermine the identity categories to which her character has been subjected. While in Munich (the birthplace of Boltanski's "hero" Karl Valentin), Lucy takes to the stage having assumed an identity that challenges the limits of both her race and her gender: "Lucy, meanwhile, sits resolutely alone in the Munich beerhall. It's her night off from the Krazy Lady cabaret where she has top billing as Gregor the Georgian juggler. The Germans think she's a queer little fellow. They humour her but she has no friends. 'There goes Gregor,' they laugh. 'He's so fast with his balls the ladies can't get at them'" (100). As Gregor, Lucy has become other than herself. There is a certain irony to her stage name. In her role as the Georgian juggler Lucy is no less abject than her namesake, Gregor Samsa of Kafka's *Metamorphosis*; like Samsa, she is alienated from both herself and the dominant culture into which she's been interpellated. In terms of what Boyarin calls "integrability into the state," she is excluded rather than embraced by the people for whom she performs. Her German audience views her as male, queer and an object of derision.

In the interview with Robinson, Riis states that humour is a means of coping with oppression. She also identifies humour as something Jews and Native people have in common: "the lower down in the social order you are, the funnier you are. People with just nothing use humour all the time. Jews have had a tough time

since the beginning of time pretty well, and the humour is there constantly in the way they live. Native people are just killingly funny; their wonky humour is embedded in everything they do" (139). The analogy Riis is drawing here is less sophisticated than her working through of traumatic experience within the novel itself. While it could be said that she is trading on stereotypes rather than challenging them (the interview seems to suggest this), I would argue, instead, that in *The True Story of Ida Johnson* she is mobilizing stereotypes in attempt to have them work against themselves. Jonathan Boyarin describes the critical tension between 'real" people and identity as currency in terms that reflect Riis's agenda: "I am not writing of 'the Indians' or of 'the Jews.' I am referring rather to the stereotyped currency of identity. The stereotypes have an interesting and contingent life of their own" (Boyarin 22).

Within the historical contexts of both modernity and post-modernity, contingency and identity seem to go hand in hand. In *The Jew: Assumptions of Identity* (1999) Juliet Steyn interrogates "the category *Jew* and 'real' Jews—as both subjects of and subject to institutions and discourses" (vii). Citing Antonio Gramsci, she argues that the vicissitudes of identity can be understood as a dialectic between historical and individual consciousness: "The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is *knowing thyself* as a product of the historical forces to date, which has deposited in you as an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory" (Gramsci, qtd. in Steyn vii-viii). According to Steyn, "subjects are not identical with their assumed *identity*: they are not the same unto themselves" (12). She describes her own project as a

call to "go beyond the provocations of identity" in order to "rethink identity as something made, as a process, as something that can never be complete, that is always contingent" (13). In other words, she is practicing what Gramsci describes as the imperative to compile an inventory of those traces of the historical process that make up who we are, an inventory that would enable us to *know* ourselves (vii-viii). Steyn's commitment to the notion of contingency as an integral element of this practice leads her to cite Derrida in a manner that is both provocative and entirely in keeping with Riis's vision: "Jacques Derrida says we are all *Jews*, insofar as people in the contemporary world are nomads and displaced" (11).

In her guise as cabaret performer Lucy is finally pushed beyond all endurance. In response to her heckling audience and their boozy compatriots in the Munich beerhall, she is reduced to a silent but bitter name-calling: "The Germans are pigs, she thinks. She has come to the beerhall to get drunk, to find a friend, to lose her sight. And all she can think is 'the Germans are pigs.' She is running down, she can feel it. And she's running out of possibilities that appeal" (100). Having traveled the world, Lucy has transcended the shortsightedness of the citizens of Longview; having reinvented herself several times over, she has learned to depend on no one. However, lacking another person with whom to share her life, her life has become not worth living. In an effort to regain some kind of balance, she imagines a home for herself, but rather than a space or location, this home takes the form of another human being: "Where do you go when it's time to go home and you have none? sitting there, trapped behind the noise and confusion she sees the full implications of her particular quest and is filled with dread. She thinks

immediately of Ida as she often does in moments of despair but is yet unable to register the fact that she is thinking of her salvation" (100).

Because the novel is broken down into a series of short disconnected passages, it is difficult to tell exactly where and when Lucy begins her journey back. The scenes that follow her beerhall epiphany belong to Ida. The next time we encounter Lucy she has just boarded a bus in Cadillac, Saskatchewan "knowing neither where she'd been nor where she was heading. Movement itself sufficed for Lucy" (112). This time, however, movement alone does *not* suffice. She feels "scorched" by the sun coming through the tinted window, and the "clear pleasure of the journey was lost" (112). Chanting the words "Better die than lie" she is overcome by dread. She is saved from her despair through an encounter with Ida who appears as if in a vision. "Her panic was immense but when the bus moved on again that too subsided. Someone was sitting next to her. Ida, she thought. The glare dimmed to a thin white line and Lucy slept" (112). This rare moment of comfort mirrors Ida's experience both within the grave and outside her trailer just before she kills her family. When Lucy wakes up she is alone,

> cool and rested. On the seat next to her lay an empty book of matches where neatly inscribed in her own handwriting she read:
>
> Ha! Better lie than die.
>
> We are all jews.
>
> We are all jews.
>
> I am a jew. (113)

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The True Story of Ida Johnson is the story of a friendship that survives over and against the edicts of what Riis describes as the male, material, white world. And just as Ida resists the confinement exemplified by the walls of the trailer she shared with Derek, so too does the novel resist the temptation to make Ida's story simply hers alone. The lives of Lucy and Ida, as Jeanne Perreault argues in "Narrative Strategies and Feminist Fundamentals," are intimately linked: "Through their stories Riis tells a philosophical story examining reality, freedom, truth and will, a psychological story of the evolution of identity and the elusiveness of memory, and a feminist romance in which two women overcome the world's assumptions and expectations to find autonomy and love with each other" (271-72). In the café in Claresholm Lucy has finally made her way home. Once Ida has finished telling the "true story" of her life, she stops talking and waits for the stranger to speak. For the careful reader to whom the book is dedicated, this is the moment of revelation and reunion: "Ida is sitting perfectly still. Her head is clear. Luke, feels drained. They regard each other from a great distance for an interminable length of time. At last Luke closes the gap. With one haunting look he lets go of the illusion of the space between. He comes home. 'Lucy,' says Ida, utterly calm, 'you took your fucking time'" (121).

Here, time and space are redefined outside the parameters of sexual difference. The desire that draws Lucy back to Ida is nothing like Derek's desire for mastery or control. More importantly, the homecoming is mutual. Neither Lucy nor Ida is forced to play the role of object. Instead, the relations between subject and object are dynamic, fluid. Make no mistake, this is not an idyllic arrangement enabling

Lucy and Ida to transcend the dynamics of power altogether. However, in contrast to the imposition of the law as hermeneutic authority outlined by Derrida in *Archive Fever*, the power here circulates. As Irigaray would argue: "Desire occupies or designates the place of the *interval*. A permanent definition of desire would put an end to desire. Desire requires a sense of attraction: a change in the interval or the relations of nearness or distance between subject and object" (Irigaray 120). Lucy abandons the "yo-yo act of running off somewhere only to remain a miscast shadow" and follows Ida to her "place over the garage" (*Ida* 121). Through this gesture of giving herself over, she initiates the next phase of what Irigaray describes as the *transition to a new age*. And even now, after travelling the world, Ida's place is unlike anything she's ever seen:

> The room is surreal. It gives a startling sense of order and incredible beauty. Everything fits but Ida and yet it has come from her. Lucy feels disoriented and foolish. She knows nothing. It reflects a mind so finely drawn and self-possessed, so lacking in *ressentiment,* that it seems somehow, inhuman. Its very perfection provides the Final Solution. None but the holy could live in a room like this; none but the whole. The terrible strength of it would eat them alive.
>
> "I've got my own bathroom," she says, pointing proudly across the room to an identical door. "This is my home." (122)

Early on in my discussion of *The True Story of Ida Johnson* I suggested that, in her attempt to establish links between "Jews" and "Indians," Riis avoids a

schematic or formulaic system of equivalences. Instead, she alerts her readers to tentative connections through allusion—the trope of mobility, the popular history of German cabaret—rather than invoking actual political or cultural alliances. While I believe that Riis's method is effective in that it enables her to draw parallels between two peoples and two histories without insisting on fixed or static "racial" identities, I am nevertheless troubled by the language used in Lucy's description of Ida's one-room apartment. The associative links between *inhuman*, *perfection* and *Final Solution* suggest something other than an emancipatory re-figuration of space. What Riis establishes, and then reinforces through the capitalization of the words Final Solution, is a parallel between Ida's home-making skills and the genocidal policies of the Third Reich.

In *The Holocaust in History* (1987) Michael Marrus devotes a full chapter to the evolution of the term Final Solution within the Nazi program. Although historians are limited by the lack of documents with which to support their analysis of the term and the various programs it designated, according to Marrus the term Final Solution (*Endlösung*) originated in June 1940 as a "territorial final solution" that was "clearly linked with evolving schemes for massive forced emigration of Jews to the island of Madagascar" (31). The term was then used with increasing frequency until, in the first half of 1941, it described as a Final Solution the forced emigration of Jews throughout Europe which would occur at the end of the war, once Great Britain had been defeated and Germany had negotiated a peace treaty with France (32). In other words, in its initial phases, the

Final Solution was a program of emigration; the Nazi's "Jewish question" would be resolved by forcing Jews to emigrate to countries outside of Germany proper.

However, by July 1941 the term took on an even more sinister meaning. In a telegram to Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the SS police, Hermann Göring gave instructions to "begin substantive preparations for a 'total solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe,' considering this to be 'the intended final solution of the Jewish question'" (Marrus 32). At the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, "Heydrich told the assembled 'Jewish experts' from across Europe that Göring had placed him in charge of preparations for 'the final solution of the Jewish question' and that implementation was to be directed through Himmler's office. The time for waiting was over" (32-33). By the time of the Wannsee Conference, the term Final Solution no longer referred to a program of forced relocation. "Most historians agree that with this meeting, European-wide mass murder emerged as the essence of the Final Solution" (Marrus 33).

Riis's use of the language the Holocaust is not limited to the term Final Solution. In both the novel and the interview with Jack Robinson Riis uses the German word *Lebensraum* to describe the thematic direction of her fiction. In the interview Riis remarks that a cramped imagination "breeds incredible violence" (131), and argues that, for Ida, the transgression of social boundaries is a means of creating alternative psychic and social spaces. In the novel itself, she follows a passage I quoted earlier—"Imagery left to cramp inside the mind self-destructs. It explodes or, more probably, expires"—with a pair of aphoristic sentence fragments: "Lack of air. Lack of *Lebensraum*?" (63). Riis's use of *Lebensraum*

seems, at first glance, appropriate: its literal English translation is "living space." However, just as the term Final Solution is marked by what Gramsci might call an infinity of traces, *lebensraum* signifies something more violent than its literal meaning conveys. The term was used by Hitler in 1939 to refer to the land east of Germany that he would annex to provide "living space" for the German people: "I have placed my death-head formations in readiness . . . with orders to them to send to death mercilessly and without compassion, men, women, and children of Polish derivation and language. Only thus shall we gain the living space [*Lebensraum*] that we need" (Hitler, qtd. in Marrus 20).

Like Christian Boltanski's more provocative installations—such as *Menschlich* (Mankind), within which he juxtaposes photographs of 1,300 *unidentified* subjects, including "Nazis, Spanish killers, French victims, Jewish people, etc." (Garb 26)—Riis's fiction blurs the lines between perpetrator and victim. When asked to explain the referential elements of his work, Boltanski refuses to a commit to any kind of moral platform. "I'm not working on the issue of being guilty or not guilty. My work is about the fact of dying, but it's not about the Holocaust itself" (qtd. in Garb 22). There is a nice fit between Boltanski's summary of his work and the ethical thrust of Riis's post-Holocaust fictions. However, where Boltanski claims to be invested in the fact of dying, Riis is more concerned with the challenge of living on in the aftermath of historical trauma. While her use of Nazi terminology seems, on the one hand, inexplicable, the language with which she describes Ida's home makes it difficult for readers to apply moral judgments with any kind of real assurance. In the end, the novel does

not offer even the most cursory elements of a dramatic—or traumatic—resolution. Ida and Lucy are reunited, yes, but their future is uncertain. The novel ends with the two women walking arm in arm "down to the highway" (126). According to Jeanne Perreault, this ending demonstrates that there is no *final* solution, beyond the relationship itself, that could guarantee these women a sense of security or belonging:

> Both women seek 'home.' Ida creates it as the final solution, as the place where the illusion of separation between subject and object, male and female, audience and storyteller and the story is destroyed/undone. Yet, the two women stay only a few moments in the perfection of Ida's room. Ida hears the coyote (the liar/trickster/deceiver: the master storyteller) calling across the prairie, and she and Lucy head out on the highway. No Final Solution is possible, and no fixed notion of story can contain Ida Johnson. (275)

In "Sexy Bodies," Sue Best suggests that Irigaray's deconstruction of the space of sexual difference makes it increasingly difficult to accept that ideas "simply imprint passive matter," but are instead "entailed or entwined with body matter" to form "a corporeal text" (190). Within Riis's reconstruction of Home, the masculine idea or metaphor of space makes way for an almost parodic form of feminine embodiment. The apartment reflects Ida in a way the trailer never did. In contrast to the chinese-box structure of the trailer—with Ida as the specular home-place for Derek contained within the literal space of their home—Ida is both mobile and in control. She is the one to determine who can enter and who can

leave: "Ida undoes two padlocks and pulls open the door. "You're the first person I ever had in here,' she says" (122). Within this alternative living space, neither the idea of space nor its material realization is given primacy. Instead, the asymmetrical privileging of mind over body is revealed as a dangerous ruse: "Very occasionally one has flashes of clarity when the will is exposed for the raw remorseless thing that it is. In an instant it sees both time and space as a sham, but the will is quick to obscure its godliness in the interests of preservation. Another moment and the same white light burns out the credibility of the will itself. The flesh survives" (*Ida* 114).

In her introduction to *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972)—published just four years before *The True Story of Ida Johnson*—Margaret Atwood argues that a national literature is not a *luxury*, but a *necessity*. In a passage that echoes the lines from Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* cited by Juliet Steyn, Atwood states that, "Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as the product of who we are and what we have been" (18). Like Gramsci's injunction to *know thyself* "as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you as an infinity of traces" (Gramsci qtd. in Steyn vii-viii), reading our national literature, as a *critical* practice, makes visible the often illegible traces of a traumatic national history. According to Atwood literature, as an inventory of these traces, gives "members of a country or a culture, shared knowledge of their place, their here" (18). She closes her introduction with the caution: "Without that knowledge we will not survive" (18).

After a careful reading *The True Story of Ida Johnson,* it seems obvious that the map Atwood deems necessary to our survival requires something more than destinations or points of departure. What the lost person needs is to see *her relation* to everything else. The beyond, as Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*, "is neither a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past" (1). In Riis's novel, time and space are folded together to create a palimpsest of past, present and future. Ida's story offers a vision of simultaneity, "a moment of transit" in Bhabha's terms, "where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1). Both Atwood and Bhabha deploy notions of space in order to forge theory into some kind of social practice. While I doubt Bhabha would agree with Atwood's claim that national literatures produce consensual knowledge of a specific place or moment, his analysis of nation-building as a self-reflexive process of negotiation does resemble what Irigaray might call a "new age" of reading:

> If we are seeking a 'worlding' of literature, then perhaps it lies in a critical act that attempts to grasp the sleight of hand with which literature conjures with historical specificity, using the medium of psychic uncertainty, aesthetic distancing, or the obscure signs of the spirit-world, the sublime and the subliminal. As literary creatures and political animals we ought to concern ourselves with the under-standing of human action and the social world as a moment when *something is beyond control, but it is not beyond accommodation.* (12)

If, as Bhabha argues, "the recesses of domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (9), then Riis's contrapuntal narrative signifies more than an individual triumph or homecoming. Lucy and Ida actively resist the constraints of those Derrida describes as the archons. Taking the form of an occupation, their resistance is levelled against structures beyond their control in an attempt to turn those structures against themselves. This novel does not, however, tell the story of a clean escape. Ultimately, neither Ida nor Lucy is really free to do as she pleases: Lucy's adventures exhaust her, rather than provide her with the freedom she is seeking, and Ida's escape from the trailer in Longview is both "fantastic" (69) and short-lived.

Perhaps one way of understanding Riis's use of Nazi terminology is as an attempt to force us, as *Canadian* readers, to engage with our history as something global as well as local. Lucy's identification as both a member of the First Nations *and* a Jew invites us to engage with the violence of our own national history through a more recent and in some ways more accessible Holocaust. Our complicity with the Nazis—and by this I mean our refusal, during the war, to accept Jewish refugees from Europe even when we knew that they were facing death[5]—is another example of the ways in which a "worlding" of our literature might force us to confront local knowledge that we'd prefer to keep hidden. That Ida's apartment could provide, as Riis puts it, a "Final Solution" suggests that questions of guilt or innocence—difficult to articulate and impossible to resolve—continue to haunt us. When Ida and Lucy abandon the perfection of Ida's room and depart to destinations unknown they are abandoning the type of home that, to

refer back to Erin Manning, mirrors "the exclusionary aspects of the nation's mandate on belonging" (xvi).

II: Cabin Fever

> Fantasy is at play in the articulation of both individual and collective identity; it extracts coherence from confusion, reduces multiplicity to singularity, and it reconciles illicit desire with the law.
>
> Joan W. Scott

> But fantasy, even on its own psychic terms, is never only inward-turning; it always contains a historical reference in so far as it involves, alongside the attempt to arrest the present, a journey through the past.
>
> Jacqueline Rose

In *Survival*, Atwood argues that the relationship between our landscape and our literature is perhaps best represented through the deployment of one of the most ubiquitous images in the Canadian literary canon (circa 1972). In her "Appendix on Snow" Atwood states that it "is in their attitudes towards winter that Canadians reveal their stance towards Nature" (65). However, rather than establish snow as a contextual symbol for death, she offers a surprisingly deconstructive take on the function of the winter landscape within the Canadian imaginary: "Nature is a monster, perhaps, only if you come to it with unreal expectations or fight its conditions rather than accepting and learning to live with them. Snow isn't necessarily something you die in or hate. You can also make houses in it" (66).

In the penultimate scene of *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, Sharon Riis demonstrates the relationship between snow and what Atwood identifies as a geography of mind through a childhood conversation between Ida and Lucy.

> "Ida," she said, "we can do anything." Ida sat down on the snow stool she'd just made to think about it. "You mean," she asked, "all this snow here isn't really snow at all?" "It's only an idea," said Lucy. "Whose?" she asked like an idiot. "Ours!" yelled Lucy. "Whose idea are we then?" Lucy hit her. The question was absurd. There was a will to life and that's all. A greedy sucking urge to become. But the disintegration had begun. Ida was right. If the world was false then perhaps so too was the will: an idea and nothing more. There were no half measures. The centre lost its hold. She was a fool. It didn't bear thinking about, was Ida's opinion. (124)

The frozen snow stool is a nice touch: Ida hunkers down on an object she has made from the very material Lucy claims is illusory, in order to think about Lucy's Nietzschean observations on the primacy of the will. The contrast between Riis's two characters could not be any clearer. Ida is a pragmatist, and therefore more able to function even in a world that seems designed to thwart her; however, without Lucy Ida would never have achieved those moments of clarity necessary to putting her plans into action. By contrast, Lucy needs Ida to temper her philosophical flights of fancy, to ground her. Within their relationship the Cartesian opposition between body and mind—an opposition that also underpins the model of sexual difference that is the focus of Irigaray's critique—is undone. It is as if Riis is anticipating the feminist engagement with Nietzsche undertaken

by Sarah Kofman and, more recently, by Penelope Deutscher who argues (with reference to Kofman) that, "in Nietzsche's work, there is no 'purely biological': Biology is already artistic and philosophical creation, and artistic and philosophical creation are already biology. [...] Nietzsche rejected any strict division between flesh and spirit" (33). Together Lucy and Ida strike a perfect balance between the flesh and the spirit. Without underestimating the conflicts that might result from their differences, I would argue that this balance is what guarantees their survival.

In *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone* Riis returns to the metaphor of snow and deploys it in a more sustained way in order to represent the tension between knowing and unknowing specific to traumatic experience. In this second novel, snow functions as a veil covering over those things her characters don't wish to acknowledge or, in Freudian parlance, "work through." When Rosalie makes an unofficial visit to the home of Josef Przysienszny in her capacity as District Health Nurse, she is relieved to see smoke rising from the chimney of his cabin. Satisfied that her client is still alive, she takes a moment to appreciate the scene itself: "Indeed, his place looked rather pretty and picturesque in the sunlight. That's the one saving grace of snow: it hides the damage we do. Even the rusting hulk of a '54 Ford is pleasing to the eye under all that whiteness" (3). What Rosalie experiences once she's inside the cabin is a disorienting exposure to the various forms of damage that are covered over by this nostalgic ideal of the homely or picturesque. Upon crossing the threshold, she feels "uneasy though not unnerved. The room is a shambles. It seems to be filled to bursting with layer

upon layer of debris" (3). Her response to the scene becomes more extreme once she's introduced herself to the room's single occupant. While the cabin itself lacks the power to unsettle her, Josef's despair—he wants to her to be someone named Wanda, and weeps when he realizes she's not—threatens to overwhelm her:

> Nothing but nothing has prepared me for this. A ravaged old man held together by what seems a century's accumulation of dirt and sweat and who knows what, lying in an equally squalid bed inside a shack so much in decay that I fear, momentarily, for my safety; an old man with eyes black and brilliant as a caged hawk, crying inconsolably as though his heart were breaking. (4)

Having accepted the task of looking in on this neighbour who lives just "across the boundary" that designates her Health Unit's jurisdiction (2), she quickly switches into professional gear, and undertakes what she describes as an "archeological dig" through the filth (6). The difference between inside and outside is signaled here through the contrast between snow—a blanket of white that covers over damage—and dirt. The only suggestion of the picturesque within Josef's cabin is the "gemütlich scene that has been carefully cut from a magazine and taped to the side" of the "industrial-sized pickle jar" in which he keeps his tea (6). "It looks like an English advertisement from the forties: Mum, Dad, and three little ones all warm and cozy as can be in front of a coal fire drinking their tea out of pretty little china cups. The children have Union Jacks knitted into their woolly jumpers" (6).

The discrepancy between the coziness of the family scene and the desolation of the cabin is striking; the magazine image, as *mise en abîme*, further heightens Rosalie's awareness of Josef's isolation and despair, and draws her into a relationship of empathetic estrangement with him.[6] That the family in the image is so quintessentially English is not an incidental detail. Josef's reputation as a recluse is not the only thing that sets him apart from the community that Rosalie represents. Riis does not use explicitly ethnic or racial categories to describe the members of this community; her description of Josef's difference is graphic enough to ensure that she doesn't have to. Before visiting the cabin, Rosalie's interactions with Josef were limited to seeing him at "the market selling potatoes," and hearing him play the fiddle, while drunk, at a wedding to which he had not been invited, "stepdancing all the while like a maniac (or a Newfie)" (2). Rosalie's perception of the difference between herself and her client is manifest in language that smacks of a kind of vernacular orientalism; her perspective is filtered through the lens of a West that is an odd conflation of Western Canada and Western Europe. Rosalie racializes Josef through an offhand allusion to the Holocaust: "We refer to him every now and then as our very own Polish Question" (3). She then situates him, spatially, through a less murderous cast of stereotype: "He's rarely a topic of anybody's conversation or concern. Just that old Polack who lives in a shack up the far end of the Egg Lake Road" (3).

However, when confronted with the jarring poverty of Josef's life, Rosalie feels a need to comfort him. She prepares him an impromptu breakfast and serves it in a parody of the waitress with a heart of gold: "Come and get it! I holler in a

decent imitation of Thelma Ritter" (6). She overcomes her disgust at the state of the kitchen table by coaxing herself along with silent, sardonic questions: "I'm a long way from having housemaid's knee myself but the layers of rotted then petrified food on this man's table are almost more than my stomach can bear. (Never mind the grimy artifacts . . . What's a man like this doing with a metronome for Chrissake?)" (6-7). The first rupture in the narrative occurs here, when, in response to her *unvoiced* rhetorical question, Josef replies: "Is also for passing time" (7). With this simple utterance the transparency of Riis's hardnosed, realist style—reinforced by the language and tenor of Rosalie's speech, as well as the quotidian details of her working life—is revealed as artifice or illusion. It is also at this point in the story that Rosalie and Josef's connection shifts into a more intimate and, given the racist dismissal that she admitted to earlier, surprisingly sexual register: "My god what an inordinately sexy man he is. In spite of the age and the dirt and the circumstance. It's in his eyes I guess. And the voice. It's in the attention he gives me" (7).

This shift to intimacy prompts Rosalie to ask real as opposed to rhetorical questions. Admitting to a desire for control—"Tell me," I say, preferring always to lead a conversation myself" (7)—she asks Josef about Wanda. Rather than give her a straight answer, he "tries another tack" (7). Although they are seated across the table from one another when the question is asked, in the next sentence, without any sort of warning or transition, they are laying together on the bed. "My hand is on his cheek. It's like an instant, or rather, delayed, replay. Like falling into a black hole" (7). As the first of many scenes into which the novel's

characters are thrown, this encounter fuses a sense of loss with sexual desire: "He's thinking 'please god please god make me dead, please god, am nothing but stone' and the next minute he's thinking 'if I move my head, just a little, to the left, I can kiss the burning in this hand and maybe surprise it a little with my tongue...' I flinch, withdrawing my hand. I can feel my face burning" (8-9).

Except for flinching, Rosalie appears to accept the encounter without explanation. It's Josef who asks to be reassured. He also wants the tension between dreams and reality to be resolved. After confessing that he often feels as if he is dreaming even when awake, he asks Rosalie for information that might provide him with a sense of certainty: "Will you tell to me something of yourself? Will you tell to me some solid things?" (9). Once she has recited the details of her life—age, place of birth, citizenship, occupation, number of children, and the status of her marriage—Josef says: "So. You want for nothing." Unexpectedly, she contradicts him: "I want for everything" (9). Josef's cryptic rejoinder—" 'Then everything is possible,' he says. 'We can begin' " (9)—marks the beginning of Rosalie's disintegration. It is this process of disintegration, I will argue, that enables her to open herself up to Josef and Wanda, as well as to the victims and survivors she encounters throughout the novel.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth explores, through the writings of Freud, de Man, and Lacan, the relationship between trauma and the disintegration of the self. Although she describes trauma as an event that is "not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the

survivor" (4), she also argues that it is something more than an individual "pathology, or the simple illness of the wounded psyche: it is always the story of the wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). In *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone*, the wound is not Rosalie's, or at least not hers alone. The truth of her traumatic experience in Josef's cabin inheres in what Caruth describes as "its delayed appearance and its belated address," which "cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains in our actions and our language" (4). As if in response to Josef's voice, Rosalie is willing to open herself, repeatedly, to an experience of others that is often excruciating. The physical excavations that are performed within the novel, both in and outside of the cabin, are material representations of the psychological and affective processes of excavation that Riis demands of her characters. It is important to note, however, that these experiences exceed the personal, as the characters are haunted by a constellation of traumatic events that are more often historical than individual. Although Josef is old enough to have actually lived through several of the events recounted (or re-*enacted*), Riis does not construct the narrative as a literary or aesthetic dramatization of the lives and deaths of individual victims.

In *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (2000), Michael Rothberg provides a list of the formal elements characteristic of post-Holocaust history: "post-Holocaust history has a traumatic structure—it is repetitive, discontinuous, and characterized by obsessive returns to the past and the troubling of simple chronology" (19). Constructed as a series of waking

dreams, nightmares, flashbacks, and obsessive repetitions, Riis's narrative is itself a traumatic performance. In the context of Holocaust studies, her work would fall, albeit uneasily, into a category Rothberg defines as "antirealist." In other words, it stands in marked contrast to a "realist" approach which asserts "both an epistemological claim that the Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe" (3-4). Rothberg's newly invented category of traumatic realism provides what is perhaps the best description of formal innovation in Riis's narratives. Within the framework of traumatic realism, there exists a "peculiar combination of ordinary and extreme elements" that reflects the disjunction at the centre of the traumatic experience itself (6). Rothberg argues that while "the traumatic combination of the extreme and the everyday blocks traditional claims to synthetic knowledge, attentiveness to its structure can also lead to new forms of knowledge beyond the realist and antirealist positions and outside of traditional disciplines" (6).

Both Rothberg and Caruth look to literary or imaginative representations of trauma in order to move beyond a narrowly conceived opposition between realism and antirealism. According to Rothberg, the dilemmas facing artists "are not fundamentally different from those facing historians, literary critics, or the interested public. In confronting such a history, we all share the need to find an adequate form for narrating and understanding an extraordinary series of events" (6). According to Caruth, "Freud returns to literature to describe traumatic experience," because "literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and unknowing" (3). There is, however, no redemptive

solution to this impasse of indeterminacy; one cannot resolve a traumatic legacy by striving towards knowledge. What Caruth argues, instead, is that in "relating trauma to the very identity of the self and to one's relation to another, [...] the shock of traumatic sight reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an ethical relation to the real" (92). It is only by working through the effects of trauma at the level of individuals *in concert with one another* that this ethical relation might be realized. In a passage reminiscent of Paul Celan's search for the connective, Caruth counsels us to read the belated address of the traumatized "not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (8).

Once Rosalie accepts Josef's ambiguous invitation to "begin," the insistence of loss becomes an indelible backdrop to their encounter. After admitting to her own confusion about the line between dreams and waking, Rosalie and Josef drink a toast to their alliance: " 'So,' he says. 'To our being a wake' " (10). The phrasing of this toast is marked by an interruption or break in its final word, a break that can be read as an instance of Paul Celan's "glottal stop." The glottal stop, according to the editors of a newly translated collection of Celan's poems, refers to both the physical and figurative closure of the glottis that precedes an "explosive release" (Popov and McHugh xiii). Taken from last lines of Celan's poem, "Frankfurt, September," the term figures an irresolvable tension between

silence and traumatic violence. In Celan's text, it is the silence itself that insists on being heard: "The glottal stop is breaking / into song" (Popov and McHugh 37). In an interesting parallel between both Celan and Riis, the pause or break represents an affirmative vocal response from within the aftermath of trauma.

In Riis's text, the play on words undermines the very sense of security that it's Rosalie's professional responsibility to extend. Josef's broken English, which he strategically exaggerates and abandons at different points within the narrative, is deployed here to connect the experience of awakening with the shared, ritual acknowledgement of another's death. The linguistic rupture is also an instance of textual irony: the discrepancy between the two versions—"awake" and "a wake"—is visible to the reader, but not audible to the scene's participants. This ambiguity reinforces the building tension between knowing and unknowing, between dreams and waking, that impels the narrative forward as a traumatic performance. Riis repeats alternative versions of the phrase several times within the next few pages. This repetition both reinforces the words' significance as rupture and renders the developing intimacy between these characters tentative.

In the scene following the toast, Josef tells a story of the previous winter when, alone in his cabin, he found himself "thinking for some reason of Viktor Seifried's beautiful new radiogram. Is Krasnystaw, near Lublin. 1939" (11). This childhood memory sets the stage for both the historicity of the characters' dreams or fantasies and Wanda's dramatic entrance into the story. "Radio Deutschland fades in and out, in and out. I am understanding nothing. I know only that I do not like this music they are playing. Is very..., *uporczywa*. It has no sweetness" (11). This

insistent music (a translation of the Polish *uporczywa* is provided at the bottom of the page) is interrupted by the transmission of a voice that is not part of the memory itself: "And I hear, in my head, on this music I do not like 'pleasegodpleasegodplease ... Help me! Somebody help me ...' I am pretty sure I am gone a little bit crazy. Is in side my head" (11).

Rosalie's instinctive response to Josef's story goes beyond the limits of anything as ordinary as empathy. She *sees* the speaker of the litany that interrupts the radio broadcast from Germany: "Josef! She's in the car! If I keep my eyes closed I can see her in the car and it's the radio we're hearing. It *is* Wagner. Don't you see? Do you see? She's crying. Is this Wanda? In the car. Almost buried under the snow?" (11). Josef responds, "Yes. Is Wanda. Rosalie. Open your eyes. Please. Are we a wake?" (11). Once Rosalie has reassured him that they are, in fact, "awake," Josef continues in his role as guide, leading her towards the car's interior. In spite of his obvious fear and her own disorientation, she gives herself over to the experience:

> He is frightened. The wind is fierce now, howling. But I feel... calm. Both lost and protected. And protective of this man who is leading me towards something... I don't know... extraordinary. I can still hear the Wagner now and then amidst the static. And the woman's prayer... When I close my eyes I can even distinguish the model and year of the car. It's a 1980 Volkswagen Rabbit. Red. How do I know this? I can't *see* outside of the car. (12)

What she registers from inside Josef's memory is that Wanda stops praying in the same moment that the radio goes "*kaput*" (12). Before she even realizes what is happening, Rosalie is witnessing Josef brave the storm "in a greatcoat and animal skins" (12) in order to save Wanda from an almost certain death. However, when he reaches into the car for Wanda, Rosalie feels his hands on her own body: "Then a whoosh of freezing air when he wrenches open the door and lifts me out over his shoulder" (13). Like the spliced narratives of distant and recent memory that are experienced, simultaneously, within the present moment of Rosalie and Josef's encounter, the boundary between Rosalie and Wanda—distinct and as yet unacquainted subjects—has been breached. In the next moment, when she is returned to herself and the warmth of the cabin, Rosalie repeats a question she's already asked twice before: "'Did you see that?' I ask him. 'Did you see it with me?'" (13). "No," Josef answers, "But I am remembering so you will know. I am thinking in your direction so you will know" (13).

Cathy Caruth discusses precisely this relationship between seeing, knowing, waking and death in her analysis of Freud's account of the dream of the burning child in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. In this account, the father of a child who's died dreams of the child speaking to him, asking him to wake up because he is burning. When the father awakens, the dead child has been burnt by the candle of the watchmen who has fallen asleep next to the child's body. In an attempt to understand why the father would dream that the child is burning rather than wake up to the actual burning itself, Freud suggests that the dream is a kind of wish fulfillment, even "in spite of its direct representation of the child's unwished for

death" (Caruth 94). What the dream of the burning child does is hide "the reality of the child's death. The dream thus transforms death into life and does this, paradoxically, with the very words that refer to the reality of the burning" (Caruth 95).

Josef's ability to convey experience in a direct and visceral way is, within the terms of Caruth's reworking of Freud, a kind of ambivalent awakening: "As an act, the awakening is not an understanding but a transmission, the performance of an act of awakening that contains within it its own difference" (Caruth 106). Unlike Rosalie, Josef does not *see* the events that he guides her through. Although what he shares with her is, in part, his own experience, he does not transmit it as something fixed, but as something that changes with each transmission, that shapes itself to the participants of the telling. When Rosalie first arrived at the cabin, Josef rejected her because she was not Wanda. What he was reluctant to awaken to was the knowledge of Wanda's death, her disappearance. When Rosalie uses the word "awake," she confirms for Josef that they are not asleep, not dreaming. However, Josef's reluctance to awaken, revealed, paradoxically, by his insistence on death as embedded in the broken phrasing of "a wake," is like the reluctance of the father of the burning child to awaken and face the fact of his loss, to face the act of living on: "To awaken is thus to bear the imperative to survive no longer simply as the father of a child, but as the one who must tell *what it means not to see* (Caruth 105).

The novel itself can be read as an account of the process by which Josef overcomes this reluctance. His transmission of the trauma of Wanda's death (the

significance of which is withheld until the end of the novel) is the first in a series of more fully developed fantasies or scenes involving all three of the novel's characters. I will argue that while the fantasies themselves often follow a linear chronology, their juxtaposition disrupts rather than "maintains and masks the divisions within society" (Scott 288). I want to tease out the ethical potential of fantasy by working my own analysis to fit somewhere in between the positions of Joan Scott and Jacqueline Rose with which I opened this section of the chapter. I want, in other words, to identify the ways in which each of the fantasy scenarios within Riis's novel reduces multiplicity and reconciles illicit desire with the law, while at the same time demonstrating that the cumulative force of these scenes, as a discontinuous and *contested* journey through the past, undermines the status quo that fantasy—as a social performance—is designed to maintain.

In "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity" (2001), Scott argues that despite the "ground of unconscious commonality" that fantasy makes possible, it "seems more useful to consider fantasy as a formal mechanism for the articulation of scenarios that are at once historically specific in their representation and detail and transcendent of historical specificity" (288). It is because of this double-coding—historical specificity *and* transcendence—that fantasy is able to fix identity (and, by extension, the social and political relations that are contingent upon this stasis). Fantasy is recuperative, therefore, because it stabilizes social relations while at the same time providing its participants an illusion of freedom and autonomy.

Scott identifies several formal aspects of fantasy necessary to generating this illusion: "The first is that fantasy is the setting of desire" (288). Citing the work of Laplanche and Pontalis, Scott argues that the subject of fantasy is not in pursuit of an object, but is, instead, caught up in a sequence of images within a very specific setting. "He [sic] forms no representation of the desired object, but is himself represented as participating in the scene" (qtd. in Scott 288). This aspect of fantasy as setting is demonstrated in the details of Wanda's rescue. Although Rosalie knows the make and model of the car, she admits that she can't see outside of its interior; she feels Josef's hands on her hips as he lifts Wanda from the vehicle, as if she's occupying Wanda's body. There is no single object that localizes her desire, as the fantasy is the setting or scene of the rescue itself.

A second formal aspect of fantasy is that it "operates as a (tightly condensed) narrative" (289). Citing Žižek, Scott argues that "the narrative is a way of resolving 'some fundamental antagonism by rearranging its terms into a temporal succession'" (289). According to this model, "contradictory elements (or, for that matter, incoherent ones) are rearranged diachronically, becoming causes and effects" (289). Žižek argues that the imposition of this narrative structure onto history is itself a fantasy with very specific social and political implications. The fantasy of history "enables individuals and groups to give themselves histories" which "can help account for the ways subjects are formed, internalizing and resisting social norms, taking on the terms of identity that endow them with agency" (Scott 289-90).

In one of the most historically specific fantasies within the novel, Rosalie finds herself thrown into an encounter with senior Nazi official Hermann Göring and playwright Hanns Johst during the early days of Hitler's rise to power. Before the fantasy begins, Rosalie hears Josef ask Wanda to tell him something about the life that led her to his doorstep in the middle of a blizzard. "'I was on my way back,' she says. 'Yesterday. I ... work for Culture. It takes me all over the province'" (30). In reply to his disingenuous query—"How does one *work* for culture?"—she explains that "it's a government department. Like Highways. Or Health and Welfare" (30). Josef's responds with a quotation that Wanda misinterprets as a threat: "When I hear the word *culture* I reach for my revolver" (30). Because she is too young to get the reference, he spells it out for her: "Göring. A fat ugly man with one good line" (30). Although Rosalie has been pointedly left out of the conversation, she interrupts in defense of the younger woman by contradicting him. "'It wasn't Göring,' I say and he looks up startled. He'd forgotten I was here. He wishes me gone. I'm dead weight on his imagination, his fantasy, his memory" (31). When he dismisses her contribution by suggesting that she couldn't know possibly know who actually said the line, Rosalie cries out: "But I was there!" (31).

Her exclamatory "I was there!" is, in terms of the linguistic model developed by John Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), an illocutionary utterance. In *Excitable Speech: The Politics of the Performative* (1997), Butler summarizes Austin's theory of performative speech as follows: "The illocutionary speech act performs its deed *at the moment* of the utterance, and yet that moment

is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The 'moment' in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of the utterance" (3). What is striking about Butler's summary are the ways in which her description of the illocutionary utterance both coincides with and contests the stabilizing effects of fantasy outlined above. Like the fantasy in Scott's formulation, the illocutionary utterance represents a ritualized and condensed historicity. However, as the unconscious expression of something which exceeds its own moment by moving both back and forth through time, it also carries within it the possibility of resistance.

In Riis's text, the fantasies into which the characters are thrown take place within the larger social-sexual fantasy being enacted within the cabin itself. The structure of a series of relatively discreet, historical scenarios embedded within the larger fantasy of Wanda's survival, is similar to the *mise en abîme* structure of the "gemütlich" magazine image embedded within the "shambles" of Josef's cabin. Through their dialectical juxtaposition, these fantasies *exceed themselves in past and future directions*, and ultimately destabilize the fixed identities and social relations they so faithfully represent. The tension between the more properly historical fantasies and the interactions between Rosalie, Josef, and Wanda within the cabin undermines the narrative affirmation of the status quo being played out within the historical scenario itself.

With her illocutionary utterance, Rosalie is thrown from the cabin into the fantasy with Göring and Johst where she's transformed into a "thin elderly man

with a limp" pushing a coffee trolley "into a magnificent room of immense proportions" (31). Once inside the room the old man is greeted by Göring, who says something that he can't hear (he's going deaf) and then thumps him on the back. Although he is overcome by the pleasure of being acknowledged, he's initially confused about the protocol of the interaction. Göring asks him if he likes the theatre, and introduces Johst as "the world's greatest living playwright" (31). He does not introduce the old man *to* Johst, but is simply confirming the playwright's status. Johst, embarrassed and irritated that the old man has been included, averts his eyes. The distinction being made here is that while Johst deserves recognition, a waiter with a coffee trolley does not. The old man accepts this distinction as the natural order of things, and is more than willing to embrace his own status as inferior, even abject: "And who can blame him? I am painfully undistinguished—even for a waiter. I've been ill. Käthe sometimes tells me there is a bad odour that comes right up out of my skin!" (32).

The next scene of the fantasy takes place in the Berlin State Theatre where the old man and his wife are watching a performance of Johst's *Schlageter*, the source for the line Josef mistakenly attributed to Göring. The old man cannot explain his presence at the theatre. However, as Scott has noted, within the logic of fantasy even incoherent details are integrated into the diachronic structure of cause and effect. The old man's solution to the logical fault within his narrative is to smooth it over by blaming himself: "I am trying so hard not to give further offence that I have no memory of the sequence of the events that followed but it must have been then that Göring or Johst or some underling gave me the tickets to *Schlageter*"

(32). Although he has no memory of the actual sequence of events, he has no doubt that such a sequence has occurred.

At the end of the play, in response to "the soldier crying out on the way to his execution 'Germany!!! Awake! Inflame! Burn Enormously!'" the old man applauds and weeps "in a wash of rapture the likes of which" he's "never known" (32). The double-coding of the fantasy is clearest in the last lines of the passage: "Käthe, more subdued but weeping nonetheless sits beside me. She is so beautiful. She is wearing a dress of midnight blue taffeta. And though her diamonds are paste they look real to me, they *are* real to me" (32). The old man is a participant in a scene that grants him the status of a wealthy patron of the arts who belongs in the State theatre; however, he is also *at the same time* a lowly waiter who does not merit a formal introduction. His moment of rapture or transcendence paradoxically confirms his actual status within the very rigid hierarchy of the Third Reich. Johst's play, which was dedicated to Aldolf Hitler "with fond devotion and constant fidelity" was first produced in 1933.[7] At this moment in history there was still a place for someone like the old waiter within German society. However, his illness and frailty, together with Johst's very obvious disavowal, suggest that this place is not secured in any way. The scene leaves the ultimate fate of the old man in question.

The fantasy's affect, its rapture, is destroyed the moment Rosalie reenters Josef's cabin. Rather than being impressed by her historical insight, Josef challenges the truth of the fantasy scenario by forcing Rosalie to consider an alternative reading of this scene: "'She is weeping, so,' says Josef, in a flat unkind

voice, 'because she must return that dress tomorrow to her cousin's wife. She is weeping also because *you* are such an ass'" (32). Disoriented by the sudden shift—between scenes, bodies, historical moments, genders—Rosalie is unsure how to respond to this new challenge. Josef accuses her of going a long way to win an argument, suggesting that there is "some central flaw" in her character (32). She refuses to entertain Josef's suggestion that their contest is not over the truth of either account, but over who has the power to determine *which* account is true.

The teleology of the fantasy is broken down even further when Josef suggests a different reading not only of the old man's fantasy, but of the historical source for the line about the revolver: "is possible Johst was wanting only to flatter Göring . . . by taking his words, amusing at most, and putting them into the mouth of heroic Albert Leo Schlageter" (32-33). Rosalie rejects Josef's suggestion by throwing his own words back at him: "*You* will go an embarrassingly long way to pursue an argument that you've already lost" (33), though she does admit, albeit silently, that she's "more than a little disconcerted by his knowledge of the play" (33). Josef answers Rosalie's lame rebuttal with a caution that returns us to the relation between seeing and knowing specific to traumatic experience: "'But Rosalie, he says, grinning now, picking up his hand of cards again, turning his back on me, 'to be witness to something is not to know the truth of it'" (33).

Josef's comment is not a warning about the unreliability of witnesses, but an attempt to nudge Rosalie out of a position of epistemological certainty towards a more ethical—because less knowing—relation with others. Initially, Rosalie

resists this lesson because it undermines her very identity. As she points out later on in the novel, her vocation as a District Health Nurse simply formalizes her *knowing* impulse to help others. "I'm the kind of person who wants to become a vital part of every household I enter. It's appalling . . . the lengths to which I'll go" (64). Suspecting that her approach often does more harm than good, she admits that her interventions are only ever stop-gap measures that cover over rather than resolve the problems of her patients: "I inveigle my way in, dispensing myself like a cheap prescription drug" (64). The conflict with Josef over his suggestion that her defense of others masks a desire to exert power over them is not an unfamiliar one: "I want to boost their dragging on the floor of morale, lift their spirits. My husband says this comes from an inflated sense of self-importance" (64).

Through her repeated exposure to traumatic situations beyond her control, Rosalie's sense of certainty—her subjective coherence—begins to break down. These experiences force her to be self-reflexive in ways that go beyond the sardonic self-consciousness that protected her up until her entrance into the uncanny universe of Josef's cabin. As she becomes aware of her own disintegration, she looks back on her life and admits to having had other moments where she'd lost track of herself, forgotten her own name. The first is a childhood experience that reads very much like the interactions between Ida and Lucy in *The True Story of Ida Johnson*. Playing "early settlers" with her friend Eva, Rosalie becomes so involved in their shared fantasy that she forgets herself completely:

> In the long twilight of that summer's evening I was digging a grave for my wife and children with a plastic shovel and pail when I lost track of my self

> and my own circumstance. I could not tell the difference between me and Eva, me and the fantasy of myself as the brave and bereft rancher or the fantasy of Eva as an Indian princess equally beset by tragedy. Cool mountain air wafted down over the hot prairie and I could not distinguish, for a moment, between me and the hot dry land, me and the cool mountain air. (70)

The dispersion of Rosalie's "self" within this scene is not experienced as alienation or loss but, paradoxically, as a coming into one's own that echoes Ida's childhood experience of being comforted within a grave. "I did not know *what* I was, never mind *who*. Still, I wasn't frightened. I felt both peace and exhilaration. I felt blessed" (70).

In both of Riis's novels a child is exposed—through her physical experience of a grave—to the trauma of genocide. This exposure to traumatic history is overdetermined by the ways in which the Holocaust and the genocide of Canada's First Peoples are brought into a complex parallel relation. In *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, this relation is embodied by Lucy, who is identified by the citizens of Longview as an "Indian" but who describes herself as a "jew." In *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone*, the relation between these separate instances of historical trauma is established by Rosalie as she moves through a discontinuous sequence of historical fantasies that are linked through her position within them. In both novels, traumatic events are not arranged into a linear narrative. Instead, temporal sequence is abandoned in favour of a structural overlay of events that bleed through one another both backwards and forwards through time. In "After Loss:

What Then?" (2003), Judith Butler argues that this type of structure reflects the "loss of redemptive narrative" which "takes shape as figurative as spatial and as simultaneous" (249).

In *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone*, the effect of simultaneity is further complicated by the relation between Rosalie's fantasies and Josef's, as well as the tension between these fantasies and the often volatile interactions with Wanda that take place within the cabin itself. In a scene that occurs at the centre of the novel, Rosalie engages in a sexual encounter with Josef and Wanda that has the same effect on her as the "early settler" game she played with Eva as a child: "The wind's still roaring but it's the roar of protection now. The wind is keeping the world at bay. And I don't know any more who is stroking whom, licking whom, fucking whom... And for a while, at least, I don't know my own name" (75).

In *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas* (2002), Rosalyn Diprose argues that dispersion is a necessary component of ethical, corporeal engagement: "generosity describes the operation that both constitutes identity and difference and resists the full presence of meaning, identity, and Being so that the self is dispersed into the other" (7). In a formulation reminiscent of Celan's *Atemwende*, Diprose describes the process of dispersion as a form of "Self-overcoming" best understood as "a process of production of self in relation to others that involves the generation of distance (or division) within the self and division (or difference) between self and others" (11). She argues, further, that the act of "locating generosity within an ontology of corporeal

intersubjectivity that is not reducible to either volitional acts or an affectivity that exceeds them grounds a passionate politics that aims for a justice that is not yet here" (14). The very visceral forms of intersubjectivity that take place within Riis's second novel undermine the fixed identities and the static social relations that are masked and managed, according to Joan Scott, through fantasy. Like the reciprocity between flesh and spirit in the relationship between Ida and Lucy, the *ménage* of Rosalie, Josef and Wanda—as both a physical and an affective relation—has the potential to change more than their individual lives.

When Rosalie emerges from the post-coital nap that follows the sexual encounter described above, she hears herself "murmuring the paternoster" (75). Because she is identified as "adamantly not a Christian" in the novel's second paragraph, the prayer (recited here in Latin) signals an obvious shift in perspective that marks her transition from the cabin to a more discreet fantasy or scene. However, unlike the immediate transfer between Josef's cabin and the magnificent meeting room in the Göring episode, her passage between spaces here is gradual, occurring one sense at a time. Although she can hear herself praying when she awakens, she is more interested in look and feel of the tangle of bodies to which she herself belongs:

> Half my body has been left uncovered during the self-serving manoeuvring of the three of us in sleep and that half is chilled to the bone. Josef, returned somehow to middle ground, is slightly curved towards me and rests the dead weight of his hand on my stomach. Wanda, curled up against Josef's

back, rests *her* hand on the soothing rise and fall of *his* stomach. Cute.

Three on a party, three peas in a pod, pigs in a poke, blind mice... (75)

Although her pleasure in the scene is obvious, the childlike playfulness of the language is undercut by the "scent of soapy ecclesiastical incense" (75). Once Rosalie leaves the bed to use the bucket that Josef keeps in a makeshift bathroom separated from the rest of the cabin by a tarp, she registers the uncanny combination of litany and incense, correctly, as a warning: "'*In nomini Domini...*' mumbles Wanda in her sleep, '*...nostri Jesu Christi...*' and Josef whimpers as though he's in pain, or frightened. The stink of incense is worse. I'm scared. I don't like all this 'I play dominoes' shit and the smell makes me feel like gagging" (76).

The scene she enters into, with all of her senses intact, is the most violent fantasy the novel has to offer. And while the scene is vividly described, it is also disorienting. It is as if Riis wants her readers to misapprehend the setting in terms of both time and place:

> I am mincing my way through a death camp, head down, numb with cold and fatigue, numb with indifference. I have wept with pity and shit my pants with fear but now I am inured to both suffering and terror. I am simply following orders. The camp is full of badly smoking fires. It's spring and the wood is wet. Useless for warmth. Useless. The dead are all around. They are a comfort to me. "Peace is at hand." (76)

To anyone familiar with testimonial literature written by Holocaust survivors—Primo Levi, Charlotte Delbo, Robert Antelme, Tadeusz Borowski and Elie

Wiesel—the scene is at once familiar. The death camps with their piles of bodies, the abject details of human waste, prisoners numbed by their exposure to terror and suffering, guards who justify their complicity by protesting that they are "simply following orders"—this description is an iconic representation of the suffering and degradation associated with the Holocaust.

One of the most jarring aspects of the scene, therefore, is the identity of the perpetrators. The narrator is neither a camp guard nor an inmate, but the "handmaiden" to a Jesuit missionary: "Ignorant bloody savages. They hate us, would eat us alive but they are afraid of the power we seem to be wielding here. Fair enough. For months now every village, every camp I mince through, five paces behind the rank skirts of my mentor, my confessor, holy father, has been devastated by smallpox, decimated" (76). The twisted beauty of the scene is that it forces the reader to negotiate what is initially an unidentified landscape as if she were, like Rosalie, a participant within it. The simultaneous figuration of the Holocaust and the Jesuit mission is, in terms of method, similar to the juxtaposition of "Jews" and "Indians" in *The True Story of Ida Johnson.* However, unlike the first novel where Riis reinforces the connection through language specific to the Nazi agenda (Final Solution, *Lebensraum*), here she uses graphic images in order to create a sense of immediacy that is both sensual and horrifying.

Like the old waiter who is grateful for the self-serving attentions of Herr Göring, the historical subject Rosalie inhabits here is both complicit with and subject to the violence of the scene. While he is openly disdainful of those he has

come to "save," he is also uncertain about the value of the mission itself: "It's death we're spreading, not the love of God" (77). His body is failing him, his mentor is a madman who "wears a wolf's head over his own" (77), and he finds himself longing for death "like an abandoned child longs for its mother, sure that nothing could be worse than these abominable days, not even hell itself" (77). Riis connects this fantasy scenario to the "real" world contained within the cabin through the one act that gives this young Jesuit any pleasure. "He can be so tender. Gentle. Kind. 'My son,' he whispers, 'my son. . .' when he wants to sodomize me. I am his handmaiden. I have lost my appetite. For food. But not for buggery. It's all I can think of now" (77). However, when he reaches across the distance of five paces to touch his mentor, he is assaulted by a flash of blinding light and Rosalie is returned to herself once more. In the aftermath of the fantasy, Rosalie downs a cup of vodka while she watches Josef sleep. When he calls out "Mama! Mama. . . please. . . I saw him. White. Like death . . . In a long black skirt. Like death. Mama" (78), she realizes that Josef is caught within the scene from which she's just returned. However, her interior monologue reveals that she has not left the fantasy completely, that the lines between these spaces have blurred. "I am astounded. I can't take my eyes off of him. Is he dreaming about me, about my demented mentor?" (78).

As I have already suggested, the Jesuit fantasy is central to the novel because it represents both the Holocaust and the genocide of the First Nations peoples through a narrative overlay of familiar images within a disorienting landscape. The connection between these two historical traumas is further reinforced by the

ways in which Josef's response to the scene that echoes and contradicts his emotional response within a scene that occurs earlier in the novel. In the earlier scene Rosalie seems to straddle the line between the fantasy of *being* Josef's mother in wartime Poland, and the relatively banal "reality" inside the cabin where Wanda and Josef are talking *about* his mother. In the fantasy, Rosalie is walking "across a great dark plain towards a small fire where a band of tattered soldiers, deserters probably, huddle" (63). Even as she moves towards the encampment, she doubts its existence. The absurdity of her situation, her awareness that everything, even her hunger, is relative, makes her laugh: "It's so funny. Even death is funny when you consider the duplicity involved. The way we dupe ourselves to the last hopeful breath" (63). Her experience of the desolate landscape is interrupted by Josef telling Wanda that he has only one picture of his mother: "She is very thin. Very old. Too old to be somebody's mama. Maybe is Grandmama I see. . . Is so cold. Is thin and hungry and cold. Empty. And Mama is laughing like she got a joke or something [...] Is possible in my picture, she is already gone. . ." (63). When Wanda realizes that Josef is dismissing his memory and, with it, his mother, she comes to the woman's defense: "But she took care of you. She taught you some things. . ." (63). Josef responds with a complete lack of empathy: "'No,' he says, in a flat defensive voice. 'She was whore. She following always the soldiers' camps. . .'" (63).

The parallels here are clear. In both scenes there is an encampment of men huddled, cold and hungry, within what has become an inhospitable landscape. The handmaiden and Josef's mother prostitute themselves in order to survive, although

both characters acknowledge the absurdity of this desire, given the hopelessness of their respective lives. And in both scenes, the primary participants acquiesce to rather than resist the violence that oppresses them. However, in each instance Riis chooses to *not* transmit the fantasy through the perspective of someone who is "simply" a victim (or, for that matter, "simply" a perpetrator). The moral universe of the novel is, like *The True Story of Ida Johnson*, given a decidedly Nietzschean cast. The recourse to a clear distinction between good and evil, between innocence and guilt, is denied to all of the characters, including those inhabiting the scene of fantasy. In order to bring this point home, Riis has Rosalie spell it out. "'Goodness' achieved out of habit or fear is no achievement at all. It's a ticket to atrophy and ignorance. No. To truly live is to embrace *all* of one's impulses and then choose the ones to act on" (90).

When Josef emerges from his nightmare of the Jesuit death-figure (it's significant that this dream is not *transmitted*), he and Rosalie discuss the details of as well as their responses to the scene. The conversation has lost the combative quality that characterized their exegesis of the Göring episode. I would argue that this change in tenor is the result of Rosalie's shift to a position of *unknowing*: "He pours us each a drink, sits down and rolls a cigarette. We sit in companionable silence for a while. At least that's one interpretation. I have so many questions to ask but I'm too exhausted to give them shape inside my head never mind articulate them" (81). Once again Josef acts as a guide, prodding Rosalie to work through her memory of the fantasy itself: "'What did you see?' he asks." She answers, "'I wasn't just a voyeur. I was there'" (81). With this answer Rosalie

reveals the traumatic effects of the experience and is compelled, like the father of the burning child in Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, to tell *what it means not to see*.

> 'There was a gathering of men, I don't know, it's hard to tell, to differentiate, when people are so ill, are suffering like that, but I think they were all men. . . they were a ways from the fires and the dead, chanting or singing and beating on skin drums. There was the smell of death and of damp ground, and the smell of the fires mixed in with the smell of the bloody incense I was waving around. But— It's not what I *saw* so much it's. . .' I don't know what to say. (82)

According to Jacqueline Rose, there is a "part of historical being, passionate and traumatized, which runs backwards and forwards, never completely in the grasp of its subjects, through psychic time" (11). At several points in the novel, the relationship between Josef and Rosalie reads like the interaction between analyst and analysand. Rosalie the reluctant patient is put through her psychic paces so that she might, even if only for brief moments, grasp hold of historical being. And yet in another way these characters are equals, representatives of a particular times and places, brought together to remake themselves and their world through an affective and corporeal engagement.

The progressive narration of history, itself a fantasy, is not adequate to the story that Riis feels needs to be told. As an alternative formal method, the layering of multiple fantasies torn from chronological time and interrupted by contests over interpretation enables Riis to expose fantasy as a reinscription of fixed identities

and social relations maintained through physical and psychic violence. At the same time, this method allows her to expose the traumatic historical memory suppressed through the imposition of these identities and social relations. Through its "collapse of sequence into simultaneity" (Butler, 2003 469), *Midnight Twilight Tourist Zone* is at once figurative, spatial and simultaneous. As Butler argues, through Walter Benjamin, narratives of progress and development—religious and otherwise—have "produced through their own excess, sites of exclusion as sites of resistance" (469).

Josef's isolated cabin is one such site. According to Erin Manning, "Every nation carries within it the semantic politics that delimit its understanding of what it means to house "a people" (xviii). The relationship between home and nation is *never* simply figurative, just as it is *always* political: "we cannot adequately rethink the political without first deconstructing the vocabulary of the home, since the language of the nation informs the very enunciations we employ to 'comprehend' both the home and the political" (Manning xviii). The horrors of the Holocaust and the genocide of the First Nations are like horrible family secrets that Riis feels must be worked through in order to effect any kind of change. Within this specifically Canadian tale, the parallel between Nazi Germany and Canada is both implicitly and pervasively drawn. The Concentration Camp and the Reservation, as two of the most extreme modes of such housing, constitute the figurative as well as material space against which Riis is writing. To face what it means to "house" a people, in terms of this relationship is, as Riis demonstrates, a potentially volatile process of excavation.

Near the end of the novel Josef tells Wanda a story to ease her passage into death; though he does not share the purpose of the story with Rosalie, he invites her to listen in. Through the process of his telling, we are brought back, full circle, to *The True Story of Ida Johnson.* Huddled together with Wanda and Rosalie under a tarp made of "a very old, worn, dirt-encrusted skin" Josef begins: "'Two hundred years ago' he says, in a low, soothing voice, a storyteller's voice, 'deep inside a long cold winter we would sit, close like this, day after day, weeks maybe. Close in like this, twelve, fifteen people trying to stay warm, alive, Dreaming. . .'" (128).

In a voice that takes on the "lilting syntax of the Woodland Cree" Josef tells the women of a dream shared by the people from whom the story has come: "A young woman walking through the bush, very beautiful in skins and fur, she falls, suddenly, almost inside a pit that she has made" (128). (From this point on the narrative is transcribed in Cree, with the English translation set off from the body of the text at the bottom of the page.) The pit into which the dream woman falls is used for trapping bears, and she is able to see an old bear trapped "down below, far down inside" (129). Because she has only fallen part way, she is free, but still frightened. As if to assuage her fears the bear—in a version of Josef in animal drag—performs a little routine designed to make the woman laugh. At this point in the story two things happen. First, the dream woman realizes that the bear must die in order to provide food and comfort to her community. Second, at the invocation of this community, Josef "holds us both to him, tight. I can feel his lips brush against my cheek when he talks" (129).

As if she knows that the story is meant for her, Wanda tries to interrupt, but Josef stops her. "Everybody is thinking in and out of dreams, and at last they know that this dream is for me. And for you" (129). He also attempts to reassure her by reminding her that the relationship between the bear and the woman—which is also the relationship between himself, Wanda and Rosalie—is not limited to a relation between discreet, autonomous beings. "No, It is not how you think. It is not simple. For the bear, he's both of us. And the frightened young woman, she's both of us too" (130).

Once the story has ended, Wanda heads "out into civilization" (130). Her departure is surprisingly devoid of sentiment, and the moment she leaves Rosalie and Josef act as if she's never been there: "'Oh Missus,' he says, reverting, an old Polack. 'I will make for you a little Slavic baby,' and smiles, sweet as Gabriel. And I, well, I am having a dirty fuck and can't think of anything to say" (134).

Once they finish, Rosalie begins to wonder how Wanda is getting on. Although Josef admits that the sex was meant to distract her, she doesn't register the significance of the remark. "'Go on then,' he says, 'go see what she's up to'" (134). The details of the scene return us to the novel's opening. Rosalie has a cup of tea with a cigarette before she steps outside into the sharp clarity of the winter day. "God, it's so beautiful. A brilliant sun on snow blue sky kind of day" (135). However, what this picture perfect setting lacks is any evidence of Wanda. When Rosalie glimpses the red slash of Wanda's Volkswagen in the snow, she's not prepared for what she finds: "I brush away some of the snow from the windshield thinking to go back for a cup of tea and then maybe check out the neighbours.

That's when I see her, Wanda, the same, dead, a block of ice, behind the steering wheel" (135). Taking "note of the bluish tinge under her eyes, the ice crystals on her brows an lashes" Rosalie realizes that Wanda's "been dead here a very long time" (135).

When Rosalie returns to the cabin it looks as it did when she first arrived. All the details of the scene are repeated. However, the contrast between the "brilliance of the sun on snow outside" (136) and the dark quiet of the cabin reinforce the finality of this particular shift in perspective, this return to "reality." Rosalie is both "awake" and "a wake." Outside of the fantasy within which Wanda and Josef are still alive, she has no one with whom to mark their passing. I had said earlier, that the novel could be read as account of the process by which Josef overcomes his reluctance to awaken. It is this legacy that he has passed on to Rosalie, through a relay of signals—broken, discontinuous, and overlapping. Unable to bear the grief she feels at the sight of him "lost under a pile of ragged quilts. Lifeless" (136), Rosalie wants more than anything to die: "I will my own heart to stop. I lie down beside him and *will* my own heart to stop" (136). However, what she's learned from her traumatic experience is that will is not what forces us to come to terms with the legacies we inherit. Her heart does not stop. Now that she's awakened, it is her duty to live on.

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[1] Ahenakew's comments were widely reported in both the national and international press. The sources I'm drawing from here include Les Perreaux's article in the *National Post*, and Erin Anderssen's, in the *Globe and Mail.* Both stories were published on 16 December 2002. As I complete this chapter (July 2005), Ahenakew has been convicted of promoting hatred against Jews, fined $1000, and been removed from the Order of Canada (see Katherine Harding's "Ahenakew Unapologetic after Conviction." *Globe and Mail* 9 July 2005).

[2] Many people doubted the sincerity of his initial apology. An article by Alex Roslin ("Speak No Evil." *This* 37.1 (Jul/Aug 2003): 16-19), ran with the caption: "last winter David Ahenakew

shocked the nation with his anti-Semitic comments. But some who know Ahenakew say he never made a secret of his intolerant views. The question is, how did he get away with it for so long?" (16). A year later, almost as if to confirm the conclusions of Roslin's report, Ahenakew replaced his first lawyer, Alan Gold, who withdrew from the case in July 2004, with Doug Christie, "the same lawyer who defended Jim Keegstra and Ernst Zundel" (*Canadian Press*, 12 November 2004).

[3]Atwood is quoted on the back of the original publication (Toronto: Women's Press, 1976), as well as on the front of the reprint edition (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1989).

[4] My working definition for the term 'imaginary' comes from Moira Gatens's preface to her collection of essays entitled *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996). To quote Gatens: "The term 'imaginary' will be used in a loose but nevertheless technical sense to refer to those images, symbols, metaphors and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity. In this sense, I am concerned with the (often unconscious) imaginaries of a specific culture: those ready-made images and symbols through which we make sense of social bodies and which determine, in part, their value, their status and what will be deemed their appropriate treatment" (viii).

[5] See Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948*. 3rd ed. Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1991. "The two North American democracies, the United States and Canada, share more than a common border and common values.... They also share responsibility for the fate of Jews in Europe. During the years of Nazi brutality, the United States, which eventually led the military crusade against Nazism, took only 200,000 Jews, including the select of European intellectual, cultural, and scientific life. As for Canada: between 1933 and 1945 Canada found room within her borders for fewer than 5,000 Jews; after the war, until the founding of Israel in 1948, she admitted but 8,000 more. That record is arguably the worst of all possible refugee-receiving states" (xxii).

[6] The phrase is not mine. Coined by the American artist and political activist Paul Chan, it captures both the ambivalence and emotional intensity of Rosalie and Josef's encounter. Although Chan does not discuss, at any point in the interview, the texts or contexts that are the focus of my own chapter, his responses buoyed me and enabled me to continue writing when my own fighting spirit began to flag. Although his analysis of fantasy is not exactly in keeping with my own, his sentiments most surely are: "I think reality is overrated. Fantasizing and escaping is a kind of self-cure we administer to ourselves, a tool for self-preservation in the face of things we cannot bear.... How we try to help ourselves to bear the burden of living is one of the most interesting, subtle and moving projects anyone will know" (24-25). See "Paul Chan by Nell McClister." *Bomb* 92 (Summer 2005): 22-29.

[7] My source for the information on Johst is Adam F. Weiss's *Georg Kaiser's The Citizens of Calais; Hanns Johst's Schlageter, and Wolfgang Borchert's Outside before the Door: Three Translations and an Explanation of the Social Image Expressed in the Plays*. Diss. U of Denver, 1965.

Chapter 3

Perec, Duras, and Kofman Under Occupation

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction* to *reaffirm by choosing*. "One must" means *one must* filter, sift, criticize, one must sort out several different possibles that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret. If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause—natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret—which says "read me, will you ever be able to do so?"
>
> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

In what might seem like a counter-intuitive move in a dissertation about formal experiments in post-Holocaust art and literature, I want to shift my focus here from art and fiction, to memoir. In Chapter 1, I discussed the ways in which Christian Boltanski uses the Holocaust as *reference* in order to create works of art that explore the relationship between individual and historical trauma. In Chapter 2, I focused on two fictional texts whose approach to the Holocaust is even more indirect or oblique. Like Boltanski, Sharon Riis includes references to the Holocaust within her work, without actually writing *about* the Holocaust. One of the most interesting formal features of these novels is their structure as "oral" autobiography, or testimony.

In this chapter, I focus on three writers whose work explores the events of the Second World War from the perspective of having survived them. However, this move from "fiction" to "fact" does not signal a shift to a more immediate account of this experience. All three of the writers discussed below identify the autobiographical text as a form of mediation. Marguerite Duras and Sarah Kofman open by explaining the genesis of their memoirs *as writing*. Although Georges Perec does not assume a meta-autobiographical voice (and therefore offers no such explanation), he opens each installment of "The Rue Vilin" with dates and times. This marks the text as a series of personal reflections recorded as if in a diary or journal. One paradox of the transition from fiction to memoir is that Sharon Riis—through her working-class, first-person narrators—is able to create a sense of immediacy, while the texts produced by Perec, Duras, and Kofman are more stilted, and opaque. There is a curious distance, within these memoirs, between the narrator and the traumatic events being described.

Perec, Duras, and Kofman structure their experiences of the German Occupation as *self-conscious* performances of traumatized subjectivity. Because of the way these performances are played out within and across the streets of Paris, the city itself emerges as a palimpsest of traumatic memory. The past bleeds through the present of the writing moment, as a layering of event—through both time and space—that is not always accessible as something solid, something known. This layering of memory produces effects that extend beyond concerns about history, or historiography. Any assumptions we might have about the fully-present subject (or the sovereignty of the victim), are also undermined. As Derrida

argues in the epigraph with which I opened, an inheritance is necessarily divided against itself, and the possibility of unity inheres in the injunction to "filter, sift, criticize," through an active and interminable process of interpretation. Within this deconstructive framework, the notion of legacy is understood as a secret that asks to be read, but is at the same time unavailable to such readings. Following his lead, I approach the legacy of the Holocaust as a secret to be read through the juxtaposition of three very different texts.

What is most surprising about Perec's "The Rue Vilin," Duras's *The War*, and Kofman's *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* are the identity conflicts they enact. Every one of these writers issues a challenge to those who condemn mobile conceptions of selfhood as ludic, irresponsible, or apolitical, through their refusal to engage in autobiography from the safety of the "authentic" and therefore legible subject-positions available to them as "victims." The relationship between memory and identity, while central to the autobiography, is never fixed, but always already under a process of revision. In *French Autobiography: Devices and Desires* (1993), Michael Sheringham argues that it is within the space created by the memory-trace (which he opposes to a narrative reconstruction of a fully-present self) that the vulnerability of the remembering self is acknowledged:

> Memory-as-trace marks a distance within the subject, a gap which can only be filled by the leap of interpretation, and which therefore perpetually calls into question the relationship between 'secret depths' ('inner' memory) and 'accidental' surface (*this* particular, contingent, memory-trace). In this perspective, to be a subject of memory is to be subject to a law which

> prohibits the confident fusion of 'memoire' and 'personne'. To take account of this law is, for the autobiographer, to find a way of attending to his or her memories which acknowledges their vulnerability to the process of remembering itself. (Sheringham 313-14)

By foregrounding the distance between *memoire* and *personne*, all three of the writers discussed in this chapter have produced texts that are realist in the sense that they refer to actual historical events. However, the relationship between the referent and its representation is complicated by a distance between the subject and his or her remembered experience.

In *Traumatic Realism*, Michael Rothberg explains this distance through Charles Sanders Pierce's theory of the index. According to Pierce's model, the index "is a sign that relates to a referent as an effect relates to a cause" (Rothberg 104). Within texts that fall under the rubric of traumatic realism, however, the index "functions differently than the traditional version. Instead of indicating an object or phenomenon that caused it, and in that sense making the referent present, the traumatic index points to a necessary absence" (104). Rothberg argues that we should read the detail or reference as "pointing to the real instead of claiming *to be* the real" (104). In contrast to the limits of a social realism understood as a transparent or faithfully mimetic representation, the autobiographical writings of Perec, Duras and Kofman are examples of "a realism in which the scars that mark the relationship of discourse to the real are not fetishistically denied, but exposed; a realism in which the claims of reference live

on, but so does the traumatic extremity that disables realist representation as usual" (Rothberg 106).

Both Rothberg and Sheringham identify topographical motifs as central to the representation of traumatic experience because of the ways in which, like memory, a traumatic scene undergoes changes over time. Rothberg "begins with the question of how to represent the space of the concentrationary universe and moves to a recognition that this space can only be represented traumatically as the registration of a repetitive structure of *time*" (99).[1] He goes on to argue that the relationship between space and time can be best understood as a relation between the "archive of facts or details referring to the event" and "the need for the construction of a realistic narrative that would shape those details into a coherent story" (100).

Rothberg's motivation for establishing this relationship, while admirable, contradicts my own sense of the value of these narratives. His model makes it possible to address texts that might otherwise be considered inappropriate (as *aesthetic* or formally innovative representations). The new category of traumatic realism "entails a survival of the claims of realism into a discourse that would otherwise be identified in terms of literary history or style as modernist or even postmodernist" (99). However, in contrast to the Adorno of my preface, Rothberg's motivation for attending to the formal elements of Holocaust representation is primarily redemptive: "Because it seeks both to construct access to a previously unknowable object and to instruct an audience in how to approach

that object, the stakes of traumatic realism are both epistemological and pedagogical" (103).

Because Sheringham is not as invested as Rothberg in recuperating the traumatic narrative as an epistemological enterprise, he is able to focus more explicitly on the mimetic relationship between memory, constructed along the lines of Freud's mystic writing-pad, and the space within which the trauma was experienced. According to Sheringham, to "remember authentically is not to be reintegrated into a past chronology but to establish a topography, to create a map or schema which would indicate relationships, continguities, and distances between discontinuous landmarks" (304). The relationship between the representation and the actual event is complicated even further by Sheringham's suggestion that, in addition to pointing to a real that is absent, the details of a traumatic narrative may in fact function like a screen-memory, "concealing something emotionally important," where the "clarity of memory is a sign of its hidden significance" (298). In order to preserve the complexity or indeterminacy that is one effect of indirect reference, Sheringham does not attempt to resolve the productive tension between knowing and unknowing that is the legacy of traumatic history:

> Our memory is thus a palimpsest of discontinuous traces inscribed through the spasmodic operations of the psyche. Furthermore, our memories do not stand still. Just as, by virtue of the intermittent, selective operations of memory, an event may have been retained in what was already a distorted

form, so memory traces are subject to revision, retranscription, and realignment under the pressure of other experiences. (Sheringham 298)

I. Perec's rue Vilin

I want to open with Georges Perec's "The Rue Vilin" (1977) because it provides the groundwork—through its emphasis on the topographical staging of impossible memory—for an exploration of the relationship between the city of Paris and texts that deal with the issues of death and survival during the German Occupation of Paris. However, in order to remain faithful to its structure, I have resisted Rothberg's recuperative injunction to turn it into a "coherent story." Perec's observations, spanning six and a half years, overlap to create what Sheringham would describe, through Freud, as a palimpsest of traces. The fact that the details of the street change over the course of his six visits supports Rothberg's thesis that the concentrationary universe is registered by its subjects through reiterations that occur over time. However, the way in which these details also seem to function like screen-memories suggests that the logic of narrative is too restrictive. The secret to which Perec's account bears witness is not made available to us through a chronology, but through a series of separate moments that overlay one another. The details that stand out within this cityscape-as-palimpsest point to an event in Perec's life that was both shattering and constitutive. They also point to an impossible memory: Perec was not in Paris when his mother was arrested because she'd already sent him to Grenoble, in the unoccupied territory, via a Red Cross interzone convoy in the fall of 1941.

In "The Rue Vilin," Perec documents the physical disintegration of the street in Belleville, the Jewish Quarter of Paris, where he'd lived as a child before the war. The account is oddly impersonal. There is no demonstration of affect. In fact, beyond the occasional autobiographical reference, there is very little to suggest that the author has any relationship to the site at all. Perec's enumeration of the derelict buildings, blocked doorways, and broken windows—which he compiled over the course of six visits that took place between February 27, 1969 and September 27, 1975—describes a neighbourhood that is being destroyed. The changes he notes from visit to visit document this disintegration, while at the same time suggesting that the street is being reclaimed as part of a larger program of gentrification. However, the objective distance between the narrator and the site has a paradoxical effect. As John Sturrock notes, "The Rue Vilin" is "made haunting by its refusal of any explicit sentiment or nostalgia" (xii). What Perec invites is an encounter with a post-Holocaust inheritance that is inexplicably intimate. The uncanny or haunting quality of the text is produced by the absence to which Perec's empirical account bears witness. The lack of pathos paradoxically forces the reader to *inhabit* the site (in Derrida's sense of the term) in order to read it. Only through our attention to the details of the cityscape that pertain to life before and during the war can we discern its secret.

The opening sequence is also the longest. As Perec inventories the buildings one by one, he moves back and forth across the street in a zigzag pattern that follows the addresses in numerical order. The first autobiographical reference is given in response to the first house: "On the left (odd numbers), No 1 has been

recently done up. I've been told it's the building where my mother's parents lived. There are no letter boxes in the tiny entrance lobby" (212). Several pieces of information are embedded within this seemingly straightforward description. We learn of Perec's origins (his mother's parents lived in No 1). At the same time, we learn that his knowledge is not based on experience, but hearsay: the renovation has erased any evidence of his grandparents that might have survived the war. The severed relationship between Perec and his family is subtly reflected in the letterboxes missing from the building's tiny lobby. It's as if even the most basic lines of communication between the past and the present have been closed off.

Perec's mother was arrested in Paris in 1943 and sent to Drancy, a holding camp just outside of Paris. Then, on 11 February 1943, she was sent aboard a cattle-truck train to Auschwitz.[2] She did not return. However, in "The Rue Vilin," her absence is never explained. Just as Christian Boltanski's repetition of "little fellow" and "little rabbi" in "What They Remember" (a text inspired by Perec's own work) reveals his childhood experience of anti-Semitism in post-war France, the secret of "The Rue Vilin" is revealed through repetition and juxtaposition. Through a sustained engagement with place, Perec relives the memory of his mother's deportation, although it's a memory he does not have. The numbered sections do not, therefore, establish a linear or historical account with an obvious beginning, middle and end. Instead, like Boltanski, Perec uses parataxis as a method through which to reproduce the site as an overlay of memory and loss. To "read" this text we must *filter*, *sift*, and *sort out* the traces of a traumatic legacy that is both barely legible and heartbreaking.

Although the writing style is spare, the passage that contains Perec's second reference to his mother is the least fluid of the entire text. With its sentence fragments, brackets and punctuated pauses, it reads as if it were pieced together from something that's been broken. It is through this awkward syntax that Perec conveys the traumatic impact of his wartime experience:

> At No 24 (this is the house where I lived):
>
> First, a single-storey building with, on the ground floor, a doorway (back up); all around, still traces of paintwork and above, not yet completely rubbed away, the inscription
>
> LADIES' HAIRDRESSER (214)

The hairdresser is Perec's mother, Cécile Perec. The reiterative structure of the paragraph that follows this inscription suggests that the reference to her profession is more than a simple transmission of a set of facts about her life. The upper-case reproduction of the letters painted onto the side of the building, together with the repetitions within the paragraph that follow it, focus our attention on the inscription as evidence of something significant. Through his ethnographic attention to detail, Perec insists that we look beyond the surface of the building to an interior that no longer exists. The hairdressing salon is the scene of a childhood that Perec is both anxious and reluctant to recreate. The structure of the paragraph betrays this tension:

> Then a low building with a doorway giving on to a long paved courtyard on several different levels, (flights of two or three steps). On to the right, a long single-storey building (giving in the old days on to the street through

the blocked-up doorway to the hairdressing salon) with a double flight of concrete steps leading up to it (this is the building we lived in; the hairdressing salon was my mother's). (214)

As in the description of his grandparents' home, the passage between past and present is closed off. The reference to absent letterboxes is mirrored here by a doorway that is blocked. The entryway between the street—Perec's vantage point—and the interior of the building exists as a trace only. The door has been made into a wall. Perec's attention to the surface of the building demonstrates the ways in which the traumatic experience of losing his mother is available to him only as a memory-trace. The distance between Perec and his mother is experienced as a form of estrangement that undermines the emotional veracity associated with conventional models of surface and depth. Perec does not offer us a glimpse into an "inner self" who registers his mother's absence as loss.

Paradoxically, it is Perec's attention to the surface of things that produces the text's most uncanny effects. There exists within these descriptions the possibility of the *heimlich*, or homely, in terms of what Freud would describe as "native" or "belonging to the home" (155). What is missing are the emotions that we would associate with this state of belonging. Perec does not frame his adult experience of the Rue Vilin as a recognition of something "familiar, tame, comfortable" (Freud 155). Through the absence of affect he produces, instead, the ambivalence that Freud believes is integral to the homely as it moves in the direction of its opposite. Defined by Freud as "Uncomfortable uneasy, gloomy dismal" (156), the unhomely coincides with the homely through a more literal figuration of the

home. *Heimlich* becomes *unheimlich* within a domestic or "familiar" space where things are "Concealed, kept from sight" or "withheld" (155).

Once he has returned to the scene of his origins (and, in doing so, has communicated the impossibility of their recovery), Perec moves along the street, describing other homes and businesses like his mother's, that are either closed or blocked off. Although he encounters the occasional passerby, it's as if the scene is haunted by residents and shopkeepers who are no longer there. He hears noises that sound as if they were made by machines he cannot see, he sees a sewing machine through a dirty window, "but no one working at it" (214), and, in spite of the fact that many of the windows and doors are boarded up, he catches sight of the odd window with curtains, or through which he can see "the outlines of rooms with yellow or yellowed wallpaper" (215). The detail of the yellow wallpaper immediately follows a description of a shop that establishes the Rue Vilin as a part of a Jewish neigbourhood: "At No 27, a shop, closed, 'La Maison du Taleth', with signs in Hebrew still to be seen and the words MOHEL, CHOHET, BOOKS, STATIONERY, RELIGIOUS OBJECTS, TOYS, on a façade of a faded blue" (214).

One way to read the contiguity between the Jewish shop and the wallpaper is as an indirect reference to the yellow stars that French Jews were forced to wear to identify themselves to the police and the Gestapo during the middle period of the Occupation.[3] This interpretation is reinforced by a description of the street itself that occurs two paragraphs later. "On the odd-number side, on the left, level with No 49, the street bends for a second time, also through about 30 degrees.

This gives the street the general appearance of a very elongated S (like the high-tension symbol SS)" (215).[4] The reference here is consistent with the wallpaper. Perec's physical movement through the street follows or tracks the destruction initiated by the Nazis during the Occupation, but it does so after an interval of over thirty years. Despite the vigilance with which he observes the details of this destruction, the street seems to yield more questions than answers.

What I have identified as the impossibility of memory is reinforced in the next passage, where the Nazi insignia is replaced by a second topographical mark that suggests questions both unasked and unanswered: "On the odd-number side, the street ends level with Nos 53-5 in a flight of steps, or rather three flights of steps that also make roughly a double sinusoid (less an S-shape than a wrong-way-round question-mark)" (215). The act of questioning is accompanied by a caution. The concrete structure of Perec's question-mark turned the wrong way round resonates with a warning posted earlier in the section that reads "BEWARE OF THE STEPS" (212).

In the third section of the text, dated Wednesday 13 January 1971, Perec describes an encounter with a resident of the street who was his mother's contemporary: "Nos 34 and 36 are slums. A woman comes out from No 36; she has lived there for 36 years. She had only come for three months; she has a clear memory of the hairdresser at No 24: '*She didn't stay very long*'" (219, emphasis added). The simple description of his mother's tenure—together with the distance Perec takes from her by identifying her simply as the hairdresser at No 24—lies at the centre of this text. The circumstances of Cécile Perec's disappearance are in

one sense covered over by the woman's straightforward declaration. However, the absence of any expressed emotion, on the part of either the neighbour or Perec himself, makes the passage more powerful. Any questions we might have as witnesses to this scene are never addressed by the participants themselves (Did this neighbour witness the arrest? Was she under threat as well? If so, how did she evade capture? How did she survive? If not, is the tenor of the statement evidence of guilt, indifference, or disdain?). There is no coherent account of his mother's disappearance available here; nevertheless, the text is gathered around this disappearance as if around an absent—or elusive—centre.

With each subsequent section of the text, the traces of the old neighbourhood are further eroded; as a result, Perec's observations become shorter. In section 5 he observes that the "lower part of the Rue Vilin seems still just about alive: piles of rubbish, washing hanging in the windows" (220). However, by the final section even the most basic signs of survival have disappeared, and Perec has very little to report: "Almost the whole of the odd-number side has been covered with cement fences. On one of them a graffito: WORK=TORTURE" (221).

If he were able to get inside of No 24, the cement fences would constitute the view from his childhood home. That he ends his account with the words "work" and "torture" locked together through the mathematical sign for equivalence inscribes—with finality but without resolution—the impossible memory of his mother's death which he reads through the present moment of his final visit. While the words do not refer to the Holocaust directly, they bear traces of the event within the present of Perec's observations. As Frances Bartkowski has

argued in another context, to "concentrate on words may seem superficial, distant, but we are doomed to that no matter how we approach the world of the camps" (1987 164). Perec registers this fate through his attention to the seemingly irrelevant details of building signs and graffiti. It is through these hidden, public signs that the legacy of the Holocaust is passed on. As Bartkowski explains, "it is in language and its products that so much of this world has been left to us. It is even in the silent spaces between that language continues to give breath to this past" (164). The last installment of "The Rue Vilin" gestures towards a historical legacy that Perec never represents directly. He reveals the fate of his mother through the evocation of another space even less hospitable than the one within which she is absent. The graffito reads like a truth-telling riff on the slogan mounted in iron over the entryway to Auschwitz: "ARBEIT MACHT FREI."

In terms of the palimpsestic structure of memory suggested by Michael Sheringham, "The Rue Vilin" functions as a literal inscription of memory onto the world, where the street itself is analogous to the wax tablet of Freud's "Mystic Writing-Pad." Perec's reading of the street—at set intervals—turns it into a surface that changes *between* intervals, while still bearing the traces of earlier versions of itself. In "Freud and the Scene of Writing," Derrida argues that in spite of Freud's expressed desire to develop a model that would explain the processes of memory through a purely physiological operation, every one of his attempts makes recourse to metaphor. He therefore lets his own readings of Freud's texts on memory "be guided by this metaphor" (199).

According to Derrida, "Trace as memory is not a pure breaching that might be reappropriated at any time as simple presence; it is rather the ungraspable and invisible difference between breaches" (201). In order to conceive of memory *as* writing, it is necessary to draw a connection between the trace and perception that does not reduce writing to a secondary, or supplementary function. The simultaneity of all six "moments" of Perec's text would constitute, for Derrida, a memory-text within which the past might be read as an inheritance:

> There is no present text in general, and there is not even a past present text which is past as having been present. The text is not conceivable in an originary or modified form of presence. The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and force are united—a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions. Originary prints. Everything begins with reproduction. Always already: repositories of meaning which was never present, whose signified presence is always reconstituted by deferral, *nächtraglich*, belatedly, supplementarily. . . ("Freud" 211)

•

It is through the tension produced by his curious restraint *within* these texts, as opposed to any explicit expression of fear or anxiety, that Perec's autobiographical writings about the war seem most prescient. In their performance of repression, they anticipate the crisis that would attend representations of the war in France during the 1980s. Texts like Perec's "The Rue Vilin" (1977) and *W, or The Memory of Childhood* (1975) explore the

aftermath of the Holocaust at a time in France when this history was still, for the most part, denied any type of critical, public expression. The indirect or oblique representations of the atrocities of the war—experienced by Perec as the deaths of parents and grandparents—testify to this repression. However, by the end of the decade everything had changed. As Geoffrey Hartman explains in "The Voice of Vichy,"

> a self-protective silence, though punctuated by scandals and revelations, prevailed for close to fifty years after the Occupation, as if public memory could not tolerate the truth of French complicity in the persecution of the Jews. Not until the early eighties—just at the time the so-called revisionists were gathering momentum—did *Vichy France and the Jews*, the book by Paxton and Marrus, neither of them French historians, make it impossible to escape a further investigation of the facts. (16)

The work of negationists like Robert Faurrison, and the trial of Klaus Barbie—the infamous "Butcher of Lyon"—galvanized the French public around issues of collective as well as individual guilt and innocence. Once Barbie was captured in Bolivia and brought back to France for his trial, he threatened to destroy the national fantasy that France was a country of resisters rather than collaborators. As Erna Paris reports, "After his forced return to France in 1983, he had made it clear that he would be happy—*very* happy to talk at his trial about all the French people who had helped him in his wartime duties, slyly telling one of his interviewers that the only things he remembered from these halcyon days of youth and power were the names of these former friends" (75).

I've chosen to juxtapose Perec's "The Rue Vilin" with the writings of Marguerite Duras and Sarah Kofman for several reasons. The first and most obvious link between these three writers is the fact that they lived through the Occupation. Second, although they devoted themselves to the vocation of writing—each one has the reputation of being a writer's writer—all three were reluctant to represent their survival experiences. However, my reasons for opening this chapter with a section on Perec cannot be reduced—even within a chapter on memoir—to biography alone. I open this chapter with "The Rue Vilin" because of the way in which it combines vulnerability with a kind of tacit recalcitrance. The indirection with which Perec represents his loss makes demands on us as readers. We are forced to regard the details of each of his numbered accounts as evidence of a "real" that is doubly inaccessible. Once we take into consideration the distance or disjunction between the "self" and the "real" that is an effect of representation (there is no access to the real outside of language which is itself a form of interpretation or translation), we must confront the added burden of a "real" that is itself an absence. Perec, like both Duras and Kofman, resists the temptation to resolve this difficulty for us.

Marguerite Duras's *The War: A Memoir* (published in France in 1985 as *La Douleur*) and Sarah Kofman's *Smothered Words* (published in France in 1987 as *Paroles suffoquées*) were released at the height of the national crisis over French collaboration. One could argue that the reluctance of these women to go public with their personal experiences during the war was finally overcome by a need to set the record straight, a project that Hartman describes as having the public

record "catch up with the facts" ("Vichy" 16). While I do not believe that this crisis was the only motivation for these works, the belated impact of the war that made itself felt through the conflicts surrounding the Holocaust during the 1980s, should not be discounted.

In *The Limits of Autobiography* (2001), Leigh Gilmore argues that every autobiography "is an assembly of self and self-representation; of personal identity and one's relation to a family, a region, a nation; and of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion)" (12). The task of the autobiographer is to situate one's "self" in terms of what Gilmore describes as the "larger organizational question of how selves and milieus ought to be understood in *relation to each other*" (12). For Duras and Kofman, as for Perec, the questions of citizenship—and the relations between the self and those defined as other—are more than philosophical or abstract concerns. The stakes here are life and death. The lack of resolution that characterizes every one of these accounts suggests that answers to these questions (and perhaps even the questions, as such) may never be fully articulated.

II. Duras's *Douleur*

> The lit-up city means only one thing to me: it is a sign of death, of a tomorrow without them. There's no present in the city now except for us who wait. For us it's a city *they* won't see.
>
> Marguerite Duras, *The War*

Duras begins her introduction to *The War* by identifying the text's provenance. "*I found this diary in a couple of exercise books in the blue cupboards at Neauphle-*

le-Château" (3). Her explanation verifies that the memoir was written soon after the events it describes. The timeline is important here, as it establishes a temporal proximity between the events and her representation of them that contributes to what we might call the memoir's "truth-effect." Because so little time had elapsed between the war and her account, we are less likely to question her version of events. The point being made implicitly here is that her account has not been subject to what Sheringham describes as a process of "revision, retranscription, and realignment under the pressure of other experiences" (298).

However, in spite of Duras's authenticating gesture, many critics question the memoir's origins. According to Leslie Hill, "there is considerable uncertainty about the actual date of composition of the material collected in *La Douleur*" (124). The uncertainty expressed by Duras herself—"*I have no recollection of having written it*" (3); "*How could I have written this thing I still can't put a name to, and that appalls me when I reread it?*" (4)—is recuperated by Hill as both symptom and method: "the failure to remember the existence of the text at all, is no doubt best understood as a symptom—if not in fact a conscious symbol—of the necessary inadequacy of memory and the guilt associated with forgetting" (124). Here, the vagaries of memory are associated with both guilt and fear. Hill argues that for Duras, remembering the past "is a precarious undertaking," because "what has to be remembered cannot be adequately contained within the available boundaries" (124). At the same time, and in a move that supports Rothberg's assertion about the epistemological and pedagogical stakes of

traumatic realism, Hill states that "the diary owes its existence to the indestructible quality of writing as an act of witness" (124).

Marilyn Schuster offers a more measured, less recuperative reading of the memoir's origins. She describes the discovery of the notebooks as a "fortunate 'coincidence'" (130) that followed on the heels of a controversy over the French publication of Duras's most popular novel, *L'Amant*, in 1984. The controversy concerned a single passage in the novel where Duras draws a parallel between collaborators and communists. According to Schuster, the comparison was incendiary for two reasons. "To equate Nazi collaboration with membership in the Communist Party *and* to come to forgive or understand it was unacceptable to politically sensitive readers" (130, emphasis added). As if to silence her detractors, Duras made public the notebooks "that chronicle her involvement in the Resistance, her husband Robert Antelme's deportation to a German concentration camp, and his return to Paris in the spring of 1945" (Schuster 130).

All this is not to suggest that the memoir is a false record. However, the fortuitousness of the discovery does complicate the timeline Duras establishes (albeit tentatively) in her introduction to the first section of the memoir. Schuster does not discount Duras's claims completely, noting that the "intense immediacy of certain details of daily life and of Antelme's painful recovery suggest that she did find notes written shortly after the war and that she also kept newspaper clippings about the day-to-day effects leading to the liberation of Paris in August 1944 and to the fall of Berlin in the spring of 1945" (131). However, Schuster does trouble the overarching premise of a completed memoir written immediately

after the war: "Stylistically, however, the title piece resembles Duras's stark, discontinuous narratives of the 1980s more than her semirealistic fictions of the 1940s" (131).

My own sense of the memoir falls more in line with Schuster's account than Hill's. I am wary of Hill's hyperbolic claim that the diary is a testament to the "indestructible" qualities of writing as testimony. Her uncritical acceptance of Duras's strategies, as well as her belief in the redemptive power of the writing itself, seems to work against one of the most frequently noted features of Duras's work: the engagement with ethical concerns without any sort of concomitant proscriptive address. Julia Kristeva has said about Duras's texts that they "domesticate the malady of death, they fuse with it, are on the same level with it, without either distance or perspective. There is no purification in store [...] no improvement, no promise of a beyond" (227). In a magnificent study entitled *Duras, Writing, and the Ethical* (2000), Martin Crowley confirms Kristeva's position on the redemptory function of Duras's writing (that there is none), but argues that, while Duras "neither shows nor tells us how to lead the good life," the writing is itself a "sustained, uncomfortable and important encounter with ethical questions and dilemmas" (1). In direct contrast to Hill, Crowley argues that the "questions raised in the wake of historical trauma cannot be necessarily answered by writing, whose attempt to do justice to this trauma may always remain deficient" (151). While he is not interested in taking Duras to task over her ostensible discovery of the notebooks, neither does he convert her explanatory preface into a symptom or symbol. Instead, he claims that what the journal

presents "is less a mystical irruption or a sacred relic than the problem of the possibility of authenticity in the field of a remembered trauma" (176).

The War is broken down into three sections that total six separate pieces. Only the first of these, "The War," is actually attributed to the notebooks; however, Duras identifies sections I and II as "true" stories about her experiences during and after the war. The line between fact and fiction becomes increasingly blurred as one reads through the remaining texts in order. In the pieces that immediately follow the memoir proper (in the first two stories of section III), Duras provides two contradictory accounts of the "rough" justice exacted by members of the Resistance at the end of the war. In each of these short texts Duras is both herself, and not herself. As she explains in her preface: "*Thérèse is me. The person who tortures the informer is me. So also is the one who feels like making love to Ter, the member of the Militia. Me*" (115). The pseudonym presumably gives her some distance from the violence described in the stories, while the preface allows her to admit to her complicity.

Duras introduces the last two stories of section III with the line, "*This one is invented*" (160, 173). These final pieces, which she identifies as "literature," offer speculative accounts of two of the war's survivors. The first story concerns a well-dressed stranger that Duras suggests might also be Ter, the collaborator to whom Thérèse is attracted. The second is described as "*A passion for the little Jewish girl who was abandoned*" (173). More enigmatic than the autobiographical texts, these pieces, with their threats of duplicity and violence that we associate with stories collected by the Brothers Grimm, read like parables, or fairy tales.

A less than generous reading of *The War* might identify this composite structure, with its representative characters and its mix of genres, as a kind of post-war literary grab-bag. However, very few critics discuss the full text in any detail. While several critics have focused on the tension between fact and fiction—both within and across the six pieces—more attention has been paid to Duras's autobiographical account of the war and its immediate aftermath that takes place in the first two sections. While I'm tempted by the stories of Thérèse the torturer because of the ways in which Duras explores the tension between innocence and guilt (an exploration that would dovetail nicely with the work of both Christian Boltanski and Sharon Riis, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2), I am more interested in the ways in which Duras retraces her experience of the war topographically, and thereby inscribes—with her body—what Crowley would identify as the reciprocity "between war-time Paris and the concentration camps" (2000 179).

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed Georges Perec's experience of the street where he spent his early childhood *as read through* a series of belated traumatic encounters with this street initiated a quarter of a century after the war. Through his attention to the material details of the buildings, sidewalks, steps, and fences, Perec establishes an uncanny, doubled view of the street. It is part of an old neighbourhood, in what was once the Jewish Quarter of Paris, during the final stages of its destruction; at the same time it is a labyrinthine structure that (with)holds, at its elusive centre, the impossible memory of his mother's death at Auschwitz.

In "The War," Duras uses many of the same strategies as Perec—repetition, juxtaposition, abrupt shifts in perspective and syntax—to figure a similarly doubled Paris. Although she frequently makes recourse to pathos in ways that are antithetical to Perec's project, both texts produce a set of equivalences—linking the streets of Paris to the concentration camp—through an overlay of impressions and observations. However, this effect is recounted from very different perspectives, and to very different ends. The melancholic tenor of "The War" is one result of this difference. Where Perec's repetitions suggest change over time, Duras's read as if she's caught within a single moment that she cannot move beyond. Kristeva describes these static repetitions as reduplications. Where Perec's text marks differences through time as well as space by documenting the date and time of each of his visits to the Rue Vilin—Duras's reduces her repetitions to a single dimension: "Reduplication is a jammed repetition. While what is repeated is rippled out in time, reduplication lies outside of time. Its is a reverberation in space, a play of mirrors lacking perspective or duration" (Kristeva 246).

Like "The Rue Vilin," "The War" tells the story of the loss of a loved one from the perspective of a subject who exists *as if* on "the very edge of the world" (Crowley, 2000 9). However, unlike Perec, Duras experienced the war as an adult, and was therefore more aware of what was happening in Paris and in the rest of Europe. While her role within the Resistance made her vulnerable to persecution, she was not Jewish and did not have to wear a yellow star that would identify her, at first glance, as an "enemy" of the occupying forces. Although she was trapped

within the city's limits, she could walk more freely through its streets than Perec or, as we shall see later in this chapter, Sarah Kofman. What is ironic about these differences, is that her memoir is the most claustrophic of the three.

According to Martin Crowley "*La Douleur* offers an unflinching gaze on the appalling demands of war at its margins" (178). It is in this sense that Duras's memoir reflects the concerns of my own project: she traces the outlines of the Holocaust from outside—or from the margins—of that event. While we never see the inside of the camps through her eyes (her husband's rescue from Dachau is engineered by François Mitterand, and executed by Duras's lover, Dionys Mascolo and two other members of the Resistance), we are given glimpses into the camp experience through spontaneous images that overcome her as she walks through the streets of Paris. Early on in the section entitled "The War," she describes her physical and psychological state in terms that reflect the apathy Primo Levi attributes to the *muselmänner*—the walking dead—of the camps: "In the street I am like a sleepwalker. My hands are thrust deep into my pockets, my legs move forward" (7).

Given the demands Duras has faced as an active member of the Resistance, the lack of agency here is striking. It's as if she's reached the limit of her endurance in the very last days of the war. The images that come into her mind unbidden, of Robert L. (Robert Antelme) lying dead in a ditch somewhere in Germany, are spliced together with reports of the Allies' progress across this same terrain. I'm quoting the lengthy passage below in full, in order to demonstrate the ways in which this doubled narrative—of death and liberation—links the streets of Paris

to both the concentrationary universe of the camps and the destruction of Germany at the hands of the Allies:

> The Rhine has been crossed, everyone knew it would be. Remagen, that was the great day of the war. It was after Remagen that it started. In a ditch, face down, legs drawn up, arms outstretched, he's dying. Dead. Beyond the skeletons of Buchenwald, his. It's hot all over Europe. The advancing armies march past him. He's been dead for three weeks. Yes, that's what's happened. I'm certain of it. I walk faster. His mouth is half open. It's evening. He thought of me before he died. The pain is so great it can't breathe, it gasps for air. Pain needs room. There are far too many people on the streets; I wish I were on a great plain all alone. Just before he died he must have spoken my name. All along the roads of Germany there are men lying like him. Thousands, tens of thousands, and him. (7-8)

Later on in the same scene, she repeats what becomes an almost formulaic iteration of equivalences; however, in this next passage it is she who is thin, whose body reflects those skeletons of Buchenwald to whom she'd compared Robert L. in the previous excerpt: "The great event of the century. Nazi Germany is crushed. So is he, in the ditch. Everything is at an end. I can't stop walking. I'm thin, spare as stone. [...] Nothing in the world belongs to me now except the corpse in the ditch. It's a red evening. The end of the world" (8). The apocalyptic tenor of this passage seems especially odd, given the context of liberation. One explanation for Duras's traumatic fascination with her husband's death is the fact that he has neither returned nor contacted her since his capture and deportation.

No one knows if he's alive or dead. As a result, and in spite of the celebrations that are going on around her, she's simply forced to wait.

Elise Noetinger has argued that it is this process of waiting that reduces Duras to something that is less than an agent of the Resistance, and more like the body of a survivor of the camps: "Racked by anguish, obsessed with nightmares, the narrator's body is literally haunted by war" (66). Noetinger reads Duras's restless energy as evidence of the war being waged at the purely physical level of the single individual. According to this reading, the splicing or doubling of narratives noted above is not simply an effect of traumatic experience, but describes the only efforts available to Duras to effect her husband's rescue: "The body at war, fighting against war, is restless. It moves forward and backward endlessly, walks, sits down, gets up, always on the verge of exhaustion, collapsing, gathering any remains of resistance as if the life of the other depended on this very fight. If she can go through this ordeal, if she fights the wish to give up, he will come back" (Noetinger 65).

While walking seems to put her into a trance-like state that functions as a means of virtual or psychic transport to the camps, Duras exhibits other physical or somatic expressions of trauma connected to Robert's survival. One of the most recurrent motifs of equivalence between camp life and "civilian" life during the Occupation is the scarcity of food. In Holocaust literature—both testimony and fiction—bread is often figured as the only thing that stands between life and death. When Duras forces herself to eat, bread functions as the metonymic link that connects her life to Robert L.'s. However, this connection makes the act of

eating impossible: "We sit down to eat. But at once I want to throw up again. The bread is bread he hasn't eaten, the bread for lack of which he died" (10). While it is not in fact plausible that by eating this bread she is forcing her husband to starve, the illogic of this cause-and-effect relationship between her comfort and his death pushes her into a practice of self-denial. Paradoxically, this denial is experienced as life-affirming even as it is obsessively destructive: "I fall asleep beside him every night, in the black ditch, beside him as he lies dead" (10).

Later on in the text, the association between bread and life in the camps is made even more explicit, as is the connection between deported French Jews and her non-Jewish husband.

> It's a month since he might have sent us news. So why wouldn't he come with the Jews? It seems to me I've waited long enough. We're tired. There's to be another arrival of deportees from Buchenwald. There's a baker's shop open, maybe I should buy some bread, so as not to waste the coupons. It's criminal to waste coupons. There are some people who are not waiting for anything. There are some who've stopped waiting. (25)

Here Duras moves from what reads like resentment about her husband's failure to return to an indifferent reference to Jewish deportees, and then on to a baker's shop, bread, and finally to coupons that are evidence that she enjoys a certain amount of privilege even within the economic crisis of the immediate post-war period. That she ends this free association with a reference to crime confirms that she feels beaten down by responsibility she bears for Robert L.'s return. In another passage just a few pages later, she describes a restaurant that she can see

through the window of her apartment that is frequented by those with money. Once again, she establishes a relationship between food—a marker of privilege, as well as the emblem of an ambivalent survival—and criminal activity: "They've got a secret menu for those who can pay. It's not normal to wait like this. I'll never know anything. All I know is that he was hungry for months and didn't see another scrap of bread until he died, not even once. The condemned man's last wishes—his weren't granted" (26).

While Robert L. is the man condemned, the sentences read as an indictment being leveled against Duras herself. Though she doesn't eat the bread that he would be denied, she knows about the "secret menu" of the restaurant across the street from her apartment. The crime referred to in the passages cited above is the crime of continued survival in the face of the horror of post-war revelations. The guilt Duras expresses here could be read as the survivor's guilt for having made it through the war when so many others did not. In one sense, her husband is a loved one she fears she's lost; in another, he represents all of those who had been subjected to the atrocities of the Nazi camps. And in the face of this suffering, she can do nothing but wait.

At another point in the narrative, she stops washing. Walking home from her work for the Tracing Service at the centre where deportees are being processed upon their return to France, she is overcome by a vision of Robert L. lying dead in a ditch. However, as she moves further away from the centre, she experiences an uncharacteristic moment of optimism (through framed by a more fundamental exhaustion): "Perhaps he will come back after all. I don't know any more. I'm

very tired" (22). In an attempt to look forward to some kind of future, she reminds herself to bathe. "I'm very dirty. I've been spending part of the night at the center, too. I must make up my mind to take a bath when I get in, it must be a week since I stopped washing" (22).

Later on in this same scene, Duras recounts a comment made by her lover that attributes her lack of personal hygiene to something more than exhaustion or lack of time: "My colleagues in the Tracing Service think I'm crazy, D. says, 'No one has the right to destroy himself like that, ever.' He often tells me 'You're sick. You're a madwoman. Look at yourself—you look like nothing on earth'" (22). Unable to comprehend the meaning of D.'s comments, she feels estranged from everyone. Defending her acts of self-destruction through an internal dialogue, she argues: "Why should I husband my strength? There's nothing for me to fight for. No one can know my struggle against the black ditch. Sometimes the vision gets the upper hand and I cry out or leave the house and walk through the streets of Paris" (23). The filth on her body allows Duras to fold herself into the vision she has of Robert L.'s body lying face down in a ditch. The lines between life and death are no longer clear here. Neither, according to Noetinger, are the lines between death and sex.

One of the more interesting connections Noetinger establishes is the relationship between sexuality, obscenity and the representation of the war. By focusing on what she defines as Duras's "manipulation of inappropriate structures of representation" she argues that in the memoir, Duras "sketches an obscenity that is the only way of short-circuiting meaning *in the same way that war does*"

(68). Because Duras uses a vocabulary and syntax that is not that far removed from the sensual world of a novel like *The Lover*, there is something both compelling and repulsive about "The War." In a certain sense, it reflects the impossible memory at the heart of Perec's narrative. However, because it foregoes his constraint, it fails. As Noetinger notes, "Duras cannot represent war, she cannot write the pain created by war because she seems aware of the fact that her writing devices—somatization of writing, body fall, screaming experienced as a break with words and thought, separation, love and death discourse—hit their limits in the context of war" (72).

Where Noetinger's account of Duras's crisis fails is in her insistence that this battle, waged as a form of distressed waiting, is a particularly "feminine" response to war: "The space of war for Duras is not that of battle, mud, starvation, or a detailed struggle for life in a concentration camp. For the waiting women, the space of war is above all haunted by imaginary visions and uncanny circumstances" (69). While I do agree that a distinction must be made between a lived and an imagined experience of the camps (a distinction that Duras herself preserves—even as she pushes at its limits), I would argue against Noetinger's universalizing claims about "women" by pointing out that this war was unique in that the majority of those "missing in action" were civilians. In other words, the line Noetinger draws between the waiting women and the fighting men does not accurately represent the specifics of the war to which Duras is forced to respond.

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In the second section of *The War*, entitled "Monsieur X, Here Called Pierre Rabier," Duras moves backwards in time and returns to a series of encounters that mark the beginning of her disintegration. Through this account of her wartime experiences, Duras contradicts Noetinger's analysis of her behaviour as a gendered and therefore passive response to the war. Her behaviour is, by necessity, overdetermined by gender. However, in contrast to the depiction of melancholy in "The War," the Duras in this second section of the text is active as well as reflective. What I want to determine is whether this is a mark of its success or its failure as a representation of historical trauma.

Pierre Rabier is the pseudonym Duras gives the Gestapo agent who arrests her husband. Their first encounter takes place at the prison in Fresnes, where she is trying to secure a parcel permit that would allow her to bring food into the camp for Robert L. Rabier attaches himself to Duras from this first meeting. Although he makes a nominal attempt to seduce her, it's clear that he values her as an object, something that would secure his status in several ways. Because she's an attractive woman, an intellectual, and a member of the Resistance she has three things to offer him: sex, symbolic capital, and information that could lead to further arrests. The two final items on the list are also the most important. Through a series of promises, rewards, and threats, he soon controls her life. Duras realizes she is caught almost immediately. A few pages into the memoir she repeats a version of this realization three times: "I see Rabier that evening" (79); "From then on Rabier phones me, at first every other day, then every day" (79). Finally she explains, "I see Rabier every day" (79).

In many ways this account follows the model set out in section I, but it develops in the reverse order. As the narrative opens, we are given a glimpse of Duras before the process of her disintegration begins; it is through her encounters with Rabier that she begins to unravel. While still in the early stages of the relationship, Duras takes her leave from Rabier after a particularly difficult evening (as a joke, he threatens her with arrest, and then laughs at her fear). Her subsequent passage through the streets of Paris recalls the walking scenes of section I: "Suddenly freedom is bitter. I've just come to know the total loss of hope and the emptiness that follows; you don't remember, it creates no memory. I think I feel a slight regret at having failed to die while still living. But I go on walking, I move from the street to the sidewalk, then back into the street. I walk, my feet walk" (88-9)

Although she tries "several times to break with" Rabier (79), neither he, nor her colleagues in the Resistance, allow her to end the relationship. Trapped between these opposing forces she begins to see herself as a prisoner, and a deportee: "Again I'm almost totally isolated. The orders are that no one is to come to my place or to recognize me on any account. Of course I drop all other duties. I get very thin, until I weigh the same as a deportee" (80). The effects of doubling or equivalence here are contradictory. There is an implicit analogy being drawn between Rabier the Gestapo agent, and those making the decisions from within the Resistance: "François Morland [a pseudonym for François Mitterand], has issued strict orders: I'm to maintain this contact, the only one that still connects us to our comrades who've been arrested. And if I stopped keeping my appointments

with Rabier, he'd start to suspect me" (79). Neither a leader of the Resistance nor a Gestapo agent, Duras is trapped. However, when she describes the two phases of her relationship with Rabier, this configuration shifts again. Her connection to Rabier gives her status within the Resistance movement, and the power to make certain decisions. One of these decisions is whether to sentence him to death:

> The first starts when I meet him in a corridor in the rue des Saussaies and ends with my letter to François Morland. It's a period of fear—daily, awful, overwhelming fear.
>
> The second phase lasts from the letter to François Morland up to Rabier's arrest. It's a period full of the same fear, it's true, but of a fear that sometimes turns into relish at having settled that he must die. At having defeated him on his own ground: death. (81)

Here, Rabier functions as a kind of mirror-image for Duras herself. In the first phase of the relationship he asserts complete control over her; in the second, it is she who controls him. As if in response to this reversal Rabier goes through an elaborate ritual that connects his power as a Gestapo agent to sex, through the accoutrements of torture. Having forced Duras to meet him at Café Flore, a fashionable restaurant that was frequented by existentialists before the war, he shows her the contents of his briefcase:

> What he does at Café Flore he will never do again. He puts his briefcase on the table. He opens it. He takes out a revolver. He does all this without a word of explanation. Then from between his leather belt and his trouser pocket he produces a watch chain that looks as if it's made of gold. He

says to me, "Look, it's the chain for the handcuffs—it's gold. The key is gold too." (90)

This scene occurs near the end of the narrative. The disintegration that began after her first encounter with Rabier goes into a kind of remission (we know it returns, because we have witnessed her despair in the first section of the text). Having survived the trial of their relationship through to the end, she is elated by both the risk and her success: "I suddenly remember something I've been told about fear. That amid a hail of machine gun fire you notice the existence of your skin. A sixth sense emerges. [...] Suddenly I'm full of the sort of ease and well-being you feel when you dive into the sea in summer. Everything seems possible" (109).

However, after setting Rabier up for his arrest, and in spite of the pleasure she feels in beating him at his own game, Duras tries to save him. At his trial she testifies twice: "I'd forgotten before to mention the little Jewish child that he spared. I asked to be heard again. I said I'd forgotten to say he had saved a Jewish family, and told the story of the child's drawing. I also said that I'd heard since then that he had saved two Jewish women, whom he smuggled into unoccupied France" (111). It's as if, with this single action, Duras is trying to undo any equivalence between Rabier and herself. In the process of beating him, she's assumed a position of mastery over him, a position she'd previously despised. By giving evidence twice, she testifies to a split within herself: she is both like and unlike her jailer. The only evidence we are privy to is the second statement quoted above; in the end, it is not enough to save him.

I am not critical of Duras's decision to speak a second time. What I do want to ask, however, is why she includes this anecdote in her narrative. In her preface to the "Monsieur X, Here Called Pierre Rabier," it's as if she's anticipated my response: "*why publish now something that is merely anecdotal*?" (71). Through an interesting sleight of hand, her answer absolves her of responsibility, as the decision was made for her by someone else: "*I showed it to my friends Hervé Lemasson and Yann Andréa. They decided it ought to be published because of the descriptions of Rabier, and of his illusion that a person may exist solely as a dispenser of reward and punishment. An illusion that usually takes the place of ethics, philosophy, and morality—and not only in the police*" (72).

By defending Rabier at his trial, Duras brings the text full circle. Despite Martin Crowley's assertion that she addresses ethical concerns without being an ethical writer, the message of this text is both redemptory and self-serving. Through the act of testifying to her second court appearance, Duras effectively fuses the difference between *memoire* and *personne*. Through her disavowal of the pleasure she takes in having power over Rabier, she makes a play for full presence. In the end, it is this play—rather than the provenance of the notebooks—that makes me doubt her word.

III. Kofman's *Memoires*

> Art and laughter, when they go together, do not run counter to suffering, they do not ransom or redeem it, but live off it; as for salvation, redemption and resurrection, the absence of any illusion shines like a ray of living light through all of Sarah's life and work.
>
> Jacques Derrida, "....."

In the third section of this chapter I return, via Derrida, to the vexed relationship between laughter and suffering. The untitled essay on Kofman from which the epigraph is taken was written in response to her death. While her suicide prompted a flurry of critical responses to her work, I have been most moved—and convinced—by those who have written about her life in terms that are not framed by an almost voyeuristic investment in this work as read through the dramatic event of her death. The relationship between laughter and suffering Derrida establishes here is doubly fitting, in that it also connects Kofman to the writer with which I opened this chapter. Like Perec, Kofman went through the traumatic experience of the Occupation while she was still a child, and survived to write not only of these experiences, but as a form of radical affirmation even in the face of a traumatic legacy. Both writers were wildly prolific. Although Perec's puzzles, word games, and lipograms are more obviously playful than Kofman's critical and philosophical texts (he wrote his 1968 novel, *La Disparition*, without using the letter 'e,' which is almost impossible in French), both writers pushed at the limits of genre, and therefore at the limits of thought and representation, for the whole of their writing lives.

In this last section of the chapter I want to trace Kofman's fractured and historically contingent identities as these are negotiated within and through her autobiographical work. In a sense, I want to show how, for Kofman, the relationship between "the text" and "the world" is mutually constitutive. The example that Derrida provides of the interconnectedness of texts and bodies supports me in this desire; it also supports my inclusion of her work here, in a project devoted to experimental representations of the Holocaust:

> Art and laughter were also for her, no doubt, readings of art and laughter, but these readings were also operations, experiences or experiments, journeys. These readings [*lectures*] were *lessons* in the magisterial sense of an exemplary lecturing or teaching (and Sarah was a great professor, as so many students throughout the world can testify); they were lessons of the lesson in the sense of an exemplary teaching, lessons in the course of which, life never being interrupted, the teacher experiments: she unveils in the act, through experimentation and performance, giving the example of what she says through what she does, giving of her person, as we say, with nothing held back, throwing herself headlong, body and soul. (173-74)

What Derrida describes here is an exemplary pedagogical performance that exceeds the limitations of the recuperative lesson or the coherent story. Like both Perec and Duras, Kofman presents us with the inscription of a complex legacy through a series of texts that are disparate, sometimes fragmented, always passionate and erudite. It is our task to read these texts with care, while at the

same time modeling ourselves on Kofman's example by giving ourselves over to the task headlong, body and soul.

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Sarah Kofman committed suicide on October 15, 1994. In that same year her memoir, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, was published in France. As an account of her childhood in Paris during the Occupation, the memoir opens with the story of her father being arrested by the Gestapo and deported to Auschwitz. The fact that she committed suicide so soon after the publication of this first sustained attempt to deal explicitly with her own experience of the Holocaust, has been interpreted as an effect of dealing with—rather than repressing or sublimating—the trauma of that war as it is figured by the death of her father. As an advocate of this type of scholarship, Steve Edwin argues that "Kofman's desolation within the social underscores the limits and dangers of writing and publishing testimony to trauma in a world in which social responsibility for trauma and oppression has been disastrously and repeatedly denied" (137). I share Edwin's despair at the wall of indifference and denial that is encountered by those who attempt to bear witness to traumatic experience. However, I'm troubled by his suggestion that the writing of the memoir led to Kofman's death: "Sarah Kofman's quest for healing ended in her suicide" (133). While he admits that his thesis is pure speculation, he seems to feel little reluctance about rewriting Kofman's memoir as a kind of protracted suicide note: "Kofman's self-destruction, I am speculating, may have resulted from a crisis produced in her very estrangement and displacement from that community-in-the-making as she testified to her traumatic experience. Her death

might be interpreted as the symptom of the disastrous failure of social support" (133).

One of the problems with a thesis like this is that it appropriates the traumatic experience of another person in order to have this experience support an already predetermined set of arguments. In Edwin's case, he wants to privilege oral testimony (where the authentic exchange between a speaker and his or her auditor is ostensibly more social, more supportive, more amenable to the building of communities) over written testimonies such as Kofman's. Perhaps because my disciplinary interests are literature and visual art, rather than the Social Sciences, I am less tempted to insist on a cause-and-effect relationship between the writing of trauma and suicide.

Therefore, while it seems necessary to acknowledge Kofman's death in a chapter dealing with the relationship between autobiographical inscription and identity, I do not speculate about or invent reasons for Kofman's suicide. On the most basic level, I feel such speculation betrays a lack of respect. I also believe that it does not serve the work itself in a productive way. What I focus on, instead, is the relationship between writing and identity, and the ways in which social imposition of fixed identities manifests itself in unexpected ways within the bodies and minds of those subject to this imposition.

At the time of her death, Sarah Kofman had written over twenty-five books. The breadth of her writing is exceptional. According to the editors of a recent collection of critical responses to her work, she left behind books "on Nietzsche, Freud, and Derrida; on Plato, Rousseau, Comte, and Kant; on Diderot,

Shakespeare, Nerval, Wilde and Hoffman; on Blanchot; and on her experience of the German occupation of France, as well as autobiographical pieces" (Deutscher and Oliver 1). A voracious reader and a prolific writer, she was also, in a very specific way, out of time. Unlike her contemporaries Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, she did not feel compelled to write *in the feminine*. About her profound identification with Nietzsche and Freud, the masculine and masterful subjects to whom she had devoted much of her intellectual life, she remained unapologetic. After giving a seminar at the School for Critical Theory in Cardiff during the Spring of 1994, she was asked by a member of the audience why she had spent her career writing about the work of these two men. To this loaded question she responded simply: "Je suis Nietzsche; je suis Freud."[5]

In a recent essay on Kofman and Nietzsche, Penelope Deutscher offers an explanation for Kofman's ironic rejoinder. Paraphrasing Kofman's claim that "we are all staging our memoires" (37), Deutscher outlines Kofman's conception of the relationship between reading and identity, between life and work as follows: "gestures of identification are material and embodied. [...] They are not just expressions of the philosopher's materiality, but also a contribution to that materiality. Kofman suggests one could interrogate one's will to renegotiate these memoires in our philosophical work, reconceiving this as life-work" (37). In 1987, Kofman's first book-length work containing autobiographical references appeared in France. One way of reading this text is as an example of just this sort of renegotiation.

Smothered Words (originally published in French as *Paroles suffoquées*) is a fragmented and philosophically complex meditation on the relationship between the Holocaust, identity, and community. The dedication that opens the text marks the beginning of the process of renegotiation cited by Deutscher above:

In memory of my father,

who died in Auschwitz

For Robert Antelme

In homage to Maurice Blanchot.

Like Duras's *The War*, *Smothered Words* can be broken into roughly three sections. After a brief introduction to each of the men included in her dedication, Kofman addresses the facts of her father's deportation, and his death at Auschwitz. She states his death as a fact, but follows this statement with a series of questions that, while specific to *Smothered Words*, are also central to her work as a whole: "Because he was a Jew, my father died in Auschwitz: How can it not be said? And how can it be said? How can one speak of that before which all possibility of speech ceases?" (9). Once she identifies his death as that which marks for her a most personal limit, "this event, my absolute, which communicates the absolute of history" (9-10), the tone with which she addresses the facts of the event change. In this shift from an admission of personal investment to the recitation of fact, Kofman demonstrates a stylistic affinity with Georges Perec:

> My father: Berek Kofman, born on October 10, 1900, in Sobin (Poland), taken to Drancy on July 16, 1942. Was in convoy no. 12, dated July 29,

> 1942, a convoy comprising 1,000 deportees, 270 men and 730 women (aged 36 to 54): 270 men registered 54,153 to 54,422; 514 women selected for work, registered 13,320 to 13,833; 216 other women gassed immediately. (10)

The information itself is taken from the Serge Klarsfeld Memorial. Like John Sturrock's appraisal of Perec's "The Rue Vilin," Sarah Kofman recognizes the power of a document to the destruction that expresses the facts of the event without pathos: "with its endless column of names, its lack of pathos, its sobriety, the 'neutrality' of its information, this sublime memorial takes your breath away" (10).

In the pages that follow this passage, Kofman has reproduced the convoy list from the Memorial that bears her father's name. Like the "neutral" details of Perec's old neighbourhood, the material fact of this list—complete with a name we've now been taught to recognize—is one of the most shocking features of the entire text. The tension between personal loss and historical trauma, communicated in words but outside of narrative, sets the stage for Kofman's reading of texts by Blanchot and Antelme that juxtaposes autobiography, philosophy and testimony without remaining faithful to anything beyond this personal and historical absolute. However, and in spite of what I perceive as a personal inscription within this text, Kofman, when asked about the references to her father's deportation, maintained that they were never meant to draw attention to her own experience of the Holocaust, insisting "both in the text and when

commenting on it that her father's death is only of public interest in the context of the broader history of the Shoah" (Dobie, 1998; xii).

In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, Kofman's readers are not asked to negotiate the complex intertextuality of *Smothered Words*. One could argue that, in the memoir proper, content is more important than form. The details of her family's history are no longer *only* of public interest in the context of the broader history of the Shoah. They are more simply personal. An account of her life spent in hiding during the years of the Nazi Occupation, the narrative is chronological and, according to its translator Ann Smock, lacks style: "It is simple, but it does not have a simple style or any style. You would not say of it 'well written' or 'a good story.' Fortunately, it exists and is plainly legible" (xi).

Although it took more than ten years for *Smothered Words* to be translated into English, the more accessible *Rue Orderner, rue Labat* was made available to English-speaking audiences less than two years after its original publication in France. Madeleine Dobie, the translator of *Smothered Words*, has suggested that the disparity in translation dates can be attributed to the "unusual, opaque structure" of the earlier text, which Dobie reads as a "textual staging of a difficult encounter between the contrasting imperatives of autobiography, history and writing" (1997 321). Other critics have pointed to the structural disparity between these texts as emblematic of a shift in Kofman's writing and thinking towards the end of her life. Vivian Liska describes *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* as "a straightforward—linear, unified and coherent—autobiographical account of her childhood years" (92). She goes on to suggest that, in "its content as well as in the

implications of its narrative form it reveals striking discrepancies between Kofman's theoretical writings and the autobiographical turn of her own last words" (92).

Caroline Sheaffer-Jones offers a double reading of the memoir's structure. According to her first reading, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* is a teleological narrative outlining the personal development of Kofman's consciousness as she passes through traumatic experience into adulthood. The text therefore "presents a totality: the unified work in which the creator is fully realized" (102). Sheaffer-Jones's second reading is not simply an alternative to the first, but is meant to undermine the possibility of a neat teleology. According to this second reading, "there is no possibility of totalization" because, while the past exists within the present, the present and the past "do not join up"; the losses represented both within the narrative, and in the gaps within the narrative, are absolute (102). In this way, the memoir complies with Kofman's own injunction in *Smothered Words*. In the first version of this injunction, Kofman attests to the value of testimony only if it is offered without power: "To speak: it is necessary—*without (the) power:* without allowing language, too powerful, sovereign, to master the most aporetic situation, absolute powerlessness and very distress, to enclose it in the clarity and happiness of daylight" (10). In the second, she speaks more specifically about the manufacture of meaning out of atrocity: "About Auschwitz and after Auschwitz no story is possible, if by a story one means: to tell a story of events which makes sense" (14).

My own reading of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* is an attempt to preserve the complications suggested by Sheaffer-Jones's second description of the memoir. Although a narrative exists, it is curiously circular, lacking an obvious climax and foregoing all resolution. As Smock states in her introduction, although there is a certain clarity to the writing, the text is paradoxically "bathed in a lucidity unclouded by insight. No sense of understanding or ultimate resolution—no relief, no consolation whatsoever—mars it. It is clear" (xii).

The basic outline of the story is as follows: On July 16, 1942, Rabbi Berek Kofman gives himself up to the Gestapo in an attempt to save his family. This is the last time they see him; he is killed in Auschwitz one year later. In order to save her six children, Sarah's mother gives them Christian names and places them in the custody of strangers for the duration of the war. She is lucky with all of these placements but one. In spite of the risks taken by those who agree to shelter her, little Sarah refuses to cooperate. She cries for her mother, refuses to be left alone and, more dangerously, refuses to break with religious laws by eating food she recognizes as not kosher. When forced to eat, she responds (or revolts) by vomiting. In desperation, her mother decides to leave her at a shelter for Jewish children where she "could continue to eat kosher" (30). At this point it becomes clear that it isn't simply the threat of disobeying religious laws that makes her vomit, it's her fear of being abandoned by the one parent she has left. "We went to the Rue Larmarck. I had the hiccups and vomited when we got there. My mother attended to the administrative formalities and left. In the stairway she heard me weeping, crying wailing. She turned around and came back, and this

time I left with her" (30). The same night the shelter is raided and all the children who have been staying there are deported. At this point Sarah's mother agrees to stay with her for the duration of the war.

After being warned by a police officer that they are about to be arrested, Sarah and her mother go into hiding with a woman who'd lived on their street a few years before. The "lady on Rue Labat" had always liked the "beautiful little blond" Kofman children (31). Sarah's mother decides, on the basis of this rather questionable praise, to ask her to hide them. Kofman's description of their passage through the streets of Paris, from the Rue Ordener to the Rue Labat, mirrors the formal elements of Perec's description of Belleville, but contains a more obvious expression of the fear and nausea that accompanies Duras on her journeys through the city: "One Métro stop separates the Rue Ordener from the Rue Labat. Between the two, Rue Marcadet; it seemed endless to me, I vomited the whole way" (31).

Under the tutelage of this woman whom she is instructed to call Mémé, Sarah undergoes a carefully engineered process of conversion through which she is transformed into the spitting image of a Catholic schoolgirl. The first step is a change of name: "she christened me Suzanne because that was the saint's name closest to hers" (39). The next step comes as something of a surprise. Because little Sarah had consistently refused to eat food that wasn't kosher, her mother had risked her own life to go out and buy food to prepare for her daughter. "But very soon Mémé declared that the food of my childhood was unhealthy; I was pale, 'lymphatic,' I must change my diet. From then on it was she who would take care

of me" (40). Soon after Sarah is agreeing to eat "raw horsemeat in broth" as well as pork and "food cooked in lard" (42).

In "Bodily Detours: Sarah Kofman's Narratives of Childhood Trauma" (2002), Kathryn Robson reads this change in diet as a practice that marks a conversion with the power to change little Sarah from the inside out. However, while her adjustment to the new diet figures an encounter between the self (the observant Jewish Sarah) and an other (the kind though unabashedly anti-Semitic Mémé), it is also signals an impossible rejection of her family, her past, as well as her heritage: "Eating simultaneously marks a difference between what is inside the body and what is outside and breaks down that distinction; it points to a distinction between self and other even as it entails the bringing of the other into the self" (610). Once she's distanced herself from her real mother, her issues about food, as well as her fear of being abandoned, are all uncannily resolved.

When the war ends, Mémé sues for custody of Sarah, and wins. Sarah's mother gets Sarah back by having her abducted. In terms of the storyline, this portion of Kofman's life story reads like a German fairytale used to warn children of the seductiveness and potential violence of strangers. However, the story being told about identity is not cautionary in any kind of straightforward way; neither is it make-believe. The conversion Sarah undergoes in the custody of Mémé is, in fact, only a continuation of a process begun at the very moment the Kofman family is torn apart. The gentle ruthlessness of the seduction simply foregrounds, and provides an agent for, the process of Sarah's assimilation.

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Kofman opens *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* in the present tense, with a haunting paragraph about the only souvenir she has of her father. The object is a pen which she keeps on her desk, in spite of the fact that it no longer works.

> Of him all I have left is the fountain pen. I took it one day from my mother's purse, where she kept it along with some other souvenirs of my father. It is a kind of pen no longer made, the kind you have to fill with ink. I used it all through school. It 'failed' me before I could bring myself to give it up. I still have it, patched with Scotch tape; it is right in front of me on my desk and makes me write, write.
>
> Maybe all my books have been the detours required to bring me to write about 'that.' (3)

It is as if her father, representing paternal and Judaic law, is exhorting her—from the grave—to write about an experience that was both traumatic and formative. Moreover, the unspoken command is expressed with real urgency through the repetition of the words "write, write." This injunction is both familiar and foreign. Writing, in the broadest sense of the term, was the force that drove Kofman for most of her life; writing also comprises the detours Kofman follows to the present moment of the memoir's introduction. To make the decision, finally, to write about 'that,' pushed her in a direction she had, for the most part, resisted. In an elegy written shortly after her death, colleague and close friend Jean-Luc Nancy remembers Sarah Kofman as someone who wrote to live, and who lived to write:

> For Sarah, writing was what it should be, or perhaps what it is for anyone when it is not considered, not in its particular qualities of style or voice,

> but above all in its bare gesture, in its delineation, its tracing, or (as she used to say) its scratching, not to say its scribble. In other words, before being the inscription and transmission of a thought, it was an attestation of existence. (viii)

As the narrative of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* unfolds, we are introduced to a child who is made familiar to us, and to herself, through the written texts she encounters and consumes. When her father is waiting to be arrested she watches, as if for signs: "I watched his every gesture, fascinated. The memory of the sacrifice of Isaac (whose depiction in an illustrated Bible, my Hebrew book from early childhood, had often worried me) fluttered through my mind" (5). The traumatic event is compared to a story learned in early childhood. More importantly, the story is remembered as a text, an illustrated book held within the mind of a child in the midst of crisis. At the end of this section, Kofman remembers this event together with an early encounter with Greek tragedy: "When I first encountered in Greek tragedy the lament 'ô popoï, popoï, popoï' I couldn't keep myself from thinking of that scene from my childhood where six children, their father gone, could only sob breathlessly, knowing they would never see him again, 'oh papa, papa, papa'" (7).

In the space of three pages, Kofman moves from a Hebraic textual encounter, to a Hellenic one. The central trauma of the narrative, the loss of the father, is thus enclosed within apposite religious and literary allusions. The trajectory of the entire text is contained within these pages, as Kofman maps out an identity based on incommensurable allegiances, overdetermined signs, and irreconcilable losses.

To quote Vivian Liska: "*Rue Ordener, rue Labat* retraces how she turned away from her mother, her past, her father's memory and her Judaism to become what she was to be until the end of her life: a secular Jew" (98). In "Conversion and Oral Assimilation in Sarah Kofman" (2001), Nicole Fermon links the title of the memoir—with its two very different sites—to this experience of conversion: "The title of this narrative, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* is telling; it is about the traffic between two houses, two worlds. Kofman's story is the articulation of a familiar but always painful traverse between cultures and religions" (162-63). However, Fermon's reading is less forgiving than Liska's. She concludes this passage by stating that the memoir is "about reneging alliances for fun, for profit, for life" (163).

Having made the series of detours—texts she's read, lectures she's taught and books she's published in her role as critic and philosopher—Kofman returns, in her last words, to the destruction of a world within which she was the loved and protected second-youngest child within an Orthodox Jewish family. The scene of her father's arrest is followed by less extreme yet equally demeaning trials. She is forced to wear a yellow star sewn into the fabric of her coat. Her memory of this indignity recalls Sartre's own analysis of the affect of this marking in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946). "We have been indignant, and rightly, over the obscene 'yellow star' that the German government forced upon the Jews. What seemed intolerable about this was that it called attention to the Jew, that it obliged him to feel himself perpetually Jewish in the eyes of others" (76). What outrages Sartre most is the

fact that the star-as-obscenity forces the Jews in France to feel themselves "becoming objects" (77).

In a section of Kofman's text named after her favourite elementary-school teacher, she writes: "It was no longer just by our noses or circumcised genitals that we Yids could be recognized. 'Starred' as we were, and packed into the last cars of the Métro in third class, we were becoming easier to easier to round up" (17). In this same section, Sarah remembers being called Dirty Yid in the playground at recess. In contrast to the joy and fascination Sarah had experienced in the Orthodox embrace of her family, she is identified as a Jew by antagonistic forces from outside the traditions with which she's familiar; the experience is shattering.

And yet the destruction that results from these lethal stereotypes paradoxically provides Kofman with an opportunity for reconstruction. Once the war is over, she is able to return to a life outside of Mémé's apartment. Her eventual reunion with her mother is experienced as a relief. She resumes her studies and even, for a short time, returns to stay with Mémé. Although they grow apart, they remain in contact almost until the older woman's death. The bookish Kofman finds herself at home once again in school and in books. When she writes about her world after the war, she offers a portrait of a smart and playful girl with many friends, who is successful in almost everything she tries. The portrait, while perhaps idealized, reflects the adult Sarah, the philosopher and teacher that Derrida describes in the passages with which I opened this discussion: "I was a very serious worker, but I also loved to joke. At the end of class I'd sometimes ask riddles such as, 'What is

bliss for a mathematician? Give up? Eating square roots at Pythagoras's table.' And the whole class would burst out laughing" (81).

Near the end of the memoir Kofman allegorizes her experience of the contest between her mother and Mémé with the following story: "For the cover of my first book, *The Childhood of Art*, I chose a Leonardo da Vinci, the famous London cartoon of the *Madonna and Child with St. Anne*. Two women, the Virgin and St. Anne, each with the same 'blissful smile,' bend side by side over the infant, Jesus, who is playing with Saint John the Baptist" (63). The personal significance of this depiction of two mothers, interpreted by Freud as a representation of da Vinci's own experience of being cared for by first his mother and then his father's second wife, is discussed with an almost obsessive fascination by critics writing about *Rue Ordener*. Most often, the allegiance Sarah shows Mémé is interpreted as a rejection of everything that is authentic about herself. While rejection plays an undeniable role in the process of Kofman's transformation, the return signaled at the opening of the text—with its reference to detours—suggests that this rejection and her subsequent assimilation into mainstream French culture had always already failed. There is no comment made, beyond the introductory injunction to "write, write" and the reference to *The Childhood of Art*, about the work of writing that sustained Kofman throughout her life. However, the range of her scholarship as well as the rigour and intensity with which she approached her work suggest that her identity, though contested, was in many ways strengthened by the trials she had faced.

Refusing to identify "simply" as a Jew, Kofman rejected any conception of community that did not leave room for otherness. According to Madeleine Dobie, her "understanding of the singularity of existence is grounded, not in the concept of self-identity, but in one of alterity" (1997, 334). Sarah Kofman was forced by historical circumstance to make something of the fractured and contingent selves that emerged out of the disaster. That she managed to do so with such integrity should push us beyond the limited scope of an identity politics that entices subjects to privilege one identity over another, or one text over many. In contrast to Duras, Kofman does not, in the end, lay claim to full presence from a fixed moral or ethical horizon. In this sense, her negotiation of identity has more in common with the indeterminacy figured by Perec in his encounter with the Rue Vilin. Penelope Deutscher describes Kofman's position on the relationship between *memoire* and *personne* in a way that does justice to these choices:

> Kofman's claim is that we are all staging our memoires (not manifesting them, but constituting them and reconstituting them), just as she was herself in relation to those and other figures, in our readings and our actions as philosophers, educators, poets, wives, daughters and Heloises, in our acts of identification, adoption, recuperation, rejection, affiliation, aggression, competition, of duty and disavowal, of raising high and bringing low. Her reminder is that these gestures of identification are material and embodied. (37)

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In his memoir entitled *The Human Race* (1947), an account of his incarceration at Gandersheim and Dachau, Robert Antelme opens with a foreword that carries within in it the Derridean injunction to "*reaffirm by choosing*" with which I opened this chapter.

> This disproportion between the experience we had lived through and the account we were able to give of it would only be confirmed subsequently. We were indeed dealing then with one of those realities which cause one to say that they defy imagining. It became clear henceforth that only through a sifting, that is only through that self-same imagining could there be any attempting to tell something about it. (3-4)

Near the end of the memoir he demonstrates the force of the imaginable by providing a definition of its opposite: "*Unimaginable*: a word that doesn't divide, doesn't restrict. The most convenient word. When you walk around with this word as your shield, this word for emptiness, your step becomes better assured, more resolute, your conscience pulls itself together" (289-290). Writing against those who would resist or repress accounts of survival as *unimaginable*, Antelme confronts us with an experience that threatens us, that has the potential to make us vulnerable, uncertain, irresolute. In this sense, his memoir reflects the concerns of the writers I've brought together in this chapter. Perec, Duras, and Kofman have accepted the challenge to reaffirm by choosing. Through the process of memory work that is also a form of imagining, they tell us about their experience at the periphery between our own world and Antelme's. In the end, I am more convinced by Perec and Kofman than I am by Duras. However, when read

together, their memoirs offer us a tentative or partial glimpse of Adorno's "it should be otherwise" within the traumatic context of that which was.

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[1] Perec, Duras and Kofman had no direct experience of the camps. I will argue that for each writer, however, his or her relationship to the city of Paris is experienced as incarceration; although it does not take place within the camps, it does take place within the concentrationary universe that is their shared legacy.

[2] All biographical information about Perec is taken from David Bellos's monumental biography, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*. London: Harvill, 1993.

[3] There is an episode recounted in Bellos's biography that corroborates the connection I'm making here. Before his departure for Grenoble, Perec attended elementary school in Paris. The memories he has of this time are happy, in spite of the difficulties caused by the Occupation. The one unhappy memory is "of being unfairly punished for causing a little girl to fall down the stairs" (56). In his autobiography, *W, or the Memory of Childhood*, Perec tells of how he was punished for this imagined crime by having his "little merit badge" removed from his jacket. According to Bellos, Perec was haunted by the injustice of this act. However, Bellos also suggests an alternative reading of the scene: "as a speculation about a memory so painful as to have been repressed, Perec's [account] engages the reader's trust and sentiment. But Perec's memory of the medal torn off cannot conceal a memory of the yellow star that the Nazis forced Jews in occupied Europe to wear" (56).

[4] Because I do not have access to the font used in the English translation of Perec's text, I have to resort to description. The letters indicating the SS of the high-tension symbol are jagged and slanted, evoking the Nazi insignia in ways that go beyond the letters themselves.

[5] Thanks to Peter Buse of Salford University for relaying this exchange.

In/Conclusion

The Topography of the Trace

> The house is past. The bombings of European cities, as well as the labour and concentration camps, merely proceed as executors, with what the immanent development of technology had long decided was to be the fate of houses. They are now good only to be thrown away like old food cans.
>
> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

> Buildings matter. So do statues, ruins, and even stretches of vacant land. Buildings provide shelter for human activities, but it is the activities, not the shelter, that make structures and spaces important to human beings trying to define their place on earth.
>
> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*

There is an obvious tension between my two epigraphs. The passage from Adorno's *Minima Moralia* was written while he was still living in exile in 1944, and betrays a sense of hopelessness about the future after Auschwitz. The excerpt from Ladd's history of Berlin, published in 1997, lacks the bitterness of Adorno's aphorism. Separated by over half a century, these two thinkers understand the devastation as if from opposite sides of an abyss. Where Adorno sees, in the ruins of Europe, a future marked by despair and homelessness, Ladd views the city of Berlin as a vast archive, a material expression of the city's history and memory: "Memories cleave to the physical settings of events. That is why buildings and spaces have so many stories to tell. They give form to a city's identity and history" (Ladd 1). And where Adorno suffered losses that would haunt him for the

rest of his life, Ladd, born thirteen years after the war, responds to the devastation with less immediacy. Although he recognizes the scale of these losses, he experiences them from a distance, as an object of historical reflection.[1]

One very productive way to understand the differences in affect suggested by these epigraphs is through the terms loss and absence. In "Trauma, Absence, Loss," LaCapra draws an analogy between historical trauma and loss, and argues that if losses "are enveloped in an overly generalized discourse of absence" (698), they are vulnerable to appropriation: "the conflation of absence and loss would facilitate the appropriation of particular traumas by those who did not experience them, typically in a movement of identity formation that makes invidious and ideological use of traumatic series of events in foundational ways or as symbolic capital" (712). He also argues, however, that in certain instances the impulse "to blur the distinction between, or to conflate, absence and loss may itself bear striking witness to the impact of trauma and the posttraumatic, which creates a state of disorientation, agitation, and even confusion, and may induce a gripping response whose power and force of attraction may be compelling" (699). According to LaCapra, successful conflations of absence and loss produce an effect of empathic unsettlement: "Opening oneself to empathic unsettlement is [...] a desirable affective dimension of inquiry that complements and supplements empirical research and analysis" (722).

In closing this project, I want to return to the ways in which experimental representations of the Holocaust often blur and conflate boundaries in their performance of this affective dimension of inquiry. In my introduction I argued

that experiments in post-Holocaust representation should not replace, but supplement, historical and testimonial accounts. It is no longer acceptable to invoke Adorno's statements about poetry after Auschwitz in order to dismiss certain *forms* of representation. According to LaCapra, the stylistic features of a work (of art, as well as of history) should demonstrate some form of empathy. In other words, the work should "avoid facile uplift, harmonization, or closure" (722), in favour of a complex and even contradictory engagement with history.

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Mounted in 1990, Christian Boltanski's *La Maison Manquante* (The Missing House), is an example of what James Young identifies as a counter-monument, a memorial space "conceived to challenge the very premise of a monument" (2000 96). Constructed in two parts that were divided between East and West Berlin, the installation explores the historical trauma of the Holocaust through a staged confrontation between ruin and archive. The dialectical tension between these two modes of memorialization corresponds to LaCapra's pairing of absence and loss, in terms of both the material and affective dimensions of the traumatic event. Though a formal structure that defies totalization, Boltanski takes his audience to the precipice of the catastrophe. As a secondary witness to the destruction of Berlin's Jewish community, he invites his audience, without recourse to what LaCapra describes as "fetishized and totalizing narratives" (722), to circulate within the work—and to engage with history—through a form of empathic unsettlement.

The Missing House is the first of Boltanski's documentary installations to rely exclusively on authentic archival materials (Flay and Metken 207). As one of thirteen pieces by different artists commissioned for an exhibition designed to commemorate German reunification,[2] Boltanski's installation was the only work to explore the relationship between the Holocaust and contemporary German culture. The more accessible of its two sites is the location of the title's missing house. 15/16 Grosse Hamburger Strasse—an empty lot in East Berlin—is the unreconstructed ruin of an apartment building that was bombed by the Allies on February 3, 1945. On the walls of the buildings adjacent to the lot Boltanski has affixed plaques identifying the residents who died as a result of the bombing. Each plaque lists the name, profession and dates of a single resident (Figure 13).

Figure 13—*The Missing House*. Reprinted from *Christian Boltanski*. London: Phaidon, 1997, p. 122.

However, in the process of researching the history of the building, Boltanski's assistants, Christiane Büchner and Andreas Fischer, discovered archival materials

belonging to a previous group of tenants: the Jewish residents who had been deported by the Nazis in 1942. In response to this discovery, a companion work entitled *The Museum* was created to supplement the original site. Boltanski designed a set of ten vitrines that were used to house the newly discovered documents, which included photographs, children's drawings, letters, and rationing tickets. Also included were the lists of possessions Jewish residents were forced to compile before being deported.

Located on the site of yet another ruin—this time the grounds of a former museum of industry located in West Berlin—the vitrines provided public access to documents that bore witness to the traumatic history of Jews in Berlin during the Second World War. By dividing the installation between East and West Berlin, and by providing an archival counterpart to the commemorative structure of the plaques, Boltanski forced his audience into an interactive engagement with the Holocaust. However, because of the political implications of the split structure, public response to the work was mixed. Through the juxtaposition of Allied and Nazi atrocities, Boltanski challenged his audience to confront the still legible traces of the Holocaust, and to consider the status of the war's victims within a post-war, post-wall Germany. While the plaques mounted on the walls adjacent to the empty lot remained undisturbed, the vitrines were vandalized.

Negative responses to the installation weren't confined to those members of Boltanski's German audience who objected to the material displayed in the vitrines. In her 1998 essay, "Mourning or Melancholia: Christian Boltanski's *Missing House*," Abigail Solomon-Godeau describes the installation as a failure

in terms of its representation of traumatic history, and argues that Boltanski's elegiac and non-empiricist approach to representation disqualifies his work "from functioning as a site of mourning" (20). Her contention is that mourning, as a process of working through trauma, can only be facilitated if the viewers of Boltanski's work are given *all* the facts. According to Solomon-Godeau, what is missing from the installation is a detailed history of the building on Grosse Hamburger Strasse before the German residents named on the plaques assumed their doomed occupancy. She therefore objects to the split structure of the installation, insisting that Boltanski has obscured the historical record of Jews in Berlin by housing the information related to the deportations in temporary vitrines away from the site of the commissioned piece.

I'm willing to concede that *The Missing House* is not a redemptory work of art and does not, therefore, function as an instrument of healing. However, I disagree with Solomon-Godeau's suggestion that it fails to adequately address the historical issues with which it engages. Rather than read the split or doubled structure of the installation as an unwittingly segregationist (and potentially anti-Semitic) re-inscription of historical events, I read the two sites together as a provocative staging of the genocide *and its aftermath.* The performative historiography produced through this juxtaposition does not offer the forms of resolution that Solomon-Godeau contends are necessary for us to work through the trauma of the Holocaust. What it does provide, however, is an alternative phrasing or representation of history. That the vitrines were both temporary and extensively documented leads me to read the structure of the installation as an

interrogation rather than a re-inscription of crimes specific to the Holocaust. The vandalism, as an unexpected form of interaction between the work of art and its audience, provided evidence, as if any were needed, that these crimes cannot simply be relegated to Germany's past, but continue their affective legacy through the ongoing process of reunification.

One of the most provocative features of the installation is the way in which the politics of identity are played out within it. Boltanski divides the residents of the building into two groups, not only in terms of tenure, but in terms of ethnic, cultural and religious identities. The simplest way to resolve this ambivalent structure would be to read the significance of the sites as fixed in some way: the Jewish residents have been preserved within coffin-shaped vitrines[3] (Figure 14) in a setting that represents Germany's former power as an industrial nation, while the Germans have appropriated the living space of their Jewish neighbours in the east (an instance of *Lebensraum* undertaken here at a more local, urban level). I would argue, however, that Boltanski is using the sites to question rather than reaffirm identity politics. In art, as in life, the dynamics of identification are anything but simple.

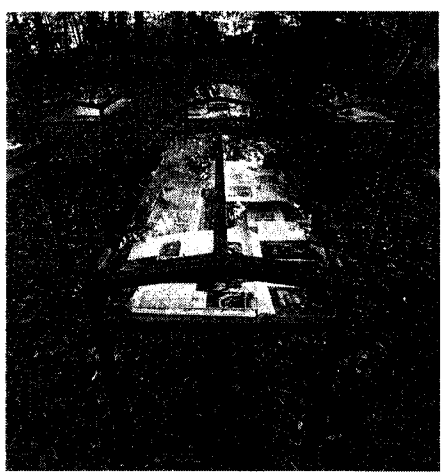

Figure 14—*The Museum*. Reprinted from *La Maison Manquante*. Christian Boltanski, Christiane Buchner, Andreas Fischer. Paris: La Hune, 1992, n.p.

In *Travelers, Immigrants, Inmates: Essays in Estrangement*, Frances Bartkowski states that "identities are always mistaken" (xvi). In the conflicts over who belongs, and where, there is more at stake than an individual investment in shared experiences, values, or history. Bartkowski cautions that the "mistakenness of identity must be taken very seriously," as the "debates about inclusion and exclusion are among the most charged sites of contestation" (xvi). *The Missing House/The Museum* stages this contest in both explicit and implicit ways. According to John Czaplicka, "*The Missing House* effectively engages its beholders in the retrieval of a complex past by combining the allusive aesthetic of the ruin, historical facts, and the powerful symbolism of the destroyed house" (168). Moreover, it does so without making recourse to representational strategies that "commemorate" the victims of the Holocaust by attending only to their destruction.

In "Veneration of Ruins," James Young describes the process of commemoration that takes place in tourist sites like Auschwitz and Majdanek as a form of violence that "forces us to recall the victims as the Germans have remembered them to us: in the collected debris of a destroyed civilization" (278). Arguing that these artifacts tell us nothing about the victims before they were arrested and deported, he asks: "What of the relationships and families sundered? What of the scholarship and education? The community and its traditions?" (279). In contrast to the fetishization of atrocity that characterizes the camp memorial, neither the destroyed building nor the documents contained within the vitrines refer to the Holocaust directly. Instead, Boltanski's installation represents the

lived experience of Berlin's Jewish residents *before* the Holocaust. As Czaplicka notes, rather "than recalling some dramatic historical event or setting such as death in the concentration camps, the house refers to everyday life and the common life that was destroyed" (168).

Although the vitrines were dismantled once the exhibition ended, the documents they contained were reproduced and compiled in the form of an artist's book designed to look like a set of archival folders.[4] This shift from museum display to textual apparatus not only provides the documents with a different means of circulation, but suggests another context through which to read them. Although most critics of *The Missing House* focus on the installation at 15/16 Grosse Hamburger Strasse, I want to shift that focus, and read the exhibition/collection as a historical reference to specifically Jewish forms of memorialization produced in the decades immediately following the war: I want to read them as versions of the *yizker-bukh*, or memorial book.

The traditional *yizker* book is a collection of genealogies, stories, maps, and sketches produced in tribute to Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Compiled and published by *landsmannschaften*, societies consisting of surviving members of a particular community, the *yizker* book provides a record of what was lost during the Holocaust through a practice of commemoration that does not recall victims as *the Germans have remembered them to us*. Geoffrey Hartman suggests a link between the *yizker* book and an older form of memorial text, "the *Memorbuch* of Nuremburg which summarizes persecutions from the First Crusade of 1096 to the Black Death of 1349" (33). In a statement that echoes James Young, Hartman

confirms the value of the *yizker* book as an alternative form of historical representation, one that does not present the Jewish victims of the Holocaust through the perpetrators' eyes: "Without these books in modern form we would have only the records of the perpetrators: orders of the day, intake lists, lives reduced to itemized effects, names and numbers in endless series" (33).

According to Jack Kugelmass and Jonathan Boyarin, editors of a collection of English translations of memorial texts, the *yizker* book is "the single most important act of commemorating the dead on the part of Jewish survivors" and has "ranged in size and format from now crumbling, thin paperbound volumes produced in displaced persons (DP) camps shortly after World War II, to the four large-format volumes devoted to every aspect of the history and daily lives of the Jews of Slonim" (1). One explanation for the changes in size and format is the fact that survivors "felt obligated to bear witness not only to the Nazi destruction but to the world the Nazis sought to destroy" (Kugelmass and Boyarin 15). The development of the post-war memorial book can be explained as the desire to represent a history, and a community, in ways that acknowledge persecution, but do not fetishize victimization. While Hartman is willing to concede that the *yizker* book is not a form of "historiography," he nevertheless views it as a "type of history with its own form and reason" (34). In his analysis of these books as a genre of historical memory, he identifies several features that the *yizker* books share with Boltanski's display and archive: "The genre is historical rather than historiographical: penetrated by contingency, by the fact that these survived and these did not, but also by an insurgent memorial tradition that gathered in and

recorded, in a spontaneous and composite, rather than ritual and integrated form, the fullness of these names" (34).

While the strategies Boltanski uses to house and disseminate the documents related to the Jewish residents of 15/16 Grosse Hamburger Strasse distinguish his memorial texts from the *yizker* book in a formal sense, the evolution of the genre itself suggests that these differences are of degree rather than kind. Like the memorial books from Eastern Europe, Boltanski's facsimile-archive commemorates specific victims, and pays tribute to Berlin's Jewish community in terms not limited to its destruction. The most significant difference between Boltanski's work and other *yizker* books is not, therefore, the form of the commemoration, but the type of Jewish community being represented. Traditionally, the *yizker* book represents a rural community, or shtetl, that was destroyed during the war. While the creators of these memorials most often live in urban centres, they do not represent urban Jewish communities. And they do not, as a rule, pay tribute to assimilated Jews. In contrast, Boltanski's memorial text represents a dispersed Jewish community whose members were citizens of a large German city. According to Czaplicka, "This place was where many assimilated Jewish Germans had long settled, but no Jewish German would or could have called the now missing house home, especially after the deportations of 1942" (169). Through his own research into the street's history, Czaplicka discovered that the building was not segregated in an exclusively Jewish neighbourhood. The Jewish residents of 15/16 Grosse Hamburger Strasse interacted with their gentile neighbours on a daily basis: "It seems appropriate that this loss be experienced in

Germany on a street once called Toleranzstraβe, because Germans of all faiths had congregated and were at home here. On this street, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish institutions had all existed" (171-2).

Because Boltanski exhibits artifacts of everyday life together with the official lists of the tenants' belongings, his memorial does more than pay tribute. Through a process of juxtaposition that recalls the paratactic structure of "What They Remember," an autobiographical text inspired by Georges Perec discussed in Chapter 1, the archive represents a relationship between the Jewish residents of Berlin and their fellow citizens through a violence that, although virtually absent from the documents themselves, is central to the work as a whole. Boltanski's understated deployment of these artifacts initiates a practice of estrangement that produces uncanny effects. The Jewish residents to whom Boltanski pays tribute were betrayed by neighbours who did nothing to save them. We are invited—through the open and associative form of the work—to an experience of history that is an affective encounter with betrayal.

James Young argues that displays of atrocity do not teach us to remember, but, enable us to forget without being aware of doing so. The illusion that the remnant is itself a form of knowledge relieves us of the burden to think and feel for ourselves: "museums, archives, and ruins may not house our memory-work so much as displace it with claims of material evidence and proof" (1993 279). What Boltanski demonstrates in his self-conscious or *meta-* staging of ruin and archive is a practice of memory-work that is, at the same time, an admission of epistemological failure. Through both its content and its structure, *The Missing*

House invites us to engage with historical contests over identity through a spontaneous, even visceral interaction. To gain access to both parts of the original installation, Boltanski's audience had to cross the physical boundary between East and West Berlin. Because of the installation's dispersion within and across spaces, visitors were literally forced to circulate within the work of art, without ever being able to see it in full. The physical structure of the installation undermines the authority of those who circulate within it. Paradoxically, its unintelligibility is the mark of its success.

It is not the artifact that produces meaning in *The Missing House*, but the complex overlay of dialectical relations: between sites, between the work of art and its audience, between historical and contemporary violence, and between the artifacts themselves. The status of the artifacts and ruins—in terms of the relation between absence and loss—is mobile rather than fixed. The house and its inhabitants are absent from the scene. Our experience of this absence is mediated by Boltanski through a process that is interactive. We experience this absence as a loss, but without the security of closure or resolution; while the remnants of history invite interpretation, they do not provide us with answers. Rather than initiate a process of critical misrecognition, where, "in coming to stand for the whole, a fragment is confused for it" (Young, 1993 276), *The Missing House* initiates an affective engagement with these remnants that forces us—through a process of empathic unsettlement—to confront that which we *cannot* know. According to art critic Jill Bennett, this effect of informed unknowing should be read not as evidence that trauma is unrepresentable or unspeakable, but as

indicative of the ways in which experimental representations of trauma allow us to read the events otherwise, enabling a glimpse of *that which should be* in representations of *that which is*, without reinstating the autonomy of the subject through the revelation of a hidden truth: "trauma-related art is best understood as *transactive* rather than *communicative*. It often touches us, but it does not necessarily communicate the 'secret' of personal experience" (7).

John Czaplicka understands *The Missing House* as a work of art that invites an affective as well as intellectual process of negotiation between reader and text: "The passage into the empty space of the missing house, *die Leerstelle* (to transfer Wolfgang Iser's term of literary Rezeptionstheorie to concrete circumstances) brings me away from the street, through a garden, and between the fire walls of tall buildings with ruinous structural outcroppings of brick and mortar" (171). The paradoxical effect of dispersion that results from this concretization of the reading process is perhaps the most powerful feature of the installation. I would argue that this effect is not limited to those who had the opportunity to walk through the space Czaplicka describes above. The negotiation between sites—through a process of invested reading—transforms the missing house into a "contemplative space" where "one can engage in *Eingedenken*—a constructive process of filling-in that may lead to a reciprocal and commemorative insightfulness" (Czaplicka 171).

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To return to the terms of the hybrid methodology I outlined in my introduction, *The Missing House* initiates a process of reading that is simultaneously analytic

and inventive. Caught within the hermeneutic circle outlined by Wolfgang Iser in "The Process of Reading," the participant in Boltanski's installation circulates within and between the sites in order to discern their meaning. However, rather than foreclosing the "polysemantic possibilities to a single interpretation" through the production of "an individual, configurative meaning" (Iser 446), the work opens that circle out further into a more incessant process of interpretation that is informed but not fixed by the reader as subject.

Where Iser's reception theory suggests that there is an end to interpretation, a formulation of ourselves through the text that enables us to "discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness" (456), Gregory Ulmer's heuretic approach allows for interactions between the work of art and the reader that unfold within a public as well as a private space of contemplation. The notion of discovery or invention central to Ulmer's method suggests that the circle is not closed, that the practice of reading is more than what Iser describes as an opportunity to "formulate the unformulated" (456). Within Ulmer's model, the interminable circulation of text makes room for a negotiation between reader and text that has social as well as individual implications. Like Celan's turning breath, the heuretic relation between text and reader makes fluid the boundaries between the self and the other, without denying that these boundaries exist. It makes an appeal—through the potential of the encounter—to new forms of habitation. As Celan argues more eloquently, the journey is itself the space within which the connective, or encounter occurs, as "paths from a voice to a listening You, natural

paths, outlines for existence perhaps, for projecting ourselves into the search for ourselves. . . A kind of homecoming" (Celan, "Meridian" 53).

In every chapter of this dissertation I have focused on works that represent the traumatic past bleeding through to a present that is fragmented, porous, and fundamentally unstable. The topography of the trace, made manifest through the blurring or conflation of past and present, figures an encounter between the self and the other that is premised on an understanding of identity as both necessary and contingent. The domestic enclosure emerges as the most important space within which this encounter is staged. Erin Manning has argued that there is a "desire in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to continue to secure time and space as the investment in identity, an investment made on territorial imperatives" (xxiv). The artist and writers with whom I've engaged here have all attempted to challenge the force of this imperative through an appeal for alternative figurations of time and space. The tension between the domestic and the social space, between the private life and the state, is therefore central to my understanding of the value of these experimental representations. According to Manning, the only ethical way to approach the relation between domestic and state violence is by questioning the illusion of security that the home provides, and by acknowledging the violence that it sanctions: "If we refrain from questioning the validity of the political structures that generate our safety within the discourse of home, we are blinded to the ways in which the home mirrors the politics of state-sovereignty, offering protection from the outside by condoning an ethics of exclusionary violence on the inside" (xvi).

As Adorno argued over forty years ago, the successful work of art "point[s] to a practice from which it abstains: the creation of a just life" (1965 194). This act of gesturing *towards*, undertaken by Boltanski, Riis, Perec, Duras, and Kofman, constitutes an ethical if not an instrumental practice. For, as Jill Bennett argues, the work of art "presents trauma as a *political* rather than a subjective phenomenon. It does not offer us a privileged view of the inner subject; rather, by giving trauma extension in space or lived *place*, it invites an awareness of different modes of inhabitation" (12). My own belief in the political power of a reading practice that resists mastery and closure in favour of something more open-ended, something interminable, should not be misunderstood as a celebration of melancholia as a form of interminable mourning, nor as a free-form engagement with post-Holocaust representation as a species of "play" that leaves everything up for grabs. In "The Veneration of Ruins" James Young argues that the process of memorialization must be mobile in order to effectively address the meanings of the traumatic event as these change from one generation to the next. This does not mean that the facts themselves are negotiable, but that for the facts to be meaningful, they must be open to new forms of representation and engagement:

> Perhaps the wisest course, therefore, will be to build into the memorial at Auschwitz a capacity for change in new times and circumstances, to make explicit the kinds of meanings this site holds for us now, even as we make room for the new meanings this site will surely engender in the next generation. For once we make clear how many people died here, for what

reasons, and at whose hands, it will be up to future rememberers to find their own significance in this past. (282)

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[1] Ladd paraphrases Adorno's statement about poetry after Auschwitz in his introduction to a section entitled "Hitler and the Holocaust Memorial": "Theodor Adorno famously declared that after Auschwitz there must be no more poetry. What kind of a Berlin can there be after Hitler and the SS?" (167). He strips Adorno's statement of any complexity (and obscures its meaning) in order to use the statement as a springboard for a discussion of the controversies surrounding memorialization and Nazism. This is the only reference to Adorno in the entire text.

[2] The exhibition was titled *Die Endlichkeit Der Freiheit* (The Finitude of Freedom). In "History, Aesthetics, and Commemorative Practices," John Czaplicka describes the genesis of the exhibition and the curators' intentions as follows: "The cultural department of the Berlin Senate invited artists to create public works of art related to the current historical transformation and to the history of specific sites in Berlin. The artists were charged with creating a public and ephemeral art that would inform the city but not decorate it or provide it with new monuments. The art works were to articulate the individual significance and history of their specific urban sites, and each artistic commentary or intervention was to join in an informative network uniting the two halves of the city in a dialogue of East and West" (159). See Works Cited for the full reference.

[3] I would like to thank Marcie Whitecotton-Carroll for this observation.

[4] While I was writing this dissertation, the New York Public Library had the only North American copy of this "archive." However, just as I was in the last stages of the project, the Bruce Peel Library (Special Collections) here at the University of Alberta began the process of obtaining a copy for their collection of artist's books. While it has not arrived in time for this final draft of the dissertation, it will provide me the opportunity to continue to work on Boltanski.

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