5

Fictions of fact: memory in transit in Vera Frenkel's video installation works *Transit Bar* (1992) and *Body Missing* (1994)

Captions to chapter 5

65 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994, installation in Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz, six panels in window and one video station.

66 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994: Murals representing elements of video channel 1. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

67 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994: Murals representing elements of video channel 2. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

68 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994: Murals representing elements of video channel 3. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

69 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994: Murals representing elements of video channel 4. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

70 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994: Murals representing elements of video channel 5. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

71 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) *Body Missing*, 1994: Murals representing elements of video channel 6. Photo: Courtesy of the Artist.

72 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) '… *from the Transit Bar*', 1992, documenta IX, Fridricianum, Kassel.

73 Aby Warburg (1866–1929) *Mnemosyne Atlas*, 1929: Plate 79.

74a Auction of *Modern Masters from Germany*, 30 June 1939, Fischer Gallery, Luzerne.

74b *Hitler and Mussolini at the Borghese Gallery before Pauline Bonaparte*, 1938, photograph.

75 'Rick's Piano Bar', still from *Casablanca* (1942, Michael Curtiz). Warner Brothers 2012.

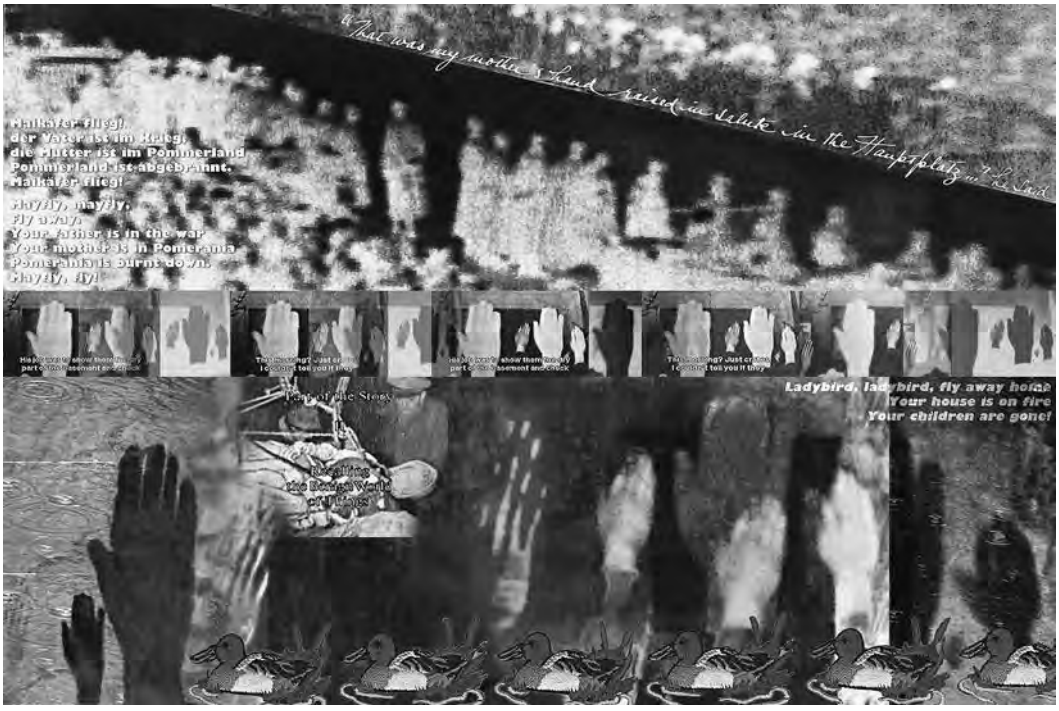
76 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) '… *from the Transit Bar*', 1992, editing composite the six participants from video monitors.

77 Vera Frenkel (b. 1938) in the installation '… *from the Transit Bar*', 1992.

65


SOUTERRAIN
Bello finito
Deo Optimo Maximo
Salvatori
Urbis civitas erexit
1659
Versöhnung mit den Toten
SOUTERRAIN
We found the list, one of the
women said.

66


Maikäfer flieg!
der Vater ist im Krieg,
die Mutter ist im Pommerland
Pommerland ist abgebrannt.
Maikäfer flieg!
Chafly, may fly,
Fly away,
Your father is in the war
Your mother is in Pomerania
Pomerania is burnt down
Chafly, fly!
Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home
Your house is on fire
Your children are gone!

67


..but each list is only partial
Schutzkasten) o.R.
Bildnis einer Dame,
Trail
of
Fragments

68


L'appareil à marquer l'absence
You say that no artworks left Vienna in your time
I was interviewed in Nuremberg two months before the

69


FEHLT
SOUTERRAIN
see for yourself. (He could see she was going to insist.)
This is the key document. November 10, 1938. Stamped with

70


SOUTERRAIN
Who else in Linz knows? he said.
Trust me, she said. Do as I ask
and let me see the list again.

71

72

73

74a

74b

75

77

5

> The only relation to art that can be sanctioned in a reality that stands under the constant threat of catastrophe is one that treats works of art with the same deadly seriousness that characterizes the world today.
>
> Theodor Adorno[1]

> The aporia of Auschwitz is, indeed, the very aporia of historical knowledge; a non-coincidence between fact and truth, between verification and comprehension.
>
> Giorgio Agamben[2]

> And this is why it seems to me that the kinds of antinarrative nonstories produced by literary modernism offer the only prospect for adequate representation of the kind of 'unnatural' events – including the Holocaust – that mark our era and distinguish it absolutely from all the history that has come before.
>
> Hayden White[3]

Preface

In his study of transgression in art, Antony Julius argues that the paradigm of avant-garde transgression as the motor for modern artistic gestures is exhausted. As an example of its loss of conviction and reduction to theatrical parody, Julius vehemently criticizes the installation *Hell* by Jake and Dinos Chapman (1999–2000) that appeared in an exhibition *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art* (London, Royal Academy, 2000). With its interconnecting vitrines forming a swastika, and evoking the Third Reich and its horrors, *Hell* lures the unsuspecting viewer into a close examination of 5,000 toy figures. The figures have been mutilated and dismembered in an ambiguous environment that mixes violations enacted by and on German army and SS uniformed figures with oblique references to concentration and extermination camps whose particular victims are sidelined.[4] Condemning those critics who claim that *Hell* is a work of 'imaginative empathy', Julius declares that extreme events such as the 'Holocaust [do] not mandate transgressive art'.

> To the contrary, art-making responsive to the Holocaust demands a break with the transgressive aesthetic … The best of these works contend with these dilemmas: how can the Holocaust be represented, when representation seems to entail the making of art objects that invite purely aesthetic contemplation? … Only a non-transgressive art practice, one that acknowledges the certainty of defeat and is willing to efface itself before its subject, while knowing that this subject is an impossible one, can negotiate such complexities. It must be allusive, modest, fragile, provisional. It must give witness to the inadequacy of images, and therefore, its own inadequacy, to retrieve meaning of the lives that were extinguished … It is an art that meets its subject at the mind's limits.[5]

Linz: other bodies

In 1994 an exhibition curated by feminist art historian Sigrid Schade, titled *Andere Körper/Different Bodies*, opened at the Offenes Kulturhaus, an art production space in Linz.

Linz? A beautiful town in upper Austria.

By chance, it was the adopted home town of Adolf Hitler. (He was actually born in Braunau-am-Inn.) As part of a grandiose cultural design, Hitler had plans for Linz. Its centre was to be redesigned – a project overseen by Albert Speer – as the new Empire's cultural capital with an Opera House, a library and a world-class art museum, designed by architects Hermann Giesler (1898–1987) and Roderich Fick (1886–1955). To fill this museum, Europe's great collections and museums would be acquired or looted in a project titled *Sonderauftrag Linz/Special Assignment Linz* established on 1 June 1939. Forcibly taken from collections in Occupied countries, 'bought' under duress for later useless Reichsmarks from private owners, or appropriated from the possessions of persecuted and later murdered minorities, much of the hoard was discovered and some elements were repatriated after 1945. But to this day many works have disappeared and remain missing.

As the starting point for her contribution to *Andere Körper*, *Body Missing*, Czech-born Canadian multidisciplinary artist Vera Frenkel (b. November 1938) focused on this missing body from the stolen artworks, that is *missing* after liberation or during the acquisition from the vast hoard accumulated by the *Sonderauftrag Linz* to create the Führermuseum. I wish to read her installation *Body Missing* originally made for the show in Linz in conjunction with Frenkel's earlier work first exhibited in Germany in 1992 '… *from the Transit Bar*' (Plates 14 and 15). Both works will be viewed in relation to the three epigraphs above and Anthony Julius's judgement about what art might do in the face of all of this history in which art, bodies and loss are grievously intertwined.[6]

At the Offenes Kulturhaus, *Body Missing* was composed of six monitors, placed strategically throughout the cultural production space of the Kulturhaus,

itself a former Wehrmacht prison. The monitors played six videotapes, each six minutes long: *Reconciliation with the Dead*, *Recalling the Benign Things of the World*, *Trail of the Fragments*, *The Apparatus of Marking Absence*, *Athena's Polished Shield*, *The Process of Redemptive Naming Begins* (Figures 66–70).[7]

Into the pillar of rectangular windows that formed part of the building's modernist façade addressing the outside of the building, the artist placed images that appeared on the videotapes and historical images (Figure 65). Photomural no. 6 was installed in the building's kitchen. When the exhibition moved to other venues these murals became transparent photomontages and were placed in light boxes that looked like packing crates, adding a more material association with storing and transport. (Plate 15) Thus there were still images, themselves layered and fragmented, complementing the moving images, which were also layered by the varied technologies available in video-editing and montage. The soundtrack included songs – notably as leitmotif the surprisingly sinister children's song full of references to war, absence and fire: *Maierkiefer flieg*, the German version of *Ladybird, Ladybird, Fly Away* – ambient sound, dialogue spoken by unseen mouths, numbers listed in German, lists read in English, secret conversations held among people whose feet alone are seen. The predominant language of the tapes was German with English subtitles.

The images on the videotapes included filmed material from the town of Linz itself. Material from the present-day was filmed in colour. It included a visual meditation on the monuments in Linz, erected in 1650 to commemorate victims of seventeenth-century mass death from the plague and to celebrate freedom from plague. Birds perch on a Baroque monument reminding us of both that deadly past and the indifference that befalls memory in relation to that which a lonely monument haphazardly commemorates. Using a moving camera, the artist is filmed descending into the basement of the Vienna Academy of Art, an institution which twice refused Adolf Hitler's application to study there as an art student. Had he been admitted, his fellow students would have been Egon Schiele and Oskar Kokoschka. This 'souterrain' – the cast-iron sign naming this below stairs domain – recurs as both emblem of the underground storage typical of any art school and as metaphor for the lumber-room of neglected cultural memory (Figure 66).

The videos and murals also contain archive images in black and white, photographs from 1945 or before, of the stacked stolen artworks stored in the salt mines at Altaussee, near Linz. Pointing out this alternation between colour and black and white, new footage and archive images, we can recall Alain Resnais's benchmark film *Night and Fog* (1955) which used precisely the contrasting rhythm of colour/black and white: present/past to create an anxious sense of the penetration of the present by the haunting past, as well as of the everyday by horror.[8] With the images on the canvases hidden, the world

of art into which the viewer is imaginatively solicited remains firmly closed. Instead the photographs make visible the compulsive amassing of merely promised bliss, not experienced but fetishistically invested in having things in one's possession. Storage becomes, therefore, an allegory not so much of memory as neurotic compulsion that cannot actually enjoy its objects, but which lives always in the hope of its excess through consumption or mere possession. Frenkel had long studied cargo-cults, and she daringly defines the Third Reich itself as a kind of cargo cult, delusionally promising one thousand years of bliss.

Finally, there are filmed scenarios punctuating the carefully choreographed and recurring interplay of these elements all now translated into video's idiomatic grain and greyness. These involved shots of feet and legs, walking up stairs or forming circles for the secret and conspiratorial meetings of artists and art historians who have, we discover, found the lists of the lost works and are scheming to remake some of the missing works, not as restitutions, but as homage. 'I remember you' is their gesture.

In her study of Frenkel's *Body Missing*, art historian Dora Apel places *Body Missing* under the sign of memory and its politics: 'The *Body Missing* project addresses both the relationship between art and politics and the role of memory as a moral force and foundation for a civilizing opposition to tyranny, that is, a site of moral resistance.'[9]

Body Missing became also a website, http://www.yorku.ca/BodyMissing/intro.html. Its point of entry is the *Transit Bar* from the 1992 installation (Plate 14), now moved to virtual space. There is a bartender who overhears the artists meeting to plan their reconstruction works and hence who have discovered the double crime (the looting and the thefts from the looted hoard) in the first place. There are the piano-players and their stories. There are the artists and their art works. The six videos from the '*…from the Transit Bar*' source materials are also there, all linked on a beautiful hand-written site map that leads to bibliographies, including Hitler's idiotic will and lists. One list, discovered by the bartender pasted into a notebook, found by 'Anna' is a list of lists. It is also spoken repeatedly in the video work and uses the dry form of a list in order to draw an elaborate picture of the nature of Hitler's *Kunstraub* (art-theft).

- what was collected
- what was stolen
- what was safeguarded
- what was transported by train
- what was shipped by truck
- what was hidden
- what was sold in Switzerland

- what arrived at the saltmine and on what date
- what left the saltmine and when
- what was given as gifts
- what was insured
- what came from private collections
- what was once another country's treasure
- what the Allies found
- what the Russians took
- what now begins to appear at auction
- what was burned
- what crossed the ocean in strange ways
- what was saved
- what was brought back after the war
- what never existed but was longed for
- what can be shown only privately
- what sits in the museums of Europe under new names
- items known to be in North and South America
- (list of vendors and sources)
- (list of postwar collections, no questions asked)
- inventories of castles
- handwritten orginal lists
- typewritten collection point lists
- what has been returned and reinstated
- what is 'heirless'
- what is still in dispute in the courts
- what was unsuccessfully claimed
- what is still missing[10]

Apel comments:

> The master list may be read as a kind of shadow list for a much larger moral horror, the other body missing that endows the Nazi *Kunstraub* policy with an intensified resonance of historical enormity. Kyo Maclear testifies to the palpable tension created between the given subject of Frenkel's project, with its lists, logs and registers, and the unspeakable dominating master text, the bureaucratic efficiency of Hitler's genocidal program.[11]

Although the connection between lists of objects and lists of people is suggestive, nothing in Frenkel's work directly refers to lists of people such as we have come to know through Thomas Keneally's docufiction *Schindler's Ark* (1982) that was made into a movie by Spielberg as *Schindler's List* (1993), where names on a list become the sole means of deliverance from annihilation. It is the viewers/readers who make the connection, assembling the fragments

and providing their own terrorized memory as the ground for reading a work that is itself foregrounding another aspect of the Third Reich: the interface of criminality and desire in the Hitlerian project, a conjunction that is far more discomforting in its proximity to the everyday than the extremity of atrocities perpetrated by the same regime. The question posed by the work may then be: what is the relation between the two, then, and now? Frenkel's work is a prompt to remember the *Kunstraub*, excavating archives and assembling documents from trials, from witnesses, from photodocuments. But it is also a supplementary comment on another, hidden theft, and hence a disappearance from the body of art, what the Monuments Men (the Allied specialists charged with tracing and relocating the looted works) named 'internal looting', on which this artwork performs its own analytical work, probing the archive theoretically by means of the capacity of video to assemble fragments, layer histories, intimate connections.[12]

Apel also stresses the multi-vocal quality of *Body Missing* as a web project with its many contributing artists. It becomes an open text, co-inhabited by their diverse relations to the missing artworks, and their own histories. It creates out of *Transit Bar* a form of hypertextual and cybernetic hospitality that already anticipates what Michael Rothberg has theorized, from readings of post-war critiques of colonialism by key concentrationary writers such as Charlotte Delbo and others, as *multi-directional memory*. Confronting competition in American society over the commemoration of different communities' traumas, Rothberg boldly defines the problem of competitive memory in which various constituencies vie for space for their identity-securing memory in a zero-sum-game of public commemoration:

> The understanding of collective remembrance that I put forward in *Multi-directional Memory* challenges the basic tenets and assumptions of much current thinking on collective memory and group identity. Fundamental to the conception of competitive memory is the notion of the public sphere as a pregiven, limited space in which already established groups engage in a life and death struggle. In contrast, pursuing memory's multidirectionality encourages us to think of the public sphere as malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions, but actually come into being through dialogical interactions with others.[13]

Frenkel's work of the early 1990s is precisely dialogical and hospitable, creating through video and the web such a public space for multi-directional memory. Apel, therefore, stresses a passage from past to future, a mechanism created through this brilliant early use of video and web technologies as aesthetic practice for the interpersonal, intercultural trans-temporal transport and continual disturbance of memory:

> *Body Missing*, then, constitutes the production of a new archive, a new body, that incorporates the memory of the body missing. It reads both back into the past and opens onto the future … *Body Missing* is not, therefore, a work of mourning; rather, Frenkel posits the question: 'What is to be the fate of all the missing artworks?' in order to project the possibility of a future for the absences of the past. In *Body Missing*, memory is not a passive repository of longing but a catalyst to action.[14]

Frenkel's attention to the missing artworks within the vast body of looted artworks becomes a specific but also metaphorical focus not only for mourning loss, but for engendering in the present engagements with the nature of the absence, that cannot be fetishistically restored, but must be actively encountered and confronted in terms of the action in the present. Frenkel's aesthetic procedures and the effects of the works in their capacity to open both to the past and the future offers us an economy of passage: a transport station.

During the Third Reich (1933–45), the building now housing the Offenes Kulturhaus in Linz, where *Body Missing* was first installed, was used as a Wehrmacht (German Army) prison. It was the site of incarcerated and probably tortured bodies, the kind of bodies (and their inhabiting subjects) who haunt so many places in Austria and Germany, their once horrible usages overwritten by new façades and democratizing purposes. A former prison is replaced by a cultural venue, a public space for cultural production, and in *Andere Körper*, it housed a feminist-inflected exhibition exploring the question of the body that had become such a fruitful topic in art engaged with gender since 1970. But what were the relations riddled (recall Hartman's periphrasis) into view between militarism, power, racism, cultural policy, art and the body, raced, gendered and otherwise under the Third Reich, an era haunting this show, knowingly, in its very location?

To invoke other bodies or indeed the bodies of others in such a context already agitates intense historical anxiety. It suggests a critically considered and political challenge to the corporeal order associated with the name of Hitler and the Third Reich that both racially and homophobically othered bodies, some eventually reduced to no-bodies in ways so catastrophic and horrific that we can hardly bear to look again at the image traces. In the case of millions gassed and cremated, there is neither trace nor marker. Gay bodies, Romany bodies, Jewish bodies, politically defiant and resisting bodies, bodies of minority faiths, naked bodies, tortured bodies, dead bodies: these were all part of the Nazis' universe of terror inflicted with intense purpose on the body as locus of the subject. I must ask again here: what is the body *after* the event in history that was the Third Reich – that is, after what the *real* and the *cultural* trauma such a historical event inflicted: what is otherness and corporality in its wake as an institutionalized process rupturing the conditions of being

human, living and dying and of representation itself? Posing such a question harks back to Theodor Adorno's insistence on both the impossibility and the necessity of art 'after Auschwitz' that requires from the artist a paradoxical obligation to engage endlessly with what cannot be represented but must not be forgotten: Lyotard's differend.[15] In exploring the work of aesthetic inscription as a transport station of trauma – rather than mourning or healing – I want to delineate the aesthetic strategies of the multi-media, audio-visual and installation practice of Vera Frenkel, who arrived at this 'station' through a series of meditations and interventions operating between innovative expansion of new audio-visual media, notably pre-digital video and a kind of anthropological inquiry into the compulsive search for the messianic and bliss. At this intersection both the contingently historical and the everyday on the one hand, and the mythic or structural on the other, are disclosed in works that involve us in their passage. As counter to the missing bodies of genocidal extermination, and to the prohibition of repetition by representation of horrific images of deadly remains of the concentrationary universe such as surfaced in Szapocznikow's enfleshed post-traumatic work, Frenkel's Levinasian gesture is to work with the face and the voice. Her aesthetic practice elaborates itself through video with its complex plays of intimacy and technological communication. She explores the potential of its wipes and dissolves, its animation of photographic montage and modernist collage as a language with which to confront what must be encountered and yet can only be so in riddling, periphrastic, allusive, modest, antinarrative nonstories.

We shall need, however, in the context of this study of trauma and aesthetic inscription, to ponder how the surfacing of a specific and personally inscribed trauma of forced migration and family loss in the life-story of Vera Frenkel intersected with the belated surfacing of a cultural responsiveness to the Holocaust, *c.*1990, that belatedness of public representations often read as itself a symptom of the latency inherent in *cultural* trauma.[16] Popularly known as the 'Holocaust' as much because of the use of that term as the title of an American NBC TV series widely broadcast in 1978, during the 1980s and 1990s the atrocious history of the Final Solution became much more widely circulated as a cultural memory and a theoretical challenge. In the context of resurgent racisms after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and ethnic cleansings in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda during the early 1990s, the understanding of the significance of Holocaust became subject to the cross-inscription of parallel situations for which legacies of the study of the Holocaust and its traumatic effects could provide a vocabulary, notably around the traumas of asylum seeking, escape from torture and dictatorship, exile and migration.[17]

Never forgotten or ignored by those who sought to bear witness and agitate the conscience of the world to this egregious assault on humanity itself, the Holocaust took off as a dense focus of multidisciplinary academic analysis

and cultural memorialization during the later 1980s and early 1990s.[18] One of the most influential of these new engagements occurred when sociologist Zygmunt Bauman broke what had been a virtual silence in sociological thinking with his benchmark study *Modernity and the Holocaust*, published in 1989.

Janina Bauman had written her memoir *Winter in the Morning*, discussed in Chapter 4, and in the preface she had posed the probing question: 'in inhuman conditions why do some people continue to behave in a human way while others do not?' As he read this line, Zygmunt Bauman acknowledged that, as a sociologist, he had never considered the Holocaust as a significant event in human social relations that presented substantial challenges to sociological thought. As a result he realized the depth of questioning now required: what is ethics, what is morality, what is the nature of submission to immoral authority, or, as he himself posed it in a series of lectures at the University of Leeds in 2010: 'What makes good people do evil?'[19] Granted there were people of extreme sadistic wickedness, psychopathic and criminal, who perpetuated the crimes of Nazism against humanity. But displacing the crime onto others whom we disown through exceptional extremity, deeming them to be essentially unlike us in their demonic evil or national character or any other device for creating a distance from ourselves, relieves all of us of a deeper horror: we could also perpetrate these crimes.[20]

Zygmunt Bauman ties the Holocaust into Modernity, not to regressive barbarity. While not directly a product of Modernity – sociologically defined as instrumental rationality that severed means from ends, fostered bureaucratic reason, and a conviction in a rationalized, scientifically evidenced notion of perfectability – the Holocaust was a potential in Modernity produced by what Bauman calls the social gardening metaphor of all modernizers (social engineers foster the healthy plants and weed out the weak and diseased). It was, therefore, entirely modern and hence inconceivable without many of Modernity's defining features. Far from being a throwback to ancient barbarism or a deviation from the enlightened path of modern progress, the Holocaust was par excellence a modern programme and a possibility of Modernity, indebted to its industrialization, social engineering, scientific racism, administrative and bureaucratic reason.

Bauman's subsequent books on *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1993) and *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), as well as his ever more coruscating analysis of the replacement of citizenship by the cultures of consumption and consumer society take up the logic exposed in his reading of the Holocaust not as an exceptional other to the norm of Modernity, but as its darkly mirroring face and hence a continuing possibility present in many banal forms of contemporary society. He writes:

> The anxiety can hardly abate in view of the fact that none of the societal conditions that made Auschwitz possible has truly disappeared, and no effective measures have been undertaken to prevent such possibilities and principles from generating Auschwitz-like catastrophes.[21]

Vera Frenkel's works *Body Missing* and '*…from the Transit Bar*' were not a response to the work of Zygmunt Bauman, although she subsequently became aware of his writings. Rather her work is a parallel investigation through an artistic practice that constantly takes the anthropological temperature of contemporary Western culture. *Body Missing* and '*…from the Transit Bar*' of 1992, made first to be installed at *documenta IX* in Kassel, Germany (Figure 72) have their own genealogy in Frenkel's distinctive investigations of storytelling, cultural genres of romance and mystery, institutional power and the messianic cults, typical of traditional and modern consumer cultures, of imaginary investment in things as a means of access to bliss. But the conjuncture of sociological thought and new modes of art (conceptual, video, installation for example) serves to highlight the cultural moment, *c.*1990, when the long delay of traumatic aporia around the meaning of the Holocaust in general produced a belated explosion of cultural inscription, and Vera Frenkel's artworking was at its cutting edge, directing us not towards the past, but to its residues and ghosts in the present.

To arrive at the moment and the reading of *Body Missing* in 1994, I need to undertake a series of backtrackings into history, art and fascism and into the career of Vera Frenkel.

Digression I: screen and body

Illustrated here is the last plate, numbered 79 (Figure 73), of the *Mnemosyne Bilder Atlas* assembled by Aby Warburg in 1929. The Atlas – composed of canvas screens hung with photographs constantly in process of re-organization and new juxtapositions – was Warburg's grand scheme for producing a historical psychology of the image, in which various configurations of bodies were tracked as what Warburg called the *pathos formula*: the gestural and representational mnemonic formulations of intense emotional and affective states. These formulae could be symptomatically tracked as they persisted and returned (the very terms of trauma)

in the culture of the image both Western and beyond. Two elements need to be signposted. The first is the *screen* created in a moment of early expository use of photography and montage. I think it will give us some insight into what can happen in the pursuit of knowledge like this when video editing, dissolving, overlaying and moving through the image becomes an artistic tool. Secondly, Warburg's work might make us ask what becomes the *pathos formula* for our era, of othered or disappeared bodies, or the paradox of the immense engagement with feminist-inflected artists with the gendered and sexual body in the context of a potential *Bilderverbot* (prohibition on the image) in the post-Auschwitz condition?

In this final plate, beside a photograph (left centre) of the fresco of the *Mass of Bolsena* (1512–14) by Italian artist Raphael, in the Vatican, Warburg placed contemporary Italian and German newspaper cuttings from 1929. These primarily document the historic, if troubling event of the reconciliation of the Papacy with the newly established dictatorship of Europe's first Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini. On 7 June 1929 the Lateran Concordat was signed between them recognizing the Pope's autonomy within the enclave of the Vatican City, but yielding its formerly autonomous military and political power to the State of Italy. The distinguished Warburg scholar Charlotte Schoell-Glass has provided a complex reading of the juxtapositions made by Warburg on this most contemporaneous and political of plates in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Schoell-Glass reveals how Warburg is 'seeing' then current historical events taking place in the new imperialist projects of Italy, Germany and Japan that presage the menacing rise of fascist imperialism with its inherent racist violence. Warburg is 'showing' by this montage or conversation between times and genres, the deeper imaginary structures resurfacing in these contemporary images where a brawny swimmer, showing off his built body overlaps with an image of a Catholic monstrance – the procession of sanctified communion host involving both the idea of the Christ's sacrificed body and the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation wherein spiritually the host is a real body. These are then linked with Japanese sacrificial punishments like *harikiri*, and the ceding of earthly power by the Vatican to a militaristic fascist dictatorship in return for State protection of Catholicism.[22] Underlying all this are Warburg's political counter-hope for an end to shedding blood for religious causes, his fear of a re-emerging form of sacrificial culture and his reminder, swinging back to the *Mass at Bolsena* by Raphael, a painting in the Vatican, of the relation between the emergence of the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation – the belief that the host does indeed become the 'body' of the Saviour – and the events following the Lateran Council in 1215 declaring this doctrine. A blood libel spread across Europe accusing Jews of desecrations of the Host at which the wafer was claimed to have bled. In retaliation for these supposed offences, real Jewish bodies bled real human blood. Warburg's analysis of the

pattern registering in these images and events disclosed the immanence of racist violence persisting in and reignited by imaginary forms.

Warburg's early twentieth-century use of a 'screen' to allow photographic reproductions of images from different orders, time periods and topics to converse and interpenetrate, drawing mythic substrates into play across everyday photojournalism and art, astutely exposing the often sinister movement of power and its dissembling across the ordinary, is a necessary reference point for what Vera Frenkel was herself doing in her multi-screened video installation *Body Missing* for the exhibition in Linz, *Andere Körper* in 1994. Independently, Frenkel and Warburg share a way of reading their own cultures, sensing its intertextualities, and making 'visible' for interpretation what remains unrepresented while being present 'across' the relays between words and images, times and spaces, media and practices. Both have influenced the conception of the virtual feminist museum as a form of cultural analysis.

Digression II: Kunstraub and the cultural politics of the Third Reich: art in exile

The Virtual Feminist Museum extends Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* with another montage of news photographs (Figures 74a and b). One photograph would show us the infamous sale of *Paintings and Sculptures by Modern Masters from German Museums* that took place at the Fischer Galleries, Luzerne in 1939. On the block is Van Gogh's *Self Portrait as a Bonze* (1888, Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge), sold as lot no. 45 on 30 June 1939 to an American, Frankfurter, for $40,000 on behalf of Maurice Wertheim of New York. This photograph of an art sale stands for the denuding of German national and provincial museums of works by 'modernist' artists following the assumption of power by the National Socialists in January 1933. Museum directors sympathetic to modern art were sacked. Works were first taken from the walls and then de-accessioned and this sale in Luzerne was the most notable. This points to two important issues. One is the identification of modernism itself with both of the mythic enemies of Nazism: bolshevism and Jewry. In the same terms as the latter were redefined as non-citizens and non-humans, namely degeneracy, modern art was named *entartete/degenerate.* Before being sold or destroyed (or privately appropriated) a vast exhibition of *Entartete Kunst: Degenerate Art* was organized, opening in Munich on 19 July 1937, one day after the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, a fascist monument to the art forms and tendencies authorized by the Nazi state as authentically German. Thus international modernism, notably its most German face, Expressionism, was held up to contempt in a perversely didactic exhibition that was paradoxically perhaps one of the first comprehensive surveys of early twentieth-century modernism, while it was also the last chance to see/celebrate modernism in Germany until 1955, when the founding by Arnold Bode of

the *documenta* initiated in Kassel resumed the broken thread of Germany's relation to international modernism and made *documenta* one of the most important quinquennial reviews of contemporary art.[23] It was at *documenta IX* that Vera Frenkel installed '*…from the Transit Bar*'.

The photograph (Figure 74b) shows the Fascist leader of Italy, Benito Mussolini; with his late-coming fascist ally from Germany, Adolf Hitler, on an official visit to Rome in May 1938, two years after the formation of the Rome-Berlin alliance, the year Mussolini, under pressure of his new ally, imposed racist anti-Semitic laws in Italy. Mussolini was showing off the splendours of his new Roman Empire to the German dictator, who would, in jealous emulation, imagine that his own imperial ambitions should be realized by relocating *all* of Europe's major art treasures to a single museum, that he would build, in his favoured town, Linz in Austria.

It may come as a surprise that Hitler's primary concerns were aesthetic. In the opening to *Hitler and the Aesthetics of Power*, Frederick Spotts reproduces a photograph taken on 13 February 1945.[24] The scene is a room in a bunker under the Reichskancellerei in Berlin. The Russians are closing in. They are at the Oder. The Allies are closing in. They have crossed the Rhine. The war is more or less lost. 'Yet', writes Spotts, 'Hitler spends hours absorbed in his model of his home town (*sic*) of Linz transformed by his favored architect Albert Speer into the cultural capital of his delusionary vision of the Thousand Year Reich. Complex lighting systems have been rigged up so that Hitler can study the overall effect at all times of the day of the entire urban project. Its several buildings must not detract from the spire of the cathedral of Ulm nearby but it must catch the first rays of the daily sun.'[25] Spotts uses this bizarre image of the near-destroyed leader in his bunker still contemplating his great aesthetic scheme to introduce us to the unexpectedly significant place of culture in Hitler's grand design. Frenkel will also repeatedly screen these images of both model and Hitler's fascinated gazing at his dreamworld.

Spotts advances the argument that Hitler's primary aims and indeed means were aesthetic: 'his conviction that the ultimate objective of political effort should be artistic achievement', although, as of 13 February 1945, the architectural reconstruction of Linz was still but a model.[26] The contents for one of its key buildings had already long been assembled. Confiscated from museums and collections, from all the countries of occupied Europe, some bought, some stolen, some liberated, some borrowed, the treasures of great European private and public collections had been systematically transferred to the Reich and many were being stored in the dry conditions of the salt mines of Altaussee not far from Linz. At its core was, however, the criminal theft of Jewish collections whose owners had been driven into exile or murdered.

Art History, museum- or university-based, thinking art to be autonomous or immune from the dirty work of politics, has been slow to see what was

always before our eyes, namely, a compromised and difficult relation between aesthetics, culture and fascism in the long twentieth century. Vera Frenkel was one of the first, as an artist, to draw attention to this topic when she created for an exhibition in 1994 at the Offenes Kulturhaus, Linz, the video-based installation work titled *Body Missing*. That same year, as the fruit of ten years' research, Lynn Nicholas published *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, followed by Hector Feliciano's study titled *The Lost Museum: The Nazi Conspiracy to Steal the World's Greatest Works of Art* in 1997.[27] This book documents the systematic 'pillage' of Jewish-owned artworks in Occupied France, because, according to Lynn Nicholas, art was a matter of the highest priority in the Reich from the moment Hitler came to power. She names Hitler and Goebbels as 'ravenous collectors' with 'insatiable appetites'. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this theft, rape, pillage, looting – note the loaded vocabulary associated with the ravages of the Roman Empire or the Viking invasions of Northern Europe – was the project to assemble a new museum to dwarf the Louvre or the Uffizi, centralizing all of European-based world culture's art treasures in Hitler's chosen town.

It is this assemblage, *Sonderauftrag Linz*, and the mechanisms and traces of this mass looting that Vera Frenkel used as the point of departure for a subtle reflection on the implication of art in the criminality of the Third Reich, then but also now. At the same time, we know that a great deal of work from these stored lootings never resurfaced – some taken by Soviet troops, some by untraced others.[28] Frenkel's work is not a documentary, such as has been made from Lynn Nicholas's book by Bonnie Cohen in 2008, although it also calls on archival material. *Body Missing* is a video meditation on memory and amnesia, loss and mania, restoration and recreation, bureaucracy and crime, and Hitlerian looting and his cultic adulation as a symptom of the delusional search for bliss by means of the acquisition of things and a faith in a false messiah.[29]

When the Allies first opened the Altaussee saltmines near Linz, where for reasons of their dry conditions, many of the stolen/looted works were stored during the war, a large amount of the scrupulously inventoried and listed artworks were or went missing. Although many works were speedily restored to their original museum homes, much has never been found. The estimated value of what was looted in art and other artefacts amounts in current terms to $90–140 billion. Although hundreds of thousands of artworks and objects were repatriated to public collections, in many cases private owners were never found. Some were missing. National Museums across Europe failed in their obligations to create inventories of returned works and then to trace owners or their descendants.

As a result of Feliciano's work, the scandal of indifference of the official art institutions in France to this historical legacy led to major exhibitions of

unclaimed works during the 1990s. A series of further scandals rocked the museums worldwide when works that had been looted now appeared in exhibitions and were reclaimed by heirs of the depropriated and murdered owners. Moreover, museum collections that had been beneficiaries, knowingly or unknowingly, of either the looted art work or that which was stolen and illegally sold by the Nazi cultural apparatus found themselves the object of disgracing lawsuits. All work in museums and coming as part of temporary exhibitions now are required to have their provenance examined and affirmed to ensure they were not part of this criminal and often genocidal appropriation.

Thus do Nazism and the Holocaust reach into the heart of the art world. Paintings wandering through strange hands now become symbols of the events of the fascist era, casting over this most discrete and elite of fields, art history and the art museum, with the shadow or criminality and genocide. The recovered or resurfacing objects become both signifiers of their own looted fate and the uncanny, chilling index of their murdered or exiled former owners.

Cultural looting is not unknown in history.[30] Indeed it has been part of the process of motivating and paying the vast hordes that conquerors mobilized in their adventures abroad. Napoleon's appropriations from many parts of Europe during his conquests in the early nineteenth century are the most famous example in recent Western history before the mid-twentieth century. Dora Apel writes:

> What distinguishes Nazi looting, like the Holocaust itself, is its breathtaking scale, ruthlessness and planning. Even the term 'looting' with its implications of spontaneous ransacking, does not begin to describe the massive, systematic, and highly organized bureaucratic machine by which the Nazis thoroughly dispossessed the culture of the Jews, as well as state property, not only in France, but all over Europe.[31]

'Like the Holocaust itself' – this phrase might tempt us back into the equation between murdered millions and missing stolen treasures, substituting what people once collected while living for those who were expropriated of their very lives. I think we must forestall any false metaphorical translation. With its specific artistic and signifying modes, the artworking in and through *Body Missing* uses video, voice, staging, documents, contemporary filming and installation to focus on the phantasmatic structure of this orderly greed, this bureaucratized theft, which was rational to the point of irrationally inventorying its own criminality. Utilizing documents that index the event in its administrative specificity – a bureaucratization that has been seen as the hallmark of the Modernity of the Holocaust, the Third Reich and its perpetrator – Frenkel lodges her operation in the present, figured by her use of an earlier artwork, '*…From the Transit Bar*', which I shall shortly discuss.[32] Frenkel re-invokes, virtually, the meeting space of a transit bar where fictitious

and actual researchers assemble to contemplate lists and losses. This becomes the unlocatable intersection between a past full of holes and gaps and a historical investigation in the present into absences that shape that very present and its subjectivities.

In the originary installation of *Body Missing* and its many subsequent exhibitions in Japan, Scandinavia, Poland, France and the Freud Museums in both Vienna and London, the transit bar returns via installation, projections, looped video sequences and computer workstations that make us, the viewers, party to this utterly symptomatic dimension of the criminal history of the Third Reich that stretches beyond the barbed wires and sites of atrocity to inhabit, sometimes too closely for comfort, the discipline of art history and the museum of art.

Vera Frenkel: the backstory

Vera Frenkel is above all a storyteller who at once uncovers the stories that are told and that we tell ourselves. In her work *The Last Valentine* (1985) she presents us with an imprisoned storyteller in a country or a time when storytelling has become a crime. The story of her work I am going to tell here will run against the flow of narrative, working back from 1994 to draw out the themes of absence and amnesia and the role of the indexical trace that binds the invisible past to remnants and objects solidly in the present. Underlying and linking the different works I shall discuss is also a question of spatial displacement, linguistic dislocation, and dissembling as well as what to do in the face of irretrievable loss.

Vera Frenkel – one of Canada's most respected and celebrated contemporary mulitdisciplinary artists – was, however, born in Bratislava into a Jewish family in the then newly formed nation of Czechoslovakia (1918–92) that would become the first sacrificial lamb offered to Hitler's imperial designs on his easterly neighbours in the mistaken policy of Appeasement.[33] When it was created in 1918, out of the ruins of the Austro-Hapsburg Empire, Czechoslovakia was a liberal, multi-ethnic democratic state that gave national identity to its many constituents: Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks, Czechs and Jews. The latter had their own schools in Czech and modern Hebrew and the Jewish people (a minority of less than 2 per cent) was recognized as a national entity (not a racial or a religious definition) in modern cultural terms. Rapidly modernizing and committed to all that Modernity could bring after generations of stagnation at the edges of a decaying empire, inspired by the democratic and egalitarian thinking of nation's founder Tomas Mazaryk, Czechoslovakia was disgracefully dismembered when the Sudetenland (home province of Oscar Schindler) was ceded to the Third Reich at the Munich Conference in 1938. In 1939, Hitler invaded the remaining sections and made them the Protectorates

of Moravia and Bohemia while setting up a puppet fascist Slovak state and ceding other parts to the fascist-dominated state of Hungary led by his ally, Admiral Horthy. Vera Frenkel's father was able to escape to Britain before the borders were closed in the summer of 1939. She, a toddler, and her mother could not immediately do so. A tiny blue-eyed, blonde-haired Vera and her desperate, equally blonde mother spent many months negotiating their escape across seven or eight European borders, finally crossing into Italy, only to find their train compartment filling up with SS officers. Racist propaganda against the Jewish body preserved them: the officers did not for one instance imagine the blue-eyed blonde mother and daughter were Jewish. The journey passed, however, with her mother wracked with terror. Mother and daughter managed eventually to get to Britain to reconnect with her father in London. The Blitz bombing of that city drove the family to Leeds, the city where the artist lived until she was eleven. The meteorological as well as economic climate was too mild for her father, a furrier, to make a living, and her mother, an accomplished *corsetière*, could only create her specialized products with hard-to-get doctors' prescriptions for her clients, so the family emigrated to a chillier Montreal in 1950 on HMS *Scythia*. At McGill University Vera Frenkel studied art and anthropology, traversing that space between unconscious motivations – the domain of anthropology – and thoughtful aesthetic practice; she also studied at the Montreal Museum School of Fine Arts. Moving to Toronto, Frenkel began as a sculptor and printmaker, but soon created 'installations' by showing prints hinged with mirrors and empty frames so that real and formal space were put into play and spectators had to participate. Performance work was also explored when she was an artist in residence at the Art Institute of Chicago and housed in the former Playboy mansion, where *Trust Me, It's Bliss: The Hugh Hefner-Richard Wagner Connection* was created in 1987, and this thematic of 'bliss' was developed in *Mad for Bliss* at the Music Gallery in Toronto, in 1989, where the text for a work that was later transformed into a Spectacolour Board amidst the advertising billboards in Picadilly Circus, *This is Your Messiah Speaking*, was first presented. This linked in with exploration of cargo cults and other contemporary symptoms of messianism in mass consumption. Her analysis of contemporary consumption picked up on the expansion of the vast cathedrals of consumption now ubiquitous as shopping malls. During a residency at Newcastle in Britain in 1990, Frenkel further observed the effects of what was new to Britain at the time, an out-of-town shopping centre named the Metro, where shopping based on ersatz Little Greece and Little Italy mixed with an amusement park, a Salvation Army band playing beneath a First World War aircraft, led her to comment: 'The convergence of war, religion, and profiteering and deliberately programmed delusion was the way they were leeching the energies of a previously thriving city.'[34] *This Your Messiah Speaking* opens:

> This is Your Messiah speaking instructing you to shop/Don't worry. No one will force you to do anything you don't want to do.

The tone becomes a little more menacing when it concludes: 'Shop, I tell you. Shop, he said. Or someone will shop for you.' Frenkel wanted to pose to us the question: what makes us believe in things to deliver us over to bliss? Of this work Vera Frenkel herself writes, making the link to *Body Missing*:

> Looking back, I see that this work, rooted in the interrogation of the abuses of power and its impact, formed the basis of my subsequent work on the forms of identity shifts and fear-induced collusion that characterize the immigrant experience, concerns that are of course central to feminist practice. This led in turn to *Body Missing*, a work on the collecting fever of the Third Reich as a cargo-cult phenomenon, and to the *Institute*, my current project on the travails of a large cultural institution as a symptom of cultural suicide.[35]

From 1979 to 1986, video, performance and installation were used in a cycle of works about a 'lost' Canadian author, named Cornelia Lumsden, which took the form of staged scenarios that problematized fiction and fact, and the use of multiple personae to reflect back to the viewer both deep cultural assumptions about art and gender, and marginality and national identity, as well as the contemporary modes of mediated information and representation through which they are recycled. As curator Louise Dompierre wrote in 1982, Vera Frenkel's method of enquiry 'relies on the use of daily myths and clichés to discover the underlying structure and, like structuralist methodology, attempts to analyse … surface events and phenomena … by structures, data and phenomena below the surface'.[36] From early on Vera Frenkel was always interested in institutions and power, making a hilarious work, to contest conservative moves to censor artistic expression, about the desperate attempt of a natural history film-maker making a documentary about fleas to cover the tiny insects' sexual organs: *The Business of Frightened Desires: Or the Making of a Pornographer* (1985).

'… *from the Transit Bar*' was an installation in the Fridericianum at the core of *documenta IX*, 1992, curated somewhat chaotically, it was felt, by the Belgian Jan Hoet.[37] (Figure 72) The context for Frenkel's work included Louise Bourgeois's cell *Precious Liquids* (1992, Centre Pompidou, Paris), and works by Marina Abramovic, Marlene Dumas, Iza Genzken, Jimmie Durham, Rebecca Horn, Eugenio Dittborn, to name but a very few who formed Frenkel's peers at this date.

Both *documenta* in Kassel and *Andere Körper* in Linz evoke the very phases of German history that shaped the life of the Czech-born Jewish artist who is now a Canadian, but within that space an immigrant. Already attuned to what would become by the mid-1990s a massive cultural tide of renewed awareness

of the significance of the Holocaust for European cultural memory, Vera Frenkel's two works introduced innovative and radical aesthetic modes for troubling these emergent modes of memorialization that suffered from what Eric Santner, a specialist in post-war German culture, identifying contrary modes of opposing dealing with the difficult past, first named 'narrative fetishism':

> By narrative fetishism I mean the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place. Narrative fetishism … is the way an inability or refusal to mourn emplots traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere. Narrative fetishism releases one from the burden of having to reconstitute one's self-identity under 'posttraumatic' conditions; in narrative fetishism, the 'post' in indefinitely postponed.[38]

Santner elaborates on the counter-process:

> The work of mourning is a process of elaborating and integrating the reality of loss or traumatic shock by remembering and repeating it in symbolically and dialogically mediated doses; it is a process of translating, troping, and figuring loss and, as Dominick LaCapra has noted in his chapter, may encompass 'a relation between language and silence that is in some sense ritualized'.[39]

Certainly, countering narrative fetishism by means of her strategies of fluidity, metaphor and suggestion, Vera Frenkel's work is not quite mourning either. I want to explore it under the sign of trauma, as a deeper loss haunting critically conceived aesthetic inscriptions that call upon the sounds of subjectivity and the memories of the body in social and communication spaces of transit and exchange, momentary intimacies and perpetual foreignness to be the home to an affective charge that arrives only when this station has been built.

'… *from the Transit Bar*', finally

Let me describe the '… *from the Transit Bar*' as the original installation created for *documenta IX* (Figure 72). As time-space work, using video and a constructed environment, '… *from the Transit Bar*' is difficult to describe in its full complexity and effect. There are three key elements I want to focus upon. There is the *event-performative* aspect of the bar that involved creating a fabricated space in a major quinquennial art exhibition around which thousands of tourists and art visitors drag themselves over 100 days. There is documentary footage of actual art visitors in 1992 resting in a working bar, buying drinks,

listening to a piano player, reading newspapers, and chatting or sleeping while TV screens display talking heads speaking languages that are subtitled in German, English and French. In the centre there is a real bar and a bartender who is sometimes a woman with a soft, melodious voice, ready to pour a drink and listen to whatever story that is offered. There is also a Yamaha Disklavier that plays recorded music and will record as you play.

The *documenta* visitors animate this space with their own displacement. Drawn from all over the world and from the locality and Germany itself, they are all momentarily in transit, some genuinely foreign, some merely not local. They are passing through this temporary space, resting, meeting, relaxing, chatting, sitting alone and pondering what they have just seen in the more conventional exhibition spaces. They may not even register that they are players in this artwork. The bar they make into a bar with their behaviour is a crossing point in many lives, a fragmentary moment in those lives. Will it make them think?

'… *from the Transit Bar*' is a structure that has been artistically fashioned and carefully built within the Fridericianum, a monumental piece of eighteenth-century Enlightenment architecture and one of Germany's oldest public museums. Built in 1779 in Hesse, the princely state of pre-unification Germany, as a library and show case for the Landgraf of Hesse's art collection, it inscribes into the city the prince's cultivation and plans to educate his subjects. So how can something that is about marginality and migration, temporariness and transit, take its place inside the very opposite architectural statement: the museum, that quintessential modernist and enlightenment project?

It does so by being a false construction built within the shell of the classical architecture of the work's allocated exhibition space. The bar itself shifts the axis of the original space. So while there was internal coherence, the space was displaced in relation to the architecture while also subtly disorienting the body by slight dissonances of angle and tilt. At certain points there are holes in the walls, which allow the visitor to peer through to realize that this is a setting, a staged space built at oblique angles to the neo-classical building. The visitor has to ask: what does this mean? Is this a real bar built with, now we look closely, a slighted dated, almost 1960s modernist style, or is it a set? Or is it a work of art?

The work claims its riddling relation to the museum building's grand classicism that it has masked with what art historian Elizabeth Legge astutely describes as a space that 'combines the structure of an airport bar with the crudeness of a school play production of *Casablanca*'.[40] Legge has hit on another level of Frenkel's artworking (Figure 75). *Casablanca* (1942, Michael Curtiz) is not only a beloved icon of cinematic history; it tells the story of two displaced people, escapees from Nazism, who last met in a Paris bar in 1940 and by chance refind themselves in another seedy bar infested with occupying

German officers and French police in a city on the edge of Moroccan coast. Wrapped up in the great love story enacted by Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman is the more terrifying political history of the fight against fascism and flight from persecution. How subtle to evoke the romantic cultural scenarios in which real terrors have been sentimentalized while placing the current consumers of culture in both a Hollywood-like set and a real space similar to that which desperate migrants and asylum seekers populate, those spaces that French anthropologist Marc Augé, admirer of Frenkel's work, named *non-lieux* – non-places of supermodernity.[41]

But into this structure within a structure, a novel historical form of social space and social and psychological experience set against the older historical form of aristocratically ritualized cultural space, Vera Frenkel obliquely places the evidence of deeply experienced lives of dislocation, forced migration, exile and perennial strangeness. For one thing, the newspapers lying around to be read were those of local refugee and immigrant communities. The profits from the bar were passed on to the hostel for asylum seekers in Kassel itself. These publications function as ports, forms of connection and communication, affirmations of temporary homes in language or custom. In each subsequent venue of the installation – Sweden or Poland or Japan or Canada – the marginal communities connecting through this now almost archaic mode of communication, the local paper, were included to colour this impersonal space with their urgent need for human and social contact and with reference to local tensions. In an interview that accompanies the DVD collection of her work *Of Memory and Displacement* (V-Tapes, 2005), Frenkel remembers that each time the installation was created with these elements, the local anxieties featured strongly in the debates it aroused around immigration and the resurfacing of treacherous racism. Past and present collide.

But the main index of and aesthetically reconfigured counterpoint to the supermodern space of late capitalism mediated through its typical non-place is the ubiquitous TV monitor that is part and parcel of the furniture of a bar, its screens never, as in the cinema, being the focus of attention and the binding centre of a communal experience. On these TV monitors, Frenkel placed faces, filmed in intimate, conversational close-up, as if we were on the other side of the bar table at which they sat to be filmed. (Figure 76) Thus the passing anomie of the supermodern bar is punctured by the face of the other presented in portrait format, as it were, a face that calls to the passing customer at the bar and offers a singular story. The stories were filmed in close-up. They are stories of people known to the artist who have for many reasons experienced displacement, forced migration, exile and hence perennial strangeness. They speak of their experiences of such situations. Hers is also one of these stories. Her temporary presence in the bar as the bartender also invested this transient space with her own memories, soon to be elaborated in a new work,

The Blue Train (2012), recovering the story her mother told her of their escape and prolonged and dangerous transit in 1939 (Figure 77).

Frenkel has plaited their narratives into a new tapestry in video montage by fracturing the stories in broken elements that layer each other, forming new patterns by coincidence despite radically different histories. Some have experiences from the Holocaust in Europe; others are political refugees. Yet others are economic migrants. Without losing specific identities, their words are woven by the video montage into a multi-threaded cloth that is at once a displaced self-portrait by an artist who so often performs and speaks in her works but is not present this time and a multiple portrait of the experience of strangeness she shares with many others.

Placing this Levinasian 'face' of the other into the Fridericianum in Kassel, in Germany in 1992 was a courageous and bold gesture. The words of these faces of otherness add to the outrage. For the spoken words of the fourteen people who appear have been dubbed into two languages the artist longed to hear, languages associated with the grandparents she never knew: Yiddish and Polish. These two languages represented for the Third Reich the barbarous deformities of lesser Slav 'races' and the non-human Jewish 'race'. For Frenkel, they are lost linguistic homes. The voices speaking languages abhorred in German, and in Germany, was, we must now admit, a kind of mourning.

The speaking heads' words were subtitled in the dominant languages of the European Union: German, French and English. But they were not subtitled consistently. For even these texts were fractured again across the many monitors because sometimes the subtitling was French but soon shifting to German and interrupted by English. Only those who travel in languages, or were forced to acquire several dominant languages because of many migrations could find their way through a single monitor. Or else the visitor to the bar would have to become the participant in the artwork, spending time with these other virtual visitors, tracking their fractured stories, building up the fragments into a picture of many colours, voices and histories. These intimate portraits defamilarized by unfamiliar tongues become the site of affect in the work, largely through the aesthetic manipulations of video technologies editing, lighting, dissolves and its most affecting feature, duration.

'… *from the Transit Bar*' now exists beyond its installation and performative history in actual exhibition spaces. Frenkel made a specially edited version on video (now available on DVD). This new piece opens with footage filmed from a moving train of railway tracks, sidings, goods wagons. The train journey became the iconic image for the transports that characterized the Holocaust through cinematic inscription. There is one infamous piece of footage of moving trains, filmed at Westerbork Transit Camp, commissioned by its Commandant Gemmeker and made by Rudolf Breslauer, in 1944 which was included and thus widely disseminated commemoratively in Alain Resnais's

benchmark film *Night and Fog* made in 1955. The movement of contemporary Polish and German trains on the actual tracks used in the 1940s became a recurring feature of Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour film *Shoah* (1985), in which the relentless movement of the trains became both a punctuating space offered to the viewer periodically during the film for reflection after a particularly harrowing testimony, and an interval recurrently reminding the viewer of the actuality of the transports that moved millions of people to their deaths along the ordinary railway lines, travel that had to be paid for like any excursion, ticketed, funded and scrupulously planned and timetabled. The train is the emblem of the modern machinery, bureaucracy, and industrial infrastructure of mass transportation to death factories and a figure of movement, displacement, exile from home and place. It is the ultimate non-space of that catastrophe and the everyday sign of people on the move.

Frenkel shares Lanzmann's desire to keep visible the modern reality and to keep us in present time rather than fetishistically distanced by archival imagery that has become iconic. Thus her trains are Canadian railways, Canadian sidings. They play as a moving back curtain to the inserted visitors to the Piano Bar who now seem to be in the club car on the train itself, put on the move. Here the moving image, video, underlines the image of mobility that is its topic. Dot Tuer, an astute reader of Frenkel's work, writes:

> Her use of video as an installation, in which the physical environment framing the video monitor is a foil for images on the video screen, entangles the viewer in an intricate skein of fictional space. Through the use of props, ordinary, almost mundane and the telling of stories, complex, almost fractured, themes of exile and memory, of false messiahs and primordial longings, emerge.[42]

A trauma reading, 1994

In an essay for the re-installation of '… *from the Transit Bar*' at The Power Plant, Toronto and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa in 1995, Irit Rogoff remembers the moment in the summer of 1992 in Kassel when she saw ' … *from the Transit Bar*'. Of the 'polyglot speech' coming from the TV monitors in Yiddish and Polish, she writes that they

> echoed the babel of languages from my childhood in Israel as well as that of other migrant languages around me in present life in California. Such echoes reverberated in the urgent harried speech of Yugoslav refugees on the move that summer in train stations all over western Germany and in the news covering the rage and grief expressed by communities of foreigners living in Germany, singled out for vicious attacks that same summer.[43]

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the reunification of the two Germanies in November that year, fierce debates about citizenship and national

identity spilt over in a terrifying resurrection of Neo-Nazi groups and racist attitudes intensely hostile to the new 'strangers': migrant workers notably from Turkey. In Germany in 1989 there were 1,500 cases of xenophobic violence reported and 2,200 cases in 1990. There were even calls for *Ausländer-freie* – Foreigner-free – zones with clear overtones of Nazi policies of making Germany *Judenfrei*: free from Jews. Two particular instances of Neo-Nazi attacks on Turkish families long resident in Germany occurred in fact after *documenta IX* had closed, namely 25 November 1992 at Möln and 29 May 1993 in Solingen, although the press were reporting less fatal assaults throughout the summer of 1992. The *Los Angeles Times* reported on 3 August 1992 a weekend of Neo-Nazi skinhead rampages in six German cities or towns including Nuremberg. The links with the past were all too apparent but this time massive protest marches were held in solidarity with the victimized. Migrancy, foreignness and the resonances with the past led Rogoff to her key interpretation of the work of Frenkel. As a viewer and then a writer, Rogoff performed some of the effects solicited by Frenkel's project theoretically and practically.

> In '… *From the Transit B*[illegible]at summer, we viewers all became aware of the complex associative layering of displacement within our own unconscious, and some of us became more acutely aware of the task we had set ourselves as cultural critics; to read the embeddedness of one cultural history in another, one displacement in another, our own embeddedness in an *intertextuality of trauma*.[44] (My emphasis)

Prompted by Vera Frenkel's early acquaintance in 1992 with Cathy Caruth's then very new work on trauma after Caruth had lectured in Toronto, Irit Rogoff became one of the first writers on art and visual culture to engage with trauma, extending it into intertextuality of trauma as a frame for analysing Frenkel's own work. For Rogoff trauma is not a 'shocking occurrence' but a 'deeply affecting event that has gone unremarked by consciousness and is nevertheless constantly revisited through associations'. Following Caruth, Rogoff lays out the double scene of trauma in the typical psychoanalytical scenario. The primary scene of infantile 'seduction' lies dormant until puberty when a revived 'memory' of the first scene 'occasions an influx of sexual stimuli that overwhelms the ego's defences. Only as a memory does the first scene become pathogenic by deferred action'.[45] To make a move from the traumatic origins of sexuality in the individual to the scene of history, Rogoff suggests that we replace the 'event' with a narrative of symptoms rather than the simple sequence of facts. The symptoms reveal themselves and that which is returning through them by means of narratives, repressed histories in the process of finding articulation. For instance by paying attention to the historical and cultural conditions of the post-colonial world that is so marked by exile, migration, transition, displacement, it becomes possible to return

to foreclosed or abbreviated narratives of flight, exile, forced migration of an early period such as the era of Nazi persecution in which, as Rogoff points out, the notion of 'flight to safety' can now reveal deeper trauma and prolonged affects resulting from the unending sense of loss, absence and uncertainty. To be a child-survivor like Vera Frenkel is not merely to have escaped to safety.[46] She has to live 'displaced' between worlds with affects that may only become apparent decades later, or when certain kinds of work, generated within the intellectually conceived project, create the space for an encounter with them, not so much surfacing but finding the aesthetic *differend*, and the means to be phrased – the Lyotardian term for what cannot be fully articulated but finds gestures that incline towards it, frame it, draw a space for its momentary flash of recognition.[47]

But by the same token, Rogoff wishes to insist that the belated Western narratives of Nazism and Stalinism run the risk of their own displacement of other narratives of genocides of Armenians, Biafrans, Bosnian Muslims.[48] It is with this in mind that Rogoff appreciates the ways in which Frenkel makes the juxtapositions and flows across the video screens refuse hierarchy and make 'equal claims on the viewer's imagination'. Furthermore, she points to the manner in which fragments of narratives of forced migration occasioned by political persecution or poverty not only create a web of traumatic instances but 'Circulating as the cultural representations of the traumas of rupture and leave-taking [they] can serve to link the symptoms of historical trauma in which we are all steeped. A hybrid historical weave emerges from these encounters' and we the viewers can become, because of their lack of specificity, 'cultural co-inhabitants of the narratives'.[49]

As a psychic space, Rogoff sees the space of transit in which history operates within it as trauma. 'What is realized is not the place of departure and not the place of arrival but the space in which trauma comes into being, into language and representation through articulated memory.'[50] I have been arguing that trauma remains inarticulatable as the Real; but its residues and traces, its affects and anxieties, can surcharge a later event. That event becomes the formal and aesthetic creation of a space hospitable to the encountering of traumatic traces, and to the ordering that a 'writing' allows us, in its mediated symbolic doses, to phrase it and in so doing create for the traumatic residue a narrative base for memory – memory, agitated however, by its ever elusive traumatic excess which in Frenkel's work is used to open up laterally and historically to the many sites and many subjects of trauma.

Trauma, as Rogoff points out, was for Freud akin to a foreign body. We use the language of colonization to explain how trauma inhabits and alienates the subject. We are, therefore, playing between the psychic register of trauma's invasive foreignness and the real experience of being made foreign. By overlaying the actual histories of mid-twentieth-century traumas of

genocide and flight with the accumulating and present-day narratives of other forced displacements and their attendant process of becoming and remaining 'foreign' as an immigrant who is always an outsider, multidirectional trauma and memory work comes into view. Caruth, cited by Rogoff, argues that it is 'in the bewildering encounter with trauma … that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history which is no longer straightforwardly referential. Through the notion of trauma … we can understand that a rethinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, precisely *allowing history to arise* where immediate understanding may not'[51] (my emphasis). This formulation beautifully captures the key proposition in this set of studies, in which the artwork becomes an occasion for *encounter* and hence a transport station of trauma.

The reception of Vera Frenkel's daring work took place strategically in a German context at a highly volatile moment of both resurgent anti-immigrant racism in reunited Germany and of anxiety in the post-colonial moment about widespread racism. Might the very allusion to both simply allow a comforting viewing position secure in its proper anti-racism? Rogoff reminds us of the delusion involved in any such position.

> One is never outside race, outside strangeness, outside difference. To be anti-racist is not only to assume a position against the evils of racism but also to extract oneself, to some degree, from the positionality of race. It is for these reasons that I need to read these theoretical texts across the surface of '… *from the Transit Bar*', for they allow it to be read as a process without closure. Slipping and sliding between the familiar and the strange, layering transparencies of association on top of one another, we are deprived of a clear-cut position that allows us to exit and stand outside the work to reframe it for the convenience of having a comfortable more ground beneath our feet, recapturing the reference that will allow us to clearly assert 'immediate understanding'. In the circular motion and layered density of '… *from the Transit Bar*', we may reflect on how we have been produced out of the vilifications and elisions of numerous racisms, the ruptures they have visited on all of us and the unexpected cultural formations that have emerged in their wake.[52]

Indirectly acknowledging the conflicts shattering the peoples Israel/Palestine as part of a much longer history of nations and racisms still playing out across Europe and the post-colonial nexus, Rogoff acknowledges the powerful force of Frenkel's aesthetic formulation as a means of generating such necessary unsettlement of victims and perpetrators before the implicated trauma of historical violation: racism in all its forms. Her commentary brings out the dialectic of what is seen and shown, what I see, *video* in Latin, and what is being incited as the reciprocating thought before the screen. We shall need, therefore, to go more deeply into Frenkel's process and medium.

Video …

This encounter with Vera Frenkel's work takes place, therefore, in the vidéothèque of the Virtual Feminist Museum. From the sculpted body hollowed, monumentalized and rendered arachnid, reduced to abjected resin skin impregnated with an atrocity image, or put into ontologically repetitious action – discussed in the preceding chapters – we are now going to examine a 'body missing' by means of a virtual screen, situated, nevertheless, in a real and uncanny space in Europe's modern historical geography of terror. This work operates at the intersection of two different strands of analysis.

One is the pairing of memory and amnesia. The other is opposition between indexicality and virtuality. The question of what is remembered, forgotten and selectively written into the narratives we call history is still deeply contested; but we have some purchase on these terms. The other axis – that which existentially indexes a real and that which enables us to think, imagine and project – puts into relation the question of why we might wish to remember and establish historical knowledge that is both verifiable by evidence but also by understanding at a deep level that it was once real but in a way that matters to us affectively in the present.

The index is one of the categories of signification, according to the American semiotician C.S. Peirce, who created a trichotomy of signs:

> I had observed that the most frequently useful division of signs is by trichotomy into firstly Likenesses, or, as I prefer to say, *Icons*, which serve to represent their objects only in so far as they resemble them in themselves; secondly, *Indices*, which represent their objects independently of any resemblance to them, only by virtue of real connections with them, and thirdly *Symbols*, which represent their objects, independently alike of any resemblance or any real connection, because dispositions or factitious habits of their interpreters insure their being so understood.[53]

The index produces meaning by being in a real or existential relation to that which it signifies for an interpretant.

Virtuality, however, has different meanings in different contexts. It can mean the real thing: 'this is virtually the same as that'. It is used of cybernetic operations and representations. Thus we speak of virtual reality as a simulacrum with which we interface 'as if' it were real. Finally, in philosophical terms, virtuality constitutes a perpetual resource for difference and change that is not bound by the logic of given reality. Thus the Virtual Feminist Museum is not an 'on line' cybernetic museum; it is a work of differentiation that may create that which does not yet exist: a feminist future and it can be actualized in a variety of ways, not limited by what existing models of reality or sense consider 'possible'.

Vera Frenkel's work of the early 1990s operated in the expanding field of aesthetic engagements with 'new media' – not yet digital – such as video and with the potentialities of the internet, the network of networks, whose origins lie in the 1960s when military and government needs required a robust system of distributed computer networks. Only in the 1990s was the internet commercialized to become the world-wide communication forum it is today. In 1989 Tim Berners-Lee, a British computer scientist, developed earlier systems of hypertext connections to create the world wide web accessed through the internet. Frenkel's work was thus at the critical edge of experimentation with the potentialities for critical work and aesthetic inscription by means of an electronic technology for capturing, storing, processing and transmitting motion images. The first Video Tape Recorder was invented in 1951 using magnetic tape; in 1971 Sony was the first to sell VCR tapes to the public and it was not until 1997 that digital video recording was initiated. The Portapac, a portable video camera and recorder, was produced by Sony in 1965, thus enabling the video camera to move out of the studio. Artists were swift to explore its new potentials.

These dates indicate the recentness of what we now consider to be the indispensable and normal technological landscape we inhabit. They also allow us to situate the temporality of Vera Frenkel's aesthetic use of a medium that by the early 1990s was also institutionalized as television, entertainment, news and relays of other cinematic and film material.

Video=I see – what is not there

As for television, we think of video technology as that which brings images into our homes and offices. Yet video shares with photography and film its own intrinsic relation to absence. As film theorist Christian Metz argued, the cinema is the imaginary signifier operating on a fetishistic register of absence disavowed.[54] What we see is an event or process (the making of the work/film) from which we, as spectator now, were excluded. This structural problematic incites a recurrence of a primal scene of phantasy in which the desire to see and the trauma of seeing too much or seeing nothing is played out in a form of oscillating ambivalence to which Freud gave the name fetishism. As a scopic regime of representation the visual in its photographic, cinematic and extended codes is always about absence and our modes of knowing and not knowing this: this is called disavowal. Fetishism means holding together contradictory knowledge: I know but I don't know.

Video shares its medium with television. Tele-vision, meaning seeing at a distance, also implies this dislocation in time and in place. Television is a vernacular, commercialized medium associated with the popular culture working its dialectics of technological merchandising, the TV set itself and the production of information and semiotic materials transmitted into a largely

domestic and increasingly personalized scene of consumption.

As an art medium, however, video operates, according to Martha Rosler's influential genealogy, on three levels.[55] Video can be used to evoke the contexts and practices of a non-fine-art domain of popular cultural production and consumption, entertainment and information, with its own borrowed as well as indigenously developed tools. Artists may use video to produce, however, a meta-critical perspective on the practices and experiences of video, ethnographically, as it were, analysing 'us', its consumers and 'them' the producers and their codes. In the manner of conceptual art, one practice critically works on and interferes with another cultural practice, usually charged with a form of ideological critique of the role of television in cultural hegemony.

Finally, Rosler argues that artists using video enter into the use of this medium with a training in medium-determined formalism – the modernist creed was that the central objective of all modernist art of value was the ever-deepening exploration of the potential of its specific medium. Some artists used video as a means of reacting against medium-specificity and its formal agenda. While others foreground of video as a medium rather than an instance of media culture in order to establish their artistic or aesthetic credentials. Hence a video fine-art practice explores and extends the defining features of video as medium: duration, montage of a new kind through video editing procedures, extended and playful modes of dissolve and transition, the box-like space of the object-like monitor, the potential for manipulating speed, delays, repetition, the potentialities of integrated audio-visual-spatial processes, its insertability. By means of this approach, the material and aesthetic dimensions predominate over the semiotic structures and conventions, exposed in the second mode discussed above. Under this rubric of radically rewriting the possibilities of the technology, image and sound can de dislocated, layered, troubled, thickened, opening up new space, while sequencing can dispense with narrative and thus attempt to solicit a different kind of spectatorship, more critical precisely as the familiar habits of the televisual become the aesthetics of video art.

An interview

In writing this analysis of Vera Frenkel's two key works of the early 1990s, I have been at pains to situate the project in its subtle responsiveness to precise historical configurations in the memory politics of that decade in which other times and other scenes replay through contemporary tensions. I have equally emphasized Frenkel's innovative aesthetic plays with video as medium for her significantly multi-vocal and intertextual memory work. But we have touched, through Rogoff's insightful reading, on trauma as a possible thematic of Frenkel's work.

Whose trauma, however? The question I posed in the preface returns. It would seem that Frenkel's work is so imaginatively in tune with its moment – indeed is one of the symptomatic sites of that complex interfacing of the primal scene of twentieth-century horror in Europe with a recognition of Europe's implication in economic, racist and colonial legacies of trauma – that it would seem limiting to re-introduce a more personal level. But throughout my arguments in this book, I have been seeking to enact the deep feminist intertwining of the lived, personally experienced, and the thought, reflected and socially or politically engaged.

My contribution to the reading of Vera Frenkel's works does not intend to collapse the anthropological and historical grandeur of her imagination into the biographical. It is rather to weave the latter back into the formal analysis and the cultural reading. Something beyond both is the affective pulse for both these works, infusing their intelligent commentary on memory politics, racism and delusion with a different tenor. Not mourning but *yearning*. Mourning works with a phallic economy of loss – Freud wrote of mourning the loss of country, identity as much as a loved object. These are relevant. But yearning – *nichsapha* in Hebrew – is a term from Ettinger's concept of a supplementary Matrixial psychic economy which elaborates a concurrent trauma that longs for a lost connectedness, and is prepared to fragilize the self, and importantly, in compassion, cannot abandon the other.

In a long and probing interview for the installation of '*…from the Transit Bar*' in Toronto in 1993, Dot Tuer asks Frenkel about the level of pain in the immigrant experience that leads to silence. She acknowledges how this works with a loss of memory and a kind of amnesia in Frenkel's work. The artist replies:

> The silence of trauma, when parents try to protect the next generation from internalizing the unspeakable, is very familiar in Canadian immigrant experience, though I am not sure the silence works. The fact that something is unspeakable is internalized through the silence itself.[56]

This silence evokes the notion of an entombed trauma composed of fear, shame and unmourned losses. Such a silence is necessary for the survivor, she argues, simply in order to carry on. But there is a second silence.

> The silence of the next generation, of deracination, also familiar, is something else. There are ways of being homeless that are not physical. Both silences were entered into and broken during the *Transit Bar* shoot.[57]

The shooting was a process of entering into silences shared with other immigrants, hence a joint occasion for the lifting of long-maintained silences. But then she avows something much more particular about Canadian experience and 'passing'.

> When people discover that I'm an immigrant, they're sometimes surprised. In some instances, I see them make their internal recalculation. Have they unwittingly shown their chauvinist card? Perhaps they have, and are angry or ashamed at having been witnessed. Or sometimes our stories are similar.[58]

Language, notably English, assists in the assimilation process. 'But it's also a mark of what my parents had to give up, and of a lost continuity.' This leads Frenkel into a discussion about Yiddish, the former lingua franca of Eastern European Jewry that traversed the national entities of Poland, Russia, Czechoslovakia and more. It appears that only recently had the artist discovered that her mother understands Yiddish although it was never spoken in her home, and that her father spoke it fluently, as he did Hungarian, Czech, Hebrew, German and English. She then tells us of an act of compassionate imagination she performed that underlines the infinitely deep resonances of language and loss of home. When her father was dying, the artist brought one of the caregivers to her father to share some words in Yiddish with him. She hoped that the simple exchanges might bring him some comfort.

> I wanted to give him the feeling of going home, of the safety of his childhood in Czechoslovakia before all the upheaval. I wanted to provide, in his moment of dying, the kind of innocence, and the bliss of the deeply familiar, of the oneness, of the openness that all my adult work warns against as an illusion. And because I had begun to learn German, which was his other mother tongue, I tried to speak to him in German, again to wash away what was alien in the hospital and to appeal to the embedded structures of his mind, to give him some kind of place to be that was not clinical, filled with machines and strangers.[59]

I am utterly pierced by the poignancy of this gesture and this scene. The voice-over languages of '*…from the Transit Bar*' were Polish and Yiddish, languages of an old, destroyed European-Jewish civilization that will never return that were also personalized as the languages of unknown grandparents. Their bodies, voices and culture had once been home to her father. In the alienated and indeed foreign medical environment of modern dying of old age, the artist's father is bathed again by voices from that lost home of childhood. But his loss, intensely felt and compassionately comforted by his daughter, is irreparable. It is, in fact, hers not as a memory but as the lining of her present, as an inheritance whose affective charge fuels her affectionate gesture of fragile and fractured linguistic restoration. She has no home to mourn. Foreignness as she later says is a natural state. The fracture that severed her father from his parents does not sever her. His dying before her does. She rebinds his lost connections with her voice. But the fracture is historical. After the event, there is no innocence, no bliss of the deeply familiar, no oneness. There can only be scepticism before all illusions of such. As trauma, the rupture that is beyond any naming as Holocaust, Final Solution, racism, genocide, xenophonia,

informs or rather forms the artworking of Vera Frenkel with that inescapable condition of the loss of the possibility of safety. Romance and mystery have been Frenkel's favoured genres and playful targets, the one delusional with its promises of bliss and union, the other compelling a perpetual detection of the secrets that are never the real ones. Here is history as symptom. Storytelling and document play games with the normal distinctions between fact and fiction, truth and lies.

Never testimonial, the oeuvre of Vera Frenkel is at once the most profoundly indexical register of the traumatic imprint of the catastrophe enacted by the Third Reich and its most imaginatively virtual translation into a form that offers something to see – *video* – and a translation by video as a theoretically expanded aesthetic medium of layering, resonating, connecting. While at one level it performs the admirable, post-colonial gesture of refusing closure and particularization of suffering, offering inventive modes of aesthetic openness and transitivity, its energizing force arises from what it never directly speaks. This is not silence any more but, I suggest, becomes *after-affect*. The anthropological perspective and the formal-structural use of her media acquire their pertinence and significance from the affective-compassionate and intergenerational dimensions glimpsed here in the scene by her father's hospital bedside.

Opening this chapter I quoted from Anthony Julius calling for non-transgressive yet creatively novel forms that might address the unprecedented legacies of the Holocaust. The final sentence of the passage reads: 'It knows that there are limits to representation that cannot be removed, in the critic Geoffrey Hartman's phrase, "without psychic danger".'[60] If, as I am proposing, Vera Frenkel's work in video installation created both culturally and personally a transport station of trauma, it also, therefore, performed aesthetic transformation of its underlying traumatic foundations that deflected psychic dangers of retraumatization into a co-inhabitable and multidirectional space. But it did so in a periphrastic, oblique, often playful way, becoming 'a site for the interpenetration of fact and fiction, the undoing and reaffirming of each by each, the acceptance of the lie in the truth, and the truth in the lie'.[61] It put memory in transit. The challenge of reading her work is to sense, to trace and also gently to allow into recognition the shadow of the trauma – that of her parents and her grandparents, and her own – that forms an affective truth playing through the stories she collects and tells. The truth lines but never directly appears in the art forms she has brilliantly shaped. What is critical is that trauma was not encrypted, entombed. Not spoken, however, formal procedures created a home for its discovery and a space to move and to be transformed at the intersection with the world. For that multiply traumatized world, Frenkel created a form of agitating but also reflective and compassionate memory that formed a passage to an ever-sensitized future.

Notes

1 Theodor Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum', *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 186.
2 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 12.
3 Hayden White, 'The Modernist Event' [1999], in Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, (eds), *The Holocaust Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 344.
4 The work was installed in the exhibition *Apocalypse* curated by Norman Rosenthal at the Royal Academy of Arts in 2000. It was destroyed in a fire in 2004 but rebuilt and massively expanded in 2008.
5 Anthony Julius, *Transgression: The Offences of Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 221.
6 *Body Missing* was also installed at the Gallery Georg Kargl, Vienna, 2001/02, and in the Freud Museum, London, 2003.
7 The title 'Process of Redemptive Naming' is derived from Siegfried Kracauer as interpreted by Gertrude Koch and Jeremy Gaines in '"Not Yet Accepted Anywhere": Exile, Memory, and Image in Kracauer's Conception of History', *New German Critique*, 54 (1991), 95–109. The fourth title is drawn from Lynn Nicholas, *Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1994). Information kindly supplied by the artist.
8 Griselda Pollock and Max Silverman (eds), *Concentrationary Cinema: The Aesthetics of Resistance in Alain Resnais's* Night and Fog (London and New York: Berghahn, 2011).
9 Dora Apel, 'The Reinvention of Memory', *Memory Effects: The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 87.
10 http://www.yorku.ca/bmissing/news/lists.html.
11 Apel, 'The Reinvention of Memory', 89. Kyo MacLear is a visual artist and novelist based in Toronto.
12 Robert M. Edsel and Brett Witte, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (London: Preface, 2009). See also www.monumentsmenfoundation.org.
13 Michael Rothberg, *Multi-directional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 5.
14 Apel, 'The Reinvention of Memory', 90.
15 Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment' [1962], in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 312–13.
16 See David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2011) for a major revision of this dominant thesis through historical research.
17 With the fall of dictatorships in Spain and Portugal in the 1970s, as well as the 'dirty wars' in Latin America, psychoanalysts and health workers with experience of working with Holocaust survivors were able to offer resources for assisting the tortured and those released from long-term imprisonment.
18 I cannot go into detail here but the timeline of *public* and *cultural* engagement with

the Holocaust as a matter of cultural memory unfolds very slowly, punctuated by key events such as the film *Night and Fog* (1955), the Eichmann Trial (1961), the translations of Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel's writings in the later 1950s and 1960s, The Auschwitz Trial (1964), the TV series *Holocaust* (1978), Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) and the opening of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum (1992). See Griselda Pollock, *From Trauma to Cultural Memory: the Unfinished Business of Representation and the Holocaust* (forthcoming 2013).

19 Janina Bauman, *Winter in the Morning* (London: Virago Books, 1986).

20 *Concentrationary Memories Project*, University of Leeds, April 28 and October 12 2010, online www.CentreCATH.leeds.ac.uk.

21 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 11.

22 Charlotte Schoell-Glass, '"Serious Issues": The Last Plates of Warburg's Picture Atlas', in Richard Woodfield (ed.), *Art History as Cultural History: Warburg's Projects* (New York: GB Arts and London: Routledge, 2001), 183–208. See also Griselda Pollock, 'Aby Warburg and Mnemosyne: Photography as *Aide Mémoire*, Optical Unconscious and Philosophy', in Costanza Caraffa, *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011), 73–100.

23 See Jürgen Klaus (ed.), *Entartete Kunst: Bildersturm vor 25 Jahren* (Haust der Kunst, Munich, 25 October–16 December, 1962); *Degenerate Art* (Forbidden Art in Nazi Germany), 4 April–20 May 1972, New York: La Boetie Gallery; and Stephanie Barron (ed.), *'Degenerate Art': the Fate of the Avant-garde in Nazi Germany* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1991), 17 February–12 May 1991.

24 Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (London: Overlook TP, 2004). See also Jonathan Petropoulos, *Art as Politics in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

25 Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, xi.

26 Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics*, xi.

27 Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*; Hector Feliciano, *The Lost Museum: The Nazi Conspiracy to Steal the World's Greatest Works of Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

28 Robert Edsel, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (New York: Center Street, 2010); Elizabeth Simpson (ed.), *The Spoils of of War*: *World War II and its Aftermath: The Loss, Reappearance and Recovery of Cultural Property* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997).

29 Elizabeth Legge, 'Analogs of Loss: Vera Frenkel's *Body Missing*', in Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 340–50, 341.

30 Sigrid Schade et al. (eds), *Kunstraub: Zur symbolischen Zirkulation von Kulturobjecten* (Vienna: Verlag Turia +Kant, 2000); Jeannette Greenfield, 'The Spoils of War', in Simpson (ed.), *Spoils of War*, 34–9.

31 Apel, *Memory Effects*, 77.

32 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 83–116; I am also thinking of Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* [1963] (London: Penguin, 1994); See also David Cesarani *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes and Trial of a 'Desk Murderer'* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006).

33 For a memoir of a fellow Jewish resident of Bratislava witnessing these events see Thomas O. Hecht, *Czech Mate: A Life in Progress as told to Joe King* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2007).
34 Vera Frenkel, Dot Tuer and Clive Robertson, 'The Story is Always Partial: A Conversation with Vera Frenkel', *Art Journal*, 57:4 (1998), 9.
35 Vera Frenkel, Dot Tuer and Cliver Robertson, 'The Story is Always Partial', 9.
36 Louise Dompierre, 'Introduction', *Likely Stories: Text/Image/Sound Works for Video and Installation – Works by Vera Frenkel* (Queen's University at Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1982), 3.
37 Steven Henry Madoff, 'Documenta IX: More is a Mess', *Art News* (September 1992), 129–31. Giancarlo Politi, 'A Documenta to Reflect Upon', *Flash Art* (October 1992), 86–9; Dan Cameron, 'Documenta IX: The Hassle in Kassel', *Art Forum* (September 1992), 86–92.
38 Eric Santner, 'History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on Representation and Trauma', in Saul Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution':* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 144.
39 Santner, 'History Beyond the Pleasure Principle', 144.
40 Elizabeth Legge, 'Of Loss and Leaving', *Canadian Art* (Winter 1996), 60–4, 61.
41 Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. Jon Howe (London: Verso Books, 1995). For Augé, place has its aura of history and memory; but in the age of airports, shopping malls, hotels, motorway cafés, computer screens, radically different forms of non-place emerge in which no organic social life takes place between individuals interacting in routinized and often depersonalized forms.
42 Dot Tuer, 'Worlds Between: An Examination of Themes of Exile and Memory in the Work of Vera Frenkel', in *Vera Frenkel: Raincoats, Suitcases, Palms* (Toronto: Art Gallery of York University, 1993), 21.
43 Irit Rogoff, 'Moving On: Migration and the Intertextuality of Trauma', *Vera Frenkel:…from the Transit Bar/…du transitbar* (Toronto: The Power Plant and Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1994), 27–43, 26.
44 Rogoff, 'Moving On …', 29.
45 Rogoff, 'Moving On …', 30.
46 While researching, I contacted the artist to clarify my own memory of the stories of her escape from Czechoslovakia, only to find at that very moment she was planning a work about that journey, *The Blue Trains* (2012), trying to refind the tape she made with her mother, because however many times she had heard the tale, its details never stuck – a feature found in other child survivors or children of survivors.
47 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
48 Rogoff: 'Moving On', 32.
49 Rogoff: 'Moving On', 3–4.
50 Rogoff: 'Moving On', 34.
51 Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies*, 79 (1991), 181–92, 182.

52 Rogoff: 'Moving On', 43.
53 C.S. Peirce, 'A Sketch of Logical Critics' [1911], *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings*, Volume 2 (1893–1913) (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 460–1.
54 Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*: *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986).
55 Martha Rosler, 'Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment' [*Block* 11 (1985–6)], reprinted in *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings 1975–2001* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 53–88.
56 Dot Tuer, 'Interview with Vera Frenkel', in *Vera Frenkel: Raincoats, Suitcases and Palms*, 48.
57 Tuer, 'Interview with Vera Frenkel', 48.
58 Tuer, 'Interview with Vera Frenkel', 48.
59 Tuer, 'Interview with Vera Frenkel', 49.
60 Julius, *Transgression*, 221.
61 Tuer, 'Interview with Vera Frenkel', 55.

Part III
Passage through the object

6 Deadly objects and dangerous confessions: the tale of Sarah Kofman's father's pen

Captions to chapter 6

78 Edmund Engelman *Freud's Desk*, Berggasse 19, Vienna, 1938.

79 Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne and the Infant Saint John the Baptist ('The Burlington House Cartoon')*, 1499–1500, charcoal (and wash?) heightened with white chalk on paper, mounted on canvas, 141.5×104.6 cm.

80 Sarah Kofman (1934–94) *Self Portrait*, 1991, pencil on paper.

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Can writing kill you? Can the coming of memory be deadly? These are the questions I want to pose in my reflections on a slim memoir by French philosopher Sarah Kofman that became the last book of the voluble and prolific writer's life. Titled *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, it is an account of the author's childhood between the ages of eight and eighteen. This childhood was passed as a Polish-Jewish immigrant child in France who was forced into hiding by the German occupation of France in 1940, after which her life was constantly under threat as a result of the enactment after January 1942 of the Final Solution.

The main elements of the story that *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* will replot are these: foreign-born Jewish citizens of France were initially targeted by the Occupying German forces with the collaboration of the French authorities. On 16–17 July 1942 a mass arrest of 28,000 Jews was planned. In fact, they seized 13,152 men, women and children who were taken to a bicycle-racing stadium known as the Vélodrome D'Hiver, the *Vél d'Hiv* for short, or to a holding camp in an apartment block in Drancy before being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, which had just started operating as a death factory a few months earlier. Under French law there could be no census on religious affiliation. But a German ordinance of 21 September 1940 required all Jewish people in Occupied France to register with the police. These files were handed to the Gestapo where they were colour-coded and classified by nationality, region, profession and street. It revealed a population of 150,000 Jewish residents in the Paris area. By 1944, 76,000 Jewish people had been deported from France under the Nazi Occupation. Only 811 returned.

Sarah Kofman's father was the Rabbi of a small Polish-Jewish community in Paris. He spent the days preceding the leaked round-up warning his congregation to flee or go into hiding. He could not himself do so for fear that they or his family would bear the retribution for his escape. He was therefore arrested, leaving his wife and their six children without visible support and at risk themselves of future round-ups. Madame Kofman renamed her children and hid them out of Paris. But Sarah would not be separated and in her noisy

grief and refusal to eat non-Kosher food risked exposure. Finally her mother brought her back to Paris. One night in February 1943, Madame Kofman was warned that their names were on the list for arrest that night. Leaving their meagre meal on the table, mother and vomiting daughter fled to the home of a Christian woman who had helped them before. Hidden in her house until June 1944, Madame Kofman was powerless to prevent the Christian woman, known as *mémé*, from taking over her child: renamed Suzanne, Sarah was made to eat horsemeat in broth and steak *sanglant* while being told that the family's Orthodox Judaism was archaic, unhealthy and backward. Progessively detached from her family, culture and religion, Sarah-Suzanne was enthralled by this luminous woman who also introduced her to philosophy, her later profession.[1] The bond with her anxious mother was broken forever. When the war ended Madame Kofman reclaimed her children including Sarah while the Christian lady sued in court to adopt the child. She lost but Sarah's life had been altered irrevocably. Fighting her mother with her recurring anorexia and relentless secular and academic study in lieu of earning money, Sarah remained attached to the Christian lady during her student years. An unexplained break then occurred. The memoir ends with *mémé*'s funeral which, however, Sarah Kofman writes she could not attend.

So the key historical facts concern the rescue and preservation of a hidden Jewish child during the German Occupation and genocidal persecution of Jewish Europeans. But it also tells of the destruction of a family in the wake of the arrest and disappearance of the author's father, a Rabbi. Written in retrospect, the book adds the post-war discovery of the nature of his death.

Rue Ordener, Rue Labat, composed between April and September 1993, was published in Paris by Gallilée on 24 March 1994. On 15 October 1994, one month after she turned sixty, Sarah Kofman committed suicide on the 150th anniversary of the death of one of her intellectual objects: Friedrich Nietzsche. No one can know why a person takes his or her own life. But the sequence of dates has made many scholars speculate that something about writing, completing and publishing the book – that is to say, completing a journey into the trauma of the past and writing it into memory – contributed to the devastating depression that overtook the author. Gleaning information from those who knew her state in 1994, Penelope Deutscher has written: 'At the end of her life, and after *Rue Ordener*, she felt herself disastrously unable to read or write', and to enjoy music, art and cinema, the mainstays of her life and work.[2] Depression drains life of emotional colour. Above all, as Julia Kristeva argues in her study of the 'black sun' that is depression, it severs the link between the psyche and language, between the subject and the signifier. Words become depleted, empty things.[3] For an intellectual, a writer, a thinker, a reader, this is already a living death. We can only feel a depth of compassion for the disaster this must have been for Kofman.

The opening line of her memoir has haunted many of its readers and indeed it points towards the source of the danger:

> De lui il me reste seulement le stylo. (Of him all that remains to me is the pen.)

What could be more poignant? All that remains of a man's entire life is a single object. Can this be true of a man who is a father? What is then the relation of this paternal object to his surviving daughter? As object, a pen is highly symbolic, the instrument of writing, the emblem of the writer, a prized tool in a pre-digital, pre-word-processor age and one that marks masculinity in an era when men wrote and, if at all, women typed up their writings. But this writer to whom the pen belonged was culturally specific in his relation to this object and all it implied about access to the word and the world created through words: he was a Rabbi, a learnèd man, a teacher, a scholar in a culture which had for centuries engendered writing. In pre-modern times all Jewish men were literate, schooled to read and write from the age of three.

Thus this fountain pen represents a time-specific memory. That generation of handwritten texts that bear the physical but also psychological imprint of the writer in drafting, revising and finalizing a text is now a relic of the past, a thing of memory.

> Of him all that remains to me is the stylo, the fountain pen.

De lui (*Of him*) as if a possession, *de lui* (*from him*) as if a bequest, *de lui*, a remnant as if part of him, the pen remains, but it remains *alone* and *to me*. This claiming of this lonely writing implement forges linguistically a link between *lui*, him and me. The usual French grammatical formulation would be *De lui il ne me reste que le stylo*. Kofman has refused the normal. She has wanted to avoid the use of the negative in order to stress the solitary condition of the pen and the desolation of the *me* who only has this one remnant of/from him. Now we see that it was not the only relic but one which remains only to me. The text continues:

> I took it one day from my mother's handbag where she had kept it with other souvenirs of my father. It is the kind of pen that is no longer made, the kind one has to fill with ink. I used it through my school days and studies. It 'failed' me before I was ready to let it go. Yet I have it with me still, patched up with scotch tape, it lies before me on my desk and it constrains me to write, to write.[4]

Stolen from his wife, the writer's mother, the pen is already seen as an anachronism, hence a carrier of the past, not the present. Moreover, it is in effect a dead pen, for it has failed this writer before she was ready to 'let it go'. It had been a companion throughout her own entry into education and scholarship. Vicariously, its use reforged a link with the missing owner. It had indeed been her instrument, allowing her to enter into his place and space by

this rather obviously Freudian association between pen and masculinity. Yet this wounded, defunct, patched-up pen that is so closely identified with *him*, the father, cannot be abandoned. It is preserved. Where? Not in a handbag, the maternal space, but on the desk, the space of writing and of men who write. This invokes Freud's emblematic desk where the great psychoanalyst, whose writings on aesthetics and femininity Kofman rigorously analysed, sat confronted not by writing instruments, but by sculptures, images from other times and other cultures, icons of their negotiated fears of love, life, death and even thought (Figure 78).

Kofman's passage creates a scenario. The writer begins to write a book. Before her is the wounded but bandaged pen of her father. It is endowed with power. It constrains her to write. It does not inspire her. It does not quite command. It is experienced as an obligation and a restricting force. The Latin root *constringere* means to bind together, tie tightly, fetter, shackle, chain but also to draw together. There is pain in this word. Then comes an even more powerful sentence:

> Mes nombreuses livres ont peut-être été des voies de traverse obligés pour parvenir à raconter 'ça'. (9)
> My numerous books have perhaps been the necessary detours to bring me to write about 'that'. (3)

In the end, therefore, this book, this writing is different from the others she had profusely undertaken – thirty books published in her philosophical career. This writing arrives only after many detours of other writings at a destination: telling 'ça' it, this, that. Did telling 'ça', however, lead to dying? What catastrophe could writing it engender?

It seems clear that a change had occurred in Kofman's professional writing already in 1987, when the philosopher first interjected reference to her father's deportation and death in Auschwitz into a much more personally scripted text, *Paroles Suffoquées/Smothered Words*, an intended homage to Maurice Blanchot.[5] The book also acknowledged Robert Antelme, who was author of one of the most searing, but humanity-affirming of accounts of life as a political deportee in a concentration and slave-labour camp, *L'Espèce humaine*.[6] Did that shift – from playing so brilliantly in the texts of other writers to inscribing herself in her own – render writing deadly?

Bringing memory into the space of writing became dangerous because of what was to be confronted as a result of its having been given literary form. Or was Kofman's a long journey *away from* an encrypted trauma that, once encountered through the prism of a 'writing', ceased to be a negative force driving her towards writing and instead arrested her before what could not yield 'the relief of signification'? Some outcomes of this dangerous undertaking find a passage through Ettinger's *transport-station of trauma* through their aesthetic inscription as transformation. Others, it seems, long encrypted

and finally inscribed in the narrative field where memory claims them, may not find a way back from the meeting that emerges in the writing trauma. I want to explore this proposition in the case of the writing by Sarah Kofman about an object and what it marks.

I first encountered Kofman's book while preparing an interdisciplinary module in 1996 ranging across literature, cinema, art, museology, commemoration debates, philosophy and psychoanalysis that confronted the cultural memory of the Holocaust. Wanting to pose the question of gender in relation to the overall annihilating terror of that event, my section on witness and testimony aimed to convey to students the extensive range of experiences by Jewish and non-Jewish survivors. Beyond the famous works of concentration-camp literature by Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel, Charlotte Delbo and Robert Antelme were testimonies to ghetto life and living in hiding. I placed Sarah Kofman's newly published and recently translated text *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* on my reading list in a weekly schedule that addressed gender and stolen childhoods. This included the newly complete edition of *The Diary of Anna Frank*, read in conjunction with Janina Bauman's *Winter in the Morning* (1986), the story of her experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto and in hiding (discussed in Chapter 4). Bauman's book is presented as the diary she wrote as a teenager; the text, in fact, had to be reconstructed from a moment in the 1980s because the original, which had survived the destruction of Warsaw during the uprising in the summer of 1944, had been lost when Janina Bauman and family were forced to escape from Poland in 1968 under the regime's anti-Semitic persecution. Bauman sought to write from the perspective of her teenage self, and in her preface speaks of having to go away from the present and relive an almost eidetically imprinted other world of which she had never spoken to husband or children.[7] I added *When Memory Comes* by Saul Friedländer, the distinguished historian and specialist on Nazism and the Persecution of the Jews.[8] Friedländer was the child of assimilated Czech-Jewish refugees, stranded in France, whose safety was only ensured by his parents' handing him over to a Catholicism in which he grew up. Planning to become a priest, he was reminded by an older priest of a past that had faded; he was encouraged to reconnect with it, in order to make his choice more honestly founded. Friedländer did not become a priest and ultimately moved to Israel from where, in 1977, under the shadow of the Yom Kippur War, he wrote his memoir. Published in French in 1978, the text is structured as a diary, with a running commentary on the present interspersed with shards of memory that take him back to the ten-year-old he was when he was separated from his parents. All these texts thus involve a form of retrospect while also seeking to conjure up the subjectivities and positions of the authors' child-selves. The forms and aesthetics of such writing offer diverse strategies that seek to hold affective reconnection to create vivid literary texts while also being safely ensconced in the present of writing.

In reading Sarah Kofman's cryptic memoir of her years as a hidden Jewish child in Occupied Paris, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, there is the temptation to undertake a psychoanalytical interpretation of the author, using the text as if it were the speech of the analysand. Kofman was, however, a philosopher of writing, dwelling in language, its play and possibility as the ground not only of thought of but of how living and writing cannot be disentangled. In 1978, Kofman wrote:

> It is not a question of my attempting here to reduce philosophy to pathology or system to biography. It is rather a certain relationship of system to life which interests me: to see, not what the work owes to life but what the work *brings* to life; to grasp how a philosophical system can take the place of *délire*.[9]

The writing in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* feels lapidary, precise and polished, acutely self-aware as any deep student of Freud and notably of his books on dreams and jokes must be, of the treacherous power of language to say more than we mean or even know. 'It' speaks; we are spoken. The other scene, the unconscious, shapes and impresses itself upon the surface of our conscious utterances, leaving us exposed to the analytically inclined reader's detection, but also to our own self-discovery.

Verena Andermatt Conley wisely reminds us that one of the powerful effects of reading Kofman's 'récit autobiographique' – as Kofman named *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* in a dedication of a copy to Conley – in the light of the death of its author so soon after its completion is the force of the book's *refusal* to provide any possible way to understand the death with which the writing career of Kofman concluded so soon after its publication.[10] Despite the depressive drag muting her voluble identity, Kofman had written several texts around this period 1993/94. In her thesis, Ashlee Mae Cummings plots a web of connections between the four final projects of Kofman that include an essay on Wilde's *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, on Nietzsche's anti-Semitism and an essay, posthumously published from the notes, on Rembrandt's painting *The Anatomy Lesson*. Cummings places these texts within the space between *Paroles Suffoquées* (1987) and *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (1993/94). Cummings, however, contests the views of Deutscher and Oliver on the meaning of the opening paragraph of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. They consider that all her work was leading to the writing of 'ça'. Cummings argues the opposite. Kofman wrote philosophy to evade 'ça':

> Her previous writings and *ça* are not at all one and the same and they are certainly not interchangeable. One could even go so far as to say that every work that Kofman wrote before *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* served the purpose of evading her own personal traumatic story and I would argue that *not* writing about *ça* in those earlier works was the only way that she could arrive at the moment of writing about *it* later.[11]

Any invocation of belatedness speaks to me of trauma. But it also gives rise to this proposition: the writer or the artist does not journey away from trauma as if it were lodged in a chronological past. Timeless, trauma knows no past. But the artist or the writer may, in fact, circuitously be creating, over a lifetime of writing, a journey away that becomes one obliged ultimately to turn towards the encounter with trauma. An edifice may have been built to contain its de-encryption, or it might fail.

The traumatic past had set out her destiny, to write, and the pen is its symbol. Yet some kind of settlement of accounts with the past the pen holds before her had *now* to be written, demanded by the dead pen. Because the past was a trauma that had not yet become a memory, it happened in writing, and only in the present, after all the books. In finally ceasing to evade it, the unprocessed past of which she was the voluble effect flashed into the present as her own becoming. Still, something could not be said: *ça* remains an enigmatic signifier.

Ça is the enigma Kofman bequeathed to her readers. Thus my question is what remains encrypted in that word? What does this line mean?

> Mes nombreux livres ont peut-être été des *voies de traverse* obligées pour parvenir à raconter 'çà'. (9)
> Maybe all my numerous books have been *the pathways* required for me to reach the point of telling 'that'. (3)

This is my inelegant retranslation: detours become pathways. *Voies de traverse* have Lacanian psychoanalytical overtones that echo but differ from Ettinger's transport station of trauma. *Voies de traverse* are the difficult and complex routes of our psychological movement from the frozen, repressed, disavowed, repetitions of our arrested neurotic or traumatized condition into a certain kind of fluid or fluent self-knowledge. It is the movement, not the destination, that psychoanalysis attempts to facilitate as a transformation from petrified blockage locked into symptoms into the possibility of a mobile economy of *life*, engagements with the world and others. Thus there is the notion of a *voie*: the railway track in French and the notion of a passage, a transfer and a journey. Kofman had undertaken an academic journey, but precisely not to arrive where her father's began in 1942 and where a *voie*, a train track, took him. Yet, she senses that she must now tell: 'raconter', which contains within it the notion of a *conte*: a tale. This is not writing per se as a physical act, but relating a story, giving the past a narrative form. So what is it to tell the *story*, to make a narrative without analysis, of *çà*? *Çà* is the least descriptive, least referential indicator of something. Perhaps it is akin to *Das Ding*, *La Chose*, the Thing in Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytical vocabulary, where it stands for a substance-less void before and beyond representation, the latter, in the form of the object, invisibly determined by this shaping presence

of the unsignified Real.[12] It is also, of course, the French term for Freud's *id*, the repressed remnant of the most intractable and infantile of psychic organizations and impulses.

Kofman dared herself to tell '*ça*'. So the text raises a critical and destructive relation between trauma and writing *it*. This means we have to follow Kofman's own methods and do a careful reading of the structure of this writing in order perhaps to glimpse the movement – the *voie de passage* – of the always unsaid and unsayable trauma somehow agitating or shaping a text that touches upon it but never contains it in the safety of a narrated representation. This is where my reading departs from the many brilliant analyses that read the text under the sign of autobiography or memoir and hence find a relatively coherent narrative of the past. I read the writing as an aesthetic operation marked by the attempt to give shape to trauma, without the writer fully knowing what 'it' was that was being shaped; whatever it was, could not be and was not said or written. Something had happened. Something that might be tracked across a telling of past events. The text, however, reveals *it*, by something that is not inside the text, not said. The pen constrained her to write what she did not (want to) know. Alone without the texts and lives and thoughts of others, Kofman was now abandoned to her own birth as a writer in the womb of historical catastrophe. It is bound, above all, to the dead object that links her to her dead father.

I discern an encrypted trauma of shame related to a scene of seduction whose recognition through writing what appeared to be a memory emerged in writing but not as language. To elaborate this reading, I shall plot out three structures in Kofman's text: Rhyme, Topography and Object.

Rhyme

In her reading, Verena Andermatt Conley identifies a core rhyme in Kofman's book between the beginning and the end that involves two deaths, two departures through dying. Conley calls it *Vanishment*.[13] The confrontation with the death of a loved one is traumatic; culturally, we have created rituals through which we deal with immediate necessities, to take a leave, however painful, through burial or cremation, through wakes and, in Jewish tradition, a carefully calibrated calendar for the first week of immediate mourning with daily services at the home, a month of less intense but still noted mourning, a year of saying Kaddish every day for the departed and a setting of the gravestone at the end of that year, followed by an annual remembrance by lighting a 24-hour candle: *Yahrzeit*. Without such formal procedures to lead us through the tearing of the cloth of shared life, and to facilitate the integration of loss as cherished memory, it is difficult to undertake full mourning as Freud analysed its stages in his text, 'Mourning and Melancholia'.[14] In my

own work on childhood maternal bereavement, however, I have found myself questioning Freud's optimistic sense that mourning is ever completed.[15] The bereaved live beside a gap. Those left-behind are, in effect, the subjects of death, the locus of where the ending of life is registered as a subjective event by the perpetual fact of 'the absence of presence, nothing more … the endless time of never coming back …'[16]

Vanishment captures the deeper sense of the mystery of a continuous and unrelieved condition of someone 'not being there', as an absence that redirects the trajectory of a life now marked by it. In both cases of the two deaths that frame Kofman's text, however, there is no participation in the rituals of farewell with which we, the survivors as subjects of death, accommodate the shock of loss. Kofman's father died out of sight, *là-bas*/over there, in Auschwitz, leaving no remains. The pen is the only relic. In the second case, Kofman is not witness to the farewell because she cryptically states she 'was not able to attend' the funeral, an ambiguous phrase leaving open both logistical impediment and psychological inability or emotional uwillingness.

The first *vanishment* is that of the author's father, Rabbi Berek Kofman, arrested during the infamous *rafle* or round-up by the French police of 16–17 July 1942, and deported through Drancy to Auschwitz where he was selected for labour, not immediate gassing. He was killed in Auschwitz, but not by the SS. We shall return to this later. The second departure is that of an elderly woman who had entered Sarah Kofman's life as the Christian-French woman who sheltered her and her mother in 1943/44, the decisive year of the author's life to whose lineaments this slim volume returns to trace them into language and also into a form of knowledge that Kofman decided to share publicly through publishing a text that would appear to diverge radically from her philosophical studies and her readings of texts, films and paintings by being so unadornedly autobiographical, but in a manner oblique, anxious and enigmatic.

If indeed this book has a shape determined by two deaths which somehow invited Kofman to join the departed and to vanish, it must be because something in the story in between, *le conte*, the fairy tale as Conley daringly names it, was traumatic at the point at which retrospect and language converged to touch it. Rather than an autobiography, written backwards from a secure point in the account's future, Kofman's text becomes an allothanatography: *allos* meaning other, and *thanatos* meaning death. It is a writing of the death of others between which what had been ten year's of the life of Sarah Kofman was now apparently restrung.

Topography I

By titling, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, moves between the two streets of Paris, very close to one another, divided by a long street, Rue Marcadet, along the length

of which Kofman describes herself vomiting in anxiety as she and her mother fled for their lives from Rue Ordener to throw themselves on the mercy of 'la dame' at Rue Labat in 1943. Street names become, however, allegorical of two worlds between which the child was then stretched by racist persecution that propels mother and child away from the one towards the other. Rue Ordener is a Jewish world; Rue Labat a Christian space. In Occupied and collaborationist as well as resistant Paris, how and why might the passage from the one to the other be traumatizing?

Kofman's representation of the two worlds as two homes, two kitchens, two regimes of intergenerational social and emotional interaction makes acutely visible that both Judaism and Christianity are regimes, if radically different, of the body, installing their differentiated subjectivities by means of a writing on and of the body. Kofman's hysteria – in classic psychoanalysis, a sign of a subject in trouble with the kinds of sexual identity and identifications proposed by heteronormative phallocentric cultural law, and in more recent elaborations a subject primordially traumatized by mortality – is recoloured by the starkness with which *as a child* she was obliged to make sense of the shocking encounter not with sexual difference but with cultural difference. Her hysteria, which takes the very physical form of vomiting, retching to expel what is within, refusing to ingest what is inserted into her body, is supremely eloquent of what Julia Kristeva revealed in her psycho-anthropological study of abjection.[17]

The textual architecture of Kristeva's analysis of abjection involves three elements that traverse comparative religion, anthropology and psychoanalysis to trace the issue of the body, its imaginary frontiers and the passage into symbolic thought. Starting with the Biblical text of *Leviticus*, Kristeva daringly concludes with a reading of the vicious anti-Semitic writer of modern literary abjection whose writing deflects abjection and violence into literature. Kristeva initially plots out the issue of the sacred (the issue of a boundary between life and meaning that marks a symbolic division: sacred or holy means simply set apart) and its counter-face the abject through a history of Abrahamic religious forms. In ancient Judaic religious practice based on taboo and transgression righted by sacrifice, setting apart and the ritual acts which perform it, give rise, however, to a powerful code of morality and ethics. Kristeva then plots the radical shift effected by Christianity's psychologization of sin, and onto modern literature that inherits and displaces religion itself by dealing with the issue of the now subjectivized abjection not as extraneous taboo or as internalized sin, but as the psychic lining of the sublimating subject. Literature becomes the symbolic space to manage and contain the fear of abjection, of the unboundaried eruption of the messy unsymbolized body, the collapse of boundaries within the psyche, projected often outside onto a scapegoat figure representing all that must be abjected for the subject to imagine itself as clean,

distinct, contained: hence, for the heteronormative white man, the image of woman, the Jew, the homosexual as leaky, viscous, disordering and grotesque.

The Judaic, originating in and intellectually transforming the ancient sacrificial understanding of the sacred as distinction/separation, defines what can and cannot be taken in either to the body or to the Temple. The Judaic body is thus defined by what it does not ingest and how it deals with emissions and eruptions from within. Kashrut, its food rules, are thus integral and symbolic, defining a particular order of sublimating abjection and subjectivity based on boundaries in which the individual body and the sacred space of the Temple mirror each other. Christianity utterly altered this logic of bodies and separations with its concept of original sin. If human subject is born in sin, s/he is by nature sinful. The flesh and the psyche are contaminated from within by sin. To be purified, body and soul must paradoxically take in that which in the Judaic sacrificial system had to be released ritually but never ingested: blood, symbolic of life itself. Thus the Christian sacrament of communion makes the body of the sinner participate by symbolic ingestion of the divinely sinless body that is willingly sacrificed and of life-blood of the incarnated divinity, thus performing a symbolic pollution in order to purify a primordial sinfulness. For Kristeva, this Christian logic fostered the elaboration of a concept of interiority that in turn engendered a different sense of moral and psychologically self-reflective subjectivity, hastened by the development of the confessional. In the secular modern form, this interiorization became the basis for the evolution of literature as a subjective space and the novel as its displaced site of ritual: form. Both take over, transform and sublimate the formerly religiously defined operations, creating an allegorical space for interiority, communion and elaboration of subjectivity.

Kristeva's is a structural analysis that identifies different symbolic systems. The danger, however, is that different systems will be placed in succession, justifying the necessary supersession of the older by the newer. Christianity is then presented as leaving behind and transcending the representative of an archaic, sacrifical mode: Judaism. Yet, as evolving historical bodies of thought and practice responding internally to many changes over centuries, Jewish and Christian regimes coexist in present time, each with its own evolution through historical time while maintaining different configurations of being and body, inside and outside. Despite the confusing and impossible adjective, Judeo-Christian, Judaism and Christianity are radically different ways of conceiving the relation between bodies and meaning. For the religiously observant within either Judaism or Christianity, the nature of the each other's psychic world and corporeal imagination remains a blind spot, unknown and unrecognized.

Thus the collision of an Orthodox Jewish child, from a family from the Eastern European home of Polish Judaism, with an actively Christian-French woman under the alienating and terrifying conditions of a political abjection

of 'the Jew' by Nazism's radical genocidal racism and under the seductive and fascinating conditions of an increasingly intimate relationship between child and the older Christian woman takes on historic proportions with potentially massive psychological ramifications.

As a child inducted into the only socio-cultural religious world she knows in an observant Orthodox Jewish household, Sarah Kofman would experience her being, her identity, her genealogical relation to both family and world by means of actions: rituals, festivals, performances and above all the highly differentiating procedures for preparing food and avoiding certain foods or mixtures, and above all blood. Patterned into the order of days, months, yearly cycles, observed as rituals performed by a mother who soaked meat to extract the blood and a father who ritually slaughtered chickens to ensure immediate exsanguination, the physicality of food, notably meat, would have been vivid and magical. To transgress Judaic food rules and ingest the forbidden is to cross a boundary that can never be re-established, for the body has been both physically changed and symbolically altered, defiled by ritual uncleanness. To eat what is forbidden is also physically to become something else even if at a later date rules are resumed. For in modern times there is no sacrifice that can be performed to right the transgression, as there was in Temple times when the rules of Kashrut were generated.

There are, however, conditions under which it is permitted to break the rules. The saving of life takes precedence over everything. Thus in a text written in 1983 titled untranslatably as *Sacrée Nourriture* (*sacrée* meaning both sacred, holy, *Kadosh*, and damned), Kofman tells both a very Jewish and a classically Oedipal story. The Jewish story: First, mother says: 'you must eat'. This is the oldest Jewish tale about the Jewish mother who stuffs her children with food as a violent and misdirected form of love created out of historic poverty. Then the father, representing the law, says 'you must not eat everything'. In the Freudian tale, it goes like this: the mother is the breast, the nourishment and nurturer, fostering desire. The father is the law, interrupting this dyadic bliss with the *nom/non du père* and says you cannot have everything you want. There is a sacrifice of desire to be made in order to access culture under my sign/name. Sarah Kofman hysterically refused this deal. Anorexia and vomiting were forms of childhood resistance born of both the fear of being stuffed and the fear of transgressing a taboo.

Now comes history. The war made all food scarce. As the Germans invaded, the population of Paris fled to the west. The Kofmans take the train to Brittany. The Red Cross provides wholesome nourishment for the refugees: ham sandwiches on buttered bread. Imagine anything more contrary to the rules of Kashrut when pork is utterly forbidden and meat and milk products cannot be mixed! The Rabbi-father, following the law, places life above food rules, as he can and must. Despite the mother's attempt to uphold their cultural

practice, the father allows the children to eat what the Red Cross has provided. It tastes good. But the text in which this recollection is recorded becomes severe immediately. Two brief sentences follow:

> A few years later my father was deported.
> We could no longer find anything to eat.[18]

Formally, the text proposes and yet hesitates to make the link between the moment of savouring the forbidden food under the benign eye of the father and the stark introduction of his disappearance and the forced advent of hunger. Was what followed experienced somehow as retribution, or is the author just stating historical fact? Kofman then gives a brief account of being 'saved' by a woman who taught her what it was to have a Jewish nose and who put her on an entirely anti-Jewish diet of raw horsemeat in bouillon. This brief *récit* ends with:

> Put in a real double bind, I could no longer swallow anything and vomited after each meal.[19]

Brevity underscores the pain of what is being recalled. Language puts its hysteria in place. The text registers the tormented body of a child without the linguistic skills the later adult will deploy in order to evoke the body as her psychic space. She has only her body to speak with. She can only be hystericized by the encounter with this third adult, who cannot easily be positioned within the structure of child/Other, self/culture that the Oedipal scenario exists to negotiate on our behalf.

The high-priestess mother who administers too much food but also polices the law the father upholds but is also empowered by it to suspend, represents one big Other. This can be dealt with. Does Kofman, however, imply that her childish thought was that the father was in some way deported for his transgression that initially corrupted the pure body of his Jewish child, seducing her with forbidden flavours, only then to abandon her, vanishing, leaving her vulnerable not to momentary, authorized transgression but a rewriting of her whole being by means of what is now repeatedly inserted into her body by someone who is between and both mother and father, and who, in the absence of the father, takes the place of the law? Yet this woman-Father stands for new law, in fact an anti-law, 'liberating' the child from the Jewish law that Christianity, as a historical-theological force, disdains as archaic and considers to have been overthrown by its new, lawless, covenant.

Many scholars read the story of Kofman's childhood recounted in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* as a painful struggle between the two mothers, the hated Jewish Rebbitzen, Madame Kofman, and the lovely Christian saviour. There is no doubt that Kofman's relation with her own mother did not survive her childhood. We cannot tell whether it would have otherwise. Part of the

unspoken trauma embedded in this text may lie in the terrible, irretrievable destruction of that bond. I am, however, more troubled by the way in which this episode of two women fighting for the affection of a child has been represented by many commentators. Inadvertently, they repeat Christianocentric culture's negative stereotyping of Judaism as loveless ritualism, superstition-based rule-bound archaicism, which these readers make their account of the anxious Madame Kofman embody while she is contrasted to the lumimous desirability of *la dame*.[20]

In an article on Kofman's complex relation to philosophical fathers, Freud and Nietzsche, philosopher Diane Morgan interprets the opposition in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* as

> …a disarmingly blatant account of the rejection of a mother, the *bios*, in search for a freer cultural identification with another. The Jewish mother in Rue Ordener is bad, restrictive, suffocating. The French mother in Rue Labat provides access to a higher, less backward looking cultural realm. That which is 'made in France' is modern, European; by contrast, the Jewish *bios* is archaic, hampered by strange and frightening customs that belong to some dark and unenlightened world. Her separation from her family and her adoption by her French Mémé, which the war permitted, allowed the young Sarah to liberate herself from this biological drag on her development.[21]

Reading this text as a kind of allegory of Kofman's philosophical orientation, Morgan's reading of the opposition which Kofman appears to offer between two maternal figures in the text runs the danger of passively reinforcing the anti-Semitic and Christian point of view of the woman named *mémé* in which Judaism is seen as archaic, strange and unenlightened.[22] Morgan is, however, not alone in tending to read Kofman's little book in terms of a struggle between her mother and the adoptive rescuer, straddling Jewish and French Christian worlds, the old and the new, and in seeing it as a story of liberation.

The conflict was not, in my opinion, a tug-of-war between two maternal subjects for one child. The historical conflict in which Sarah Kofman found herself was hugely overdetermined by long-standing religious contestations between Judaism and Christianity, aggravated by the conditions under which a Christian woman 'saved' a Jewish child in the presence of another woman, her own mother, bereaved horribly by the terrifying arrest and deportation of her husband, without any money, powerlessly responsible for the survival of her scattered hidden children, herself living in daily fear of being discovered and deported to her death. She was then forced helplessly to witness a systematic attempt to appropriate the child and alienate its affections from its own mother and cultural identity and to remake the child's subjectivity within an alien system.

I want to offer a Freudian reading. The Christian woman who 'saved' the

child effectively took over the place of the father who had been deported. It was she who now determined what was eaten and how, disempowering/castrating the Jewish mother and abjecting Judaism itself. She controlled the input and output of the little girl's guts, already twisted with anxiety, hysterically closing against forced ingestion, already symptomatically responding to oral seduction. Red meat – that is, with blood – is mentioned for more than factual reasons. The bloodiness is deeply symbolic of the depth and resonance of what was being perpetrated by the new food regime.

I am suggesting that the topographical distance between the two apartments signalled by the two addresses in the title dramatize the overlay between the structural formation of subjectivity in the Freudian Oedipal triangulation by the historical and ethnically specific conditions by which it was exploded. That traumatic reconfiguration, like the Oedipus Complex itself, was written symbolically and literally on the child's body. The f(n)ormative structure was shattered by the departure/deportation of her father. It was rewritten by the insertion, into his space of authority over the child's body and being, of a woman. This *Christian* woman, was not empowered by the phallus, but by her Christianity and Frenchness. That was the passport to survival. Yet acceding to survival on these grounds, enacted upon the child a trauma of deracination that humbled all things Jewish, turning what was innermost in her identity and its intergenerational connections to both mother and father into what was most to be abjected. If Jewish legal identity passes through the mother, Kofman was being severed from her own lineage by adoption; severance from her father was being performed by substitution.

The Christian woman could do what neither the actual mother nor the vanished father could: save the child, keep her alive, literally by feeding her up with radically different foods, and, metaphorically, by protecting her through passing her off as her own daughter. The 'lady' – *la dame* – has no name in the text. She is called *mémé*, a French term of endearment for grandmother. The repeated syllables of the 'm' can also be associated with *ima*, the Hebrew word for 'mummy', or *maman* of the French. Both involve opening the mouth and touching the lips together: it is a very oral or labial consonant that also has the quality of infantile echolalias, primary vocalizations, calls. We discover that the lady was in fact called Claire. But she is only invoked as *la dame* or *mémé*, and by place-namings.

Much of Sarah Kofman's critical work was written *with* and *again*st Freud. *With* signals Kofman's acknowledgement of the psychoanalytical discovery of how unconscious structures and fantasies shape what we think and write; *against* indicates some resistance to the manner in which what Freud thought and wrote continuously foreclosed the space of the feminine. As theorized by classic psychoanalysis, femininity is unlivable. Freud could explain the formation of a heterosexual feminine subject, initially, like the boy child, totally

enamoured of the mother, only by positing a violent rejection on the girl's part of the mother because she failed to give her a phallus. Turning away from the mother in hurt and rage, Freud supposed that the feminine subject unconsciously imagines indirect access to the phallus by passively offering herself to the father or his substitute in the delusive hope of becoming thereby a passage for the phallus to enact its own phantasy of generation through her, by her becoming a mother.

Kofman did not become a mother. Not only did she reject Freud's definition of femininity but also she resisted the culturally defined feminine position her Jewish mother had lived and tried to foster upon her. In the typical Jewish sexual division of labour, a woman lived a life of work and procreation, but not thought. The Jewish woman works and maintains the family, often supporting them, while the husband is a scholar or a teacher. This is not the Christian bourgeois disposition of the working breadwinning man and the leisured woman.[23] But both in different ways exclude the girl and woman from scholarship and the life of the intellect, symbolic creativity.

Philosophy is thus the sphere of the masculine in both cultures. It is culture, language and otherness. After the war, Kofman's mother pressures Sarah into work, to make her perform her proper function, namely to go to work to maintain the family. Sarah Kofman wants access to the masculine position made possible for her through the secular French education system. She wants to generate language and ideas in a curiously filial and disobedient relationship with surrogate fathers: Freud and Nietzsche. This is typical of intellectual women of the twentieth-century moment of emancipation through education. But it is also ethnically slanted because of the Jewish order of gender difference. Not based on the opposition masculinity=activity versus femininity=passivity, it works in the reverse: men are quietist but creative thinkers, women the active procreative doers. *Mémé*'s domestic agency is consistent with women's work. Structurally, however, she had taken the place of the Oedipal father of desire because she momentarily possessed the symbolic phallus, displacing the Jewish father of identification who, in disappearing and dying, evacuated his place-holding of the phallus.

The psychic economy plays itself out across the two spaces: the economy of sexual difference in which desire is forged is reconfigured by traumatic events within history. Sarah Kofman lived on after the rupture of her Orthodox family, and lived out its contradictions in terms of cultural identities created through gaining access to a secular education that enabled her to become a distinguished modern philosopher, while being forced to confront Christian notions of transcending Jewish archaicism. She had to make her own psychic negotiation of what happened to her when a child, vulnerable, menaced and in need of everything racist persecution made her own parents unable to provide.

Topography II: the text

We must now approach the topography text itself. Why does it end where it does? Why does it end as it does, abruptly?

Chapter XXIII is titled in the French edition by place names: *Hendaye – Moissac – impasse Langlois.* Most of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* recounts the events of one day – 16 July 1942 – and eighteen months between February 1943 and August 1944. But it is also a testament to the effects of this brief but formative moment: the traumatic core of a life that had to be lived when those two 'events' rerouted the child's life.

A traumatic event ends childhood prematurely and abruptly. From almost one moment to another, the child moves from the world of childhood, an evolving and protected series of spaces and relationships which absorb life's events into an order that will continuously be integrated as real memories or retold narratives and provide the cushion on which the child can grow up. Extreme events disrupt this fragile process with terrifying suddenness inducing a traumatic rupture in itself. They precipitate the child into a new world where she must prematurely study adults, follow new leads, make sense of the enigmatic world outside in order merely to survive. Kofman's story of the destruction of her family and the abrupt cessation of her childhood is not unique. It is there, in that space, that she fashioned a text for those who can read what it is trying to say about the child's encounter with the specific locale and aftermath of that moment within a terrible history when being a Jewish child exposed her not only to total loss but also to the risk of her own possible death precisely for 'being' Jewish, a hitherto unknown 'identity' since it was identical with being, but has now become an indelible 'sin' that merits death.

With its geographical namings, *Hendaye–Moissac–impasse Langlois*, Chapter XXIII tells of the attempted distanciations from Rue Labat enforced by Madame Kofman after liberation. After moving in and out of Paris, trying to see *la dame* openly or secretly, Sarah Kofman is eventually sent with her sister to a Jewish institution in Hendaye, on the borders with Spain, and then to Moissac in the south of France near the Pyrenees, in order to re-introduce her to Judaism. There she remains for five years. Not technically oriented, Sarah is, however, allowed to go to the local French schools to follow the classical, mathematical and scholarly curriculum. This sets her apart from the other Jewish children in the ORT establishment that aimed to prepare Jewish children for a working life in technology and industry. For her final years of schooling she returns to Paris to live again with her mother who cuts off the electricity at night to prevent her 'improper' studies – she defiantly reads by flashlight – while once again attempting to feed her. Hunger strike is the teenager's resistance once again. Losing seven kilos over two years, Sarah Kofman also loses all faith and ceases religious observance completely.

Kofman finally moves away from life with her mother in the *impasse Langlois* thanks to a scholarship. Nothing is said in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* of the agonizingly dysfunctional mother-daughter relation: her mother's death is only mentioned in passing. But *mémé* has also moved away, retiring to Sables D'Olonne on the Atlantic Coast just north of La Rochelle. In a beautifully crafted sentence, Kofman writes of visits during her student years:

> L'été, je passais *là-bas* un mois de vacances avec elle. Nous promenions au bord de la mer. (98)
> During the summer, I spent my holiday month with her down there. We would go for walks beside the sea. (84)[24]

Sarah Kofman is punning on *Labat* and *là-bas*, the latter meaning 'over there' or 'down there' – i.e, on the Atlantic Coast; both the street name and the phrase sound the same in French.[25] Like an enthusiastic student come home for the vacation, Sarah Kofman shares with *mémé* all the joys of her liberated student life, cinema, friends, acting, discussions about the existence of God, eating sandwiches in the gardens of the Luxembourg.

But from this seemingly easy-going and familiar scenario of happy summer days by the sea, the final two paragraphs of the last chapter of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* radically swerve away. As a university student, another life begins. This represents an act of *déchirement*. She who was repeatedly severed from *mémé* against her will, now performs her own severance and dons a new identity: *étudiante* cutting off all contact with *mémé*. A colon explains:

> …je ne supporte plus de l'entendre me parler sans cesse du passé, ni qu'elle puisse continuer de m'appeler son 'petit lapin' ou sa 'petite cocotte'. (99)
> … I can no longer tolerate hearing her talk about the past all the time or letting her keep calling me her 'little bunny' or her 'little darling'. (85)

Something made unbearable the affectionate encoding within the world of *mémé* that she had struggled so hard against her mother and the odds to maintain up to that point. No explanation is offered. The tense changes from the past of *récit* to the present. The inability to tolerate the evocation of the past is continuous. Later, when visiting, Kofman tells us that she makes sure she is accompanied by a man friend: *un ami*. The text then reports the recent death of *mémé* in a hospice. Did she die of cancer? Handicapped, almost blind, she could no longer listen to music but still whistled tunes on the telephone. So there was contact at the end.

The final paragraph starts with a puzzling sentence: '*Je n'ai pu me rendre à ses obsèques*. I was not able to go to her funeral.'(99/85) It is not in the conditional but the past perfect: a fact that does not permit of psychological speculation. But she knows something of what was recalled at *mémé*'s graveside: the priest reported that she had saved a Jewish girl during the war. This is so

ambiguous. *Sauver* is the Christian word for salvation as well as a term for rescue. Had she rescued her from destruction, or saved her from her Judaism? The final sentence returns us to a little Jewish girl 'pendant la guerre', the time and place of a saving of a girl affirmed by the priest forever as 'Jewish'.

What is the relation of the death of *mémé* and the unattended funeral? It would have been a Christian funeral. Perhaps that made it impossible to attend. Is Verena Andermatt Conley correct in relating it back to the death with which the book opens: a death that is unmournable for its lack of a grave and *obsèques* proper to it? That death, all commentators agree, is the significant traumatic void for Kofman. It is the death of Bereck Kofman at Auschwitz. I will have to return to it.

Topography III: scenes

As I suggested above, the twinned topographies *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* became sites of a gender-variant restructuring of a normative Oedipal triangulation determined by a historically imposed traumatic rupture of the Kofmans' lives. Sarah Kofman's writing of this is also shaped by a knowingly Freudian imaginary. The book works not so much as a narrative of events as the evocation of a series of scenes that recall Freud's trope of the scene, the scene of sexual difference, above all the primal scene.

The first scenario in the present sets us before the desk of the writer. Unlike Freud's Vienna and London working spaces (Figure 78), Kofman's has no visual record. But her opening paragraph sets up the scene of writing, at a desk with only – it seems – the broken pen before her to incite her to write.

Chapter II has a date as a title: *16 Juillet 1942*. This also sets a scene. It was on 16 July 1942 that the police arrested Sarah Kofman's father. It is the last time she saw him. It was the day her childhood ended. Kofman tells us that he knew he would be 'ramassé': she has it in quotation marks, marking the deformation of language typical of the Third Reich: 'collected', rather than arrested, picked up like rubbish.

A premeditated act of racist historical violence is registered in Kofman's barest prose that sets a scene, just one scene of what the word 'picked up' translates. It is known that French police had leaked the proposed Gestapo-led *Operation Spring Breeze*. Jewish people were warned of an approaching *Aktion* against them. Indeed Rabbi Kofman did his fair share of warning his co-religionists, encouraging them to flee. Then he came home, waited and prayed. He feared that if he attempted to hide, his wife and children would be taken in his stead, or more of his congregation might be taken in his stead. Many other commentators on the perfidious logic in which the Jews were trapped have spoken of these impossible, doomed choices people were forced into once the trap was set by the Nazis.

A new scene. The rabbi remains in his study, a wonderful cabinet of curiosities and site of many Jewish rituals. Sarah watches and recalls the strangest of Biblical legends, the story of Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac. The Jewish formulation is *Akedat Itzak, the Binding of Isaac.* The *sacrifice* of Isaac is the Christian reformulation of the story in Genesis, which functions to turn the momentous Judaic displacement of actual child sacrifice into a topological and symbolic act of substitution that serves as a precedent for the return of human sacrifice that the Son of God will undergo to save the world. Like many children I have taught in Jewish religion schools, Sarah Kofman was disturbed by this horrifying story of a father who conscientiously obeyed his God's injunction to kill his own son, even to binding him and laying him on the altar before an angel stopped the knife in his hand and offered a ram in the boy's place. The Binding of Isaac may be understood as the Hebrew version of the Laius element in the Greek story of Oedipus; both evidence the father's infanticidal wish. Watching the Rabbi-shochet ritually slaughter chickens and circumcise baby boys under an image of Abraham raising his knife to his son's neck bound a series of violent images to the man who now sat passively awaiting his fate.

When the police come, the mother tells them her husband is not there. Afraid that they will take her and the children instead, the father comes forward. Madame Kofman tries every ruse to protect her husband, lying about her infant son's – significantly named Isaac – age, and pushing out her belly to suggest a new pregnancy. The Rabbi waits ready for the sacrifice. Observant and obedient, he allows himself to be 'picked up'. The writer, a watching, witnessing child, is shamed at her mother's mendacity, worries about the news of a forthcoming child, and tries to make sense of her father's sacrifice.

The wife must go to the police in her last ditch attempt to convince the police of the two conditions (being pregnant and having a child under two) that might save him. The text gives us the first primal scene of the traumatic past: six orphaned children standing in the Parisian street weeping like a Greek chorus: *o fate* which comes out in French as *o papa*, rather than *o popoi* (14/7). The invocation of the Greeks Kofman knew well in her philosophical capacity here allows a truly frightful moment of violent fear, grief, confusion, total abandonment and loss of all safety to be secured into a ritualized evocation of 'fate'. Deflection is at work, but for the reader tuning in to the condition of six children under ten, alone in a foreign land – they speak Yiddish and Polish and only learn French at school – watching those who are meant to guard them being taken brutally by the French police, this is a truly traumatizing scene. Nothing can be the same again when parents are thus officially 'castrated' by alien authorities.

In her pitiless and astute double autobiography of her classed and gendered history of her mother and herself, cultural historian Caroline Steedman writes

tellingly of two primal scenes in her white, working-class London childhood when class became the instrument of parental 'castration': her mother is berated in front of her children by a middle-class health visitor who condemns her house as unfit for children, and her father is humiliated by a park warden when he picks some bluebells for his daughter. Steedman wants to show how the classic Freudian model is painfully inflected by class, and how Freud's own compensatory phantasy of paternal authority can be destroyed within the social axes of power.[26] In Kofman's case fascism and racism perform this destruction of parents before the eyes of baffled children.

The blank in the page pauses the narrative but Chapter III begins: 'As it turned out, never again did we see my father (15/8).' Removed forever, the story must now be told again – it was first averred in the text in 1987, *Paroles Suffoquées* – what Kofman came to know later about how her father died at Auschwitz. But before that is told, the text records the receipt of a postcard written in French in another's hand requesting that the Rabbi-father be sent cigarettes in the 2 kilogram package that was permitted. This postcard becomes a treasured relic into which the young child invested the voice and desire of the missing father. She tells us that the later discovery of its loss was experienced as a second loss of her father. This resonates. The first loss, the traumatic wrenching away into the unknown void of separation, is fetishistically disavowed by attachment to that which recreated a momentary line of communication, a thread of contact from the transit camp at Drancy: the postcard full of its own paradoxes, not written by her father, in French, bearing the collaborationist Maréchal Pétain's image. Given the horror of the paper that later turns up confirming definitively his death and the later oral report of how he died, this attachment to a postcard, bearing Pétain's hateful face becomes a means of holding on to the man whose attachment to cigarettes is lovingly reported in the following chapter where the smoker's weekly torture of the well-observed non-smoking rule of the Sabbath is described. But did we notice in this chapter, as an aside about the later loss of the paternal postcard, that we are given the only passing reference to the death of the author's mother here? It holds no emotion. It is only the occasion to discover the mother's lack of care in keeping a postcard that we can then understand imaginatively rather than actively was so cherished by the daughter. If she lost her father a second time, it seems it was through the death of her mother which led to the discovery of the postcard's being missing. The supposed guardian of the other souvenirs kept in a handbag failed even in this and is thus blamed for a second severance from the father as memory. Yet in the writing, her death –as it were – occurs at the same time as the father's double dying.

We shall soon come to the other souvenir still kept by the daughter, taken from the mother's purse, the pen – when and why? Does it, a writing imple-

ment relate to the missing written postcard retrospectively? Is it another layering of identification performed and preserved through writing?

This section and the next opening backwards into the world before 16 July also serves as a description of a Jewish childhood in an Orthodox Polish family that plots out the annual cycle of Jewish festivals in irregular order and fractured memories. Chapter VI returns us from this idyllic retrospect back to 16 July: setting into writing the defining dates of Kofman's world – before 16 July and after 16 July. Happy memories of school find a place out of time because Chapter VII starts with the account of how between July 1942 and February 1943 her mother has to undertake the task of hiding her renamed children; Isaac becomes Jacquot, Rachel becomes Jacqueline, Aaron Henri: so why was Sarah's name not changed too? The children are hidden in the countryside. Chapter VIII tells of 'the real danger' now experienced: 'separation from my mother' (33/27). This reconnects with an earlier experience of toddler anxiety when Sarah Kofman, aged 2 or 3 years, had once lost her mother in a public place. This is a portrait of a child submerged in separation anxiety. She has also just experienced the arrival of another brother, the annihilating sibling.

Juliet Mitchell has recently drawn psychoanalytical attention to the relations that Freud ignored: sibling relations and the impact on any child of the arrival of a sibling.[27] The experience Mitchell describes as akin to death. From being the one, the baby, the displaced infant experiences its dispossession when another arrives and takes its place 'at the breast' as a profound assault on being, a sensation akin to dying which can become the ground for hysteria: hysteria according to Mitchell is thus without gendered particularity. It arises in this nexus of being with and being utterly without, of desire and a feeling of dying, becoming nothing.

The round-ups increase in intensity and, clinging to her mother, Sarah and Madame Kofman must find refuge here and there. But they have one refuge of habit 'la dame de la rue Labat'. So comes the second primal scene that has the quality of arrested memory of the night of 9 February 1943 when mother and daughter are warned that they are on the list for this evening's round-up. Mother and daughter flee along the length of Rue Marcadet (the geographical reference is hallucinatory) to be welcomed by the beautiful lady in her *peignoir*. That image too is held as an angelic but erotic vision.

Along that long journey, Sarah Kofman reports that little Sarah vomits all the way. Anxiety has taken over the site of the other brain: the digestive system, that most delicately calibrated sensitive and loquacious site of psychic anxiety converted into the body's language of symptoms.[28] Mother and daughter dare to make one last visit next day to the desecrated site of origin – the family home mutilated by the Gestapo with its seals and punitive destruction for their not being there; never again would Sarah have a family home. The only

refuge for the 'recherchées' was the apartment on Rue Labat. Thus at once we have a welcome and hospitality on the one hand, and a sense of this place being the only site of possible escape from fleeing endlessly from a now utterly destroyed 'home'.

Up to this point in her life, however, little Sarah refused to be separated from her mother. Despite many attempts to hide her somewhere safe, the child refused food and forced a reunion. In the telling, this fact is repeated often. It is insisted upon. The repetition in writing provides it with a significance that the text does not spell out; the intensity of the attachment becomes all the more remarkable because of the violence of that mother's emotional disappearance effectively from Sarah Kofman's life after arrival at Rue Labat.

The following chapters document what is titled by Chapter XII: *Metamorphosis*, the hinge of the text. Evoking Ovid, once again, metamorphosis is the title in French and English of Kafka's infamous allegory, *Der Verwandlung* (1915), implying the total transformation of species being. Metamorphosis is also the link across Kofman's memoir with creative but devastating transformation. Like Daphne or Arachne, Sarah Kofman is being faced with a forcible alteration that in some way involves a kind of dying. Noticing this term alerts us to its profound rupture. Contemplating a formal conversion to Christianity from which, in fact, little Sarah/Suzanne actually flees the church in which baptism is to take place, Sarah is informally renamed Suzanne and step by step, *la dame* transforms the child inside and out. This is not a matter of superficial makeover: a few new clothes, a new feminine hairstyle to replace her lice-infested cropping by her mother, entrancing as they may be.

Two different verbal constructions occur that confuse us as to who was the agent in this metamorphosis. Chapter XII concludes:

> Je ressens vaguement ce jour-là que je me détache de ma mère et m'attache de plus en plus à l'autre femme. (53)
> On that day I feel vaguely that I am detaching myself from my mother and becoming more and more attached to the other woman. (44)

Then in Chapter XIV we read:

> A son insu or non, *mémé* avait réussi ce tour de force: en présence de ma mère, me détacher d'elle. (57)
> Knowingly or not, *Mémé* had brought off a tour de force: right under my mother's nose, she'd managed to detach me from her. (47)

So there was a change of *attachment* brought about by an act of *detachment*. The text continues that the detachment was 'Et aussi du judaisme/And also from Judaism'.

> She had saved us, but she was not without anti-Semitic prejudices. She taught me that I had a Jewish nose and made me feel the little bump that was the sign of it. She also said, 'Jewish food is bad for the health; the Jews crucified our savior, Jesus Christ; they are all stingy and love only money; they are very intelligent, no other people has so many geniuses in music and philosophy.' Then she'd cite Spinoza, Bergson, Einstein and Marx. It is from her lips and in that context that I first heard those names, which are so familiar to me today. (47)

Kofman thus records a babble of anti-Semitic tropes confusing the child with negation of her own parental family and its traditions while offering one positive lifeline that could win *la dame*'s approval and maintain a link with her past: intellectual achievement. Yet this is troubling. Naming this list of great thinkers as Jewish can itself be anti-Semitic when coming from 'her lips'; they are being named, othered, by a non-Jew as Jewish. They are being marked out for that fact, and not existing merely as great thinkers. Significantly, Freud is not part of this list.

A series of transformations of habits, eating, clothes, and language – Kofman soon no longer speaks but still understands Yiddish – culminate in two further scenes. Kofman is taken to visit the lady's large extended family in the countryside on Sundays. There she discovers 'family and the family spirit' based on gathering several generations together (52). The almost Impressionist image of the bourgeois family gathering in gaiety and peaceful interaction evokes a negative memory of the lack of such relations in the Kofman household. The Rabbi and his wife had emigrated from Poland to France in 1929. Just over ten years later his entire family had died in the Warsaw ghetto. Of ten brothers and sisters, only one escaped, living in Yugoslavia and married to a non-Jewish wife. The Rabbi did not throw him off but sent letters to this brother signed with drawings of the hands of his children. Compressed into one paragraph, the two worlds are being juxtaposed: the flower-filled garden at L'Haÿ-les-Roses and the burnt-out remnants of a ghetto, the site of mass dying. This recollection leads to mention of a recovered object: a photograph of the Rabbi from his youth when 'he doesn't know what lies in store for him' (53).

The book is moving in to what I identify as its climactic scene: the final scene of seduction. Whatever it is that the text is telling at this point, it wants the readers to catch its sexual overtones. In his reading of Kofman's book, Michael Stanislawski's interpretation is unequivocal in describing the homosexual seduction of the child by 'the lady'.[29] One night they return from L'Haÿ-les-Roses too late for the last *métro* and *mémé* books them into a hotel. Kofman calls this chapter *Paravent*, after the screen behind which she remembers the mature woman undressing.

> I have no memory of that night in the hotel save of the undressing scene behind the mahogany screen.

> The next day we took the first *métro*. My mother was waiting, sick with worry, certain we'd been arrested and obviously unable to enquire at the police station.
>
> I had completely forgotten her. I was quite simply happy. (54–5)

I do not think anything happened here. But this does give us a clue to the core of what constitutes the anxious knot at the centre of this *conte*: a double process of seduction. First comes an emotional and oral seduction away from the mother, away from Judaism, and into the complex and alluringly different life-world of the French-Christian woman. Part of this, however, involves the precocious exposure to adult sexuality in the form of *la dame's* weekly tryst with a boyfriend at which Sarah-Suzanne is allowed to participate. The book intimates a knowing courtship of the child, but not simply into a replacement maternal relationship, even if that was *la dame's* conscious purpose. Survival, love and desirability are plaited into a bond with disturbing transgressions that produce momentary happiness in a child's world trimmed at every turn with terror. Kofman tells us that she buried 'her entire past' and, worst of all, feared the end of the war, the ending of her time so close to *mémé.*

But liberation comes in August 1944. Kofman's mother is free at last to reclaim her scattered children, find a home, and take back the daughter the lady has tried to 'steal' from her. Another sudden and absolute severance is imposed on the child, forced now to return to another hotel, to share a bed, this time with her mother. I detect an unconscious rhyme between the two scenes; one of blissful happiness and another of penniless misery marked by a bad meal cooked on a butane gas cooker that Sarah, of course, refused to eat. Negotiations for a slower severance are begun, but physical violence from the mother – beating with a strap – attends any breach of the terms. In a French court, *mémé* sues for custody of Suzanne-Sarah and is awarded her care on the grounds of violent abuse by Madame Kofman. The lady phones her boyfriend triumphantly reporting the legal win of 'my little girl'. Sarah Kofman records feeling uneasiness, neither happy nor secure until her mother, fearsome in her defence of maternal and Jewish rights, 'violently' reclaims her. 'I struggled, I cried, I sobbed. Deep down I was relieved.' (61)

At this point the *conte* stops, and it seems, veers off into two detours which are, in fact, other scenes that evoke the indecipherable complexity of feelings before these two contesting figures. Kofman tells us that for the cover of her book on Freudian aesthetics, *The Childhood of Art* (1970), she wanted a detail from Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna and Child with St Anne* (Figure 79). The chapter is composed of a lengthy quotation from Freud's essay on Leonardo, the topic of Freud's first attempts at theorizing the aesthetic psychoanalytically. The drawing shows St Anne, her daughter Mary on her knee, the child Jesus with John the Baptist leaning on his grandmother's knee. It is about two generations of women, and two children. The unfinished drawing repeats a

relatively rare Christian iconography that occurs in the painting in the Louvre by Leonardo, but with a more complex relationship between the figures of Anne and Mary and the child. Freud interpreted this doubling of the maternal figure as Leonardo's imaginary projection onto the screen of art as a double scene. At once it reflects his own experience of his adoptive mother Donna Albiera, his father's wife, and his father's mother, Mona Lucia. Behind this historical explanation of mother and grandmother tenderly gazing at one child, lies another memory that involves the two women who mothered him in infancy and childhood: the peasant Caterina to whom he was born, and the adoptive higher-class mother, wife of his minor aristocrat father who acknowledged him, thus alienating him from the nourishing mother of infancy and the social space into which he was born. Freud suggests that the grandmother figure of St Anne corresponds to Caterina, the peasant mother. The blissful smile screens the envy the latter may have felt in giving up the child to an aristocratic rival. Freud's doubled reading holds before us both the generational pairing mother/grandmother (*maman* and *mémé*), while reversing that hierarchy to use the older woman as screen for registering the displaced mother's rage and envy. Does this chapter allow for both little Sarah's shifted affections and the anguish of the displaced mother, now recalled as doubling the maternal gaze within which the child is held?

Contradictory emotions are also registered by the second detour, into Alfred Hitchcock's film *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), a film about the substitution of a good old lady (a secretly brilliant spy disguised as a nanny) for a harsh and ugly one. Kofman's description concludes with a reference to Melanie Klein's good and bad breast, which these swopped mother figures represent, 'utterly separate from one another, but changing into each other' (66). Only with these two allegories in between can the story continue to tell of one blissful reunion with *mémé* which reads more like the reunion of lovers. Yet, I stress, it is being told from the point of view of the unconsciously 'seduced' child's ignorance of what is happening emotionally, and sexually, within her at this point. Thus truth or phantasy matter little compared to the affective after-affect. Sleeping in the same bed with *mémé*, Kofman candidly confesses:

> I remember especially the first night, when my emotion and excitement were very great. Just to feel close to her put me in an 'odd' state. I was hot, I was thirsty, I was blushing. I kept mum, and really would have been hard put to say anything about it, since I had no idea what was happening to me. (67)

I do not think that this is a frank avowal of homosexuality. For that self-discovery of the capacity to feel love or desire for another woman is not the meaning of what Kofman is reporting. The writing clearly evokes a highly eroticized scene, but one in which the child-participant is not yet a sexual being, even while her bodily signs are initiating it. She is experiencing an

intensity of emotion and its attendant physical excitement in relation to being close to an older woman, who has been inscribed in the text as a woman of desire and a desired one through the regular visits of the boyfriend. In one sense she dangerously evokes the unconsciously desired Oedipal father who can open up the space for the daughter to separate from the mother.

I want, however, to suggest that on the *Matrixia*l string, this woman offered access, through what Bracha Ettinger calls *fascinance*, to the girl's emerging own femininity. For Freud, femininity as a difference is forged only in desperate discovery of feminine lack vis-à-vis the masculine phallus, in which the girl becomes a feminine subject through penis-envy and her hateful rejection of her castrated mother. Ettinger radically shifts Freud's solely phallocentric and hence negative explanation of feminine sexual difference.

> If Oedipal difference is the key to feminine sexual difference, the question '*what does a woman want?*' quickly turned into the question *what does a woman want from a man?* It is not sustained long enough at the level of *what does a woman want from a woman?*[30]

Returning to the text of Freud's case-study of 'Dora', a troubled eighteen-year-old, fascinated by her father's 'mistress', Frau K., and who gazed for hours at the *Sistine Madonna* by Raphael in the art gallery at Dresden, Ettinger argues that the girl who will become a woman learns what femininity might be through a prolonged gazing – *fascinance* – at another woman, what Ettinger names the *ffam*, the *femme-fatale-autre-Mère*, namely a mature, sexual woman, who is not the actual mother (for we find it hard to contemplate our own conception in our mother's active sexuality).

This quest for knowledge of femininity takes the form of *fascinance*:

> Dora's fascination with Frau K., like Dora's admiration of the Madonna were not expressions of homosexual desire. Dora did not desire Frau K. sexually. She desired to be caught in a move of fascination that belongs to femininity, a move composed of a girl towards a woman-figure, who is fascinated too by the daughter-girl and who allows her sufficient proximity to sustain the *illusion of inclusion in her mature and elusive maturity – a femininity which is not directed at the girl but outside and away from her*. Yet the girl desires to be included inside it for instants of eternity whereby she participates in advance, and by proxy, in a world not yet fit for her own immature sexuality.[31]

In her elaboration of the concept of *fascinance*, Ettinger focuses on Marguérite Duras's novel *The Ravishment of Lol V. Stein* (1964) in which a violent disruption of this prolonged gazing at and exposure to another woman leads the heroine Lol compulsively to seek to repeat the scene that she still needs time to complete. Finally, when that fails, Lol succumbs to psychosis, unable to make the transition into her own sexuality and femininity.

I am arguing that Sarah Kofman's *récit* is not a confession as such. Her writing registers, in a kind of faux-naive but true-naive manner, a process instanciating this concept *fascinance*. The girl-becoming-a-woman-Sarah needed to watch and be near *mémé* to find a way to access a proferred femininity that the older woman hospitably represented. Her need was to be included in something, *in the feminine*, in the desirable, represented by the mature, sexual woman, through which she can pass from a traumatically arrested and hystericized childhood into joyfulness in life. Having reparatively read for *fascinance*, we cannot ignore Kofman's creation of this scene of reunion that tilts towards eroticism.

Rue Orderner, Rue Labat registers an undecipherable form of seduction that loops back, in a very different way to the scene of seduction discussed in Chapter 2 on Louise Bourgeois. But, unlike Bourgeois's scene under the table, the trauma of seduction it indexes is ultimately not concerned with sexuality. The eroticism is a distraction. Here, instead of a pure hystericization of anxiety when confronted with the enigma of adult sexuality, as was the case in Bourgeois's story of the children hiding under the table, the scenes Kofman has chosen to highlight within the structuring of her text by place and scene have the opposite, dehystericizing, eroticizing effect, allowing the body to become hot, excitable and pleasured but in a pre-pubertal, non-genital sense of participating in advance in a moment of space of female sexuality on the verge of which she still hovers. What makes us burn, however, is shame.[32]

Narratively or textually, the process of separation from this need to remain in permitted fascinance/proximity to what is not yet finished with her own real sexual awakening is thus traumatizing, even though it happens slowly over the next few chapters with furtive visits and secret letters and a long stay in hospital. But finally sent to the South, educated and then back to war with her mother, Sarah Kofman becomes a *student*. She takes up the life of the intellect. She has her own friends, including *un ami.* She has made her own sexual choice. She continues to have some contact, but revolts against being held in that overwarm childish relation of now uncomfortably eroticized childhood that she no longer needs. She does not attend the lady's funeral.

The object

We can now return to the opening lines:

> De lui, il me reste seulement le stylo.
> Of him, all that remains [for/to me] is the pen.

I have already discussed elements of this paragraph, and spent much of this chapter placing it in the context of the ending and the climax of the book, its topographies and primal scenes. I have suggested a trauma of seduction

and veered away into another, matrixial account for what the lady might have represented for the child Sarah Kofman. I have also suggested a distortion, via religious and cultural alienation of the Oedipal configuration and the appropriation of the place of the father. For the passage into her own womanhood, modern, educated, secular but still Jewish in identity if never in practice, Kofman returns to the disappeared father. Only now can we go back to the desk, and back to 16 July 1942 and ask what is the role of the surviving object: *le stylo de lui?*

Chapter II opens with a date in italics: 'On *16 July 1942*, my father knew he was going to be picked up.' Was it that *ça*/'that' that the pen incited its final, vicarious owner to travel back and yet always, towards – remembering Adorno's German phrasing *Nach Auschwitz*, meaning towards as well as after? Remember Chapter III, written in retrospect: 'As it turned out, we never did see my father again.' With the postcard she had 'that last sign of life we had for him'. It was lost: 'It was as if I had lost my father a second time. From then on nothing was left, not even that lone card that he had not even written' (9). His death was, however, certified in writing. It took place in Auschwitz. So we confront two pieces of writing – the last sign of life and the official inscription in a register that confirmed two things: At the age of forty-two, Rabbi Kofman had been selected for slave labour, probably in Auschwitz-Monowitz, and was not sent for immediate gassing. Yet he was killed. This is the bookend writing of his death. After the bleak death certificate, an Auschwitz survivor who apparently witnessed that death gives the family a report. Refusing to work one day, and wanting to pray on a Sabbath, Rabbi Berek Kofman was beaten with a pickaxe by a French-Jewish butcher-turned-Kapo and then buried alive.

The full and horrific import of the title of the first book to dare to speak of her father's death, *Paroles Suffoquées: Smothered Words*, now hits us. That text transferred the horrible dying onto the very words that had been written to speak of the entire trauma that culminated in something worse that ordinary death, in Auschwitz. Chapter II *Smothered Words* text begins:

> Since Auschwitz all men, Jews and non-Jews die differently: they do not really die; they survive death because what took place – back there – without taking place, death in Auschwitz was worse than death: 'Humanity as a whole had to die through the trial of some of its members (those who incarnate life itself, almost an entire people, a people that had been promised an eternal presence). This death still endures. And from this comes the obligation never again to die only once, without however allowing repetition to injure us to the always essential ending.'[33]

Framed philosophically with a paraphrase of Theodor Adorno's final meditations on metaphysics 'after Auschwitz' (1966), the passage also cites Maurice Blanchot's afterword to *Vicious Circles* before returning to the brutal statement:

> 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? Of this event, my absolute, which communicates with the absolute of history, and which is of interest only for this reason. 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 clarity and happiness of daylight. And how can one not speak of it, when the wish of all who returned – and he did not return – has been to tell, to tell endlessly, as if only an infinite conversation could match the infinite privation.[34]

To tell endlessly, because such endless telling alone matches the infinite privation, recalls the *telling* to which the author was eventually constrained by the pen itself, all that remained because he did not return, and he did not return because he died '*because* he was a Jew'. Not *as* a Jew under Nazism racial laws. But he died being a Jew, speaking to his God 'beseeching God for all of them, victims and murderers alike' (10). *This* has to be spoken, voiced, enunciated by a language that threatens to betray those 'smothered words' by its own illuminating power to master every experience, to cover over the void, the traumatic aporia, that it must remain.

Calling upon Lyotard, Adorno, Blanchot and Antelme, honouring them for writing and speaking, *Smothered Words* is a wilfully painful journey through other writers' words to the impossible place where the father, the Rabbi, the Jew, died a death worse than death, as part of a historical catastrophe that afflicts all humanity (according to Blanchot) through what happened to two peoples, the Jewish people in particular, *back there*, *là-bas*, in the event collectively remembered after Adorno as 'Auschwitz' which, however, for many like Rabbi Kofman was the actual site. Berek Kofman born 10 October 1910, in Sobin, Poland, did not die in the specially industrially manufactured killing machinery of that place, Auschwitz-Birkenau, where as a Jewish man he would have been starved, overworked and eventually gassed or worse, left to die the death of internal disintegration they called becoming a *Muselmann.* He was buried alive after suffering a brutal beating by a fellow Jew for daring to carry on an act of religious fidelity in a place where all such human aspiration and ambition for grace or hope had been systemically abolished.

It is of this man, suffocated to death to smother his words, that all that remains, as the writer of these texts writes, is a patched-up, unusable fountain pen. So that object is a material index, an affective icon and an intellectual symbol: but of what? It is also a link in an affective chain between child and father, a chain severed by what Blanchot named an absolute, both personal and historical, while being maintained precisely by the power of the object to 'speak' a command: write, write. Yet, all the books the author did write were to avoid coming to tell *that*. *That* cannot be simply what she had already written

in *Smothered Words* about his terrible dying that she embedded in a textual study of writings by Blanchot and Antelme. The *that* cannot just be the story of the contestation over her identity and affections that forms the narrative of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. But the what of *ça* lies between them.

The *that* that must be finally written is the act from which her father died and its relation to the acts that occurred with his vanishment. The act of saying words, words that got him smothered, signify a relation to a non-relational, radical alterity which sustains the humanity of the utterer.

> In this unnameable 'place', he continued to observe Jewish monotheism, if by this, with Blanchot, we understand the revelation of the word as the place in which men maintain a relation to that which excludes all relation: the infinitely Distant, the absolutely Foreign. A relation with the infinite, which no form of power, including that of the executioners of the camps, had been able to master, other than by denying it, burying it in a pit with a shovel, without ever having encountered it.[35]

This is not about his religious faith per se. It is about its philosophical potency to imagine a humanity in relation to an otherness in opposition to the total destruction of humanity represented by the camp in totalitarian usurpation that rendered all men superfluous.

Smothered Words was the first address to either autobiography or the Shoah. That writing showed how intensely intertwined were her life and his death. What followed were texts in which Kofman engaged with Judaism, anti-Semitism and the Shoah and culminated in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, the story of what happened to Sarah Kofman herself after the deportation of her father and the break-up of the family forced into disguise and hiding. Thus the pen also constrains her to write of what happened in the chain of events following the round-up on 16 July 1942. All that remains from before is a pen. The Rabbi's pen is the sign of all the writing, speaking and practices in faithful observance of which he was murdered in the most ghastly way imaginable. The terrible truth is that his actual death did not occur as part of the process of impersonal annihilation of the Jewish population under racial laws. *It happened in a confrontation over the very religious identity and its philosophical possibility that Sarah Kofman was* ***seduced*** *into abjuring as a vulnerable child in an extreme historical situation.*

For me, the deep unsaid of Kofman's text lies smothered, buried, here. The father's pen links writing to daring to confess what I can only overdramatically name a forced and unknowing apostasy – a radical alienation – while plotting out its psychological/ emotional/historical conditions which forced it. About Auschwitz, and after Auschwitz no story – *récit* – is possible, Kofman says, if by a story one means: to tell a story of events which makes sense. So the pen incites a memoir that is not a story that makes sense. It is the writing of its

senselessness that is contained in the presence of the pen, instead of the father, and in the life of writing of the daughter who now has to write her way back through unbearable grief and unspeakable shame. She cannot hide behind other men-writers-thinkers to deflect this journey into the traumatic fissure in the historical formation of her self.

Becoming scholar and writer in the French secular education system involved breaking the conventions of her Orthodox Jewish home in more ways than no longer eating Kosher meat. It involved a transgendering identification with the masculine, the scholar, the Rabbi, the philosopher by means of the pen. Of this Sarah Kofman made a creative and productive life writing over thirty books. But there is something else in that pen: *ça*.

The trauma remains in senselessness – the unnegotiable, irrecoverable trauma of the daughter, who having broken the covenant in fidelity to which her father outrageously suffered an exceptional and unthinkable living death, and in her having loved and been loved for it, touches the unspeakable shame at the process of her survival – *seduction* into apostasy – and her compensatory but transgressive identification with the masculine scholar that was made possible indirectly by it. Now the pen is both transport station to the missing father and the means of prying open the encrypted secret: the pain of the encounter with what was not imagined – shame.

On 15 October 1994, a year after completing the book that begins, *Of him all that remains is the pen*, six months after its publication, Sarah Kofman took her own life. I am asking, therefore, if the final utterance of words that never directly spoke of *ça* but tracked their way to a realization of what had been the encrypted secret, functioned, therefore, catastrophically. Rather than being a transport station of trauma, the pen of the father called forth an encounter with the hitherto uncognized affect at the core of her trauma and its knowledge gave no relief. Her writing's revelations smothered her as if the surrogate identification with the writing man-pen fractured to leave a gap and breach between father and daughter that could not find a link or a string to transport the trauma to anywhere but nothing: death was where no more writing would come.

Postface

In the publication of *Sacrée Nourriture: Damned Food* in *Les Cahiers du Grif* in 1997, a drawing by Sarah Kofman precedes the text (Figure 80) From childhood, Kofman drew incessantly, later as a daily ritual. There are hundreds of drawings by Kofman, mostly faces and figures, some landscapes.

Drawn in pencil, a cage of lines that might suggest hair encircle a face created by smudged pencil punctuated by darker intensities that signal two

eyes, a cocked eyebrow, and an opened mouth. The effect is one of intense anxiety. There is no volume, just a skin of colour pierced by an intense gaze created by the dark marks that give the eyes a strange but distracted intensity. What is striking in all Kofman's drawings of herself, her husband and others, is that there is no substance to the bodies. Her lines, washes and smudging create a force-field of intensity, a map of charged tension across forms that freely float in space or are sometimes caged.[36]

In *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, there is one other object mentioned that links back to her father. It is a letter he had written to his brother in Yugoslavia, signed with drawings of his children's hands. It is recovered by Kofman's sister from the brother's surviving wife. It reminds Sarah Kofman that she drew hands constantly throughout the war years. The pen – writing – meets the hand drawing hands. Indeed it seems Kofman drew and painted all her life. There was one exhibition of her work in Paris at a bookshop. I have failed to track down its traces. It is time perhaps to see her drawings again.

Notes

1 In the original French Sarah Kofman calls this woman *mémé.* In the English translation the translator capitalizes the name. I follow the French original but in references using the English translation the name will appear as *Mémé*. Sarah Kofman, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (Paris; Galilée, 1994), trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

2 Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver, 'Sarah Kofman's Skirts', *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 7. I also want to thank Penelope Deutscher for helpful correspondence during my research.

3 For a superb analysis of the affective zone of depression see Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

4 Sarah Kofman, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (Paris; Galilée, 1994), 9; trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 3. Hereafter I will give the page references in the text to the French/English editions.

5 Sarah Kofman, *Paroles Suffoquées* (Paris: Galilée, 1986); *Smothered Words*, trans. Madeleine Dobie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998). Brief, almost autobiographical texts had appeared in *Première Livraison*, no. 4 (1986) and no. 5 (1987). Translations: Sarah Kofman, 'Autobiographical Writings', trans. Frances Bartkowski, *SubStance*, 15:1 (1986), 6–13. For a review of these texts see Michael Stanislawski, *Autbiographical Jews: Essays in Jewish Self-fashioning* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 139–74.

6 Robert Antelme, *L'Espèce humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947); *The Human Race* trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999). Antelme argued that he encountered certain instances of human solidarity within the camp and even with bystanding Germans.

7 Janina Bauman, *Winter in the Morning* (London: Virago Books, 1986) reprinted recently with her second volume of memoirs, *A Dream of Belonging*, in one volume

as *Beyond These Walls: Escaping the Warsaw Ghetto – A Young Girl's Story* (London: Virago Modern Classics, 2006). 'Why? And Why?', ii.

8 Saul Friedländer, *Quand vient le souvenir* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978); *When Memory Comes* [1978], trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979).

9 Sarah Kofman, *Aberrations: le devenir-femme d'Auguste Comte* (Paris: Aubier-Flammarion, 1978), 41; trans. Paul Patton.

10 Verena Andermatt Conley, 'For Sarah Kofman: On *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*', *SubStance*, 25:3 (1996), 153–9.

11 Ashlee M. Cummings, *The Shelter of Philosophy: Repression and Confrontation of the Traumatic Experience in the Work of Sarah Kofman*, MA Thesis, University of Miami, 2009, 13, http://etd.ohiolink.edu/view.cgi?acc_num=miami1248976254.

12 For an elaboration of Freud's concept of the Thing, see Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis Book VII 1959–60*, trans. Dennis Potter (London: Routledge, 1992).

13 Conley, 'For Sarah Kofman: On *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*', 154.

14 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia' [1917], Penguin Freud Library, Vol. 11: *On Metapsychology* (London: Penguin, 1984), 245–68.

15 Griselda Pollock, 'Deadly Tales', *Looking Back to the Future: Essays on Art, Life and Death* (London: Routledge, 2001), 371–90.

16 Tom Stoppard, *Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), 90–1.

17 Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

18 Sarah Kofman, 'Sacrée nourriture', in Christiane Besson and Catherine Weinzaepflen (eds), *Manger* (Liège: Yellow Now, 1980); trans. Frances Bartkowski as 'Damned Food', in Thomas Albrecht, Georgia Albert and Elizabeth Rottenberg (eds), *Sarah Kofman: Selected Writings* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 248.

19 Kofman, 'Sacrée Nourriture', translated as 'Damned Food', 248.

20 For a subtle study of the manner in which European culture since Shakespeare has represented Judaism as a dried up, exhausted, rule-bound and loveless religion contrasted with the youthful beauty and emotional freedom of Christianity, see Hyam Maccoby, *Antisemitism and Modernity: Innovation and Continuity* (London: Routledge, 2006), particularly 97–108.

21 Diane Morgan, 'Made in Germany: Judging National Identities Negatively', in Penelope Deutscher and Kelly Oliver (eds), *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 233.

22 Kofman, *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, 1996: 41–2 and Chapter XIV, 47–80.

23 For a fascinating study of Berthe Pappenheim, exemplifying the difficulties modernizing Jewish women experienced as they moved from traditional Jewish forms of sexual division of labour into Christian bourgeois mores that imposed limited education and restricted activity upon women, see Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1997), 313–60.

24 My literal translation. Ann Smock translates: 'Mémé had moved to Sables D'Olonne where I spent a month's vacation with her in the summer. We went for walks on the beach.', 84.