

Radical Sense
Now Reader Volume 4

MY FAVORITE STATE

is not Iowa or Delaware; it is temporary. Having a body with fluid hinges is temporary. Being so wrapped in music I cannot separate the dancer from the dance is temporary.

Being able to breathe cool air embroidered with cardinal song through the open window is temporary. To know that winter will pass, to know that sunlight will once again

pierce the lake in shafts, to know such things are forever temporary is a temporary state of being, which I'm trying to make a constant state of mind, yet it somehow never lasts.

(Michael Bazzett)

CHAPTER FIVE

The One-State Solution

The Palestine–Israel conflict has traditionally been presented in the West, especially by Zionist commentators, as extremely complicated. Views predicated on this premise have served not only to obscure the actual situation, but have also forcibly led to the conclusion that the solution to such a problem was bound to be no less complex and probably impossible to achieve. In reality, nothing was further from the truth. The issue is in essence quite simple: a European settler movement ineluctably displaced an indigenous population and wilfully denied its basic rights, inevitably provoking resistance and recurrent strife.

The obvious way to end that strife would have been to redress the injustice done to the indigenous people as far as practically possible, and find a reasonable accommodation for the needs and rights of everyone involved. The parameters of such a solution are clear, and the only difficulty was how to implement them, not because of their complexity, but because of Israel's obdurate clinging to its settler colonialist ideology, Zionism, and the Western support that allowed or even encouraged it to do so.

This chapter is concerned with the question of what constitutes a durable and just settlement between Palestinians and Israelis, irrespective of how attainable it was at the time of writing. The fact that something is right or wrong is independent of what can be done about it. Israel had no new ideas for solving the conflict, only re-workings of the old Zionist formula for maintaining a Jewish state, that is, one with a Jewish majority. In three-quarters of a century, Israel never managed to resolve its original dilemma with the Palestinian presence. Its attempts at obliterating the Palestinians in

myriad ways – from their original dispersion, to the denial of their history and existence, to their political marginalisation, to their imprisonment in ghettos – had failed to eradicate them as a physical and political reality.

Yet the Israeli fantasy persisted that it was still possible to pursue a policy against the Palestinians that would simply make the problem go away. This can be summed up as a ‘more of the same’ strategy: nullifying Palestinian resistance by overwhelming force, confining the Palestinians in small, isolated enclaves so as to prevent their forming any sort of meaningful state, strangling their economy and society, and thus pushing them to emigrate (to Jordan or anywhere else, as long as it was outside what Israel considered to be its borders), and ignoring the rest – the refugees in camps, the other dislocated Palestinians, and those treated as unequal citizens of Israel. The difficulties of managing such scattered Palestinian groupings in order to ensure that none of them bothered Israel would have been a daunting prospect for anyone. But it seemed not to have deterred successive Israeli leaders from trying to make it happen.

The alternative – accepting the Palestinian presence as a reality that had to be addressed through genuine negotiations and a mutually agreed settlement – was not one that Israel wanted to contemplate. The desire on the part of ordinary Israelis for ‘peace’ was widespread after the Oslo Accords, but it was not accompanied by an acceptance (or even an understanding) of the requirements that such a peace would demand from them. Most of those who accepted the need for Palestinians to have their own state were unclear about the Palestinian state’s exact geography, and unprepared to relinquish land they had come to regard as theirs. In fact, as the Israeli commentator Gideon Levy pointed out in *Haaretz* (19 March 2006), had Israelis seriously supported the creation of a Palestinian state, they would soon have realised that it was not compatible with the carve-up of the West Bank they and their government had brought about. He identified this situation as ‘Israel’s national disease, to have their cake and eat it’.

Reconciling these opposites had been a central preoccupation of Israeli leaders ever since the acquisition of the 1967 territories and the emergence

of the two-state proposition. Israel had been able to ignore this solution for decades until it gathered such inexorable momentum over time as to make it impossible to reverse. Moreover, by its relentless policy of settling Jews in the Palestinian territories (140 settlements dotted all over the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with 100 illegal outposts in 2021), Israel was helping to bring about a situation it desired even less: the inextricable mixing of the two peoples so as to preclude their future separation.

Israeli fears of Palestinians as a ‘demographic threat’, openly discussed by Israeli politicians and leading figures, were regarded uncritically in the West as legitimate, as if it were acceptable for a nation to define itself exclusively by reference to ethnicity or religion, and seek to exclude those who did not qualify on those counts. It was such ideas of course that had led to the expulsion of the non-Jewish (Palestinian) population from the country in the first place, and which continued to fuel the impetus to expel even more, including those who are citizens of the state. Meanwhile, the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza were segregated inside their own areas. These Israeli attitudes clearly reflected a combination of the anti-Arab racism that was an inevitable concomitant of Zionism and a feature of the Jewish state from the beginning, and the more recent Israeli fear of ‘terrorism’ – that is, resistance – for which the mass disappearance of Arabs was seen as the only remedy.

Accordingly, ambitious scenarios for a future Israel, shorn of its Palestinians and safe for Zionism, were much discussed at one time. ‘Our future in 2020’, published in 2005, envisaged a demilitarised Palestinian state possibly federated with Jordan, with the right of refugee return abrogated, and full normalisation with the Arab and Islamic states. Joint Israeli/Arab projects would be dominated by Israel with the Arabs providing the land and the manpower; the Arab trade boycott would be terminated, and Israel would become the local agent for multinational companies in all parts of the region.¹ A year later, Giora Eiland, a former head of Israel’s National Security Council, who did not believe that a Palestinian state in the 1967 territories was viable and might become unstable for that reason, proposed several grand measures to enhance

Israel's future security. According to these, Israel would annex 12 per cent of the West Bank and ask Jordan to donate 100 sq. km of its own land to compensate the Palestinians; 600 sq. km of Northern Sinai would be taken from Egypt and joined on to Gaza to make it more viable, and Egypt could be compensated with 200 sq. km of Israel's Negev Desert. A tunnel would be dug under Israeli territory to connect Egypt with Jordan.² Eiland did not explain why either Jordan or Egypt should accept these encroachments on their land and security. Yet in 2022, after nearly two decades, versions of these proposals were still being considered.

The Jordanian option, where the Palestinian enclaves would be formally attached to Jordan, had gone into abeyance following Ariel Sharon's death in 2014. Jordan had always struck Sharon as the natural home for Palestinians, although he realised that Jordan would not be willing to go along with this. He therefore envisaged that, given time, the Palestinian entity created by Israel's fragmentation policy in the West Bank, would itself agitate for a federation with 'the artificial kingdom', as he called Jordan. He foresaw it as inevitable that the West Bank Palestinians would meld socially and economically with Jordan (where approximately 60–70 per cent of the population was Palestinian), and together they would form the 'Palestinian state'. The advantage of this outcome for Israel was that the transition would happen peaceably and not appear to have been imposed by force, Amman might replace Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, and the refugee problem could be solved there. In other words, the Israeli plan was to promote this solution by knowingly creating a fragmented, non-viable entity in the West Bank which was bound to look towards its Jordanian neighbour for a solution.

This plan was not as fanciful as it sounded. Many exiled Palestinians living in Western countries owned second homes in Jordan, went there regularly to see friends and relatives, arranged for local marriages for their children, and aimed to retire there. Since a considerable number held Jordanian nationality – a leftover from the days when the West Bank was annexed to Jordan – it made those moves all the easier. One could see how

plausible, even natural, it seemed for the Jordanian state to become the substitute homeland for Palestinians denied any other.

The intense striving for an independent Palestinian state post-Oslo, however, put the Jordanian option out of mind. But it did not vanish from Israel's political thinking. Meanwhile, Israel's only strategy for Palestinians was repression and more repression. Undoubtedly, many Israelis were genuinely afraid of Palestinians, especially after the Second Intifada, and hence their support for the building of the separation wall. But at bottom, there was also the ever-present fear that whatever acknowledgement was made of the Palestinians as a political presence, even a denuded one, could signify the beginning of an unstoppable unravelling of the Jewish state itself.

As ever, the real problem lay with Israel's governing ethos and its inability to evolve. Zionism, which had been so resourceful in its early stages, ingeniously exploiting every opportunity to further its aims and intelligently considering its every move, showed itself in the end to be unimaginative and unable to adapt to new realities. The 'Iron Wall' philosophy of Vladimir Jabotinsky, articulated in the early decades of the twentieth century, remained more than eighty years later Israel's only answer to the problem.³ To deal with the Palestinian threat by building a wall, both physical and political, that would shut the Palestinians out was the only solution Israel could think of to forestall the inevitable consequences of its project. Basing Zionism inside another people's land without ensuring their effective annihilation, on the model of what happened, for example, in the settler colonialisms of Australia or the US, was a foolish mistake. This omission returns us to Benny Morris's regret, set out at the beginning of this book, that Israel did not expel the whole of the Palestinian population in 1948 and safeguard Zionism's long-term future.

But this did not happen and Israel should have evolved ways over the decades of its existence to address the problem it had created other than by recourse to crude strategies of repression and brute force. Where the global trend was towards pluralism and the integration of minorities, Israel's

struggle for ethnic purity was regressive and counter-historical. Nor was it likely that such strategies would work even on the practical level, for, as already discussed, the difficulties of removing so many Palestinians and ensuring that they did not return or resist the fate Israel had assigned to them, were formidable. Pursuing the same ‘iron fist’ policy Israel had always adopted actually limited its options in the long run. The more Israel repressed the Palestinians, the harder they resisted. Gaza was a case in point where constant bombing and policing was militarily costly, and had not succeeded in quelling its Hamas and Islamic Jihad leadership.

The dead-end route that Israel’s ideology had condemned it to is eloquently described in a 2006 *Haaretz* piece by Amir Oren, ‘Living by the sword, for all time’.⁴ Referring to a recent Israeli Army assessment of the conflict which concluded that it was ‘irresolvable’, he wrote, ‘This is our life (and our death) as far as the eye can see. Endless bloodletting until the end of time.’ While Israel clung to a Zionism that precluded any relationship with the Arabs other than one of master and slave, no comfortable outcome for Palestinians, Arabs, or Israelis themselves was possible.

Towards the one-state solution

The twenty-first century is in its third decade, at the time of writing, and the Palestinian situation could be judged to have deteriorated to its worst point since the *Nakba*. Israel had successfully broken up the Palestinian people into fragmented communities living in different localities and under different conditions. Those under occupation in the post-1967 territories are being subjected to hardships that would have destroyed a less tenacious people; the refugees remain in their UN-supported camps in and around Palestine; millions of other exiles have made homes in various countries around the globe, and the Palestinian citizens of Israel are living anomalous lives amongst their usurpers. What had been an effective leadership in such a fragmented situation is largely defunct. The PLO has dwindled into a

semblance of its old self, having been adopted by the ever more discredited PA leadership to give itself legitimacy.

Worst of all, an ever more assertive and powerful Israel, heavily backed by Western states, has been left to wreak all this damage without let or hindrance. It is free to pursue its life-long ambition to erase the physical presence and history of the people it has replaced so effectively as to eventually leave no credible witness to what happened, and no one to cast doubt on its legitimacy.

Yet at the same time, the Palestinians are in the process of attaining a global level of support unprecedented in their history. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, the populations of many of the very countries whose governments held pro-Israel positions, were going in the opposite direction. The Palestinian struggle resonated with many ordinary people, especially younger generations in the West, who saw it as a paradigm for what was natural and just. It became the emblem of anti-colonial struggles and anti-racist protests, like the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, twinned with their own. Britain's second main political party, the Labour Party, under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership from 2015 to 2019 openly espoused the Palestinian cause. Had he gone on to become Britain's prime minister in 2019, the UK government would have placed that cause at the centre of a major European country's foreign policy.

This is not to say that Palestinians had won the battle for public opinion in the West. But there was undoubtedly more sympathy for their cause than at any time previously. This was especially the case in the wake of Israel's massive military attacks on Gaza, Operation Cast Lead in 2008–09, and Operation Protective Edge in 2014. Reporting and TV footage of these ferocious assaults on a besieged people made a significant impact. Israel's unlawful use of white phosphorus in Operation Cast Lead had visible and horrific effects on civilians in Gaza, many children among them, and the vast differential in the death toll on each side told its own story. In the 2008–09 assault, the Palestinian Ministry of Health numbered 1,440 Palestinians dead, as against the Israeli Defence Forces' (IDF) figure of just 13 Israelis. In 2014, the UN estimated at least 2,104 Palestinians had been

killed, and 66 Israelis. More than half of the Palestinian casualties were civilians, in contrast to a majority of soldiers on the Israeli side. In the aftermath of the May 2021 uprisings, with Gaza attacked again, international support for Palestinians rose to new heights.

A YouGov opinion poll conducted in Britain, France and the US at the end of Operation Protective Edge in August 2014 reflected the effect of these assaults. Public sympathy for the Palestinians doubled in Britain, and increased in France, though to a lesser extent. It remained unchanged in the US, where support for Israel is traditionally high. But even in the US, a later Gallup poll in 2020 found a modest increase in support for Palestinians among groups previously known to be unsympathetic, that is, older, white Americans, those with some college education, conservatives and moderates.

Other US opinion polls have reinforced this picture. Gallup's World Affairs surveys indicated a more favourable US trend towards Palestinians from 2001 onwards, and a 2016 Pew Research Center survey noted growing support amongst young Americans, up from 9 per cent in 2006 to 27 per cent. None of this seriously dented support for Israel, consistently higher at 50 to 60 per cent, but the increase was significant.

Public opinion worldwide in 2018 was assessed to be overall more sympathetic towards the Palestine cause, and less so towards Israel.⁵ The BBC's 2012 poll of 22 countries showed Israel to be near the bottom of those most negatively viewed, only just above Iran, Pakistan and North Korea. These modestly favourable changes in opinion polls should be seen alongside the striking situation on student campuses in Britain, and even more so in the US. Students in both countries were active in solidarity with the Palestinians to such an extent that campuses were seen by some Jewish students as intimidating for them. It became commonplace for Israeli speakers, however distinguished, to face disruption to their lectures by pro-Palestinian students.

As with opinion polls, flare-ups of pro-Palestinian student support tended to occur especially at times of Israeli aggression against Palestinians. Following the 2008–09 assault on Gaza, students at British universities up

and down the country, including Oxford, the London School of Economics and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), staged sit-ins and occupations of university buildings. They called on university leaders to divest from arms companies dealing with Israel, provide free visas for students from Gaza, establish scholarships for Palestinian students, and other supportive acts. By 2015, the Student Union at SOAS was demanding that the university, which had close ties with the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, sever its links with all Israeli institutions. The University and College Union, representing college teachers and staff, was working to help Palestinian students gain UK scholarships

This increasing popular pro-Palestinian support could carry the seeds of a future different to the dismal outlook now envisaged. That possibility will be discussed in the Conclusion of this book.

Support for Palestinian statehood

The positive position on Palestinian statehood in the early twenty-first century appeared quite persuasive, almost a done deal. After 2012, when 138 out of the 193 UN member states recognised ‘the State of Palestine’, Palestine was granted UN non-member observer status. From there, the new state was able to join a number of international bodies; already a member of the League of Arab States, Palestine became a member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the International Olympics Committee, the Group of 77 developing nations (of which it was made chair in 2019), and UNESCO. In 2014, the International Criminal Court recognised Palestine as a state, permitting it to bring cases before the Court.

In conformity with UN Security Council Resolution 242, the UN recognised the territory of this state to be ‘based on the 1967 borders’, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The geographical borders of the new state have never been defined any more exactly than that, and a stipulation that there should be a mutually agreed ‘land swap’ is just as unclear. According to this, West Bank territory occupied by the Israeli settlements would be annexed to Israel in exchange for equivalent Israeli territory for the

Palestinians. But the exact parameters of this land swap were never defined or agreed upon, though it was understood that the area of land exchanged would be between 1 and 3 per cent.

The Palestinian state, which these moves were helping to create in concrete form, is an essential component of the two-state solution. This solution is currently seen as the only realistic option for the future of Israel and the Palestinians. It is approved by the international community, and has no serious competitor except in the wishful thinking of idealists and activists who dream of a single democratic state replacing the present arrangement in Israel-Palestine. President Biden's new administration in 2021 reaffirmed its commitment to the two-state solution, and intended to re-engage the international community through activating the dormant Middle East Quartet.⁶ This US determination was strongly reiterated following the uprisings in Israel and the occupied territories during May 2021.

The two-state solution

In 2022, and despite much criticism and disappointment at its lack of success, the two-state solution enjoyed wide international support. A sizeable percentage of Palestinians, especially those under Israeli occupation, also backed this solution, although in decreasing numbers as it became more and more unattainable. For those in the Palestinian diaspora, 'Palestine', after the Oslo Accords had made such a concept possible once again even though so little of it had been liberated, became the focus of their efforts as a place of hope and the potential start of the journey back home.

It is probable that no greater illustration of the triumph of hope over reality exists than the two-state solution. It should be clear to the reader that, given the reality on the ground, there was in 2022 no possibility of a state coming into being that would satisfy the Palestinians' minimal demands. Nor, after 55 years of Israeli occupation, could one envisage a partition of the country as it stood. These facts had been clear for decades,

but yet the two-state solution remained on the books at the UN, the League of Arab States, the European Union, the US, the Palestinian Authority, and, as already pointed out, for many Palestinian individuals and communities.

Recognition of the Palestinian state was supposed to be the first step on the way to a lasting resolution. Most Palestinians initially anticipated a growing exchange with Israelis in the context of two neighbouring states at peace, and that this friendly contact would lead in time to a melting of the border between the two and a true mixing of populations. In this way, there could even be a sort of return for the refugees, but not as a way of taking over Israel. Some Palestinians believed strongly that the national quest for an independent state had to be coupled with a genuine and sincere acceptance of Israel's permanence, not a ruse for undermining it.⁷

It was not that these ideas were articulated as such, or even at the forefront of Palestinian preoccupations, in the demand for statehood. The dominant need was to have the occupation lifted and normal life regained, even though it meant dividing what had been Mandatory Palestine into two states, Israeli and Palestinian. This two-state aim is probably the best known and most internationally accepted solution of all for the conflict. Its support amongst Palestinians did not stem initially from any belief that it was in itself an ideal or even a desirable solution, but rather that it was the *only* way, as they saw it, of saving what little was left of Palestine, a place in which to recoup Palestinian national identity and social integrity.

Israel's ghettoisation of Palestinian society had led to a social fragmentation and national disorientation that could only be reconstituted in a Palestinian state free of Israeli interference. Many Palestinians believed that without this crucial phase of healing and reintegration, there could be no advance for the national cause. In addition, and given the massive power imbalance on the one hand and the international support for the creation of a Palestinian state on the other, the two-state solution acquired a 'most we can hope for' character that was indisputable. The fact that for a while it also looked to be potentially attainable added to its attraction.

The Oslo Accords had nurtured in Palestinians both inside and outside the occupied territories an aspiration to statehood, encouraged by Western-

funded 'state-building' projects, no less staunch than that which had animated the first Zionists (and with far greater legitimacy). In fact, many wealthy Palestinians consciously emulated the Zionist model by zealously investing in the Palestinian towns Israel had vacated after the Oslo Agreement in order to build their state by incremental steps (though, as they said, without displacing anyone in the process). Prominent among these was the Palestinian entrepreneur, Munib al-Masri, whose monumental palace built commandingly atop a hill in Nablus struck me when I saw it as a statement of possession meant to defy the Jewish settlements encroaching on his city, which were all deliberately sited on hilltops in a crude bid to claim the Arab land below them for Israel.

Palestinians have always rejected the idea of partition, although it was a familiar one in Palestine's history as a device used by Britain and later the UN for accommodating Zionist ambitions in the country. The Zionists first proposed it to the Mandate authorities as far back as 1928 when their numbers in the country were very small.⁸ In 1937, the Peel Commission set up by the British Government to find a solution for the conflict between Jews and Arabs in Mandate Palestine, recommended that the country be divided into Jewish and Arab states. In 1947, UN General Assembly Resolution 181 made the same recommendation and for the same reason. The story of how this resolution, which the UN was not legally entitled to table in the first place, was pushed through to a vote in its favour is an ignoble one.

It is no secret that it took vigorous US and Zionist arm-twisting and intimidation to overturn the majority of states that would have voted against it.⁹ The resolution was passed against strong Arab opposition (though some Palestinian communists accepted it, hoping it would put a brake on Zionist colonisation), not least because it was the first international recognition accorded to what was a blatantly unjust, settler colonialist enterprise in an Arab country, and which the Zionists used subsequently to legitimise their presence. It was seen as an extension of the original injustice perpetrated in 1921 by the League of Nations in conferring on Britain a mandate to encourage Zionist settler colonialism in the first place. For the people of

Palestine, partition was an outrageous assault on the integrity of their country and a gift to the Jewish immigrants of a statehood they did not deserve. This remained the Palestinian position after 1948, when the aim of the newly formed PLO in 1964 was Palestine's total liberation, 'the recovery of the usurped homeland in its entirety', as the Preamble to the 1964 Palestine National Charter phrased it.

In 1974, however, the question of partition returned, at least implicitly, to the national agenda. At its twelfth meeting, the Palestine National Council (PNC) formally resolved to set up a 'national, independent and fighting authority on every part of Palestinian land to be liberated' from Israeli occupation. Although there was no mention of a Palestinian state and no recognition of Israel, the resolution paved the way to a new thinking about the future. This was reflected in the next PNC meeting in 1977, which called for 'an independent national state' on the land, without referring to its total liberation. By 1981, the PNC had welcomed a Russian proposal for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the idea of a two-state solution was becoming increasingly familiar.¹⁰ In 1982, the Saudi-inspired Fez Plan, which called for the creation of a Palestinian state in the occupied territories and an implicit adoption of a two-state solution, also won guarded Palestinian endorsement. Jordan began to feature as the other part of a possible Palestinian/Jordanian confederation in the PNC meetings after 1983. This was accompanied by an increasing emphasis on the attainment of Palestinian goals by diplomatic means, including for the first time an endorsement of ties with 'democratic and progressive' Jewish and Israeli forces and the internationalisation of efforts to find a peaceful solution.

The outbreak of the First Intifada and the PLO's isolation following its expulsion by Israel from Lebanon in 1982 were important factors in accelerating the trend towards the two-state solution. Palestinian awareness of the realpolitik of Israel's power and the futility of military struggle against it convinced the PLO to adopt a political programme that reflected this reality. Hence it was the PLO which came to recognise Israel and propose the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside it as the aim of the Palestinian struggle. This was a recognition that what was just

was a separate issue from what was possible and attainable under the circumstances, and a decision to pursue the latter at the expense of the former.

What would have been just was for the whole of Mandate Palestine to revert to the dispossessed Palestinians, thus solving the refugee problem for good, and for Israel to compensate them for their losses over the years. But the PLO saw this was impossible to realise and so opted for what was, they believed, attainable. At its eighteenth meeting in November 1988, the PNC accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for negotiations with Israel. It also and most significantly accepted the previously rejected and humiliating UN Partition Resolution 181, finding itself acquiescing 41 years later to the division of Palestine and recognising Israel as a legitimate state. The Declaration of Independence that was the hallmark of this meeting set down the notion of a Palestinian state, implicitly to be established within the 1967-occupied territories, with East Jerusalem as its capital. A month later, the PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, reinforced this recognition of Israel in an affirmation of ‘the right of all parties to the conflict to live in peace and security’.

The PNC was the dispersed Palestinian people’s best attempt at a representative body in exile through which to reflect the broad range of their views. Even so, the 1988 decision voted in by the PNC was not uniformly welcomed, and the idea of a ‘statelet’ on 23 per cent of the original Palestine’s territory was met with derision by many individuals and groups. The retreat from the original PLO goal of Palestine’s total liberation, which had become evident since 1977, was regarded by this constituency as a craven capitulation to Israeli hegemony. I remember how angry my fellow activists in London felt at this betrayal of principle. They convened meetings, wrote defamatory articles and made speeches denouncing the ‘statelet’ and demanding a return to the PLO’s original charter. The first London PLO representative, Said Hammami, posted there in 1975, strongly supported the creation of a Palestinian state and responded to these accusations with fierce condemnation. I recall him telling me with a chilling prescience he could not have been aware of at the time, ‘So, you

don't approve of what we [the PLO] are doing? Believe me, the day will come when all of you will rend your clothes with regret you did not fight for the "statelet", because even this small thing will be denied us, you will see!'

After the 1993 Oslo Accords made implicit the goal of creating a Palestinian state, which Palestinians and international agencies started to prepare for in the occupied territories with enthusiasm, the two-state solution dominated the international political discourse, even, as we saw, amongst Israelis. It was affirmed by UN resolutions, at one time formed part of George W. Bush's vision for the future of the region and was central to the 'Road Map', laying out the path to an international peace proposal. Sharing the fate of all other peace proposals for this conflict, however, it was never implemented. Barak Obama's Secretary of State John Kerry made indefatigable peacemaking attempts in 2014 to make the two-state solution a reality, but to no avail. As Obama left office in 2016, he was still trying to work out a way to leave an outline for the two-state solution, possibly through the UN.¹¹ His successor, Donald Trump, also supported the two-state solution, although in a form so distorted by pro-Israel bias, it was scarcely recognisable as such.¹²

However, in 1993, the international consensus was not *whether* a Palestinian state would be created but *when* and in what territory. The Palestinian doubters went into abeyance, waiting to see what would happen or half-believing that their fears had been misplaced, and the return of Yasser Arafat and the PLO leadership to Palestine seemed to herald a new dawn.

But it was a false dawn. Israel's policy of 'creating facts' on the ground, the single most effective foil to these plans, put the creation of a sovereign, viable Palestinian state out of reach, and thereby spelled the end of the two-state solution. As Israeli colonisation and segmentation of the West Bank proceeded unimpeded throughout the years since 1967, up to and including the period after the Oslo Agreement, the Palestinian territories supposed to form the state were rendered unusable for that purpose by the jigsaw of Jewish colonies, bypass roads and barriers.

Jerusalem was judaised beyond the possibility of its becoming the Palestinian capital, and Gaza was left stranded in an Israeli sea, unconnected to the rest of Palestine, its single shared border with Egypt not under its control. These logistical obstacles in the way of a viable Palestinian state became so extreme over the decades that many observers, including the most ardent supporters of the two-state solution, started to fear that it was not going to happen. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories was forced to conclude as far back as 2006 that ‘this vision [of a two-state solution] is unattainable without a viable Palestinian territory. The construction of the wall, the expansion of settlements, the de-Palestinisation of Jerusalem and the gradual incorporation of the Jordan Valley are incompatible with the two-state solution.’¹³ Numerous studies and commentaries appeared, analysing this problem and drawing the conclusion that a two-state outcome had been superseded.¹⁴ The head of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), Jeff Halper’s concept of Israel’s occupation as a triple-layered ‘matrix of control’ – military, territorial and bureaucratic – is probably the most graphic of these and the best illustration of Israel’s tenacious and irreversible hold on Jerusalem and the West Bank.¹⁵ The geographer Jan de Jong’s maps of the occupied territories vividly demonstrated the impossibility of a Palestinian state arising in these segmented lands.¹⁶

Given this situation, Palestinian Authority officials indicated that they would be forced to abandon the two-state solution and press for equal citizenship with Israelis.¹⁷ The need to dissolve the PA and force Israel to deal with the Palestinians directly as a people under occupation rather than shielding behind the fiction of an independent government was openly debated.¹⁸ Ahmad Qurei, the Palestinian prime minister at the time, announced in January 2004 that if the two-state solution were made impossible to achieve, then the Palestinians had no alternative but to aim for one state, a tactic meant to ‘scare’ the Israelis and their US sponsors into checking the growth of settlements and other obstacles to the creation of a

Palestinian state. These assertions have been made several times subsequently.

But they scared no one, since Israel had no intention of ever letting a viable Palestinian state come into being. Its colonisation programme and studied avoidance of serious peace agreements or meaningful negotiations were all designed to ensure that nothing other than a truncated entity incapable of becoming anything more would ever exist alongside the Jewish state. Had Israel conceded on this point and a sovereign Palestinian state been created within the whole of the 1967 territories, a period of tranquillity might well have ensued. But sooner or later, the basic issues would re-emerge and call for resolution, namely, the initial dispossession that had led to the loss of most of Palestine and the expulsion of its people. Israel could no more abandon the West Bank settlements to allow for a Palestinian state there than it could leave Tel Aviv. As the left-wing Israeli activist Haim Hanegbi put it, 'Any [Israeli] recognition that the settlements in the West Bank exist on plundered Palestinian land will cast a threatening shadow over the Jezreel valley and over the moral status of Beit Alfa and Ein Harod [places in Israel pre-1967].'¹⁹

These issues would not be resolved in a territory comprising only one-fifth of the original Palestine and in the absence of a just solution for the refugees, who could not be absorbed into such a small area. The proposed state was scarcely viable as it was, without a further influx of refugees. But it could form the bridgehead for an eventual refugee return. Israelis knew this as well as any Palestinian, which was why they resisted the creation of a sovereign, viable Palestinian state so fiercely and fought against any affirmation of the Palestinians as a people with a national cause. It was also why they needed almost just as much to set up a non-viable entity they would call a state, as a fig-leaf to satisfy the international community. In reality, it would be both a dustbin for dumping unwanted Palestinians who could threaten Israel's demography, and a way of preserving Zionism.

Israel was not wrong in its apprehensions. Those most anxious to bring about this version of the two-state solution were Israel itself and the Western powers, which wanted to save a project they had unwisely backed

from the start and could not now abandon. To these may be added the pro-Western Arab states whose chief concern was a quiet life free from Western pressure to accommodate Israel and the wrath of their own populations for doing so. It was true that, in addition, there had grown amongst many Palestinians a genuine desire for a separate state, feelings nurtured by years of deprivation under occupation and, as we have mentioned, the fear of losing the rest of Palestine if they held out for anything more ambitious.

In recent years, a concern with recouping Palestinian identity and society fractured by Israel's separation and closure policies has added powerfully to the desire for independence. Decades of cruel treatment at the hands of Israel also led to considerable hostility towards Israelis, and a longing to separate from them for good. This antipathy only grew with time, provoked by the siege and recurrent bombing of Gaza.

Those understandable reactions aside, what did the Palestinians really gain from a settlement that left the lion's share of their original homeland and its resources in the hands of a Zionist state that had robbed them of it in the first place? And what of the majority of their people, the millions of refugees and displaced, who had no access to that homeland? Why would anyone assume that such obvious injustice could be forgiven or forgotten? In a research study I carried out in 1999/2000, just before the outbreak of the Second Intifada, I interviewed 42 randomly selected Palestinian Arabs and 50 Jewish Israelis about the conditions for reconciliation between them.²⁰ These were people who came from various walks of life and, had it been a larger sample, might have been reasonably representative. Some twenty opinion-formers from both sides (academics, politicians, journalists) were also questioned about the same topic. The results predictably showed that the greatest differences of view were over the issues considered basic to the Palestinians: the right of refugee return, Israel's acknowledgement of responsibility for their expulsion and the right to compensation.

A 'historic reconciliation' with Israel, as the Palestinian respondents termed it, would require an Israeli apology and acknowledgement of its responsibility for the *Nakba* and accepting the right of return with compensation as basic conditions. (The Israeli respondents, with a few

exceptions, were unwilling to accept any of these terms.) Two-thirds of Palestinians were willing to accept the two-state solution, but only as a stage, and all of them considered the area pre-1967 to be Arab land. Was it possible, therefore, that such people could accept a Palestinian state, even had it been available, as anything other than a first stage to a retrieval of the rest of Palestine? Even if it took decades to accomplish, the return of the whole country had to be their final destination.

The two-state solution and the right of return

The refugee issue is possibly the most cogent argument against a two-state solution. The 5 million refugees and their descendants, living in camps, most but not all run by the UN, since 1948 formed the core of the Palestinian problem. They cherished the memory of the lost homeland and reared their descendants on a detailed knowledge of their towns and villages of origin in the old Palestine. On a visit to Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut in 1998, I was astonished to hear small children, aged 4 and 5, reciting the names of places they called their hometowns in what is now Israel. The children all said they were ‘going back’ there when they grew up. Listening to them, I was both saddened and awed at the tenacity with which the Palestinians held on to the idea of return, despite decades of exile in the worst of conditions and the apparent hopelessness of their cause.²¹ I wondered why they were allowed to indulge their dreams in this way, if it were the case that the international community had no intention of implementing the refugees’ right to return.

It is no accident that these camps provided the fighters of the PLO formerly and those of Gaza’s Hamas activists latterly. The refugees, representing the bulk of Palestine’s displaced population in 1948, also delivered a majority of the workforce that helped to build up the Gulf States from the 1950s onwards, and many went on to become successful entrepreneurs, journalists and other professionals. The prominent former editor of the London-based *al-Quds al-Arabi*, and media commentator

frequently cited in these pages, Abdel Bari Atwan, for example, started life in a Gaza refugee camp.

The right of return on which all these displaced people's hopes were pinned was a *cause célèbre* for Palestinians. Had there been no refugees and the Palestinian problem merely one of Israeli occupation, the conflict would have been easier to solve. But the 1948 dispossession was a fundamental part of Palestinian history, the legal backbone of the Palestine cause, and the crucial basis on which the Jewish state was built. Few people in the West appreciated the importance of the right of return for Palestinians, which should have been enforced from the beginning, and it became customary for Western policymakers to view the Palestinian refugees as commodities that could be moved about when required, and not as human beings with needs and desires. The fact that this issue was of core importance to Palestinians was constantly ignored. But if there were to be a settlement, the refugee issue would reassert itself forcefully for all Palestinians, and a deal that did not address this would not be considered just, legal, or an end to the conflict.

The two-state solution stood no chance of solving this problem on any count. And strictly speaking, as some have argued, the creation of two states in itself logically ruled out a refugee return to the area within the Israeli state.²² The two-state solution required the Palestinians to recognise Israel *as a Jewish state*, that is, one with a Jewish majority, and therefore incompatible with an influx of non-Jews. That left the putative Palestinian state as the only option, but it could not hope to accommodate the number of returnees, whatever Israel feared, and especially not as the tiny, segmented entity Israel had in mind. Nor was it fair that people expelled from Haifa or Safad should have to make their homes in Ramallah or Jenin. Had the Palestinians, who were aware of all this, been less desperate for a way out of the dire situation of rapid Israeli encroachment on their land and existence, they would not have accepted a solution that abandoned the refugees to their fate. Their logic in doing this was to live to fight another day, for the basic injustice of the situation would remain and resurface at a later date. None of the convoluted arrangements devised by Israel and the

Western powers to dispose of the refugee issue could make Palestinians forget that it was their homes and land that had been usurped by a people who had no right to them and whose self-righteous ownership of a country that was not theirs was a constant affront.

The one-state solution

The obvious alternative to the two-state proposal was the one-state solution. It is important to understand this was not simply a matter of logic, but of a fundamental difference in approach to solving the conflict. The two-state solution and its variants have as their sole object – no matter what the rhetoric about a ‘just and comprehensive settlement’ – the termination of Israel’s occupation and its damaging consequences for Palestinian civil life in the occupied areas. It leaves untouched the issue of the nature of the Israeli state and its dangerous ideology, Zionism.

A whole literature exists that analyses Zionist ideology, its meaning and significance, in ways that have mystified it into a quasi-religion, an identity, and a badge of honour for Jews. Yet, in its application to historic Palestine, Zionism was a simple, practical programme to take the land but not the people. Palestine, denuded of its Arab inhabitants, would become Jewish owned and so attain the Jewish ‘ethnic purity’ Zionism longed for. These aggressive and racist aims never changed over time, and no matter how much Palestinian land the state of Israel acquired, in Zionist terms, it was still short of the ultimate goal.

In line with this, many Jewish Israelis saw a continuing need to expel Arabs. In 2006, a prominent Israeli leader was publicly calling for such expulsions from the West Bank.²³ Ten years later, a Pew Center survey found (Reuters, 8 March 2016) that nearly half of Jewish Israelis wanted Arabs expelled or transferred; 79 per cent believed that Jewish citizens deserved preferential treatment; and eight out of ten Arabs interviewed complained of ‘heavy discrimination’ against them by Jewish Israelis.²⁴ In 2021, the US-based Human Rights Watch released a detailed report of what it called Israel’s apartheid practices, whose effect could be construed as a

means to make Palestinian life intolerable and thus encourage outward emigration.²⁵

At the same time, the Jewish state remained a foreign body in the Arab region, an anomaly no more ready to integrate with its Arab neighbours than it had been in 1948. That is not to say Israel gained no official Arab acceptance in its 75 years of existence. In 1979 and 1994, it signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan respectively; and in 2020, its relations were normalised with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. But these formal alliances were based on Israel's superior power and its standing as a conduit to US favour. In no way did these treaties integrate Israel into the Arab region. Israel remained a state committed to a hostile ideology that could only feed continuous conflict.

In its essence, the one-state solution aimed to address these problems by going to the heart of the matter: the existence of Israel as a Zionist state. If it was the case that the imposition of Zionism on the Arabs had been the cause of the Palestinians' dispossession, the rejection of their rights and the constant state of conflict between Israel and its neighbours, it made no sense for a peace agreement to preserve that status quo. The key date in the genesis of this conflict was not 1967, as the two-state proponents implied, but 1948. Israel's occupation of the 1967 territories was a symptom of the disease, not its cause.

The problem was that the two-state solution did not just confine itself to dealing with the symptoms; it actively helped to maintain the cause. The roots of the conflict, as has frequently been reiterated in this book, lay in a flawed and destructive project that never changed. It refused to adapt to its environment or accept any limitations on its aspirations. Indeed Israel's very success encouraged this process: the more it took and escaped retribution, the more it wanted to take, and so on in a self-perpetuating cycle of aggression and expansionism. Only by bringing the Zionist project to an end, proponents of the one-state solution argued, would the conflict also be ended. Such an approach was a radical challenge to decades of Arab 'pacification' and coercion at the hands of those concerned to preserve the Zionist project.

The one-state solution meant the creation of a single entity of Israel/Palestine in which the two peoples would live together without borders or partitions. An equitable division of a small country like Palestine with resources that respect no borders, especially not artificially constructed ones, was logistically unworkable. All the partition proposals previously devised had discriminated heavily in Israel's favour. The one-state solution was unique in addressing this and all the other basic issues that perpetuated the conflict – land, resources, settlements, Jerusalem and refugees – within an equitable framework. As such, it answered to the needs of common sense and justice, the *sine qua non* of any durable peace settlement.

According to the adherents of the one-state solution, in a single state, no Jewish settler would have to move and no Palestinian would be under occupation. The country's scarce resources could be shared without Israel stealing Palestinian land and water, or Palestinians left starving and thirsty. Jerusalem would be a city for both peoples, not the preserve of Israel to the anger of Arabs, Muslims and Christians, and the detriment of international law. Palestinian refugees would be allowed to return to their original homeland, if not to their actual homes. Their long exile and blighted existence would end, and the states that had played host to them could be relieved at last of a burden they had carried for more than seventy years. The long-running sore of dispossession that had embittered generations of Palestinians and perpetuated their resistance could heal at last.

With the outstanding issues thus resolved, no cause for conflict between the two sides would remain, and the Arab states could then accommodate the Israeli presence in their midst with genuine acceptance. Such an outcome would by extension also dampen down the rage against Israelis and Jews that had come to fuel violence and terrorism. Arab hostility, real or imagined, which Israelis constantly faced and which forced them to maintain their state by superior force of arms and US patronage would end. Israel, which had become the most unsafe place on earth for Jews, could, when transmuted into the new, shared state, be a place of real refuge for them. A normal immigration policy, once the returning Palestinian refugees had been accommodated, would operate, under which Jews and others who

wanted to live in Palestine/Israel could do so according to fair and agreed rules.

On this analysis, the one-state solution was the most obvious, direct and logical route to ending an intractable conflict that had destroyed the lives of so many people and damaged the Middle East region so profoundly. And for that reason it should have been the most actively pursued of all the options, but especially by the Palestinians, for whom it meant a reversal (as far as that was practically possible) of a process that had robbed them of their land and made them stateless refugees.

People often discussed the one-state solution as if it were a revolutionary idea. But it was no forward-looking innovation: rather more a way of going back, of restoring a land deformed by a near-century of division, colonisation and plunder to the whole country it had been before 1948. It was a healthy rejection of disunity in favour of unity and a humane desire for a life based on cooperation rather than confrontation. How much better for Israeli Jews to learn to live together with Palestinian Arabs in a relationship of friendship and collaboration that had the potential to be excitingly productive, rather than be condemned to the barren and dangerous dead-end future that Israel was driving them towards.



Can the one-state solution ever happen?

The foregoing account has shown how difficult it would be to implement the one-state solution. Yet that should not have been the starting point of the discussion. The question of whether this solution was *feasible* was frequently confused with whether it was *desirable*, and it was here that the struggle for hearts and minds should have started. Prolonged concentration on the two-state outcome as the only solution for the conflict had made it into a mantra that discouraged imaginative thinking. If one set aside the issue of feasibility, the advantages of the unitary state made it unarguably desirable. No other solution was able to satisfy the needs of justice for the Palestinians, including the refugees, and the needs of security for Israelis. Though these needs were frequently derided by Arabs who wondered why a state armed to the teeth and supported to the hilt by the world's one superpower should ever have felt insecure, Israeli Jewish fear was real.

Whatever its source – and most of my Palestinian survey respondents put it down to the fact that, as they said, thieves never rested easy while their victims were close by – Israeli insecurity is an important factor. Indeed, it was frequently invoked by Israel to justify its attacks on neighbouring states. My father, who had lost everything through the creation of Israel and yet who mainly blamed the British for allowing the tragedy to happen, viewed Jewish anxieties with empathy. He saw the whole Zionist project as nothing more than a product of this Jewish fear. Arabs did not understand that, he often said, and it was one reason for their inability to deal with Israel.

Making the one-state solution happen was going to be hard and its supporters looked to a far distant future for its fulfilment. 'Not in my lifetime,' many of them said, or 'it will take a hundred years or more', or 'my children may see it, but their children more like', and so on. Whatever the truth, this solution could not come about in a rush or by a miraculous conversion to the view that it was the only way forward. Nor could it be imposed by force of circumstance (as will be discussed later). It has to be seen as a slow process of evolving political and social awareness,

campaigning and preparation, all of them entailing arduous struggle.⁹⁵ It could not be otherwise, given the monumental task of dismantling the structure and institutions of a state built on Zionism and replacing it with a genuinely democratic dispensation of equal rights and non-discrimination.

The leap for Israelis from a worldview of supremacy and exclusivism imposed by force to a humanist philosophy of peaceable coexistence and opposition to racism and violence would be a huge one. As would the leap for Arabs, from their position of rejection of any rights in Palestine for people they see as nothing more than colonisers, and enmity towards Israelis developed over decades, to an unqualified acceptance of them as equal partners. It also requires of Arabs the difficult task of re-defining their own national identity and a readiness to embrace a new and unique entity in the region, a Palestinian-Israeli state without precedent. The role of those Arab regimes that had based their *raison d'être* on hostility to Israel with all the military and economic developments that that entailed would need to be revised. As such, the consequences for the region would be profound.

It is not the purpose of this book to set out a blueprint for building the unitary state. One could write out a list of the traditional steps well known to all activists as to how one carries a political idea forward. This would include such things as political education, the creation of cadres and constituencies, enlisting the support of top politicians and decision-makers, and so on. But the main plank of the campaign was to start a debate amongst Palestinians and Jews about the one-state solution, to unify them around the concept, while at the same time ensuring that it became a part of the mainstream discourse. A two-state interim phase in which Palestinians replenished their shattered identities, regained normality and generally recovered from the Israeli occupation was a possible route to the end result, at least in theory (since the Palestinian state looked an unlikely eventuality, as discussed above). It was also a necessary aspiration to maintain in the short term so as not to create splits amongst the Palestinians. Too many of them had become attached to the idea of having their own state and too many still believed that the international community would help them achieve it, to throw away the chance. And indeed, in the unlikely event of

its happening and with a policy of open borders, growing exchange and collaboration between the two states, that could have led to their eventual integration and, eventually, a one-state outcome. Likewise, a bi-national stage, reassuring Israelis and Palestinians that their national identities would not be subsumed in a single state before they were ready, was another possible route to the same end point.

An equal rights strategy

The foregoing has been a presentation of common-sense arguments for what is the only logical solution to this long-running conflict. But logic and common sense mean little in a situation of unequal power, where the stronger side has succeeded for over seventy years in imposing its will on the weaker side. Nor would persuasion, organisation and popular mobilisation, however promising they appeared, be sufficient to make it happen in time. And time is of the essence for the Palestinians, as their land is progressively eaten away by Israeli colonisation, their capital city, Jerusalem, increasingly judaised, and the return of refugees indefinitely delayed.

And yet, the way forward is at hand. By the start of 2022, the basic conditions for achieving a one-state solution in Israel/Palestine were in place. Not everyone recognised this fact, or wanted to, even though the reality on the ground was staring them in the face. Accustomed for decades to think in terms of the two-state solution, one that would deliver the longed-for state of their own, most Palestinians ignored anything that contradicted this vision. If they had not, they would have realised that from 1967 onwards Israel/Palestine had become a single state in all but name.

The real-life position was that the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea was one single entity, under the administration of one sovereign government, that of the state of Israel. The so-called Green Line, marking the 1949 armistice, that used to separate 1948-Israel from Jordanian-ruled East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and Egyptian-administered Gaza, had disappeared for all intents and purposes. Israel's

resounding victory in the Arab–Israeli War of June 1967 enabled it to seize Palestinian (and Syrian) territory, which have been under military occupation to this day.

The result is that Israel/Palestine in 2022 was already one state, but it was an unequal one with differential rights and classes of citizenship. Its population comprised 6.6 million Israeli Jews with full citizenship and rights, 1.8 million Israeli Palestinians, also with citizenship but restricted rights, and 4.7 million Palestinians with no citizenship and no rights. This last group, as we saw above, was further handicapped by years of Israeli military rule, and myriad discriminatory practices. These were detailed in a damning 2017 UN report, quickly withdrawn from the UN’s website following an outcry from Israel and the US,⁹⁶ that documented what it called the apartheid system imposed on the Palestinians by Israeli policy and its devastating effects. Two newer reports documented the same apartheid reality, the first by the Israeli human rights organisation, B’tselem, in January 2021,⁹⁷ and the second by Human Rights Watch in April 2021.⁹⁸ The latest on the same topic was Amnesty International’s report, unequivocally titled ‘Israel’s apartheid against Palestinians: A cruel system of domination and a crime against humanity’, released in February 2022.⁹⁹

All of these were powerful critiques of Israel’s discriminatory practices against the Palestinians under its rule. Unsurprisingly, several World Bank reports, the latest in 2019, found that Israel’s occupation of the West Bank had led to an ‘unsustainable’ economic situation, with zero growth and two out of three young people unemployed. Meanwhile, Israel’s near-total blockade of Gaza’s land, sea and airspace was causing chronic shortages of essential foods, medicines and construction materials. To punish Gazans for throwing incendiary devices over the barrier with Israel, Gaza’s fishermen, on whom many depended for sustenance, were restricted in 2021 to a fishing limit of ten nautical miles, down from the twenty miles that were agreed under the Oslo Accord. A 2012 UN study had predicted that by 2020, Gaza’s coastal aquifer would be damaged beyond repair, leaving its people without potable water, and the majority only kept alive by the support of external funding.

This man-made situation was the inevitable result of a long-standing Western policy of permissiveness towards Israel that allowed it to flout international law with impunity. How else could Israel have been left to rule over a population to which it had offered no citizenship or rights, while also denying them the protection of the Fourth Geneva Convention to which they were entitled as occupied people? Israel's pretext, that the 1967 Palestinian territories were 'disputed', not occupied, is not accepted in international law. But that did not deter Israel from behaving as a sovereign state in the occupied territories, considering itself free to act as it wished 'in its own land'.

Had it not been for the existence of the Palestinian Authority, set up by the Oslo Accords in 1996, this anomalous situation would have come to light decades ago. The illusion that the PA created in people's minds (the Palestinians included), of an independent government of a state-in-waiting, was extraordinarily effective in presenting the Israeli-Palestinian relationship as one of near equivalence. It obscured the glaring inequality of occupier and occupied, and the reality of Palestinians as a people under colonial rule without legal rights. The internationally supported two-state solution which promised to create an independent Palestinian state, soon to join the community of nations, put the finishing touches to this false portrayal.

A smart PR campaign that accused Israel's critics of antisemitism was run to help Israel escape censure for its illegal system. This campaign was already working well in Europe and the US, where legislation against anti-Israel activities was being formalised in several countries. US backing for Israel had never been stronger, and as we saw, several Arab states reversed their previously hostile positions on Israel, and were making alliances with it.

It was for the Palestinians to draw the correct inference from the inequitable, one-state reality in which they lived. The American Jewish commentator (and former liberal Zionist), Peter Beinart, did just that in two remarkable articles. In the first, 'I no longer believe in a Jewish state' (*New York Times*, 8 July 2020), he recognised the one-state reality of

Israel/Palestine and put forward a thesis of equal rights in that state. He described Israel as an unequal bi-national state, and recommended it become an equal state as the only way to gain stability. In a later article for *Jewish Currents* (27 April 2021), he went further and stated, ‘There is no [Jewish] right to a state’, an analysis of the right to self-determination used by Zionism to justify its seizure of Palestine. But that self-determination came at the cost of basic Palestinian rights.

Jewish self-determination violated Palestinian rights on a massive scale. It violated the rights of individual Palestinians living in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip by denying them citizenship in the country under whose rule they lived. It violated the individual rights even of those Palestinians who held Israeli citizenship by denying them equality under the law. And it violated the rights of Palestinian refugees and their descendants by preventing them from returning to the places from which they were expelled. For these reasons, Beinart concluded that the best solution is the creation of an ‘equal state’.

For that to happen, Palestinians in their turn need to set aside the failed strategies of the past and examine the real options before them. Whatever long-term ambition they had nurtured for themselves, currently they lived unequal lives in a system that oppressed them. And that had to end. Only a demand for equal civil and political rights with the rest of the population ruled by Israel could address this immediate oppression and open a route to restoring their rights. At one stroke, an equal rights demand would put the ball in Israel’s court: either it must vacate the Palestinian territories it occupied, or give their population equal rights with the rest – a straightforward, logical choice it would be interesting to see Israel refute.

There are some honourable antecedents to a Palestinian equal rights campaign. The South African freedom struggle aimed from the start for equality of rights of all citizens in a new democratic South Africa, and after 1948, for the overthrow of apartheid. Its message inspired an international anti-apartheid movement in 1960 that helped to end South Africa’s system of discrimination against non-whites. For a time, it used armed struggle, but its tactics were mostly non-violent. A Palestinian Freedom Charter

modelled on South Africa's was a good start. Though the parallels with the Palestine case are not exact, the struggles were alike enough for Nelson Mandela to say in a 1977 speech in Pretoria, 'We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians.'

The civil rights movement of the mid-1950s in the southern United States makes another uplifting model for Palestinians to follow. Its origins in a long-standing American history of slavery are different, but its strategy to attain equal rights for African Americans was an object lesson in peaceful, effective civil action for Palestinians to study. The movement's use of litigation, mass media publicity, boycotts, people's marches, sit-ins and civil disobedience inspired huge national support, that eventually forced the federal government to pass major civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965.

The advantages for the Palestinians of an equal rights system are many: equal legal status, equal government representation – through which refugee repatriation could become policy, equal access to education, employment and social services, and the multiple benefits of a normal civic life that they never had under occupation. Above all, such a system would enable Palestinians to remain on their land. As Israeli journalist Gideon Levy pointed out in his article 'The single-state is already here' (*Haaretz*, 10 April 18), only a system of equal rights for everyone can make Israel a true democracy, with the prospect that it could be headed one day by a Palestinian president and a Jewish prime minister, or vice versa.

The obstacles in the way of implementing this idea are immense, and overlap with much that has already been mentioned. Zionists would see in it the end of Israel as a majority-Jewish state, and so the end of Zionism. Jewish Israeli citizens reared on a diet of supremacy and entitlement, and conditioned to hate and fear Arabs, would reject any attempt at equivalence with them. The Israeli state, accustomed to exploiting Palestine's land and resources, while subjugating its people, would not be prepared for an equal relationship with them.

The Palestinians for their part would regard an equal rights proposal as a defeat of the national project and the end of resistance to Israel. Whatever

the rhetoric about equality, they would fear becoming second-class citizens, alongside the current Palestinian citizens of Israel. Those whose lives had been blighted by Israel's occupation wanted only to live in a separate state of their own. After the Oslo Accords, when hope of an independent state was running high, many Palestinians were encouraged to believe it would happen. I remember seeing dozens of foreign NGOs in Ramallah busily preparing the Palestinians for 'statehood'. They helped to entrench the idea to which many still cling.

Not least, all those who espoused the two-state solution would reject the idea as a negation of an internationally agreed position. Having secured United Nations backing for a Palestinian state on the 1967 territories as part of a two-state solution in several General Assembly resolutions, and recognition in 2012 of 'the State of Palestine' by a majority of 138 member states, they argued, why throw away those gains? Especially when, on the strength of it, Palestine was now accepted as a member of several international bodies like UNESCO and the International Criminal Court. In addition, opinion polls among Palestinians (and Israelis) had consistently shown support for two states, even though it fell to 43 per cent in 2018 (down from a high of 70 per cent in a 2013 Gallup poll). Lastly, the Palestinians' own formal representative, the PLO, was at the forefront of support for this solution, and would also oppose its overthrow.

No one could deny these were genuine objections. But by the same token, the reality on the ground was undeniable too. A glance at the map showed the logistical impossibility of a viable state in what remained of the 1967 territories, and a moment's reflection would underline the impossibility of trying to clear Israel's settlements out of them. Without a giant upheaval in the balance of world power, or a miraculous change of heart on the part of Western states, the two-state solution would remain out of reach. Unless some of those who espoused this solution could come up with an effective way of making it happen, continuing to push for it could be regarded as time-wasting and irresponsible.

Yet, as we have pointed out, the two-state solution, even if it did become reality, could not offer the Palestinians full justice. Only an equal

rights system, grounded in equal respect for the needs of all citizens, could give the Palestinians the basic right to live decent lives in their own homeland, and eventually to repatriate those of their compatriots who were expelled in 1948 and thereafter. At the time of writing, there was no real constituency for this solution on either side, although the idea had started to attract interest amongst political thinkers and those who already supported a one-state solution. The PA's late senior negotiator, Saeb Erekat, was never one of those, but in 2017, after the US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, he announced the end of the two-state solution. 'Now is the time to transform the struggle for one state with equal rights for everyone,' he said.¹⁰⁰

It will be difficult to accomplish, and can only be done in stages. The Palestinian Authority must first be persuaded to convert itself from a pseudo-government of a non-existent state with unrealistic aims into a campaigning body that leads the equal rights project. If that happened, a wide-ranging campaign would be instituted involving civic education, use of mass media to promote the idea internationally, recourse to international law, and networks of connection with like-minded individuals, organisations and states such as South Africa. This list is not exhaustive, but shows what might be done once the political decision over equal rights is made.

Supporters of Palestinian rights everywhere must swing behind this demand. Jewish Israelis who share this vision need to join the Palestinians in a joint struggle for equality. Creating a just society in place of Israel's current system that privileged one group over others is the only moral and realistic option for the future. It is also the best way to rectify the terrible wrong done by Zionism to Palestinians, and also to Jews.

UNACCOMPANIED ANTHEM

We live as we dream ... alone.
—Joseph Conrad, “Heart of Darkness”

I was not born to this
wariness. I came of age
as my kind do—armed with ache
and swathed in rectitude,
a rough carving
sluiced under a torrent
of disregard. Still, I did not
suffer unduly. Most often
I bore witness: I listened,
then took it back into a solitude
neither light nor rain
could reach. There I would sit
and rock myself warm.
I tell you this long past
the learning of it. I ate quickly,
dreamt little, read like a fiend—
not quite a shadow,
more than a smudge;
you begrudged me
even these tremulous
pleasures. I came to you
grinning with grief,
but if called upon
would not pause to lift up a fist—
the only one in the room
who raises her hand
when no one else speaks,
though the answer is obvious.

(Rita Dove)

Eleven years ago, when I was in a small-town Illinois high school, I had never heard of the word “anarchism” — at all. The closest I came to it was knowing that anarchy meant “chaos”. As for socialism and communism, my history classes somehow conveyed the message that there was no difference between them and fascism, a word that brought to mind Hitler, concentration camps, and all kinds of horrible things which never happened in a free country like ours. I was subtly being taught to swallow the bland pablum of traditional American politics: moderation, compromise, fence-straddling, Chuck Percy as wonder boy. I learned the lesson well: it took me *years* to recognize the bias and distortion which had shaped my entire “education”. The “his-story” of *mankind* (white) had meant just that; as a woman I was relegated to a vicarious existence. As an anarchist I had no existence at all. A whole chunk of the past (and thus possibilities for the future) had been kept from me. Only recently did I discover that many of my disconnected political impulses and inclinations shared a common framework — that is, the anarchist or libertarian tradition of thought. I was like suddenly seeing red after years of colourblind grays.

Emma Goldman furnished me with my first definition of anarchism:

Anarchism, then really stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraint of government. Anarchism stands for a social order based on the free grouping of individuals for the purpose of producing real social wealth, an order that will guarantee to every human being free access to the earth and full enjoyment of the necessities of life, according to individual desires, tastes, and inclinations.¹

Soon, I started making mental connections between anarchism and radical feminism. It became very important to me to write down some of the perceptions in this area as a way of communicating to others the excitement I felt about anarca-feminism. It seems crucial that we share our visions with one another in order to break down some of the barriers that misunderstanding and splinterism raise between us. Although I call myself an anarca-feminist, this definition can easily include socialism, communism, cultural feminism, lesbian separatism, or any of a dozen other political labels. As Su Negrin writes: “No political umbrella can cover all my needs.”² We may have more in common than we think we do. While I am writing here about my own reactions and perceptions, I don’t see either my life or thoughts as separate from those of other women. In fact, one of my strongest convictions regarding the Women’s Movement is that we *do* share an incredible commonality of vision. My own participation in this vision is not to offer definitive statements or rigid answers but rather possibilities and changeable connections which I hope will bounce around among us and contribute to a continual process of individual and collective growth and evolution/revolution.

¹Emma Goldman, “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For”, *Red Emma Speaks* (Vintage Books, 1972), p.59.

²Su Negrin, *Begin at Start* (Times Change Press, 1972), p. 128.

What Does Anarchism Really Mean?

Anarchism has been maligned and misinterpreted for so long that maybe the most important thing to begin with is an explanation of what it is and isn't. Probably the most prevalent stereotype of the anarchist is a malevolent-looking man hiding a lighted bomb beneath a black cape, ready to destroy or assassinate everything and everybody in his path. This image engenders fear and revulsion in most people, regardless of their politics; consequently, anarchism is dismissed as ugly, violent, and extreme. Another misconception is the anarchist as impractical idealist, dealing in useless, Utopian abstractions and out of touch with concrete reality. The result: anarchism is once again dismissed, this time as an "impossible dream".

Neither of these images is accurate (though there have been both anarchist assassins *and* idealists — as is the case in many political movements, left and right). What is accurate depends, of course, on one's frame of reference. There are different kinds of anarchist, just as there are different kinds of socialists. What I will talk about here is communist anarchism, which I see as virtually identical to libertarian (i.e. nonauthoritarian) socialism. Labels can be terribly confusing, so in hopes of clarifying the term, I'll define anarchism using three major principles (each of which I believe is related to a radical feminist analysis of society — more on that later):

1. *Belief in the abolition of authority, hierarchy, government.* Anarchists call for the dissolution (rather than the seizure) of *power* — of human over human, of state over community. Whereas many socialists call for a working class government and an eventual "withering away of the state", anarchist believe that the means create the ends, that a strong State becomes self-perpetuating. The only way to achieve anarchism (according to anarchist theory) is through the creation of co-operative, anti-authoritarian forms. To separate the process from the goals of revolution is to insure the perpetuation of oppressive structure and style.
2. *Belief in both individuality and collectivity.* Individuality is not incompatible with communist thought. A distinction must be made though, between "rugged individualism", which fosters competition and a disregard for the needs of others, and true individuality, which implies freedom without infringement on others' freedom. Specifically, in terms of social and political organization, this meant balancing individual initiative with collective action through the creation of structures which enable decision-making to rest in the hands of all those in a group, community, or factory, not in the hands of "representatives" or "leaders". It means coordination and action via a non-hierarchical network (overlapping circles rather than a pyramid) of small groups or communities. (See descriptions of Spanish anarchist collectives in next section.) Finally, it means that successful revolution involves unmanipulated, autonomous individuals and groups working together to take "direct, unmediated control of society and of their own lives".³
3. *Belief in both spontaneity and organization.* Anarchists have long been accused of advocating chaos. Most people in fact believe that anarchism is a

³Murray Bookchin, "On Spontaneity and Organization", *Liberation*, March, 1972, p.6.

synonym for disorder, confusion, violence. This is a total misrepresentation of what anarchism stands for. Anarchists don't deny the necessity of organization; they only claim that it must come from below, not above, from within rather than from without. Externally imposed structure or rigid rules which foster manipulation and passivity are the most dangerous forms a socialist "revolution" can take. No one can dictate the exact shape of the future. Spontaneous action within the context of a specific situation is necessary if we are going to create a society which responds to the changing needs of individuals and groups. Anarchists believe in fluid forms: small-scale participatory democracy in conjunction with large-scale collective cooperation and coordination (without loss of individual initiative).

So anarchism sounds great, but how could it possibly work? That kind of Utopian romanticism couldn't have any relation to the real world...right? Wrong. Anarchists have actually been successful (if only temporarily) in a number of instances (none of which is very well known). Spain and France, in particular, have long histories of anarchist activity, and it was in these two countries that I found the most exciting concretisations of theoretical anarchism.

Beyond Theory — Spain 1936–39, France 1968

The revolution is a thing of the people, a popular creation; the counter-revolution is a thing of the State. It has always been so, and must always be so, whether in Russia, Spain, or China.⁴

— Anarchist Federation of Iberia (FAI), *Tierra y Libertad*, July 3, 1936

The so-called Spanish Civil War is popularly believed to have been a simple battle between Franco's fascist forces and those committed to liberal democracy. What has been overlooked, or ignored, is that much more was happening in Spain than civil war. A broadly-based social revolution adhering to anarchist principles was taking firm, concrete form in many areas of the country. The gradual curtailment and eventual destruction of this libertarian movement is less important to discuss here than what was actually achieved by the women and men who were part of it. Against tremendous odds, they made anarchism work.

The realization of anarchist collectivisation and workers' self-management during the Spanish Revolution provides a classic example of organization-plus-spontaneity. In both rural and industrial Spain, anarchism had been a part of the popular consciousness for many years. In the countryside, the people had a long tradition of communalism; many villages still shared common property or gave plots of land to those without any. Decades of rural collectivism and cooperation laid the foundation for theoretical anarchism, which came to Spain in the 1870s (via the Italian revolutionary, Fanelli, a friend of Bakunin) and eventually gave rise to anarco-syndicalism, the application of anarchist principles to industrial trade unionism. The *Confederacion Nacional del Trebajo*, founded in 1910, was the anarco-syndicalist union (working closely with the militant *Federacion Anarquista Iberica*) which provided instruction and preparation for

⁴Paul Berman, *Quotations from the Anarchists* (Praeger Publishers, 1972), p. 68.

workers' self-management and collectivization. Tens of thousands of books, newspapers, and pamphlets reaching almost every part of Spain contributed to an even greater general knowledge of anarchist thought⁵. The anarchist principles of non-hierarchical cooperation and individual initiative combined with anarco-sindicalist tactics of sabotage, boycott and general strike, and training in production and economics, gave the workers *background* in both theory and practice. This led to a successful *spontaneous* appropriation of both factories and land after July 1936.

When the Spanish right responded to the electoral victory of the Popular Front with an attempted military takeover, on July 19, 1936, the people fought back with a fury which checked the coup within 24 hours. At this point, ballot box success became incidental; total social revolution had begun. While the industrial workers either went on strike or actually began to run the factories themselves, the agricultural workers ignored landlords and started to cultivate the land on their own. Within a short time, over 60% of the land in Spain was worked collectively — without landlords, bosses, or competitive incentive. Industrial collectivization took place mainly in the province of Catalonia, where anarco-sindicalist influence was strongest. Since 75% of Spain's industry was located in Catalonia, this was no small achievement⁶. So, after 75 years of preparation and struggle, collectivization was achieved, through the spontaneous collective action of individuals dedicated to libertarian principles.

What, though, did collectivization actually mean, and how did it work? In general, the anarchist collectives functioned on two levels: (1) small-scale participatory democracy and (2) large-scale coordination with control at the bottom. At each level, the main concern was decentralization and individual initiative. In the factories and villages, representatives were chosen to councils which operated as administrative or coordinating bodies. Decisions always came from more general membership meetings, which all workers attended. To guard against the dangers of representation, representatives were workers themselves, and at all times subject to immediate, as well as periodic, replacement. These councils or committees were the basic units of self-management. From there, they could be expanded by further coordination into loose federations which would link together workers and operations over an entire industry or geographical area. In this way, distribution and sharing of goods could be performed, as well as implementation of programs of wide-spread concern, such as irrigation, transportation, and communication. Once again, the emphasis was on the bottom-to-top process. This very tricky balance between individuality and collectivism was most successfully accomplished by the Peasant Federation of Levant, which included 900 collectives, and the Aragon Federation of Collectives, composed of about 500 collectives.

Probably the most important aspect of self-management was the equalization of wages. This took many forms, but frequently the "family wage" system was used, wages being paid to each worker in money or coupons according to her/his needs and those of dependants. Goods in abundance were distributed freely, while others were obtainable with "money".

The benefits which came from wage equalization were tremendous. After huge profits in the hands of a few men were eliminated, the excess money was

⁵Sam Doigoff, *The Anarchist Collectives* (Free Life Editions, 1974), p. 27.

⁶*Ibid*, pp.6, 7, 85.

used both to modernize industry (purchase of new equipment, better working conditions) and to improve the land (irrigation, dams, purchase of tractors, etc.). Not only were better products turned out more efficiently, but consumer prices were lowered as well. This was true in such varied industries as: textiles, metal and munitions, gas, water, electricity, baking, fishing, municipal transportation, railroads, telephone services, optical products, health services, etc. The workers themselves benefited from a shortened work week, better working conditions, free health care, unemployment pay, and a new pride in their work. Creativity was fostered by self-management and the spirit of mutual aid; workers were concerned with turning out products which were better than those turned out under conditions of labour exploitation. They wanted to demonstrate that socialism works, that competition and greed motives are unnecessary. Within months, the standard of living had been raised by anywhere from 50–100% in many areas of Spain.

The achievements of the Spanish anarchists go beyond a higher standard of living and economic equality; they involve the realization of basic human ideals: freedom, individual creativity, and collective cooperation. The Spanish anarchist collectives did not fail; they were destroyed from without. Those (of the right and left) who believed in a strong State worked to wipe them out — of Spain and history. The successful anarchism of roughly eight million Spanish people is only now beginning to be uncovered.

C'est pour toi que tu fais la revolution.⁷

(“It is for yourself that you make the revolution.”)

— Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit

Anarchism has played an important part in French history, but rather than delve into the past, I want to focus on a contemporary event — May-June, 1968. The May-June events have particular significance because they proved that a general strike and takeover of the factories by the workers, and the universities by the students, could happen in a modern, capitalistic, consumption-oriented country. In addition, the issues raised by the students and workers in France (e.g. self-determination, the quality of life) cut across class lines and have tremendous implications for the possibility of revolutionary change in a post-scarcity society.⁸

On March 22, 1968, students at the University of Nanterre, among them anarchist Daniel Cohn-Bendit, occupied administrative buildings at their school, calling for an end to both the Vietnam war and their own oppression as students. (Their demands were similar in content to those of students from Columbia to Berlin protesting *in loco parentis*.) The University was closed down, and the demonstrations spread to the Sorbonne. The SNESUP (the union of secondary school and university teachers) called for a strike, and the students' union, the UNEF, organized a demonstration for May 6. That day, students and police clashed in the Latin Quarter in Paris; the demonstrators built barricades in the streets, and many were brutally beaten by the riot police. By the 7th, the

⁷Daniel and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism — The Left Wing Alternative* (McGraw-Hill, 1968), p.256.

⁸See Murrey Bookchin's *Post Scarcity Anarchism* (Ramparts Press, 1974) for both an insightful analysis of the May-June events and a discussion of revolutionary potential in a technological society.

number of protesters had grown to between twenty and fifty thousand people, marching toward the Etoile singing the Internationale. During the next few days, skirmishes between demonstrators and police in the Latin Quarter became increasingly violent, and the public was generally outraged at the police repression. Talks between labour unions and teachers' and students' unions began, and the UNEF and the FEN (a teachers' union) called for an unlimited strike and demonstration. On May 13, around six hundred thousand people — students, teachers, and workers — marched through Paris in protest.

On the same day, the workers at the Sud-Aviation plant in Nantes (a city with the strongest anarco-syndicalist tendencies in France⁹) went out on strike. It was this action that touched off the general strike, the largest in history, including ten million workers — “professionals and labourers, intellectuals and football players.”¹⁰ Banks, post offices, gas stations, and department stores closed; the subway and busses stopped running; and trash piled up as the garbage collectors joined the strike. The Sorbonne was occupied by students, teachers, and anyone who wanted to come and participate in discussions there. Political dialogues which questioned the very basis of French capitalist society went on for days. All over Paris posters and graffiti appeared: *It is forbidden to forbid. Life without dead times. All power to the Imagination. The more you consume, the less you live.* May-June became both an “assault on the established order” and a “festival of the streets”.¹¹ Old lines between the middle and working classes often became meaningless as the younger workers and the students found themselves making similar demands: liberation from an oppressive authoritarian system (university or factory) and the right to make decisions about their own lives.

The people of France stood at the brink of total revolution. A general strike had paralysed the country. The students occupied the universities and the workers, the factories. What remained to be done was for the workers actually to *work* the factories, to take direct unmediated action and settle for nothing less than total self-management. Unfortunately, this did not occur. Authoritarian politics and bureaucratic methods die hard, and most of the major French workers' unions were saddled with both. As in Spain, the Communist Party worked against the direct, spontaneous actions of the people in the streets: the Revolution must be dictated from above. Leaders of the CGT (the Communist workers' union) tried to prevent contacts between the students and workers, and a united left soon became an impossibility. As de Gaulle and the police mobilized their forces and even greater violence broke out, many strikers accepted limited demands (better pay, shorter hours, etc.) and returned to work. Students continued their increasingly bloody confrontations with police, but the moment had passed. By the end of June, France had returned to “normality” under the same old Gaullist regime.

What happened in France in 1968 is vitally connected to the Spanish Revolution of 1936; in both cases anarchist principles were not only discussed but implemented. The fact that the French workers never did achieve working self-management may be because anarco-syndicalism was not as prevalent in France in the years prior to 1968 as it was in Spain before 1936. Of course, this is an over-simplification; explanation for a “failed” revolution can run on into infinity. What is crucial here, once again, is the fact that it happened at all. May-June,

⁹Ibid, p.262.

¹⁰Ibid, p.250.

¹¹Bookchin, *On Spontaneity and Organization*, pp. 11–12.

1968, disproves the common belief that revolution is impossible in an advanced capitalist country. The children of the French middle and working classes, bred to passivity, mindless consumerism, and/or alienated labor, were rejecting much more than capitalism. They were questioning authority itself, demanding the right to a free and *meaningful* existence. The reasons for revolution in modern industrial society are thus no longer limited to hunger and material scarcity; they include the desire for human liberation from all forms of domination, in essence a radical change in the very “quality of everyday life”.¹² They assume the necessity of a libertarian society. Anarchism can no longer be considered an anachronism.

It is often said that anarchists live in a world of dreams to come and do not see things which happen today. We see them only too well, and in their true colors, and that is what makes us carry the hatchet into the forest of prejudices that besets us.¹³

— Peter Kropotkin

There are two main reasons why revolution was aborted in France: (1) inadequate preparation in the theory and practice of anarchism and (2) the vast power of the State coupled with authoritarianism and bureaucracy in potentially sympathetic left-wing groups. In Spain, the revolution was more widespread and tenacious because of the extensive preparation. Yet it was still eventually crushed by a fascist State and authoritarian leftists. It is important to consider these two factors in relation to the situation in the United States today. We are not only facing a powerful State whose armed forces, police, and nuclear weapons could instantly destroy the entire human race, but we also find ourselves confronting a pervasive reverence for authority and hierarchical forms whose continuance is ensured daily through the kind of home-grown passivity bred by family, school, church, and TV screen. In addition, the U.S. is a huge country, with only a small, sporadic history of anarchist activity. It would seem that not only are we unprepared, we are literally dwarfed by a State more powerful than those of France and Spain combined. To say we are up against tremendous odds is an understatement.

But where does defining the Enemy as a ruthless, unconquerable giant lead us? If we don't allow ourselves to be paralysed by fatalism and futility, it could force us to redefine revolution in a way that would focus on anarcho-feminism as the framework in which to view the struggle for human liberation. It is women who now hold the key to new conceptions of revolution, women who realize that revolution can no longer mean the seizure of power or the domination of one group by another — under *any* circumstances, for *any* length of time. It is domination itself that must be abolished. The very survival of the planet depends on it. Men can no longer be allowed to wantonly manipulate the environment for their own self-interest, just as they can no longer be allowed to systematically destroy whole races of human beings. The presence of hierarchy and authoritarian mind-set threaten out human and planetary existence. Global liberation and libertarian politics have become *necessary*, not just utopian pipe dreams. We must “acquire the conditions of life in order to survive”.¹⁴

¹²Bookchin, *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, p.249.

¹³Berman, p.146.

¹⁴Bookchin, *Post Scarcity Anarchism*, p.40.

To focus on anarcho-feminism as the necessary revolutionary framework for our struggle is not to deny the immensity of the task before us. We do see “only too well” the root causes of our oppression and the tremendous power of the Enemy. But we also see that the way out of the deadly historical cycle of incomplete or aborted revolutions requires of us new definitions and new tactics — ones which point to the kind of “hollowing out”¹⁵ process described later in the “Making Utopia Real” section. As women, we are particularly well-suited for participation in this process. Underground for ages, we have learned to be covert, subtle, sly, silent, tenacious, acutely sensitive, and expert at communication skills.

For our own survival, we learned to weave webs of rebellion which were invisible to the “masterful” eye.

We know what a boot looks like
when seen from underneath,
we know the philosophy of boots. . .

Soon we will invade like weeds,
everywhere but slowly;
the captive plants will rebel
with us, fences will topple,
brick walls ripple and fall,
there will be no more boots.
Meanwhile we eat dirt
and sleep; we are waiting
under your feet.

When we say Attack
you will hear nothing
at first.¹⁶

Anarchistic preparation is not non-existent in this country. It exists in the minds and actions of women readying themselves (often unknowingly) for a revolution whose forms will shatter historical inevitability and the very process of history itself.

Anarchism and the Women’s Movement

The development of sisterhood is a unique threat, for it is directed against the basic social and psychic model of hierarchy and domination. . .¹⁷

— Mary Daly

¹⁵Bookchin, *On Spontaneity and Organization*, p.10.

¹⁶Margaret Atwood, “Song of the Worms”, *You Are Happy* (Harper & Row, 1974), p.35.

¹⁷Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Beacon Press, 1973), p. 133.

All across the country, independent groups of women began functioning without the structure, leaders, and other factotums of the male left, creating independently and simultaneously, organizations similar to those of anarchists of many decades and locales. No accident, either.¹⁸

— Cathy Levine

I have not touched upon the matter of woman's role in Spain and France, as it can be summed up in one word — unchanged. Anarchist men have been little better than males everywhere in their subjection of women.¹⁹ Thus the absolute necessity of a feminist anarchist revolution. Otherwise the very principles on which anarchism is based become utter hypocrisy.

The current women's movement and a radical feminist analysis of society have contributed much to libertarian thought. In fact, it is my contention that feminists have been unconscious anarchists in both theory and practice for years. We now need to become *consciously* aware of the connections between anarchism and feminism and use that framework for our thoughts and actions. We have to be able to see very clearly where we want to go and how to get there. In order to be more effective, in order to create the future we sense is possible, we must realise that what we want is not change but total *transformation*.

The radical feminist perspective is almost pure anarchism. The basic theory postulates the nuclear family as the basis for all authoritarian systems. The lesson the child learns, from father to teacher to boss to God, is to OBEY the great anonymous voice of Authority. To graduate from childhood to adulthood is to become a full-fledged automaton, incapable of questioning or even thinking clearly. We pass into middle-America, believing everything we are told and numbly accepting the destruction of life all around us.

What feminists are dealing with is a mind-fucking process — the male domineering attitude toward the external world, allowing only subject/object relationships. Traditional male politics reduces humans to object status and then dominates and manipulates them for abstract “goals”. Women, on the other hand, are trying to develop a consciousness of “Other” in all areas. We see subject-to-subject relationships as not only desirable but necessary. (Many of us have chosen to work with and love only women for just this reason — those kinds of relationships are so much more possible.) Together we are working to expand our empathy and understanding of other living things and to identify with those entities outside of ourselves, rather than objectifying and manipulating them. At this point, a respect for all life is a prerequisite for our very survival.

Radical feminist theory also criticizes male hierarchical thought patterns — in which rationality dominates sensuality, mind dominates intuition, and persistent splits and polarities (active/passive, child/adult, sane/insane, work/play, spontaneity/organization) alienate us from the mind-body experience as a *Whole* and from the *Continuum* of human experience. Women are attempting to get rid of these splits, to live in harmony with the universe as whole, integrated humans dedicated to the collective healing of our individual wounds and schisms.

¹⁸Cathy Levine, “The Tyranny of Tyranny”, *Black Rose* 1, p.56.

¹⁹Temma Kaplan of the UCLA history department has done considerable research on women's anarchist groups (esp. “Mujeres Liberes”) in the Spanish Revolution. See also Liz Willis, *Women in the Spanish Revolution*, Solidarity Pamphlet No. 48.

In actual practice within the Women's Movement, feminists have had both success and failure in abolishing hierarchy and domination. I believe that women frequently speak and act as "intuitive" anarchists, that is, we *approach*, or *verge on*, a complete denial of all patriarchal thought and organization. That approach, however, is blocked by the powerful and insidious forms which patriarchy takes — in our minds and in our relationships with one another. Living within and being conditioned by an authoritarian society often prevents us from making that all-important connection between feminism and anarchism. When we say we are fighting the patriarchy, it isn't always clear to all of us that that means fighting *all* hierarchy, *all* leadership, *all* government, and the very idea of authority itself. Our impulses toward collective work and small leaderless groups have been anarchistic, but in most cases we haven't *called* them by that name. And that is important, because an understanding of feminism as anarchism could springboard women out of reformism and stop-gap measures into a revolutionary confrontation with the basic nature of authoritarian politics.

If we want to "bring down the patriarchy", we need to talk about anarchism, to know exactly what it means, and to use that framework to transform ourselves and the structure of our daily lives. Feminism doesn't mean female corporate power or a woman President; it means *no* corporate power and *no* Presidents. The Equal Rights Amendment will not transform society; it only gives women the "right" to plug into a hierarchical economy. Challenging sexism means challenging *all* hierarchy — economic, political, and personal. And that means an anarca-feminist revolution.

Specifically, when have feminists been anarchistic, and when have we stopped short? As the second wave of feminism spread across the country in the late 60s, the forms which women's groups took frequently reflected an unspoken libertarian consciousness. In rebellion against the competitive power games, impersonal hierarchy, and mass organization tactics of male politics, women broke off into small, leaderless, consciousness-raising groups, which dealt with personal issues in our daily lives. Face-to-face, we attempted to get at the root cause of our oppression by sharing our hitherto unvalued perceptions and experiences. We learned from each other that politics is not "out there" but in our minds and bodies and between individuals. Personal relationships could and did oppress us as a political class. Our misery and self-hatred were a direct result of male domination — in home, street, job, and political organization.

So, in many unconnected areas of the U.S., C-R groups developed as a spontaneous, direct (re)action to patriarchal forms. The emphasis on the small group as a basic organizational unit, on the personal and political, on anti-authoritarianism, and on spontaneous direct action was essentially anarchistic. But, where were the years and years of preparation which sparked the Spanish revolutionary activities? The structure of women's groups bore a striking resemblance to that of anarchist affinity groups within anarco-sindicalist unions in Spain, France, and many other countries. Yet, we had not called ourselves anarchists and consciously organized around anarchist principles. At the time, we did not even have an underground network of communication and idea-and-skill sharing. Before the women's movement was more than a handful of isolated groups groping in the dark toward answers, anarchism as an unspecified ideal existed in our minds.

I believe that this puts women in the unique position of being the bearers of a subsurface anarchist consciousness which, if articulated and concretized can take

us further than any previous group toward the achievement of total revolution. Women's intuitive anarchism, if sharpened and clarified, is an incredible leap forward (or beyond) in the struggle for human liberation. Radical feminist theory hails feminism as the Ultimate Revolution. This is true if, and only if, we recognize and claim our anarchist roots. At the point where we fail to see the feminist connection to anarchism, we stop short of revolution and become trapped in "ye olde male political rut". It is time to stop groping in the darkness and see what we have done and are doing in the context of where we want to ultimately be.

C-R groups were a good beginning, but they often got so bogged down in talking about personal problems that they failed to make the jump to direct action and political confrontation. Groups that did organize around a specific issue or project sometimes found that the "tyranny of structurelessness" could be as destructive as the "tyranny of tyranny"²⁰ The failure to blend organization with spontaneity frequently caused the emergence of those with more skills or personal charisma as leaders. The resentment and frustration felt by those who found themselves following sparked in-fighting, guilt-tripping, and power struggles. Too often this ended in either total ineffectiveness or a backlash adherence to "what we need is more structure" (in the old male up/down sense of the word).

Once again, I think that what was missing was a verbalized anarchist analysis. Organization does not have to stifle spontaneity or follow hierarchical patterns. The women's groups or projects which have been the most successful are those which experimented with various fluid structures: the rotation of tasks and chair- persons, sharing of all skills, equal access to information and resources, non-monopolized decision-making, and time slots for discussion of group dynamics. This latter structural element is important because it involves a continued effort on the part of group members to watch for "creeping power politics". If women are verbally committing themselves to collective work, this requires a real struggle to unlearn passivity (to eliminate "followers") and to share special skills or knowledge (to avoid "leaders"). This doesn't mean that we cannot be inspired by one another's words and lives; strong actions by strong individuals can be contagious and thus important. But we must be careful not to slip into old behavior patterns.

On the positive side, the emerging structure of the women's movement in the last few years has generally followed an anarchistic pattern of small project-oriented groups continually weaving an underground network of communication and collective action around specific issues. Partial success at leader/"star" avoidance and the diffusion of small action projects (Rape Crisis Centers, Women's Health Collectives) across the country have made it extremely difficult for the women's movement to be pinned down to one person or group. Feminism is a many-headed monster which cannot be destroyed by singular decapitation. We spread and grow in ways that are incomprehensible to a hierarchical mentality.

This is not, however, to underestimate the immense power of the Enemy. The most treacherous form this power can take is cooptation, which feeds on any short-sighted unanarchistic view of feminism as mere "social change". To think of sexism as an evil which can be eradicated by female participation in

²⁰See Joreen's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness", *Second Wave*, Vol. 2, No. 1, and Cathy Levine's "The Tyranny of Tyranny", *Black Rose* 1.

the way things are is to insure the continuation of domination and oppression. “Feminist” capitalism is a contradiction in terms. When we establish women’s credit unions, restaurants, bookstores, etc., we must be clear that we are doing so for our own survival, for the purpose of creating a counter-system whose processes contradict and challenge competition, profit-making, and all forms of economic oppression. We must be committed to “living on the boundaries”²¹, to anti-capitalist, non-consumption values. What we want is neither integration nor a coup d’état which would “transfer power from one set of boys to another set of boys”.²² What we ask is nothing less than total revolution, revolution whose forms invent a future untainted by inequity, domination, or disrespect for individual variation — in short, feminist-anarchist revolution. I believe that women have known all along how to move in the direction of human liberation; we only need to shake off lingering male political forms and dictums and focus on our own anarchistic female analysis.

Where Do We Go From Here? Making Utopia Real

“Ah, your vision is romantic bullshit, soppy religiosity, flimsy idealism.” “You’re into poetry because you can’t deliver concrete details.” So says the little voice in the back of my (your?) head. But the front of my head knows that if you were here next to me, we could talk. And that in our talk would come (concrete, detailed) descriptions of how such and such might happen, how this or that would be resolved. What my vision really lacks is concrete, detailed human bodies. Then it wouldn’t be a flimsy vision, it would be a fleshy reality.²³

— Su Negrin

Instead of getting discouraged and isolated now, we should be in our small groups — discussing, planning, creating, and making trouble. . . we should always be actively engaging in and creating feminist activity, because we all thrive on it; in the absence of [it], women take tranquilizers, go insane, and commit suicide.²⁴

— Cathy Levin

Those of us who lived through the excitement of sit-ins, marches, student strikes, demonstrations, and REVOLUTION NOW in the 60s may find ourselves disillusioned and downright cynical about anything happening in the 70s. Giving up or in (“open” marriage? hip capitalism? the Guru Maharaji?) seems easier than facing the prospect of decades of struggle and maybe even ultimate failure. At this point, we lack an overall framework to see the process of revolution in. Without it, we are doomed to deadended, isolated struggle or the individual solution. The kind of framework, or coming-together-point, that anarca-feminism provides would appear to be a prerequisite for any sustained

²¹Daly, p.55.

²²Robin Morgan, speech at Boston College, Boston, Mass., Nov., 1973.

²³Negrin, p.171.

²⁴Levine, p.50.

effort to reach Utopian goals. By looking at Spain and France, we can see that true revolution is “neither an accidental happening nor a coup d’etat artificially engineered from above.”²⁵ It takes years of preparation: sharing of ideas and information, changes in consciousness and behavior, and the creation of political and economic alternatives to capitalist, hierarchical structures. It takes spontaneous direct action on the part of autonomous individuals through collective political confrontation. It is important to “free your mind” and your personal life, but it is not sufficient. Liberation is not an insular experience; it occurs in conjunction with other human beings. There are no individual “liberated women”.

So, what I’m talking about is a *long-term process*, a series of actions in which we unlearn passivity and learn to take control over our own lives. I am talking about a “hollowing out” of the present system through the formation of mental and physical (concrete) alternatives to the way things are. The romantic image of a small band of armed guerrillas overthrowing the U.S. government is obsolete (as is all male politics) and basically irrelevant to this conception of revolution. We would be squashed if we tried it. Besides, as the poster says, “What we want is not the overthrow of the government, but a situation in which it gets lost in the shuffle.” This is what happened (temporarily) in Spain, and almost happened in France. Whether armed resistance will be necessary at some point is open to debate. The anarchist principle of “means create ends” seems to imply pacifism, but the power of the State is so great that it is difficult to be absolute about non-violence. (Armed resistance was crucial in the Spanish Revolution, and seemed important in France 1968 as well.) The question of pacifism, however, would entail another discussion, and what I’m concerned with here is emphasizing the preparation needed to transform society, a preparation which includes an anarca-feminist framework, long-range revolutionary patience, and continual active confrontation with entrenched patriarchal attitudes.

The actual tactics of preparation are things that we have been involved with for a long time. We need to continue and develop them further. I see them as functioning on three levels: (1) “educational” (sharing of ideas, experiences), (2) economic/political, and (3) personal/political.

“Education” has a rather condescending ring to it, but I don’t mean “bringing the word to the masses” or guilt-tripping individuals into prescribed ways of being. I’m talking about the many methods we have developed for sharing our lives with one another — from writing (our network of feminist publications), study groups, and women’s radio and TV shows to demonstrations, marches, and street theatre. The mass media would seem to be a particularly important area for revolutionary communication and influence — just think of how our own lives were *mis*-shaped by radio and TV²⁶. Seen in isolation, these things might seem ineffectual, but people *do* change from writing, reading, talking, and listening to each other, as well as from active participation in political movements. Going out into the streets together shatters passivity and creates a spirit of communal effort and life energy which can help sustain and transform us. My own transformation from all-american-girl to anarca-feminist was brought about by a decade of reading, discussion, and involvement with many kinds of people and politics — from the Midwest to the West and East Coasts. My experiences

²⁵Doigoff, p. 19.

²⁶The Cohn-Bendits state that one major mistake in Paris 1968 was the failure to take complete control of the media, especially the radio and TV.

may in some ways be unique, but they are not, I think, extraordinary. In many, many places in this country, people are slowly beginning to question the way they were conditioned to acceptance and passivity. God and Government are not the ultimate authorities they once were. This is not to minimize the extent of the power of Church and State, but rather to emphasize that seemingly inconsequential changes in thought and behavior, when solidified in collective action, constitute a real challenge to the patriarchy.

Economic/political tactics fall into the realm of direct action and “purposeful illegality” (Daniel Guerin’s term). Anarco-syndicalism specifies three major modes of direct action: sabotage, strike, and boycott. Sabotage means “obstructing by every possible method, the regular process of production”²⁷. More and more frequently, sabotage is practised by people unconsciously influenced by changing societal values. For example, systematic absenteeism is carried out by both blue and white collar workers. Defying employers can be done as subtly as the “slow-down” or as blatantly as the “fuck-up”. Doing as little work as possible as slowly as possible is common employee practice, as is messing up the actual work process (often as a union tactic during a strike). Witness habitual misfiling or loss of “important papers” by secretaries, or the continual switching of destination placards on trains during the 1967 railroad strike in Italy.

Sabotage tactics can be used to make strikes much more effective. The strike itself is the workers’ most important weapon. Any individual strike has the potential of paralysing the system if it spreads to other industries and becomes a general strike. Total social revolution is then only a step away. Of course, the general strike must have as its ultimate goal worker’s self-management (as well as a clear sense of how to achieve and hold on to it), or else the revolution will be still-born (as in France, 1968).

The boycott can also be a powerful strike or union strategy (e.g., the boycott of non-union grapes, lettuce, and wines, and of Farah pants). In addition, it can be used to force economic and social changes. Refusal to vote, to pay war taxes, or to participate in capitalist competition and over-consumption are all important actions when coupled with support of alternative, non-profit structures (food co-ops, health and law collectives, recycled clothing and book stores, free schools, etc.). Consumerism is one of the main strongholds of capitalism. To boycott buying itself (especially products geared to obsolescence and those offensively advertised) is a tactic that has the power to change the “quality of everyday life”. Refusal to vote is often practised out of despair or passivity rather than as a conscious political statement against a pseudo-democracy where power and money elect a political elite. Non-voting can mean something other than silent consent if we are simultaneously participating in the creation of genuine democratic forms in an alternative network of anarchist affinity groups.

This takes us to the third area — personal/political, which is of course vitally connected to the other two. The anarchist affinity group has long been a revolutionary organizational structure. In anarco-syndicalist unions, they functioned as training grounds for workers’ self-management. They can be temporary groupings of individuals for a specific short-term goal, more “permanent” work collectives (as an alternative to professionalism and career elitism), or living collectives where individuals learn how to rid themselves of domination or possessiveness in their one-to-one relationships. Potentially, anarchist affinity

²⁷Goldman, “Syndicalism: Its Theory and Practice”, *Red Emma Speaks*, p.71.

groups are the base on which we can build a new libertarian, non-hierarchical society. The way we live and work changes the way we think and perceive (and vice versa), and when changes in consciousness become changes in action and behavior, the revolution has begun.

Making Utopia real involves many levels of struggle. In addition to specific tactics which can be constantly developed and changed, we need political tenacity: the strength and ability to see beyond the present to a joyous, revolutionary future. To get from here to there requires more than a leap of faith. It demands of each of us a day-to-day, long-range commitment to possibility and direct action.

The Transformation of the Future

The creation of female culture is as pervasive a process as we can imagine, for it is participation in a VISION which is continually unfolding anew in everything from our talks with friends, to meat boycotts, to taking over storefronts for child care centres, to making love with a sister. It is revelatory, undefinable, except as a process of change. Women's culture is all of us exorcising, naming, creating toward the vision of harmony with ourselves, each other, and our sister earth. In the last ten years our having come faster and closer than ever before in the history of the patriarchy to overturning its power... is cause of exhilarant hope — wild, contagious, unconquerable, crazy HOPE!... The hope, the winning of life over death, despair and meaninglessness is everywhere I look now — like talismen of the faith in WOMANVISION...²⁸

— Laurel

I used to think that if the revolution didn't happen tomorrow, we would all be doomed to a catastrophic (or at least, catatonic) fate. I don't believe anymore that kind of before-and-after revolution, and I think we set ourselves up for failure and despair by thinking of it in those terms. I do believe that what we all need, what we absolutely require, in order to continue struggling (in spite of oppression of our daily lives) is HOPE, that is, a vision of the future so beautiful and so powerful that it pulls us steadily forward in a bottom-up creation of an inner and outer world both habitable and self-fulfilling for *all*²⁹. I believe that hope exists — that it is in Laurel's "womanvision", in Mary Daly's "existential courage"³⁰ and in anarcho-feminism. Our different voices describe the same dream, and "only the dream can shatter stone that blocks our mouths."³¹ As we speak, we change, and as we change, we transform ourselves and the future simultaneously.

It *is* true that there is no solution, individual or otherwise, *in our society*.³²

²⁸Laurel, "Towards a Woman Vision", *Amazon Quarterly*, Vol. 1, Issue 2, p.40.

²⁹And, by self-fulfilling I mean not only in terms of survival needs (sufficient food, clothing, shelter, etc.) but psychological needs as well I (e.g., a non-oppressive environment which fosters total freedom of choice before specific, concretely possible alternatives).

³⁰Daly, p.23.

³¹Marge Piercy, "Provocation of the Dream".

³²Fran Taylor, "A Depressing Discourse on Romance, the Individual Solution, and Related Misfortunes", *Second Wave*, Vol. 3, No. 4.

But if we can only balance this rather depressing knowledge with an awareness of the radical metamorphoses we have experienced — in our consciousness and in our lives — the perhaps we can have the courage to continue to create what we DREAM is possible. Obviously, it is not easy to face daily oppression and still continue to hope. But *it is our only chance*. If we abandon hope (the ability to see connections, to dream the present into the future), then we have already lost. Hope is woman's most powerful revolutionary tool; it is what we give each other every time we share our lives, our work, and our love. It pulls us forward out of self-hatred, self-blame, and the fatalism which keeps us prisoners in separate cells. If we surrender to depression and despair now, we are accepting the inevitability of authoritarian politics and patriarchal domination ("Despair is the worst betrayal, the coldest seduction: to believe at last that the enemy will prevail."³³ Marge Piercy). We must not let our pain and anger fade into hopelessness or short-sighted semi-"solutions". Nothing we can do is enough, but on the other hand, those "small changes" we make in our minds, in our lives, in one another's lives, are not totally futile and ineffectual. It takes a long time to make a revolution: it is something that one both prepares for and lives now. The transformation of the future will not be instantaneous, but it can be *total*. . . a continuum of thought and action, individuality and collectivity, spontaneity and organization, stretching from what is to what can be.

Anarchism provides a framework for this transformation. It is a vision, a dream, a possibility which becomes "real" as we live it. Feminism is the connection that links anarchism to the future. When we finally see that connection clearly, when we hold to that vision, when we refuse to be raped of that HOPE, we will be stepping over the edge of nothingness into a being now just barely imaginable. The womanvision that is anarca-feminism has been carried inside our women's bodies for centuries. "It will be an ongoing struggle in each of us, to birth this vision"³⁴ but *we must do it*. We must "ride our anger like elephants into battle".

We are sleepwalkers troubled by nightmare flashes,
In locked wards we closet our vision, renouncing . . .
Only when we break the mirror and climb into our vision,
Only when we are the wind together streaming and singing,
Only in the dream we become with our bones for spears,
we are real at last
and wake.³⁵

³³Marge Piercy, "Laying Down the Tower", *To Be of Use* (Doubleday, 1973), p.88.

³⁴Laurel, p.40.

³⁵Piercy, "Provocation of the Dream".

SUMMER VACATION IN THE SUBJUNCTIVE

If I were a woman. If I were a wanted woman. If I were a woman with soft fingers. If I were on a beach with a man—if he was a man, if a man can be a man before he acts like a man. If I were on a beach with a man and he held my hand. If I liked my hand being held, even if it was held at the wrong angle. If my wrist was wringing in pain but I kept it there. If my heart were held wrong, like my hand. If I kept it there. If I was kept. If I was kept in pain. If I were pain. If I were a woman—if I were a woman before I was a woman. If I were a woman who knew her body like a woman knows her body. If a woman knew. If I knew. If I were on a beach with that man—if, this time, that man dissolved into sand. If the sand became hot under my feet but my feet were gold. If a woman were made of sun. If I were made of sun. If I burned the world around me until it shone beautiful and brown. If this burning was called healing. If the healing made light.

(Ashley M. Jones)

17

The Empire Strikes Back

A Posttranssexual Manifesto

SANDY STONE

SANDY STONE'S "POSTTRANSSEXUAL MANIFESTO" has been described justly as the protean text from which contemporary transgender studies emerged. It developed a poststructuralist analysis of gender identity that opened up new possibilities for transsexuals—and, by extension, for other types of people who feel themselves to be "differently gendered"—to escape the powerful effects of both medical and feminist discourses that have worked to efface and invalidate their life experiences. Simultaneously, Stone called for a new body of intellectual work, grounded in new practices of selfhood, to take root and flourish, and give fresh expression to "entire spectra of desire" that had previously been unexpressed.

The title of Stone's article refers directly to Janice Raymond's 1978 anti-transsexual polemic, *The Transsexual Empire*, in which Raymond personally attacked Stone for daring to present herself as a woman and to work as a sound engineer at Olivia Records, a women-only feminist music collective. Stone exacts her revenge more than a decade later, not by waging an anti-feminist counter-attack on Raymond, but by undermining the foundationalist assumptions that support Raymond's narrower concept of womanhood, and by claiming a speaking position for transsexuals that cannot be automatically dismissed as damaged, deluded, second-rate, or somehow inherently compromised.

Sandy Stone's path-breaking essay explicitly addresses the literary genres of transsexual biography and autobiography. It looks at the ways that others have "ventriloquized" their ideas about gender through transsexual mouthpieces, as well as how transsexual autobiographical writing has often uncritically reproduced discourses of gender that ultimately are unhelpful for understanding the complex specificity of transsexual embodiment and experience. One of Stone's goals in critiquing previous representations of transsexualism was to encourage new forms of self-expression capable of revealing the deep and powerful ways we all construct a sense of self in reference to our particular form of embodiment. In the wake of Stone's article, a gradual but steady body of new academic and creative work by transgender people has gradually taken shape, which has enriched virtually every academic and artistic discipline with new critical perspectives on gender.

FROGS INTO PRINCESSES

The verdant hills of Casablanca look down on homes and shops jammed chockablock against narrow, twisted streets filled with the odors of spices and dung. Casablanca is a very old city, passed over by Lawrence Durrell perhaps only by a geographical accident as the winepress of love. In the more modern quarter, located on a broad, sunny boulevard, is a building otherwise unremarkable except for a small brass nameplate that identifies it as the clinic of Dr. Georges Burou. It is predominantly devoted to obstetrics and gynecology, but for many years has maintained another reputation quite unknown to the stream of Moroccan women who pass through its rooms.

Dr. Burou is being visited by journalist James Morris. Morris fidgets in an anteroom reading *Elle* and *Paris-Match* with something less than full attention, because he is on an errand of immense personal import. At last the receptionist calls for him, and he is shown to the inner sanctum. He relates:

I was led along corridors and up staircases into the inner premises of the clinic. The atmosphere thickened as we proceeded. The rooms became more heavily curtained, more velvety, more voluptuous. Portrait busts appeared, I think, and there was a hint of heavy perfume. Presently I saw, advancing upon me through the dim alcoves of this retreat, which distinctly suggested to me the allure of a harem, a figure no less recognizably odalisque. It was Madame Burou. She was dressed in a long white robe, tasseled I think around the waist, which subtly managed to combine the luxuriance of a caftan with the hygiene of a nurse's uniform, and she was blonde herself, and carefully mysterious. . . . Powers beyond my control had brought me to Room 5 at the clinic in Casablanca, and I could not have run away then even if I had wanted to. . . . I went to say good-bye to myself in the mirror. We would never meet again, and I wanted to give that other self a long last look in the eye, and a wink for luck. As I did so a street vendor outside played a delicate arpeggio upon his flute, a very gentle merry sound which he repeated, over and over again, in sweet *diminuendo* down the street. Flights of angels, I said to myself, and so staggered . . . to my bed, and oblivion.¹

Exit James Morris, enter Jan Morris, through the intervention of late twentieth-century medical practices in this wonderfully "oriental," almost religious narrative of transformation. The passage is from *Conundrum*, the story of Morris' "sex change" and the consequences for her life. Besides the wink for luck, there is another obligatory ceremony known to male-to-female transsexuals which is called "wringing the turkey's neck," although it is not recorded whether Morris performed it as well. I will return to this rite of passage later in more detail.

MAKING HISTORY

Imagine now a swift segue from the moiling alleyways of Casablanca to the rolling green hills of Palo Alto. The Stanford Gender Dysphoria Program occupies a small room near the campus in a quiet residential section of this affluent community. The Program, which is a counterpart to Georges Burou's clinic in Morocco, has been for many years the academic focus of Western studies of gender dysphoria syndrome, also known as transsexualism. Here are determined etiology, diagnostic criteria, and treatment.

The Program was begun in 1968, and its staff of surgeons and psychologists first set out to collect as much history on the subject of transsexualism as was available. Let me pause to provide a very brief capsule of their results. A transsexual is a person who identifies his or her gender identity with that of the "opposite" gender. Sex and gender are quite separate issues, but transsexuals commonly blur the distinction by confusing the performative character of gender with the physical "fact" of sex, referring to their perceptions of their situation as being in the "wrong body." Although the term transsexual is of recent origin, the phenomenon is not. The earliest mention of something which we can recognize *ex post facto* as transsexualism, in light of current diagnostic criteria, was of the Assyrian king Sardanapalus, who was reported to have dressed in women's clothing and spun with his wives.² Later instances of something very like transsexualism were reported by Philo of Judea, during the Roman Empire. In the eighteenth century the Chevalier d'Eon, who lived for thirty-nine years in the female role, was a rival of Madame Pompadour for the attention of Louis XV. The first colonial governor of New York, Lord Cornbury, came from England fully attired as a woman and remained so during his time in office.³

Transsexualism was not accorded the status of an “official disorder” until 1980, when it was first listed in the *American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. As Marie Mehl points out, this is something of a Pyrrhic victory.⁴

Prior to 1980, much work had already been done in an attempt to define criteria for differential diagnosis. An example from the 1970s is this one, from work carried out by Leslie Lothstein and reported in Walters and Ross’s *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*⁵:

Lothstein, in his study of ten ageing transsexuals [average age fifty-two], found that psychological testing helped to determine the extent of the patients’ pathology [*sic*]... [he] concluded that [transsexuals as a class] were depressed, isolated, withdrawn, schizoid individuals with profound dependency conflicts. Furthermore, they were immature, narcissistic, egocentric and potentially explosive, while their attempts to obtain [professional assistance] were demanding, manipulative, controlling, coercive, and paranoid.⁶

Here’s another:

In a study of 56 transsexuals the results on the schizophrenia and depression scales were outside the upper limit of the normal range. The authors see these profiles as reflecting the confused and bizarre life styles of the subjects.⁷

These were clinical studies, which represented a very limited class of subjects. However, the studies were considered sufficiently representative for them to be reprinted without comment in collections such as that of Walters and Ross. Further on in each paper, though, we find that each investigator invalidates his results in a brief disclaimer which is reminiscent of the fine print in a cigarette ad: In the first, by adding “It must be admitted that Lothstein’s subjects could hardly be called a typical sample as nine of the ten studied had serious physical health problems” (this was a study conducted in a health clinic, not a gender clinic), and in the second, with the afterthought that “82 per cent of [the subjects] were prostitutes and atypical of transsexuals in other parts of the world.”⁸ Such results might have been considered marginal, hedged about as they were with markers of questionable method or excessively limited samples. Yet they came to represent transsexuals in medicolegal/psychological literature, disclaimers and all, almost to the present day.

During the same period, feminist theoreticians were developing their own analyses. The issue quickly became, and remains, volatile and divisive. Let me quote an example.

Rape... is a masculinist violation of bodily integrity. All transsexuals rape women’s bodies by reducing the female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves.... Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception.

This quote is from Janice Raymond’s 1979 book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of The She-Male*, which occasioned the title of this paper. I read Raymond to be claiming that transsexuals are constructs of an evil phallocratic empire and were designed to invade women’s spaces and appropriate women’s power. Though *Empire* represented a specific moment in feminist analysis and prefigured the appropriation of liberal political language by a radical right, here in 1991, on the twelfth anniversary of its publication, it is still the definitive statement on transsexualism by a genetic female academic.⁹ To clarify my stakes in this discourse let me quote another passage from *Empire*:

Masculine behavior is notably obtrusive. It is significant that transsexually constructed lesbian-feminists have inserted themselves into the positions of importance and/or performance in the feminist community. Sandy Stone, the transsexual engineer with Olivia Records, an ‘all-women’ recording company, illustrates

this well. Stone is not only crucial to the Olivia enterprise but plays a very dominant role there. The . . . visibility he achieved in the aftermath of the Olivia controversy . . . only serves to enhance his previously dominant role and to divide women, as men frequently do, when they make their presence necessary and vital to women. As one woman wrote: "I feel raped when Olivia passes off Sandy . . . as a real woman. After all his male privilege, is he going to cash in on lesbian feminist culture too?"

This paper, "The *Empire Strikes Back*," is about morality tales and origin myths, about telling the "truth" of gender. Its informing principle is that "technical arts are always imagined to be subordinated by the ruling artistic idea, itself rooted authoritatively in nature's own life."¹⁰ It is about the image and the real mutually defining each other through the inscriptions and reading practices of late capitalism. It is about postmodernism, postfeminism, and (dare I say it) posttranssexualism. Throughout, the paper owes a large debt to Donna Haraway.

"ALL OF REALITY IN LATE CAPITALIST CULTURE LUSTS TO BECOME AN IMAGE FOR ITS OWN SECURITY"¹¹

Let's turn to accounts by the transsexuals themselves. During this period virtually all of the published accounts were written by male-to-females. I want to briefly consider four autobiographical accounts of male-to-female transsexuals, to see what we can learn about what they think they are doing. (I will consider female-to-male transsexuals in another paper.)

The earliest partially autobiographical account in existence is that of Lili Elbe in Niels Hoyer's book *Man Into Woman* [1933].¹² The first fully autobiographical book was the paperback *I Changed My Sex!* (not exactly a quiet, contemplative title), written by the striptease artist Hedy Jo Star in the mid-1950s.¹³ Christine Jorgensen, who underwent surgery in the early 1950s and is arguably the best known of the recent transsexuals, did not publish her autobiography until 1967; instead, Star's book rode the wave of publicity surrounding Jorgensen's surgery. In 1974 *Conundrum* was published, written by the popular English journalist Jan Morris. In 1977 there was *Canary*, by musician and performer Canary Conn.¹⁴ In addition, many transsexuals keep something they call by the argot term "O.T.F.": The Obligatory Transsexual File. This usually contains newspaper articles and bits of forbidden diary entries about "inappropriate" gender behavior. Transsexuals also collect autobiographical literature. According to the Stanford gender dysphoria program, the medical clinics do not, because they consider autobiographical accounts thoroughly unreliable. Because of this, and since a fair percentage of the literature is invisible to many library systems, these personal collections are the only source for some of this information. I am fortunate to have a few of them at my disposal.

What sort of subject is constituted in these texts? Hoyer (representing Jacobson representing Elbe, who is representing Wegener who is representing Sparre),¹⁵ writes:

A single glance of this man had deprived her of all her strength. She felt as if her whole personality had been crushed by him. With a single glance he had extinguished it. Something in her rebelled. She felt like a schoolgirl who had received short shrift from an idolized teacher. She was conscious of a peculiar weakness in all her members . . . it was the first time her woman's heart had trembled before her lord and master, before the man who had constituted himself her protector, and she understood why she then submitted so utterly to him and his will.¹⁶

We can put to this fragment all of the usual questions: Not by whom but *for* whom was Lili Elbe constructed? Under whose gaze did her text fall? And consequently what stories appear and disappear in this kind of seduction? It may come as no surprise that all of the accounts I will relate here are similar

in their description of “woman” as male fetish, as replicating a socially enforced role, or as constituted by performative gender. Lili Elbe faints at the sight of blood.¹⁷ Jan Morris, a world-class journalist who has been around the block a few times, still describes her sense of herself in relation to makeup and dress, of being on display, and is pleased when men open doors for her:

I feel small, and neat. I am not small in fact, and not terribly neat either, but femininity conspires to make me feel so. My blouse and skirt are light, bright, crisp. My shoes make my feet look more delicate than they are, besides giving me... a suggestion of vulnerability that I rather like. My red and white bangles give me a racy feel, my bag matches my shoes and makes me feel well organized... When I walk out into the street I feel consciously ready for the world's appraisal, in a way that I never felt as a man.¹⁸

Hedy Jo Star, who was a professional stripper, says in *I Changed My Sex!*: “I wanted the sensual feel of lingerie against my skin. I wanted to brighten my face with cosmetics. I wanted a strong man to protect me.” Here in 1991 I have also encountered a few men who are brave enough to echo this sentiment for themselves, but in 1955 it was a proprietary feminine position.

Besides the obvious complicity of these accounts in a Western white male definition of performative gender, the authors also reinforce a binary, oppositional mode of gender identification. They go from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory between.¹⁹ Further, each constructs a specific narrative moment when their personal sexual identification changes from male to female. This moment is the moment of neocolporrhap— that is, of gender reassignment or “sex change surgery.”²⁰ Jan Morris, on the night preceding surgery, wrote: “I went to say good-bye to myself in the mirror. We would never meet again, and I wanted to give that other self a last wink for luck . . .”²¹

Canary Conn writes: “I’m not a *muchacho* . . . I’m a *muchacha* now . . . a girl [*sic*].”²²

Hedy Jo Star writes: “In the instant that I awoke from the anaesthetic, I realized that I had finally become a woman.”²³

Even Lili Elbe, whose text is second-hand, used the same terms: “Suddenly it occurred to him that he, Andreas Sparre, was probably undressing for the last time.” Immediately on awakening from first-stage surgery [castration in Hoyer’s account], Sparre writes a note. “He gazed at the card and failed to recognize the writing. It was a woman’s script.” Inger carries the note to the doctor: “What do you think of this, Doctor. No man could have written it?” “No,” said the astonished doctor; “no, you are quite right . . .”—an exchange which requires the reader to forget that orthography is an acquired skill. The same thing happens with Elbe’s voice: “the strange thing was that your voice had completely changed . . . You have a splendid soprano voice! Simply astounding.”²⁴ Perhaps as astounding now as then but for different reasons, since in light of present knowledge of the effects [and more to the point, the non-effects] of castration and hormones none of this could have happened. Neither has any effect on voice timbre. Hence, incidentally, the jaundiced eyes with which the clinics regard historical accounts.

If Hoyer mixes reality with fantasy and caricatures his subjects besides (“Simply astounding!”), what lessons are there in *Man Into Woman*? Partly what emerges from the book is how Hoyer deploys the strategy of building barriers within a single subject, strategies that are still in gainful employment today. Lili displaces the irruptive masculine self, still dangerously present within her, onto the God-figure of her surgeon/therapist Werner Kreutz, whom she calls The Professor, or The Miracle Man. The Professor is He Who molds and Lili that which is molded:

what the Professor is now doing with Lili is nothing less than an emotional moulding, which is preceding the physical moulding into a woman. Hitherto Lili has been like clay which others had prepared and to

which the Professor has given form and life . . . by a single glance the Professor awoke her heart to life, a life with all the instincts of woman.²⁵

The female is immanent, the female is bone-deep, the female is instinct. With Lili's eager complicity, The Professor drives a massive wedge between the masculine and the feminine within her. In this passage, reminiscent of the "oriental" quality of Morris's narrative, the male must be annihilated or at least denied, but the female is that which exists to be *continually* annihilated:

It seemed to her as if she no longer had any responsibility for herself, for her fate. For Werner Kreutz had relieved her of it all. Nor had she any longer a will of her own . . . there could be no past for her. Everything in the past belonged to a person who . . . was dead. Now there was only a perfectly humble woman, who was ready to obey, who was happy to submit herself to the will of another . . . her master, her creator, her Professor. Between [Andreas] and her stood Werner Kreutz. She felt secure and salvaged.²⁶

Hoyer has the same problems with purity and denial of mixture that recur in many transsexual autobiographical narratives. The characters in his narrative exist in an historical period of enormous sexual repression. How is one to maintain the divide between the "male" self, whose proper object of desire is Woman, and the "female" self, whose proper object of desire is Man?

"As a man you have always seemed to me unquestionably healthy. I have, indeed, seen with my own eyes that you attract women, and that is the clearest proof that you are a genuine fellow." He paused, and then placed his hand on Andreas' shoulder. "You won't take it amiss if I ask you a frank question? . . . Have you at any time been interested in your own kind? You know what I mean."

Andreas shook his head calmly. "My word on it, Niels; never in my life. And I can add that those kind of creatures have never shown any interest in me."

"Good, Andreas! That's just what I thought."²⁷

Hoyer must separate the subjectivity of "Andreas," who has never felt anything for men, and "Lili" who, in the course of the narrative, wants to marry one. This salvaging procedure makes the world safe for "Lili" by erecting and maintaining an impenetrable barrier between her and "Andreas," reinforced again and again in such ways as two different handwriting styles and two different voices. The force of an imperative—a natural state toward which all things tend—to deny the potentialities of mixture, acts to preserve "pure" gender identity: at the dawn of the Nazi-led love affair with purity, no "creatures" tempt Andreas into transgressing boundaries with his "own kind."

"I will honestly and plainly confess to you, Niels, that I have always been attracted to women. And to-day as much as ever. A most banal confession!"²⁸

—banal only so long as the person inside Andreas's body who voices it is Andreas, rather than Lili. There is a lot of work being done in this passage, a microcosm of the work it takes to maintain the same polar personae in society in the large. Further, each of these writers constructs his or her account as a narrative of redemption. There is a strong element of drama, of the sense of struggle against huge odds, of over-coming perilous obstacles, and of mounting awe and mystery at the breathtaking approach and final apotheosis of the Forbidden Transformation. Oboy.

The first operation . . . has been successful beyond all expectations. Andreas has ceased to exist, they said. His germ glands—oh, mystic words—have been removed.²⁹

Oh, mystic words. The *mysterium tremendum* of deep identity hovers about a physical locus; the entire complex of male engenderment, the mysterious power of the Man-God, inhabits the "germ glands"

in the way that the soul was thought to inhabit the pineal. Maleness is in the you-know-whats. For that matter, so is the ontology of the subject. Therefore Hoyer can demonstrate in the coarsest way that femaleness is lack:

The operation which has been performed here [that is, castration] enables me to enter the clinic for women [exclusively for women].³⁰

On the other hand, either Niels or Lili can be constituted by an act of *insinuation*, what the New Testament calls *endeuein*, or the putting on of the god, inserting the physical body within a shell of cultural signification:

Andreas Sparre . . . was probably undressing for the last time . . . For a lifetime these coverings of coat and waistcoat and trousers had enclosed him.³¹

It is now Lili who is writing to you. I am sitting up in my bed in a silk nightdress with lace trimming, curled, powdered, with bangles, necklace, and rings . . .³²

All these authors replicate the stereotypical male account of the constitution of woman: Dress, makeup, and delicate fainting at the sight of blood. Each of these adventurers passes directly from one pole of sexual experience to the other. If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible. And nobody *ever* mentions wringing the turkey's neck.

No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, *I'm* suspicious.

How do these accounts converse with the medical/psychological texts? In a time in which more interactions occur through texts, computer conferences, and electronic media than by personal contact, and consequently when individual subjectivity can be constituted through inscription more often than through personal association, there are still moments of embodied "natural truth" that cannot be avoided. In the time period of most of these books, the most critical of these moments was the intake interview at the gender dysphoria clinic when the doctors, who were all males, decided whether the person was eligible for gender reassignment surgery. The origin of the gender dysphoria clinics is a microcosmic look at the construction of criteria for gender. The foundational idea for the gender dysphoria clinics was first, to study an interesting and potentially fundable human aberration; second, to provide help, as they understood the term, for a "correctable problem."

Some of the early nonacademic gender dysphoria clinics performed *surgery on demand*, which is to say regardless of any judgment on the part of the clinic staff regarding what came to be called appropriateness to the gender of choice. When the first academic gender dysphoria clinics were started on an experimental basis in the 1960s, the medical staff would not perform surgery on demand, because of the professional risks involved in performing experimental surgery on "sociopaths." At this time there were no official diagnostic criteria; "transsexuals" were, *ipso facto*, whoever signed up for assistance. Professionally this was a dicey situation. It was necessary to construct the category "transsexual" along customary and traditional lines, to construct plausible criteria for acceptance into a clinic. Professionally speaking, a test or a differential diagnosis was needed for transsexualism that did not depend on anything as simple and subjective as feeling that one was in the wrong body. The test needed to be objective, clinically appropriate, and repeatable. But even after considerable research, no simple and unambiguous test for gender dysphoria syndrome could be developed.³³

The Stanford clinic was in the business of helping people, among its other agendas, as its members understood the term. Therefore the final decisions of eligibility for gender reassignment were made by the staff on the basis of an individual *sense* of the "appropriateness of the individual to their gender of choice." The clinic took on the additional role of "grooming clinic" or "charm school" because, according to the judgment of the staff, the men who presented as wanting to be women did not always

“behave like” women. Stanford recognized that gender roles could be learned (to an extent). Their involvement with the grooming clinics was an effort to produce not simply anatomically legible females, but *women* . . . i.e., *gendered* females. As Norman Fisk remarked, “I now admit very candidly that . . . in the early phases we were avowedly seeking candidates who would have the best chance for success.”³⁴ In practice this meant that the candidates for surgery were evaluated on the basis of their *performance* in the gender of choice. The criteria constituted a fully acculturated, consensual definition of gender, and *at the site of their enactment we can locate an actual instance of the apparatus of production of gender*.

This raises several sticky questions, the chief two being: Who is telling the story for whom, and how do the storytellers differentiate between the story they tell and the story they hear?

One answer is that they differentiate with great difficulty. The criteria which the researchers developed and then applied were defined recursively through a series of interactions with the candidates. The scenario worked this way: Initially, the only textbook on the subject of transsexualism was Harry Benjamin’s definitive work *The Transsexual Phenomenon* [1966].³⁵ [Note that Benjamin’s book actually postdates *I Changed My Sex!* by about ten years.] When the first clinics were constituted, Benjamin’s book was the researchers’ standard reference. And when the first transsexuals were evaluated for their suitability for surgery, their behavior matched up gratifyingly with Benjamin’s criteria. The researchers produced papers which reported on this, and which were used as bases for funding.

It took a surprisingly long time—several years—for the researchers to realize that the reason the candidates’ behavioral profiles matched Benjamin’s so well was that the candidates, too, had read Benjamin’s book, which was passed from hand to hand within the transsexual community, and they were only too happy to provide the behavior that led to acceptance for surgery.³⁶ This sort of careful repositioning created interesting problems. Among them was the determination of the permissible range of expressions of physical sexuality. This was a large gray area in the candidates’ self-presentations, because Benjamin’s subjects did not talk about any erotic sense of their own bodies. Consequently nobody else who came to the clinics did either. By textual authority, physical men who lived as women and who identified themselves as transsexuals, as opposed to male transvestites for whom erotic penile sensation was permissible, could not experience penile pleasure. Into the 1980s there was not a single preoperative male-to-female transsexual for whom data was available who experienced genital sexual pleasure while living in the “gender of choice.”³⁷ The prohibition continued postoperatively in interestingly transmuted form, and remained so absolute that no postoperative transsexual would admit to experiencing sexual pleasure through masturbation either. Full membership in the assigned gender was conferred by orgasm, real or faked, accomplished through heterosexual penetration.³⁸ “Wringing the turkey’s neck,” the ritual of penile masturbation just before surgery, was the most secret of secret traditions. To acknowledge so natural a desire would be to risk “crash landing”; that is, “role inappropriateness” leading to disqualification.³⁹

It was necessary to retrench. The two groups, on one hand the researchers and on the other the transsexuals, were pursuing separate ends. The researchers wanted to know what this thing they called gender dysphoria syndrome was. They wanted a taxonomy of symptoms, criteria for differential diagnosis, procedures for evaluation, reliable courses of treatment, and thorough follow-up. The transsexuals wanted surgery. They had very clear agendas regarding their relation to the researchers, and considered the doctors’ evaluation criteria merely another obstacle in their path—something to be overcome. In this they unambiguously expressed Benjamin’s original criterion in its simplest form: The sense of being in the “wrong” body.⁴⁰ This seems a recipe for an uneasy adversarial relationship, and it was. It continues to be, although with the passage of time there has been considerable dialogue between the two camps. Partly this has been made possible by the realization among the medical and

psychological community that the expected criteria for differential diagnosis did not emerge. Consider this excerpt from a paper by Marie Mehl, written in 1986:

There is no mental nor psychological test which successfully differentiates the transsexual from the so-called normal population. There is no more psychopathology in the transsexual population than in the population at large, although societal response to the transsexual does pose some insurmountable problems. The psychodynamic histories of transsexuals do not yield any consistent differentiation characteristics from the rest of the population.⁴¹

These two accounts, Mehl's statement and that of Lothstein, in which he found transsexuals to be depressed, schizoid, manipulative, controlling, and paranoid, coexist within a span of less than ten years. With the achievement of a diagnostic category in 1980—one which, after years of research, did not involve much more than the original sense of “being in the wrong body”—and consequent acceptance by the body police, i.e., the medical establishment, clinically “good” histories now exist of transsexuals in areas as widely dispersed as Australia, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Vietnam, Singapore, China, Malaysia, India, Uganda, Sudan, Tahiti, Chile, Borneo, Madagascar, and the Aleutians.⁴² (This is not a complete list.) It is a considerable stretch to fit them all into some plausible theory. Were there undiscovered or untried diagnostic techniques that would have differentiated transsexuals from the “normal” population? Were the criteria wrong, limited, or short-sighted? Did the realization that criteria were not emerging just naturally appear as a result of “scientific progress,” or were there other forces at work?

Such a banquet of data creates its own problems. Concomitant with the dubious achievement of a diagnostic category is the inevitable blurring of boundaries as a vast heteroglossic account of difference, heretofore invisible to the “legitimate” professions, suddenly achieves canonization and simultaneously becomes homogenized to satisfy the constraints of the category. Suddenly the old morality tale of the truth of gender, told by a kindly white patriarch in New York in 1966, becomes pancultural in the 1980s. Emergent polyvocalities of lived experience, never represented in the discourse but present at least in potential, disappear; the *berdache* and the stripper, the tweedy housewife and the *mujerado*, the *mah'u* and the rock star, are still the same story after all, if we only try hard enough.

WHOSE STORY IS THIS, ANYWAY?

I wish to point out the broad similarities which this peculiar juxtaposition suggests to aspects of colonial discourse with which we may be familiar: The initial fascination with the exotic, extending to professional investigators; denial of subjectivity and lack of access to the dominant discourse; followed by a species of rehabilitation.

Raising these issues has complicated life in the clinics.

“Making” history, whether autobiographic, academic, or clinical, is partly a struggle to ground an account in some natural inevitability. Bodies are screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements that emerge from ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices within the academic and medical communities. These struggles play themselves out in arenas far removed from the body. Each is an attempt to gain a high ground which is profoundly moral in character, to make an authoritative and final explanation for the way things are and consequently for the way they must continue to be. In other words, each of these accounts is culture speaking with the voice of an individual. The people who have no voice in this theorizing are the transsexuals themselves. As with males theorizing about women from the beginning of time, theorists of gender have seen transsexuals as possessing something less than agency. As with “genetic” “women,” transsexuals are infantilized, considered

too illogical or irresponsible to achieve true subjectivity, or clinically erased by diagnostic criteria; or else, as constructed by some radical feminist theorists, as robots of an insidious and menacing patriarchy, an alien army designed and constructed to infiltrate, pervert and destroy “true” women. In this construction as well, the transsexuals have been resolutely complicit by failing to develop an effective counterdiscourse.

Here on the gender borders at the close of the twentieth century, with the faltering of phallogocentric hegemony and the bumptious appearance of heteroglossic origin accounts, we find the epistemologies of white male medical practice, the rage of radical feminist theories and the chaos of lived gendered experience meeting on the battlefield of the transsexual body: a hotly contested site of cultural inscription, a meaning machine for the production of ideal type. Representation at its most magical, the transsexual body is perfected memory, inscribed with the “true” story of Adam and Eve as the ontological account of irreducible difference, an essential biography which is part of nature. A story which culture tells itself, the transsexual body is a tactile politics of reproduction constituted through textual violence. The clinic is a technology of inscription.

Given this circumstance in which a minority discourse comes to ground in the physical, a counterdiscourse is critical. But it is difficult to generate a counterdiscourse if one is programmed to disappear. The highest purpose of the transsexual is to erase him/herself, to fade into the “normal” population as soon as possible. Part of this process is known as *constructing a plausible history*—learning to lie effectively about one’s past. What is gained is acceptability in society. What is lost is the ability to authentically represent the complexities and ambiguities of lived experience, and thereby is lost that aspect of “nature” which Donna Haraway theorizes as Coyote—the Native American spirit animal who represents the power of continual transformation which is the heart of engaged life. Instead, authentic experience is replaced by a particular kind of story, one that supports the old constructed positions. This is expensive, and profoundly disempowering. Whether desiring to do so or not, transsexuals do not grow up in the same ways as “GGs,” or genetic “naturals.”⁴³ Transsexuals do not possess the same history as genetic “naturals,” and do not share common oppression prior to gender reassignment. I am not suggesting a shared discourse. I am suggesting that in the transsexual’s erased history we can find a story disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender, which originates from within the gender minority itself and which can make common cause with other oppositional discourses. But the transsexual currently occupies a position which is nowhere, which is outside the binary oppositions of gendered discourse. For a transsexual, *as a transsexual*, to generate a true, effective and representational counterdiscourse is to speak from outside the boundaries of gender, beyond the constructed oppositional nodes which have been predefined as the only positions from which discourse is possible. How, then, can the transsexual speak? If the transsexual were to speak, what would s/he say?

A POSTTRANSSEXUAL MANIFESTO

To attempt to occupy a place as speaking subject within the traditional gender frame is to become complicit in the discourse which one wishes to deconstruct. Rather, we can seize upon the textual violence inscribed in the transsexual body and turn it into a reconstructive force. Let me suggest a more familiar example. Judith Butler points out that the lesbian categories of “butch” and “femme” are not simple assimilations of lesbianism back into terms of heterosexuality. Rather, Butler introduces the concept of *cultural intelligibility*, and suggests that the contextualized and resignified “masculinity” of the butch, seen against a culturally intelligible “female” body, invokes a dissonance that both generates a sexual tension and constitutes the object of desire. She points out that this way of thinking about gendered objects of desire admits of much greater complexity than the example suggests. The lesbian butch or femme both recall the heterosexual scene but simultaneously displace it. The idea

that butch and femme are “replicas” or “copies” of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic power of their internal dissonance.⁴⁴ In the case of the transsexual, the varieties of performative gender, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body *which is itself a medically constituted textual violence*, generate new and unpredictable dissonances which implicate entire spectra of desire. In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries. I suggest we start by taking Raymond’s accusation that “transsexuals divide women” beyond itself, and turn it into a productive force to multiplicatively divide the old binary discourses of gender—as well as Raymond’s own monistic discourse. To foreground the practices of inscription and reading which are part of this deliberate invocation of dissonance, I suggest constituting transsexuals not as a class or problematic “third gender,” but rather as a *genre*—a set of embodied texts whose potential for *productive* disruption of structured sexualities and spectra of desire has yet to be explored.

In order to effect this, the genre of visible transsexuals must grow by recruiting members from the class of invisible ones, from those who have disappeared into their “plausible histories.” The most critical thing a transsexual can do, the thing that *constitutes* success, is to “pass.”⁴⁵ Passing means to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a “natural” member of that gender. Passing means the denial of mixture. One and the same with passing is effacement of the prior gender role, or the construction of a plausible history. Considering that most transsexuals choose reassignment in their third or fourth decade, this means erasing a considerable portion of their personal experience. It is my contention that this process, in which both the transsexual and the medicolegal/psychological establishment are complicit, forecloses the possibility of a life grounded in the *intertextual* possibilities of the transsexual body.

To negotiate the troubling and productive multiple permeabilities of boundary and subject position that intertextuality implies, we must begin to rearticulate the foundational language by which both sexuality and transsexuality are described. For example, neither the investigators nor the transsexuals have taken the step of problematizing “wrong body” as an adequate descriptive category. In fact “wrong body” has come, virtually by default, to *define* the syndrome.⁴⁶ It is quite understandable, I think, that a phrase whose lexicality suggests the phallogentric, binary character of gender differentiation should be examined with deepest suspicion. So long as we, whether academics, clinicians, or transsexuals, ontologize both sexuality and transsexuality in this way, we have foreclosed the possibility of analyzing desire and motivational complexity in a manner which adequately describes the multiple contradictions of individual lived experience. We need a deeper analytical language for transsexual theory, one which allows for the sorts of ambiguities and polyvocalities which have already so productively informed and enriched feminist theory.

In this volume, Judith Shapiro points out that “To those ... who might be inclined to diagnose the transsexual’s focus on the genitals as obsessive or fetishistic, the response is that they are, in fact, simply conforming to *their culture’s* criteria for gender assignment” [emphasis mine]. This statement points to deeper workings, to hidden discourses and experiential pluralities within the transsexual monolith. They are not yet clinically or academically visible, and with good reason. For example, in pursuit of differential diagnosis a question sometimes asked of a prospective transsexual is “Suppose that you could be a man [or woman] in every way except for your genitals; would you be content?” There are several possible answers, but only one is clinically correct.⁴⁷ Small wonder, then, that so much of these discourses revolves around the phrase “wrong body.” Under the binary phallogentric founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorized, only one body per gendered subject is “right.” All other bodies are wrong.

As clinicians and transsexuals continue to face off across the diagnostic battlefield which this scenario suggests, the transsexuals for whom gender identity is something different from *and perhaps irrelevant* to physical genitalia are occluded by those for whom the power of the medical/psychological establishments, and their ability to act as gatekeepers for cultural norms, is the final authority for what counts as a culturally intelligible body. This is a treacherous area, and were the silenced groups to achieve voice we might well find, as feminist theorists have claimed, that the identities of individual, embodied subjects were far less implicated in physical norms, and far more diversely spread across a rich and complex structuration of identity and desire, than it is now possible to express. And yet in even the best of the current debates, the standard mode is one of relentless totalization. The most egregious example in this paper, Raymond's stunning "All transsexuals rape women's bodies" (what if she had said, e.g., "all blacks rape women's bodies"), is no less totalizing than Kates's "transsexuals . . . take on an exaggerated and stereotypical female role," or Bolin's "transsexuals try to forget their male history." There are no subjects in these discourses, only homogenized, totalized objects—fractally replicating earlier histories of minority discourses in the large. So when I speak the forgotten word, it will perhaps wake memories of other debates. The word is *some*.

Transsexuals who pass seem able to ignore the fact that by creating totalized, monistic identities, forgoing physical and subjective intertextuality, they have foreclosed the possibility of authentic relationships. Under the principle of passing, denying the destabilizing power of being "read," relationships begin as lies—and passing, of course, is not an activity restricted to transsexuals. This is familiar to the person of color whose skin is light enough to pass as white, or to the closet gay or lesbian . . . or to anyone who has chosen invisibility as an imperfect solution to personal dissonance. In essence I am rearticulating one of the arguments for solidarity which has been developed by gays, lesbians and people of color. The comparison extends further. To deconstruct the necessity for passing implies that transsexuals must take responsibility for *all* of their history, to begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body. The disruptions of the old patterns of desire that the multiple dissonances of the transsexual body imply produce not an irreducible alterity but a myriad of alterities, whose unanticipated juxtapositions hold what Donna Haraway has called the promises of monsters—physicalities of constantly shifting figure and ground that exceed the frame of any possible representation.⁴⁸

The essence of transsexualism is the act of passing. A transsexual who passes is obeying the Derridean imperative: "Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres."⁴⁹ I could not ask a transsexual for anything more inconceivable than to forgo passing, to be consciously "read," to read oneself aloud—and by this troubling and productive reading, to begin to *write oneself* into the discourses by which one has been written—in effect, then, to become a (look out—dare I say it again?) posttranssexual.⁵⁰ Still, transsexuals know that silence can be an extremely high price to pay for acceptance. I want to speak directly to the brothers, sisters and others who may read/"read" this and say: I ask all of us to use the strength which brought us through the effort of restructuring identity, and which has also helped us to live in silence and denial, for a re-visioning of our lives. I know you feel that most of the work is behind you and that the price of invisibility is not great. But, although *individual* change is the foundation of all things, it is not the end of all things. Perhaps it's time to begin laying the groundwork for the next transformation.

NOTES

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1. Jan Morris, *Conundrum*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974) 155.
2. In William A.W. Walters, and Michael W. Ross, *Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
3. This capsule history is related in the introduction to Richard Docter's *Transvestites and Transsexuals: Toward a Theory of Cross-Gender Behavior*, New York: Plenum Press, 1988. It is also treated by Judith Shapiro, "Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex", in this volume, as well as by Janice Irvine in *Disorders of Desire: Sex and Gender in Modern American Sexology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). In chapter seven of this volume, Gary Kates argues that the Chevalier d'Eon was not a transsexual because he did not demonstrate the transsexual syndrome as Kates understands it; i.e., "intense discomfort with masculine clothes and activities, as is normal in male-to-female transsexuals." Kates's idea of the syndrome comes from standard texts. Later in this paper I discuss the mythic quality of much of this information.
4. In Mehl's introduction to Betty Steiner, ed., *Gender Dysphoria Syndrome: Development, Research, Management* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985).
5. Walters and Ross, op.cit.
6. From Don Burnard and Michael W. Ross, "Psychosocial Aspects and Psychological Theory: What Can Psychological Testing Reveal?" in Walters and Ross [58,2].
7. Walters and Ross, [58,3].
8. Walters and Ross, [58,3].
9. There is some hope to be taken that Judith Shapiro's work will supercede Raymond's as such a definitive statement. Shapiro's accounts seem excellently balanced, and she is aware that there are more accounts from transsexual scholars that have not yet entered the discourse.
10. This wonderful phrase is from Donna Haraway's "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden Of Eden, New York City, 1908–1936," in *Social Text* 11, 11:20.
11. Haraway, op.cit. The anecdotal character of this section is supported by field notes which have not yet been organized and coded. A thoroughly definitive and perhaps ethnographic version of this paper, with appropriate citations of both professionals and their subjects, awaits research time and funding.
12. The British sexologist, Norman Haine, wrote the introduction, thus making Hoyer's book a semi-medical contribution.
13. Hedy Jo Star, (Carl Rollins Hammonds), 1955. *I Changed My Sex! [From an O.T.F.]*. Star's book has disappeared from history, and I have been unable to find reference to it in any library catalog. Having held a copy in my hand, I am sorry I didn't hold tighter.
14. There was at least one other book published during this period, Renée Richards's "Second Serve," which is not treated here.
15. Niels Hoyer was a pseudonym for Ernst Ludwig Harthern Jacobson; Lili Elbe was the female name chosen by the artist Einar Wegener, whose given name was Andreas Sparre. This lexical profusion has rich implications for studies of self and its constructions, in literature and also in such emergent social settings as computer conferences, where several personalities grounded in a single body are as much the rule as the exception.
16. Hoyer [163].
17. Hoyer [147].
18. Morris [174].
19. In *Conundrum*, Morris does describe a period in her journey from masculine to feminine (from a few years before surgery to immediately afterward) during which her gender was perceived, by herself and others, as ambiguous. She is quite unambiguous, though, about the moment of transition from *male to female*.
20. Gender reassignment is the correct disciplinary term. In current medical discourse, sex is taken as a natural physical fact and cannot be changed.
21. Morris [115]. I was reminded of this account on the eve of my own surgery. Gee, I thought on that occasion, it would be interesting to magically become another person in that binary and final way. So I tried it myself—going to the mirror and saying goodbye to the person I saw there—and unfortunately it didn't work. A few days later, when I could next get to the mirror, the person looking back at me was still me. I still don't understand what I did wrong.
22. Canary Conn, *Canary: The Story of a Transsexual* (New York: Bantam, 1977), 271. Conn had her surgery at the clinic of Jesus Maria Barbosa in Tijuana. In this excerpt she is speaking to a Mexican nurse; hence the Spanish terms.
23. Star, op.cit.
24. I admit to being every bit as astounded as the good Doctor, since except for Hoyer's account there are no other records of change in vocal pitch or timbre following administration of hormones or gender reassignment surgery. If transsexuals do succeed in altering their vocal characteristics, they do it gradually and with great difficulty. But there are more than sufficient problems with Lili Elbe's "true story," not the least of which is the scene in which Elbe finally "becomes a woman" by virtue of her physician's *implanting into her abdominal cavity a set of human ovaries*. The attention given by the media in the past decade to heart transplants and diseases of the immune system have made the lay public more aware of the workings of the human immune response, but even in 1936 Hoyer's account would have been recognized

- by the medical community as questionable. Tissue rejection and the dream of mitigating it were the subjects of speculation in fiction and science fiction as late as the 1940s; e.g., the miracle drug “collodiansy” in H. Beam Piper’s *One Leg Too Many* (1949).
25. Hoyer [165].
 26. Hoyer [170]. For an extended discussion of texts that transmute submission into personal fulfillment cf. Sandy Stone, forthcoming, “Sweet Surrender: Gender, Spirituality, and the Ecstasy of Subjection; Pseudo-transsexual Fiction in the 1970s.”
 27. Hoyer [53].
 28. Ibid.
 29. Hoyer [134].
 30. Hoyer [139]. Lili Elbe’s sex change took place in 1930. In the United States today, the juridical view of successful male-to-female sex change is still based upon lack; e.g., a man is a woman when “the male generative organs have been totally and irrevocably destroyed.” (From a clinic letter authorizing a name change on a passport, 1980).
 31. Hoyer [125].
 32. Hoyer [139]. I call attention in both preceding passages to the Koine Greek verb *ἐνδύειν*, referring to the moment of baptism, when the one being baptized enters into and is entered by the Word; *endeuein* may be translated as “to enter into” but also “to put on, to insinuate oneself into, like a glove”; viz. “He [sic] who is baptized into Christ shall have put on Christ” In this intense homoerotic vein in which both genders are present but collapsed in the sacrific[ed] body cf. such examples as Fray Bernardino de Sahagun’s description of rituals during which the officiating priest puts on the flayed skin of a young woman (in Frazer [589–91]).
 33. The evolution and management of this problem deserves a paper in itself. It is discussed in capsule form in Donald R. Laub and Patrick Gandy, eds., *Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome* (Stanford: Division of Reconstructive and Rehabilitation Surgery, Stanford Medical Center, 1973) and in Janice M. Irvine, *Disorders Of Desire: Sex and Gender in Modern American Sexology*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
 34. In Laub and Gandy [7]. Fisk’s full remarks provide an excellent description of the aims and procedures of the Stanford group during the early years, and the tensions of conflicting agendas and various attempts at resolution are implicit in his account. For additional accounts cf. both Irvine and Shapiro, op.cit.
 35. Harry Benjamin, *The Transsexual Phenomenon* (New York: Julian Press, 1966). The paper which was the foundation for the book was published as “Transsexualism and Transvestism as Psycho-somatic and Somato-Psychic Syndromes” in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy* [8:219–30 (1954)]. A much earlier paper by D.O. Cauldwell, “Psychopathia transsexualis”, in *Sexology* 16:274–80 (1949), does not appear to have had the same effect within the field, although John Money still pays homage to it by retaining Cauldwell’s single-s spelling of the term. In early documents by other workers one may sometimes trace the influence of Cauldwell or Benjamin by how the word is spelled.
 36. Laub and Gandy [8, 9 *passim*].
 37. The problem here is with the ontology of the term “genital,” in particular with regard to its definition for such activities as pre- and postoperative masturbation. Engenderment ontologizes the erotic economy of body surface; as Judith Butler and others (e.g., Foucault) point out, engenderment polices which parts of the body have their erotic components switched off or on. Conflicts arise when the *same* parts become multivalent; e.g., when portions of the (physical male) urethra are used to construct portions of the (gendered female in the physical male) neoclitoris. I suggest that we use this vertiginous idea as an example of ways in which we can refigure multivalence as intervention into the constitution of binary gendered subject positions; in a binary erotic economy, “Who” experiences erotic sensation associated with these areas? (In chapter ten in this volume Judith Shapiro raises a similar point in her essay “Transsexualism: Reflections on the Persistence of Gender and the Mutability of Sex.” I have chosen a site geographically quite close to the one she describes, but hopefully more ambiguous, and therefore more dissonant in these discourses in which dissonance can be a powerful and productive intervention.)
 38. This act in the borderlands of subject position suggests a category missing from Marjorie Garber’s excellent paper “Spare Parts: The Surgical Construction of Gender,” in *differences* 1:137–59 (1990); it is an intervention into the dissymmetry between “making a man” and “making a woman” that Garber describes. To a certain extent it figures a collapse of those categories within the transsexual imaginary, although it seems reasonable to conclude that this version of the coming-of-age story is still largely male—the male doctors and patients telling each other the stories of what Nature means for both Man and Woman. Generally female (female-to-male) patients tell the same stories from the other side.
 39. The terms “wringing the turkey’s neck” (male masturbation), “crash landing” (rejection by a clinical program), and “gaff” (an undergarment used to conceal male genitalia in preoperative m/f transsexuals), vary slightly in different geographical areas but are common enough to be recognized across sites.
 40. Based upon Norman Fisk’s remarks in Laub and Gandy [7], as well as my own notes. Part of the difficulty, as I discuss in this paper, is that the investigators (not to mention the transsexuals) have failed to problematize the phrase “wrong body” as an adequate descriptive category.
 41. In Walters and Ross, op.cit.
 42. I use the word “clinical” here and elsewhere while remaining mindful of the “Pyrrhic victory” of which Marie Mehl spoke. Now that transsexualism has the uneasy legitimacy of a diagnostic category in the DSM, how do we begin the process of getting it *out* of the book?
 43. The actual meaning of “GG,” a m/f transsexual slang term, is “genuine girl,” (*sic*) also called “genny.”
 44. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

45. The opposite of passing, being *read*, provocatively invokes the inscription practices to which I have referred.
46. I am suggesting a starting point, but it is necessary to go much further. We will have to question not only how *body* is defined in these discourses, but to more critically examine who gets to say *what "body" means*.
47. In case the reader is unsure, let me supply the clinically correct answer: "No."
48. For an elaboration of this concept cf. Donna Haraway, "The Promises Of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in Paula Treichler, Cary Nelson, and Larry Grossberg, eds. *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
49. Jacques Derrida, "La Loi Du Genre/The Law Of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell in *Glyph* 7(1980):176 (French); 202 (English).
50. I also call attention to Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of the *mestiza*, an illegible subject living in the borderlands between cultures, capable of partial speech in each but always only partially intelligible to each. Working against the grain of this position, Anzaldúa's "new *mestiza*" attempts to overcome illegibility partly by seizing control of speech and inscription and writing herself into cultural discourse. The stunning "Borderlands" is a case in point; cf. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987).

FLOWER IN THE WIND, 1963

The flower in the wind can move only as much as the wind allows it to move. In this way, it is unmoored while moored. Have you ever been escorted by a man into a room? The way his hand pushes the door open, how he gently puts his hand on your back. And because your back is to him, the touch feels both like comfort and a sudden blade. When the coroner cuts me open, light will spill out onto the metal table, then onto the floor. The light will be discolored by the ambition of men. At the very back of a woman's body is a large shield. We were meant to use it daily, but sometimes the pull of the men was too much. This is why the shield can be passed on. None of us use it the way it was meant to be used. It's hard to know what men want from us but a chance to strike their sword on a shield made of light. And when the woman finally gives him some light, he can pull the dripping sword out of her back. So many people would die to have what you have, a man said to me yesterday. I told him that the conundrum is there, in the sentence.

(Victoria Chang)

3

The Specificity of Desire

The object is by nature a refund object.

—Jacques Lacan

1

Let us take a closer look at the idea that we are never fully self-actualized and in particular the idea that our sense of deprivation—our sense of being perpetually “unfinished”—is not an impediment to an inspired life, but rather its precondition. This is a bold claim, for it aligns inspiration with lack, with what philosophers such as Sartre have characterized as the “nothingness” that punctures our “being.”¹ In the final chapters of this book, I explain why this alignment is not always accurate, why some of our most inspired moments are ones when we feel utterly complete. I am, in other words, by no means saying that deprivation is the only way to attain inspiration. Richness often begets more richness, abundance more abundance. There are times when we invent wonderful things, such as art, love, beauty, values, ideals, or

beliefs, for the simple reason that we need a way to consume a surplus of creative impulses that would otherwise feel unmanageable. During such times, our energies overflow, forging new pathways as well as building unanticipated connections between already existing pathways, thereby allowing us to rearrange the coordinates of our existence. This capacity to mold conduits of energy into novel configurations represents an important facet of creativity—one that is predicated on the pressure of fullness rather than of lack, so that the more saturated, the more crowded with stimuli we feel, the more easily we are able to bring new things into being.

But I do also believe that there is a strong link between our sense of lack (emptiness or inner dissatisfaction) and creativity. This is because lack gives rise to desire. It makes us want things, and sometimes the best way to get these things is to invent them. Alternatively, we can scour the world for already existing things that might satisfy us. Either way, we are motivated by the urge to fill the lack within our being: in the same way that an empty room invites us to furnish it, our inner nothingness invites us to populate it with things that mean something to us.

I am using the word *thing* quite freely here, for it can refer to anything from material objects to personal values to other people. In a sense, it hardly matters what we stuff into the void of our being as long as we are able to alleviate the anxiety this void tends to generate. In another sense, however, nothing is as important as the quality of the things we either invent or discover, for—as I suggested in the previous chapter—it is when we fail to pay attention to the specific texture of the things we reach for that we tend to clutter our inner world, not to mention our daily lives, with things that do not bring us any real satisfaction and that might even harm our chances of finding personal meaning. Sadly, our desperate quest for meaning (or self-fulfillment) can sometimes drive us to accumulate heaps of irrelevant things that we do not need and that burden us by their sheer excess; ironically, the very things we resort to in order to ward off the nothingness that threatens to engulf us can in turn engulf us. This is how we come to spawn a great deal of waste. Our collective efforts to flee from our lack have

created societies drowning in litter and other useless items, so that we spend considerable resources managing the residue of our avarice.

I have already noted the hoarding mentality that sometimes gets the better of us: the fact that no matter how much we have, we tend to want more. Such excess of hunger can be a response to an excess of emptiness—a futile attempt to comfort the hollow place within us that weeps even when we smile. Most problematically, when this hunger gets intertwined with more circumstantial forms of hunger, such as the desperation to beat the odds of poverty, it can fuel what cultural critic Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism”: the unfounded faith that one’s tireless efforts to find material success, cultural acceptance, or everyday stability will eventually pay off no matter how bleak one’s situation. Berlant focuses specifically on how socially marginalized individuals often continue to make emotional investments in the very collective structures and belief systems—say, the ideals of liberal capitalism—that oppress them in the first place. Such is the predicament, for instance, of the working-class adolescent who has watched his or her parents toil without reward for two decades, but who still believes that hard work will automatically result in class mobility and social belonging.² My emphasis here is more on the false optimism of those who assume that amassing an enormous pile of material resources will somehow shield them from the realization that it is our plight as human beings to live with a degree of deprivation, that, ontologically speaking, we will never be (or have) “enough.” But both scenarios highlight the ways in which lack can give rise to misguided exertions to overcome it.

The difference, of course, is that the kind of circumstantial lack Berlant is talking about could be rectified by a more egalitarian socioeconomic order. It is hard to tolerate in part because it is in principle unnecessary; it is not an essential part of the human condition, but rather the outcome of a deficient political organization. And, on the practical level, it is also hard to tolerate because there are few effective ways to compensate for it. In contrast, the kind of foundational (ontological) lack I am analyzing can be countered by a whole host of constructive undertakings. Although it can certainly

breed the sort of surplus of greed I have sought to problematize, we also possess quite a few innovative means of coping with it. Indeed, our unease in the face of this lack has arguably produced many of the most prized objects and activities of human history: from books, paintings, sculptures, photographs, and love poems to philosophies of living, scientific discoveries, ethical systems, exploratory expeditions, and working fireplaces—noble things have arisen from our sense of dispossession. This is why it is possible to argue that our foundational lack holds tremendous value even when we acknowledge that our circumstantial deprivation rarely leads to the good life that we are programmed to fantasize about. In the same way that our foundational vulnerability is not merely what injures us, but also what makes us receptive to the world's enabling influences, our foundational lack opens to realms of creativity without which our lives would be much less captivating.

2

To understand the connection between lack and creativity, it may help to think about it in concrete terms. Consider what happens when we lose a person we love. The void left by this person may initially be so devastating that we cannot find a way to go on with our lives. Our grief slows down our private universe, sometimes to the point of paralysis. This is a necessary part of mourning and frequently quite productive because it forces us to take notice of aspects of our being that we usually ignore. There may be reticent voices within us that cannot normally fight their way into our consciousness because the noisier, more insistent ones take up so much space. Grief has a way of making such tenuous voices audible; it stills the habitual commotion of our interiority so that we can gain access to new layers of self-awareness. Yet as long as we remain within the crypt of our sadness, we cannot usually reap the benefits of our deepened self-understanding; we cannot take advantage of our increased wisdom until we have started to loosen the grip of mourning. And nothing signals our capacity to do so

better than our ability to creatively reach for a suitable substitute for what we have lost.

The time of grief can feel endless. But, eventually, the void caused by our loss asks to be filled; it drives us to look for replacements. Sometimes this means finding another person to love. Other times it means finding another way to gain satisfaction so that we, for instance, pour our energies into a creative project, an intellectual exertion, a professional goal, or a political ambition. Happily for us, we do not need to find an exact duplicate of the person we have lost, but merely someone (or something) capable of engaging our passion as powerfully. Similarly, the best way to get over a disappointed aspiration is to counter it with a new one that absorbs us as thoroughly as the one we were unable to bring to fruition. The minute our desire invents or discovers a new object—the minute we find ourselves connecting with a new person or aspiration—we have taken the first step toward overcoming our sadness; we have begun to gradually give up what we once held dear so that something different can become equally valuable to us.

One reason this process can be so agonizing is that it is intrinsically paradoxical: it recognizes the value of the old, often to the point of worship, while slowly working toward the new. But there is no denying that the moment the new becomes a real possibility, the moment we manage to envision a genuinely viable alternative to what we have lost, is the moment when the present begins to eclipse the past. This transition of course does not necessarily erase our ambivalence about our loss, let alone our faithfulness to what we have lost. There may be key losses in our lives—losses of people or aspirations that feel absolutely irreplaceable—that we might never be able to surpass entirely. Such people or aspirations may leave an enduring imprint on our psyches, becoming a more or less prominent ingredient of our overall inner composition. One might in fact say that to the extent that our psyches hold the (conscious or unconscious) memory of everything we have lost, our identities cannot be divorced from the people and aspirations we have left behind; our personalities always carry the nostalgic trace of our losses. Yet if we are to go on with our lives, if we are to

invent or discover new sources of passion, eventually we will need to break the paralysis of grief; we will need to find new objects for our desire even when we cannot quite banish the ghosts of the old ones.³

The acute void left by the loss of a loved person or aspiration is not the same thing as the ubiquitous existential malaise (or foundational lack) I have started to align with creativity. But the principle is the same—namely, that our lack gives rise to an impulse to invent or discover entities that are capable of granting us a compensatory satisfaction. Simply put, our sense that something is missing from our lives spurs us to imaginative activity, inciting us, as it were, to play with nothingness. According to this account, many of the most valuable things in life result from the fact that we are never fully adjusted to our environment—that our interactions with the world tend to leave us slightly disgruntled. As I have pointed out, if we felt entirely fulfilled, we would quickly lose our motivation for invention and discovery; our self-sufficiency would kill our curiosity about the world. Consequently, although we may fantasize about the possibility of absolute happiness, about a seamless fit between us and the world, the fact that we are unable to achieve this fantasy is the source of a great deal of magnificence.

3

We have, once again, arrived at the idea that the world is a source of both wonder and frustration. I began this chapter with a quotation from Jacques Lacan because there are few thinkers who have articulated this tension more persuasively. Lacan explains that our relationship to the world is inherently conflicted. On the one hand, we can attain a fully human existence only by inserting ourselves into preexisting structures of language and collective meaning. If we refused to do so, or if we were somehow incapable of accomplishing this task, we would not develop the capacity to speak, relate, love, or make meaning; we would be trapped in a solipsistic bubble that would make it impossible for us to gain either psychological

or emotional depth. This is why processes of socialization are indispensable for human intelligibility, why, as I have stressed, we cannot accurately describe human life without describing our radical dependence on others. This is essentially the same thing as saying that we would be nothing without the world: we draw our power, our resources, from the power and resources of the world.

On the other hand, our reliance on the world can be humbling. Precisely because we can survive only through participating in collective, impersonal systems of meaning and value, we come to recognize our relative insignificance; we come to see that we are merely a tiny element of the world's overall organization. We cannot, for instance, usually amend a cultural belief or practice without eliciting the assistance of others; no matter how outdated this belief or practice may be, and no matter how exasperated it may make us, we do not have the power to revise it without turning to others for help. There are of course exceptions to this predicament. There are writers whose prose becomes so influential that it alters cultural views or standards of artistic excellence. There are painters, composers, photographers, and other creative individuals whose work causes dramatic shifts in their respective fields. There are scientists, inventors, politicians, and lawmakers whose contributions to society enhance the lived reality of all of us. And there are courageous activists whose fervor for change actually manages to bring about such change: there are individuals whose voices are so charismatic that we have no choice but to pay attention. But most of us do not ever attain this level. And even those who do attain it don't usually experience themselves as omnipotent; even the most gifted among us are prone to the dissatisfaction that stems from feeling that no matter what we do, it is never quite enough. If anything, the more ambitious the aspiration, the more likely it is that the person trying to attain it feels inadequate to the task.

Lacan posits that our sense of inadequacy is primordial—and thus impossible to banish—because it is the price we pay for socialization. Prior to socialization, we do not yet understand ourselves as separate entities, which in practice means that we are

the world and the world is us. Socialization shatters this illusion at least on two different levels. On a literal level, it introduces a wedge—an insurmountable obstacle—between us and the maternal body (or the body of the one who cares for us). On a more figurative level, it delivers a huge blow to our narcissistic sense of being the navel of the universe. In so doing, it divests us of our infantile fantasy of wholeness and uncomplicated belonging, generating an unquenchable longing for a state of plenitude that we imagine we have somehow been unfairly robbed of: a lost paradise we can never recover but that we spend the rest of our lives pursuing. The fact that we never possessed this paradise in the first place, that we were never completely whole and at ease to begin with, does not in the least diminish our resolve to recover it. Lacan designates this lost paradise as “the Thing,” indicating by the capital T that it is not an ordinary fantasy object, but a very special Thing of incomparable worth; it is the Thing that our deepest desires are made of.⁴

Some of us replace the lost paradise that the Thing symbolizes with an otherworldly paradise, which is arguably one reason religion wields so much power around the globe. But many of us go about the undertaking in the way I have outlined—namely, by finding surrogates for what we think we have lost: we pursue people and various aspirations to alleviate the ache within our being. This is why Lacan asserts that “the object is by nature a refund object.”⁵ Every “object” (every person or aspiration) we invent or discover is “refund” in the sense that it is always a substitute for the original lost Thing. We place one thing, one object, after another into the empty slot left by the Thing, and those objects that come the closest to reviving the Thing, that contain the strongest echo of the Thing’s special radiance, are the ones we feel most passionate about. However, because no object can ever fully replicate the fantasized perfection of the Thing, we are condemned to repeat our quest ad infinitum. We are, so to speak, always on the lookout for the perfect object that would, once and for all, grant us the unmitigated satisfaction we (fantasmatically) associate with the missing Thing. This is why

we spend our lives concocting ever more ingenious ways of resurrecting it. One might in fact go as far as to say that it is because we do not have the Thing that the various things of the world matter to us in the first place; it is because we feel deprived of the Thing that we are capable of being interested in (and devoted to) things other than ourselves.

I have proposed that it is because we cannot locate the ultimate meaning of our lives that we are compelled to produce more partial meanings that resonate with the uniqueness of our character. Similarly, it is because we cannot have the Thing that we feel motivated to reach for its echo through the various objects that we encounter in the world; it is because we cannot have the sublime object that we are driven to look for its luster in more mundane substitutes. Such substitutes may fall short of the Thing's luminescence, yet insofar as they evoke it, they lend meaning to our lives. As to which objects speak to us and which do not, that is determined by the always highly idiosyncratic manner in which we experience the Thing's absence. In other words, the specificity of our desire—what Lacan calls the “truth” of our desire—has to do with the unique parameters of our sense of existential deprivation.

Note, once more, how fortunate it is that the objects we invent or discover as deputies for the Thing do not need to—indeed, cannot—ever reincarnate it flawlessly, for if they were to do so, our creative impulse would come to a halt. It is because the things of the world do not necessarily bear any obvious resemblance to the Thing that human creativity can take so many different forms; the gap between the Thing and the things we use to compensate for its absence guarantees that there is room for innovation. Without this gap, we—as well as the societies in which we live—would languish, for there would be no incentive to keep devising new modalities of meaning and value. Established meanings and values would become so entrenched that they would be totalitarian. On this view, the lack within our being is the foundation not only of our personal transformation, but also—insofar as a large enough accumulation of personal transformations results in cultural transformation—of the advancement of society.

4

Regrettably, there are times when we lose track of the fact that the correspondence between the lost Thing and the things we turn to as its representatives does not need to be entirely accurate; there are times when we ravage the integrity of our objects by trying to force them to coincide with our fantasy of what we have lost. This is one reason it might be a good idea to heed the advice of Heidegger, who urges us to allow the things of the world to disclose themselves to us according to their own distinctive rhythm;⁶ it is why it might sometimes be wise to take a step back from the world so as to create space for objects to materialize in their own way, without any interference from us. This is perhaps nowhere as important as in our relationships with other people and particularly with those we love, for our temptation to use them as a means of plugging the void within our being can cause us to conflate them with the fantasy object (the Thing) to such an extent that we fail to respect their independent reality. In such cases, our affection is narcissistic rather than generous in the sense that its goal is to make us feel better about ourselves rather than to pay tribute to the singularity of the other person; it is essentially selfish in that what we are looking for is a solution to our own sense of incompleteness rather than a genuine connection to another person.

Such a narcissistic attitude can be hard to sidestep in the context of romance because the Thing is never as powerful, as likely to exhilarate us, as it is when we fall in love. Though we have the capacity to raise more or less any object to the Thing's special status, nothing invites us to do so more ardently (or explicitly) than the object of our love. The person we love seems to contain a living and breathing morsel of the Thing, which is why we are prone to idealize (and even overidealize) him or her. And inasmuch as our object gives us the impression that we can touch the Thing in tangible ways that make unmediated satisfaction available to us, it can be virtually impossible to resist; it is because the love object promises the end of alienation that our desire solidifies around it with extraordinary intensity. Within this heady state, it is all too

easy to fall into a narcissistic fixation that causes us to treat our beloved as a mere instrument of our own salvation.

It is, then, possible to develop a mercenary attitude toward our loved ones. Indeed, ironically enough, it is when we pursue the fullness of our own experience most determinedly that we are most likely to ignore the multidimensionality of those close to us, with the result that we see in them only what we want to see and value only those of their attributes that appear to seal the lack within our being. In such situations, we sideline, and sometimes even resent, those dimensions of others that do not cater to our needs, thereby developing a one-sided understanding of who they are. We studiously avoid those of their characteristics that confuse the fantastic image we hold of them, privileging instead what makes sense to us from our self-serving perspective. In this way, even the luster of the Thing we locate in another person—the sublime echo of special significance that renders a given individual unfathomably precious to us—can become abusive when it overshadows the rest of this person's character. When this luster becomes the only thing we appreciate about another person, we may have attained our ideal, but we have lost the person.

Narcissism is the very opposite of authentic relationality, for whenever we operate from a narcissistic premise, we cannot really see the other person, but rather bask in the flattering image of ourselves that he or she reflects back to us. In addition, because it is not possible for anyone to uphold this image entirely reliably—because components of a given person's own character will sooner or later cloud its clarity—we are bound to be disappointed. Insofar as we are looking for what another person can never grant us, namely a version of ourselves that is more complete than what we are able to attain on our own, every person is fated to let us down. Even a person who contains an unusually strong echo of the Thing, who resonates on the precise frequency of our desire, cannot do so consistently. Because even the most enthralling person is never *merely* this echo—because every person exceeds the specifications of our desire in countless different ways—we can never find a person who will invariably satisfy us.

From this viewpoint, we make a mistake when we collapse the distinction between self and other and reduce the other to the coordinates of our desire. This is why it is essential to recognize that no matter how much pleasure others give us, they cannot deliver us from our existential malaise. They cannot heal our wounds, make us whole, conjure away our pain, or complete us in any definitive sense. They may offer us moments of self-actualization; but they cannot give us redemption.

5

This is not to deny that there are objects that approximate the Thing more loyally than others. Such objects enchant us more than those where the Thing's echo remains more subdued or diffuse; they transmit something about the Thing's original splendor, so that when we are in their presence, we feel more elevated, more self-realized, than when we are forced to function in a universe of less venerable substitutes. It is as if, to once again borrow from Lacan, they contained something "more than" themselves, so that when we interact with them, we interact with both the objects themselves and the trace of the Thing that these objects hold.⁷ This is why we value some objects over others, some people and aspirations over others. Our appreciation can in fact become nearly obsessive, so that we cannot bear the thought of losing those objects that most robustly communicate the Thing's majesty. Such objects wield an enormous amount of power over us, for they promise unadulterated fulfillment, with the consequence that we cannot even imagine giving them up. And when we lose such an object, our grief is greater than what we experience in the aftermath of more ordinary objects.

This clarifies a great deal about the specificity of human desire. On the one hand, it is true—as I have explained—that we are astonishingly versatile when it comes to finding ways to compensate for our lack. We can get our satisfaction from a variety of different sources so that some of us, for example, value relationships over all

other things, whereas others assess work or creative endeavors to be so rewarding that they consistently opt for them at the expense of relationships. And most of us operate within a complex field of investments so that one moment we devote our energies to our relationships, another to our careers, and yet another to a book, a hobby, a solitary walk, or a slice of blueberry pie. On the other hand, we tend to be quite discriminating about the investments we make. It is simply not the case that any slice of blueberry pie will do. There is a flexibility about the sources of our pleasure, but within each “category” of pleasure (relationships, careers, books, etc.), there is a hierarchy among the components so that one activity with our friends will fulfill us more than another, one career triumph will be sweeter than another, one book will engross us more than another, and so on. Moreover, even if two people like the same book, their appreciation is unlikely to manifest in the same way. Because the echo of the Thing reverberates differently for each of us, no two people’s desires are exactly the same.

This specificity of desire is one of the major causes of our suffering, for more often than not, we cannot quite get what we want. It can be tricky to find the right kinds of objects, so that we can, for instance, go for long periods without a romantic relationship because we do not come across anyone who matches the frequency of our desire. Even when we interact with countless people who in principle meet all the necessary specifications of desirability, we cannot force ourselves to want any of them if they fail to emit a strong enough echo of the Thing. The flipside of this is that when we do locate the right person, it can be very difficult for us to shift our desire to another even when the person in question is not available or rejects us. In addition—and this point bears repeating—when we lose such a person or his or her love, we are much more devastated than when we lose someone who has merely scratched the surface of our affections. Along closely related lines, when we (due to an accident, illness, or old age, for example) become incapable of pursuing an aspiration that has given us uncommon pleasure, we might find it harder to adjust to the loss than we would with some less meaningful activity.

Even though we possess innumerable options for coping with our inner void, finding just the right approach can be challenging. And one of the thorniest things about life are those moments when the object we have settled on does not alleviate our lack but instead adds sting to it by disillusioning us—as is the case, for instance, when someone we love humiliates us. When a fresh lack meets the original lack we are trying to redress, we can be mortified beyond expression. In such instances, there is too much of lack, as it were, so that we feel defeated by the sheer vastness of our deprivation. Our wound is so gaping that we cannot even begin to imagine how we might fill it. This is one way we arrive at depression. Alternatively, we may succumb to addictions, using work, sex, food, drugs, alcohol, or even self-inflicted pain as a coping mechanism. We operate under the erroneous impression that the more work, sex, food, or anything else we cram into the void within our being, the fuller we will feel. And our disappointment about the outcome only reinforces the cycle, so that the less satisfied we feel, the more relentlessly we seek satisfaction. This is one reason addictions are so difficult to break. The only way out of the rotation is to be willing to tolerate the pain that arises from lack, and many of us are not that strong. Or at least we are not *always* that strong.

The specificity of our desire can thus cause us a great deal of trouble. But this difficulty does not change the fact that our ability to find the echo of the Thing in ordinary objects—as Lacan puts it, to endow mundane things with “the dignity of the Thing”⁸—is our best line of defense against our encroaching sense of nothingness. Although there is no ultimate cure for this nothingness, many of us manage to lead relatively satisfied lives through the kinds of compensatory measures I have delineated. As long as we have access to objects and activities that engage our passion, we are to some extent inoculated against the anxiety caused by our lack. To be sure, this lack will always lurk in the shadows of our interiority, waiting for those moments when we, for one reason or another, fail to find a suitable object or activity. During such moments, our lack will slide into the forefront of our consciousness, rendering us acutely aware of our vulnerability. If we are lucky, such moments

will pass quickly so that we can, once again, focus on things that confer meaning to our lives. In this sense, our pursuit of personal meaning—of a life that feels worth living—is an attempt to send our lack back into its hiding place. And because this is never a permanent solution, because, as I have maintained, we can never pinpoint a meaning that will forever release us from our lack, we have no choice but to repeatedly renew our pursuit; we have no choice but to endlessly resuscitate our desire to make meaning out of the raw ingredients we have been given (or chance upon in the world).

6

I have shown that one of the many ruses of social power is to silence the specificity of our desire and to replace it with purely conventional yearnings. Against this backdrop, what is so miraculous about the Thing's echo is that it tends to trump such yearnings. Precisely because it expresses something about the utterly distinctive manner in which each of us experiences our existential deprivation, it cannot easily be reconditioned to follow cultural (general rather than specific) scripts. Consequently, whenever the Thing's echo resounds strongly enough in an object (person or aspiration) we have selected, it overpowers the social voices telling us that we have made a bad choice. For example, our cultural environment may try to convince us that we have fallen in love with a person of the "wrong" age, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, or educational level. Our family, relatives, friends, and former lovers may inform us that our partner is not suitable for us. Alternatively, those around us may attempt to talk us out of taking a specific job because (they think) it will make us miserable: it is too ambitious, too stressful, too demanding, too this or that. But once our desire has been fully engaged, such warnings have little power. Even when we rationally admit that the voices that surround us have a point, we cannot keep ourselves from seeing our lover or taking that job. This is because the echo of the Thing is more compelling than reason.

One might say that the Thing's echo introduces a code of ethics that is drastically different from the one that dictates the parameters of socially legitimate longings. Although there is no doubt that our desire can become so specific, so rigidly fixed, as to be pathological (more on this in the next chapter), there is also a certain integrity to its specificity—an integrity that makes us courageous enough to stand up for ourselves when our environment tells us that our desire is injudicious. In fact, inasmuch as this integrity makes it possible for us to perceive the preciousness of what we are socially encouraged to shun, ignore, or trivialize, it allows us to make room for values that are not culturally valued, ideals that are not culturally idealized, and meanings that are not culturally recognized as meaningful. It, potentially at least, empowers us to devise patterns of appreciation that deviate from the ones we have been conditioned to uphold, thereby translating desires that are normatively considered devoid of worth into something profoundly (and personally) worthwhile.⁹ This is why our ability to revere the Thing's echo is, for Lacan, not only what satisfies us on an individual level, but also a binding ethical imperative—why he famously posits that “ceding on” the truth of our desire is an ethical failure of tremendous proportions.¹⁰

Lacan implies that our loyalty to the Thing's echo protects us against the nihilistic tendency to think that no matter how much we strive to formulate new values, ideals, meanings, and patterns of appreciation, the social establishment will always defeat us. Because the Thing's distinctive code of ethics gives us pause whenever we are asked to betray the truth of our desire, it safeguards us against complete social capture. This is an ethics that is not dictated by the instrumentalist imperatives of utility but rather assesses the value of objects—as well as of the ethical actions related to these objects—on the basis of their proximity (or faithfulness) to the Thing. The object that comes the closest (or remains the most faithful) to the Thing is, ethically speaking, more important than one that is merely useful. As a result, if ethics in its usual sense deliberates on the prudence or imprudence (or, more nobly, on the rightness or wrongness) of this or that action, Lacanian ethics is a

matter of pursuing the echo of the Thing regardless of social cost; it is a matter of following our passion—the distinctive thread of our desire—even when doing so means going against the morality of the dominant cultural order. This is why Lacan boldly states that the “only thing of which one can be guilty of is having given ground relative to one’s desire.”¹¹

This is obviously a complicated ethical stance in that there may be situations where our desire is not particularly palatable or where it conflicts with the desires of others.¹² Yet Lacan’s vision is not meant as a call to selfishness, but rather as an urgent reminder that some paths of desire are more truthful—and more singularizing—than others. People who complain about a general sense of apathy often do so because they have lost touch with the Thing’s echo; they have lost their capacity to distinguish between objects that correspond to the inimitable intonation of their desire and others that merely grant the illusion of satisfaction. One reason for this is that the vast commercial machinery of our society is explicitly designed to drown out the Thing’s echo. This machinery makes so many sparkly decoys available to us that we can get sidetracked by the huge volume of our choices. Such decoys, which press on us from all sides, obscure the Thing’s aura for the simple reason that they are deliberately manufactured to shine extra brightly. They flood us with a homogenizing blare that can induce us to accumulate the piles of useless junk I referred to earlier. The materialism of the Western world has in fact reached embarrassing proportions, so that the number of alluring distractions vying for our attention in an average department store or suburban mall can be overwhelming, as can the variety of things that flash across our television screens on a nightly basis. And the fact that the West’s affluence has often been purchased at the expense of less privileged societies only adds exigency to the necessity of resuscitating the Thing’s ethical code—a code that makes us more selective (and thus less wasteful) in relation to the world’s offerings.

In our culture, it is easy to attribute the Thing’s aura to too many objects, so that we mistake the decoy for the genuine article. Fortunately, though, the opposite usually does not happen: we

rarely hesitate in the face of the genuine article. That is, we usually know when we have stumbled upon the “real” thing;¹³ we know immediately when we have come across an object that matches the stipulations of our desire. In this sense, recognizing the right object is not the hard part. What takes so much effort is learning to dodge the lures that misdirect our desire by offering a plausible masquerade of the Thing’s echo. Obviously, the more connected we remain to the specificity of our desire, the less likely it is that we will be seduced by the masquerade. Furthermore, to the degree that we consistently choose well, we build an ever-expanding repertoire of memories that contribute to the gradual elaboration of our character. The objects that compose this repertoire become consequential beyond their time-specific “use value.” We endow them with an enduring significance because they contain a sedimented record of our history. On this view, our faithfulness to the Thing is not merely a matter of discovering its echo in different objects over time, but also of sustaining our ability to discover it repeatedly in the same object; it is a matter of finding ever new ways of appreciating our most treasured objects.

7

In this context, it is useful to recognize that we have been granted one particularly effective tool for resurrecting the Thing’s echo: language. According to the account I have given, we revive the dignity of the Thing when we, for instance, fall in love or invest ourselves in an important personal aspiration. In comparison, the powers of language may seem feeble. Yet there is perhaps nothing in our lives that allows us to access the Thing’s echo as dependably as language. Though on the one hand language is a big part of the very socialization process that seems to deprive us of the Thing to begin with, on the other it offers us a dexterous means of dealing with our dispossession. Among other things, it is a versatile medium for introducing new values, ideals, meanings, and patterns of appreciation into the world. In addition, even creative

endeavors that do not rely on language, such as painting, sculpture, photography, and dance, can be enriched by an encounter with language. In other words, the reward we get from a painting (to take just one example) can be multiplied by our ability to attribute various meanings to it, so that as much pleasure has arisen from our efforts to decipher Mona Lisa's smile as from the smile itself.

Although there may be experiences, such as erotic or meditative states, that are diluted by the intrusion of language, most products of human activity profit from the layers of language that accumulate around them. An ancient play or poem (already a linguistic artifact) gathers weightiness from the interpretations that generations of readers have placed on it. This is why there is something uniquely delicious about reading a musty, fraying volume that countless other readers have handled and marked; the scribbles on the margins, along with the less tangible associations circulating in our culture, can be valuable additions to the original text rather than something that mars its purity. Similarly, what people have over the years made of certain politicocultural interventions is as much a part of our heritage as those interventions themselves. The reams of writing produced by something like the Declaration of Independence or Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, though perhaps not as important as the declaration or the speech itself, play a central part in our collective history.

What is more, although it is certainly possible to become addicted to words in the same way that we can become addicted to many other things, this is not usually a calamity. Verbosity can be annoying to others, and there may even be cases where the inability to stop speaking or writing exhausts us, but speaking or writing does not generally damage us (unless of course we choose to speak or write against social hegemonies that have the power to take revenge on us). That is, language is usually a fairly benign "solution" to the gnawing lack within our being, provided we do not let it degenerate into meaningless chatter. And, from a slightly different perspective, it can even help those who have in one way or another been traumatized. It is not a coincidence that trauma

survivors often feel an overwhelming need to tell their stories, for there can be something cathartic about capturing the painful event within a network of words. When trauma is translated into language, words become a barrier of sorts between the traumatic experience and the person who has undergone this experience; they function as a distancing mechanism that creates some space between the trials of the past and the present moment, thereby making it less likely that the survivor will relive the traumatizing experience indefinitely.

This is not to say that the narrativization of trauma is effortless. One of the most common responses to extreme suffering is silence. And for some individuals, silence may even be a way of working through their suffering. Yet for many others, the (repeated) telling of hurtful experiences is the first step toward being able to let go of some of their pain. This is the principle behind most Western therapeutic approaches. And it is also what underpins personal or collective efforts to convert pain into words. These efforts may consist of something as simple as a personal journal or they may produce something as sophisticated as an autobiographical novel. Alternatively, they may take the form of a poem, a song, or a magazine article. Other times, they may result in a political rally or a religious gathering. Such personal or collective attempts to communicate pain and to witness the pain of others return a modicum of agency to survivors. Even though they rarely produce a triumphant overcoming—even though trauma's impact tends to linger far beyond such interventions—they do often offer some relief. It is as if they provided a secure place to lean on so that it becomes possible for survivors to relinquish some of their self-protective (but exhausting) guardedness in relation to the world.

The foundational lack I have been discussing in this chapter is not the same thing as the pain of acute trauma. Like the existential vulnerability I spoke about in the previous chapter, the lack I have been analyzing here is more universal, more equally distributed, than trauma. But the insight about the power of language is equally applicable in the sense that language may well be our strongest shield against the demons of emptiness. In the context

of severe trauma, there may be other things that are more effective, such as justice or retribution; a sense of closure may in many instances do more than the ability to give an account of our experiences. But when it comes to our foundational lack, there is no possibility of justice or retribution; there is no closure, unless one considers death as one. Fortunately for us, language thrives on this open-endedness, so that there is in principle no limit to our ability to use constellations of language to throw a protective cloak over our lack. Such constellations can be poetic or metaphoric, as is usually the case with art, or they can be highly functional, as is the case with the language of science and everyday pragmatism. Either way, they place a veil of sorts between us and our lack so that we do not need to experience the immensity of our emptiness; they render our malaise less immediate, less insistent, so that it cannot consistently derail us. In this sense, although it may well be that without language—which is, among other things, an instrument of consciousness—we might not have an awareness of our inner lack in the first place, language is also one of our best antidotes to this lack.

Long after I stopped participating
Those images pursued me
I found myself turning from them
Even in the small light before dawn
To meet the face of my own body
Still taut and strong, almost too
Strong a house for so much shame
Not mine alone but also yours
And my brother's, lots of people's,
I know it was irrational, for whom I saw
Myself responsible and to whom
I wished to remain hospitable.
We had all been pursuing our own
Disintegration for so long by then
That by the time the other side
Began to raise a more coherent
Complaint against us we devolved
With such ease and swiftness it seemed
To alarm even our enemies. By then
Many of us had succumbed to quivering
Idiocy while others drew vitality from new
Careers as public scolds. Behind these
Middle-management professors were at pains
To display their faultless views lest they too
Find censure, infamy, unemployment and death
At the hands of an enraged public
Individuals in such pain and torment
And such confusion hardly anyone dared
Ask more of them than that they not shoot
And in fact many of us willed them to shoot
And some of us were the shooters
And shoot we did, and got us square
In the heart and in the face, which anyway
We had been preparing these long years
For bullets and explosions and whatever
Else. A vast unpaid army
Of self-destructors, false comrades, impotent
Brainiacs who wished to appear to be kind
Everything we did for our government
And the corporations that served it we did for free
In exchange for the privilege of watching one
Another break down. Sometimes we were the ones
Doing the breaking. We would comfort one another
Afterward, congratulating each other on the fortitude
It took to display such vulnerability. The demonstration
Of an infirmity followed by a self-justificatory recuperation
Of our own means and our own ends, in short, of ourselves
And our respect for ourselves—this amounted to the dominant

Rhetoric of the age, which some called sharing, which partook
Of modes of oratory and of polemic, of intimate
Journals and of statements from on high issued by public
Figures, whom at one time or another we all mistook ourselves for.
Anyway it wasn't working. None of it was working.
Not our ostentation and not the uses we put our suffering
To, the guilt- and schadenfreude-based attention
We extracted from our *friends* and *followers*, and even the passing
Sensation of true sincerity, of actual truth, quickly emulsified
Into the great and the terrible metastasizing whole.
To the point it began to seem wisest to publish only
Within the confines of our own flesh, but our interiors
Had their biometrics too, and were functions not only
Of stardust, *the universe* as we now were prone to addressing
The godhead, but also of every mean and median of the selfsame
Vicious culture that drove us to retreat into the jail of our own bones
And the cramped confines of our swollen veins and ducts in the first place
Our skin was the same wall they talked about on the news
And our hearts were the bombs whose threat never withdrew
Images could drop from above like the pendulum in "The Pit
And the Pendulum" or killer drones to shatter the face of our lover
Into contemporaneous pasts, futures, celebrities, and other
Lovers all of whom our attention paid equally in confusion
And longing, and a fleeting sense like passing ghosts
Of a barely-remarked-upon catastrophe that was over
Both before and after it was too late. We were ancient
Creatures, built for love and war. Everything said so
And we could not face how abstract it was all becoming
Because it was also all the opposite of abstract, it was
Our flesh, our mother's bloodied forehead
On the floor of Penn Station, and wherever we hid
Our face, *amid a crowd of stars* for example as Yeats
Once put it, and for stars insert celebrities
Or astrology here, your choice, and even when
We closed our eyes, all this was all we looked at
Every day all day. It was all we could see.
We were lost in a language of images.
It was growing difficult to speak. Yet talk
Was everywhere. Some of us still sought
To dominate one another intellectually
Others physically; still others psychically or some
Of all of the above, everything seeming to congeal
Into bad versions of sports by other means
And sports by that time was the only metaphor
Left that could acceptably be applied to anything.
The images gave us no rest yet failed over
And over despite the immensity
Of their realism to describe the world as we really
Knew it, and worse, as it knew us

The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action*

I HAVE COME to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That the speaking profits me, beyond any other effect. I am standing here as a Black lesbian poet, and the meaning of all that waits upon the fact that I am still alive, and might not have been. Less than two months ago I was told by two doctors, one female and one male, that I would have to have breast surgery, and that there was a 60 to 80 percent chance that the tumor was malignant. Between that telling and the actual surgery, there was a three-week period of the agony of an involuntary reorganization of my entire life. The surgery was completed, and the growth was benign.

But within those three weeks, I was forced to look upon myself and my living with a harsh and urgent clarity that has left me still shaken but much stronger. This is a situation faced by many women, by some of you here today. Some of what I experienced during that time has helped elucidate for me much of what I feel concerning the transformation of silence into language and action.

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In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what had I *ever* been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. And that might be coming quickly, now, without regard for whether I had ever spoken what needed to be said, or had only betrayed myself into small silences, while I planned someday to speak, or waited for someone else's words. And I began to recognize a source of power within myself that comes from the knowledge that while it is most desirable not to be afraid, learning to put fear into a perspective gave me great strength.

I was going to die, if not sooner then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you. But for every real word spoken, for every attempt I had ever made to speak those truths for which I am still seeking, I had made contact with other women while we examined the words to fit a world in which we all believed, bridging our differences. And it was the concern and caring of all those women which gave me strength and enabled me to scrutinize the essentials of my living.

The women who sustained me through that period were Black and white, old and young, lesbian, bisexual, and heterosexual, and we all shared a war against the tyrannies of silence. They all gave me a strength and concern without which I could not have survived intact. Within those weeks of acute fear came the knowledge – within the war we are all waging with the forces of death, subtle and otherwise, conscious or not – I am not only a casualty, I am also a warrior.

What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps for some of you here today, I am the face of one of your fears. Because I am woman, because I am Black, because I am lesbian, because I am myself – a Black woman

warrior poet doing my work – come to ask you, are you doing yours?

And of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, “Tell them about how you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.”

In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live. Within this country where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision, Black women have on one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism. Even within the women’s movement, we have had to fight, and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our Blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson – that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, Black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid.

In my house this year we are celebrating the feast of Kwanza, the African-american festival of harvest which begins the day after Christmas and lasts for seven days. There are seven principles of Kwanza, one for each day. The first principle is Umoja,

which means unity, the decision to strive for and maintain unity in self and community. The principle for yesterday, the second day, was Kujichagulia – self-determination – the decision to define ourselves, name ourselves, and speak for ourselves, instead of being defined and spoken for by others. Today is the third day of Kwanza, and the principle for today is Ujima – collective work and responsibility – the decision to build and maintain ourselves and our communities together and to recognize and solve our problems together.

Each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation.

For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth.

And it is never without fear – of visibility, of the harsh light of scrutiny and perhaps judgment, of pain, of death. But we have lived through all of those already, in silence, except death. And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered, and I would still die. It is very good for establishing perspective.

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own. For instance, "I can't possibly teach Black women's writing – their experience is so different from

mine." Yet how many years have you spent teaching Plato and Shakespeare and Proust? Or another, "She's a white woman and what could she possibly have to say to me?" Or, "She's a lesbian, what would my husband say, or my chairman?" Or again, "This woman writes of her sons and I have no children." And all the other endless ways in which we rob ourselves of ourselves and each other.

We can learn to work and speak when we are afraid in the same way we have learned to work and speak when we are tired. For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.

The fact that we are here and that I speak these words is an attempt to break that silence and bridge some of those differences between us, for it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

*Say Translation
Is Art*

Sawako Nakayasu

Say this.

Say not this.

Say it again.

Like this.

Say it again say whatever it takes, whatever it brings, say this.

Say translation as open art practice as open as matter and anti-matter.

Say anti-translation as refusing, or not, to translate altogether, say not this.

Say anti-translation as not refusing to translate, just refusing to translate. Refusing to translate, like this. Say it again.

Say I've never heard someone divulge so much of their personal intimate life only to claim that their politics are private, say coded language, say language is code.

Say translation of private space.

Say public translation.

Say I share this shape with you, say your shape is your shape, like this.

Say nonbinary stance toward texts and translations.

Say who, you.

Say who, I.

Say translating in the dark. Say smuggled translation, illegitimate translation, illegal translation, undefinable translation, unauthorized translation. Screw and unscrew the hegemony cap translation.

Say feral translation.

Say eros in translation, say I want to be translated by you, say but not you, say I want, I want, I want, I say.

Say translation oceanic as desire.

Say wild caged animal longing to be free translation.

Say I choose, say I choose this, translation a series of choices like any other moment of agency, say choose to luxuriate in the micro-erotics of choosing this word over that word, of choosing this word *and* that word, of breathing heavily into a space that may or may not have been there all along.

Say I tend, I incline, I lie down at your feet.

Say I bend, I love, I stretch, I break.

Say I bend language translation, I love language translation, I stretch language translation, I break language translation.

Say I am busy making.

Say I am busy loving translation.

Say I am busy code-switching translation, I am busy
cross-dressing translation, I wear it with pleasure.

Say pleasure.

Say what is the smallest unit of translation, say word, say syllable, say phoneme, say orthography, say handwriting, say breath, say the particle of thought preceding articulation.

Say what is the largest unit of translation, say poem, say book, say all the books, say everything they ever wrote, say everything they never wrote, have yet to write, say the transit between everything they ever wrote and everyone who ever reads anything they ever wrote, or say something larger more vast.

Say what does queer liberation look like if it chooses not gay marriage but alternative structures of human relationships, say instead of book into translated book, say book into alternative structures of literature via translation, alternative structures of literature via translation.

Say that other thing, say ineffable, say possum, say tiger, say intergalactic creatures all afloat in the pre-choate digitas, say this is how they translate, say I you you me, I risk you me, say this and translate me.

Say white feminism grows up and out of itself into the fecund intersection translation.

Say to translate the thick river is only one choice out of many.

Say translation in lively defiance of the social desire to translate like everyone else.

Say, when Harryette Mullen reads from *Muse & Drudge* the laughter dispersed to different moments in different parts of the audience, translation.

Say, when Sarah Ruhl's play *The Clean House* begins with a joke told in Spanish, the pleasure of laughing in a theater alongside others is limited to those who can get the joke in Spanish, translation.

Say, when Gabrielle Civil inserts her body into images of canonical performance art, *Swallow the Fish* and *Experiments in Joy* translation.

Say, when Layli Long Soldier translates the governmental apology to Native American tribes, *Whereas* translation.

Say, when M. NourbeSe Philip translates the legalities that translated African lives into insurance money, *Zong!* translation.

Say Pauline Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* translation.

Say James Turrell's light into physical material translation.

Say Butch Morris's structured improvisation translation.

Say Tehching Hsieh's durational performance translation.

Say Hito Steyerl's "In Defense of the Poor Image" translation.

Say Christine Sun Kim's "Degrees of Deaf Rage" translation.

Say Amber DiPietra and Denise Leto's *Waveform* translation.

Say José Muñoz's "Wildness of the Punk Rock Commons" translation.

Say Paul Preciado's dildotectonics translation.

Say Carolee Schneemann's meaty joyful vaginal translation.

Say Jack Halberstam's *Queer Art of Failure* translation.

Say Raúl Zurita's *Sky Below* translation.

Say Third Cinema translation.

Say "bad" translation.

Say "F" translation.

Say ephemeral translation.

Say misfit, unpopular, unloved translation.

Say *Sula* translation (TM).

Say assigning new values of beauty translation, glorious
bad beauty translation.

Say meritless, ugly, bush pig translation, say bad beauty
translation.

Say Gurlisque translation (LG, AG), say Necropastoral
translation (JM).

Say Outranspo, say Language Poetry translation.

Say no to SIDOLT translation, Standard Inferiorizing
Definition of Literary Translation translation (DR).

Say make it better in translation (KW).

Say *Mud* translation (MIF), say Fast-Speaking transla-
tion (AW), say Mushroom Velada translation (MS), say
Technicians of the Sacred ethno-translation (JR).

Say idiottranslator, idiot-translator, ignorant translator, ignorant schoolmaster translator, say emancipated translator (JR).

Say swerve, say post, say movement, say transit.

Say queer, say cruising, say punk, say jammed, say nonbinary say poly say trans+ or trans* translation.

Say inaccurate translation, unfaithful translation, say what good is the faithful if they are not much fun to be with translation.

Say conceptual translation, say open text translation, say avant-garde translation, say pomo translation, say poco translation.

Say translation as self-portrait, translation as repetitive self-portrait, translation as Frida Kahlo self-portraits, as Joe Brainard Nancy portraits, Cindy Sherman self-portrait translation.

Say self-translation as eliminating the myth of the original (RS), say translating into a language not your native language, say committing error in translation, say violating the integrity of that language, say opening up the fissures where other things can seep through translation (CS), say blessed are the cracked for they let in the light translation (GM). Say let in the light a different light translation. Say take space make space translation. Say translation as breathing room, say translation as breath, say translation as extension of life.

Say translation as process, say translation as pedagogy, translation as pastime, translation as navel gazing, translation as close reading, translation as language study, as therapy, as training, mouthing, wearing, playing, running, jumping, skipping, translation as amateur sport, translation as playing in a field, as dancing at a club (LNND), as not site but zone (EA), as porous, fluid syntax, translation verbs over all over the place nouns.

Say partial translation, half-assed translation, abandoned translation, mediocre translation, losers and suckers translation, nasty translation, bitchy translation.

Say unmarketable translation, say unremarkable translation, say unsellable translation, say unlikable translation.

Say rescue the translation from belligerent capitalism translation, from imperialist takeover translation, well-meaning neoliberal multicultural translation, from too much love is suspicious translation, from "Report to an

Academy" translation (FK), from "Eating the Other" translation (bh).

Say translation-speak of the subaltern (GCS).

Say translation as destruction and reconstruction, translation as rehearsal site for reimagining the conditions of literature (AB, EH), say translation as architecture, as site-specific architecture or post-architecture translation, architecture in the form of removal translation (GMC).

Say translation as conversation, as friendship, as intimacy (SC), as generous. Say counter-translation as correspondence. Say *Subsisters* translation (UW, SS). Say translation in e-mail, translation with parents, translation at the kitchen table (MK), translation in the process of finding queer love and learning the language of a country (Lesotho) within another country (South Africa) and mourning the loss of friendship and love (ZP).

Say chosen family translation counter to inherited wealth translation, inherited values translation.

Say remote translation, say close translation, say nomad translation (PJ), say constantly in flux translation, say real time translation, say incomplete translation, say translation in progress, say slow translation, say instant translation, say infinite duration translation, say mouth full of translation, body full of translation, translation in spite of and within the limitations of body, time, space.

Say their names, in and out of translation, the names of women killed in Mexico's drug cartel violence (MR, JH, RL).

Say their names, in and out of translation, victims of the massacre at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida (AC).

Say their names, in and out of translation, Black people killed by American police (CR).

Say vomit, say gagging, say choking translation, say I spent the entire summer of 2020 with low-grade fever and endless nausea, say this vomit-inducing country translation. Say my younger body drinking alcohol, body rejecting even a small amount by vomiting, they say women have trouble saying no, I envied my body's clarity in vomit translation.

Say race and racism, quiet translation of, say in Asia I learn to better understand it, to talk freely, say in 2017 I return to where I am from and learn anew how to speak, how not to say the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time, say translating myself into silence, into poetry. Say a book full of translated vomit, gagging, choking. Say in the before of translation is silence, say in the after of translation is silence.

Say *Fuck the Police* translation, say Public Enemy translation, say Tribe Called Quest translation, say Blackalicious translation. Say TLC's "No Scrubs" written on an old envelope in the car translation. Say Jok'Air, on va turn up toute la nuit translation.

Say Defund the Police translation, say divesting from racist brutality and investing in social services translation, say priorities preferences customs inclinations values of importance and investment can shift because they need not stay the same in translation.

Say just because it is common and normal to translate and prioritize the sense and meaning of a poem at the cost of its sound and music, or to translate this poem and that poem but not the book in its entirety, say priorities preferences customs inclinations values of importance and investment can shift because they need not stay the same in translation.

Say microtranslation, say for example translate only one component of a poem, translate only the syntax, translate the syntax in its entirety, say translate the entire sonic landscape of the poem, say translate the spirit, the kinetics, the ghost that haunts it, say leave behind, leave out, alter the sense, say no they would never do that, would I do that, say I would do that, say do that to me, do that to me.

Say the more time I spend writing and translating and making art, the more they all blend into each other. Say the more time I spend being human and knowing and caring about other humans, the more the conventional structures of human relationships blend and regroup and reinvent those structures. Say new structures of language articulated via the LGBTQIA+ community opening the door to new formulations for structures of literature.

Say translation is opportunity.

Say I'm sick of too many conversations about source and target, author and translator, foreignizing and domesticating (LV, FS).

Say nonbinary stances toward translation sitting with and alongside both extremes, say on one end the magic of translation allows me to read the work of Alejandra Pizarnik and Ursula Andkjær Olsen and Dorothy Tse, and then say on the other end the ambitious comparative literature student reading in two, three, four languages because if one is to read seriously one must read it in the original, say all of it together alongside.

Say two-legged human being, female, lesbian, musician, composer, among other things translation (PO).

Say what you can do to help, if you'd like to, is to call your families your bosses your landlords your friends, everyone you know, and come out of the closet as queer translation (CAC).

Say overcoming heteronormatively naturalized desires by learning to recognize all naturalized desires such as the desire for a certain kind of beauty in translation (PP).

Say desire wears the mask of naturalization, say translation is a process of denaturalization which is also a means of decolonizing desire.

Say suspicion in all that appears to be natural translation, all that appears to be compulsorily able-bodied translation (JM, JG), say I translate with my body, say my body is not the same as your body (KB), in fact, say my body produces bags of shit, one heat-seeking bag of shit and another heat-seeking bag of shit translation, translation into and out of continuous

translatable bags of shit, because we cannot scream we translate (DB).

Say translation as a means of denaturalizing desire in language as rehearsal for denaturalizing decolonizing and overall flat-out liberating desire in real, actual, lived life, hooray.

Say fluent easy legible clear lucid readable translation,
say yes and but.

Say translation at the edges of perception, say do you
really want to be defined by your limitations translation.

Say aesthetics over politics translation, say politics over
aesthetics translation.

Say nation state translation, say I'm over that nation
state translation.

Say back translation from the colonial language original
to the home language translation, writing in a colonial
language already a translation before having been writ-
ten at all (YS). Say treacherous translation, translation
both pointing out the gulf and trying to bridge the
distance (SBS). Say I refuse to translate (DMC).

Say I'm not here just to close the distance translation.

Say shift in parameters translation, say sense is not
everything translation, say translate just the sounds,
just the syntax, just the awkwardness, just the wildness,
translation no more impossible than art.

Say ambient translation.

Say magical neo-translation.

Say outsider translation.

Say diasporic translation as a means of widening conversation about race (JK).

Say distributed centrality translation that washes away the notion of the margin (LS).

Say Ultratranslation (JH, JP).

Say dialect translation, say spoken translation, say accent translation, say second language translation, stepmother tongue translation, Taylor Mac and Judy translations.

Say here not here, there not here translation.

Say how now corrupt loyalty fidelity to what translation.

Say vomit translation, say diarrhea translation, say logorrhea translation.

Say I translate because I vomit, I vomit because I translate, and yet and yet.

Say how infinitely complex any move for liberation must be translation (AL).

Say break and rebuild everything via translation.

Say free translation, I say it, I do translate like that and also like this but there is more to that story translation, more to that arc, art, ball in the air translation I pitch it to you still in the air translation.

October 18, 2020

In order of first appearance:

Toni Morrison, Lara Glenum, Arielle Greenberg, Keith Waldrop, Douglas Robinson, María Irene Fornés, Anne Waldman, María Sabina, Jerome Rothenberg, Jacques Rancière, Ryoko Sekiguchi, Cole Swensen, Groucho Marx, LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Emily Apter, Franz Kafka, bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Augusto Boal, Erica Hunt, Gordon Matta-Clark, Sophie Collins, Uljana Wolf, Sophie Seita, Madhu Kaza, Zahra Patterson, Pierre Joris, María Rivera, Jen Hofer, Román Luján, Anderson Cooper, Claudia Rankine, Lawrence Venuti, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Pauline Oliveros, CAConrad, Paul Preciado, Johannes Göransson, Joyelle McSweeney, Kate Briggs, Daniel Borzutzky, Yi Sang, Serk-Bae Suh, Don Mee Choi, John Keene, Lisa Samuels, JD Pluecker, Audre Lorde.

To the Fig Tree on 9th and Christian
Ross Gay

Tumbling through the
city in my
mind without once
looking up
the racket in
the lugwork probably
rehearsing some
stupid thing I
said or did
some crime or
other the city they
say is a lonely
place until yes
the sound of sweeping
and a woman
yes with a
broom beneath
which you are now
too the canopy
of a fig its
arms pulling the
September sun to it
and she
has a hose too
and so works hard
rinsing and scrubbing
the walk
lest some poor sod
slip on the
silk of a fig
and break his hip
and not probably
reach over to gobble up
the perpetrator
the light catches
the veins in her hands
when I ask about
the tree they
flutter in the air and
she says take
as much as
you can
help me
so I load my
pockets and mouth
and she points
to the step-ladder against
the wall to
mean more but
I was without a
sack so my meager
plunder would have to
suffice and an old woman
whom gravity
was pulling into
the earth loosed one
from a low slung
branch and its eye
wept like hers
which she dabbed
with a kerchief as she
cleaved the fig with
what remained of her
teeth and soon there were
eight or nine
people gathered beneath
the tree looking into
it like a
constellation pointing

do you see it
and I am tall and so
good for these things
and a bald man even
told me so
when I grabbed three
or four for
him reaching into the
giddy throngs of
yellow-jackets sugar
stoned which he only
pointed to smiling and
rubbing his stomach
I mean he was really rubbing his stomach
like there was a baby
in there
it was hot his
head shone while he
offered recipes to the
group using words which
I couldn't understand and besides
I was a little
tipsy on the dance
of the velvety heart rolling
in my mouth
pulling me down and
down into the
oldest countries of my
body where I ate my first fig
from the hand of a man who escaped his
country
by swimming through the night
and maybe
never said more than
five words to me
at once but gave me
figs and a man on his way
to work hops twice
to reach at last his
fig which he smiles at and calls
baby, c'mere baby,
he says and blows a kiss
to the tree which everyone knows
cannot grow this far north
being Mediterranean
and favoring the rocky, sun-baked soils
of Jordan and Sicily
but no one told the fig tree
or the immigrants
there is a way
the fig tree grows
in groves it wants,
it seems, to hold us,
yes I am anthropomorphizing
goddammit I have twice
in the last thirty seconds
rubbed my sweaty
forearm into someone else's
sweaty shoulder
gleeful eating out of each other's hands
on Christian St.
in Philadelphia a city like most
which has murdered its own
people
this is true
we are feeding each other
from a tree
at the corner of Christian and 9th
strangers maybe
never again.

The Last Resistance*

A Marrano is a Jew, forcibly converted to Catholicism in Spain or Portugal at the time of the Inquisition, who cultivates her or his Jewishness in secret. The Marranos cherish their identity as something to be hoarded that also sets them irrevocably adrift. Jacques Derrida liked to compare his Jewishness with theirs, because they do not belong, while still remaining Jewish, even if they reached the point where they ‘no longer knew in what their Jewishness consists’.¹ Today, according to an article in *Ha'aretz*, descendants of the Marranos in South America are returning to their Jewish faith. They do not want to convert – they do not wish to repeat their history in reverse. But they do want to belong to an ancestral community that many of them, deep in the interior of the continent, have been quietly performing for more than 500 years in the rituals of family and domestic life (today, their journey is from the mountains and out of the interior, to the cities from the plains). They want the status of people ‘returning to the religion of their forebears’.² An expert on the Inquisition at São Paulo University in Brazil describes one such descendant as carrying ‘history in his flesh and blood’.³ And yet there is also here a tragedy in the making. There is virtually no court to which they could declare their allegiance that is sure to be honoured by Israel should such a descendant decide to take what might seem to be the logical next step of their destiny and make the ancestral land of Palestine their home.

‘Flesh and blood’ suggests our most intimately held forms of allegiance. It brooks no argument one might say. And yet, as this story suggests, it can

be contested, subject to the injunctions and restrictions of competing national identities and state laws. There is an irony here since Israel claims its allegiance to the land of Palestine precisely on the grounds of blood-transmitted descent. 'It is impossible to say', Freud wrote to the German author Arnold Zweig when Zweig had just returned from a visit to Palestine in 1932, 'what heritage from this land we have taken into our blood and nerves.'⁴ Yet, if Israel founds its identity on the notion of return, it will not grant these Marranos citizenship, even while it converts Native Indian Peruvians and Catholic Croatians who claim no such historical affinity to Jewishness, in order to people the settlements.⁵

The term 'flesh and blood' is of course ambiguous. As well as the most intimate, visceral form of belonging, it also denotes flesh torn and blood spilt in times of war. If I start with the tale of the modern-day Marranos it is because it offers such an inflated, almost grotesque, version of the painful twists which flesh and blood are heir to. Derrida, I imagine, would have been truly horrified by this story. First as a type of betrayal – 'I feel myself the inheritor, the depository, of a very grave secret to which I myself do not have access', he stated in the same interview in which he mentions the Marranos a few months before he died in 2004.⁶ It seems unlikely therefore that he would have welcomed the attempt by these descendants to consolidate their identity and faith. But secondly, and no less, I think he would have been appalled to watch this yearning collide with the fierce and defensively drawn parameters of the modern nation state. Either way, our story suggests that flesh and blood, as intimate cherished belonging, cannot today escape – perhaps has never truly escaped – the fate of nations.

The Marranos stand for a form of identity that is at once precarious, creative and threatened. The question they pose – the question that frames this and many of the essays to follow – is: what does it mean to be 'one of a people' in the modern world? Throughout the 1930s, in his extraordinary correspondence with Arnold Zweig, Freud finds himself asking the same question. It carries with it, as we shall see, that of the future and destiny both of psychoanalysis and of the Jewish people.

In a letter to Zweig of August 1930, near the start of their correspondence, Freud expresses an uncharacteristic confidence in the future of psychoanalysis. 'I have never doubted', Freud writes, 'that long after my day analysis will finally win through.'⁷ Overjoyed, Zweig reminds Freud in

his reply of the ‘bitter words of deep disappointment’ Freud had uttered at their last meeting. ‘I am now happy to learn’, Zweig writes, that these words belonged ‘more to a passing gloom in your feelings than to a Freudian judgement’ – although no one is ‘more entitled to feel this gloom than you [...] we are delighted to see it dispersed.’⁸ But by the end of the same paragraph, as if forgetting his own euphoria, Zweig’s conviction has started to slip. ‘We are only sorry,’ he continues, that ‘you do not feel that so vital, dynamic and revolutionary a principle as yours, once launched upon the world, will continue to be effective, until it has finally overcome all the blunt resistance the world can offer.’⁹ For Zweig, in the 1930s, the world is the patient. Resistance is blindness. It is the strongest weapon or bluntest instrument the mind has at its disposal against the painful, hidden, knowledge of the unconscious. But in Zweig’s reading, resistance stretches its meaning into the farthest reaches of public, political life. Freud is a revolutionary and it is the world that is resisting, although psychoanalysis will be victorious in the end. Without so much as a blush of theoretical embarrassment, he fearlessly lays the terms of the private clinical psychoanalytic encounter across the world of nations. By 1934, in a subsequent letter, he is even more emboldened. ‘Freud and Tyranny (capital T) together – impossible’, he declares: ‘Either one follows your profound teachings and doctrines, controls one’s emotions, adapts them to serve as positive forces in the world, and then one must fight for the liberation of man and the dethronement of national states [...] or one must impose upon mankind as ideal for the future his gradual suppression in a fascist system.’¹⁰ The choice is clear – psychoanalysis, or fascism.

Freud and Zweig’s correspondence opens in 1927, when Zweig writes to Freud requesting permission to dedicate his book on anti-Semitism to him. His debt to Freud, he writes, is threefold – for reintroducing the ‘psyche into psychology’, for the ‘obeisance’ that anti-Semitism owes to Freud, for the ‘restoration’ of Zweig’s ‘whole personality’ (there is, and will be, no qualification – this is the utmost devotion).¹¹ But note how even here, in this first humble approach to a figure who unmistakably bears all the features of the master, Zweig can effortlessly fold his own personal debt to psychoanalysis into the world of politics. On the subject of anti-Semitism the world ‘owes obeisance to Freud’. Zweig’s acute personal debt is that of the world. By the time the correspondence ends, it is clear that the world’s

debt has not been, and will not be, paid, not in their lifetime at least. Zweig's last letter to Freud is dated 9 September 1939, the day of the outbreak of the Second World War.

Zweig's equivocations have the strongest resonance for today: which Freud should we believe, or with which of Freud's two moods, as laid out by Zweig in the 1930s, should we concur? Freud confident of the final victory of his science, or Freud watching darkness descend over Europe? Should we today read Freud's words of despair as 'passing gloom' or indeed as the profoundest and still relevant 'Freudian judgement'? After all the legacy of the 1930s is still with us – we are no closer, we might say, to Zweig's confidently proclaimed 'liberation of man and the dethronement of national states'. Anti-Semitism, which provides the opening occasion for their correspondence, still forms part of the fabric of Europe; except that today, as the story of the Marrano descendants suggests, it is linked, in complex and multidetermined ways, to the Jews' entry into the world of nations, one of the most immediate legacies of the crisis Freud and Zweig were witness to in their times. How those links should be thought about, whether there is any connection between a rise in European anti-Semitism and the actions of the state of Israel has become one of the most contested issues of our time. Few would dispute, however, that the 1948 creation of Israel was decisively affected, if not decided, by the Nazi genocide. In November 1938, shortly after fleeing Nazi Austria for London, Freud declines to contribute to a special issue of *Time and Tide* on anti-Semitism on the grounds that he has been too personally implicated, and that the task should fall to non-Jewish people. At the end of his letter to the editor, he asks somewhat disingenuously: 'Ought this present persecution not rather give rise to a wave of sympathy in this country?'¹²

Of all people Freud should know that hate most often does not give rise to love, but to more hatred. 'Our hate', writes Joan Rivière in 1937, 'is distributed more freely than our love.'¹³ Hatred propagates, feeds on itself. None of this has gone away. In *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing*, part two of psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas's extraordinary novella trilogy on the life and thoughts of an analyst, a group of characters sit in a café in Hampstead in London (unmistakably Giraffe on Rosslyn Hill) and muse about the world post the 'Catastrophe', as 9/11 is termed. They are discussing an essay by analyst Rosalind Ryce and musing on her thoughts: 'she would state that the unconscious reason why people go to war with one

another – like Superpower’s beating up of other countries, or Israel’s military domination of the Palestinians – is that hate is pleasure’.¹⁴ ‘The pleasure of hating others’, comments the analyst on whom the book turns, ‘exceeds the national interest in befriending the world.’¹⁵ Hatred is one of the psyche’s most satisfying emotions. In the face of such hatred, Zweig moves to Palestine in 1933, Freud finally and reluctantly as an exile to London at the very last moment in 1938. From Vienna to Haifa, they offer one version – from the heart of the battle as one might say – of what psychoanalysis can tell us about the fate of nations in the modern world.

Zweig’s confident assertion that psychoanalysis will finally overcome ‘all the blunt resistance that the world has to offer’ is worth pausing at. In the most common political vocabulary, resistance is tied to liberation, it represents the break in the system where injustice gives way to freedom. You resist tyranny, you resist oppression, you resist occupation. More important, perhaps, you resist ‘resistance’ being described as anything else (for example in post-war Iraq, you resist struggle against US occupation being described as nothing more than foreign-backed opposition to new democratic freedom). The conference at the London School of Economics which provided the original occasion for this essay was entitled: ‘Flesh and Blood: Psychoanalysis, Politics, Resistance’. ‘Resistance’ came at the end, after politics, one step away from psychoanalysis, declaring its progressive allegiance – as if to suggest that the link between psychoanalysis and resistance, if you are thinking politically that is, might be remote or precarious to say the least. What would it have looked like if ‘resistance’ had appeared midway or caught between the two? It is, I would suggest, the most troubled term in the triptych – hence the title of this essay and book. If in political vocabularies, resistance is the passage to freedom, for psychoanalysis, it is repetition, blockage, blind obeisance to crushing internal constraint. For Zweig, only the overcoming of resistance in this psychoanalytic sense will allow the world to be saved. The aim of psychoanalysis, he states firmly in another letter, is to release energy into the world ‘against the forces of reaction’. Instead of festering inside the mind, or being dissipated in writing – he is a writer so this is harsh self-condemnation – such forces ‘should express themselves in real life, there creating order, establishing connections, overcoming inhibitions, making decisions, surmounting resistances’.¹⁶ In this, the private and public aims concur. It is of his resistances that Zweig most urgently desires to be cured:

‘Things are going marvellously well’, he writes in a letter addressed to ‘Dear and revered Mr Freud’ in 1932, ‘as far as resistance and resolution are concerned.’¹⁷ (‘Warmest greetings and best wishes for the overcoming of your resistances’, Freud ends a letter of 1934.)¹⁸ In this vocabulary, then, resistance is not the action of the freedom fighter, the struggle against tyranny, the first stirring of the oppressed; it is the mind at war with itself, blocking the path to its own freedom and, with it, its ability to make the world a better, less tyrannical, place.

For these two Jewish writers, charting the inexorable rise of fascism in their time, tyranny (or un-freedom) and resistance therefore go hand-in-hand. They are brothers-in-arms. Fascism is a form of resistance, a carapace against what the mind should, ideally, be able to do with itself. Something shuts down, closes cruelly into its allotted and unmovable place. The ‘vicious mean world’, Zweig writes in 1934, is grown as ‘rigid as a machine’.¹⁹ ‘Is not the frightful struggle you have been waging for about forty years (or more?) against the fallacies, taboos, and repressions of our contemporaries’, he writes to Freud in 1932, ‘comparable with the one the prophets waged against the recalcitrant nation of their day?’²⁰ It is the task of the psychoanalytic prophet to rail against the nation.

In the letters that pass between Freud and Zweig, psychoanalysis therefore appears, perhaps more boldly and prophetically than anywhere else, as a critique of national self-enchantment. Nationalism is the supreme form of resistance to the pain of psychoanalytic insight, because it allows a people to believe absolutely in love of itself (national passion would then be one of the chief means of at once denying and performing the pleasures of hatred). Zweig writes as a German and a Jew. As a German, he cannot bear ‘to see this nation carrying around with it a false, trashy, vain image of its great and frightful achievements and suffering’; as a Jew, he defends himself against the offshoot of such vain, trashy self-love in anti-Semitism.²¹ Unlike Freud, Zweig will move to Palestine – indeed that move forms as much the backdrop or core of their correspondence as the rise of fascism. But although Zweig makes the move to Palestine, he cannot bear it. He cannot make the transition from the violent abuse and disabuse of national identity in Europe to renewed national passion which will be the story of so many Jews in Palestine. Zweig’s disillusionment with the ‘flight-flight’ into ‘Rousseauist’ or ‘Imperialist’ Zionism, as he terms it, is total: ‘I

have established quite calmly’, he writes to Freud in 1935, ‘that I do not belong here.’²² ‘All our reasons for coming here were mistaken.’²³ Against the whole drift of the Jewish people who migrate massively from Europe to Palestine immediately after the war, Zweig leaves Palestine for Germany at the invitation of the GDR government in 1948 on the eve of the establishment of the state of Israel. Already in 1934, Zweig had been doubly disaffected – caring no longer for Germany, ‘the land of my fathers’, unenthusiastic about living in Palestine with the Jews.²⁴ ‘Such a passion’, Freud writes in response, ‘is not for the likes of us.’²⁵ Freud welcomes the fact that Zweig is ‘cured’ of his ‘unhappy love’ for his ‘so-called Fatherland’.²⁶

If we return to Freud’s famous letter on Zweig’s return to Palestine, quoted above, we then find that it is heavily qualified: ‘our forebears lived there for perhaps half or perhaps a whole millennium’, he writes but then adds in parenthesis ‘(*but this too is just a perhaps*)’. He continues: ‘and it is impossible to say what heritage from this land we have taken over into our blood and nerves’, and then qualifies again in parenthesis: ‘(*as is mistakenly said*)’.²⁷ With these two rarely quoted asides, Freud dismantles the twin pillars of the Jewish claim to Palestine. Perhaps we lived there, perhaps not; it is a mistake to claim that the land flows in our blood. As far as nationhood is concerned, flesh and blood – or in Freud’s formula ‘blood and nerves’ – is a suspect form of belonging.

It is of course a strikingly modern critique. As Neal Ascherson pointed out in an article which appeared in the London *Observer* on the sixtieth anniversary of Hitler’s defeat in April 2005, it seemed perfectly acceptable to Churchill, for example, that millions of people should be shunted around the world—roughly ten to twelve million by the time the war was over – in the search for purity of the nations. Like so many of his contemporaries, ‘he believed that a nation state should be racially homogeneous to be secure and healthy’.²⁸

Freud is often branded a conservative politically for his suspicions about Communism, his views of women, and the often autocratic nature of his procedures (one might wonder what is left). It is nonetheless crucial that for nationalism in its most venerated form he had neither time nor space. It was Dostoyevsky’s great failure, he writes in his essay ‘Dostoyevsky and

Parricide’, that he landed ‘in the retrograde position of submission to both temporal and spiritual authority’, blindly in thrall to the Tsar, the God of the Christians, and to ‘a narrow Russian nationalism’, a position which, he comments dryly, ‘lesser minds have reached with smaller effort’²⁹. Dostoyevsky, he pronounces, with an uncharacteristic finality of judgement, ‘did not achieve freedom’, he became a ‘reactionary’.³⁰ None of this of course detracts from Dostoyevsky’s achievement as a writer, but it too implies, as Zweig suggests, that energy ‘dissipated’ into writing can leave the subject powerless as a political agent, vulnerable to the false promises of autocracy. In this analysis, nationalism is resistance at large. Like submission to the Tsar and to God, it requires a drastic narrowing of internal horizons.

Although, as we shall see, the formula is finally too blithe, Zweig is right to start at least from the premise that psychoanalysis pitches itself against tyranny inside and outside the mind. More than once, Freud himself runs a line straight from one to the other. It is because we are creatures of the unconscious that we try to exert false authority over ourselves. Autocracy is in itself a form of resistance, a way of staving off internal panic. The news that reaches our consciousness, he writes in ‘A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis’ of 1917, is deceptive and not to be relied upon, but we submit all the more willingly to its dictates. We do not want to hear the internally unsettling news that might come from anywhere else. We are never more ruthless than when we are trying to block out parts of our own mind. ‘You behave like an absolute ruler who is content with information supplied him by his highest officials’, Freud addresses a fictive audience, ‘and never goes among the people to hear their voice.’³¹ Like Tony Blair, for example, who regularly boasted of being the listening Prime Minister, notably in the 2004 election campaign, but who never allowed the people – a million on the streets against the Iraq war – to affect him. Blair, we could say, wanted the form, without the potentially self-decaying stress, of democracy. Beware of the political leader who will not listen – or who boasts of listening, or appears to be listening, but hears nothing. You can be sure that he is spending a huge amount of energy, energy that could fruitfully be used otherwise, in warding off unconscious, internally dissident, messages from himself.

To the question, Why did Blair so unequivocally offer his support to George Bush? David Clark, Labour government adviser before he became

one of Blair's strongest critics, has suggested that many of Blair's policies and most of his mistakes, notably on Iraq, could be explained by weakness of will, that he is 'mesmerised' by power. According to this argument it was not the boldness or courage of his convictions that led Blair to war, but the 'calculation that, whatever the risks, it would ultimately prove to be *the line of least resistance*'.³² Here resistance is associated with weakness, the easy option, choosing a path that may seem unlikely, difficult, or even self-defeating but which, in this case because of a counter-pull, the pull of power in Clark's analysis, is in fact the easiest, if not the only, path to take. Freud uses the same phrase when he is trying to explain the choice of hysterical symptom at the very beginning of his work, when he suggests that an unconscious thought, struggling to evade the censor and achieve expression, will follow the easiest path it can take, and attach itself to a pre-existing bodily complaint. Anna O suffered from tetanus in one arm. As she watched over her dying father, prey to contrary passions of grief and revolt, she tried to stretch it out to ward off a hallucinated snake, only to find that her arm had gone to sleep. From that point on, the tetanus pain would be provoked by the sight of any snake-like object. The arm was the part of the body most amenable to her inner distress. The discharge of affect, Freud writes, follows 'the path of least resistance'.³³ Something has been prepared in advance and the unconscious seizes on it to make its presence felt. In these early thoughts then, resistance drops its guard at the slightest provocation. Resistance, as in Clark's analysis of Blair, is weak and willing. Like Dostoyevsky, in thrall to God and Tsar, Blair submits to Superpower and goes where he is led.

But while this analysis may seem supremely tempting, it will not take us far enough. It makes life, just as it made the process of analysis, too easy. Freud does not stay here for long. Even while he is offering this view of resistance as gentle, yielding, temporary obduracy – something that silently makes way for the unconscious – his thoughts on the matter are starting to follow a very different drift. Resistance hardens. Slowly but surely, it takes up its full meaning as struggle against the unconscious, and from there, as canny, resourceful and above all stubborn refusal to cooperate. Freud has to abandon his early hypnotic procedure, because it conceals the resistance; it does not do away with it but merely evades it 'and therefore yields only incomplete information and transitory therapeutic success'.³⁴ By bringing the unconscious so effortlessly to the surface, hypnosis leaves the patient,

when they return to their normal state, more or less exactly as they were before. From this point on, as much as resistance of the conscious to the unconscious, resistance means resistance to the psychoanalytic treatment. ‘The task [of analysis]’, Freud writes in 1907, ‘consists of making the unconscious accessible to consciousness, which is done by overcoming the resistances.’³⁵ Without resistance, no analysis. There can be no access to the unconscious, hence no analytic treatment, without a fight.

Once Freud makes this move, once resistance becomes the core of psychoanalysis, everything gets far more difficult. So much so that the difficulty of resistance will in some sense dominate the rest of Freud’s work and life. And once this happens, then Zweig’s blithe conviction that psychoanalysis can defeat resistance, in the mind and in the world of nations, will become harder to sustain. In today’s political climate, with no sign of diminution in national passion and its dangers, I believe that we have to understand why. Zweig’s starting exhilaration – that the world’s resistance to unfreedom will be undone – has not been borne out by events (it was not borne out by the events that immediately followed). We need to follow the path leading Freud to redress his own optimism in the way that so dismayed Zweig in 1933. For Zweig, as we have seen, Freud was a prophet, and a prophet’s vision is rarely actualised in the real world. *Prophets Outcast* is the title of an anthology edited by Adam Shatz of *The Nation* that includes all the dissident Jewish voices, past and present, in Palestine.³⁶ Calling Freud a prophet, Zweig may have been closer to the truth than he would have liked, at least consciously, to think. But it is not only Freud’s writing that issues a caution to the belief that psychoanalysis will finally triumph, sway the world and dethrone the nations. Zweig’s own fiction offers no less a challenge, and nowhere more clearly than in the extraordinary, but little known, novel – the offspring in many ways of his correspondence with Freud – which he writes from the heart of Palestine.

When Zweig returns from his first visit to Palestine in 1932, he plunges into a depression. ‘I am deep in my work’, he writes, ‘and equally deep in depression.’³⁷ Physically exhausted by his journey, dispirited by the terrible political situation in Berlin, it is nonetheless to his work that Zweig ascribes the greater part of his despair. Zweig is writing a short novel about the Dutch-Jewish writer Jacob Israel de Haan, who was murdered in Jerusalem in 1924. ‘The figure of this Orthodox Jew who “reviled God in Jerusalem”

in clandestine poems and who had a clandestine love-affair with an Arab boy – this important and complex character’, he writes to Freud, ‘gripped my imagination while the blood was still not dry in the whole affair.’³⁸ The trip to Palestine brought the ‘old plan’ to life again and he sketched away at the novel while in the country itself, making a plan he describes as useful and ‘indeed fascinating’.³⁹

But the plan falls apart when Zweig discovers a ‘flaw at the most vital spot’: de Haan, it turns out, was not murdered by Arabs at all, as he had believed for seven years, but by a political opponent, a radical Zionist ‘known to many people and still living in the country today’.⁴⁰ De Haan had started out an active Zionist – indeed as a lawyer he had defended Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the subject of Chapter 4, who was the founder of Revisionist Zionism, when he was arrested by the British in 1920. But he slowly lost faith and turned against the Zionists in Palestine. A member of the Orthodox movement Agudath, he made himself hated when he headed a delegation to the press baron Lord Northcliffe to protest at the tyranny of official Zionism in 1922. Although Zweig does not name him, it is now believed that Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, a member of the highest council of the socialist Zionist Haganah who would become the second President of Israel, was involved in contracting the murder of de Haan. He was killed by a *chalutz*, a Jewish emigrant to Palestine who worked as a pioneer in the early settlements, ‘because his hatred of political Jewry had turned him into a traitor and informer’.⁴¹

At first Zweig receives this discovery as a ‘frightful blow’, but then he realises that this fact was ‘far better than the old’: ‘it compelled me to see many things accurately without pro-Jewish prejudice and to examine the political murder of one Jew by another exactly as though it were a political murder in Germany’.⁴² It compelled him, he continues, ‘to tread the path of political disillusionment yet further, as far as necessary, or possible – further than was good for me’.⁴³ What Zweig has discovered – and in this he is way ahead of his time – is that Jewish nationalism is not, cannot by very dint of being nationalism be, innocent. Because of the opposition from the indigenous peoples which it was bound to encounter (as Jabotinsky acknowledged), but also because it enlists and requires such passionate identification, Zionism cannot help, although it will go to great lengths to this day to repress this internal knowledge, but be a violent – that is,

internally, as well as externally, violent – affair. The discovery is a blow to Zweig, yet it is – he writes to Freud – precisely through the ‘collapse’ of his original plan that his novel, which ‘condemns nationalism and political murder even among Jews’, finds its ‘true dimension’.⁴⁴

Zweig could of course have dropped the novel when he realised his mistake. He could have chosen not to offend Jewish sensibilities by probing this case too deeply. Instead, rather like his hero whom he names de Vriendt – the novel is called *De Vriendt Goes Home* – he chooses to pursue his path to its painful, violent, end, and thereby to court the wrath of the Zionists among whom he is living in Palestine. Disillusioned with Jewish nationalism, announcing that disillusionment to the world by writing the novel, Zweig, we could say, boldly repeats de Haan’s original offence. For this he too, like de Haan although not so dramatically, will be ostracised: ‘I am a Jew – heavens, yes,’ he writes in 1936, ‘but am I really of the same nationality as these people who have ignored me ever since *De Vriendt* came out?’⁴⁵ (in his correspondence with Freud he admits to the profoundest, most troubling, identification with his character).

But it is not just in its critique of nationalism that Zweig’s novel offers a type of Freudian text for our times. It is as if the first shock to his system, the fatal flaw in his original plan, leaves Zweig free to demolish, not just one, but all false gods. There is no boundary – of religious, national, sexual identity – that de Vriendt does not cross. Zionism is, in his view, a mistake. The hubris of man usurps the role of God (this was the classic critique of Zionism by one section of Orthodox Jews). De Vriendt dreams of the ‘fall of Zionism’ and, in what is surely a deliberate parody of Theodor Herzl’s largely failed diplomatic initiatives, he has fantasies of a recruiting campaign across Eastern Europe ending with a congress in Vienna where ‘the claim of the Zionists to stand as representatives of the Jewish people would be explicitly denied’.⁴⁶ And although he is Orthodox, the fiercest critic of Zionist secularism, he pens blasphemous poems, discovered by his horrified religious supporters after his death, which have this to say about God:

Prophets and saviours – we await them still;
With earthquake, famine, strife, we fight in vain;
There is no work to make us men again;
Thou gav’st us but the arts to hate and kill.
[...]

Wool and wadding and wax have stoppered Thine ears,
Thy hands are too smooth to help, like the smooth skin of fish;
Thou art far above our labours and troubles and tears;
As a God for the white man Thou art all that the white man could wish⁴⁷

This God – blind, privileged, white – could have been lifted straight out of Freud’s onslaught against the delusions of religious faith, *The Future of an Illusion*, where he refers, not favourably, to ‘our present-day white Christian culture’ (and indeed probably was) (or perhaps Tariq Ali’s *Clash of Fundamentalisms*). Finally – adding insult to injury we might say – if homosexuality is de Vriendt’s guilty secret, the curse of a capricious God, it is also ecstatic release into freedom, the repository of his utopian dreams, the place he goes in pursuit of a better world. By roughly half a century Zweig anticipates the idea advanced by psychoanalytic critic Leo Bersani, that homosexual passion provides the only possibility of a narcissistically shattering but utopian liberation from the constraints of the ego, the over-controlling and proprietorial self: ‘It was a terrible and shattering experience [...] That is his deep impulse: to fling away the twisted self, to be rid of the false fortuitous embodiment, and set its atoms free for fresh embodiment under a more fortunate star, in a better hour.’⁴⁸

Pushing his novel much further than he needed to go (and too far, as he himself says, for his own good), Zweig has created a true Freudian anti-hero. As an anti-Zionist and friend to the Arabs, he betrays the Jews; as a homosexual, he betrays the Arabs (his lover’s brother also wants to kill him); he betrays the religion of his fathers as a reviler of the faith. Zweig, we could say, leaves no stone unturned. For this he suffers terribly, not just as one of the *Verlatene* or the forsaken, as de Haan became known, but in his own mind (it is, he writes to Freud, a ‘kind of self-analysis’).⁴⁹ Reading the correspondence it feels that he would not have been able to write this novel, which he eagerly and anxiously sends to Freud on the eve of publication, if the founding spirit of psychoanalysis had not presided over its conception, if he had not been able to guarantee its safe passage into Freud’s hands. ‘Now it really is out; you have it in your hands,’ Zweig writes to Freud after a halt in the publication due to misprints, ‘and you will feel how much it owes to you.’⁵⁰

One could read the message of this novel quite simply as the one Edward Said lifted out of Freud’s last work on Moses in his 2001 talk ‘Freud and the Non-European’: in order to save the new nation from too

rigid and self-regarding an identity, to modulate the certainties of Zionism and open it up both from without and within, in order to stop the tragedy that will unfold in Palestine, Zionism needs Freud.⁵¹ Or to put it in the rather different words of de Vriendt: to confuse ‘the Lord’s people of Israel with modern Nationalism [...] means paralysis and weakness at the heart’.⁵² The new nation will not be able to tolerate the vision of this sexually complex, sceptical, blaspheming Jew. Zweig kills off his own prophet. In this rendering, Jewish nationalism entails violence, not only against the Arabs, but also by Jew against Jew. This does not involve denying Arab violence against the Jews in Palestine (as the novel’s portrayal of the Arab riots of 1929 makes clear). But in the spirit of psychoanalysis, which sees moments of failing or slippage as the path to unconscious truth, it is the basic flaw, the collapse of the original plan, that gives to this novel its true dimension. Deftly Zweig shifts the dramatic centre from the curse of homosexuality to the curse of nationhood. Note that in this he also anticipates the development of psychoanalytic studies which has likewise shifted from the politics of sexuality to the politics of nation states over the past decade. Once Zweig makes his discovery that de Haan was murdered by Zionists, then he can write the story of his disillusionment with nationalism into the body – across the flesh and blood – of the nation-in-waiting. Near the end of the novel, an old Jew lies dying in a remote village where de Vriendt’s assassin finds himself as he flees the arm of the law. To save the old man’s life, he offers his blood, but the dying man will not take it. There will be no redemption for this crime.

Although Zweig – and indeed Freud in his essay on Dostoyevsky – suggests that writing can dissipate the energies needed to transform the world, and, in the latter case, make the writer prey to autocracy, love of God and Tsar, in this novel Zweig has suggested a rather different role and destiny for fiction. And that is, that literature can give a public shape and audience to realities which the dominant view of the world – what de Vriendt terms despairingly ‘the spirit of the time’ – needs terribly to include in its vision, but which it cannot tolerate or bear to see.⁵³ For this relationship between fiction and the unconscious, Zweig offers one of the most graphic metaphors, seized from his own flesh and blood. He suffers from a visual complaint that will eventually blind him. ‘Through the gap in the retina’, he writes to Freud of hallucinations provoked by his disorder, ‘one could see

deep into the unconscious.⁵⁴ ‘My right eye’, he continues, ‘is playing a trick on me [...] in the act of seeing a small bubble is produced in the retina, as a camera, so that in the centre of my field of vision I see a dim round gluten, which is more or less opaque, surrounded by a dark ring.’⁵⁵ Within this frame, grimacing faces have started to appear, day and night ‘literally at every moment, both when my eyes are closed and when they are open’.⁵⁶ Changing more or less with the rhythm of his pulse beats, these faces are first unmistakably Jewish, then recumbent men, dying and decomposing, until they mutate into death’s heads and often too ‘something like the portraits of intellectuals wearing the clothes of remote centuries, complete with skull-cap and pointed beard’ (on one solitary occasion he sees a decomposing female face).⁵⁷ Offering these images to Freud – a trick ‘I cannot conceal from you as a psychologist’ – Zweig shows the darkness of his mind peopled by Jewish faces in decay (the faces he had lovingly charted in his 1920 *The Face of Eastern European Jewry*).⁵⁸ Was he anticipating horror, reaching back to his forefathers, or simply registering in the depths of his unconscious a vision of mortality as the ever-present underside (or pulse beat) of nations?

By the time Zweig writes this in 1930, Freud knows that access to the unconscious is far harder than he had originally envisaged. The unconscious does not take the path of least resistance, to use that early phrase; it chooses the path where resistance most strenuously does its work. By the end of his life Freud will talk, not of resistance *to* the unconscious, but resistance *of* the unconscious, as if the unconscious had become active in refusing knowledge of itself.⁵⁹ The mind, like the world of the 1930s and I would say today, is a frightening and fortified place. Zweig’s final disillusion with Zionism comes when he joins a demonstration with left-wing workers only to have them ‘keep up the nationalistic fiction that they did not understand me when I spoke German’.⁶⁰ They had his speech translated into Hebrew ‘as though’, he continues wryly, ‘all 2500 of them did not speak Yiddish at home’.⁶¹ ‘And’, he continues, ‘all this took place with the left-wing Paole Zion [the Zionist Socialists], who are attacked by the other “righter” Social Democrats as being international.’ It is the last nail in the coffin, the moment that precipitates his decision to leave: ‘So we are slowly thinking of leaving but it will take some time.’⁶² Zionism in 1935 shuts out the

clamour of the world, represses its own international dimension, silences the voices or languages it does not want to hear.

As Edward Said pointed out in his talk on Freud's *Moses*, the international does not just include Europe, but needs to expand still further to include the Egyptian component of Israel's own past. 'The misunderstanding of Egyptian pre-history in Israel's religious development', Freud writes to Zweig in 1935, 'is just as great in Auerbach as in the Biblical tradition. Even their famous historical and literary sense can only be an Egyptian legacy'⁶³ (a quote which confirms Said's reading). 'Europe', as Zweig writes to Freud in 1938, 'is now such a small place.'⁶⁴

At the beginning of this essay, we saw Zweig battling to retain his faith in the future of psychoanalysis in the face of Freud's despair. It would seem, then, that this was no 'passing gloom' on Freud's part, but the profoundest confrontation of psychoanalysis with the outside world, a world it is so often – and so wrongly – seen to ignore. Nor does it seem to be a coincidence that Freud's and Zweig's dismay about the world of nations, together with Freud's despondency about the future of his science, intensify when Freud realises the increasing difficulty of psychoanalysis in the consulting room. As soon as Freud defines the task of psychoanalysis as the struggle against resistance, he recognises the new challenge that faces him. We aim, he writes in 1907, to arrive 'at the distorted material from the distortions'.⁶⁵ But inevitably, he acknowledges, with reference to his magisterial failure in the case of Dora, 'a portion of the factors that are encountered under the form of resistance remains unknown'.⁶⁶ As with mourning, as with femininity, both of which he famously describes as a great 'riddle', as indeed with the unconscious itself, Freud has to allow that there are limits to psychoanalytic knowing, places where it cannot, finally, go. 'It is not so easy', he writes in the same year, 'to play upon the instrument of the mind.'⁶⁷ Shakespeare gives him his cue. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are set upon by Hamlet to solve the riddle of his despair, but when Hamlet invites them to play the fiddle, they refuse even when he begs them and tells them it is as easy as lying. Hamlet's response, which Freud quotes, is scathing: 'You would pluck out the heart of my mystery [...]' *Sblood, do you think I am easier to be played upon than a pipe?*⁶⁸ Although Freud is mocking those who claim they can cure neurosis without

submitting to the rules of his craft, the one to whom he is issuing the caution is, surely, himself.

So what is the last resistance? Appropriately perhaps, we reach it, as Freud did, only at last. In 1926, in an addendum to *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety*, Freud lists no fewer than five types of resistance (resistance has multiplied). Three stem from the ego: repression, transference and the gain from illness. The fourth is the resistance of the unconscious itself. But the fifth arises from the superego – ‘the last to be discovered’, (hence my title), ‘also the most obscure though not always the least powerful one’.⁶⁹ Last but not least, as one might say (Derrida referred to himself as ‘le dernier des juifs’ which can translate as ‘the last of the Jews’ but also as ‘last but not least’ or ‘last and least’, depending on your ideological inflection). Crucially, this is not the force that Freud describes as resisting recovery because it clings to the advantages of being ill – like the neglected, exploited and subjugated wife whose illness subordinates her inconsiderate husband to her power.⁷⁰ Sadly, this is not a force that calculates so wisely, so cleverly, so well. The force of this fifth and last resistance is far more deadly, because it arises out of the pleasure the mind takes in thwarting itself. ‘It seems to originate’, Freud explains, ‘from the sense of guilt or the need for punishment and it opposes every move towards success, including, therefore, the patient’s own recovery through analysis.’⁷¹ There is almost a tautology here. Resistance arises from resistance. There is, Freud writes, ‘a resistance to the uncovering of resistances’.⁷² By the time he gets to his famous late essay of 1937, ‘Analysis Terminable and Interminable’, this force appears as more or less insurmountable: ‘No stronger impression arises from the resistances during the work of analysis than of there being a force which is defending itself by every possible means against recovery and which is absolutely resolved to hold on to illness and suffering.’⁷³ We are dealing, he writes, with ‘ultimate things’.⁷⁴ ‘We must bow to the superiority of the forces against which we see our efforts come to nothing.’⁷⁵

Freud is talking about the superego – the exacting, ruthless and punishing instance of the mind through which the law exerts its pressure on the psyche. In the correspondence with Zweig, it is also shadowed, as for example in this quote, cited earlier, when Zweig was in euphoric mood: ‘Either one follows your profound teachings and doctrines, controls one’s

emotions, adapts them to serve as positive forces in the world, and then one must fight for the liberation of man and the dethronement of national states, or one must impose upon mankind ... his gradual suppression in a fascist system.' In fact the full quote reads: 'one must fight for the liberation of man and the dethronement of national states which are only substitutes for the Father-Moloch. Or one must *perpetuate this Father-Moloch* and impose upon mankind as ideal for the future his gradual suppression in a fascist system.'⁷⁶ Zweig's optimism, his yearning and willed conviction that psychoanalysis will triumph and dethrone the nations depends therefore on toppling the instance of the law inside the mind. There will be no more burnt offerings, no false idols. Children will no longer be sacrificed to assuage the wrath of the gods.

Despite the passion between Freud and Zweig, or perhaps as intrinsic to that passion, this forms the basis of the most profound difference between them, which is finally far more than a difference of mood. In Zweig's vocabulary, you adapt, you control. By a flick of the analytic switch, as it were, you turn emotions into a positive force in the world. By 1937, Freud is somewhere quite else. If the superego is the seat of the last resistance, it is because it is the place of tyranny inside the mind. Perversely it draws its power from the unconscious energies it is trying to tame (hence for Slavoj Žižek, after Lacan, the irreducible obscenity of the law). It is overwhelmingly powerful. 'There is often no counteracting force of a similar order of strength,' Freud had already written in 1923 in *The Ego and the Id*, 'which the treatment can oppose to it' (unless the analyst plays the part of 'prophet, saviour, redeemer' to which all the rules of analysis are opposed).⁷⁷ It is also, for Freud, tied irrevocably to the death drive, the instance of violence inside the psyche which, in the second half of his life – the half dominated by war – led him to revise his theory of mental life. We are not, as he puts it in his 1937 essay, 'exclusively governed by the desire for pleasure'.⁷⁸ There is a pleasure in subjugation; there is a pleasure – hence the last resistance – in pain. Idealisation of self and nation is a way of submitting to a voice that will never be satisfied. You may be able to soften the commands of the superego; indeed this will come to be defined as one of the most crucial aims of analysis. But you cannot overthrow it. Zweig's language of control – 'either one controls one's emotions' – repeats the edicts of the voice it is trying most earnestly to assuage. You are never more vulnerable to autocracy than when you think you have dispensed with the

law. Faced with this resistance, Freud's language darkens, takes on the colours of the crisis that has by now almost reached his door: 'we are reminded that analysis can only draw upon definite and limited amounts of energy which have to be measured against the hostile forces. And it seems as if victory is in fact as a rule on the side of the big battalions.'⁷⁹ (This is the year before the *Anschluss* when the Nazis will invade Austria and Freud leaves for England.)

'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' is famous, or rather notorious, for Freud's conclusion that the bedrock of the psyche is the man's fear of passivity, the woman's wish for a penis. Rereading it for today, this does not seem to be the most crucial, or 'ultimate' thing (times, or perhaps I, have changed). Or rather, although it is indeed where Freud ends, this is an instance where, as in most nineteenth-century novels, the so-called final moment or ending feels a bit like an attempt to tidy up, bring things to a finale that is trumped, or at least seriously confused, or challenged, by what has come before. What stands out in this essay is the force of resistance as a general principle, resistance as the canny, ever resourceful activity of the human mind. In the face of this resistance, Freud becomes not just speculative, as Derrida so convincingly showed him to be on the concept of the death drive, not quite or only defeated, but something more like cautious, humble almost (not his dominant characteristic). The whole field of enquiry, he writes, 'is still bewilderingly strange and insufficiently explored'.⁸⁰ A year later he will describe his own Moses project as built on feet of clay. But here he goes further, as his endeavour seems to be coming apart, almost literally, in his hands. Resistance is everywhere, spreading into places he can no longer specify. Either, he writes, the libido is too adhesive, in which case the analyst feels like a sculptor working in hard stone as opposed to soft clay; or it is too mobile, dissolving, washing away the imprint of analysis as if it had never been: 'we have an impression, not of having worked in clay, but of having written on water'.⁸¹ In his famous essay on 'The Mystic Writing Pad', Freud had used as his analogy of the mind the child's game, where first you write, then you erase what you have written by lifting the top sheet leaving a clean page with the trace, or memory of what you have written underneath (he was trying to explain how the mind is fresh to receive impressions from the outside world while retaining the traces of the unconscious).⁸² Now, however, Freud is writing

on water. There is no more precarious inscription than this. Psychoanalysis will continue to do its work but without illusions. It would be the direst form of pretension to claim, in 1937, but not only in 1937, that psychoanalysis could permanently dispose of the perils of the world or of the mind.

In fact Zweig, in other moments (other moods), is only too aware of the limits of analysis. He knows only too well that the mind only wants to pursue its own path. Writing *De Vriendt* is a terrible experience for him that brings his own repressed homosexuality to light: 'I was both, the Arab (semitic) boy and the impious-Orthodox lover and writer.'⁸³ But the knowledge, as he puts it, is 'to no avail'. It simply plunges him into depression. Controlling one's emotions is no solace: 'The liberated instinct wants to live its life right through emotionally, in phantasy, in the flesh and blood of the mind.'⁸⁴ 'Flesh and blood' points to the wily, recalcitrant force of the unconscious, as much as it does to the compelling, reluctant, intimacies of kinship and of war. The last resistance is in the flesh and blood of the mind.

For all that, Zweig's political analysis of his and Freud's moment was astute, and still relevant for our times. This passage could be read as a diagnosis of Zionism today:

Fear of death and of spirits have made religions what they are, the 'salvation of the soul' has swallowed up the salvation of the living human being and has handed over the state to the armed forces, so that the custodians of the states and their inhabitants are today, as in the time of Saul, on the one hand priests and on the other soldiers, and our age which is so technically terrifyingly armed compels our thoroughly uncivilised fellow men to dwell in greater fear than our forebears did, but with the same basic emotions.⁸⁵

To evoke once more the Marrano descendants, carrying history in their 'flesh and blood', who are trying to return to the Jewish religion of their forebears: they want to claim an allegiance unbound to orthodoxy, not as conversion, but one that can still perhaps bear the traces of their peculiar story – an affinity, not an identity in the custodianship of armed forces and of priests.

Nothing in this essay finally detracts from the necessity or indeed possibility of resistance in its more familiar political guise. Since the time of Freud's and Zweig's correspondence, resistance has mutated, shifted its location and shape, alighting in places and forms that neither of them could

have anticipated. ‘After about 10pm’, writes Rachel Corrie in *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, staged at the Royal Court in 2005, ‘it is very difficult to move because the Israeli army treats anyone in the streets as resistance and shoots at them. So clearly we are too few.’ (The play was cancelled on the eve of its performance on 22 March at the Theatre Workshop in New York and then staged at the Minetta Lane Theatre in November 2006.)⁸⁶ Indeed, Palestinian resistance to Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, one of the longest-running occupations of our time, could fairly claim the title ‘the last resistance’ for itself. We would then be talking of resistance not as obduracy, but as challenge, like psychoanalysis one might say, to the powers that be, even while it has been the immense difficulty of such a challenge that has been the subject here. It is also a premise of psychoanalysis that the symptom is economically inefficient, too demanding; the carapace – the wall – will break. In his book *On the Border*, which describes a life of dissident activism in Israel, Michael Warschawski defines as his overriding aim: ‘To resist by all means any attempts to close up the cracks in the wall.’ But he too does not underestimate the difficulty: ‘we are talking about fighting for a redefinition of who we are’.⁸⁷

Or to return to the heart of the history taking shape here: Resistance in one of its most famous incarnations – the very emblem of the word for many – as Resistance to Nazism itself (which Freud did not live to see, but which will be central to the life and work of Marcel Liebman, the subject of Chapter 12 in this book). ‘This word’, Derrida writes in his meditation on resistance to, and within, psychoanalysis, ‘which first resonated in my desire and imagination as the most beautiful word in the politics and history of this country [...] charged with all the pathos of my nostalgia, as if what I would have wanted not to miss at any cost would have been to blow up trains, tanks and headquarters between 1940 and 1945.’⁸⁸ ‘Why’, he asks ‘has this word come to draw to itself, like a lover, so many other significations, virtues, semantic and disseminal opportunities?’⁸⁹

The point of this first essay has been to issue a caution. Psychoanalysis remains for me the most powerful reading of the role of human subjects in the formation of states and nations, subjects as driven by their unconscious, subjects in thrall to identities that will not save them and that will readily destroy the world. I also believe that it offers a counter-vision of identity as precarious, troubled, uneasy, which needs to be invoked time and time

again against the false certainties of our times. But it is precisely *analysis*, and we should not ask too much of it. If we do, we risk, like Zweig does at moments, asking it to play the part of redeemer, prophet, saviour, which is, as Freud pointed out, to go against the spirit not to say the therapeutic rules of psychoanalysis itself. If psychoanalysis is persuasive, it is because – as Freud came more and more to acknowledge – far from diminishing, it has the profoundest respect for the forces it is up against.

Near the end of his life, when he is suffering from the throat cancer that will finally kill him, Freud offers to read his last great work, *Moses the Man*⁹⁰ to Zweig who, although not yet blind, already then in 1935 can barely read: ‘I picture myself reading it aloud to you when you come to Vienna,’ Freud writes, ‘despite my defective speech.’⁹¹ ‘When can I read it to you?’ he writes again the following month (it is his hardest work, written across the passage into exile, and will take another two years for Freud to complete).⁹² ‘I am writing by lamplight,’ Zweig writes to Freud in 1937, ‘when I should not really do this.’⁹³ It is one of the most moving moments or strains of their correspondence: the two men reaching out to each other through their physical failing. Perhaps this tentative encounter can serve as a graphic image for what might be involved – as the world darkened around them – in trying to make the unconscious speak. The point of this first essay has been simply to suggest that we should not underestimate the difficulty in the times ahead.

STILL LIFE WITH WINDOW AND FISH

Down here this morning in my white kitchen
along the slim body
of the light,
the narrow body that would otherwise
say forever
the same thing,
the beautiful interruptions, the things of this world, twigs
and powerlines, eaves and ranking
branches burn
all over my walls.
Even the windowpanes are rich.
The whole world outside
wants to come into here,
to angle into
the simpler shapes of rooms, to be broken and rebroken
against the sure co-ordinates
of walls.
The whole world outside. . . .
I know it's better, whole, outside, the world---whole
trees, whole groves---but I
love it in here where it blurs, and nothing starts or
ends, but all is
waving, and colorless,
and voiceless. . . .
Here is a fish-spine on the sea of my bone china
plate. Here is a fish-spine on the sea of my hand,
flickering, all its freight
fallen away,
here is the reason for motion washed
in kitchenlight, fanning, gliding
upstream in the smoke of twigs, the rake
against the shed outside, the swaying birdcage
and its missing
tenant. If I should die
before you do, you can find me anywhere
in this floral, featureless,
indelible
surf. We are too restless
to inherit
this earth.

(Jorie Graham)

Etel Adnan

To Write in a Foreign Language

Languages start at home; so I will start with the history of my involvement with many languages and with the way the use of languages which were not the ones I should have normally spoken or used in writing poetry and prose, affected me. I will start with some information about my own family's background, and its own struggles on the same theme.

My mother was a Greek from Smyrna, when Smyrna, before World War I, was a predominantly Greek city, a Greek speaking community within the Ottoman Empire. My father was an Arab. He was born in Damascus, Syria. At the age of twelve he joined the Military Academy in Istanbul, called the War College. That was close to the end of the nineteenth century. Damascus was a part of the Ottoman Empire, and my father was an Ottoman officer. Turkey being then an ally of the Kaiser's Germany, my father got training in Turkish, German, and French, besides his earlier studies in Arabic. French was taught in the Ottoman Empire for general education, for the same reasons that it was also taught in Russia.

My father, who was a Moslem, married my mother who, much younger than him, also represented a different culture. This was at the beginning of World War I, somewhere around 1916. So I was told. They spoke Turkish together; the Greeks, living in Turkey, all knew some Turkish and spoke Greek only at home and in their schools. Their lives were very close to their church, and culture and religion were intertwined. There were extremely few marriages outside one's culture-group.

The Ottoman Empire was an "empire," which meant it was not a state with a unified group of people. It was an empire in which Turkish was not even the most spoken language. Turkish itself was a language full of Arabic words and expression, because the Turks, being Moslems, learned the Koran in Arabic. There were also Armenians, in the Empire who spoke Armenian, as well as Turkish. So almost everybody knew at least a bit of another language besides their own; but everyone was rooted in their community language and life.

So, as I said, my parents had Turkish as a common language. My mother had gone to a convent school until she was twelve; the French had convents in all the major cities, and the "educated" people learned French. Some French, at least. So my parents understood French, knew how to read and write it. My mother spoke, but did not study, Turkish. So when my father was on the Dardanelles front, close to Istanbul, for quite a while and through a major battle, he wrote letters to her in French. His language was romantic, in the tone of the German, Austrian, or Russian novels of the time. Many years later, because these letters were carefully kept and

were my mother's pride and joy, I read them. They could have been written within a work like Tolstoi's "War and Peace": they spoke of love, of war, of life and of death. They were written under the sound of the cannons, in black ink and a handwriting that drew the letters of the alphabet very clearly. They are lost today, because of the too many moves I made in my life, and the carelessness of my younger days.

I was born in Beirut, Lebanon, because at the end of World War I my parents left Turkey and came to settle in Beirut. Beirut was close to Damascus, my father's home. Many years later, I was born in a world totally different from the one my parents knew. The Allies had occupied the Arab East and had divided it; the French kept for themselves a region they sub-divided into Syria and Lebanon. They immediately started in Lebanon, a network of French schools run by French priests, brothers, and nuns.

Thus, I went to a French convent school and was educated in French. The children of my generation saw a country ruled by French people who enjoyed for themselves, and their language and customs, the prestige always attributed to Power. We were taught the same books as the French kids in Europe, the capital of the world seemed to be Paris, and we learned the names of all kinds of things we never heard or saw: French rivers, French mountains, the history of blue-eyed people who had built an empire. The French nuns whose families had just suffered an invasion from the Kaiser's armies hated the Germans and passed on to us the hatred of German...and so on. Somehow we breathed an air where it seemed that being French was superior to anyone, and as we were obviously not French, the best thing was at least to speak French. Little by little, a whole generation of educated boys and girls felt superior to the poorer kids who did not go to school and spoke only Arabic. Arabic was equated with backwardness and shame. Years later I learned that the same thing was happening all over the French empire, in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Black Africa and Indochina.

The method used to teach French to the children was in itself a kind of a psychological conditioning against which nobody objected, the people thinking that whatever nuns do is always good and for the best: so there was a system in all the French-run schools which charged a few selected students to "spy" on the others: anybody heard in class or in recreation speaking Arabic was punished and a little stone was immediately put into the pocket of that child; speaking Arabic was equated with the notion of sin. Most of the students spoke Arabic at home, but when they themselves became parents they started talking in either French or Arabic to their own children, or a mixture of the two languages.

Going back to my own childhood: as early as I can remember I spoke Greek and Turkish until I was about five years old, the time I went to school. The fact that at school I spoke French, and that there were French residents in the city — some of them neighbors with whom my mother used the French she herself had learned in Smyrna in her childhood — made us as a family use French at home more and more: my mother happily, my father reluctantly. And there were reasons for that: my father was an Arab in an Arab country and spoke Arabic in his dealings in town or with his friends. My mother, not knowing Arabic, identified somewhat with the French people, although she never thought that being a Greek made her similar to them. No, she only knew their language, imperfectly, and used it, and started to use it also with me, the only child of her marriage.

I remember my father, who was an old man for the child I was and looked rather like the grandparents of the other kids, once in a while, like somebody getting out of a dream, start suddenly to get worried and say to my mother things along

these lines: "we are not in France, and all this French speaking is not right. This child should learn Arabic." She would reply: "Why don't you teach her?" and he would keep silent, or say a few words in Arabic, words that seemed to be swallowed up by the whole house. When I was six or seven I remember my father had a fountain pen which he liked particularly; once in a while he had to fill out administrative papers, and since Arabic was the official language, he wrote, in a regular and distinguished way, lines and lines in a language which was for me neither foreign nor familiar. He taught me the Arabic alphabet, and made me copy it maybe a hundred times. I used to draw the letters with application.

Then, for a short while, he used an old Arabic-Turkish grammar that had survived his own adventurous life. He was proud of telling me that it was the very Arabic-Turkish grammar he had used at the Military Academy as a cadet: the book was thick, narrow, with yellowish pages, and its cover much written over. I learned in it to decline verbs, and short sentences which explained the use of the verb forms. Sometimes I was bored, or distracted; he used to scold me gently, but he used to lose his own patience very quickly, and using my mother as a witness he would say: "it's hopeless, the schools should be doing that, and these nuns are propagandists. Everything is propaganda in this country!" Tired of giving unscheduled lessons, and perhaps, and more seriously, because of being a man vanquished in the war, a witness to the end of an empire for which he fought, got wounded and decorated, this Ottoman officer was not a pedagogue: he told me one day to sit and copy the grammar book, page after page: "copy these lessons, he told me, and you will learn Arabic."

So I remember that once in a while (did it last one year, two years, a single season? I can't tell) I used to sit and copy — which means reproduce faithfully, words after words whose alphabet I understood, but seldom their meaning — never trying to understand what I was writing: I think that I loved the act of writing things I did not understand, and I pretended that I was learning a language without effort, just by writing it down. There must have been something hypnotizing about these exercises because much later, and for different reasons, I ended up doing practically the same thing. Of this I will speak later.

Copying a language I didn't know did not make me learn Arabic; and living in a school where Arabic was the forbidden thing made me feel very alone and want to give it up. My father inadvertently helped; he said one day, maybe out of nostalgia for his student days at the War College — I remember this very clearly, because by then I must have been about ten years old — he said that the future of the world was in the sciences and particularly chemistry, and that he would send me when I grew up to Germany to study and be a chemist. Was I happy to dream of such an extraordinary thing, or was it an ideal excuse not to study Arabic? All I know is that when, a few years later, under the pressure of the Government, the French schools started to teach a course in Arabic for two hours a week, I went up to the Mother Superior of the school and told her that as I was going to Germany some day to study I didn't need to take the course. She said that was all right, if that was what my parents thought. So I took Latin with the French born children and never went beyond the first chapters. Spring in Beirut made children troublesome and summer followed very quickly; extra studies like Latin, drawing, sewing, and botany never went very far with anybody. And as for adding Arabic! Arabic became a second class language within its own country.

When World War II erupted I was in secondary school. I saw the city of Beirut

become an internationally important city. The French and British armies had headquarters in it and the cosmopolitan character of the place glittered with a special romanticism for which movies had prepared us. To a population which included communities of Greeks, Italians, Kurds, and Armenians, besides the native population, were added troops of different nationalities making up the Allied armies: Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Black Africans, Free Poles. Beirut became a microcosm, a little tornado of war and fun. It did not see real war, but the armies which were tearing the world apart.

For the little girl I was, that meant "new" faces, new "happenings," new languages. We became conscious of the "importance" of the English language, and some Lebanese families who were familiar with Alexandria and Cairo, who had lived there and had come back, brushed up the English they spoke just to be in the stream of History. The American University of Beirut, which had mainly foreign students, started increasing its Lebanese student body. The city which was bilingual was becoming trilingual. When, in fact, about ten years later the Palestinian refugees came to Lebanon, the most educated among them knew Arabic and English and a whole business section of the city, close to the American University, used English and not French as a commercial language.

Universities create cultural areas around them and Beirut revolved around three universities that represented three cultures, three ways of life, three intellectual options, I would say three destinies. And as expected, writers, literary magazines, even newspapers, followed the trend. It was of course a kind of wealth, an opening onto the world, a thrilling diversity. But it also created, in a country too small to easily absorb such a strong wind of change and cultural pulling apart, undercurrents of tensions that were to explode a generation later and practically destroy it.

Little by little, Lebanon developed an intense cultural life, but this was fragmented into linguistic groups: there were major poets (like Georges Schehadeh), writing in French; most were still writing in Arabic, and there were writers, poets and journalists writing in English. For a country of three million people such a phenomenon considerably reduced the audience for each group. It was a genuine problem. A poet or a writer never had the feeling that he or she was addressing himself or herself to the nation as a whole. I was writing in French. I started writing poetry at the age of twenty: it was a long poem that I called "Le Livre de la Mer," "The Book of the Sea," a poem which sees the interrelation between the sun and the sea as a kind of cosmic eroticism. But even here, later on, the fact that the poem was written in French presented me with a problem. My work in poetry is generally translated into Arabic and published in the two or three most important Arab literary magazines. "The Book of the Sea" is not yet translated for the very reason that the sea, as a noun, in French, is feminine, and the sun is a masculine word. In Arabic it is the contrary: the whole poem is developed along the metaphor of the sea being a woman and the sun a warrior, or a masculine principle. So the poem is not only not translatable, it is, in a genuine sense, unthinkable in Arabic.

In the early fifties I went to Paris to study philosophy at the Sorbonne and wrote some poetry. I met American students at the Cité Universitaire and after a short trip back to Beirut I landed in New York, in January 1955, and a few months later in Berkeley, California. I did not realize that changing universities was not just continuing one's studies elsewhere. It was a total subversion of one's own thinking, a little earthquake in a student's life. Going from the Sorbonne to the University of California in Berkeley, in 1955, was like changing planets. Knowing four languages

already, more or less efficiently, was I aware of language as a potential problem? I really still don't know: what I do know is that I arrived in Berkeley, in a philosophy department at the time when Anglo-Saxon universities were — to make matters worse for me — involved mainly in linguistics (and, I should add, symbolic logic). It had not occurred to me that the ten words and five sentences I could manage in English were no preparation to audit such complicated courses. I did my best; read *Time* magazine avidly, listened to jazz records, and within six months I was pretty much integrated — at least superficially — into American university life.

Something happened, though, which determined my life: I fell in love with the American language. I was thrilled by the Californian way of speaking English, by the style, the lingo, the slang, of American publications, by the "specialized" languages of American sports; listening to baseball games or football games was like entering secret worlds. I don't know if I liked the games in their own right or the whole ritualistic language that went with them. I used to feel proud of describing games, to friends, in their right terminology. I was happy to use idiomatic expressions, to understand cowboy talk and small town talk. I knew, in American, things I could not tell in any of the languages I knew, because my experiences in those languages were limited, or seemed limited, or were too familiar to keep for me a sense of discovery. Speaking in America was like going up the Amazon River, full of dangers, full of wonders.

At the University things were different. I had a hard time trying to find interest in my new studies; I had to redirect deeply rooted habits of thinking and feeling. I remember how amazed I was, or rather how shocked, when I heard that one of my fellow students, a young Yugoslav man, had the subject he proposed for his Ph.D. thesis rejected. He wanted to write on Nietzsche and they told him that this was not acceptable because Nietzsche was not a philosopher, but a poet (things have changed since the cultural revolution of the sixties and I doubt that today this subject matter would be refused on the same grounds.) But I was all the more unable to understand the Department's decision, given that I considered philosophy, after Hölderlin and Heidegger, as finding its greatest expression in poetry.

I was doing very little writing those days because I was in a state of permanent discovery: a whole new world was being opened day after day, and that included the discovery of Nature as a force, a haunting beauty, a matter of daylight dreaming, an obsession. Riding in a car on the American highways was like writing poetry with one's whole body. I did not stay more than a few years at the University and never wrote any doctoral thesis. I found a job in a small college in Marin County, close to San Francisco, teaching Humanities. I was happy.

I was starting something new, a new experience, and the feeling of some sort of stability, a profession which has its own rhythms, brought me back to the desire for writing. I still considered myself as a French speaking person, even if I was teaching in English. But when I thought seriously about poetry and writing again, I discovered a problem of a political nature. It was during the Algerian war of independence. The morning paper was regularly bringing news of Algerians being killed in the war, or news of the atrocities that always seem to accompany large scale violence. I became suddenly, and rather violently, conscious that I had naturally and spontaneously taken sides, that I was emotionally a participant in the war, and I resented having to express myself in French. Today I do not have these violent reactions towards the French language because the problem has long been settled. There is peace between Algeria and France. Then, things were different: Arab

destiny as a whole seemed to be dependent on the outcome of that conflict. The dream of Arab unity was very alive then, and Algeria was its symbol.

I realized that I couldn't write freely in a language that faced me with a deep conflict. I was disturbed in one fundamental realm of my life: the domain of meaningful self-expression. Something quite unexpected solved my problem, a solution which was like the opening of a side window, as if one morning the sun did not rise where it was expected to rise, but close by, at a different point of the horizon. I met, on the Berkeley campus, a woman who was the head of the Art Department of the College. Her name is Ann O'Hanlon. We chatted in the middle of an alley next to rose bushes and when I told her that one of the courses I was teaching was Philosophy of Art, she asked me if I was painting, and when I said "no," she wondered how one dealt with the philosophy of a subject one did not practice, and my answer was, I remember clearly, that my mother had told me I was clumsy. She said: "And did you believe her?!"

The fateful conversation not only instantaneously freed my hands, but also, like a planet changing orbits, it directed my attention, and then my energies, toward a new art form which meant a new universe of interests. I went to the Art Department in my free time and I started painting. I soon realized that to me this meant a new language and a solution to my dilemma: I didn't need to write in French anymore, I was going to paint in Arabic.

All this was happening around the year 1960. Furiously, I became a painter. I immersed myself in that new language. Abstract art was the equivalent of poetic expression; I didn't need to use words, but colors and lines. I didn't need to belong to a language-oriented culture but to an open form of expression (many years later, traveling in Morocco, I had a discussion with a Moroccan painter who told me that in his view Morocco has so many good painters because this is the way their best artists solve the language problem, those of the generation who grew up under the dominance of French culture). My spirit was loose. I understood that one can move in different directions, that the mind, unlike one's body, can go simultaneously in many dimensions, that I moved not on single planes but within a spherical mental world, and that what we consider to be problems can also be tensions, working in more mysterious ways than we understand. As time passed, and as I taught in English, I felt more and more at ease with this new language I was using. I was not using this new language, I was living it.

Then, there was Vietnam. America in Vietnam. Vietnam in the American psyche. The war on television. The protests in the streets. The cultural revolution that was taking place in America had Vietnam as one of its sources, and one of its consequences was that the war issue became also a literary rallying point, a concern for the poets and a dynamic subject matter. Poets wrote against the war, or rather, fought against the war through poetry.

One day — I was particularly affected by the war images on the television screen, and was tired and dispirited—I found on the table of the Professors' Lounge, a literary magazine looking like a newspaper folded in four; it said it was distributed freely, and welcomed poetry as action against the war. That was the *S.B. Gazette* (S and B standing for Sausalito and Belvedere, two elegant small towns north of San Francisco). I came home, put a piece of paper in my typewriter and, almost as if not paying attention to what I was doing, wrote a poem: "The ballad of the lonely knight in present-day America," and sent it to the *S.B. Gazette*. In a few days came a

note scribbled with a pencil on a torn notebook page saying "poem much welcome" and below: "send more!" and was signed "Leon Spiro." I was a poet in the English language!

I wrote some other poems, dictated by emotions and events, and felt part of an immense movement of American poets at a time when poetry seemed to grow in that country like music and grass. One day Robert Kennedy was asked by journalists, for maybe the tenth time in his life, how he felt about his brother's absence. Bobby Kennedy cried and as an answer cited Romeo's speech on Juliet's beauty in the night. I was so moved to see a man, in a culture that denies men the need to cry as being a sign of weakness, cry openly for his dead brother and express through Shakespeare his sense of the inner unity of love, that I wrote to him and said I would be happy if he read the poem I had written, the first one, the ballad. I got a wonderful answer telling me he was moved by the text.

Letters arrived asking me if I would participate in poetry readings or have the poems I wrote republished in some anthologies. I received letters from poets from the United States or Latin America which were sent just to share thoughts. That was a time when poetry became, for a few years, the only religion which has no gods and dogmas, no punishments, no threats, no hidden motivations, no commercial use, no police and no Vatican. It was an open brotherhood open to women, men, trees and mountains.

I was entering the English language like an explorer: each word came to life, expressions were creations, adverbs were immensely immense, verbs were shooting arrows, a simple preposition like "in" and "out" an adventure! Writing was a sport, sentences were like horses, opening space in front of them with their energies, and beautiful to ride.

The old ghosts had not disappeared. The Arab World did not vanish from my preoccupations. On the contrary. I was starting to travel in the summers to Morocco, or Tunisia, or back to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon. I made friends with many Arab poets of Arabic or French expression. Poetry and painting stayed separate, but one day when I decided to write, or, to be precise, copy poetry in Arabic with the intent to integrate "calligraphy" into a style of working with watercolors and inks which was contemporary, I engaged myself on a trail that is still in front of me. I found Japanese folded papers, like the old books of Japanese woodcuts where each double page was an image tied, or not tied, to the following ones. Something from my childhood emerged: the pleasure of writing, line after line, Arabic sentences which I understood very imperfectly: I took modern poetry written by the major Arab poets and "worked" with them. I did not try to have them translated to me, I was satisfied with the strange understanding of them: bits here and there, sentences where I understood but one key word; it was like seeing through a veil, looking at an extraordinary scenery through a screen, as if the screen did not erase images but toned them down and made them look even more mysterious than they were.

Year after year I worked on these long papers, like horizontal scrolls, with my imperfect writing, aware that it was the opposite of classical calligraphy that was at stake; it was reading through the art of a poet's work. These works have been exhibited in galleries in the United States and in some Arab capitals. They arouse questions, they provoke passionate discussions, they puzzle most of the time, they make their ways in magazines, articles and critics' studies. They represent to me a coming to terms which I would never have expected until it happened, with the many threads that make up the tapestry of my life. I integrated myself in the cultural

destiny of the Arabs by very indirect ways, and I hope that the search is not over.

Where am I now?

I gave up teaching in the early seventies and went back to Beirut. I left the United States suddenly. I came into a city which was going through its best years. I threw myself into the center of an active volcano. It was fascinating. I found myself again in a French speaking world, French and Arabic, but mostly French for me, as I found a job as director of the cultural pages of a French speaking and newly founded daily paper. It was good to again be where Arab history was seemingly happening, to go to Aleppo for a vacation instead of the Sierras, and to know more of Cairo and Damascus than of New York. It was refreshing, it was exciting, this shift into new territory. Beirut had moved so fast that it was for me a brand new city.

Of course, I wrote in French, left English aside out of necessity. I was too busy to meditate on its consequences on anything called a "literary career." Literature has never been a profession to me, it has been something for books. My own writing was like my own breathing: something I was doing.

A tragic and nasty war erupted in Beirut in 1975. People's lives exploded with the buildings and, like the pieces of the destroyed buildings, they went in all directions. Some of us went to Paris. French speaking Lebanese went to Paris. English speaking Lebanese went to London or New York. Some, mostly for business purposes, went to Arab countries. I went to Paris two years after the war had started, not to stay indefinitely but to wait for things to calm down in Lebanon. Things did not calm down, as we all know, they went from bad to worse, from civil war to occupation. When in Paris, I heard of a terrible thing that had happened in Lebanon: a woman I knew a little but respected immensely was kidnapped by Christian militiamen, tortured and killed. I am not telling her story here, only that the "reasons" for her ordeal were not morally acceptable. I wrote a book, a fiction based on reality, about this tragic incident: *Sitt Marie-Rose* was written and published in Paris. In French.

I had personal reasons, a few years later, to go back to California, as going back to Beirut looked more and more a difficult thing to do. The paper I was working for had closed. Other difficulties were to be considered.

Back in California. What would I do in California but paint and also write. I realized that I think more happily, with a more natural flow, when I don't fight my environment. I would even say that my writing is influenced, or rather grows, the way plants grow out of soil and water, from the land I am inhabiting. So whenever I write in America, I write in English.

What can I say of the fact that I do not use my native tongue and do not have the most important feeling that as a writer I should have, the feeling of a direct communication with one's audience? It is like asking what I would have been if I were somebody else. There are no answers to such questions. These questions are like trying to hold reflections in one's hands. There are a growing number of writers who use an "international" language, like English, who use in fact another language than their own because of history, or because of exile, or because of personal taste.

Do I feel exiled? Yes, I do. But it goes back so far, it lasted so long, that it became my own nature, and I can't say I suffer too often from it. There are moments

when I am even happy about it. A poet is, above all, human nature at its purest. That's why a poet is as human as a cat is a cat or a cherry tree is a cherry tree. Everything else comes "after." Everything else matters, but also sometimes does not matter. Poets are deeply rooted in language and they transcend language.

Someone can stand up and ask me why didn't I, on my own, at some point in my life, learn Arabic? This is a question that sometimes haunts me. I don't go on accusing the old colonial system (like Franz Fanon so beautifully did). I am not, and Arab writers are not, for example, in the situation of the Black African writers whose native languages have been totally eradicated by both the French colonial administration and then by their own governments. Arab writers are totally responsible for the language they use.

I have always been part of the here and now. I did not take time out of everyday life to consecrate all my efforts to acquire Arabic as a full language. When the sun is strong and the sea is blue I can't close my windows and go in and "study" anything. I am a person of the perpetual present. So I stayed "outside"; Arabic remained a forbidden paradise. I am both a stranger and a native to the same land, to the same mother tongue. This century told us too many times to stay alone, to cut all ties, never to look back, to go and conquer the moon: and this is what I did. This is what I do.

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