At the Limits of Representation

Counter-tourism in Jean Améry and W.G. Sebald[1]

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The title of this collection — *Representing the Unimaginable: Narratives of Disaster* — raises a pair of provocative questions, one technical, the other ethical: Can we represent the unimaginable, is it within our symbolic means? And should we, do we have the right? These questions are related but not identical; the difference between them is particularly acute in an age when images of actual disaster circulate widely, whether as "news" in the networks or as "entertainment" in the internet. The title also suggests an answer—one as provocative as the questions. We can represent the *unimaginable* by simply representing the *real* because some events—for instance, disasters—exceed our worst nightmares. Approaching the *limit* of representation through an *excess* of the real over the imaginary has a long theoretical tradition, stretching back at least as far as the Kantian Sublime. This excess has been conceived in any number of ways—the thing-in-itself, nature, the divine, the unconscious, the pre- or non-linguistic. By definition, excess is what lies beyond human understanding and control. Conceiving excess as disaster, however, raises its own set of problems, in part because disasters can be intentionally produced or manufactured in ways that other forms of excess cannot. This strikes me as a particularly modern issue because technology provides the unfortunate means to produce disasters on an ever-increasing scale—along with the increasingly accurate means to record them. These considerations lead me to reformulate the opening questions in the following ways: In what sense is a *produced* disaster *unimaginable*? What special ethical considerations are involved in representing intentional disasters?

The Holocaust is an important touchstone for both of these questions.[2] Berel Lang coins the term "evil Sublime" to describe the difficulty we have representing the Holocaust, a disaster which was *imagined* and *documented* by those responsible for the "Final Solution," but which nevertheless remains *unimaginable* (Lang 56-7, 124). Pointing to this paradoxical nexus of the imagined and unimaginable, Lang argues that the evil Sublime is the point where the technical and ethical limits of representation meet: excess on the part of the real calling for restraint on the part of the imaginary. This argument makes intuitive sense. While we encourage inventiveness in works of imagination, we discourage it in representations of disaster, which are supposed to be documentary as opposed to figurative: faithful to historical facts and respectful towards the memories of the victims. Lang calls this zero-degree of figuration the standard of "non-representational representation" (12).

The standard of non-representational representation raises another important question also touched upon by Lang: Why should we represent disaster at all? Why not simply maintain a respectful silence towards the events and the victims? There are two primary arguments in favor of representation, one psychological and the other pedagogical. The former holds that victims must represent trauma to work through it. (An analogous argument is that societies, like individuals, must work through collective trauma.) The pedagogical argument, not unrelated to the psychological one, holds that representing the past keeps us from repeating it. Both of these arguments assume that representation adds something to the events—an unknown quality that helps us make sense of disaster or helps prevent its recurrence or both.[3] Of course, this "unknown quality" argument can also justify imaginative or figurative representations of disaster: art is supposed to supplement disaster with whatever it is that makes it *art*—critical perspective, originality, aesthetic appeal, tradition, symbolic complexity, theme—and this unknown quality, which distinguishes it from the "merely" documentary, is supposed to throw the events into a new light. In this sense, the argument for disaster art (figurative representation) resembles the argument for disaster documentation (non-representational representation). Repeating the past as *symbol* is supposed to help us avoid repeating it as *symptom* or *event*.

These therapeutic and pedagogical arguments are often mobilized to explain the recent proliferation of Holocaust images—what some critics have described as a veritable explosion of film, literature, art, museums, and monuments since the 1970s.[4] The trend in the United States is to see Holocaust art as a form of testimony, even when it is produced by those at a remove from the actual events (this is variously called "second-hand witnessing" or "prosthetic memory" [Landsberg], "heteropathic memory" [Hirsch] or, by its critics, "memory envy" [Hartman]). In Germany, the pedagogical arguments are understandably more central, especially when it comes to major public memorials and museums. Representing the Holocaust is a way of ensuring that it will never happen again—*nie wieder*.

To these therapeutic and pedagogical arguments must be added an argument about the moral importance of memory. Because the "Final Solution" was designed to eradicate nearly all traces of the victims and their culture, because the number of eyewitnesses is daily shrinking, and because a small but nevertheless persistent group of deniers claim the Holocaust never happened, we must never forget.[5]

Though there is much back and forth on the individual merits of the therapeutic, pedagogical, and moral arguments, few reasonable people would challenge the importance of representing the Holocaust.[6] There is much debate, however, over what forms these representations should take. This is because the

imperatives to remember, testify, and prevent come into conflict with demands for representational restraint (that is, the standard of "non-representational representation").

We sometimes forget that important writers and theorists have urged restraint. From Adorno's misunderstood and later modified dictum that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz would be barbaric, to Susan Sontag's critique of "fascinating fascism," to Saul Friedlander's concerns over "the Holocaust cult of kitsch and death," there has been an important line of opposition to what might be called Holocaust art, in both its highbrow and popular forms. These critics do not argue that the Holocaust should not be represented. Rather, they are concerned that figurative representations, both of victims and of persecutors, distract us from what really happened or even appeal to perverse forms of pleasure. They attempt to draw a line between historical and figural representtations of the Holocaust in order to distinguish bearing witness from voyeurism, disaster scholarship from disaster tourism.

The most recent and sustained attempt to impose ethical limits on Holocaust art has been undertaken by Berel Lang, who argues that *all* figurative representation distorts the distinguishing features of Nazi genocide:

> The moral enormity based on the twofold denial of individuality and personhood in the act of genocide and the abstract bureaucracy that empowered the "Final Solution," moved by a corporate will and blindness to evil—these constitute a subject that in its elements is at odds with the humanizing effects of figurative discourse and the individuation of character and motivation that literary "making" projects onto its subjects. (163)

Lang's model of figurative representation is romantic, even Bloomian. He holds that "figuration is intrinsically personal" (163-4) and that "figurative discourse and the elaboration of figurative space obtrude the author's voice and a range of imaginative turns and decisions on the literary subject" (69). In other words, the "unknown quality" that figurative representation adds to disaster is *individuality*, the very thing the Nazi genocide was designed to—and did—destroy. According to Lang, the alternative to "individualizing" the Holocaust through art is to "let the facts speak for themselves" (69), to strive for "nonrepresentational representation" (12). Indeed, this is more than an alternative, it is a moral imperative: "representation within the limits of history, history within the limits of ethics" (34). According to Lang, art should aspire to the level and form of history, and history to the form of the diary (22) or chronicle (34).

This is a powerful argument, but I think it is flawed—and flawed tragically. First, I find Lang's emphasis on the "individuality" of art and artist questionable. It seems equally possible that art is not a symbol but a symptom, that it doesn't represent personality but its decomposition. This is the gist of Dominick

LaCapra's assertion that representations of the past, whether artistic or scholarly, act out past traumas in ways that contemporary agents don't always understand.[7] Second, I find Lang's assertion that the "facts speak for themselves" equally problematic. I mention in passing Hayden White's well-known argument that the meaning of facts is predicated on their emplotment, which in turn is a function of accepted literary conventions and genres.[8]

For Lang, however, the opposite is the case: emplotment is not a literary convention but a moral necessity grounded in the evil Sublime, the excess of events—evil because *imagined* or *intentional*—over representations. Lang understands the evil Sublime "as a way of rejecting the postromantic claim of 'no limits' on content or form, and of re-establishing a link *between* content and form ... precisely because some content exceeds any form" (124). This link between content and form *in extremis* is an attempt to bridge what analytical philosophers call the fact-value or is-ought gap by way of a negative analogy: the boundary representation *cannot* pass (man-made disaster) is the boundary it *should not* pass (restraint).

I call Lang's theory tragic because of the way it alternately foregrounds and sacrifices the individual as a category. Lang's form-content, fact-value equation minimizes the role of individuality in the production of history to the degree that his romantic aesthetic maximizes it in the production of art. Art, according to Lang, is the expression of individual perspective, but history expresses—or should express—the impersonal correspondence between symbol and event.[9] We might summarize Lang's position by saying that it elevates the individual in the production of art, then removes the individual from the production of history, precisely because the Nazis destroyed individuals—and individuality—in society. In other words, *inhuman* destruction demands *objective* representation. To get at the unimaginable horror of the Nazi imagination, the historian should simply list what happened, in a form resembling the chronicle as closely as possible.[10]

The power of this tragic argument—as in any tragedy—lies in its symmetry. The standard of "non-representational representation" is the theoretical counterpoint to the "evil Sublime." Both formulations refer to *man-made* limits of representation: the one *evil* because intended (i.e. produced by conscious agents who knew what they were doing) but nevertheless unimaginable; the other *objective* because intentionally unimaginative (or non-figurative). However, the symmetry of these formulations also makes them melancholic in the Freudian sense of the term, as they project an unmourned absence—the absence of *particular* individuals—onto an entire genre of writing as a *general* problem. Lang's ideal model of history—a perfectly objective chronicle that would always expand to include more details—is the infinite attempt to perform an impossible act of mourning. Amy Hungerford has pointed out that the lists of dates and events that would make up such a chronicle bear more than an

accidental resemblance to the lists of victims' names read aloud at commemorative rituals: "The history that Lang reduces to chronicle is a history that he has transformed into memorial" (111). Lang's objective history recapitulates the *fact* of historical loss—the historical destruction of the Jews—as a *standard* for historical representation, constantly deferring the object of mourning as a never reachable limit of language, the impossible goal of "non-representational representation."

Lang's theory does a powerful job of dismissing fraudulent testimonies like Wilkomirski's *Fragments*. But it also instructs us to reject all Holocaust writing that does not maintain a transparent relation to facts, and presumably to resist texts as disparate as Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's List* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which diverge, in the style of their presentation, from the standard of "non-representational representation" (Lang calls these texts "non-fictional fiction" [22]). Lang's standard, however, seems to me to be neither desirable nor attainable. We cannot limit *works* of imagination (fiction) or *the* work of the imagination (point of view), nor should we want to. The standard I propose to apply to representations of disaster is not correspondence (truth) but commemoration (mourning): a form representing not only the past but its connection to the present. History, it seems to me, is not only a series of events but the narrative of our relation to them. We should encourage, not discourage, discourse about the Holocaust as a way of connecting past events to contemporary concerns. As the horrible events of the Holocaust recede farther back in time, much of this discourse will necessarily be imaginative. That does not mean that it will be untrue or immoral.

At the outset of this paper I sketched the following line of argument: since the representation of disaster is well within our technical means, ethics must intervene to limit the proliferation of disaster images. However, I think the opposite is actually the case: disaster is extremely difficult to represent. Documentary images, unaccompanied by explanation, tend to convert disaster into its opposite: spectacle or entertainment. It is figuration—the *narration* of disaster in the conference title—that makes it possible to present disaster in a meaningful way. To my mind, the ethical question is not *Should we represent disaster?* but *How do we understand our relation to disaster?* While I do not want to enter the age-old ethical debate between deontology and consequentialism, it seems to me that ethics is a matter of community rather than limits. Inclusiveness makes sense to me as an ethical category, while accuracy does not.[11] Disasters are disastrous precisely because they pose a threat to a moral and symbolic community. We should judge representations of disaster according to their ability to enable new communities by engaging the attention and sympathy of those not immediately involved in the events.

In an attempt to explore what this commemorative ethic might mean in terms of Holocaust representations, I turn briefly to Jean Améry's *Jenseits von Schuld*

und Sühne (*At the Mind's Limits*, first published in 1966), and W.G. Sebald's last novel *Austerlitz* (2001), which unfolds between two visits to a place Améry describes in detail: the fort at Breendonk, Belgium, transformed by the Nazis into a notorious detention torture, and execution center, where Améry was imprisoned and tortured for his work in the Belgian resistance. Lang holds up Améry's text as an example of what he calls the "blurred genre" of Holocaust writing, in which representation (in this case philosophy) aspires to the condition of history (in this case memoir) (44-45). Sebald praises Améry for similar reasons. In "Against the Irreversible," an essay included in the English version of *On the Natural History of Destruction*, but not in the German original, *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, Sebald argues that the authenticity of Améry's voice is linked to his non-narrative prose style.[12] Of course, *Austerlitz* incorporates Améry's text into a narrative structure. This novel, like all of Sebald's novels, is essayistic, but it also has a plot. Lang would probably object to the text for precisely this reason: it relies on a presumably fictional narrative of a refugee from the Prague Kindertransport to represent a disaster that demands non-narrative objectivity: the Holocaust.

Lang and Sebald are correct in emphasizing Améry's essayistic style. Améry deals with what we have been calling the limits of representation—and what he calls the limits of *Geist* or mind (see, for instance, Améry 52)—directly. But he also approaches these issues through what used to be called the "method of indirection," that is, through narration and figuration. In his most famous chapter, "Torture," Améry leads readers into the torture chamber as if they were tourists, thematizing our relation to the past as a relation to place.[13] Améry is suspicious of Holocaust tourism. Later in the book, he cautions against instrumentalizing the Holocaust in the touristic search for moments of "pikante Verfremdung" (95). This scepticism suggests that his geographical figure is not casual. Indeed, Améry's analysis of the relation of Nazism to torture is grounded on spatial metaphors. Drawing an analogy between torture and wars of territorial expansion, he defines as sadism—the essence of National Socialism—as a violation of borders, corporeal in the case of torture (the analogy is rape [66]), and territorial in the case of war (76-78). The victim's body situated in space is both the point where power is brought to bear on its object and the ultimate rationale of genocidal ideology, which seeks to strengthen boundaries of an imaginatively "pure" state by purging foreign, that is, "Jewish," bodies from a "purified" body politic. The geographical metaphor, and the narrative/touristic approach to it, allows Améry to compress the genocidal myth of purity, the object it would destroy, and also the results of torture—into a single lasting experience: "Wer der Folter erlag, kann nicht mehr heimisch werden in der Welt" (85).

Geographical metaphors also allow Améry to transform his horrible experiences into a metaphor for describing an ongoing and universal threat. In

the same way that he links torture to homelessness ("nicht mehr heimisch"), Améry linkes misery ("das Elend") to exile ("die Verbannung") (87). On the one hand, these paired descriptions refer to his own exile after being forced to flee his native Austria—where he finally returned, as Sebald points out, not to live but to commit suicide (Sebald 161). However, exile is also the general description of the social world after the Holocaust; nobody is at home in a world where the camps once existed. (This is also a central theme in Sebald—a point I will return to in a moment.) According to Améry, torture reaches beyond the torturer and its victim to negate the very principles that make society possible: torture is the total negation of the other, understood both as the "social principle" (the other as the basic category of cohabitation, the difference and multiplicity fundamental to any society) and as the "reality principle" (the other as an actually existing person) (77). By threatening the existence of the other, torture also damages the social contract, which according to Améry involves two clauses: the first that the other will help me in time of need; and the second, that I have the right to defend myself and/or seek justice, that is, to take "an eye for an eye," when the first clause fails (66). The victim of torture, of course, can neither expect help nor strike back. By inflicting pain on the victim's body, torture damages the victim's relation to society.[14] In this way, torture marks the inversion of the social and the emergence of what Améry calls the *Gegen-Mensch*, whose entire purpose is to dominate others by exercising absolute power over life and death. Améry implies that it is because the Gegen-Mensch has already emerged that the general public of the mid-1960s is indifferent to torture in Vietnam (58). The *Gegen-Mensch* is also the basis of Améry's controversial contrast between Nazism and medieval torture, which he says establishes a sort of "complicity" between the torturer and the victim (75); and between Nazism and Totalitarian Communism, which no matter how repressive, remains an "idea of men," while Nazism is simply the apotheosis of the anti-Man (71).[15]

Améry's essays are an attempt to re-establish the social contract though common alienation, inviting us to visit as tourists the world of the *Gegen-Mensch*. The touristic approach is essential because we repress the fact that we already live in a world where torture exists. In this sense Améry's readers are not tourists but counter-tourists, visitors lead to discover not a particular site, but our general state of common exile. The essay, of course, is more than a guided tour. For instance, Améry does not hesitate to exercise his right to *lex talionis* by accusing his torturer by name. This is not merely revenge but the reconstitution of the social: He argues that when the *Gegen-Mensch* is brought to justice, and executed, he becomes once again a *Mitmensch*, united with his victims in the impossible desire to turn back the clock (131). However, Améry realizes that the *lex talionis* can only reach so far (142). It would be monstrous to revenge the murder of six million with another six million. Since absolute justice is

impossible, he is forced to settle for just representations of history, defined as an impossible act of revenge on time itself (142, 133-34).[16]

According to Améry, the just representation of history would entail making Auschwitz as central to German history and culture as Goethe (142-43). Writing shortly after the Auschwitz trial, he doubted this would happen; however, the argument could be made that in the last 45 years it has. Representations of destruction have produced a state of general exile—a general distrust of tradition and "Heimat." This is measurable in German pacifism and the commitment to constitutional, as opposed to emotional, patriotism. To my mind, even contentious debates like the "Historikerstreit" or the recent exchange over the bombing of German cities are positive symptoms of history deprived of the false certainty of Heimat. [17] A point that Habermas keeps making in these debates, echoing one of Améry's, is that the past should be represented in a way that makes it bearable for the descendents of victims to live side-by-side with the descendents of persecutors.[18]

Sebald's novel *Austerlitz* represents precisely this kind of cohabitation as an extended and intermittent dialogue. The novel, for lack of a better term, is narrated by a German exile—an unnamed man who can no longer live in Germany because he sees potential or actual SS members in his neighbors ("After all, I had lived among them until my twentieth year" [23]). His interlocutor, Austerlitz, is also an exile: a child survivor of the *Kindertransport* to England, who only recovers his memories late in life, through a series of traumatic experiences and depressions. Austerlitz the character fits the description Sebald gives of Améry: a victim of trauma whose memories are disruptive and discontinuous, poised between the need to forget and the inability to remember (149). We might say he is an exile not only of geography but of memory. Austerlitz spends his life trying to avoid his past—studying the architectural history of the nineteenth century, which he identifies as "a substitute or compensatory memory" (140). Yet in researching architectural history, he also uncovers the prehistory of the Holocaust—for example in the monumental buildings constructed by King Leopold II in Belgium with profits from the colonial genocide in the Congo. These compensatory memories prefigure as *telos* the destruction Austerlitz represses as memory. Geography might repress or bury the past, but it is also an index of that past. Thus Austerlitz's own theories of architecture are tainted by the very history he seeks to avoid, for instance the following theory of ruins, which uncannily echoes Albert Speer's: "somehow we know by instinct that outsize buildings cast the shadow of their own destruction before them, and are designed from the first with an eye to their later existence as ruins" (18-19).

Austerlitz makes this remark apropos of Breendonk, which he sees as an example of how human projects tend to extend "beyond any reasonable bounds" (*ibid.*). Austerlitz is particularly interested in the architectural history of fort-

resses, which could never be constructed quickly enough to keep up with the technological advances constantly being made in warfare, and so were invariably outdated before their completion. Breendonk is a perfect example of this violent uselessness, since it is part of a ring of fortresses that always proved ineffectual in repelling invaders. Breendonk did, however, make a terribly effective prison—a defensive structure, even in ruins, can be an instrument of oppression. These same ruins now serve as a memorial and a tourist attraction—a point of entry into some of the particularly gruesome details of the Holocaust. The narrator visits Breendonk after meeting Austerlitz for the first time and again after meeting him near the end of the novel. The fort, as memorial, is an index of the past, a space of commemoration, as well as a frame for the narrative, opening the diegetic space in which the discourse unfolds.[19] Geography here is a complex topos, both symbol and space, in which the present narrates its relation to the past. This figure of historical narration is very different from Lang's, emphasizing *not* a supposed correspondence of symbol and event, but an itinerary, which is also a dialogue, in shared space. The difference between "non-representational representation" and narration is precisely this space: the lived space of the present, which is also the space of commemoration.

Sebald's narrative links what might roughly be called "German memory" to traditionally Jewish tropes: Diaspoa, exile, and in this case torture, since the German narrator identifies with Améry and other victims. The danger, of course, is historical relativization. *Luftkrieg und Literatur* preceded the current debate surrounding the bombing of German cities, but it anticipated and now is a part of the argument. Sebald is also open to charges of "virtual Jewishness" (Ruth Gruber) and "memory envy" (Geoffrey Hartman)—in other words, of misappropriating Jewish experience to represent post-war German experience. The other potential problem lies in converting the destruction of European Jewish communities into a metaphor for postmodern or general exile—something Améry himself warns against (145). What interests me most about Sebald, however, is his use of space, which becomes the figure and setting of a particular kind of commemoration. This is what he has in common with and borrows from Améry. In both texts, geography becomes literally the place where boundaries are negotiated—the locus where the past, as index or ruin or residue, meets our attempts to represent *and* avoid it. History is not merely a matter of letting the "facts speak for themselves"; it is a matter of representing a past which continues to shape the present, not only as memory but as a landscape riddled by lack. The difference between *representing* disaster and *repeating* it is the narrative itinerary that moves through (and therefore acknowledges) the ruins remaining long after the events. The narratives we follow in Sebald and Améry are not simply guided tours, but confrontations with the destruction we

live in but try to forget. This form of exile, at once permanent and transnational, is what I call counter-tourism.

In conclusion I will briefly define what I mean by counter-tourism. This necessarily involves defining tourism, which at its most basic level might simply be understood as a circular trajectory first moving towards then returning from a locus of difference.[20] To this basic definition should be added an understanding of how difference is produced. Dean MacCannell has sketched out some of the semiological considerations involved, arguing, for instance, that no tourist attraction can exist without markers—an argument implicating local difference in a global network of signs. Economic factors also play an important role, both in designating tourist attractions and in shaping the typical touristic itinerary, which posits vacation and adventure as fantastic antidotes to work. We should understand the basic narrative that somehow corresponds to an authentic self, which it conjures, regenerates, refreshes, etc. This Romanticism is of course a commodity, wrapped up with the language of advertising and deeply embedded in the geographical inequalities of the global market. What has always struck me is how horribly homogeneous the language—and often the experience—of touristic "authenticity" is.[21]

What then is Holocaust tourism? The search for authenticity as a negative extreme, comparable to Lang's evil Sublime or Amery's "pikante Verfremdung." The measurable rise in Holocaust tourism over the last twenty years has paralleled what Kerwin Lee Klein calls the re-emergence of "memory" (i.e. trauma theory) in historical discourse, which she argues is actually a "re-enchantment" with those elements of postmodernism aligned with "the excess, the unsayable, the blank darkness, the sublime, or some other Absolute whose mysteries can be grasped only by those initiates armed with the secret code" (Klein 137). Memory has always been tourism's answer to history, since it is easier to walk away from a week's vacation with a "souvenir" than to spend years studying the languages, traditions, and customs of a foreign place. In much the same way, it is easier to experience "shock" at Auschwitz and to "identify" with the victims than to study the complex history of the Holocaust. Of course, the quest for negative experiences has become "desirable" for reasons stretching beyond theoretical trends. For whatever reason, disaster sells in the contemporary media market; we seem to take a voyeuristic-sadistic delight in other people's pain. Holocaust tourism fits this disturbing trend. To the vicarious enjoyment of the negative must be added a virtuous identification with the positive: most tourists go to Auschwitz or Holocaust memorials and museums to identify with the victims. Philip Gourevitch's *New Yorker* essay on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum makes this argument quite convincingly. Also significant here is Ruth Gruber's account of "virtual Jewishness" in Eastern Europe, the profitable marketing of all things Jewish in places where Jewish communities no longer (or barely) exist.

Over and against this fascination with "kitsch and death," it is possible to sketch a counter-touristic itinerary, whose mileposts would include figures like Améry and Sebald. These figures are not shy about identifying victims and perpetrators, but they resist transposing these categories onto geographical locations—although Amery is outspoken about his discomfort of traveling in Germany (as is Sebald's protagonist Austerlitz). Neither Améry nor Sebald allow later generations to think themselves virtuous simply by virtue of their late (or geographically distant) birth. The perfect example is Austerlitz digging under the surface of "innocent" Belgium to find King Leopold beneath, or Amery confronting his contemporaries with their indifference to torture in Vietnam. Counter-tourism transforms the circular itinerary of the tour into a permanent line of flight; it eschews both the localization (and containment) of evil and the easy identification with victims. Améry and Sebald do not teach us that evil is "over there" in a place that can be visited then left behind. On the contrary, they force us to recognize that it is all around and potentially within us. Counter-tourism attempts to create a community out of common exiles. It forces us to confront the fact that we inhabit a world where disasters continue to exist, and it forces us to recognize that we are capable of instigating them.

NOTES

[1] Special thanks go to Michael Hoffman, my dissertation advisor, colleague, and friend, and a co-traveler in counter-tourism research. My discussion of Sebald is especially indebted to his insights.

[2] I am not arguing that the Holocaust is the *most* important touchstone for these issues. In fact, I find debates over the relative historical and moral significance of different disasters damaging for all parties involved. To put the following discussion in perspective, I briefly note that the Holocaust should be considered as part of a long and horrifying history of genocide. Consider David Stannard's intervention in *American Holocaust*: "The destruction of the Indians of the Americas was, far and away, the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world" (*x*).

[3] The term "unknown quality" is adapted from Paul Virilio's recent "Unknown Quantity" exhibition of disaster images and art the Foundation Cartier in the Boulevard Raspail in Paris.

[4] For a discussion of this issue see Novick pp. 1-15, and especially pp. 2-3 where he criticizes the view that our current—and rather delayed—preoccupation with the Holocaust can be understood as a collective "return of the repressed."

[5] At the political level, the moral imperative to remember is linked to public rituals of repentance and mourning. At the communal level, remembering has become an almost religious duty. The historian Peter Novick, among others, argues that the Holocaust has become a "consensus symbol," replacing shared ritual and belief as the defining center of American Judaism (Novick 7).

[6] Novick is the exception, arguing that we cannot expect to derive any moral from the Holocaust, or use it to teach anything other than itself (263).

[7] LaCapra says, "Transference is itself at the intersection of the personal, political, and textual, and it encompasses at least two related issues: the way in which problems and processes active in the texts or artifacts we study are repeated in displaced and often disguised or distorted form in our very accounts of them; and the more interpersonal dimension of involvement made familiar by psychoanalysis" (LaCapra 1994, 111; see also pp. 45-48).

[8] White scales back his argument slightly vis-à-vis the Holocaust, suggesting that the "facts" of the Holocaust (his scare quotes) which justify us in not emplotting it according to "pastoral" or "comic" modes, unless, of course, that mode was being used to make a metacritical point. This, however, is his basic position, stated in the same paragraph: "For the differences among competing *narratives* are differences among the "modes of emplotment" which predominate in them. It is because narratives are always emplotted that they are meaningfully comparable; it is because narratives are differently emplotted that discriminations among the kinds of plot types can be made" (40).

[9] Interestingly, this is where Lang's ethic of "non-representational representation" meets its opposite in trauma theory, which understands language as an index of the past it cannot speak. Trauma theory views testimony as a discourse in which affect often supplants fact; although it is precipitated by catastrophe, and although it bears witness to that catastrophe, survivor testimony does not necessarily give an accurate account of catastrophe; in fact, the inaccuracies and distortions are treated as an index of the trauma that occasions them. Shoshona Felman famously points out that the testifier does not have to "*possess* or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it...that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker" (Felman and Laub 15). Lang differs from the trauma theorists in his rejection of testimony and individual perspective, but he resembles them in his account of language as an index—not merely a symbol—of fact.

[10] "The denial of individuality and personhood in the act of genocide; the abstract bureaucracy that empowered the 'Final Solution,' moved by an almost indistinguishable combination of corporate and individual will and blindness to evil, constitute a subject that in its elements seems at odds with the insulation of figurative discourse and the individuation of character and motivation that literary 'making' tends to impose on its subjects" (Lang 1992: 316)

[11] Lang also talks about moral community, but it is grounded in a model of proximity bordering on a model of "identity," so that "the lives and deaths of relatives and friends differ in their effects on us from the lives and deaths of others" (64). To my mind, this model of community is uncomfortably close to the "corporate" (Lang's term) models of community it sets out to critique.

[12] "His memoirs could not, of course, be a narrative in any traditional sense, and they therefore dispense with any kind of literary stylization which might encourage a sense of complicity between the writer and his readers" (151).

[13] "Wer als Tourist Belgien besucht, den mag vielleicht ein Zufallsweg nach dem halbwegs zwischen Brüssel und Antwerpen gelegenen Fort Breendonk führen" (55).

[14] Compare Elaine Scarry: "In the very processes it uses to produce pain within the body of the prisoner, [torture] bestows visibility on the structure and enormity of what is usually private and incommunicable, contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body. It then goes on to deny, to falsify, the reality of the very thing it has itself objectified by a

perceptual shift which converts the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory but, to the torturers and the regime they represent, wholly convincing spectacle of power" (27).

[15] Améry's constant opponent here is Hannah Arendt. He sees sadism as a distinguishing feature of Nazism; communism, no matter how perverted, is a utopian or human dream. Arendt on the other hand links totalitarianism and communism as two forms of "totalitarianism." Disagreeing with the thesis of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Améry also argues that the sadism of his torturer is proof that evil is not "banal" (78).

[16] Amery anticipates Lang's conception of history as a moral force, but instead of linking morality to the historicist category of accuracy, he links it to the existential category of honesty or authenticity (130-32).

[17] The recent discussion of the bombing of German cities was instigated largely by the publication of Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand*. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* has since been drawn into the discussion, but it is more concerned with the moral enormity of ignoring the bombing in German literature than with the moral significance of the bombing itself. I note in passing that there is a great deal of disagreement over the effectiveness of German representations of the Holocaust. Eric Santner, for instance, points to the problem of "narrative fetishism," by which he means "the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place" (144).

[18] As Jürgen Habermas famously puts it in "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing," "there is the obligation incumbent upon us in Germany ... to keep alive, without distortion and not only in an intellectual form, the memory of the sufferings of those who were murdered by German hands. It is especially these dead who have a claim to the weak anamnesic powers of solidarity that later generations can continue to practice only in the medium of a remembrance that is repeatedly renewed, often desperate, and continually on one's mind. If we were to brush aside this Benjaminian legacy, our fellow Jewish citizens and the sons, daughters, and grandchildren of all those who were murdered would feel themselves unable to breathe in our country" (Habermas 233). Habermas makes a similar argument about the importance of Berlin's "Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe," designed by the Jewish American architect Peter Eisenman and still under construction at the time of this writing (Habermas 1999).

[19] First the narrator goes into torture chamber; on his second visit, 30 years later, he cannot enter, but instead sits outside and reads a book about another man's futile search for his extended family, who were killed in the Holocaust (this passage is slightly mistranslated in the English version, suggesting that the narrator failed to enter the fort the first time).

[20] See, for instance, the introduction to Georges Van Den Abbeele's *Travel as Metaphor*.

[21] For more on the homogeneity of touristic itineraries, particularly in a North American context, see my "Theodore Dreiser and Emily Post: Politics and Early Road Books."

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