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Gold-Encrusted Chaos: An Analysis of Auschwitz Memoirs

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**GOLD-ENCRUSTED CHAOS: AN ANALYSIS OF
AUSCHWITZ MEMOIRS**

by

Mary D. Lagerwey

**A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology**

**Western Michigan University
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GOLD-ENCRUSTED CHAOS: AN ANALYSIS OF
AUSCHWITZ MEMOIRS

Mary D. Lagerwey, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 1994

One way to better understand the Holocaust is to look closely at several survivors' stories. In my dissertation I closely examine six published memoirs of women and men from one time and place: Auschwitz, 1942-1945. Specifically, I ask three questions:

1. How do Holocaust memoirs relate a universal human story?
2. How are Auschwitz memoirs informed by gender?
3. How do Auschwitz memoirs exemplify a polyphony of voices which engulfs and transcends gender differences?

In exploring the first question, I develop a thesis, that there is a universal story which captures the experiences of Auschwitz survivors' experiences. Next, I develop a Noah's Ark method of gendered pairing of survivors to explore an antithesis, that Auschwitz memoirs vary systematically by gender. The antithesis confirms a certain gender predictability and stereotyping. Women's concerns and stories were often different from their male counterparts.

Lastly, I develop a synthesis. Other factors such as nationality and ethnicity may also inform these memoirs. I look for a polyphony of voices from Auschwitz survivors which transcend dichotomous categories of gender.

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Western Michigan University, 1994

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hannah Arendt has said that each of us is born into and lives within webs of stories and storytellers. This has become abundantly clear to me throughout my graduate studies and dissertation research. I have a new appreciation for the countless stories which have been interwoven with mine. The webs of stories into which I was born emphasized the word, the life of the mind and the worth of each individual story. My writing is born out of and sustained by this living heritage, comprised most immediately by my family: My mother, Marcia; my maternal grandmother, Deane; my sisters, Karen and Renee; my brothers, Peter, Robert, and David; my uncle, Walter; and the memories of my father, Pieter and my paternal grandmother, Maartje. I am especially thankful to my children, Alexander and Arie; and my husband, Richard, who have generously allowed my unfolding academic story to recast our life stories together.

At Western Michigan University there are countless people whose stories have fortuitously intersected with mine. I think especially of students and professors who have become colleagues and friends, and of administrative staff who have guided me through labyrinths of bureaucracies.

My committee members have graciously equipped me with tools necessary for finding my voice of scholarship. Gwen Raaberg has provided a bridge between literature and sociology, and taught me much about the importance of women's voices and their stories.

Acknowledgements--continued

Douglas Davidson has lent enthusiasm to my work and helped me place my thoughts within larger contexts of canon and marginality. Subhash Sonnad has--again and again--asked complex questions and attempted to keep me sociologically grounded. My advisor, mentor, colleague, and friend, Gerald Markle, has shown immense wisdom and patience, knowing instinctively when to guide and when to let me struggle through webs--and mazes--of text and story. He has shown by example and word, what it means to be a scholar of great depth and integrity. He has taught me to value my emergent voice and demonstrated unfailing confidence in me.

Mary D. Lagerwey

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CHAPTER I

REFLECTION AND INTRODUCTION

History is what hurts. (Frederick Jameson, 1984, p. 102)

History is not 'what hurts' so much as 'what we say once hurt.' (Linda Hutcheon, 1989, p. 82).

In approaching stories of Auschwitz survivors, I begin by asserting--with all due modesty--the relevance of my own stories. For interpretations of these extraordinary texts are inextricably bound and shaped by the details of my stories, the social web of stories within which I live and speak. As with any human being, I have many stories, many identities, in which past and present are interwoven. My family of origin is devoutly Calvinist, from my great-grandmother Maatje Dieleman to my minister father, Pieter Lagerwey. As such, I learned to value The Word as a repository of truth. I learned that questions of faith (although not necessarily religion) permeated all of life and death.

I am no longer a Calvinist. I took seriously the Calvinist claim that each human being has a calling, and pursued my sense of calling in feminist and intellectual lines. I have come to understand that the Word [which] become flesh and those whom my community sanctioned to proclaim the singular interpretive truth of the Word were exclusively male. There was no room for multiple truths.

Perhaps a Calvinists should not be surprised by events such as the Holocaust: If all humanity is totally depraved perhaps the only

surprise is that its horrors are not the norm. Stories of the Hell (to which all of humanity would be justifiably doomed were it not for the grace of God choosing a few for salvation) bare a marked similarity to stories of Auschwitz.

Perhaps, for the sake of argument and a consistent personal narrative, I exaggerate and simplify. Perhaps. I do know that although I can no longer accept the core beliefs of the religious tradition in which I was raised, I will always take with me a deep respect for words. I have found my interest in words reinforced by poststructuralism's emphasis on how language itself helps constitute reality. Words are not unmediated truth, nor the only approach to truths. I feel compelled to resist any totalizing narrative which claims a monopoly on truth.

When and how did I learn of the Holocaust? What social texts and collective memories shaped my inherited memories of this event? I don't remember first learning of the Holocaust. The Diary of Anne Frank was one of the first full-length books I read. But I knew of the Holocaust before. I grew up believing that the United States had fought the European part of World War II to try to save or liberate Anne Frank. But then, I'm Dutch, my parents are from the nation which Judith Miller (1990) describes as constructing a uniformly positive past regarding its role in the Holocaust. My father was born in Michigan, but returned with his parents to live in the Netherlands. I grew up with stories of how his family fled the Netherlands to return to the United States shortly before the Nazi invasion, and how some of his cousins in the Dutch resistance were

killed by the Nazis. I assumed that the purpose of the resistance was to stop what we now call the Holocaust. Reading Anne Frank's words crystallized these notions for me--that as a nation and as individuals, she was the reason Americans fought the Germans. I read her diary at about the same age she was when she wrote it, and I imagined that, with my dark hair and eyes, I looked a bit like her.

A few of my relatives have also been interested in the Holocaust. My cousin, a professor of Germanic Languages at Elmherst College near Chicago, has been studying literature by children of the Nazis and other Germans of World War II. His father, my father's brother, a retired professor of the Dutch language and an officer in the order of Orange-Nassau from the Netherlands government (the Dutch equivalent of knighthood) for his work in Dutch language, literature and culture, has read much of Elie Wiesel's Holocaust writing, and finds it deeply disturbing, in part as a theodicy problem for which he has no answer.

In 1979, with three friends, I visited Dachau. We had been spending a few days in Munich while touring Europe on ten-speed bikes, and decided to ride out to see the concentration camp. Several images stand out from that visit. First, no one whom we asked for directions admitted to knowing where the camp was. Secondly, I remember the place as desolate, almost too clean. Lastly, I can still picture the large statue of twisted emaciated bodies which stands in front of the camp. In retrospect, we later realized that none of us had taken any pictures there.

My disillusionment came later and gradually in learning that the United States did much less than it could to oppose the genocide, that there were, to those in Washington, other compelling priorities for opposing Hitler and many excuses for failing to save the lives of countless Jews. And I learned that all too many of the Dutch collaborated with the Nazis.

Years later I read the German protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Letters and Papers from Prison (1972), written over a period of eighteen months from the Tegel Interrogation Prison (he was hung on 9 April 1945 at Flossenburg for his part in the officers plot to assassinate Hitler) and, still later, Corrie ten Boom's The Hiding Place (1971), a story of a Dutch family which was sent to Ravensbruck for hiding their Jewish neighbors from the Nazis. Since then I'd read Sophie's Choice (Styron, 1979) and seen the movie, watched Lina Wertmuller's equally controversial Seven Beauties (1980), read Primo Levi's Periodic Table (1984) and Elie Wiesel's Night (1958/1960) before becoming professionally interested in the Holocaust. I've known personal stories of the Holocaust for as long as I can remember, but little chronological history.

Now I am writing my doctoral dissertation on the stories of Auschwitz survivors. I look back on my journey thus far, from being an occasional tourist of Holocaust sites to one whose waking (and often sleeping) hours revolve around this event, its textualized traces and its stories. Much of it began when I began working with my advisor, Dr. Markle, and three of his honors students on a

comparative analysis of three types of Holocaust texts: newspaper accounts, memoirs of survivors, and videotaped testimonies (Markle et al., 1992). I also became a reader for his book, The Gray Zone, a reflexive sociological meditation on the Holocaust. In working on these two projects, I found that I was confronted with central issues of existence: stories of Western society and my own stories. I kept returning to written stories of survivors as the site at which the questions became most accessible to me. I have joined those for whom Cynthia Ozick (1988) speaks, "I cannot not write about it" (p. 284).

My knowledge of the event and the actors involved has greatly increased, and so has my awareness of the difficulty of writing on the subject. I have become increasingly aware that I am a feminist, and as such, have a strong and personal interest in honoring the lives of women of the Holocaust. I have become acutely and painfully aware of the questions raised by the intersection of theodicy and the Holocaust. I have been shaken to my core.

Journal Entry: 16 November 1993

I am again a tourist. I stand at Auschwitz II--Birkenau. (The Poles I've met insist that I call the camp by its German name, Birkenau, not Brezinka, the town where it is located.) Like millions before me, I have come by train and on foot. I have taken an early morning train from Krakow to Oswiecim, where I visited Auschwitz, now officially a State Museum. There one can buy film, postcards,

books of photographs, and even a hot dog. Overwhelmed by the contrasting images of death and commercialization, I do not follow the signs and the crowds to the major exhibits. I spend time at the Dutch and Jewish memorial exhibits in the former barracks, then leave to walk the three kilometers to Auschwitz II.

Birkenau, by contrast, is almost desolate. I see a few signs for a suggested visitors' walk to what my brochure calls the 1967 Monument Commemorating the Victims of Fascism. Across the fields I see a solitary group of students, and the ruins of earth, train tracks and buildings. The land is flat; an occasional tree grows. I am dimly aware of bits of mud--perhaps mingled with ashes--sticking to my boots. I dare not touch the wires.

Millions of stories are buried here in the largest cemetery in the world. Unlike those who stood here half a century ago, I have the luxury of letting my mind wander. I wonder about the lost lives, the lost stories of those who have stood where I am standing now. I think about Hannah Arendt's web of stories or narratives, and sheer happenings--those silences which are beyond stories. I wonder what truths and whose stories have been lost here. All I know are a few stories from this inner circle of hell which now sucks at my boots. As Primo Levi (1959) said, "death begins with the shoes" (p. 29).

I also think about Elie Wiesel (1978), best-known of the Holocaust memoirists, who asserted a remarkable uniformity in camp memoirs: "They seem to have been written by one man, always the same, repeating a thousand times what you, the reader, even if you

are his contemporary, will never understand" (p. 200). I have second thoughts about Wiesel.

A half century has passed since the events of the Holocaust. No matter how widely I read, listen and travel, there will always be a chasm between these events and my understanding of the events. My knowledge of the Holocaust comes indirectly from a variety of sources or texts. Many survivors, most now elderly, have written their memoirs; oral biographers and film-makers have produced a corresponding record in video-tape. Historians, too, relate Holocaust stories, and place them within various contexts. I have visited the sanitized remains of concentration camps, seen museums and memorials dedicated to the Holocaust. I have seen and contemplated the art of survivors such as Kadar and of those such as Judy Chicago who know of the events only vicariously. I have been a tourist at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, and wondered what I would now know of the Holocaust if this museum were my only source of information.

I have read too of the tension between the unspeakable and the need to bear witness to that which no one was meant to survive. Survivors and scholars alike have questioned whether we can even speak of or write stories of Auschwitz.¹ George Steiner, literary critic and an early scholar of the Holocaust, titled his collected essays, Language and Silence; Patterson chooses as the title for his 1992 book on the Holocaust, The Shriek of Silence. Lanzmann's Shoah is filled with long and powerful silences. Each asserts a paradox: we cannot say it, but ultimately it must be said.

According to Langer (1975), each asks,

how should art--how can art?--represent the inexpressibly inhuman suffering of the victims, without doing an injustice to that suffering? [Isn't there] something disagreeable, almost dishonorable, in the conversion of the suffering of the victims into works of art? (p. 1)

When I read memoirs of Auschwitz, I wonder: can survivors tell their stories without violating concrete and fragmented reality, without tidying up the horror, without imposing non-existent coherence and meaning? The answer must be both yes and no. "The past is only known to us today through its textualized traces" (Hutcheon, 1989a, p. 81), primarily through stories. But, as Hannah Arendt wrote, although every culture has a web of stories within which it represents itself, not every event fits into the totality of that narrative structure (1958, 1968). The "sheer happenings [of history] refuse narrative forms and are woven into Holocaust survivors' stories as silences" (Linden, 1993, p. 11). I listen for and to the silences.

I agree with Langer (1978): total silence would be surrender and cynicism at best, a complicity in suppressing the victims' stories. In the words of Andreas Huyssen (1993),

awed and silent respect may be called for vis-a-vis the suffering of the individual survivor, but it is misplaced as discursive strategy toward the historical event, even if that event may harbor something unspeakable and unrepresentable at its core. (p. 256)

I have found that my way of doing sociology necessitates a personal and reflexive stance. Ultimately, and no matter how shrouded with terminology and intellectualization, the only stories I can tell are in my own voice. I can only tell of my experiences of

reading others' stories. The words of Clifford Geertz (1973) ring true, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of events" (p. 10).

Furthermore, I must ask whether I have the right to study this topic. Feminist artist Judy Chicago has been criticized for representing the Holocaust when she is neither a survivor nor the child of a survivor. But Chicago is Jewish, and in her Holocaust Project she explores her heritage, her story. I've struggled with similar questions, with different answers. The first, relatively easy to answer, is: Do I, being non-Jewish and with no known relatives as its victims, have the right to study this topic? The answer for me is yes, but with the full realization that my perspective is different from survivors, their children and Jews who collectively were threatened with annihilation.

A second question is more difficult, and I continue to struggle with it. Is this my story too, and if so, how? I know that I have glimpsed a part of what humans can do to other humans. I know that the two countries which I claim in my heritage, the Netherlands and the United States, did not behave in uniformly exemplary ways (in spite of official stories of protecting Anne Frank and of liberating Dachau) towards the victims of the Holocaust. Perhaps my story falls more within a framework of perpetrators or bystanders than of victims or rescuers.

I also wonder whether I am not a vulture or a voyeur. I have been writing papers, and now a dissertation, made possible because humanity has slaughtered millions in a new and most efficient manner.

The atrocities of Auschwitz are the raw materials of my intellectual life. I cannot get around this fact. I sit back, acutely aware that my thoughts and words are powerless to change one iota of the past, present or future.

How then am I to approach Holocaust memoirs? They are neither unmediated historical chronicles nor imagined fictions; neither mimetic representations nor ephemeral nightmares. Memoirs are discourse, personal truths and presentations of self and others. Most importantly, they are real. Young's (1988) views of the critic in relation to Holocaust writing applies equally to all scholars.

The role of the critic here is not to sort fact from fiction in Holocaust literary testimony, but to sustain an awareness of both the need for unmediated facts in this literature and the simultaneous incapacity in narrative to document these facts. (p. 11)

The Holocaust falls outside the flow of history as we know it. It is a standstill of history--a shock demanding a standstill of thoughts and making it "impossible to continue in its old rational ways" (Siebert, 1992, p. 28). (Here I take sides in the so-called historian's debate among West German historians. During the 1970s and 1980s several prominent academic historians claimed that it was time, once again, to see German history as continuous. These and other claims about the uniqueness of the Holocaust were bitterly attacked by Jurgen Habermas.² James Young (1988) has framed his work in an exploration of the tension between the imperative of telling about violent events and the inevitable dilution of the violence which occurs in the telling. The very impetus for narration is weakened by the act of narration. In speaking of the Holocaust and narrative,

Young writes:

It is almost as if violent events--perceived as aberrations or ruptures in the cultural continuum--demand their re-telling, their narration, back into traditions and structures they would otherwise defy. For upon entering narrative, violent events necessarily reenter the continuum, are totalized by it, and thus seem to lose their violent quality. Inasmuch as violence is resolved in narrative, the violent event seems also to lose its particularity--i.e., its facthood--once it is written. (p. 15)

Narrative structures events. It frames, mediates and assimilates the violence it narrates. By its very structure it negates the reality of the violence--framing it in coherence to make it comprehensible. Will my own quest for understanding, my own writings--even as I speak of violence and chaos--somehow diminish the reality of the event?³

Statement of the Problem

I have decided that one way to better understand the Holocaust is to look closely at several survivors' stories. As one especially interested in the written word, I chose to listen to stories in the form of published memoirs. In spite of the de-humanizing oppression of Auschwitz, I doubted whether a single voice could speak for all survivors, and as a feminist, I wanted to hear voices of both women and men. I chose to narrow my focus to one time and place: Auschwitz: 1942-1945.

I decided to listen closely to the voices of six Auschwitz survivors. By choosing three women and three men and pairing them by gender, I could explore in depth some of the ways in which their written stories might be informed by gender. Specifically, I asked

three questions:

1. In what ways is the story of Auschwitz a single story? How do Holocaust memoirs relate a universal human story?

2. How are Auschwitz memoirs informed by gender? How do these pairs of memoirs by women and men compare? In what ways do the memoirs affirm and reverse gendered expectations for discourse and self-writing?

3. How do Auschwitz memoirs exemplify a polyphony or a cacophony of voices which engulfs and transcends gender differences? What insights does this polyphony of discourses provide into the grotesque bureaucratic violence which formed the essence of Auschwitz? In exploring the first question, I develop a thesis, that there is a universal story (e.g., Wiesel's) which captures the experiences of Auschwitz survivors experiences. In turning to gendered pairs of memoirists, I develop an antithesis, that Auschwitz memoirs vary systematically by gender. I examine the texts for affirmation and reversals of expectations for gendered discourse and self-writing?

Finally, I develop a synthesis. I begin by arguing that other factors such as nationality and ethnicity may also inform these writings. I look for a polyphony of voices from Auschwitz survivors and for ways in which Auschwitz discourse might transcend dichotomous gendered categories. In the synthesis I also ask what insights this polyphony of discourses may give us into the grotesque bureaucratic violence which formed the essence of Auschwitz?

CHAPTER II

INTRODUCTION TO PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Thesis

Knowledge of the Holocaust has been transmitted across time and distance through a broad array of texts: from contemporaneous accounts of journalists and escapees (typically ignored) to historical accounts and public memorials. Many of the handful who lived have told their stories: through art, fiction, poetry and memoirs. Each text paints its own picture, delivers its unique tale. Taken together they form a collage of images and stories from which Americans draw their knowledge of the Holocaust.

In a recent collection of articles devoted to sociological studies or personal narrative, Michael Erben (1993) begins with a grandiose claim, that "the study of biography offers the surest indication of a particular era's intellectual climate" (p. 15). I would modify the term biography to include all forms of personal narrative, including autobiography and memoir, and the term era to specify schools of thought and various disciplines, including my own. I would also qualify his claim, for biography's privileged position in scholarship. But his comments point to a renewed interest in personal narrative among sociologists, and suggest that it may be useful to place my analysis within the matrices of intellectual climates surrounding a sociological study of Auschwitz memoirs.

Generations of Scholarship on Personal Narrative

Feminist scholars have recently turned to personal narrative as an exemplar for discussions of canon, subjectivity and representation. Sidonie Smith's (1987) work on autobiography and gender is particularly relevant to my study. She offers a clear delineation of three historic phases of interest in Western autobiography. The three phrases can be simply summarized as "facticity, psychology and textuality" (p. 7); or, to use Smith's (1993) more recent terminology, "bourgeois individualism, the collaborative subject, and the resisting subject" (p. 393).

Although these approaches coexist and have not strictly followed a neat unilinear progression, they correspond to three time periods. The first culminates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Smith credits cultural forces of greater democratization, individualism, romanticism, notions of self-made men, great men theses, evolutionary progress, social Darwinism, Freudianism and increased literacy with this initial critical interest in autobiography. Autobiography was to be checked against other historical evidence for accuracy, and itself served as historical documentation and a subcategory of biography.

Georg Misch (Smith, 1987) captures the essence of the first generation of autobiographic scholarship.

The progressive unfolding of Western history can be read in the representative lives of the people who participated in its unfolding and that the particular types of Western Man

can be read in the hermeneutics of each successive manifestation of self-representation. The contemporary intellectual outlook revealed in the style of an eminent person who has himself played a part in the forming of the spirit of his time. (pp. 4, 8)

The personal story is of interest precisely and only because it has public significance. In the first phase of individualism and positivistic historiography, representative lives were by definition male. It is no accident that the initial representative life of an Auschwitz survivor has been male, (i.e., Elie Wiesel).⁴ For the first generation of autobiographical scholarship, the female autobiography is in some sense an oxymoron.⁵ Written from a position of marginality or from one of pseudomascularity, it is by definition other, non-representative.

Within the second generation, issues of gender come to the forefront. All texts come to be seen as gendered texts. Smith (1987) places the second phase or generation of interest in autobiography in the late 1950s and early 1970s. Interest in autobiography turned from historical to "an ahistorical poetics" (p. 11), from documentation and representation of an era to psychological issues of self-representation, the construction of an identity through writing, and agency. "Autobiography can [thus] be read as one generic possibility among many within the institution of literature, with the result that critics and theorists do with it what they have done with other genres. Most particularly they have attempted to define the genre and to categorize its manifold expressions in a hierarchy of types" (p. 5).

With the developments of structuralism, poststructuralism and postmodernism, there has been a third approach to autobiography. This third generation of autobiography challenges earlier assumptions of mimesis and referentiality of language "and a corollary confidence in the authenticity of the self" (p. 5). Each text contains a polyphony of voices, and each voice is overdetermined: not only by gender, but also by nationality, ethnicity and ideology. Each autobiography is thus not the story, or even a story of a life, but many stories; there can be no representative master narrative--of any event or any life, including Auschwitz and the lives which it devastated and destroyed. While the third generation has a strong psychological element, it also goes beyond it to dispute the legitimacy of autobiography as a master narrative and of autonomous representational life stories. It places autobiography within a fluid social context of reader(s) (p. 46).

Sociological Approaches to Personal Narrative

Feminist scholars have turned increasingly to personal narrative over the past couple of decades. A few sociologists have rediscovered an intellectual tradition which grants legitimacy to personal narrative as source of sociological data. Reclaiming Dilthey's late nineteenth century work on biography as a topic and methodology for verstehen, a hermeneutics of biography has captured the imagination of sociologists who occupy the interdisciplinary realms where social science, literary and aesthetic criticism and the humanities

converge.

Dilthey's work, according to Erben (1993), is simultaneously deductive and interdisciplinary. He began with not the simplest but the most complex social phenomena. "Socio-historical reality was to be captured and interpreted through an account of that highly singular and highly complex repository of the cultural--the individual; in other words, through biography" (p. 16). True to his time, he focused on the biographies (and not autobiography or other forms of personal narrative) of great men as collections of particular stories most appropriate for accessing the essence of an era. For, Dilthey maintained, "the study of history was the study of individuals, changing and causing change in their interactions--a sort of collective biography of verstehen (Erben, 1993, p. 16).

In the twentieth century, sociology has paid sporadic attention to personal narrative. The personal narrative was equated with biography, and subjectivity was ignored. It was Mills' (1959) insight that sociology (or social science) is the intersection between coordinates of biography, society and history (p. 143). For Mills, the term biography has a double meaning. At one level, and in the body of his classic work, The Sociological Imagination, it refers to the lives of individuals in society. Yet Mills treats these lives as social facts, not as discourse.

Another source which has most directly influenced my own ideas about biography is Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's 1966 book, The Social Construction of Reality. This book combines a phenomenological

approach, what later came to be called social constructionism, with a sociology of knowledge--the notion that all knowledge and all stories have material bases, but are re-written in light of subsequent events and interpretations.

Norman Denzin (1989, 1990, 1991) embraced personal narrative in his analyses of stories. He has introduced a methodology of multiple readings of cultural texts. He draws on Foucault's (1972, 1980) discussions of knowledge and power to suggest that an analysis of popular and official canon gives insight into cultural rules as to what constitutes legitimate stories of past, present and future--what is said and how, and what remains unsaid. For Denzin, life stories are cultural constructed narratives, powerfully shaped by culturally approved versions of events.

Denzin also criticizes Mills for being too removed from stories of actual lives. He is too distant and treats biography as social. He also turns to the biography, or life, of the social scientist (1991). For Denzin, scholarly work is not to be divorced from one's day to day life and interests.

Yet my approach has been greatly influenced by Mills' injunction that each man (sic) be his own methodologist. To borrow Levi Strauss's terminology, I approach theories as bricolage, as an array of tools to be used as appropriate to the task. My research incorporates perspectives from various disciplines--particularly historical, gender, and literary studies--within a sociological framework. I am most interested in the universality and particularity of

Holocaust stories, and the ways in which multiple voices speak of a singular event.

Holocaust Memoirs

Holocaust scholarship on personal narrative has paralleled Smith's conceptualizations of generations: facticity and bourgeois individualism, psychology and the collaborative subject, and textuality and the resisting subject. Initially, memoirs served as factual documentation of the event. At this stage, as James Young (1988) notes, "people wrote to extend 'I write, therefore I am' to 'I write, therefore the Holocaust was'" (p. 38). A single story was able to capture much of the horror of the Jewish community, from ghetto to trains to camp, through selections, death, and--for a remnant-- liberation. With time, survivors wrote more particular stories and scholars looked for differences in experiences: Jews and non-Jews, Germans and Italians, the religious and non-religious, women and men-- each category of survivors wrote of distinct experiences. Scholars applied their tools of textual analysis to personal narratives from the Holocaust. This second phase incorporates aspects of Smith's concepts of psychological and textual analysis. By the sheer fact of survival, any Holocaust survivor may be said to be a resisting subject. As I discuss in Chapters IV and V, resistance in personal narrative has far-reaching implications.

Leading scholars, particularly in literary studies, have included memoirs in their analyses of Holocaust texts. The boundaries between genres of Holocaust writing, whether history, fiction or memoir,

are often blurred. Holocaust fiction often imitates the style of memoirs and memoirs are often "embellished with fictional elements" (Heinemann, 1986, p. 8). For Young (1991), memoirs, and all texts of Holocaust memory, are metonymical--allowing one to access the whole through multiple yet particular interconnected fragments (p. 303).

Yet, as Young (1988) argues, personal Holocaust testimony is a unique form of literature. Each author of a memoir or diary, "attempts to salvage, however tenuously, an authentic empirical connection between text, writer, and experience" (p. 24). Feminist Holocaust scholar Marlene Heinemann (1986) further distinguishes memoir as a distinct genre. While personal, memoir points beyond the individual to the collective, to historical events. "It is filtered through memory, feelings, and the tendency to create coherent patterns and structures. Holocaust memoirs tell us what their authors remember about some of their experiences" (p. 6).⁶

In his earlier writings, Langer (1978) gives detailed analyses of Holocaust writing, including memoirs. His analysis is thorough, focusing on lesser known survivors such as Delbo, as well as the better known ones such as Wiesel. This is especially significant as this work preceded most of the interest in women and the Holocaust and--by five years--the first conference on women and the Holocaust on March 1983.

Langer (1991) has turned his attention to survivors' videotaped stories. He asserts that survivors' oral stories are more authentic because it cannot achieve narrative coherence and unity.

They are more spontaneous and contain multiple and irreconcilable identities; they cannot be formed into a single life story. "The raw material of oral Holocaust narratives, in content and manner of presentation, resists the organizing impulse of moral theory and art" (p. 204).

Joan Ringelheim (1985, 1990, 1993), feminist philosopher and Holocaust scholar, argues powerfully against privileging oral testimony over written stories. Instead, she points out, interviewees are in a unique position of being susceptible to trying to please a specific interviewer, and interviewers are susceptible to wanting to hear comfortable answers. All stories, whether written or oral, are discourse, and shaped by context and audience.

Holocaust scholars often approach memoirs as historical documents or accounts. It is true that while memoirs provide alternative and overlapping stories of the past, they are historical documents in themselves. As part of the historian's grab bag of memories memoirs allow access to individual and communal or public memory.

Much has been written in recent years on the distinctions and blurring between fictive and non-fictive genres. Hayden White (1978) has written extensively on the rhetoric of history, in part defining it in relationship to other genres (pp. 121-134). Even historical accounts cannot escape the conventions of structure. Further, White goes on to say that

the historical narrative reveals to us a world that is putatively finished, done with, over, and yet not dissolved, not falling apart. In this world, reality wears the mask of a meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can

never experience. Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. (p. 21)

The deep structural content of historical discourse is narrative prose, inseparable from a speculative philosophy of history. All historical reconstructions are essentially constructed stories (White, 1973, pp. ix, xii). All discourse, whether historical conceptualization or memoir, relies on chronicle, story, modes of emplotment and meaning (White, 1973, p. 5), scene, agent, act, agency and purpose. Any story, any telling, is a mode of discourse which wraps itself around a unifying structure. The mere fact of structural necessity form means that the content of what is communicated is inevitably one step removed from the event itself.

Although it has lost most of its initial shock value, White's work is most useful as a reminder that all historical accounts are, at a deep structural level, stories. No telling is ever an unmediated recordings of events-as-they-were. We talk about and around the past, shaping and re-shaping our stories of the past within constitutional socio-historical and gendered contexts.

White's work has touched on issues of Holocaust scholarship. In 1992, Saul Friedlander included his essay, "Historical Emplotments and the Problem of Truth" in his collection of essays on Representation of the Holocaust. Most interestingly, while White distinguishes between the Holocaust as an event and narrative discourses about this event, he implies that some stories are much closer to events than others.

The conflicting stories from different survivors do not negate each other. Each survivor's story is shaped by how events were experienced and reflexively interpreted over time. As Young (1988) explains, the witnesses' proximity to events often limited their perceptions--in fact, the reality of concentration camp inmates was easily manipulated and distorted by their captors.

Linda Hutcheon's work on the poetics and politics of postmodernism (1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1993) supports the notion that facts of history are essentially stories. What is written is never identical with that event which is written about.

Few sociologists have studied the Holocaust. R. Ruth Linden's (1993) recent publication on personal narrative and the Holocaust is unique. She takes a reflexive, ethnological and phenomenological approach to lived experiences of female survivors. She draws from stories and silences of these women, weaving their strands with her own stories.

As scholarship on story and discourse has shown us, no event can be fully represented. We are always at least one step removed from raw event and experience, even our own. Scholars thus do not have direct access to experiences about the Holocaust, but can assess its emergent stories and silences. Auschwitz memoirs tell us how survivors have written about their experiences, but cannot fully capture the event itself. Memoirs--and indeed all discourses, all historical records--are textualized traces of events. I approach them as culturally mediated stories, not as direct mimetic reflections of

Auschwitz.

Method

Stories of Holocaust survivors have played a major role in Holocaust studies and remembrance. Each survivor "tell[s] what he [sic] experienced and witnesses" (Howe, 1988, p. 182). The reader or listener is called upon to hear, to listen. Collectively and individually, their stories add to our collective awareness of an event which has powerfully shaped our time. They keep the Holocaust "within the bounds of history" (p. 183).

As of 1990, the Archive of the Auschwitz Memorial had a collection of 943 memoirs (over 20,000 pages) and 2744 accounts (over 17,000 pages transcribed by the staff of the memorial) of Auschwitz survivors. The memorial has been actively collecting these documents for the past three decades. Although each testimony is singular and of great value, the overwhelming number of memoirs required that I set restrictive criteria for choosing my sample.

I have limited my study to written testimonies of survivors of Auschwitz. I analyze the works of six survivors--three females and three males--in detail. All have been published in English. Based on a thorough library search, and a review of Holocaust course syllabi and anthologies, I also include an extensive appendix listing other English-language Auschwitz memoirs. I have excluded all diaries written during the Holocaust, and all explicitly fictional accounts--including those written by survivors and drawn from personal experience of the Holocaust. I have also excluded accounts by survivors

who were in Auschwitz for a brief period of time. I have concentrated on a set of works which focus precisely and extensively on personal recollections of a phenomena which happened at one time and at one place: Auschwitz, 1942-1945.

Noah's Ark

"Two of each kind, a male and a female" (Genesis 6:20) they entered Noah's Ark. Two--female and male (or as Genesis 7:2 describes the pairs, "the male and its mate)--of each species traveled with Noah. Noah as well was one of a pair, but his wife is without name. In the stories of history, since before the time of Noah, women have been "wives," "daughters of man" (in contrast with the sons of God--see, for example, Genesis 6:4), or simply absent. A few have had stories told about them, fewer have told their own stories, and still fewer have been heard.

I listen to stories told by a few women and men of Auschwitz. I use an approach, which I call Noah's Ark, to examine memoirs of three gendered pairs of survivors: Sara Nomberg-Przytyk--Primo Levi, Charlotte Delbo--Jean Amery, and Fania Fenelon--Szymon Laks.

My first pair, Sara Nomberg-Przytyk and Primo Levi are detached and reflexive story-tellers. For each, stories are at the core of existence, even existence and death at Auschwitz. Their words are their own, but the tales they tell are the tales of others.

Charlotte Delbo and Jean Amery, my second pair, also maintain a distance in their writing. Delbo's memoir is poetic, staged as a drama in the present tense, the stories of her comrades at Auschwitz.

Amery's essays are philosophical, yet intensely personal. Both Delbo and Amery are passionate about literature and intellectual life, often more concerned with larger issues of justice than with specific details of individuals' lives.

My final pair, Fania Fenelon and Szymon Laks were both members of the Auschwitz II orchestras. Fenelon was the vocal soloist; Laks was composer and conductor. Their central theme is the orchestra: its social and musical problems, its reception by the Germans, its humor and/or sarcasm, and--ultimately--the juxtaposition and alliance between music and death at Auschwitz.

Besides its literary and metaphoric appeal, the Noah's Ark approach offers analytic opportunity. All six memoirs tell of events of the same time (from mid 1943 to mid 1945) and place (the few hundred acres that comprised Auschwitz). One should thus expect similar stories. What I found were very different stories: "different horrors, same hell" (Goldenberg, 1990, p. 150). That such differences occurred, despite nearly identical spatial and temporal characteristics, sets the stage for the analysis.

In choosing these works, I follow the approach of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1992) in their recent book on autobiography: "We do not claim to present here a representative sampling. Our selections need to be understood as in every sense exemplary, and clustered in some areas at the expense of others" (p. xxii). I am playing the role of an editor--combining several stories into one work. My study is descriptive and illustrative. "These narratives can be read as individual stories or they can be read collectively as one story refracted

through multiple lives, lives that share a common experience" (Smith & Watson, 1992, p. 4).

Testimonies of Auschwitz survivors, individually and collectively, form windows through which we can begin to view the complex interplay between the historic event of the Holocaust and gender as a major factor in the representation of experience and the formation and expression of knowledge.

Trinity

Each memoir is not the same memoir when read at different times or by different readers. I follow a process of concrete negation and move from thesis to antithesis to synthesis within historical contexts which roughly parallel generations of scholarship in Western autobiography: facticity, psychology and textuality. Thesis, antithesis and synthesis ring true for different readings of the texts. Each is historically interdependent.

I present a thesis--one which resonates in Elie Wiesel's words--that Auschwitz can be represented by a single voice, a particular story which "is perhaps close enough to shared experience to justify the telling" (Schweickart, 1991, p. 525). As with the first generation of autobiographical scholarship, this single voice is presumably male.

In my antithesis I argue that women's voices have been ignored, and are qualitatively different from the male voice. In my readings of the memoirs and in prior scholarship on gender and the Holocaust,

I noted a dichotomy: to borrow Habermas' terms, a predominant instrumental rationality associated with male discourse, and a contrary affective rationality. In the antithesis I ask how discourses of Auschwitz violence are informed by gender. In the antithesis, each memoir, as well as the collected stories from women's memoirs, constitute gendered texts of Auschwitz.

As feminist Holocaust scholar R. Ruth Linden (1993) has noted, there is tremendous difference in the terms text and discourse. In my antithesis, I approached memoirs as text, monologic works which I approach in terms of gendered dichotomies. While offering insights into ways in which gender shapes experience and story, it does not emphasize the dialogic nature of story, and the polyphony of voices, spoken and silent, within and between stories. Thesis and antithesis are also discourse, in dialogue with each other and with communities of knowledge.

Following feminist interpretations of Michael Bakhtin's writing, I consider my thesis and my antithesis as polyphonic voices in dialogue.⁷ I affirm and subvert, use and critique, the arguments of thesis and antithesis, and develop a synthesis which simultaneously occupies and challenges the boundaries of these discourses. At these boundaries I explore the world of totalitarian domination, where everything is possible.⁸

My synthesis is a non-essentialist feminist analysis, arguing that particularities of individual voices are based in, but also reach beyond, gender-linked dichotomies. I examine the role of the grotesque in discourses of Auschwitz violence.

Thesis, antithesis and synthesis are historically dependent on each other. The move from thesis to antithesis to synthesis parallels what Smith (1987) has identified as three generations of scholarship in Western autobiography: "facticity, psychology and textuality (p. 7). But it also circles back to consider thesis and antithesis in dialogue with each other and with a polyphony of voices.

Thesis

Scholars have often argued that a singular voice is appropriate for Holocaust literature, that the dehumanizing experiences of death camps engulfed individual differences--whether of gender, nationality or intellect. It is difficult, if not impossible, to refute the argument that regardless of particular circumstances or the gender of survivors, "the Holocaust is a story of loss, not gain" (Pawelczynska, 1979, p. 757).

Elie Wiesel's book, Night, was the first well known memoir of a survivor.⁹ It is Wiesel who serves on Presidential Commissions and appears on late-night television. He wrote the foreword for the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust. His story has become the universal story of Holocaust suffering and survival. His voice--the voice of a singular man--has become the voice of the Holocaust survivor.

Wiesel's story contains the major elements of the (male) Auschwitz grand narrative. His story begins in a small town in Hungary. He and his family are close and feel relatively safe--in spite of deportation of foreign Jews and the warnings of one Moshe (Moses) who

returned. Then Germany invades Hungary, and German troops occupy of the town. Wiesel's family believes that the war will soon be over, and so they endure the arrests of Jewish leaders, confiscation of valuables, and a decree demanding that all Jews wear a yellow star. Then comes a forced move to a crowded ghetto, establishment of a Jewish Council and police, and deportation of some--then all--ghetto residents by cattle wagons to an unknown destination. In the days and nights on the trains, countless individuals die from starvation, lack of water and suffocation before they arrive at the platforms of Birkenau (Auschwitz II). On arrival there is the first selection: to the right for work, to the left for immediate death--it is a heinous game in which the players do not know the rules nor the consequences of their decisions. Families are torn apart, and never see each other again. Those given a reprieve endure the degradations: stripped of all possessions--including clothing--and totally shaved, disinfected, inspected and given rags for clothing. What follows is a melange of confusion, unrelenting cruelty, senseless work, hunger, thirst, sickness, death, and finally, a march into Germany through days of snow, starvation and bullets. Liberation comes only after most--including the rest of Wiesel's family--have died.

A singular story of one survivor is infinitely more accessible to the imagination and the emotions than a report of mass suffering. As Auschwitz survivor Ka-Tzetnik 135633, (1963) wrote in the post-script to his Auschwitz novel Atrocity,

Rudolph Hoes, the Commandant, has stated that 2,000,000 men, women and children were burned in Auschwitz. The tragedy of

these zeros is impossible to comprehend. I have told part of the story of the two million in the life and death of one small boy. (postscript)

Others have deliberately pieced together one story, one grand narrative, from fragmented testimony. In his book, The Survivor, Des Pres (1976) attempted "to provide a medium through which these scattered voices [of Holocaust survivors] might issue in one statement" (p. vi). The very title of his book, using the singular survivor reflects his attempt to conflate particular diverse stories into one seamless universal story.

CHAPTER III

ANTITHESIS

Limitations of the Thesis

Western auto/biographical convention holds that one successful life story can embody an entire historical event or period. The subject of master narratives is unequivocally male. According to Smith (1993),

the white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual human being becomes the representative man, the universal human subject. His life story becomes recognizable, legitimate, and culturally real. They neutralize or suppress ideologies, histories, and subjectivities non-identical to those of the universal human subject. The life stories of many people whose history differs from that of the universal human subject because of race, class, and gender identifications go unwritten, or if written, misread or unread. (pp. 393-394)

Elie Wiesel's story has become the story of Auschwitz survivors, if not the story of Holocaust survivors. Yet the very notion of a single story constructs more coherence than exists: "The whole thrust of such works is to seal up and cover over gaps in memory, dislocations in time and space, insecurities, hesitations, and blind spots. Any hint of the disparate, the dissociated, is overlooked or enfolded" (Benstock, 1991, p. 1048).

My doubts arise not over the legitimacy of Wiesel's voice, but from the implicit--sometimes explicit--claim that there is only one voice, that one male voice may represent the many. The thesis of a singular representative voice "insists on its universality at the

same time that it defines that universality in specifically male terms" (Fetterley, 1978, p. xii). The Auschwitz survivor becomes not only Wiesel, but archetypical male. As Sidonie Smith (1987) argues, autobiography by males is mistakenly taken as representative master narrative. This can be seen in critical responses to Wiesel's memoir, and in his own characterization of Holocaust personal narrative as speaking one story with one voice.

Postmodernism, beginning in particular with Lyotard (1979/1984), has pointed out inherent weaknesses in privileging a particular story or in assuming that there is a singular story to be told. The grand narratives of the Enlightenment, and by extension modernity, ignore or silence less powerful voices, and lend support to the violence and misery of the 20th century: domination, oppression and genocide. When master narratives of occidental science and universalistic claims of truth, uniform identity and legitimation silence the pluralism of small particular narratives, cultural imperialisms result.

Lyotard's critique of legitimizing metanarratives of modernity closely parallels critical theory's criticism of ideologies which legitimate the control of a dominant class. Their targets of criticism are often similar: "capitalism, the culture industries, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy and the bourgeois family the contemporary organization of society" (Best & Kellner, 1991, p. 247). Lyotard also joins with elements of the Frankfurt School, (most notably Adorno) as an adamant critic of institutionalized reason inherent to modernity (p. 5).¹⁰

R. Ruth Linden's book, Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust, (1993) is one of the few previous non-positivistic sociological works on the subject. She calls for a combination of overtly reflexive ethnomethodology and feminism in all sociological research, including any study of the Holocaust. The strengths of her work lie in its feminist reflexivity and use of personal stories in examining the Holocaust from a sociological perspective.¹¹

With the exception of Linden's insightful work, there has been little feminist sociological scholarship on the Holocaust. There have been, however, several feminist approaches to a sociology of personal narrative. Liz Stanley (1993) places auto/biography within a context of a sociology of knowledge. She notes that all knowledge is situational and contextual, and varies systematically--most notably, by gender. By the fact of their existence, women's life stories challenge notions of representative male auto\biography, for "women's textual and published lives are made against the grain of exemplary male lives, whose implied universalism is thereby rejected" (p. 46).

Stanley draws from Robert Merton's (1977) work in suggesting that autobiography is source of insiders' knowledge, equally valid as outsiders' knowledge. She simultaneously defines "autobiography as text--that is seeing it as a topic for investigation in its own right, and not as a resource to tell us about something lying outside the text itself" (p. 43), and claims that "there is no need to individualize, to de-socialize, 'the individual,' because from one person

we can recover social process and social structure" (p. 45), thus approaching text as resource after all. Stanley appropriately notes that auto\biographies do not tell single stories. Each life story is nested in other life stories. And, as the textual analysis of the antithesis demonstrates, many who tell their own tales chose to tell others' as well.

Mary Evans (1993) notes that the increased interest in personal narratives coincides with increased attention to the stories of those normatively silent in the grand narratives of history. Histories of the dispossessed, the less powerful, and of those labeled other emphasize the limits of meta-theory and meta-narrative. Interest has shifted from a few so-called representative biographies as windows to the dynamics of an age, to a plurality of personal narratives--often in the first person--to "illustrate the general with the particular and in doing so make more vivid the workings of social structures, and particularly of ideas and motives" (p. 7).

Evans' (1993) proposed sociological use of personal narrative supports a turn from inductive to deductive study of life stories, a "shift in the codes and subjects of biography" (p. 8). Although it leaves personal narrative as text to be read in a positivistic manner, and emphasizes the psychological in its emphasis on motives, Evans' work lends support to the notion that phenomena and events can to be viewed through unofficial stories of the less powerful.

Holocaust Scholarship Supporting the Antithesis

From the perspective of thesis, divergent Holocaust voices are

other and therefore marginal. The first scholars to systematically listen to women's voices from the Holocaust treated them as an aside, a contrast to the norm of the male story. Des Pres, for example, in *Ringelhiem* (1984) departs from his grand metanarrative in briefly contrasting female survivors' experiences with men's. He concluded that "under infinitely more terrible circumstances, women in places like Auschwitz and Ravensbruck made better survivors" (p. 72). While Holocaust scholarship has not completely ignored women's stories, it generally supports the thesis of a single representative or composite voice. Lawrence Langer (1975) and James Young (1988), for example, refer to works by women--including Charlotte Delbo, Fania Fenelon and Sara Nomberg-Przytk--in their analyses of Holocaust memoirs. But neither examines female or male texts as gendered voices.¹² Langer's (1991) work on memory, for example, categorizes Holocaust testimony as a unified body of literature.

In most Holocaust scholarship, "the particularities of women's experiences and reflections [on the Holocaust] have been submerged and ignored" (Rittner & Roth, 1993, p. xi). Yet as the larger over-all realities of the Holocaust have entered the "stock of common knowledge," using Berger and Luckmann's (1966, p. 41) terms, a second generation of Holocaust scholarship has paid increasing attention to a wide range of differences in existing and emerging stories--differences between concentration camps, between religious and secular Jews, between Jews and non-Jews, between nationalities, and between women and men. As Holocaust scholar Marlene Heinemann (1986) argues,

the study of Holocaust literature has focussed primarily on the writings of men, whose perspectives have been taken as representative of the experience of all Holocaust victims. But to assume that Holocaust literature by men represents the writings of women is to remain blind to the findings of scholarship about the significance of gender in history and literature. (p. 2)

From selection ramps to death, women and men were separated in the camps. Owing to the setting and to "their biology, i.e., as child-bearers, and their socialization, i.e., as nurturers and homemakers" (Goldenberg, 1990, p. 151) their experiences were distinctly different. Goldenberg's words on the need to listen to women's voices from the Holocaust echo Heinemann's.

English language audiences know Holocaust literature primarily through male writers and have generalized those experiences to represent the whole. Narratives by women survivors, however, form a group that differs significantly from those by men. We are obliged to examine, separately, the lives of women and of men to determine the differences in the way they were treated as well as in the way they responded. (pp. 150, 152)

Feminist scholarship supports an antithesis to the notion of a singular story, and suggests that the experiences of women and men at Auschwitz were not only separate, but qualitatively distinct.¹³ Female voices among survivors tell distinctive stories of sexuality, friendship and parenting. The 1983 Conference, "Women Surviving the Holocaust" (organized by Joan Ringelheim and sponsored by The Institute for Research in History in New York City), was significant in promoting a feminist analysis of Holocaust survivors' stories.¹⁴ Initially, these efforts focused on differences between women and men in their accounts (taken as unmediated representations) of Auschwitz. Several have suggested that women's experiences in the

Holocaust (and their accounts of their experiences) were qualitatively different from men's. Many concluded that women's modes of survival were superior. As Holocaust studies moved into gender analysis, it generally looked at women's experiences and stories collectively. Scholars looked for gendered differences.

Ellen Fine (1990) has argued that women's use of literature in communal settings in concentration camps "was a life-sustaining force, a means of bonding and support, of moral and spiritual sustenance" (p. 93).

Sybil Milton (1984) speaks of apparent gender differences between men and women in their responses to concentration camp existence: hunger and food; housekeeping; and mutually supportive networks. She turns to memoirs as documentary evidence, and argues that women were better survivors.

Heinemann also argues that women's experiences in the Holocaust were qualitatively different from men's. She analyzed women's Holocaust narratives from a variety of genres and identified themes of sexuality, intimacy, and authenticity. She found three particular sex-based problems for women: sexual abuse and humiliation, including rape and prostitution; menstruation and amenorrhea, with related fears of humiliation and infertility; and maternity and childbirth. Her analysis goes far beyond the content of women's Holocaust writings to examine issues of genre, authenticity, subjectivity, literary norms and canon.

Smith (1993) notes an additional strength of biographical methods which look at women as groups. Such methods can give insights

into structural relationships and counter or intervene in "rampant individualism" (p. 396). This operates at two levels: the antithesis as a whole groups women survivors (and perhaps those who died) together; but the women tell collective and collected stories of the women and of individual women throughout their own stories.

Textual Support for the Antithesis

It is appropriate to begin a textual analysis of Auschwitz mem-oirs by placing the texts within gendered coordinates. For within Auschwitz, gender defined and sealed the fates of millions. Nazi ideology drew the parameters of life and death, of choice and non-choice, over a template of biologically-based classifications--

lineage, gender and individual deviations from the Aryan norm. The voices from Auschwitz speak repeatedly: women and children first, but for death, not life. The women and men who survived the initial selection at the train ramp, worked, ate, slept and died apart from each other.

My analysis of gendered pairs of survivors' stories furnishes ample textual support for the antithesis. Within women's stories, I found numerous examples of affective rationality: emphases on moral-practical reasoning, social integration, conflict resolution, and informal networks; and a denial that any absolute goal, including survival, should determine one's behavior. Turning to male memoirs, I also found abundant examples of instrumental rationality: emphases on survival by whatever means necessary, efficiency and official institutional ties.

Nomberg-Levi

Nomberg and Levi, professional writers after the war,¹⁵ are at their literary best when they speak through the voices and stories of others. They approach truths indirectly, taking the reader on a narrated and open-ended tour of a photo album labeled Auschwitz. Nomberg's (1985) stories, told through the voices of other inmates, are immediate, bound by time and place. She asks that the reader "listen to the story I am going to tell you and then you can tell what you think" (p. 110). Levi's stories have a quality of timelessness. His tales are universal in scope, a re-telling of the grand narratives of creation, good and evil.

In his last work, Levi (1988) speaks reflexively of his life-long adventure of story-telling:

I will tell just one more story, the most secret, and I will tell it with the humility and restraint of him who knows from the start that this theme is desperate, the means feeble, and the trade of clothing facts in words is bound by its very nature to fail. (p. xx)

For Nomberg (1985), human connections and stories are the essence of what it means to be human. To be human is to love and be loved, to have a story. The women of Auschwitz take on the flesh of humanity only when Nomberg can conceive of a past, a story for each. I tried to imagine, she wrote of the faceless women of the Leichenkommando "whose job it was to load the dead into the trucks, what kind of women they had been a few years ago, when they loved and were loved" (p. 115). She shudders in silent rebellion at the sexist logic which believed that youth and beauty could buy a reprieve from

death by gas. "She is really young and pretty. Why did they write her number down? I trembled at that terrible logic, as though there were some justification in killing the sick, the elderly, and the unattractive" (p. 29).

There are few female characters in Levi's (1979) tales, in fact, "in those days it rarely happened that one saw a woman close up, an experience both tender and savage that left you shattered" (p. 40). When Levi (1959) speaks of women, they remain within a private realm of maternal nurturing--a world on a collision course with the public world of death. Mothers care for their children in preparation for a one-way trip to Auschwitz.

The mothers stayed up to prepare the food for the journey with tender care. Would you not do the same? If you and your child were going to be killed tomorrow, would you not give him to eat today? (p. 11)

Nomberg (1985) juxtaposes stories of individual women with a chorus of women who live, breath and die as one. As they are forced to stand and watch the execution of Mala, a "heroine" who had attempted to escape, "one enormous sigh was heaved from their collective breasts. 'Mala, Mala'--a whisper issued from a thousand lips like a single sigh" (p. 103). They listen helplessly to children screaming "Mama!" as they are being burned to death, and 'a scream of despair tore out of our throats, growing louder all the time" (p. 82).

Levi's (1959) style of writing emphasizes authority and coherence of form. He wrote his first memoir "not in logical succession, but in order of urgency" (p. 6), later arranging the manuscript in

chronological order.

In his writing, a brutal instrumental rationality characterizes every level of life and death at Auschwitz. Without brutality and enormous luck, it was impossible to survive. In his last work, The Drowned and the Saved, Levi (1988) concludes: "The worst survived, that is the fittest; the best all died" (p. 82).

In The Periodic Table, Levi uses the chemists' paradigm of the elements as a metaphor for all of reality: Auschwitz, the Enlightenment, and the worlds of story and myth. He classifies his own family, Piedmontese Jews, with their complex history of wandering, as inert elements. There is mystery and turmoil. But this chemist dreams of bringing rationality into a world of chaos.

In the midst of his Auschwitz tale, Levi curiously presents the mythic story of Lilith, perhaps the first wife of Adam, perhaps the scandalous lover of God. On their shared birthday, Levi and the Tischler (the carpenter) tell stories of Lilith to explore mysteries of creation, sex and evil--and of Auschwitz. Unlike the male characters in Levi's stories, Lilith is the object, not the subject, of the story. It is not her story. Lilith, an icon of womanhood, is not fully human.¹⁶

Delbo-Amery

Born just one year apart, in 1913 and 1912 respectively, Charlotte Delbo and Jean Amery were two agnostic intellectuals, arrested in 1942 for their roles in resistance movements, sent to prison and

subsequently to Auschwitz. Their Auschwitz manuscripts appeared in print just one year apart, Delbo's in 1965, and Amery's in 1966. Both published extensively in Europe after the war, but are only recently gaining audiences in the United States.

Delbo, a non-Jewish member of the French resistance, was imprisoned in Auschwitz in January, 1943. She wrote her memoir immediately after her liberation, but waited twenty years to have it published. "I wanted to make sure it would withstand the test of time, since it had to travel far into the future" (quoted in Lamont, 1990, p. x).

Much of Delbo's (1968) writing contradicts the notion that Auschwitz was characterized by ruthless individualism. She describes the women she came to know at Auschwitz: "There were eight of us, our group of eight friends whom death would separate" (p. 20). She considers all women prisoners, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, as one. "We stood there motionless, several thousand women speaking every language, reduced to the beating of our hearts alone." Death, too, is universal. "The women who are lying there in the snow are our companions of yesterday" (p. 21).

For Delbo (1965/1968), the universal category of comrade can expand to include women and men, "and in the spring men and women spread the ashes [and] fertilize the soil with human phosphate. There has to be someone to drain the marshes and to scatter the ashes of the others" (p. 12).

Her long poetic lists of new arrivals, reminiscent of Whitman's

poetry, include women and men from every corner of the continent.

There are those who come from Warsaw with big shawls and knotted bundles/ those who come from Zagreb, women with kerchiefs on their heads/ those who come from the Danube with garments knitted by the hearth in multicolored yarns/ those who come from Greece, bringing black olives and Turkish Delight/ they are in white tie with shirt fronts that the journey has completely ruined. (p. 8)

Amery (1990), too, catalogues the inmates of Auschwitz, but he calls them by their professions: craftsmen, businessmen, professor, lawyer, librarians, economists, and mathematicians (pp. 3-4). Women are noticeably absent from his list. In fact, Amery never mentions the women of Auschwitz.

As an intellectual, Amery (1990) is incapable of speaking the camp slang, the only accepted form of communication between prisoners.

In a conversation with a bunkmate, for instance, who talked at length about his wife's daily menu, he [the intellectual] was anxious to slip in the observation that at home he himself had done lots of reading. But when for the thirtieth time he received the answer: Shit, man!--he left off. (pp. 6-7)

For both Delbo and Amery, there is no return, no reclamation of what has been lost. But for Delbo (1965/1968), there remains a possibility of recreating a home. The women seek refuge from the open fields during a rainstorm, and envision their shelter as a home. "We provide the house with all its furniture, polished, comfortable, familiar. We are huddled against one another. The house becomes warm, lived in. We stare at the rain wishing that it would last till evening" (p. 88).

For Amery (1990), there is no longer any home, and "the

realization that there is no return" leads logically and emotively to the conclusion that "there is no 'new home'[and] whoever has lost it remains lost himself" (p. 48). Amery seems to long for home, but lacks the women's skills in constructing--even temporarily in their imaginations--what he has lost.

Delbo and Amery speak of emotions, but in very different ways. For Amery (1990), emotions are the passion of the intellect--a means to fulfill the tasks of the Enlightenment.

Emotions? For all I care, yes. Where is it decreed that enlightenment must be free of emotion? To me the opposite seems to be true. Enlightenment can properly fulfill its task only if it sets to work with passion. (p. xxi)

He distrusts his senses. After eating a plate of sweetened grits, he is euphoric. But it does not last. "Like all intoxications they left behind a dreary, hangover-like feeling of emptiness and shame. They were thoroughly false and are poor proof of the value of the spirit" (p. 10). In the final analysis, Amery deeply distrusts his own emotions. The intellectual, he says, is immune to self-pity. "We don't believe in tears" (p. 68).

For Delbo (1965/1968), emotions are overt, immediate and are expressed within contexts of friendship and trust. In the inhuman world of Auschwitz, allowing another to cry in safety is a great gift. In a moving passage, Delbo tells Lulu, another prisoner: "I really can't take it any more. This time I mean it." Lulu takes Delbo's shovel, shields her from the sight of guards, and insists that she cry.

I did not want to cry, but the tears spill over, run down my

cheeks. I let them run down and when a tear touches my lips, I taste its saltiness and I go on crying. I cry. I think of nothing, I cry. I no longer know why I am crying. (pp. 117-118)

Drawing from a universal image of maternal love, she concludes, "It is as though I had cried on my mother's breast" (p. 118).

Fenelon and Laks

Of the pairs, Fenelon and Laks most clearly exemplify the contrast between affective and instrumental rationality: Laks writes of two instrumental goals: personal survival and musical quality, with the later taking precedence. For Fenelon, music is not a detached aesthetic; it is inevitably relational. Exploited musicians and beautiful music cannot exist together. At Auschwitz, music is tainted, false.

Neither Fenelon nor Laks portray themselves as isolated individuals at Auschwitz.¹⁷ Through their music, both created or were absorbed into networks: Fenelon's within a more private world with other prisoners in the women's orchestra; and Laks, all too often, with the powerful and official world of the SS.

Fenelon's (1976/1977) ties follow less official channels. She meets Clara, a fellow musician, on the train to Auschwitz, and feels a maternal wish to feed and protect her, to take her "under one's wing (p. 15).

I offered her some of my treasures: sardines, real ones in oil, sausage, pare de campagne, a Camembert, some jam. She gave me some foie gras and champagne. We swore never to leave one another, to share everything. (p. 13)

Fenelon speaks repeatedly of the conflicts which develop between Clara and the other women of the orchestra. Clara betrays them all as she trades in their friendship for affiliation with the powerful of Auschwitz.

For the remaining women in the orchestra, their fears are collective fears. They would live or die together; their musical skills and the whims of the SS were all that stood between them and the gas chambers. As the women discuss a new commander of the crematoria: "We'll have to play well for him. No wrong notes" (p. 229). As an anonymous mass of musicians, they exist only so long as they meet the needs of the SS.

Laks (1948/1989), by contrast, identifies with the Germans in their appreciation of music:

There really is no doubt that Germans are music lovers from birth and that nothing musical is alien to them. Their insistence on having music at a place like Auschwitz is only one example of this passion. (p. 69)

Laks' (1948/1989) major irritation (and what is most threatening) while at Auschwitz is the poor quality of the music. Musical taste and talent are the primary bases on which he makes moral judgements--of prisoners and of Germans. A German who loves music of a certain quality is, to Laks--at some level--a better, more sympathetic, German. He speaks warmly of the young Rottenfuhrer Pery Broad, "the most faithful friend of our orchestra" (p. 79). At his trial after the war, "there was a lot of talk about the numerous crimes committed by this whippersnapper. As far as I know, though, no one mentioned his uncommon musical talents" (p. 80).

For Laks (1948/1989), the SS enjoyment of music is humane, a sharing of culture. When one of the SS listened to music, "he somehow became strangely similar to a human being. His voice lost its typical harshness, he suddenly acquired an easy manner, and one could talk with him almost as one equal to another." "At such moments," Laks concluded, "the hope stirred in us that maybe everything was not lost after all" (p. 70).

He places his concern for his fellow musicians within a context of concern for the quality of music. He maneuvers for orchestra members to obtain indoor work, not to save their lives but to enhance the music and "enable them to retain the nimbleness of their hands and fingers and thereby ensure a better sound and a more rhythmic cadence of the marches" (p. 66). He does not want them to go hungry because "a well-fed musician plays better than a hungry one" (p. 97). Laks' (1948/1989) problem, the orchestra's problem, is that musicians continually died, "causing empty spaces in the chords, quite often in solo parts" (p. 48).

Laks (1948/1989) is ever ready to seize an opportunity. When the Czech camp of four thousand, including its orchestra, was murdered one day, Laks and his orchestra inherit their music stands and instruments:

We also inherited from the Czechs a few violins, a trumpet, and a priceless violoncello, whose lack I had painfully felt. Not only would it enrich the sound of our orchestra, but it would give me the opportunity of forming a string quartet.
(p. 91)

Fenelon's (1976/1977) descriptions of the women's orchestra have

a sexual subtext of depersonalization and degradation. They "have to get all tarted up" (p. 95) to play their Sunday afternoon concerts for the SS. The SS commanded the women of the orchestra to transcribe and compose scores, play marches as prisoners went to and from work, and perform private concerts for them in the evening-- an activity she describes as "nightwork" (p. 55). She sings on command for the SS with simulated passion and hidden disgust.

For me, singing was a free act, and I was not free; it was above all a way of giving pleasure, giving love, and I felt a frantic desire to see those three SS men stuck like pigs, right here, at my feet. Standing in front of those men with their buttocks spread out over their chairs. (p. 93)

She continues, and her language shifts: she is no longer standing, singing and fantasizing revenge. She is lying down, completely vulnerable.

I felt as though I were living through one of those nightmares in which you want to cry out and can't. That cry would save your life, enable you to escape from the attendant horrors, and yet you lie there open-mouthed with no life-saving sound emerging. (p. 93)

She writes of "the concerts which the SS came to, at times chosen by themselves, to relax after their 'hard' work" (p. 55). After a day of sending thousands of deportees to their deaths [in gas chambers] "they go back into their mess to have a quiet drink, play the piano, have a girl or they come here to listen to music" (p. 60).

One evening, after a hard day at the ramp, the brutal Herr Langerfuhrer Kramer and two other SS men demand, "Now, a moment's respite for all of us. We are going to hear some music" (p. 92). The orchestra plays Schumann's "Reverie" and Fenelon sings "Madame

Butterfly." The SS, particularly Kramer, are "appropriately" moved. The music "washes over him." Not without bitter irony, Fenelon (1976/1977) observes:

Satisfied, he had relieved himself of his "selection" by listening to music as others might do by masturbating. Relaxed, the Langerfuhrer shook his head and expressed his pleasure. How beautiful, how moving! (pp. 92-3)

Writing from within the literary community, Smith (1993) offers general strategies which feminist biographers and autobiographers have used to "challenge official histories, including that of the universal human subject" (p. 394). Several, however, leave the "certitudes of bourgeois individualism" (p. 395) intact, as does the antithesis. One may, for example, give what Liz Stanley calls "contrasting exemplars" (p. 46) of women who reject their given roles and challenge culturally approved modes of being and discourse.

A Reverse Antithesis

While women have traditionally been taught to read and write as men, women and men can resist androcentric discourse (Fetterley, 1978; Culler, 1982). Women and men alike can and do write from perspectives of both affective and instrumental rationality. For women as well as men, Auschwitz was not an ennobling experience. Friendships did not always triumph over betrayal. There were few opportunities for valor in this inferno. When I listen more closely to the men's voices, and not just to women's reports of men's behavior, I find many instances of community and mutual aid. The stories of Auschwitz are too complex to fit neatly into gender stereotypes. Women as well

as men tell countless stories of violence and treachery. Affective and instrumental rationality are not so neatly separated along gendered lines.

For Nomberg (1985), there is no grand narrative of sisterhood among the women prisoners. Rather, there are frequent accounts of jealousy and squabbling among women prisoners. Nomberg notes frequent violent fights

over a place in the food line, over a drink of water, over a potato in the soup, there would be fights over bread that women stole from under each other's pillows. They cried in desperation, yelled, and pounced at each other's eyes.
(p. 4)

Bereft of kin, Levi (1959) forms deep and intimate friendships with other men. In Survival in Auschwitz, he remembers his friend Alberto.

I did not manage to gain permission to sleep in a bunk with him. It is a pity. It is winter now and the nights are long, and since we are forced to exchange sweats, smells and warmth with someone under the same blanket, and in a width little more than two feet, it is quite desirable that he be a friend. (pp. 51-52)

Levi (1959) credits his survival to Lorenzo, not so much for his material aid, but by his goodness. For Lorenzo showed Levi

that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror; something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving. (p. 111)

Brutality among prisoners is not gender-bound. She describes the "chain of cruelty" which placed the newcomers (zugang) at the bottom. Those with positions of relative privilege used whatever methods were necessary to assure their own survival and their

relatively comfortable way of life: "Cruelty towards the weak and humility towards the strong was the rule here" (pp. 20-21).

What is selflessness, and what is calculated instrumental rationality? Most pointedly in Levi's work, these questions do not have clear-cut answers. Levi (1988) remembers with painful clarity, that when he found an extraordinary singular supply of water, he shared it only with his close friend Alberto. He speaks of "belated shame" (p. 81) for this "selfishness extended to the person closest to you" (p. 80). Alberto was kin and entitled to a share in the treasure of pure water. The other prisoners were not: "Daniele had caught a glimpse of us in the strange position, supine near the wall among the rubble and then had guessed" (p. 80).¹⁸ Levi further complicates our attempts to classify his behavior according to gender stereotypes. He prefaces this story with the words of a woman physician who also survived Auschwitz. "How was I able to survive Auschwitz? My principle is: I come first, second, and third. Then nothing, then again I; and then all the others" (p. 79).

Instrumental rationality is not limited to the stories of male survivors. Delbo (1965/1968) writes: "Taking one's tea means getting it by force, in a melee of blows, jabs, punches, screams. Consumed by thirst and fever, we are spun around in the melee" (p. 71).

In the extremities of Auschwitz, socialism--or selfishness--demands that scarce resources go to those most likely to survive. Delbo debates with herself whether to give a little girl water. "She is ill, worn out by fever, her lips discolored, her eyes haggard."

Delbo continues: "She is thirsty. She hopes I will leave her a few drops of water in the bottom of my mess tin." But Delbo finally decides, quite rationally: "Why would I give her some of my water? She is going to die anyway" (p. 82). Every morning she feels ashamed, and every morning she ignores Aurore's pleas. The logic of thirst and death is stronger than the logic of compassion.

Feminist scholars have characterized male stories as coherent and closed. Yet for Amery (1990), like Delbo, stories of Auschwitz are ultimately open-ended. In his preface to the 1977 edition of his book (first published in 1966) he writes:

I had no clarity when I was writing this little book, I do not have it today, and I hope that I never will. Clarification would also amount to disposal, settlement of the case, which can then be placed in the files of history. My book is meant to aid in preventing precisely this. (p. xxi)

And in spite of his disclaimers for emotionality, Amery (1990), places an extremely high value on being loved. In his soul-searching chapter on "The Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew" he explicitly equates being loved with being human, "[All of Germany] denied that we [the Jews] were worthy of being loved and thereby worthy of life" (p. 87).

Perhaps the antithesis characterizes these two musicians most accurately. Perhaps, too, I was too quick to judge, too quick to confuse exploitation with valor, an overwhelming passion for music with purely instrumental rationality. On a second and perhaps a third reading, we find exceptions to gender stereotypes. But, even more significantly, their stories transcend the essentialist

biological categories into which they were placed at Auschwitz.

Surprisingly, I also found Laks (1948/1989) breaking out of stereotypical male behavior. While he speaks glowingly of Germans in their love of music, it is three men, all Jewish Poles, of whom he writes with great warmth. In fact, it is their humanity, not their material assistance which he remembers with gratitude. They are "stars that will shine for me until my dying day. Who spoke to me as one equal to another, as one man to another, Pole to Pole, Jew to Jew. Thanks to them I felt like a human being again" (pp. 104-105).¹⁹ As with Fenelon, he tells the stories of his friends in detail. He has corresponded with them long beyond liberation.

Laks (1948/1989) writes of a rather exclusively instrumental rationality in his concern for the quality of music at Auschwitz. But he cannot be so easily dismissed. He borrows the rationality of the Germans, and knows full well what he is doing. As Kapellmeister, he knows that his German superiors have no concern for the health and well-being of his musicians. He arranges less arduous work for them by arguing that orchestral instruments must be protected against the elements, that to play well, the musicians must be well fed and their fingers kept warm.

Laks (1948/1989) is aware that his position in the orchestra was one of unparalleled privilege and luck, accounting for his survival for two and a half years where others did not live as many months. He writes angrily of those who assert that music had any utility for the thousands of starving prisoners forced to march to the beat of

his music as they went to and from their work. And he answers one woman who asks with resentment why he survived when millions did not, "I'm sorry, I didn't do it on purpose" (p. 15).

These textual examples serve to discredit any notions of universal female superiority in survival at Auschwitz and of gendered essentialism in survivor discourse. But to reverse or blend the categories merely leads us to a foregone conclusion: women can speak as men, men can speak as women, and both can borrow from the other gender's discourses.

Joan Ringelheim's (1984, 1985, 1990, 1993) work is unique in feminist Holocaust scholarship. It pushes the frontiers of feminist and Holocaust studies far beyond the dichotomies of the antithesis. She is remarkably reflexive in her critique of directions in which the new field of feminist scholarship on the Holocaust is moving (including a critique of her own contributions to this).

Ringelheim (1985) turns issues of gender differences around, and warns against assuming that women's survival strategies were positive. She argues against a cultural feminist view which looks at individual responses and ignores the context of gender-based oppression surrounding supposed strengths of women. How does one evaluate survival mechanisms learned through pre-camp oppression? What prices have women paid for their survival? Were friendships and interpersonal ties uniformly positive? Have women survivors transformed their stories in culturally acceptable ways in order to live with themselves in the present--are they in part deceiving themselves

when they emphasize friendship as a means of survival? These are difficult and painful questions. Yet these issues must be faced if we wish to examine these memoirs with depth and integrity.

Valorizing women's stories and experiences which arise out of oppression deflects attention away from larger issues of gender and racial tyranny and allows for Pollyanna endings for the tiny fraction of individuals who survived, as if they survived due to their resourcefulness, not primarily luck. "Ultimately, survival was luck" (Ringelheim, 1993, p. 383). Gender may have influenced how people survived, but being female did not increase women's chances of survival. In fact, the statistics she quotes show that per Nazi policies, Jewish policies and assumptions, and social organization, more women than men were killed.

One additional strength of Ringelheim's challenging and insightful analysis is her recognition, and indeed emphasis, on all stories as discourse. She wrestles with the fact that her recorded interviews with women are mediated discourse and not necessarily to be taken at face value. She concludes her 1993 article with complex and challenging questions on gender, the Holocaust and stories of survivors.

My analysis of written life-stories supports her questioning of the assumed advantages women had in camps. I noticed, for example, much more mention of fighting and bickering in women's stories than other scholars have mentioned. Ringelheim also analyzes the topics women survivors discuss, but, especially in her later

reflexive work, as discourse.

CHAPTER IV

SYNTHESIS

Limitations of the Antithesis

My antithesis follows much of the scholarship on gender and the Holocaust, and sensitizes us to the distinctiveness of male and female stories. It draws attention to important gendered differences in voices of female and male survivors, and disallows privileging a male voice as universal. However, the antithesis also implies that there is one essential and collective voice for women of the death camps and another for the men. In fact, as Smith (1992) notes, there is a tendency to construct multiple stories for men²⁰ and one story for any category of other. "Western eyes see Man as a unique individual rather than a member of a collectivity, of race or nation, of sex or sexual preference, Western eyes see the colonized as an amorphous, generalized collectivity" (p. xvii). If only women's voices are gendered, men's voices remain center-stage. In the antithesis it is easy to designate women's voices as other--as if there is one story for all women, and individual stories for individual men. The antithesis, with its comparisons of female and male voices, reinforces a totalizing essentialism.

Yet within the hermetically sealed world of Auschwitz, and in the memories and stories of survivors constructed years and decades later, particular individuals assert their singularity. Their

stories will not and cannot be squeezed into two-dimensional taxonomies. There are too many discordant sounds.

Thus, I could not conclude my analysis at the level of gendered dichotomies. Powerful and necessary as the second generation of Holocaust scholarship on personal narrative has been, it remains incomplete. Perhaps Linda Hutcheon's words (1993) on grand narratives and binary systems of categorization are most applicable to the antithesis, "such systems are indeed attractive, perhaps even necessary; but that does not make them any the less illusory" (p. 247).

As Jeanne Costello (1991) notes, problems with binary gendered analyses of women's autobiography

include the totalization of theories about women, the isolation of gender from other conditions as the only category of analysis, the application of preconceived theories about female experience to women's texts, the privileging of a few primary and secondary texts for analysis, the dependence upon traditional measures of aesthetic value, and the consideration of women's texts separately from those by men. (p. 125)

The more I explored the antithesis, the more inadequate it became. It reinforced the notion of woman as marginalized other and failed to account for striking differences within gendered discourse, and the totalizing oppression of Auschwitz. Furthermore, the anti-thesis spoke to me in much the same voice as Enlightenment rationality which goes hand in hand with bureaucratic structures at the core of the Holocaust. Any dichotomous analysis of other reinforces ideologies of domination. As Nancy Fraser argues (1989), dichotomies such as Habermas' categories of instrumental and practical reasoning are inherently ideological and counter-factual, firmly grounded in

gendered subtexts. As such, they frequently mask implicit androcentric biases (pp. 8-9, 113-143). Yet much of the literature on gender and the Holocaust, including my own antithesis, echoes this dichotomy.

With the obvious difficulties in the antithesis, I considered several options. First, as I discussed in the previous chapter, it was not difficult to find textual support for reversals of the antithesis. Each memoir contains instances in which women and men violated gendered norms for behavior and reasoning. Unfortunately, the limitations of the antithesis restrict the usefulness of this option.

I turned to the works of Theodor Adorno (1974) to better understand some of the connections between the rationality of the Enlightenment, domination and the Holocaust. Adorno, with Max Horkheimer, argues that the "urge for equality" (p. 170) and object-ivization of individuals are outgrowths of Enlightenment, and are tied directly to Nazi ideology. He further argues that "anti-Semitism [is] always stereotyped thought [in which] judgements are based on blind subsumption" (pp. 201-202). By such logic, any element of society which cannot be subsumed into the identity of a whole "stand[s] out as the disturbing factor in the harmony of the national society" (p. 185), and is not fully human. Adorno does not address issues of gender, but warns again a mentality in which "victims are interchangeable" (p. 171). I began to suspect that the antithesis lends itself to stereotyped thought, and subtly reinforces an ideology of subsumption. Does not the antithesis merely add another

master narrative, that of women survivors as other, subsume their voices into a single story and leave male stories center-stage?

Adorno's warnings against subsumption anticipate arguments of poststructuralists against dominant master narratives.²¹ Much of postmodernism is based on the works of Jean-Francois Lyotard. Holocaust scholars have looked to his work for insights into modernity, narrative and memory, but seldom acknowledge the gendered nature of experience, discourse and scholarship.

I am drawn to a postmodern critique of grand narratives and singular universal voices, and appreciation of a multitude of narratives and stories. The past and the present are not static, but interdependent and evolving. The quest to discover a true story of the past is relinquished and replaced with an open view of a constructed past--a past "open to revision" (Greene, 1991, p. 305). Individual and collective stories form complementary and overlapping access to truths of the past. "The truth in history is not the only truth about the past; every story is true in countless ways, ways that are more specific in history and more general in fiction" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 229).

Lyotard calls multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy (Best & Kellner, 1991) as antidotes to modernity's "search for a foundation of knowledge, for its universalizing and totalizing claims, for its hubris to supply apodictic truth, and for its allegedly fallacious rationalism" (p. 4). His work on pluralism echoes some of Arendt's (1978) writings on plurality as "one of the basic existential conditions of human life" (p. 74).

I also considered a postmodern approach to gender, rationality and discourse. I would attempt to obliterate the dichotomy of the antithesis altogether and explore ways in which memoirs privilege one type of rationality over another. I would then deconstruct the very notion of rationality itself, and focus on the indeterminacy of each text and each story. Although intellectually appealing, this option brought me too far afield from the memoirs and the events of Auschwitz.

I choose another approach. I looked again at feminist scholarship on the Holocaust, and found a non-essentialist and reflexive perspective in the works of Joan Ringelheim (1990). There are many pasts, many stories to the Holocaust. "[N]o two Jews experienced what is called the Holocaust in quite the same way. There is no time, there is no place that is the same for everyone, not even Auschwitz" (p. 143).²²

I chose to listen to stories of Auschwitz as a multitude of voices, each universal and gendered, each singular and particular. Not only are there many texts of Auschwitz, but there are multiple voices within each text. For, as Camilla Stivers (1993) reminds us, "subjectivity (and writing) is always already filled with the voices of others" (p. 419). I listen, not only for a single dominant voice or for dichotomous gendered voices, but for voices which insist that some remnant of the individual's story be salvaged. These stories rebel against a fascist ideology of anonymity and total domination and make strange or defamiliarize monolithic and dichotomous conceptions of that time and place.

My critiques of the antithesis are woven from intellectual traditions of feminism, postmodernism, Hannah Arendt, and Michael Bakhtin. I attempt to listen more closely to the voices, and to hear the polyphony within each text, the many voices of each survivor and the various intonations of each voice.

I borrow critical theory's emphasis on relationships between history, culture, and aesthetics. From literary studies, I use Bakhtin's ideas of polyphony and heteroglossia. I also draw from feminist studies' to understand the ways in which gender shapes experience and discourse. I challenge the purported universality of male Holocaust discourse and the stereotypes which frame many gendered studies of Auschwitz. My research gives credence to marginal voices and recognizes their stories as vehicles for counter-memories. My goal is to develop an integrated approach for the understanding of Auschwitz memoirs as texts of memory.

For me, gender permeated but did not determine every aspect of each work. I could not neatly section off portions of content or style (e.g., reproductive concerns and narrative closure) and label them alone as gendered. But neither could I find in the works a clear pattern of female experience, rationality or discourse. Every supposed pattern revealed itself as a totalizing stereotype, ruptured by counter-example, and discourse on all together divergent planes.

Synthesis as Plurality and Polyphony

Plurality or polyphony is more true to events and the memoirs

than either a metanarrative or a gendered dichotomy. "Any universalized concept of 'woman'" is, in Smith's (1993) words, "inadequate" (p. 397).

As I reviewed the literature on stories, autobiography and plurality, I frequently came across references to the works of Hannah Arendt. Seyla Benhabib (1991), for example, uses Arendt as a springboard for dialogue with Habermas, the Enlightenment, ethics, modernity and postmodernity. But her discussion of Arendt is most helpful here in her explorations of plurality (p. 138), the webs of "narrative histories--both one's own and those of others" (p. 129) in which all action and all interpretation is situated, and of theorists as storytellers (p. 91). While Benhabib draws from postmodernism and Arendt to argue against grand meta-narratives, she gives scant attention to multiple stories, voiceless (dead) victims, and power and totalitarianism--a situation in which power differentials are absolute. Turning directly to Arendt, I found that she places story central to scholarly endeavor. The theorist emerges as storyteller, culling and constructing individual and all-encompassing stories from societal webs of narrative and story. Story is neither static nor monolithic. It is always already emergent, plural and dialogic.

I turned again to the work of Sidonie Smith (1987) in my critique of the dichotomies and essentialism of the antithesis. In her exploration of gendered binary opposites, Smith is most critical of essentialism as "reified notions of 'masculine' and 'feminine' selfhood" (p. 49).

Unfortunately, much of Smith's writing remains psychological. While she opens the door for a more sociological approach to autobiography in her discussions of the third generation of autobiographical scholarship, readers and cultural stories which constitute autobiography, these discussions are brief and underdeveloped. She also minimizes the socially dynamic quality of all discourse. Wiesel and Levi may have written their earliest works from the margins, but their voices (particularly Wiesel's) are anything but marginalized today, protestations by Wiesel notwithstanding. Will female voices follow similar paths as they are rediscovered? She alludes to the possibility of other sources of marginality such as class and ethnicity, but only within the context of women's voices as doubly or triply marginalized.

There has been much debate over if and how the Holocaust was historically unique. I believe that it was, but for this dissertation, I wish to shift my attention to an issue more immediate for inmates of its work and death camps. In the words of Auschwitz survivors, the world of Auschwitz was not only without precedence, but also totally other. It was a total institution unlike any other they had known. It was another planet, hell, an upside down world, a betrayal of all expectations, a surrealistic nightmare. Many survivors write of their post-Auschwitz existence as a wrenching split between their day-to-day lives and their memories of unfathomable horror. Within this hermetic world, degradation and violence, privilege and culture, interpersonal relationships, religiosity and even

language take on frightening new and twisted meanings. Survivors write of Auschwitz not so much as a microcosm of the known world as a world of chaos in which the norms by which they have ordered their lives have been obliterated. It would be both true and too simplistic to say it was an inversion of the outside world.

Bakhtin and the Grotesque

In thinking of Auschwitz as an inverted world of chaos, I again turned to Bakhtin and found myself fascinated by his concept of the carnivalesque. In such a context, power relationships are inverted and subverted, but only temporarily, and with the tacit approval of those in power. I became increasingly uncomfortable with the notion of carnival as applied to Auschwitz. It presumed too much autonomy on the part of inmates, and there is an emancipatory moment in carnival, a hint of the temporality of power relationships. And the notion of Auschwitz as carnival makes a mockery of unimaginable suffering. In spite of its game-like qualities for a privileged few, (games of deception, subversion and power), Auschwitz was anything but play. The first-person stories we have are from those who--through timing, privilege, powerful connections, luck--survived. It is easy to read valor and subversion into their stories and assume these were possibilities for all who disembarked from the trains at Auschwitz. But we know better. The world of Auschwitz is cruel and ugly, without redemption.

Yet aspects of the carnivalesque remained in my thoughts as I re-read the memoirs. I read repeatedly of--to use Bakhtin's terms

grotesque and ironic depictions of rationality. Following Patterson's (1992) work on silence, Bakhtin and Holocaust writing, I noted that the grotesque is a central aspect of the carnivalistic, and degradation is the essence of the grotesque. The polyphony of voices from Auschwitz is neither joyful nor humorous, but grotesque and bazaar. The grotesque is an ugly upside down world, a world of the bizarre, the incongruous and the irrational. Grotesque reflects the horrors possible when games of life and death are played out under conditions of hierarchical and absolute power of life and death; the grotesque reflects feeble efforts of those without power to subvert the bizarre totality in which they are immersed. Here and there a rare murmur subverts the deadly rationality of Auschwitz. Good and evil, loyalty and friendship, female and male behavior: the contours are no longer recognizable. As Yiddish poet Kadia Molowsky wrote in Howe (1976): "Pack in all my blackened pots. Their split lids, the chipped crockeries. Pack in my chaos with its gold-encrusted buttons, since chaos will always be in fashion" (p. 454). Gold, no longer a emblem of beauty, purity and abundance, evokes images of golden teeth torn from corpses' mouths, of tarnish and decay.

But I found that when applied to Auschwitz, Bakhtin's use of the grotesque can be also problematic. As with carnival, he allows potential for emancipation in the grotesque, and minimizes the effect of power. As Arendt (1973) and Aaron (1993) wrote, the central goal and purpose of Auschwitz was total domination. As a prototype of totalitarianism, Auschwitz was a world where everything is possible.

One of the few sociological works on Bakhtin is Michael Gardiner's (1992) incisive manuscript on Bakhtinian dialogics and ideology. He argues that while Bakhtin is frequently idealistic and even utopian, his critique of the monologism of the Enlightenment is an perceptive condemnation of European domination, "scientific rationalism, utilitarianism and positivism" (p. 169). Perhaps as discourse of the grotesque, survivors' memoirs can offer resistance to the domination and monologism of Auschwitz. But it would be most inappropriate and inaccurate to suppose that the grotesque in the events of Auschwitz contain emancipatory potential in themselves.

As I explored the nuances of Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism, polyphony and the grotesque, I found that his concepts are consistent with feminist theory. Feminist scholars such as Dale Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry (1991), Sheryl Stevenson (1991), Diane Price Herndl (1991) and Clair Wills (1989) contend that Bakhtin's writings offer support for honoring the voices of women, and resisting totalizing monologism of dominant male voices. They also argue against a single gendered voice speaking for a generic category of women.

According to Bauer and McKinstry (1991),

the object is not, ultimately, to produce a feminist monologic voice, a dominant voice that is a reversal of the patriarchal voice, but to create a feminist dialogics that recognizes power and discourse as indivisible, monologism as a model of ideological dominance, and narrative as inherently multivocal, as a form of cultural resistance that celebrates the dialogic voice that speaks with many tongues, which incorporates multiple voices of the cultural web.
(p. 4)

My textual analysis reveals grotesque and ironic depictions of rationality, and the heteroglossia of voices, from Auschwitz--not

joyful nor humorous, but grotesque and bazaar. Good and evil, loyalty and friendship, female and male behavior: the contours are no longer recognizable.

In the synthesis, grotesque violence emerges as the essence of Auschwitz's institutional organization. Each voice reveals its own experience of that totality. At times these voices also reveal a particular humanity and subversion of the deadly rationality of Auschwitz.

Nomberg-Levi

Of the three pairs, Nomberg and Levi best exemplify the polyphony, heteroglossia and indeterminacy of Auschwitz voices, the dialogism between contradictory rules of behavior, and--at times--their own lack of narrative authority. Their voices alternate between what Bakhtin (1981) calls authoritative discourse and internally-persuasive discourse (p. 424).²³ With the stories of Nomberg and Levi, we take a journey, to use Levi's (1988) phrase, into a "gray zone [a place with] "an incredibly complicated internal structure which contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge" (p. 42), and the lines between good and evil, and between gendered expectations are blurred.

Within layer after layer of story, Nomberg (1985) insists that the reader question simple dichotomies of good and evil, of innocent and guilty. Of one prisoner, a German communist, she writes: "I had heard many different stories about her. In each situation she was a

different person. I cannot judge Orli. I will not even try" (p. 41). And of another, a religious Slovakian, she writes, "[They] told me stories about Cyla. When she first came to the camp, she was barely fifteen years old. She came from a well-to-do Jewish family, religious and highly respected" (pp. 53, 54). "Today," Nomberg concludes, "she is eighteen years old and has the heart of a criminal capable of committing murder" (p. 55). Perhaps, Nomberg suggests, any of us could be Cyla.

Nationality and ethnicity often challenge gender as a master status. German Jewesses, in particular, expected special treatment because of their (perceived) Teutonic status. Nomberg describes a scene which belies any images we might have of universal sisterhood among the women prisoners at Auschwitz: "I am German, not Jewish," one of them, an older woman, kept repeating. They can't treat us like this." Thinking of themselves as Germans, these prisoners wanted nothing to do with Polish prisoners. They "despised" Polish-Jewish prisoners, "their fellow victims, more than they hated the SS" (p. 19).²⁴

Let us return to the story of Lilith which I presented in the antithesis. In nine short pages it captures the richness of storytelling and the complexities of gender relations. Levi suggests (and perhaps rejects) the possibility that she is ultimately responsible for Auschwitz. Levi (1979) invites us to question stories, meanings, and perhaps even gender stereotypes. He turns upside down, then obliterates, binary opposites such as gender stereotypes. To the

male gaze Lilith is the mysterious embodiment of the complexities of life itself. It is a story within stories, a story about stories, and of truths within conflicting truths. "I won't guarantee that I myself didn't add something, and perhaps all who tell them add something: and that's how stories are born" (p. 42).

Levi (1979) does not guarantee the veracity of his story. Indeed, he deconstructs his story even as he tells it. "The stories [of Lilith] are many. I'll tell you a few of them, because it's our birthday and its raining, and today my role is to tell and believe; you are the unbeliever today" (p. 41). Levi's story of Lilith is a story within stories, truths within conflicting truths. Lilith has many guises: she is the first woman, the first to insist on "equal rights or nothing" (p. 42), a she-devil, God's lover. Levi draws into question his version of the stories of Lilith, and we are left with this possibility for yet another story, her story.

In the antithesis, gender--particularly the status of motherhood--defines the social world. Yet within Auschwitz motherhood was twisted by an impossible logic of survival, and the polyphony of voices is not bounded by gender. One story can be told with more than one voice. The women sometimes often found dead children in suitcases: According to Nomberg (1985),

imagine, I unpack a valise, and find a dead girl in it. She must have been about two years old. The mothers hid the children in the hope that once they got them into the camp they and the children would remain together. (p. 76)

Yet twenty pages later, Nomberg gives a contrasting interpretation of this all-too-common phenomena, where she contends that in route to

Auschwitz some mothers hid their infants in suitcases in attempts to save themselves at the cost of their children (p. 98).

The SS had determined that newborns who survived their arduous births at Auschwitz were to be killed along with their mothers. To save the mothers, the women delivered in secrecy. Women from the infirmary suffocated the newborn or gave it a lethal injection before it took its first breath. "The mother is told that the baby was born dead" (p. 69). Nomberg tells a story of one woman, Esther, who learns of this practice, and protests against the hideous practical reasoning of the women of Auschwitz.²⁵

She resists the logic to which they have been coerced by the SS, and cannot comprehend--cannot absorb--the logic of the SS (that the unthinkable is possible). As a "naive fool" she is powerless and does not fully comprehend. Yet Esther recognizes the absurdity of birth and death at Auschwitz, resists this world, and "makes strange" its practices (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 402-4; Bauer, 1991, p. 678).

Esther believed--as perhaps all mothers do--that her child would be too beautiful for anyone to kill. Esther gives birth to her son in the infirmary. With great pride and delight she nurses him. On the third day, Mengele arrives at the infirmary and, without a second thought, sends Esther and her splendid baby to their deaths. "She went naked, and in her arms she held the baby. She held it up high as though she wanted to show them what a beautiful and healthy son she had" (p. 71).²⁶

For Levi (1988), rational behavior--the very idea of rationality, whether instrumental or affective, at Auschwitz--is inherently

ironic. Levi describes the degrading and militaristic "bed-making" ritual. In his telling, the scene resembles an episode from the "Key-Stone Cops"--but the objective is survival, not comedy.²⁷ The beds (such as they were) were wood planks, mattresses were thin and filled with wood shavings; pillows were torn and filled with straw; two men slept in each bed. After reveille, all beds had to be made immediately and simultaneously and perfectly. "It was therefore necessary for the occupants of the lower bunks to manage as best they could to fix mattress and blanket between the legs of the tenants of the upper levels" (p. 117).

Levi (1988) describes the "frantic moments" during bettenbaum: "The atmosphere filled with dust to the point of becoming opaque, with curses exchanged in all languages." After this frenzy of activity, "each bed must look like a rectangular parallelepiped with well-smoothed edges, on which was placed the smaller parallelepiped of the pillow." There were, of course, consequences. Anyone who did not properly make the bed was "punished publicly and savagely" (p. 117). There is incalculable brutality and death, it must be administered within bureaucratic order and discipline.

Delbo and Amery

In Delbo and Amery's writings, the grotesque irrationality of Auschwitz comes through as a dominant theme. "One is" Delbo (1965/1968) writes, "at odds with all reason" (p. 18) where words can no longer "reawaken reason" (p. 79). There is neither affective nor instrumental rationality, but, to use Horkheimer's words, an "eclipse

of reason." Those arriving at Auschwitz "expect the worst. They do not expect the unthinkable" (p. 6).

Knowledge leads to death: "it would have been better never to have entered and never to have found out" (p. 12). The refrain of "Try to look, try to see" (pp. 95, 96, 97, 99) turns to a cry of "Do not look, do not listen. Do not think" (p. 120), and those who know "screamed because they knew, but their vocal cords had ruptured in their throats" (p. 40).

Delbo's writing is permeated by a disembodied unreality. At times she tells her story as a nightmarish surrealistic theater, set apart from rest of world. She weaves together past and present, then and now, here and there in an eternal present. All takes place in a "time outside of time" (p. 37). She gives her chapters names such as "The Day," "The Next Day" and "The Same Day." Even the present is oddly one with the past, "And now I am sitting in a cafe writing this story--for this is turning into a story. The weather clears, it is afternoon? We have lost track of time" (p. 31).

She speaks of laughter, but it is a silent mocking laughter. She tells of running a gauntlet of blows from clubs and belts, and compares herself to a disembodied and decapitated duck. "And then I felt like laughing. Or rather, no, I had seen a double of myself wanting to laugh" (p. 45).

Familiar scenes are ripe with betrayal: a drink of water, a flower, young children at play--each is twisted beyond recognition. Two healthy little boys play outside their home--but they are playing

an ugly game of commandant and prisoner (Delbo, 1965/1968, pp. 109-112). It is the grotesque taken to the extreme, in which "all that was familiar for us and friendly suddenly becomes hostile" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 48).

One of the most poignant stories in her memoir is of a pink tulip in the window of a house which she and the other women prisoners pass one day on their way to work in the fields. The house, with its white muslin curtains, and especially its flower, brings reminiscence of a world beyond the camp, and dreams for a return to that world. When the women learn that the house belongs to an SS officer of the camp, they feel bitterly betrayed: "we hated our memory and the tenderness that they had not yet dried up within us" (p. 69).

For Delbo, memories of Auschwitz are also nightmares beyond words. She captures the power of the word and imagery. Her deep physical and emotional memories of the Holocaust invade her consciousness as nightmarish sensations and images. In her 1985 collection of essays (beautifully translated from the French in 1990 by her friend Rosette Lamont), she comments on her ability to speak of the Holocaust most clearly from a detached perspective.

When I talk to you about Auschwitz, it isn't words that are swollen with emotional charge. Otherwise, someone who has been tortured by thirst for weeks on end could never again say. 'I'm thirsty. How about a cup of tea.' This word has also split in two. Thirst has turned back into a word for commonplace use. But if I dream of the thirst I suffered in Birkenau, I once again see the person I was, haggard, half-way crazed, near to collapse; I physically feel that real thirst and it is an atrocious nightmare. If however, you'd like me to talk to you about it. (pp. 3-4)

Delbo can and does use words to capture the nightmare reality of her

experiences. But to do so, she departs from straight-forward intellectual telling of the past, and focuses on one word, thirst.

One reviewer summarized Delbo's memoir as an exploration of silence and language, the non-referentiality or invalidation of the semiotic process itself. She comments, "One wonders with Charlotte Delbo just how it can mean anything that one has 'survived a death camp' and so ponders the chilling question buried at the heart of her work might it not have been better for the sake of coherence if no one had ever come back at all?" (Kingcaid, 1984, p. 108).

While Delbo is able to use her literary cultural heritage as a link to the past, for Amery, that cultural heritage is shattered. For him, torture and Auschwitz are unequivocally stories of unredeemable loss--home, country, language, cultural heritage, dignity, past, identity. He is and always will be homeless in the deepest sense possible. While Amery (1990) uses metaphors of Auschwitz as an inferno (p. 12) or hell (p. 35), and himself as one of those who has been resurrected (p. 64) or a Kafkaesk bug (p. 64), he also experienced Auschwitz as intensely and unremitting reality. "Nowhere else in the world did reality have as much effective power as in the camp, nowhere else was reality so real. In no other place did the attempt to transcend it prove so hopeless and so shoddy" (p. 19). He claims no possibility of redemption through suffering. He continues with the Christian metaphor of crucifixion to capture the permanence of Auschwitz, "It nails every one of us onto the cross of his ruined past" (p. 68).

Though she was a communist, with expressions of universal egalitarian humanity, Delbo's judgments of female prisoners are often bound in status. Polish women, women of the orchestra, the Jewish women--none are unequivocally comrades or kin. There are not only gendered voices, but nationalized voices, ethnic voices, ideological voices.

Delbo (1965/1968) tells of a time when she is faint with thirst and has no bread to trade for water. "I have no bread. I give away all my bread in the evening to get tea. [The Polish woman] tips over the tin and the water spills [to the ground]" (pp. 83-84). It is not clear here whether ethnicity or capitalism, or more likely some combination thereof, directs the Polish woman's cruelty. What is clear, is that to Delbo, this fellow-prisoner is unequivocally defined by her Polish nationality.

Delbo (1965/1968) excludes the women in the orchestra from the kinship of comradeship. They have their uniforms, their instruments, their very lives because less talented--or perhaps merely less fortunate--musicians have died. All is tainted.

There are little girls from boarding school with their identical pleated skirts and their hats with blue streamers. A band will be dressed in the little girls' pleated skirts. Do not look at the violinist. She is playing on a violin that would be Yehudi's. (pp. 8, 11, 119)

Neither are Jewish women fully comrades. In fact, Delbo complains that they "make trouble for us." In the same scene there is also a Frenchman, a member of the resistance; "We would brave anything to talk with him" (pp. 102-103). For Delbo, the boundaries of

kinship are fluid: ideology and nationality take precedence over gender and ethnicity; Polish women, women of the orchestra, Jewish women--none are invariably comrades.

Amery (1990) brilliantly captures the bureaucratic violence which characterized Nazi operations. He describes his torture by the SS: "Whoever was tortured, stays tortured. Torture is erratically burned into him, even when no clinically objective traces can be detected" (p. 34). "The boundaries of my body are also the boundaries of myself. My skin surface shields me against the external world. If I am to have trust, I must feel on it only what I want to feel" (p. 30).

Torture was not some accidental quality, but rather the essence of Auschwitz. Perhaps we should understand the existential--but permanent and definitive--effects of absolute power. Amery concluded, in words not unlike those of contemporary feminists, that torture is "like a rape" (p. 28), a permanent violation of one's very core of being.

Fenelon-Laks

The cruelty women showed each other at Auschwitz is not surprising. What is noteworthy is the basis on which lines of discrimination were drawn. The women's conductor, Alma Rose (1993), a German Jew and a niece of Gustav Mahler, defined Germans as "the best musicians in the world" (p. 117). Fenelon (1976/1977), a Frenchwoman vying with the Germans for cultural distinction, identifies the Polish

women prisoners as most brutal. She tells how, shortly after arriving at Auschwitz, Polish women prisoners roughly shaved her and stripped away her clothes. She promises herself, "'If I ever get out of here, I'll kill a Polish woman. And I'll see to it that all the rest die; that shall be my aim in life.' I always had to have an aim in life" (p. 19). As with Delbo, Fenelon does not define all other women prisoners as sisters, and the Polish women are categorically unacceptable. Social integration and regulation of conflict belong within the confines of a particular group.

Fenelon and Laks are aware that other prisoners categorize them as collaborators with the Germans, vultures who feed off from the deaths of others. Delbo, (1965/1968) for example, writes of the women's orchestra:

There are little girls from boarding school with their identical pleated skirts and their hats with blue streamers. They pull up their stockings carefully as they alight. They walk demurely five by five as though on a Thursday outing (p. 11).

As they march past the orchestra in the early morning, the women yell out to the musicians, "Quitters, bitches, traitors!" (p. 46).

On another occasion, the women give a concert in the women's infirmary, knowing that their audience will be gassed the next morning. Fenelon (1976/1977) finds humor in the performance and the orchestra's choice of works--from "The Blue Danube" to "Land of Smiles". The audience, however, found little humor in the performance. "Some shrieked like suffering animals, some blocked their ears, rocked in time. Some oblivious to our presence, were praying, hands clasped.

Very few were following the concert in the normal fashion" (p. 128). When the concert is over, Fenelon wonders as an afterthought: "Had we already become brutes? How could one explain one's indifference?" (p. 130).

Laks (1948/1989) gives a much stronger portrayal of the reaction of women in the infirmary, where a portion of the men's orchestra gives a Christmas eve concert. They begin with "Silent Night," played loudly to drown out the women's sobs. "From all sides spasmodic cries, ever more numerous, ever shriller, began to roll in on me: "Enough of this! Stop! Begone! Clear out! Let us croak in peace!" (p. 99). For Laks, such behavior is hard to understand. So much did music overwhelm his environment that he found unprecedented musical opportunities at the camp. "It is shameful to admit it," he writes, "but I left Birkenau with regret" (p. 124).

Fenelon's (1976/1977) use of humor--at first glance entirely out of place in an Auschwitz memoir--is best understood as a grotesque form of resistance within parameters set by the SS. On arrival at Auschwitz, and after selection at the ramp, she temporarily reflects: "'I wouldn't actually come here for a Christmas holiday, of course,' I said jokingly. 'The staff haven't quite been licked into shape yet; they're not what you'd call considerate'" (p. 17).

Later, under infinitely more oppressive circumstances, resistance takes the form of subtle subversion of rules against playing Jewish music. She disguises works of Jewish composers so that "the women in the work groups marched off to the rhythm of Jewish music,

and some of them clearly recognized it. Not a single SS ever noticed" (p. 125). She includes a piece by Mendelssohn on a program for the SS and titles it "Violin Concerto." She is confident that "None of them is bright enough to notice" (p. 125). Fenelon summarizes her use of carnivalistic humor at Auschwitz, "It was amusing to be able to sing a song of hope under their noses. Guile is the revenge of the weak" (p. 125).²⁸

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

I began with questions and I am left with more questions. I have asked questions about the Holocaust and stories, and struggled with questions about how my own story might fit into this web of stories. In organizing my analysis of these memoirs around three specific questions, corresponding to thesis, antithesis and synthesis:

1. In what ways is the story of Auschwitz a single story? How do Holocaust memoirs relate a universal human story?

2. How are Auschwitz memoirs informed by gender? How do these pairs of memoirs by women and men compare? In what ways do they memoirs affirm and reverse gendered expectations for discourse and self-writing?

3. How do Auschwitz memoirs exemplify a polyphony or a cacophony of voices which engulfs and transcends gender differences? What insights does this polyphony of discourses provide into the grotesque bureaucratic violence which formed the essence of Auschwitz?

I began my analysis with a thesis of two parts: universalism and--at the same time--masculinity. In my thesis I think of each story as metonymical--allowing one to access the whole through multiple yet particular interconnected fragments (Young, 1991, p. 303). The particular resonates with the whole. For me, the thesis rings

true in the respect that the collective voices of Auschwitz memoirists form a larger polyphonic text, giving me a richer understanding of Holocaust experiences. As a collection of voices grounded in a singular historical event, the memoirs form a single socially constructed text.

Yet I reject the masculine voice on both ideological and empirical grounds. A story of a specific man is particular, not universal. And there are large numbers of Auschwitz memoirs--many of considerable historical value and literary quality--by female authors. Universalism, as advocated by Des Pres, treats memoirs as unmediated records of the past, as recordings of objective events, or direct mimetic reflections of events. In this positivistic light, memoirs become static documents rather than vibrant discourses, and lose the richness of the particular and less powerful voices.

There is tremendous variation and subjectivity in all memoirs. All memoirists remember and portray events through their own particular filters, their own eyes, ears and thoughts. Each memoirist has a singular perspective(s) and a singular style(s) of story-telling. Some memoirists try to create coherence and meaning, as if recording history-as-it-is-happened, an objective account or chronicle of events. Others are more comfortable with indeterminacy and limited authority.

The antithesis, beginning in early feminist literature, and continuing with the textual analysis, confirms a certain gender predictability and stereotyping. Gender did count at Auschwitz. Women's concerns and stories were often different from their male

counterparts. But the total institution that was Auschwitz often overwhelmed gender. Delbo (1965/1968) despairingly contrasts the sterilization of the women and the men, and concludes: "And what difference does it make? Since none of them is to return. Since none of us will return" (p. 107).

The synthesis shatters the boundaries of thesis and antithesis. In pairing survivors, I found surprising parallels in style and content of works and a richness which reaches far beyond gender stereotypes. I have attempted to "sustain the tension between the numbing totality of the Holocaust and the stories of the individual, families, communities" (Huysen, 1993, p. 260).

Journal Entry, 2 February 1994

I have driven two and a half hours to Chicago, to the Spiritus Museum to see Judy Chicago's "Holocaust Project" Exhibition. I purchased her book on the exhibit several weeks ago, and have been eager to see it. It's mid-week, late morning and there are only half a dozen other visitors there. I start by visiting other exhibits, in particular the children's art work on the war in Bosnia, and work my way around to the main exhibit.

I begin with a half an hour video made by Judy and her husband, photographer Donald Woodman, with whom she has collaborated on the project. The video, almost painfully reflexive, is not so much about the exhibit as part of the project itself. The headphones which accompany the tour are again in Chicago's voice, and an integral part of the project. I take about two hours to tour the exhibit. It is a

broadly collaborative work, utilizing the skills of numerous "artisans" in layers of texture and time. I do not agree with her critics who argue that the story of the "Holocaust Project" is too removed from Chicago's family and experience to claim as her own. I think too of how the Holocaust has become part of the intellectual stories of many of us, and of the variety of texts and medium we use to tell these stories.

Journal Entry, 13-14 February 1994

I am in Washington D.C. to visit the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I spend Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. viewing the permanent exhibit. Joan Ringelheim, Director of Oral History at the Museum, has left me a ticket so I do not have to stand in long lines and jostle my way into the exhibit. I feel unjustifiably privileged. Do survivors and their children also receive advance tickets? Do they wait in endless lines to see and hear nationally sanctioned stories of their pasts?

As we enter the exhibit, we are classified by gender. There are two boxes of cards, one male and one female. A sign asks to take one (and only one, please) card, appropriate to our gender. On the card is the story of one victim of the Holocaust. Some are also survivors. I take two cards, one from each box. Both are survivors.

In spite of icy roads and sidewalks, the museum is crowded. The tour is self-guided and aided by computer technology. Once one has gained admittance to the exhibit, it is all very efficient. The

machinery of audio and visual tapes and interactive computer programs, runs very smoothly, processing an average of 4,200 visitors a day since its opening on 26 April, 1993. A guard at the beginning of the exhibit announces that there are over nine hours of videotape in the permanent exhibit, and the museum is only open seven hours. I feel rushed.

I begin on the fourth floor, with an introduction and exhibits of pre-Holocaust worlds. The third floor covers the Holocaust itself, and the second looks at post-Holocaust life. Throughout, The United States plays roles of not-so-innocent bystander and victorious liberator. I see exhibits which the signs say are duplicates of what is at the Auschwitz I Museum. None look familiar. I pass through a box car and a section of barracks from Birkenau. This is clearly an educational museum.

What I had visited in Poland was something all-together different. Again there are the books, pictures and other memorabilia for sale. Again, I cannot bring myself to buy anything here. I look and listen for stories from the Netherlands and of women. For the Netherlands there are dates for the invasion, survival statistics and the story of Anne Frank. I notice that women's voices are well-represented in collages of audio and video taped survivors' stories. On an interactive computer I look up the names of the memoirists I have been studying. I find the names of Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, but none of the women.

The next day I meet with two women on the staff from the

Holocaust Museum's Research Institute. We discuss the rather dismal status of scholarship on gender issues of the Holocaust and our works-in-progress. There is a meeting of minds, and I leave feeling that I have been given their blessings to pursue my research.

Reflections on Method

I have been asked why I have chosen to analyze survivors' published stories. Why not oral testimony? Why not personal interviews? I question the validity and reliability of interview data, and argue against privileging oral testimony. Yet when I have met with survivors and survivors' children, I become acutely conscious of perspective, my affinity for the written word, and the particularity of my own intellectual stories. Their speech resonates with an immediacy unique to those directly shaped by the events. I wonder if I am being presumptuous to even attempt to tell my version of what I have seen and heard and read. I listen, and in turn tell and re-tell what I understand from within the unique coordinates of my life story--as a feminist sociologist, a Dutch-American, struggling with questions of voices, stories and meanings.

I have used a "Noah's Ark" method to both construct and examine the antithesis and synthesis. The method is not without problems. Dichotomous categories are inherently simplistic, and may lead away from understanding. In the thesis, one voice speaks for the overwhelming dehumanization of Auschwitz. As I move from thesis to antithesis, the "Noah's Ark" method fits most neatly in the gendered pair analysis of the antithesis.

In the synthesis these pairs form a backdrop against which the inadequacies of gendered dichotomies become obvious. The dichotomous pairs have lost their initial tidy boundaries which worked so well in the antithesis. They are themselves voices in dialogic encounter with each other and with me, a reader. Collectively, they speak across and within gendered spaces as polyphonic voices of a larger written Holocaust text.

I am also aware of considerable arbitrariness in my categorizing disparate excerpts of various texts by various authors. Often one particular passage illustrated both antithesis and synthesis. Nonetheless, by pairing individuals rather than groups, I preserve unique voices and avoid the essentialism of the antithesis.

Although the synthesis is more complete than either thesis or antithesis, I do not wish to suggest an Enlightenment model of continuous progress in coming to understand Auschwitz. Yet I write from within and in opposition to aspects of the Enlightenment using words and methods which might suggest otherwise. As Hannah Arendt (1978) the "triadic dialectical movement--from Thesis to Antithesis to Synthesis" (p. 49) can be easily construed as a guarantee of infinite progress. I concur with Arendt that the process of negation in this dialectical movement "is an annihilating force that could just as well result in a process of permanent annihilation as of Infinite Progress" (p. 50).

I have borrowed from critical theory's method of concrete negation, retaining some of that which is negated (i.e., thesis and

synthesis) in the synthesis. But I side with Adorno and Horkheimer in their pessimism regarding progress, and against Habermas in his belief in the emancipatory potential of reason.²⁹

In my analysis of memoirs I have turned or spiraled inward-- from a broad supposedly universal story to dichotomous gendered stories and to particular stories within stories. As a sociologist I am uncomfortable leaving my analysis at this level. My thoughts reach outward towards issues of gendered stories and marginality, plurality and resistance, chaos and the grotesque. I consider, in turn, each of these issues.

Gendered Stories and Marginality

My dissertation is, in part, my attempt to give credence to a wider variety of voices, particularly women's voices, and to recognize the authority and validity of their stories. My work has been made possible because in the past decade, other scholars have resurrected--found, translated into English and published--a smattering of marginalized voices, particularly those of women. I am especially interested in the forthcoming English translation by Ruth Lamont of Charlotte Delbo's trilogy of Auschwitz memoirs.

Yet I struggle with questions of to whose voices should I listen, and listen most closely. In choosing only works published in English, I have followed some of the dictates of canon. Each work I have examined has passed the hurdles of publication and translation into English. I have chosen well-articulated stories over those

whose words and structures echo the chaos and confusion of Auschwitz.³⁰ I have chosen works which most clearly address my research questions and seem appropriate to my Noah's Ark method and an analysis of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. There is no archimedean point outside the range of Holocaust scholarship from which I have-- or even could--chose to whose voices I would attend.

To write from the margins is to simultaneously take on two voices. First, the writer takes on the voice and language of the colonizer, or dominant culture. Secondly, the individual is claiming a status as a subject, not merely an object of the colonizer. The marginal autobiographer cannot claim to speak with a universal voice. The writer's voices--survivors' voices and perhaps mine as well--are polyphonic.

The subjectivity of memoirs is one of their strengths and reasons for existence. Subjectivity proclaims the admittedly limited perspective of the memoirist; it also proclaims the memoirist as subject--not merely an object--with valid impressions, thoughts and perceptions. As I have seen with Levi's telling of stories of Lilith, memoirists may choose not to grant the gift of subjectivity to those of whom they write.

Spoken with voices which the machinery of Auschwitz intended to forever silence, all survivors' voices--female and male--are to some degree marginalized. Elie Wiesel wrote his tale And the World Was Silent in 1956, long before he was well-known. Lesser known voices, and the earlier stories of those such as Wiesel and Levi³¹ who have

earned literary reputations through their Holocaust writings, are most obviously written from the margins.

In the nearly fifty years since the Holocaust, processes of canon-formation have been operative for Holocaust literature. I have analyzed scholarly reviews, publication and translation histories, anthologies and educational uses for clues as to whose voices are heard most frequently and most prominently. Wiesel's story took on the characteristics of first generation autobiography. By every measure which I undertook, Night has been canonized by scholars and the media. Wiesel's rise to prominence places him far from the margins of discourse on the Holocaust and oppression.

Other survivors--Fania Fenelon and Szymon Laks, Charlotte Delbo and Jean Amery--had professional reputations before Auschwitz. Their marginalized identities compete with other identities--musicians, playwright, philosopher--for "master status." Neither gender nor survivor status alone determine one's degree of marginalization.

Thus there are degrees of marginality among survivors' voices. The body of Holocaust literature has a range of voices, from dominant voices heard through public media to marginalized voices, heard by few others. Male voices remain center-stage (and at times solo voices) in Holocaust scholarship.

Feminist theory suggests that all discourses are structured by gendered themes and relative positions of power and knowledge. All texts, female or male, purportedly objective or not, are gendered texts. But gender must be contextualized along with factors such as ethnicity, social class, nationality and ideology. Gender permeates

and inflects - rather than determines--discourse. Marginality is multidimensional. I return to Jeanne Costello's (1991) assertion that privileging gender leads to totalization. Any analysis of discourse, she concludes, must "situate gender where it belongs--in a matrix of historical contingencies" (p. 127).

Women's discourse is too diverse to be categorized simply in contrast to that of men. Gender is not unequivocally the singular constitutional determinate of these discourses. To focus exclusively on gender is to miss the rich and important interstices in the weave of survivors' lives.

Resistance and Polyphony

I have come to know about Auschwitz through a collage of texts and images, from journalistic accounts to oral history to memoirs (Markle, et al., 1992). I have listened to multiple voices speaking from one place and one time. While there was one event, there are multiple perspectives and many tellers. Stories of Auschwitz resemble a "Rashomon" play more than a unified omniscient documentary. Different survivors and even some of the perpetrators tell the same stories or legends from widely divergent viewpoints.³²

My study of Auschwitz memoirs points to the impossibility of a singular universal story of the camps or of any particular camp. None can legitimately claim to fully represent Auschwitz: 1942-1945. Each story is singular and irreplaceable. Rather than a single voice--be it female or male--giving a single narrative of the past, I find a "complex interplay of text or voices" (Parada, 1987, p. 208).

Rentschler's (1985) words on history, film and the Holocaust speak as well to Holocaust memoirs. Instead of a single narrative of the past, history "appears as a result of semiosis and amounts to a many-voiced phenomenon [in which] stories inevitably contain a multiplicity of embedded narratives" (p. 80). Each story underscores the particularity of each human experience and the individual humanity of each victim.

Stories most powerfully reveal certain truths and make the realities of the Holocaust accessible to the imagination in unique ways. But to exist as history, stories must be inscribed, purposefully constructed or re-membered as what Foucault termed "counter-memory" (Lourie, et al., 1987, p. 3). By telling another's story one can restore his or her experiences to history (Parada, 1987, p. 205).

As Brockmann's (1986) analysis of the Bitburg incident showed, unofficial stories may challenge the distorting mirror of official narrative, and attempt to disturb, subvert, and transform existing order and interpretations of the past. "History and memory are anathema to ruling ideologies, for history is always a continuing story and carries with it the implication of the overcoming of the present as well as the past" (p. 160).

Resistance to total domination (Arendt, 1973) demands that the particular be celebrated, not incorporated into a single story or grand narrative.

Total domination strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual. Totalitarian domination seeks to achieve this goal through ideological indoctrination of the

elite formations and through absolute terror in the camps.
(p. 438)

When I think of survivor memoirs as texts of resistance, I think first of what they are not. They are not necessarily emancipatory. While they may contain stories of rescuers or "resistance fighters" they are neither epistemologically nor teleologically equivalent to the resistance of fighters, e.g., in Warsaw.

Yet I wonder with Smith (1993) whether "the potential benefits of polyphonic interpretation give way before commodified cacophony. As a readers we end up only with a kind of touristic experience" (p. 403). While commodification and tourism seem most inappropriate, I too have been a tourist of commodified Holocaust texts. And I wonder if cacophony captures some of the grotesque chaos which the more neutral and harmonious word polyphony misses. Each voice reveals its own experience of that totality. But together, individual voices join together in a dissonant polyphonic cabal.

Chaos and the Grotesque

My analysis points toward what might seem to be an oxymoron: bureaucratic violence. Violence permeated every aspect of life and death at Auschwitz. But violence flourished not because of perpetrators or victims personalities, but because of the totalitarian structure of Auschwitz. My thoughts on chaos and the grotesque echo Hannah Arendt's writings on totalitarianism and evil. She points away from individual psychological explanations for the violence of Auschwitz, and places Auschwitz in the center of the bureaucratic

ideology of the Nazi regime. Total domination is a characteristic of institutions, not of personalities. Grotesque violence emerges as the essence of Auschwitz's institutional organization. In Auschwitz irrationality and chaos are juxtaposed with cruel bureaucratic logic. For Arendt Nazi logic demanded that the victims of concentration and extermination camps must be innocent. They need not be without blemish for their deaths are not sacrificial. But there can be no connection between their actions and their deaths.

At times these voices also reveal a particular humanity and subversion of the deadly rationality of Auschwitz. Most often, as in the story of Esther, resistance is deadly and only possible in the guise of the fool.

The machinery of Auschwitz went beyond the nihilistic principle that "everything is permitted" and demonstrated that in this world, "everything is possible" (Arendt, 1973, p. 440). While the resultant chaos and sense of profound unreality permeate all personal testimony, I do not however, concur with Arendt that therefore survivors' stories cannot lead towards understanding.

A word of caution: as with my method of concrete negation, Bakhtin's concepts of the dialogic and the grotesque all too easily point towards redemptive potentialities. Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque is closely tied to the notion of carnival, with its temporary challenges and ultimate return to pre-existing social relations. At Auschwitz the stakes were much higher--for those who died, for those who survived and for humanity. To look Auschwitz in the face

is to take a Kafkaesque journey into an abyss of Western Civilization and know that one is implicated by its multifaceted but only too-concrete reality.

Imagery: Visual and Audio

As I read and re-read the memoirs, my thoughts went back to my questions of silence, inexpressibility and Bakhtin. Although I have used Bakhtin's (1981) audio metaphor of polyphony, I am also drawn to his thoughts on "verbal images" and music as a metaphor for moving from seeing to hearing (pp. 259, 340). Metaphor and imagery work as powerful antidotes to the manner in which narrative structure can subsume and deny the reality of the Holocaust as an event. Images express that which cannot be captured in purely historical or philosophical discourse. As rhetorical devices they go beyond relaying facts to make events, experiences and impressions "imaginatively available" to the readers' mind and emotions (Langer, 1975, pp. 9, 30). Rhetorical conventions of imagery are fully appropriate and necessary for commemoration, but ultimately, they too are inadequate.

While I am most familiar with the word and as a vehicle for understanding, I've come to appreciate more and more that which goes beyond words. In the works of Judy Chicago and of the Hungarian artist and Auschwitz survivor Gyorgy Kadar, in the sculptures and memorials of Holocaust museums in Auschwitz and Washington D.C., in the metaphors of the grotesque and of verbal images, I believe lies one way of telling stories which are beyond words. The stories of

Auschwitz are auditory in their polyphony, their antiphony and their cacophony, but they are also visual as collages of layered pictures. As I look back on my photographs from Auschwitz, I begin to think of my blurred and distant pictures joining the close-up shots taken by survivors.

A photograph of Auschwitz from the air would show only a few hundred acres with demarcated coordinates. But, in fact, we have many photographs, many pictures taken from the ground from various angles, from countless perspectives, nooks and crannies, all from within camp. There is no god-like omniscient gaze over Auschwitz, taking in and recording every death, or even every life. These photographs have been stored in survivors' memories and developed slowly over a span of over 45 years. At times other pictures are superimposed on the original, and details rearrange themselves in the long and arduous process of development and printing. Some are in focus, others more blurred. A closer look at the photographs shows that their images are surrealistically fluid, even liquid, shifting very slowly, almost imperceptibly, under our eyes.

No picture--whether photograph, painting or video--can ever be a straightforward record of events. Yet, I wonder whether some more are more true than others? All pictures are mediated, but the skills of the photographer, the developer and the printer powerfully shape the ways in which they tell their stories.

Some, such as Levi, have taken multiple photographs, and developed them over a span of decades. He told his story in memoirs,

essays, poetry and fiction. He cannot not speak. At the end of a long career of writing and rewriting the stories of Auschwitz, he quotes from Coleridge's "Ryme of the Ancient Mariner" Until my ghastly tale is told/ This heart within me burns (1989).

I too write and rewrite. I also read and reread. I have grown very fond of the survivors whose stories I am retelling. I am grateful to them for making their stories known. For me, and perhaps for them, John Ciardi's words (1959), written of poet and Dachau survivor Josef Stein in "The Gift," ring true. "Clean white paper waiting under a pen is the gift beyond history and hurt and heaven" (p. 65).

ENDNOTES

¹Here and in the title of this paper, I use Auschwitz to refer to the events which occurred at the death camps at Oswiecim and Brezinka during Nazi occupation, not as names for the Polish towns.

²For a review, see Charles S. Maier, The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

³Although it may be impossible to articulate some memories in narrative form without negating their meaning, the lie may be necessary for survival once the violence has ended. Dori Laub, a psychiatrist, himself a Holocaust survivor who counsels other survivors of trauma, argues that although experiences of the Holocaust do not fit narrative structure, giving narrative structure to the memories of trauma is the only way survivors can move beyond the trauma and live in the present (1992). For an overview of recent narrative theory and representation see Robbins (1992).

⁴Elie Wiesel has become a phenomena in himself. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to trace the controversies surrounding his evolving role.

⁵There is an alternative voice of the thesis, Anne Frank, heard as far back as the early 1950s: "Anne Frank stood for all the Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, but she also stood for adolescent girls trying to assert their individuality in the complicated context of family life. Frank had written herself into being" (Rose, 1993,

p. 76).

⁶Memoirs differ from diaries in their relation to time. A diarist does not know the end of his or her own story, each story is infused with the diarist's constant knowledge that, to paraphrase Margaret Van Horn Dwight's 1810 pioneer diary, "If I [die] there will be an end to my journal" (Blodgett, 1991, p. 24). This is especially true for diaries or journal written under conditions of extreme danger, in which diarists do not know if any particular entry will be their last. In contrast, each memoirist is, by definition, a survivor, one of a small minority of those sent to Auschwitz who was still alive at the time of liberation.

⁷Dialogism as a method follows a process of concrete negation, in which discourses interact discursively and assimilate the words and approaches of prior discourses. For an example of this method, see Diane Price Herndl's work in which she develops a feminine dialogic to explore relationships between the novel as a genre and feminine language (1991).

⁸As David Rousset's (1947) writes in The Other Kingdom, "normal men don't know that everything is possible. Even if the evidence forces their intelligence to admit it, their muscles do not believe it" (p. 168). For Arendt as well (1973), the total domination and unreality of Auschwitz is the essence Nazi totalitarianism.

⁹It was first published in 1956, in Yiddish under the title, The World Was Silent. In 1958 an abridged version was translated into French. In 1960, the French version was translated into English in the United States under the title Night.

¹⁰There has been, however, a long-standing debate between Jurgen Habermas and Lyotard on modernity. Lyotard's 1984 work on postmodernism is, in part, a reaction to and critique of Habermas' ideas on legitimation crisis and the possibility of a "fully communicational society" (Jameson, 1984, p. vii). Habermas (1984, 1992), for his part, has written specifically against postmodernism, including Lyotard. In contrast to Habermas, Lyotard denies any global theory of legitimation. He argues that power relations remain intact, and consensus is only temporary and situational. Dissent remains vital and necessary in all communication.

Selya Benhabib (1992) has given a detailed and insightful critique of Lyotard's postmodernism in light of the contributions of Habermas. She has also offered a detailed analysis of the similarities and differences between postmodernism and critical theory in general.

¹¹Occasionally Linden takes a surprisingly positivistic approach to the stories themselves, treating them not as discourse, but as unmediated historical documents. She is much more reflexive in analyzing her own story and intellectual history. Yet her inductive ethnomethodology serves as a model for sociological studies of personal Holocaust narratives.

¹²To his credit, Langer's (1978) analysis of Delbo's work preceded most of the formal interest in women and the Holocaust and--by five years--the first conference on women and the Holocaust on March 1983. He describes Delbo's writing with admiration.

The poetic style freezes the horror instead of transfiguring it. Her language approaches the status of music with its lyric repetitions and incantations, though she seeks visual images equivalent to the rhythmic phrases of sound. (p. 203)

¹³Texts, whether of scholarship or of survivors' stories, are dynamic, informed by the socio-historic contexts within which they are produced and read. Thus, it is not surprising to find scholarship on Holocaust texts evolving. Various developments in interpretation offer their own insights; and each text is a different text in different times and places.

¹⁴See Katz and Ringelheim (1983) for conference proceedings.

¹⁵Nomberg was a journalist by trade. Levi, a chemist, retired from his position at the Turni paint factory in 1974 to write full-time.

¹⁶See Camilla Stivers (1993) for a discussion of why women need to be able to tell their own stories.

Having rejected women's historical status as the object of the male subject's defining gaze, feminism demands that those who have been objectified now be able to define themselves, to tell their own stories. This is essentially a claim that each human being occupies a legitimate position from which to experience, interpret, and constitute the world. (p. 411)

¹⁷Laks was apparently unaware of the well-known French singer's earlier (1977) work. He writes in his "Overture" to Music of Another World (1948/1989), "as far as I know, there is no book discussing in detail the real role of music in the life of the camps" (pp. 5-6).

¹⁸This incident was also etched permanently in Daniele's mind. When the two met again, months later in Byelorussia, Daniele accused Levi, "Why the two of you and not I?" (Levi, 1988, pp. 80-81).

¹⁹At other times, Laks (1948/1989) shows amazing elitism and insensitivity to other prisoners. He writes in bewilderment at the lack of gratitude other Poles showed when he attempted to correct their grammar.

Someone called out, 'Hey Felek, hand me that shoe laying there!' I shouted out, 'You say hand me that shoe lying there, not laying there.' My brother musician, but not in race, got down from the pallet, gave me two slaps, and screamed, 'You, you lousy Jew, are you trying to teach a Pole to speak Polish?' (p. 104).

²⁰Unless otherwise indicated, I use the words male and men as a particular category of privileged men: white, heterosexual.

²¹As noted most pointed by Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism is more useful as a means of deconstructing elements of society, but left to itself, it offers little in the way of direction or hope for change.

²²See also Young (1993, 1991, 1998) for explorations of inter-relationships between pasts of the Holocaust and evolving contexts in the present. His earlier work centers on literary texts, while his more recent examines Holocaust memorials as texts of collected memory.

²³As one might argue in the antithesis, I found that Nomberg uses more internally persuasive discourse, while Levi invokes both internally persuasive and authoritative discourse.

²⁴In 1992 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson edited a collection of essays on gender and women's autobiography. They aptly note that "locations in gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality complicate one another. Neither can one be oblivious to the precise

location in which the subject is situated" (pp. xiv-xv). Autobiography must be placed within its sociohistorical context.

²⁵This story is perhaps the best known of Nomberg's tales, and has been published separately by Amor Fati (Austin) in 1985 as Esther's First Born.

²⁶I've come across no stories by the women whose babies were killed at birth.

²⁷See Charlie Chaplin's 1940 movie "The Great Dictator" for a biting parody of Hitler and Nazi society.

²⁸Laks (1948/1989) tries to use humor, but it is sarcasm at best--perhaps this is because he is elite himself, and cannot really join in the carnival. He tells us that during his two and a half years at Auschwitz:

My situation continued to improve. I was not eating so badly, had a finely shaved head, and had made for myself a new striped suit, a 'fashionable' one, with bell-bottom trousers [and a] narrow-waisted jacket (pp. 60-61).

²⁹In this regard, Adorno can be seen as a proto-postmodernist.

³⁰I found the confusion of Auschwitz and of life after liberation most strikingly reflected in Elie A. Cohen's 1973 work, The Abyss: A Confession. Cohen, a Dutch Jew, worked as a prison-doctor at Auschwitz from September 1943 through January 1945. His wife and four year old son were murdered in the gas chambers there.

³¹Levi's position within Holocaust canons has changed tremendously since the publication of his first memoir. His memoir spans thirty years and five books. A 1959 reading of Levi's first work If This be a Man is not the same as a 1984 reading of the same work, now

translated as Survival in Auschwitz. In 1959 Levi worked as a chemist. His works were little known outside of his native Italy. But in 1984, his 1975 work The Periodic Table was translated into English, and his earlier works gained in popularity.

³²Several stories appear in several memoirs, including the ones in the study. No telling matches another telling in all of its details. The dancer, the lovers of Auschwitz, the girl who survived the gas only to be shot; survivors weave these myth-like tales into their own stories.

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