

mandel, to claim the mundane
train, as long as it's not in *my*
backyard

bostock, atrocity, mundanity and
mental state

borg, personal atrocity,
sodomasochism, and the secret
lover's unshared tryst

friedman, how to make your
students cry

shukaitis and lichtenfeld, tragedy
of the common

jeffries, police use of excessive
force against black males

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atrocity, outrage



and the ordinary

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Atrocity, Outrage, and the Ordinary
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To Claim the Mundane

Naomi Mandel

Issue Editor

for M.B .O'Sullivan

If you're a habitual visitor to these pages, you've probably noticed that this special issue of the *Journal of Mundane Behavior* differs from its predecessors in a number of ways. Our previous issues had contemporary photos on the cover – enigmatic ones, generally – that we hoped you'd puzzle over for a while before giving in and reading the caption and saying something like “aha! vaginal rings! Now I get it.” This time we've gone for the representational, and not only that, we've chosen a painting – an old, old painting about an even older theme: an ancient Greek legend; the fall of Icarus. As the story has it, Icarus and his father Daedalus were imprisoned on an island by Minos, king of Crete, and Daedalus built wings out of feathers and wax so that he and his son could escape. But Icarus, drunk on the power of flight and heedless of his father's warnings, flew too high, too close to the sun; the wax on his wings melted and he fell into the sea and drowned. Your basic Greek myth, meaning many things at once: Listen to your parents. Pride cometh before a fall. Technology can only get you so far. Remember your sunscreen.

Pieter Bruegel, a Flemish painter, created “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” around the middle of the sixteenth century, and you have to look closely to find the fall: all we can see of Icarus are his naked legs, half-submerged in the sea in the lower right-hand corner. Centuries later, at the dawn of WWII, the British poet W.H. Auden had this to say about the painting:

... everything turns away
 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
 Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
 But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
 As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
 Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
 Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

“Landscape with the Fall of Icarus” reverberated for us in many ways, not least because it resonated so strongly with many other fallings – a year ago this week people fell from the sky – but because it reminded us of the

strange marriage we've brokered here: atrocity and the everyday. To some, the conjoining seems counterintuitive: after all, isn't atrocity precisely what does *not* occur everyday? Doesn't speaking about atrocity in the same breath as our most mundane activities somehow demean it, detract from the compassion it demands and from the outrage it invites? Or is it more accurate to say that the co-existence of atrocity with the everyday is an atrocity in itself, one that demands our outrage? The answer lies, we believe, in the painting, in which, as Auden noticed, "everything turns away quite leisurely from the disaster." As we channel-surf through hunger, terrorism, disease and abuse – those of us, at least, who are fortunate enough to own a TV, pay for cable, and choose what we want to watch – the fact that atrocity *does* occur everyday, and that some of us have the cash, time and opportunity to sustain the illusion that it doesn't, should make us think about what we may be turning away from, what failures are deemed by us, like the ploughman, to be important, what is it that we, like the sun, have to do, and where is it that we, like the ship, have to get to that facilitates this comfortable aversion of our gaze. Just how do the mundanities of our everyday lives shield us from disaster? And if we were not shielded, could we have an everyday life? Could we have a life at all?

What Bruegel is saying -- and Auden, nearly 400 years later, is repeating – is that it is not callous indifference but the endurance of the mundane that is illuminated – albeit sinisterly – by atrocity. Callous indifference is a problem in itself, but it is, I think, less of a problem than it is generally made out to be. Most people – I may even go so far as to say all people – find the spectacle of human suffering disturbing – that's precisely why we channel-surf away from it. Those who sanctimoniously enjoin us to "care" are ultimately taking the easy way out: such sermonizing is easier (and far more comfortable) than addressing the uncomfortable fact that one can only care so much before the tragedy of other peoples' pain invades and ravages our own lives, paralyzing us with grief, drowning us in depression, destroying the reassuring mainstays of our everyday existence and making victims of us too. "Pity," Hermann Melville once wrote, "is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it."

How do we reconcile this common sense with pity's pain? Fields that need to be tilled with bodies falling from the sky? Melville's fatalism here is disturbing: do common sense and pity need to cancel each other out? Couldn't they collaborate somewhat more productively? The process of alleviating suffering is generally conceived as three-step: inform, educate, act. But there is an essential middle, invisible step: generating the tools that will integrate this knowledge and action into our everyday lives, providing us with a kind of mental split screen that we can't channel-surf away from, enabling us to mourn without being bereft, to care without needing to be cared for, to act on behalf of others without paralyzing ourselves. It is this elusive middle step that Bruegel is inviting us to ponder: the painting is not about Icarus, it is not about the

landscape. It is about the conjunction of the two, and only we, the viewers, can take that in. Bruegel is inviting us to contemplate none other than ourselves: what does it mean to be human in the face of disaster?

While thinking about this question we need to remember that to turn away from disaster is a profoundly human thing to do. As human beings, we value our bodies and want them to remain healthy. We value the surroundings – food, heat, institutions of support – that facilitate our remaining physically and psychically intact. Bodies broken, minds awry, the institutional "cracks" into which we can fall – all remind us unpleasantly of our fragility. Our everyday lives are designed to keep us from pondering that fragility too closely: we're too busy, after all, getting to work, making a sandwich, searching for a paper clip, filling out a form, to wonder what would happen if it all went away. Sometimes it is the smallest thing – trying to make a salad with a paper cut, for instance – that topple us, like Icarus, into the painful realization that despite the bastions of everyday life we've erected, we are no more than a body half-submerged in death: we are human, we are fallible, we are fragile, we are weak. Everyday life is designed to protect us from that realization, to keep us, for the sake of our sanity, at a safe distance from suffering that could too easily become our own.

Precisely for this reason, though, the spectacle of human fragility has its own attraction. Oedipus' self-mutilation filled theatres in Greece, and images of atrocity claim first place in our prime time. We surreptitiously glance towards car wrecks or gaze raptly at horrible images in books or on TV or our computer screens. That this fascination co-exists with abomination is not a sad, sad comment on contemporary culture – it, too, is what makes us human beings. But if we want to move away from this fascination with such spectacles and do something about suffering, we need first to recognize the role that the everyday plays in this crucial aspect of our humanity. Because suffering, and the fascination it compels, are located not in some distant jungle, some unpronounceable location, some exotic site, but in the most mundane aspects of our everyday lives – this is what Auden, in the same poem, called suffering's *human* position:

About suffering, they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking
dully along...
Even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

To say that suffering has a human position is to locate suffering firmly *within* that fortress of minutiae, a fortress designed precisely to keep suffering at bay. Be it visible, half-visible (like Icarus' body), or invisible, suffering is part and parcel of our most mundane activities. We know this, on some level – those of us who consume a disproportionate percentage of the globe's resources – but we cannot face this fact squarely: such pain, like space, is too vast to imagine. I propose that we turn our gaze away from this incomprehensible pain and towards ourselves: if suffering on so vast a scale is part of our everyday lives, does that mean that, living our everyday lives, we are responsible for other peoples' suffering, or even culpable in it? Am I to blame for the chaos in the Middle East, the famine in North Korea, the plight of homeless children on the streets of Mexico City? What do the inconsequential minutiae of my day have to do with the dissolution of other peoples' lives? The turn away from disaster implicitly answers this question with "nothing": there's nothing I can do, I'm not responsible, I'm outta here. Such inability to assume responsibility is too often misinterpreted as indifference, but a more accurate designation of the problem lies, I think, in our Manichean tendency towards too firm distinctions between victim and perpetrator, helpless and powerful, innocence and guilt.

Each society has a range of mechanisms – be they legal or religious or some combination of the two – whose purpose is allocating responsibility for suffering. Public opinion, legal judgment, personal and institutional morality – all work to confront suffering, to tame and control it by distinguishing between those who cause suffering and those who are affected by it, effectively separating the guiltless from the guilty, assigning innocence, relegating blame, and managing the uncomfortable computations and negotiations that such allocations require. The inextricability of suffering from everyday life, however, dissolves these distinctions, rendering these mechanisms irrelevant: innocence, says Auden, is beside the point; it's a privilege reserved for the torturer's horse (the horse's ass, actually). If suffering is human, innocence is not: it is neither our birthright, nor something we can strive for, conquer, buy, steal or claim.

* * * * *

Another unique aspect of this issue is its timing. We wanted to open this issue – an issue dedicated to marking the terror attacks of September 11 – by reflecting on how, presidential rhetoric to the contrary, what we are taking note of is both entirely unprecedented and, at the same time, nothing new. Depending on your political inclinations, the events of September 11, 2001 were either unique or inevitable, richly deserved or entirely unprovoked, a predictable product of generations of conflict or the dawn of an entirely new age. And the release of this issue one year after that date lends these questions additional weight: What is this timing meant to convey? Are we remembering September 11th, and if so, how? Are we commemorating it, and if so, as what? The answer

to either question is rife with conflict – think about the current debate over what to do with ground zero, for instance – but it needs to be answered, and answered soon, because once September 11, 2001 is remembered, the manner in which it is commemorated will become part of our everyday lives, marking us inescapably as members of a certain community with which we may not wish to identify (I write this in Rhode Island which celebrates V-J day – Victory Over Japan – annually). Thinking about how to insinuate September 11 into part of our daily lives is thinking about who, and how, we want to be.

Official commemoration is different from personal memory, of course, but it is official commemoration that gets inscribed into the communal identity – be it national, ethnic, regional or religious – in the name of which intense suffering is inflicted by some individuals on to others regardless of personal affiliations or beliefs. We need, therefore, to be very vigilant about official commemoration and about what that commemoration says about us, because such articulations form us – and inform our futures. In his celebratory essay on nationalism, Ernst Renan said that nations are constituted by forgetting – specifically, by forgetting atrocities like the massacre of Saint Bartholomew (“it is good for everyone to know how to forget”). Over a century later Benedict Anderson, noting what nations can do to each other, replied that one needs to know what it is one has forgotten – in other words, you must remember something in order to “have already forgotten” it. Memory and forgetting play a crucial role in national, religious, ethnic communities and the atrocities that these communities inflict upon each other, forming a deadly cycle which preserves ancient hatreds while our ability to act on these hatreds is enhanced – the Nazis taught us that and fifty years later events in the Balkans reminded us. Perhaps we need to be reminded again and again: forgetting is intricately tied up with memory; you can't do one without the other, and the politics of commemoration cannot be ignored.

It is for this reason that this issue of the journal, while deliberately released one year after September 11, deals only indirectly with the events of that day. Rather, we've chosen to focus on how incidents that, because of the degree of horror they imply, should disrupt our daily lives are acclimated into them – through pedagogy, through the media, through therapy, through our collective social, historical and statistical narratives. What should disrupt our daily lives is, of course, a loaded question: just what do we mean when we say “atrocious”? The dictionary, in this case, is vastly unhelpful: atrocity is generally defined as that which has the quality of being atrocious, which means that an atrocity can be anything from a heap of dead bodies to Britney Spears on a bad hair day. I like this vagueness, because it puts the definition of atrocity firmly in our hands and makes us responsible for what we choose to be outraged by (“outrage” implies, for me at least, a degree of passivity and helplessness,

as if rage had erupted from us, propelled by some force beyond our control). At the same time though, to think of something as “an atrocity” objectivizes it somewhat, freezes it in space and time and sets it up for our observation in a frame, a screen, a classroom, or some other space that is at a certain safe distance from our everyday lives. Mapping this distance, scrutinizing and traversing it, or otherwise putting this space to good use is an underlying concern for all the authors in this issue. Each of them, in a variety of ways, wants to make the invisible visible, to capture the process of turning towards or away from pain and to display that process for our perusal. If the pain they study varies from the cosmic to the most deeply personal, the wide range of topics covered in this issue reflect less on the elusiveness of some concept of “adequate pain” that would qualify as a legitimate “atrocity” but, rather, illuminates the richness of our ways of seeing, understanding and approaching disaster.

Kelly Train’s “As Long As It’s Not In My Backyard: September 11th and Other Apocalyptic Events” discusses how the conglomeration of events we know as “September 11th” have been mobilized as an argument for American exceptionalism. Through their construction and depiction in news media and political rhetoric, September 11th has been discursively produced as “unique,” distinct and isolated from other acts of terror across the globe. Such a production, Train argues, facilitates an essentially self-serving American ideology: if September 11 is not mundane, if it is not “just another atrocity” like those we view every day on the nightly news, U.S. response to it (both domestically and internationally) is justified as an exceptional response to an unprecedented disaster.

The interaction of specific perceptions and widespread action is continued in William Bostock’s essay, “Atrocity, Mundanity, and Disturbed Collective Mental States.” Bostock opens with the enigmatic statement: “Atrocity is an attack on mundanity,” and elaborates that “the mundanity of one individual, group, community, or civilization, may be an affront to certain other individuals and groups.” Viewing one culture’s everyday life as an atrocity perpetrated against another culture is, for Bostock, the product of a “disturbed collective mental state,” for which the perpetration of violence can have a certain therapeutic value. An enigmatic link between sociology and psychology, perturbed perceptions and perturbing acts, Bostock’s essay is especially relevant as increasing globalization, combined with media sophistication, contributes to the construction and facilitation of the situations he describes.

The link between the suffering individual and cultural suffering is explored further in Mark Borg’s “Personal Atrocity, Sadomasochism, and the Secret Lover’s Unshared Tryst,” an account of a therapeutic process by which, through the intimacies of the analyst/analysand relationship, personal suffering meets domestic trauma through the cultural cataclysm of the Holocaust. Stylistically, the author echoes these levels of suffering by moving, at times,

from a clinical to an anecdotal to a personal voice, demonstrating on a range of levels how suffering, in its varying manifestations, interpenetrates not only our experience of the world but our articulations of this experience.

A similar range of voices is articulated in the following essay, “How to Make Your Students Cry: Lessons in Atrocity, Pedagogy, and Heightened Emotion,” as Natalie Friedman explores the connection between atrocity and teaching. The granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor and a teacher of Holocaust literature and expository writing, Friedman moves through personal reflection, rhetorical and pedagogical theory, classroom anecdotes and literary analysis to analyze how her personal knowledge, outrage and anger work to generate an emotional response from her students, a response that, significantly, helps the students break through sentimental platitudes and stifled classroom culture to produce more thoughtful, self-reflexive, and courageous writing.

Moving from the individual back to the social level, Stephen Shukaitis and Rachel Lichtenfeld, co-authors of “Tragedy of the Common: Markedness and the Creation of Mundane Tragedy,” note that the manner in which an atrocity is represented determines the degree to which it will invade our everyday lives. Shukaitis and Lichtenfeld add that this representation works to package atrocity into a commodifiable element while it simultaneously effaces the suffering that it was initially designed to highlight. But it is precisely this process, they conclude, that can be harnessed and utilized for positive purposes: political involvement and engagement in the problem of suffering.

The interpenetration of visible and invisible suffering is also a concern in “Police Use of Excessive Force against Black Males: Aberrations or Everyday Occurrences” by Judson Jeffries. Despite popular perceptions to the contrary and a lack of conclusive data, says Jeffries, black men are the victims of a disproportionate degree of police brutality. Jeffries’ essay raises this enigmatic question: when a problem is not deemed worthy of study, or when the methods by which studies are undertaken do not take into account factors like reluctance to report incidents of brutality or the tendency of perpetrators towards duplicity, how do you prove the problem exists, much less begin to formulate a solution? Hopefully Jeffries’ essay will pave the way towards more effective approaches to this serious concern.

Scott Schaffer offers us a “politics of outrage” in his contribution to the issue. Looking at the presence of “ordinary atrocities” - everyday events, such as encountering people who are homeless or social phenomena such as sexual violence - Schaffer argues that our imbuelement in our everyday lives prevents us from understanding how and why these phenomena recur. Much like the versions of atrocity we are used to - war, disease, famine - these ordinary atrocities feel overwhelming; but Schaffer claims that by channeling the sense of fury we prevent ourselves from feeling into a coherent vision of the world we would like to see, we can achieve social change that can prevent future atrocities, be they local or global.

Sol Bard's photograph of the Twin Towers concludes this special issue. Looking both forward (at the rising sun) and back (when the World Trade Center was intact), this photo serves as our commemoration for the past victims of this disaster, as well as marking our concern for future victims of its aftermath. When we juxtaposed this photograph with the Allingham quote, we found a dual vision of past and future, the devastated with the intact, the work of mourning with the celebration of those infinite possibilities that each of our most mundane days presents. This is the tone on which we've chosen to end this issue on Atrocity, Outrage and the Ordinary - an end that, we hope, will be a beginning as well.

* * * * *

It is somewhat traditional for editors of special issues of the *Journal of Mundane Behavior* to comment, however briefly, on why they were compelled toward that particular theme. My own reason was simple: I wanted to edit this special edition because I am Israeli and I have lived with atrocity for most of my life. This means not only that atrocity has invaded my everyday life in the form of rocket attacks, suicide bombs, innocent objects laced with explosives, and a myriad of other manifestations, but because I am close, very very close, to atrocities inflicted on my neighbors the Palestinians. My generation is the generation that invaded Lebanon, that faced two Intifadas, and that killed and died in Gaza and Hebron. We saw the Zionist ideology that saved our parents and grandparents from the death camps crumble as, in its name, we did terrible things to other people. When I say that atrocity has marked my life, then, it is not as a victim that I speak but as a perpetrator as well: while bits and pieces of Israelis have been collected from the smoking remnants of a building or a bus, thousands of Palestinians have been rounded up, arrested, interrogated and beaten. While Israelis now think twice before gathering at a restaurant or café, Palestinians are confined to their homes for weeks on end, deprived of food and medicine. These sad facts show, not that one side suffers more, but that both sides suffer, and that our suffering is linked, as linked as our hopes and dreams for a future on the same godforsaken strip of sand and stone.

And yet - and this is the strangest part - it is this knowledge, this experience, this uncomfortable intimacy with suffering, that makes me somewhat hopeful. Because as we - Israelis and Palestinians - awkwardly, angrily, hesitantly talk about peace, what keeps us coming back to the table is the painful awareness of what we have done to each other, this unbearable community of suffering we have created together. This is a community in which the most mundane elements of everyday life - running out for milk, getting on a bus, getting to work or to school, meeting a friend - have become the site of our bloodiest battles, our most heartbreaking losses, our most unforgivable crimes. At the same time, this is a community in which these same mundane elements

- running out for milk, getting on a bus, getting to work or to school, meeting a friend - are the site of our greatest triumphs. These triumphs, this snatching at scraps and shreds of normalcy in the midst of disaster, are like shards of a broken mirror that reflect an unscathed sky. Like the women in Buchenwald who swapped recipes while they were starving, to claim the mundane is to cling to survival. It's a flight towards the sun despite the roiling waters underneath. It's not a solution, it's not even a panacea, but it's a gesture towards the privilege of having a life. And in the face of such misery, when faced with such suffering, to claim the mundane can be on occasion the strongest, most hopeful, most human thing to do.

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As Long As It's Not in *My Backyard*: September 11th and Other Apocalyptic Events

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Abstract: This article analyzes the effects of the events of September 11th on American discourse. The author argues that the events of September 11th have been discursively produced as “unique” and unconnected to other acts of terror across the globe. The “uniqueness” of September 11th and the personal terror it has evoked in American discourse facilitates the reproduction of other acts of terror, and their images, outside the United States as part of the mundanity of the everyday news media. The article revolves around four themes: 1) the binary racialized construction of “the American” versus “the Arab,” 2) the happening of events as chaotic versus the desire for social order and control, 3) the construction of September 11th as a “unique” event unconnected to other apocalyptic events, and 4) the mundanity of atrocities in the media versus the emotional upheaval resulting from the events of September 11th.

One of the most bizarre images I witnessed recently was the hysteria (no Freudian gendered, sexed pun intended) put forth by Ross Perot, featured on Larry King Live the night of February 20, 2002, discussing the *need* (Perot's emphasis - not mine) for everyone in the United States to arm themselves (as is The Great American Tradition in that Texas-shoot-first-ask-questions-later interpretation of “the right to bear arms” clause in the American Constitution) and band together against the possibility of a future September 11th. Perot's crazed, tyrannical rant focused on berating all eligible youth to join the army and protect themselves and “their country” from all future potential incidents as the September 11th (2001) atrocity. Now keeping in mind that in this particular instance the message came packaged in “Ross Perot format,” which seems to take on a unique character all of its own, the hysteria, paranoia, and downright fear (albeit not completely without cause; I too felt the hairs on the back of my neck stand up watching each of the Twin Towers collapse, and later the devastating images of New York City's downtown core) put forth by Perot was an expression that cannot simply be reduced to the imagery imbued in Ross Perot “the man” himself. Rather, Perot's tirade is symbolic of the national sentiment and national consciousness (however essentialized) displayed in *Journal of Mundane Behavior*, volume 3, number 3 (September 2002), pp. 337-349. © 2002, Kelly Amanda Train and *Journal of Mundane Behavior*. All rights reserved.

the American media.

In response to watching Perot's diatribe on CNN, the questions that come to mind are: What makes the events of September 11th different from other acts of terror across the globe? What makes this event different from the constant barrage of images of acts of terror on the nightly news? What makes those images mundane, and the images of September 11th frightening? This article attempts to address these questions. I am arguing that the events of September 11th have been discursively produced as "unique" and unconnected to other historical and present day acts of terror around the world. The "uniqueness" of September 11th and the personal terror it has evoked in American discourse facilitates the reproduction of other acts of terror, and their images, outside the United States as part of the mundanity of the everyday news media. This article revolves around four themes: 1) the binary racialized construction of "the American" versus "the Arab"; 2) the happening of events as chaotic versus the desire for social order and control; 3) the construction of September 11th as a "unique" event unconnected to other apocalyptic events; and 4) the mundanity of atrocities in the media versus the emotional upheaval resulting from the events of September 11th.

Would The Real American Please Stand Up

No matter how frightening the images (and reality) of the September 11th destruction, what became even more scary was the immediate and continuing discourse that produced two essentialized and distinct opposing categories of "the United States" (read: the innocent victim of devastation), known as "Us," versus "the Arabs" (read: the evil perpetrators of undue violence and harm), known as "The Enemy." Although "The Enemy" was singled out as Osama bin Laden, his image nonetheless signified and personified an entire racialized community. Osama bin Laden's image was not simply his own, but symbolized all Arabs in the American imagination. Rather than being seen as an individual with his own particular political agenda, he was produced as *the* representative of all Arabs. His image, plastered all over CNN and other American news media, signified Arabness as synonymous with "terrorist."

This discursive image of bin Laden was substantially different than the image constructed of Timothy McVeigh (of the Oklahoma bombings). At no point was McVeigh produced or perceived as representative of *the* entire white Anglo-Saxon community. Instead, the image of McVeigh was of an aberrant (read: psychologically unstable) individual. As a white Anglo-Saxon male, McVeigh is included in the notion of "Us." As a result, he constitutes part of the community we perceive as providing safety, security and protection for "Us" against the Other who wishes "Us" harm. It is too traumatic to imagine or think that one of "Us" could have done such a horrendous act as either the Oklahoma bombings or September 11th to another member of "Us." To make sense of the McVeigh case, we need to rationalize these actions as those

of a lone "madman."

Nationalist discourses, and particularly with respect to Perot's "call to arms" against "The Enemy" focus on the notion that membership in the "Us," *the nation*, provides a sense of security, safety and refuge for its members. These discourses emphasize *the nation* as a contained entity threatened by outside forces wishing to destroy it and its members. The illusion of *the nation* as a place of safety and security is reified through state bureaucratic organizations, such as the military, federal intelligence organizations and immigration and citizenship/naturalization departments, that produce the sense that "The Enemy" and other dangers that threaten our welfare are outside the realm of "Us." Thus, horrors and other atrocities perpetrated on "Us" must come from "out there," from someone/something outside the notion of "Us." We should not forget that for a long while, investigations of the Oklahoma bombings focused on finding a perpetrator (or a group of perpetrators) who was not white and Anglo-Saxon, but a racialized Other; hence, someone who was not one of "Us."

In terms of the September 11th attacks, "The Enemy" has been discursively produced as a visible racialized entity that exists outside of *the nation*. The notion of *the nation*, in this case the United States, is produced as a homogenous entity comprising *one people*, Americans. "We" become imagined as one people, Americans, juxtaposed to "The Enemy." American news reports of the crisis produced images of "Americans" as an unmarked group of people. For example, media images showed family photographs of Americans who had been killed at some point during the crisis, either aboard one of the planes that crashed into the Twin Towers or had been in the Towers when they collapsed. These pictures were always taken prior to the crisis and consisted of the victims in everyday American family settings. These photographs, which were played on CNN, NBC, CBS and ABC news reports, were meant to evoke empathy from its American audience. Specifically, the images were intended to create the basis of a nationalistic oneness with other Americans. When we view these news clips, we are supposed to see ourselves and our lives. As "Americans," we share an imagined common bond with those directly affected in the World Trade Centre collapse. In contrast, images of Afghanistan and the Afghani people were meant to evoke a completely different reaction. Video clips of Afghani people in traditional (non-Western) dress, speaking Arabic (not English), worshipping Islam (non-Western religion), and living in poverty-stricken, desert, non-Western conditions were meant to reinforce how removed and *different* "We" are from "The Enemy." In essence, the image produced of "who" is "American" is at odds with the image of "who" is an "Arab."

"The Enemy" is also constituted as an homogenous entity, but one that is marked and racialized; *different* from "Us." The marking of "The Enemy" occurs through the use of racialized images that signify "Arabness." These

markings symbolize the social meanings attached to specific physical and cultural characteristics, both real and imagined, that are produced as social signifiers of "Arabness" (Miles 1989; 1993; Frankenberg 1993). For example, specific characteristics such as skin colour, hair colour and texture, eye colour and shape, cultural practices and behavioral traits, among other attributes, are imbued with social meanings that signify particular racialized identities (Miles 1989; 1993; Gilman 1991). Since the September 11th crisis, pictures of Arab-looking males have been plastered across American news reports and used to reinforce in the American imagination what "The Enemy" looks like. The processes of racialization erase how signifiers and symbols of race are social constructs, and naturalize these attributes as innate and biological (Miles 1989; 1993). These social processes mark "The Enemy" as a visible racialized entity. The imagery of "The Enemy" is juxtaposed to the image of Americans. "We" as Americans constitute and signify an unmarked category (read: white).¹ This imagery reinforces the normalization of whiteness in the American imagination.

Through the use of various forms of subordinating, racialized imagery, "The Enemy" is represented as an impersonal, inferior objectified entity. This imagery serves to exacerbate the social construction of "The Enemy's" cultural and moral *difference* from "Us." One only needs to think of the media's portrayal of Muslims/Arabs as inhumane, uncivilized and immoral. The oppositional imagery of "Us" and "Them" has been emphasized through the media's discourse of *difference*. For example, images of "Us" versus "Them" have been juxtaposed through the following imagery and discourse: Americans/Arabs, First World/Third World, civilized/uncivilized, industrialized/primitive, cultured/backward, faithful God fearing people (read: "good Christians")/ worshippers of Islam (read: religious lunatics), moral/immoral, and innocent victims/murderers. This kind of imagery facilitates our sense of disconnectedness from "The Enemy," and thus, is responsible for our inability to identify with "Them."

The binary relationship between "Us" and "The Enemy" is further emphasized through nationalist discourses that produce the latter as an entity outside *the nation* in terms of both proximity and as a common people sharing a common bond (Anderson 1983; Gilroy 1987; 1993). The notion of "Us" refers to a group of people sharing an *imagined* common national, historical, racial and cultural identity inside specific geographic boundaries (Anderson 1983). The notion of a common "Us" is an illusion, or, as Anderson (1983) argues, *imagined*. Using Anderson's notion of communities and nations as *imagined* entities, the notion of a common "Us" is wholly constructed, and not a natural phenomenon (Anderson 1983). Yet, nationalist discourses of "Us" and "Them" make these *imagined* communities *real* through people's everyday lives in how they find themselves positioned in terms of membership and belonging within *the nation*, as either "Us" or "Them," and the privileges or denial of rights that may result from inclusion or exclusion.

It is important to keep in mind that the United States is a country of immigrants, and as a result, the United States is *home* to many American-Arabs. Yet, because the racialized image of "The Enemy" represents all Arabs, the notion of *the nation* must necessarily exclude American-Arabs from being able to be part of *the nation*. American-Arabs are constituted as a political entity excluded from and in opposition to *the nation* of the United States. The production of categories of "Us" and "Them" are exclusive and contained. Hence, being Arab does not allow one to belong to *the nation*. Nationalist discourses make sense of the presence of Arab citizens in the United States by emphasizing the image of "The Enemy Amongst Us." In other words, while American-Arabs may be citizens of the United States and live there, they do not *belong to the nation*.² Nationalist discourses are able to easily produce a viable "Enemy From Within" through marked essentialized racialized imagery of "the Arab" (Gilroy 1987). This imagery produces an image of "The Enemy" that is easy to communicate, conceptualize and identify within and among the American public.

Perot's "call to arms" against "The Enemy" has grave consequences in the material lives of American-Arabs living in the United States. "The Enemy" has been produced as a visible racialized entity (i.e., Arab) and therefore knowable in an immediately identifiable sense. As a result, innocent individuals who supposedly "look" like "The Enemy" (whatever that means in the American imagination) but are American citizens might have experienced being ostracized, discriminated against, and having lost their civil liberties as a result of their racialized identity, rather than by the virtue of their own personal politics, actions (or inaction) and identifications. Thus, while American-Arabs may have been citizens of the United States, they do not have entitlement and membership in *the nation* because they have been regarded as "The Enemy Within."

The construction of a concrete and knowable enemy has been necessary to facilitate, legitimate and rationalize the arrests and abusive treatment of Arab-Americans in the aftermath of the attacks. During this period, a number of Americans who "looked" Arab (including Arab-Americans, Israeli-Americans and South Asian-Americans living in the United States) were detained and questioned by authorities under the auspices of their possible involvement in the attacks solely on the basis of their being identified as "Arab." Under the guise of "national security," American officials were able to randomly demand various Arab-Americans explain their whereabouts and general existence in the United States by producing proper citizenship and other identification papers. CNN showed interviews with Arab-Americans and South-Asian Americans who felt they could not leave their homes, even to travel a few miles, without having all of their citizenship, passport and identification papers on them. People feared being jailed by American authorities because they would mistakenly be seen as a "terrorist" because they "looked" Arab.

This discursive visibility of “The Enemy” has been particularly important for easy identification of “The Enemy Outside” (Arabs in the Middle East) and “The Enemy Within” (Arabs living in the United States).³ It is the production of “The Enemy Within” that legitimizes the harassment that many American-Arabs experienced in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. This racialized imagery enabled nationalist discourses to exclude American-Arabs from membership and *belonging* in the nation.

Listening to the discourse espoused in the American national consciousness and the American media in particular, one gains a strong racialized image of “who” is an American citizen and “who” is not. These communities or categories are produced and reified as separate, distinct and contained entities. They do not overlap. To be a member of one racialized category necessarily disqualifies one from *belonging* to the racialized community that constitutes the image of *the nation* (Gilroy 1987). Even more so, this racialized imagery appears to be fixed, static and biological. In other words, these racialized images are exclusive and naturalized through the discourse of the American media. There is no choice in membership. Rather, being (or “looking”) Arab means being hegemonically placed in the category of “The Enemy,” no matter what one’s politics, affiliations or citizenship. It means being immediately found guilty of perpetrating evil in the Courts of American Public Opinion on the basis of one’s racialized identity.

The pathological racialized imagery imbued in the notions of “Us” and “Them” denies how these constructs are products of discursive processes and practices that organize and order society, and ultimately produce our social and material realities. The categorization of people into racialized subjects allows for the binary production of “the good” (read: the United States) versus “the bad” (read: Arabs). These oppositional categories remove any and all complications and render the events of September 11th down to the most basic intelligible, simplistic and comprehensible elements of “Us” versus “Them.” The processes of racialization make identifying who “They” are immediate (Miles 1989; 1993). These processes of racialization facilitate arresting individuals in the post-trauma aftermath, which ultimately provide a means of reintroducing social order and control as “They” become immediately identifiable. This produces the illusion that the possibility of future traumatic events can be mitigated and prevented. It is no surprise that systemic racism is central to reinstating and reproducing social order and control.

Chaos/Control/Chaos/Control

Perot’s “call to arms” is a desperate plea for social order in the United States to be reinstated, and for American life to return to normalcy (in that essentialized image of middle America). The catastrophic acts of September 11th remind us of the unthinkable; that events always occur in chaos (Haver 1994). Chaos, however, is not conducive to social organization and order. For society to

be controlled and ruled, it must be made sensible and rational. Thus, for social order to exist, the events of September 11th need to appear as an aberration that can now be prevented in the future by a variety of factors, including heightened military security, surveillance and intelligence. In other words, acts of terrorism need to appear controllable, even though they are inevitably uncontrollable and chaotic (Haver 1994). For the aftermath of the event to seem controllable, crises must be rationalized (Haver 1994).

The rationalization of events rests entirely on the illusion of our complete knowledge of the event. If September 11th appears not only aberrant, but preeminent, then the occurrence of the events of September 11th can be rationalized and legitimized on the basis that they could not have been foreseen. For normalcy (read: social order) to be resumed, and for the American public to be able to return to their pre-September 11th lives, there is a need for such acts to appear to be controllable, preventable and avoidable in the future. For an incident to seem controllable and/or preventable, it must appear that all aspects of the event are knowable, and therefore foreseeable. This can only happen if the events of September 11th seem to occur within a specific rational chronological time frame or pattern (Haver 1994). The event itself and the chronology of the attacks must appear orderly and predictable. Yet, the happening of events can only be perceived as orderly and chronological in hindsight. The present and future are always chaotic and unpredictable.⁴ However, it is too traumatic for us to acknowledge the present and future as unforeseeable and uncontrollable. Thus, we need to believe that history and hindsight will provide us with the illusion that catastrophes and atrocities can be prevented. For example, George W. Bush’s “war on terrorism,” which consists largely of targeting American-Arabs and severely tightening immigration restrictions, creates the illusion that future acts of terrorism are being mitigated and prevented. It is this illusion that allows us to resume our everyday lives in the aftermath of crisis and chaos.

I would also argue that the visible racialization of “The Enemy” facilitates the reinstatement of social order in the United States in the traumatic aftermath of the September 11th attacks. “The Enemy” symbolizes chaos and calamity to the social order of society.⁵ The production of “The Enemy” as a visible and marked racialized entity allows for what is chaotic in society (“The Enemy”) to be easily identifiable. Thus, “The Enemy,” including Arabs living in the Middle East and more specifically, American-Arabs living in the United States, can be known and dealt with immediately through various means, such as surveillance, detainment and arrests. The illusion of “The Enemy” as a knowable and identifiable entity enables social order to be quickly reinstated. Even more so, the marked image of “The Enemy” allows the American public to believe that future atrocities can be prevented by targeting one particular racialized community.

Catastrophes and atrocities are, by nature, unpredictable and unforeseeable. Essentially, that is how they occur. Yet, it is too traumatic for us to consciously acknowledge and realize that atrocities are neither controllable nor preventable. Perot's "call to arms," and other similar media and political pronouncements, provide the illusion that such events are controllable and avoidable on the basis that now that the event has occurred, preventative measures can be put into place through bureaucratic means to avoid future destructive attacks. It is this belief that allows us to resume our everyday lives in the aftermath of the September 11th crisis.

Uniqueness And Other Myths

What seems particularly bizarre about Perot's statement, as with all other American political and media messages regarding September 11th, is the "unique" nature that such events have been perceived, in the United States, to possess; as if no other catastrophic events had ever taken place in the world. This "uniqueness" is made even stronger by the perception that this was an event of such magnitude that nothing in history could be considered to be comparable to it. All apocalyptic events, such as September 11th, the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pol Pot's Cambodian "Killing Fields," and the Rwandan, Bosnian and Burundi genocides (to name a few) are "unique" in their own ways. Despite the differing particulars of each event, including how such events are organized, the methods of killing and destruction, the intentions underlying the events, etc., there is no one event which is more or less horrendous than the rest (Bauman 1995). They are catastrophes that cannot be compared, and therefore their results are not comparable. Although the media, political analysts and academics try to measure suffering and horrors through various means, such as analyzing the scale of attacks and the extent of their destruction on cities, industry and people, or counting bodies and using these numbers and other factors to qualitatively compare and rate catastrophic events as more and less destructive and with more and less suffering, they are each qualitatively and quantitatively horrific, their consequences horrific, and their happenings horrific.

Claims of the catastrophic uniqueness of the events of September 11th have been produced through American discourse and reified through the American media. Mostly these claims are expressed through reports which emphasize shock, dismay, disbelief and anger at two related factors: 1) the targeting of American civilians and 2) the targeting of American civilians on *continental American soil* and the success of the attempt to create mass casualties and destruction. What gives rise to uniqueness claims in this circumstance is that Americans and America itself have been attacked on U.S. (The attack on Pearl Harbor at the beginning of World War II occurred on non-continental American territory, away from American centres of economic and political power). Prior to the World Trade Centre collapse, American casualties have only occurred outside of continental North America. (Remember that the Oklahoma bombings

turned out to be perpetrated and carried out by an *American*. Remember also that the prior attempt on the World Trade Centre failed to create harm and mass destruction). These uniqueness claims substantiate and legitimate the events of September 11th as an unprecedented incident that is not only unconnected to other acts of terror historically, socially and globally, but as having *the* most detrimental effects.⁶ American media reports of the Twin Towers collapse emphasize, in the manner in which they are reported, that catastrophes that occur outside of the United States are expected, assumed, even mundane. This was apparent by tones of shock, dismay, disbelief and anger in newscasters' voices when reporting on the September 11th attacks. These expressions were in sharp contrast to the blasé manner in which global catastrophes are reported by these same newscasters every day.

There is an illusion for those of us who live in North America that we are separated, even immune, to the ills of the rest of the world. For the United States to be attacked on its own soil, and sustain immense devastation on its own turf and of its own people, creates, in the American imagination, substantiated uniqueness claims. These claims are imbued with the idea that American lives are worth more than lives lost by non-Americans across the globe. (The value placed on American lives is wholly racialized and classed. Compare the photographs shown of primarily white, middle class, American victims in comfortable, family settings to those of, for example, impoverished, starving and suffering people of colour in Rwanda, other parts of Africa, Cambodia, etc., or emaciated white bodies lying dead on the unpaved, dirt streets in Bosnian villages).

The notion of uniqueness produces and reifies the assumption that catastrophic events and the suffering they cause can be measured and compared. In naming the preeminence of the events of September 11th, the prioritization and distinction of these events necessarily denies the enormity, suffering and destructive consequences of other atrocities. This process, in effect, compares atrocities by emphasizing the magnitude and "uniqueness" of September 11th in relationship to other acts of terror. The *difference* between the September 11th catastrophe and other acts of terror is produced through discourses that emphasize the "uniqueness" of the events of September 11th. Rather than catastrophic events being seen as a continuum of atrocities, uniqueness claims perpetuate and facilitate the privileging of American suffering as more detrimental, more serious, and more horrific than the suffering of other victims of acts of terror globally and historically. Other acts of terror are rationalized as having lesser importance with lesser consequences.

Nationalist notions of "Us" and "Them" facilitate our sense of disconnection from atrocities that occur outside the concept of "Us." Acts of terrorism outside the United States that do not involve Americans do not affect "Us." These events occur outside of our nationalist conception of place, space and history. In other words, events of horror that occur outside of the

geographical boundaries of the United States and to non-Americans happen outside of our conceptual proximity of what constitutes *our backyard*. The notion of *our backyard* is produced through nationalist discourses to evoke an imagined community of a common, homogenous people who share national and cultural origins inside contained geographical boundaries that serve as *the nation*, or more specifically, *one nation, one people* (Gilroy 1987; 1993; Anderson 1983). Events that occur outside the boundaries of what constitutes “Us” (read: an essentialized notion of *one people* inside contained geographical boundaries of *the nation*) are conceived as separate from and unrelated to our own personal reality. Hence, we are *immune* to horrifying images of terror that happen to the Other. The images of other global, historical acts of terror become part of the mundanity of everyday news coverage.

One particular example that comes to mind is the Arab/Israeli conflict. We are inundated with images of Palestinian attacks on Israelis and Israeli attacks on Palestinians on CNN and other news media. Yet, these acts of terror are mundane, part of the everyday news coverage images we see regularly. These images have no direct impact for “Us.” Rather than recognizing the events of September 11th as part of the continuum of terrorist acts around the globe, the political statements and media coverage surrounding the collapse of the Twin Towers constructed the latter as a “unique” event. American media coverage and political discussions emphasized the suffering inflicted on the United States, and Americans generally, as unprecedented elsewhere. Political and media discussions made distinctions horrific acts in the Middle East that happened to “Others,” and the horrendous acts that happened to “Us” as Americans. This discourse reproduced the *difference* between acts of terrorism experienced in the United States versus acts of terrorism that occur in the Middle East, and more generally, around the world. This *difference* emphasized the heightened suffering of Americans and the preeminence of the devastation to the United States, against the everyday, “to be expected” (read: mundane) occurrence of acts of violence and terror in the Middle East, or anywhere else.

The Mundane And The Personal

So why is it that despite the fact that we are barraged with catastrophic images of acts of war, terrorism, rape, murder, famine, genocide, and general violence on a regular day-to-day basis in the media, we do not see these pictures as anything but mundane? We regularly view the atrocities that happen to someone else, the Other, on the other side of the world, as part of the normal everyday occurrences around the globe. Why are they not personal to us? In direct contrast, the September 11th collapse of the Twin Towers evoked great emotional outburst and outright fear among us personally. Are events only apocalyptic, earth shattering and horrific if and when they directly effect our own personal reality (or, rather, the illusion of our own personal reality as parlayed through nationalist sentiments and patriotic discourse)?

When we see acts of horror in the news media that are occurring around the globe, we are able to relegate these events to a specific temporality - time, place and space - which we see as Other and separate from ourselves and our lives (Haver 1994). We are not implicated in these events. Thus, we are able to place the event in a specific context which we see as separate and outside our own being. In other words, we see ourselves as *immune* to the happening of the event. In constituting ourselves as immune, we refuse to see a connection between these events and our own historicity and sociality. We might see this as our refusal to consciously recognize how the occurrence of horrific acts around the world could be part of our own reality, our own existence, with direct effects and implications for us. As a result of such refusal, we feel no emotional attachment to the imagery in the media. Such images appear as part of the mundanity of everyday news broadcasts. These events are reported in the American media in such a way whereby they appear inconsequential to our own existence. When it happens to “Us,” it is unique, a tragedy, a catastrophe, personal. When it happens to the Other, to “Them,” it is mundane, not a part of our reality, something that occurs in a different historical time, place and space.

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Notes

¹ I am using Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) notions of marked and unmarked racialized identity. Frankenberg argues that whiteness has been being socially produced as an “unmarked,” and therefore invisible, racialized construct, in contrast to the social production of Otherness as a “marked,” and therefore visible, racialized category.

² The experience of American-Arabs in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks has not been the only circumstance in the history of the United States where the rights and entitlement of non-white racialized American citizens to membership and belonging to *the nation* were questioned and denied. Japanese-Americans living in the United States during World War II were subject to suspension of their human rights and civil liberties, forcibly placed in internment camps, and their property and personal effects confiscated as a result of their racialized identity.

³ I am borrowing Paul Gilroy’s (1987; 1993) notion of “the enemy within” from his discussion on the exclusion of Blacks in Britain from membership and belonging in *the nation*.

⁴ The idea that the happening of events is perceived as orderly in the past, but as chaotic in the future was pointed out to me by Tim Grumme in various discussions we had about the content of this article.

⁵ My argument that the presence of “The Enemy” in the United States in the aftermath of the September 11th crisis symbolizes social disorder is based on Zygmunt Bauman’s (1995) theory that the victims of all genocides symbolize disorder to the ordering of society. Bauman states that genocides begin with classifying people into groups of “desirable” and “undesirable,” and that the killing of “undesirables” operates as part of a larger framework of bureaucratic social ordering.

⁶ Uniqueness claims surfaced with respect to debates surrounding the atrocities of the Holocaust. Specifically, the Holocaust became reified as preeminent and unique through discourses produced to ensure the memory of the Holocaust be kept alive (see Goekjian 1991). The media has capitalized on the use of uniqueness claims to discuss and label the September 11th events.

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Atrocity, Mundanity and Mental State

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Abstract: The paper explores the idea that atrocity is an attack on mundanity causing and caused by disturbance to collective mental states. Atrocity caused by a disturbed individual acting alone could be the result of a desire to disrupt the mundanity of others because of a perception offence. Shocking though these isolated individual acts are, they have no political repercussion. Another type of atrocity is the organised group atrocity carried out for political objectives. In this case, there will be severe and long-term repercussions, and in extreme cases, they can even escalate to war. Again perceptions and moods are present, but in this case they will be shared collectively. As collective mental disturbance is becoming globalized, it can be assumed that atrocity and war will continue. After reviewing current thinking about the nature and causes of disturbed mental states, the paper notes that the trauma of atrocity and the burden of mundanity have been implicated in each other. A research agenda using simulated conflict dynamic and conflict resolution techniques is suggested and a program of action to calm a disturbed collective mental state is indicated.

Atrocity, War and Mundanity

...a group of individuals, most of whom are perfectly inoffensive, may, when gathered in a crowd, be drawn into acts of atrocity.
-- Durkheim, 1964 [1895]: 5

This paper will take this observation as its starting point.

Atrocity is an attack on mundanity. Atrocity is an act of heinous wickedness or wanton cruelty that can occur at any time or place, and when it is perpetrated by a disturbed individual acting alone, could be the result of a desire to disrupt the mundanity of others because of that individual's perception and mood. Shocking though these isolated individual acts are, they have no political repercussion. When the atrocity is perpetrated by an organised group it has severe repercussions of retaliatory atrocity, preventative atrocity (such as genocide) or, in extreme circumstances, war. It is important, therefore, to try to understand the motivations to commit atrocity: whether provoked or unprovoked – as when, for example, it is for allegedly therapeutic reasons.

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War is a legitimised atrocity, although particularly gross acts of wanton destruction of non-combatants (including surrendered troops) are regarded as *war crimes*. The firebombing or nuclear bombing of cities has been controversial, regarded by some but not others as an atrocity. As war is legitimised atrocity, the labelling of an act of atrocity as an act of war will have huge implication as to the legitimisation of the atrocity. For this reason, most atrocity perpetrators will be at pains to have their acts accepted as legitimate acts of war.

Mundanity pertains to the worldly, earthly preoccupations with everyday life, and while in itself it is generally a benign set of activities and rituals, that is, the daily routine of “the ‘unmarked’ – those aspects of our everyday lives that typically go unnoticed by us,” as the *Journal of Mundane Behavior* describes it (JMB, 2002), or the ‘texture of daily lived reality’ (Orleans, 2001: 2). But the mundanity of one individual, group, community, or civilization may be an affront to certain other individuals and groups. Mundanity, when seen through the distorting lens of a disturbed mental state, could be seen as demanding and justifying nothing less than an act of atrocity, though the act probably won’t be seen and interpreted by its perpetrator as an atrocity but rather an act of war, legitimized atrocity, or even of therapeutic value. Atrocity and war causing severe disruption to mundanity have long been regarded as having major implications for mental health, but it can also be argued that they are also a product of disturbed mental states at a collective level.

From a methodological point of view it would be desirable to interview in depth atrocity perpetrators both before and wherever possible after the act of atrocity, so as to test this hypothesis. However, given the nature of the subject, the enquirer must rely on media interviews, memoirs, and the reports of perpetrators’ associates. There is also an alternative approach through the powerful insight of literature: specifically the desire to spread unhappiness to others, so as to make them pay for one’s own unhappiness, as found in the works of Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and Zola, to name just several sources of this particular insight. Therefore, one can generate *intuitively* a hypothesis – the cause of atrocity is a disturbed collective mental state – and place this before the reader in the hope of response.

Collective Mental States: Do They Exist?

In Australia there is currently a Minister of Immigration who, when told that illegal immigrants were found by a UN Working Party to be suffering *collective depression*, replied that he did not know what the term meant (Age, June 7, 2002). Many academics also deny that collective mental states exist, as do some members of the public. This could be because *collective consciousness* seems to imply a *group mind*, or the idea of a hypothetical collective transcendent consciousness or spirit which was assumed to characterise a group or community (Reber, 1995: 323). The methodological problem of how such an entity could be tested empirically has had the effect of placing it outside modern empirical

social science, which is predominantly quantitative, leading one observer to comment that ‘there has been practically no research directly assessing the reality of collective consciousness’ (Varvoglis, 1997:1).

This notwithstanding, a survey of current social science literature finds a surprisingly large amount of reference to various conditions of collective mental state, such as *collective dignity* (Smith, 1991: 163), *collective fear* (Lake and Rothchild, 1996), *collective vulnerability* (Orleans, 2001), *collective memory* (Takei, 1998), and *collective consciousness* (Munayyer, 1999). The health disciplines reveal a longer but also intermittent interest: *collective anxiety neurosis* was hypothesised by the psychiatrist Kiev (1973), *collective habituation to genocide* was discussed by the psychoanalyst Shatan (1976: 122), *collective retribution* by the psychologist Staub (1992: 164) and *collective trauma* from the perspective of health care by Myers (1999). *Collective responsibility* (Harff, 1995), *collective moral responsibility* (Pies, 2001) and *collective guilt* (Johnstone, 1999) have also been discussed as a problems of moral philosophy while from the perspective of sociolinguistics *collective language grief* has been discussed in relation to communities that have lost or anticipate the loss of their language (Bostock, 1997). Language itself is a *collective right* (Kymlicka, 1995) or *droit collectif* (Breton, 1997: 47).). *Psychohistory* is another important approach to collective mental states, in particular the importance of trauma during childhood (Scharf, 2000). Organisational theorists have considered *collective organisational anxiety* as an important factor in their subject of interest which is a *collective mental model* (Voyer, Gould and Ford, 1996). All of these conditions can be grouped under the general category of *collective mental state*, but it is possible that there is a particular mixture of conditions that can become a dangerous impulse to atrocity: for example, collective depression over unwanted mundanity, combined with desire for collective retribution.

The Motivations to Commit Atrocity

(1) The Depression of Unwanted Mundanity

Psychological factors are recognised as being very important as causes of depression, and depression can be a precondition for atrocity. For example, depression is often actuated by the illness or death of someone close or other forms of profound loss including loss of hope for the future or other form of grief (Haig, 1990: 7-11). Individual depression is thus characterised by a loss of personal hopefulness which is now becoming recognised as an important part of the mind-body relationship (Nunn, 1996), and this applies equally to group depression.

Another variant of this view is that depression is caused by feelings of *learned helplessness*, which results when punishment is received without being contingent upon the actions of the individual (Collier, Longmore and Harvey,

1991: 336). *Learned helplessness* could be considered as similar to a loss of control over one's life, even in, or particularly in, its mundanity.

The World Health Organization has recognised the spread and significance of depression, noting that mood disorders (including depression) are estimated to affect some 340 million people, that is, of epidemic proportion. In the United States of America alone, the yearly cost of depression is estimated at US\$44 billion, equal to the total cost of all cardiovascular diseases. (WHO, 1997).

José Maria Vigil has investigated the psychological well-being of the Latin American continent and diagnosed a state of *collective depression*, that is, as having actually the same symptomatology as for individual depression: disappointment, loss of self esteem, self accusation, demobilisation, disorientation, depoliticization, escape into spiritualism, loss of memory, withdrawal and psychosomatic problems (Vigil, 2000: 2). It is possible in a similar way, to assess the condition of a large proportion of young people as being one of *collective depression*.

A mundane condition of starvation, famine, civil war and political oppression, would not always cause atrocity, but one could conceive these as preconditions for atrocity. The burden of unwanted mundanity is not confined to the Third World. Many people, particularly young adults, in affluent developed societies such as those of North America, Europe or Australasia, are showing symptoms of depression.

The epidemic of depression now becoming globalized could be a response to the tension in global culture: on the positive side of this particular stage of cultural development is the promise of infinite lifestyle possibilities, choice, freedom and consumer goods, while on the negative side, which is more likely to correspond to reality, is poverty, disease, deprivation and the loss of hope, with a particular group being seen as responsible for this situation—a mind-set to which many young people, especially those in third world countries, may be particularly susceptible.

As Eckersley puts it,

...(t)he situation may also reflect a growing failure of modern Western culture to provide an adequate framework of hope, moral values, and a sense of belonging and meaning in our lives, so weakening social cohesion and personal resilience.... In investing so much meaning in the individual "self," we have left it dangerously exposed and isolated, because we have weakened the enduring personal, social and spiritual relationships that give deeper meaning and purpose to our lives. (Eckersley, 1997).

The burden of the deep inner void created by an unfavourably or degradingly mundane society is a dangerously unstable situation because this void can be filled by bad or evil leaders who can instigate atrocity, the classic example being Hitler, who in *Mein Kampf* promised that "heads would roll." In the context of modern organization theory, Hirschhorn has confirmed the conclusion that certain types of leadership can have "toxic effects" on organizational motivation (Hirschhorn, 1990: 533), and this insight can surely be applied to societies at the political level.

(2) *Revenge*

A depressed mental state could not in itself be seen as a cause of atrocity, but it may create the kind of mental disturbance created by events or deliberate manipulation that can end with atrocity. Specific atrocity can cause depression not only in those individuals immediately affected by loss, but also at a collective level. Atrocity can therefore create the condition for further atrocity.

Collective memory of a past atrocity can be a motivation to atrocity. In 1389 in the Battle of Kosovo, Turkish invaders committed atrocities as part of their conquest of the Balkans, and avenging these have been put forward as grounds for attack on Islamic Kosovars in 1998.

Writing earlier on the wider subject of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the novelist Danilo Kis identified nationalism as the causal factor: a state of collective and individual paranoia, where *collective paranoia* is a combination of many individual paranoias brought to paroxysm in a group whose goal is '...to solve problems of monumental importance: survival and prestige of that group's nation.' (Kis, 1996: 1). Atrocity was thus interpreted as nationalism, not atrocity.

Psychologists and others have long been concerned with explaining aggression or unprovoked attacks or acts of hostility, and many theories have been put forward. Firstly there is the instinct theory of aggression, represented among many others by Freud who recognised a destructively powerful death instinct, and also by Lorenz (1966) in whose view aggression was a survival-enhancing instinct which is present in human beings as well as other animals, and which can be collective as well as individual. A second view is that aggression is a learned response, rationally chosen and dispassionately employed in the furtherance of selected goals by children, adolescents, adults, and groups such as politicians and the military (Gurr, 1970, 32). The third approach is the 'frustration-aggression theory' first proposed by Dollard (1939). Here aggression is seen as a response to frustration caused by interference in the pursuit of goals or any other disturbance to the collective mental state. The aggressive response to frustration is seen as a biologically inherent tendency in humans and other animals, and is not necessarily incompatible with the other two approaches. None of the three approaches is exclusive, but of the three approaches, the

latter seems to be the most widely accepted. For example, Gurr takes the view that ‘...the primary source of human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism...’ (1970, 36), but he goes on to include among the sources of frustration the sense of relative deprivation, which can be infinitely diverse in origin, nature and response.

The desire for revenge can affect certain strata of society, specific groups, communities, nations and even continents, and can be so widespread and generalised that the term *collective vengeance* can be used to describe the situation. A specific event such as the unexpected death of a public figure such as a political leader by assassination can be the cause of an episode of collective vengeance and ultimately be a trigger for war or genocide, as was the assassination by aircraft destruction of President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda in 1994.

(3) *Reactive or Preventative Atrocity*

As already noted, war is legitimized atrocity. While often retributive, atrocity can also be pre-emptive or preventative. *War* can be open armed conflict, as between sovereign states, but war can also occur within states as civil war, wars of secession (possibly having an identity component) or wars of independence between pro-independence forces and a colonial or other type of occupying state. Here the labelling process as *atrocity*, *act of terrorism* or *legitimate act of war*, is critical, as external support will depend on whichever label is accepted.

Civil war is war within a state where the objective is control of a state, and thus differs from secession of a part from the whole with a view to gaining the power to implement a particular form of government, policy or regime. In civil war both sides are likely to be highly organised and heavily armed, as in the American Civil War (1861-1865), where loss of life was higher than for Americans in World War 2, or the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) where the bloodshed was also very great. Both civil wars were about ideology: the former in relation to the issues of race and central government, and the latter was concerned with class, religion, and land ownership but with an ethnic implication in that Catalonia and the Basque Country, with their distinct ethnic identities, were strongholds of Republican support with some sympathy in Galicia. In some civil wars, ethnicity has played no part: in the English Civil War (1642-1648), ideology and regime change seem to have been the main issues. When civil war has an identity dimension, it can generally be assumed that many grievances will be implicated, either overtly, as in the situation involving the Kurds or the civil war in Sri Lanka (Bostock 1997) or as in the civil war between the IRA and the British Government in Northern Ireland, where the past and present treatment of Irish Gaels is an important item in the store of grievances embedded in collective memory. All of these civil wars have been heavily marked by atrocity.

(4) *Collective Fear*

Creating collective fear among a targeted population seems to be a common aim among the perpetrators of atrocity. As Orleans states “This is the prime objective of terrorism: to alter the texture of daily lived reality by injecting a blend of apprehension, trepidation, despair and ruin.” (Orleans, 2001: 2). Hitler created and used the mental state of fear of atrocity by the advancing Russians as a means to control the German public and prolong World War 2 in Europe. The orchestration of individuals, families and communities into agents of homicidal/suicidal behaviour through the manipulation by fear is a frequently observed and generalised component of the same dynamic in which atrocity is perceived both as an immanent threat and a potential resolution.

The generalized state of fear does provide another precondition for atrocity.

When a large number of people collectively experience fear, one can say that this fear is a product of the collective mental state. Such a state can be engineered by the controlled supply of information and interpretation, which is used to generate collective anxiety. Lake and Rothchild expanded on this theme when they wrote that

As groups begin to fear for their safety, dangerous and difficult-to-resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence...Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs, operating within groups, build upon these fears of insecurity and polarise society. (Lake and Rothchild, 1996: 41).

Most studies of organised violence do not attribute all causality to leadership, as there must be a facilitating followship or at least acquiescent bystanders (Staub, 1989: 23), and very likely a situation where the “raw material” of collective grievances are present.

(5) *Collective Desensitization to Violence*

Suicide and violence towards others including homicide are closely related. WHO reports that violence in all its forms has increased dramatically worldwide in recent decades. During 1993, at least 4 million deaths resulted from unintentional or intentional injury, including 300,000 murders. Of the violent deaths, some 3 million were in the developing world. In many countries, homicide and suicide account for 20%-40% of deaths in males aged 15-34 and in half the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, homicide is the second leading cause of death in people aged 15-24. It is more frequent among men, increases in direct relationship with age, and is closely associated with depression, personality disorders, substance abuse and schizophrenia (WHO, 1997). It should be noted, however, that sufferers of specific mental illnesses generally have no greater proclivity towards violent crime than other members

of a population (Siegfried and Goetinck, 1996). It would seem inevitable that a climate of generalized violence would favour the planning and execution of atrocity.

Borkenau took up this point when he related the mental state of proclivity towards violence to the effect of severe changes to the social and political milieu in which violence becomes commonplace:

Once the carapace of custom is disrupted, the process acquires the characteristics of a chain reaction. Every rift opened by the devaluation of rules widens automatically and produces new rifts in other places....conduct becomes more and more irrational, the area of moral uncertainty is constantly widening, until the typical situation of the "dark ages," a situation of total insecurity and universal crime, is reached. (Borkenau, 1981: 385).

(6) Therapeutic Atrocity

Sometimes killing is seen as healing, as in suicide, but killing others can also be seen as an act of healing, as in supposedly benevolently motivated collective euthanasia. An example of this is the *war of extermination*, where a power seeks to completely extirpate a whole category of people by genocide (Kuper, 1981), for the believed therapeutic benefit of the perpetrators and sometimes even for the victims, as in a kind of mercy killing. The war of extermination may be limited in scope, or disguised as resettlement, as in the Black War in Tasmania (Kuper, 1981, 40), or it may be wholesale as in the Third Reich where a considerable number of categories of people were targeted (Hilberg, 1967) or Cambodia under Pol Pot which has been described as an *autogenocide* in that Cambodians themselves were targeted (Staub, 1989).

In the light of this discussion, it is possible to hypothesise that the impulses towards aggressive behaviours provide a complex assortment of motivations to atrocity, culminating in homicidal, genocidal and suicidal acts (these often being related) and a diverse range of other atrocities including mass rape and mass mutilation. However there is always present a common factor: a disturbed collective mental state.

Philosophical Implications of a Disturbed Collective Mental State

Thus the condition of the collective mental state can be hypothesised as having an essential role in the great question of human society: order or conflict, peace or war, accommodation or genocide, mundanity or atrocity.

The precise nature of the link between mental state and behaviour is the age-old philosophical and moral question of *responsibility*, which will remain unresolved. Another way of looking at the same problem is to say that antisocial behaviour may not be a result of illness: "... harm to society...should not be part of the definition of mental illness, because to include it would open the

door to saying that, for example, all rapists and all those who oppose society's aims are mentally ill" (Collier, Longmore and Harvey, 1991: 314). However, it is obvious that the necessary task of co-ordinating large-scale violence requires large numbers of willing participants and therefore that similarity of motivation, mood, ontology, information supply and interpretation must be assumed. However, such violence also requires that a moral choice that has been made and, therefore, cannot be excused. As Pies has written: "Terrorism, in short, is a moral choice—and in principle, it is reversible." (Pies, 2001: 4).

Pies (2001:1) discussed the problem of whether there can be a collective psychopathology when he wrote "only a clinical evaluation can determine whether an individual suffers from a mental illness, and no group can be diagnosed *en masse*." He then went on to state that "we justifiably may ask: is terrorism related to certain *habitual ways of thinking* that have analogies in some psychiatric disorders? I believe so." Pies thus gives a valuable confirmation to the hypothesis of this article, but his position also creates a problem: if one uses clinical terms for which there might be specific diagnostic tests, then one is making a collective diagnosis which can then only be metaphorical.

An answer to this problem is to avoid the use of clinical terminology such as *disorder*, *paranoia*, (noting that *depression* is both a clinical term and a plain English term), though one can well accept the right of others to use those terms. But it is still possible to describe in plain English the collective mental state of a community both relative to other communities and also in terms of changes to its former self. These conditions could be summarised as having a collective mental state that is either *adjusted to its circumstances* or *disturbed*. But how does an adjusted or disturbed mental state in an individual become collectivised?

The Functioning of Collective Mental States

Many social scientists have suggested that the mechanism by which collective consciousness comes about is *contagious reciprocity*. Kiev developed this theme when he saw not only depression but *collective anxiety neurosis* as being spread by contagion, analogous to an infectious disease (Kiev, 1973: 418).

Another mechanism of change in collective mental state is the result of *collective trauma*, which works by changing the existing ties between survivors (Myers, 1999: 2). Among individuals, it has been recognised that stress can be a cause of or trigger for disorder, so that when stress is widespread throughout a community, a significant change in the collective mental state can be predicted. At the collective level, it has often been observed that major traumatic events or continuing conditions of extreme stress (such as in ghettos) do produce a heightened incidence of suicide and other indicators of mental illness, though in actual war, suicide rates do drop.

An important mechanism is the *feedback loop*. In their study of an industrial plant, Voyer, Gould and Ford (1999) found that many efforts to reduce organisational anxiety were counterproductive because of the presence of reinforcing feedback loops between the various elements of collectively held attitudes and perceptions. There were also balancing feedback loops which had the effect of reducing anxiety and helping the organization to achieve equilibrium, that is, its position before a stressful event. The collective mental state of anxiety is therefore increased or decreased through the mechanism of feedback. Voyer, Gould and Ford referred to a Dutch study which showed that in one organization, the leader's role was in fact the only balancing feedback loop (Voyer, Gould and Ford, 1999: 3), an early confirmation of the idea that leaders or rulers have an important part to play in the dynamics of the collective mental state.

The common element in the various mechanisms of change in the collective mental state—contagion, shared trauma or feedback loop—is communication of memory and perception and interpretation of reality: whether these perceptions are well founded in reality is immaterial.

Conclusion: Calming the Collective Mental State

Atrocity is an attack on mundanity causing and caused by disturbance to a collective mental state. Sometimes a particular mundanity can be interpreted as offensive and calling for atrocity. This process can create the conditions for conceiving further atrocity in a process of endless recycling. Atrocity can escalate to war or legitimized atrocity (which rarely settles a conflict) or genocide (which is the fullest expression of preventative or therapeutic atrocity).

What is needed is the application of atrocity avoidance techniques, and here many experiments have been carried out in simulated conflict and conflict-resolution exercises, often as part of academic courses. Constructive compensation for past atrocity, the removing of the depression caused by both atrocity and mundanity, and major modification of the collective mental state by creating the calming influence of an atmosphere of hopefulness, often while working in conditions of extreme difficulty and discouragement, is the essential task. For reasons of responsibility and therefore atrocity cycle reduction, atrocities must not go unpunished. But the punishment should not be violent, as in capital punishment or state-sponsored assassination, which exacerbates rather than calms the mental state of the associated group through contagion with trauma amplified by feedback loops. Here one could refer to the execution by the British of the leaders of the Irish Uprising of 1916 (with the exception of de Valera who held United States citizenship), and for which, it could be argued, Britain is still paying a price today.

When mundanity is degrading it should be recognised as a potential cause of atrocity, and practical steps at alleviation must be undertaken. One line of investigation has suggested enquiry into the causal power of the group to

change individuals when they become part of a group. In this view, leadership is important among the group processes that require research (Forsyth 1996: 5). Leadership can instil a sense of future, and here it could be relevant to be reminded of the phrase attributed to Dag Hammarskjöld: "the future: yes."

Note

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Personal Atrocity, Sadomasochism, and the Secret Lover's Unshared Tryst: Mundane Behavior Meets Clinical Psychoanalysis

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Abstract: This is a discussion of trauma as it was explored over the course of a woman's four-year psychoanalysis. The paper highlights how patient and analyst (the author) engaged in a series of interactions that brought the woman's history of abuse and abandonment, her stultified outrage, as well as her sadomasochistic fantasy life, into treatment. In exploring the main themes of her treatment – abandonment and homelessness – as well as her attachment to a seemingly mundane object, a bottle of water, I will elaborate how this woman's fantasy life was enacted as a form of sexual surrender that allowed her access to her own historical experience of atrocity, oppression, and hope. I argue that in the interactive matrix of psychoanalytic treatment, atrocity and sadomasochistic desire may appear in the most mundane of behaviors, and that they will have multiple conflictual meanings that demand exploration rather than facile celebration or condemnation.

A patient walks into her analyst's office. She is thirty-six years old, heterosexual, and single, a woman who lives at home with her brother and her elderly parents. She had been put up for adoption at birth by her biological mother, which set up the major themes of her treatment and her life: abandonment and a gnawing sense of homelessness. A few days after her birth, she was taken into the home of her adoptive parents. She brings with her a history – sexual and physical – of personal atrocities and their accompanying traumata. These have been perpetrated upon her in two ways: directly, in sexual and physical abuse; and transgenerationally, through her adoptive father who was a Holocaust survivor. She brings with her guilt, rage, and loneliness, and a million masochistic and suicidal fantasies. She carries the dreaded diagnostic label *Borderline Personality Disorder*, and a dream that through psychoanalysis she will be saved from a life of pain. She also brings a bottle of water. And of all the things that she brought, it was the most mundane one, the bottle, that was the key to unlocking everything else. In this paper, I will explore and examine that unlocking process through the lens of contemporary interpersonal/relational psychoanalysis. To

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understand this patient, a quick review of the way psychoanalysis looks at food and fear will be helpful.

Food and Fear: Clinical Concepts

Conventional psychoanalytic wisdom suggests that patients not be permitted to bring food or drink into their sessions. Analysts generally understand such (mundane) behavior as a defense against oral dependency needs that require analysis. Gratification of these impulses/ wishes/needs discourages their emergence in affect and transference, and so undermines vital opportunities for interpretive work on the oral stage of psychosexual development. Oral preoccupations are associated with primitive dependency needs, and especially when oral impulses are gratified by the ingestion of food, they may be associated with sadomasochistic fantasies – the sadistic chewing, biting, or gnawing upon the mother’s breast, the father’s penis, the mother’s penis, etc., and then the masochistic suffering of associated guilt and anxiety.

Anxiety in many forms of psychoanalysis, especially contemporary interpersonal and relational theory, is the primary target for therapeutic intervention and is considered a primary source of psychopathology. Selective inattention and dissociation are *security operations* (i.e., defenses) that, while keeping a person’s self-esteem and self-experience from being overwhelmed by anxiety, also limit that person’s overall experience of him- or herself across the dismissed domains of thinking, feeling, behaving, and interacting with others. What Sullivan (1953) called the *self-system* is the sum total of security operations that we build up inside ourselves to ward off overwhelming experiences of anxiety. When anxiety cannot be warded off, it results in the experience (or re-experiencing) of trauma.

An Analytic Patient?

When I met the patient, whom I call Jean, I was working at a small community mental health clinic in New York City.

Jean showed up an hour early for her first session, carrying the water bottle that would be her (our) constant companion throughout the work. She spent most of our time pleading with me to not abandon her as her birth mother (and her recent therapist) had. She revealed a long history of severe physical and sexual abuse (including a previous therapy in college with a therapist who had suggested “role-playing” a rape scene, and then in fact actually inflicted on Jean a series of actual rapes). When personal trauma becomes an everyday experience, as it was with Jean, it can devastate an individual, chronically coloring their personality with heavy doses of hypervigilance and suspicion. When personal trauma reaches this level of devastation, I believe it can be considered an atrocity, which is I use the term in instances to discuss Jean.

She described her home as a “concentration camp,” wherein she, under the totalitarian rule of her father, was allowed no freedom whatsoever – including the freedom to have a job, or relationships (especially romantic ones). In fact, she said, therapy was the only activity that her parents allowed. Jean described her father’s violence, and how she understood it to be a reaction to her and her brother’s displays of emotion during their childhoods. Jean related that her father’s history as a Holocaust survivor had left him unable to tolerate *any* emotional expression. She described her father telling her that the Nazis had drowned his mother in front of him and his brother as they entered the concentration camp. He had suppressed and punished emotional expression in his children, so severely that the neighbors had occasionally intervened, coming and getting the children and taking them to their home, sometimes in the middle of the night. Jean, her brother, and their mother all agreed that given the father’s horrific experiences, his intense reaction to his children’s emotions was “as it should be.” Over time, Jean revealed many incidents of abuse at her father’s hands, and the equally horrifying awareness that her mother was both unable and unwilling to stop him.

Over the first two years of analysis, Jean described a series of molestations and rapes that had been perpetrated upon her. She had vague memories of having been molested by a “faceless man” as a very young child – a man who may have been her father. Her father’s brother, also a Holocaust survivor, also molested her on a number of occasions, even though she warned her parents of his intent. Jean’s parents never confronted her uncle, although at some point they stopped leaving Jean alone with him. Starting in early adolescence, she began to get herself “unwittingly” into situations that in fact (as she recalled later) she knew to be dangerous. (This included the one that enabled the rape by her college therapist.) She became addicted to heroin, and there was a period of about five years during which she was highly promiscuous (e.g., sneaking into bars and having anonymous sex with numerous partners). She had a long-term and highly abusive relationship with an older man, and powerful fantasies and impulses about having to be a hooker on the mean streets of Brooklyn. (Jean had been off heroin for quite a number of years when I met her, though she still fantasized, and threatened, about using it, and it was *the* reason that her parents “let” her attend treatment).

All this notwithstanding, Jean excelled in school. She completed high school and went immediately to college. Though there continued to be problematic patterns of behavior in her life (abusive relationships, alcohol and drug abuse), she was always able to perform in the academic context, and when she graduated at twenty-two she accepted a position with the juvenile probation department.

Jean remained there for three years, having found a “true calling.” “I was made for taking care of troubled kids,” she said. She met a man who worked

in her department, a fellow probation officer, and fell in love. They planned to marry.

She also became very attached to some of the children with whom she worked. She fostered their relationships with her fiancé, and encouraged them to trust him as they trusted her. She felt uneasy with his "obsession" with childhood sexual abuse (he had an entire library at home dedicated to the topic), but she felt certain that this was a work-related obsession. However, during an outing, one of the boys punched her fiancé, called Jean a "traitor," and never spoke to her again. She recalls "putting the pieces together" in horror, and coming to the realization that she had done the unimaginable – she had lured the children she so loved "into the jaws of a wolf in the fold."

Jean struggled for a while to come to terms with what her fiancé had done, but she was distraught. A few weeks later, while out driving with him, she attempted to jump out of the car while it was moving at top speed. He pulled over, hit her in the face, and left her on the side of the road. Jean walked home, went into the bathroom, and attempted to overdose on her father's heart medication; she felt wretched: not so much over the horrible ending of her engagement, but over the belief that she had colluded in doing harm to children. She was hospitalized briefly, released, and referred to the clinic where we met. Over the ten years between that event and our meeting, she had sunk further and further into a state of total isolation and dysfunction, to the point where she had no job, no friends, and no activities except for her therapy.

Jean was immuring herself in her house, which didn't feel like her home. She couldn't go out into the world because she didn't feel safe, but home didn't feel safe either. She was bereft, and she described this as her personal state of "homelessness."

She cried during sessions as she spoke about the ways that she had been abandoned and rejected by her biological mother and, recently, her therapist. "I have no home," she whispered, and this was a primary thematic experience for her in the general context of her life. She begged me not to leave her. She told me that she would do "anything" for me if I would keep her. I tried to assure her that I had no interest in leaving her, but her pleading only increased.

At the end of one of our initial sessions, while we were scheduling the other sessions for that week, I became curious about the already-incessant presence of the water bottle that Jean brought into her sessions. Things had gone fairly smoothly in that particular session, so I thought that I might take that opportunity to explore the presence of her water bottle, especially considering that it had been thoroughly drained during the course of our forty-five minutes together (as it had been in each of her other sessions). I framed an (I thought) innocuous question, to which Jean responded curtly, "Fuck you," and walked out. So it began.

Jean began to set up the thing she feared most, the worst form of sadism that I could perpetrate upon her masochistic self – rejection and abandonment. The enactment around the water bottle had already called up sadistic fantasies, and in fact she came into the office two days later apologizing, and promising that I could punish her in any way that I saw fit. Except by taking away her water bottle.

For a long time it went on like that. Jean and I struggled to establish a working analytic relationship, but it was rough going. Her need and her fear were in constant conflict, and after her rages at me and infuriated departures from my office would come spates of terrified phone calls and pleas that I not retaliate by abandoning her. But between, and with the help of, these sadomasochistic melodramas, some analytic work was getting done.

Throughout our time together, in every session hour, in every desperate phone call, her message repeated over and over, "Don't leave me!" which she often stated as "Don't kill me." It was a nightmare but we stuck it out.

Before revealing more about the water bottle, I would like to present some theoretical descriptions of atrocity and masochism that I found helpful in making sense out of this case.

Ghosts Made Flesh: Atrocity Transmitted, Perpetuated, and Enacted

Atrocity and its accompanying traumatic underpinnings can be enacted in daily life. Freud's (1919) thoughts on the aftermath of the First World War contain precursors of current notions of trauma:

The primitive fear of death is still strong within us and always ready to come to the surface on any provocation. Most likely our fear still implies the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry him off to share his new life with him (242).

That is, through the transmission of trauma and through traumatic enactments, we "share" our lives with the dead – we live with ghosts in our midst.

Winnicott (1974) similarly viewed the fear of breakdown as the fear of a previous event, rather than a future one. Such haunting relates to past, current, and ongoing conditions of internalized atrocity, rather than to actual or certain future happenings. In a related vein, Sullivan (1953) delineated the interpersonal security operations that may be called into effect to *inattend* or *dissociate* the internal conditions inherent in unbearable states of preparation. When a traumatic event, such as rape, occurs, for example, the traumatized person might then be unable to recall the specific details of the event. Often when this is explored, it is clear that the emotional impact of the event has not been registered – in other words, that the emotional impact has been "inattended" or "dissociated." These operations engage a feedback loop between primitive experience and current perception based on a dreaded and quickly approaching

future event or state. All we need for the atrocity to exist *inside* is the belief in its possibility. It is then sustained through perpetual enactment of this preparation.

While Freud viewed difficult (i. e., psychotic/borderline) patients as “non-analyzable,” Sullivan (1962), who viewed these conditions as *human processes*, developed methodologies for working with such people. In fact, Sullivan’s *one-genus postulate*, that “everyone is more simply human than otherwise” (32), arose out of his work with such patients. He saw that the psychotic states existed at the farthest end of a continuum between mental health and mental disorder. Sullivan (1940) believed, unlike most theoreticians of his time, that human “personality tends toward the state [of] mental health or interpersonal adjustive success” (97).

Sullivan (1964), whose ideas form a cornerstone of contemporary interpersonal and relational psychoanalytic theory, posited that schizophrenia and like disorders are cultural phenomena related to early and/or ongoing failures in a person’s environment. They represent a form of *acculturation* to chaotic and traumatic (family/cultural) environments. He believed that such traumatic states were transmitted through empathic linkages between caretakers and infants. Winnicott (1965) echoed such thinking in his assertion that there is no such thing as a baby, only the infant-mother (or *mothering one*) pair – the “self” as inseparable from the interrelationship of “self and other.” In an unbreakable linkage like this, when atrocity occurs, there is no escape.

The Masochistic Surrender

Emmanuel Ghent is an interpersonal/relational psychoanalyst who has challenged traditional notions of sadomasochism by considering masochism as a form of *surrender*, as opposed to *submission*. Underlying such a surrender is the deep desire/need that people have to be *known* by another. In counterpart, sadism is the activity of the *knower*, in the penetrative and often painful process of gaining access to the other’s inner experiences. Ghent (1990) says that

surrender has nothing to do with hoisting a white flag; in fact, rather than carrying the connotation of defeat, the term will convey a quality of liberation and expansion of the self as a corollary to the letting down of defensive barriers...There is [in the masochist] deeply buried or frozen, a longing for something in the environment to make possible the surrender (108-109).

Ghent describes the longing of masochists to give up their defensive barriers – to be recognized and known, accepted for who they *really* are. According to Ghent, and Winnicott before him, the wish to be recognized is universal, but people in certain situations of danger can realize it only masochistically. This may be the absolute risk that a traumatized person can take in the presence of a potentially dangerous *other*. It is a game of chance that will either confirm

(required submission in the interaction – repetition of the earlier trauma) or disconfirm (the accepted surrender – breaking the cycle of repetition) their experience of the environment as being wholly malevolent.

Freud (1924) viewed masochism as an expressive of early drive derivatives, or a superego phenomenon. Later, psychoanalysts viewed it as a defensive reaction of the ego (Horney, 1935; Reich, 1933). More recently, Stolorow and Lachman (1980) have suggested that “masochistic activities may...represent abortive (and sometimes primitively sexualized) efforts to restore and maintain the structural cohesion, temporal stability, and positive affective coloring of a precarious or crumbling self representation” (30). Taking all these factors into account, Ghent (1990) suggests that masochistic submission

holds out the promise, seduces, excites, enslaves, and in the end, cheats the seeker-turned-victim out of his [or her] cherished goal, offering in its place only the security of bondage and an ever amplified sense of futility...[Yet] the intensity of masochism is a living testimony of the urgency with which some buried part of the personality is screaming to be exhumed (pp. 115-116).

Bromberg (1998) suggests that “the drastic means an individual finds to protect his or her sense of stability, self-continuity, and psychological integrity, compromises the later ability to grow and be related to others” (6). Along these lines, Ghent considers the masochistic tendency as a means of shoring up a lack of cohesion in the self and argues that this lack requires a form of patterned impingement from the environment in order to stabilize. For Ghent, “impingement” is very similar to “penetration,” and “the deeper yearning, which remains invisible behind compulsive masochistic activity (in itself needed to forestall chaos and disintegration) is the longing to be reached and known, in an accepting and safe environment” (118).

It is also possible that masochism is a person’s way of letting parents off the hook. By taking parental failures in as an expression of the badness inside themselves, traumatized people can both take on the care-taking responsibilities themselves, and simultaneously hold out for a better caretaker in the future. Of course, the only way to test out the new caretaker is to repeat the submit/surrender chance game – a cyclic system. Masochism may be the way that this caretaker self keeps what is essential, what is absolutely necessary for the self to survive – what feels core, real, and intact – safe until it can found by a caring other. Considered in this fashion, masochism may be a powerful expression of hope: masochism was home for Jean, until she could find a home that didn’t require it. It was the placeholder of home in her life. Thus the seeking, waiting, hoping endeavor may be a person’s best shot at self-cure while waiting for the unlikely appearance of another person, a relationship, a world, in whose context those essentials will be safe to come out.

The Secret Lover's Unshared Tryst

One day Jean came in, lay down on the couch, and wept for fifteen minutes, saying finally, "You might as well know the sad truth, I am dying." She went on to tell me how everyone would be better off if she were dead.

After listening to her enumerate the reasons that the world would be a better place without her, I said, "Your dying is a cause for major celebration? Perhaps, then, we can sing and dance around the room."

She replied, "I know you want me to have an emotional reaction to the thought of my own death, you want to convince me that I am not dead already. But I'm not going to give it to you. I hate you. I won't give you the satisfaction."

"You hate me," I replied, "because I see what's alive in you."

"Yes...and everyone who sees *that* tries to kill it. And if you see that, you can see what else is in there, and will lock me up forever." With that, she left, leaving behind a trace element that would be brought to life in the following (and final) sessions of our work together.

In the next session she presented a dream: "*You and I were wrestling...I couldn't tell if we were fighting or playing...it seemed physical...sexual.*" Jean felt thrilled and terrified when she woke up. She associated this dream with a painful but erotically charged experience that she had had during a colonoscopy in the preceding week. She described the dream as a "soft porno show." As she described her feelings of sexual desire, her mood shifted, she seemed startled at the frankness of her associations and she shrieked, "These are *crazy* thoughts, and you are Judas!"

In the next session, Jean began by asking if I was angry with her. I replied that there might be some comfort in seeing me as someone who was mad at her. She then said softly, "I hate you," and was silent for five minutes.

She then whispered, "I have been more disoriented lately. I suspect that you know what *it's* all about..."

Therapist: What what's all about...?

Jean: I would be mortified, embarrassed...

Therapist: You're talking about the *crazy* thoughts?

Jean: For all my life I have been trusting people, they have been throwing it all in my face. I have been having this experience here. It started with weird thoughts...it's sick...you know about the *bottle* and will lock me up. I drink water, I always drink water. I drink to fill my bladder, I hold it until it becomes painful, almost unbearable, I contract my muscles, you know, down there. It gives me something like an orgasm...like we are having sex here, together, alone...but together. I'm ashamed. You will lock me up now [she begins weeping]. I'd rather have regular sex...with

a person...with a man who's not you and not me. Sex is unbearably painful for me...

Therapist: Is *this* experience unbearably painful for you?

Jean: Not until now.

Therapist: Why now?

Jean: Because you know I'm *crazy*. I will walk out. I can't stand it that you know. But I didn't want you to accuse me of avoiding it. I was never going to tell anyone.

Therapist: And now we have to hold it together.

In her next session, she told me that she was embarrassed, but that she believed we could *hold* her experiences together. She then revealed a dream from the night before:

I'm Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz with ruby shoes. I said, "I have no home." The scarecrow said, "I gave you away because I didn't want you," the tin man, "You're nobody's child," and the lion, "You were a mistake." They left me alone.

She woke up crying. After the last session, she said, she had felt that she *did* have a place. She recalled her life as a singular event, a torture in which she did not belong because no one had ever made room for her as she was, with all of her "hang-ups, quirks, and idiosyncrasies."

"Where was the good witch?" I asked.

"I'm not sure there is such a thing," Jean replied, "but come hell or high water, I was going to see you today. I've always wanted you to know that I'm in really bad shape. I always wanted you to help me. I needed to know that it was safe to let you in. The only way I could know was to let you in... You know, let you in."

Rather than interpreting our interchange over the previous sessions as an expression of some archaic id impulse, I accepted it as an interpersonal risk, a surrender that was necessary for Jean if she was going to be able to feel known and accepted – at home.

When Jean had said "fuck you" that first time we met, I had understood it only vaguely as an invitation into a sadomasochistic enactment that would develop and unfold over the course of our time together, and represent the atrocities that she had experienced, internalized, and repeated. I could not have guessed the powerful enactments that would emerge through that water bottle.

In her analysis with me, as in virtually all of Jean's other relationships and experiences, she had recreated the internal atrocity site – the place of maximum vulnerability, the place that others had abused, raped, humiliated, and abandoned, leaving her in a state of psychic homelessness. She took a valiant risk to share this lonely place, initially symbolized by the bottle (bladder) full of water, representing her clandestine sexualization of the analytic relationship, as well as her hope for actual physical and emotional contact with another person. She shared this in the only way she knew how – by enacting a primitive, somatic sexuality that had heretofore existed in isolation, and that needed to be experienced with the *one* person she felt could destroy (or save) her. She did this by taking a masochistic gamble: Would our relationship, like so many others, require her submission to the sadistic impulses of a recreated, and so familiar, *other*? Would I use this information/experience to humiliate her, lock her up, or disavow the importance of the risk that she had taken to trust that our relationship would *contain* her “craziness”? Or would she *finally* be able to surrender her suffocating defenses and be welcomed back home, to the place where she could feel known and accepted *as she was*?

As Jean told me that day, she had begun to feel that this *could* happen, that we could contain her “craziness” and make a safe place for her with all her quirks and all her fears. What more could we build on this breakthrough experience? We both imagined, as we began to explore this issue, that time would tell. It is with immense sadness that I must relate that time told us nothing more.

Conclusion

During our entire four years together, Jean had almost never missed a session. When she missed all four sessions the next week due to illness, I knew that it was serious. She showed up on the following Monday barely able to speak, struggling with pneumonia. Later that week I learned that the pneumonia had won. According to her doctor, her heart just “gave up.”

It had felt as if we had finally been able to create together a facilitating environment wherein we could safely enact the *surrender* that Ghent has so compassionately described. Jean had finally been able to give voice to her internal isolation and her life-long experience of internalized atrocity. She had surrendered herself to yet another imminently dangerous interpersonal situation, and, in so doing, she continued her ongoing struggle to be known and loved – right up until the very end of her life. Her untimely death left me to wonder how she might have expanded this process into other areas of her life.

Dostoyevsky (1955) asked, “Who says human nature is capable of bearing *this* without madness?” (46). *This* – the thought of *death*. As if in answer to Dostoyevsky's question, Bromberg (1998) says that “finding a voice for what may drive the self mad if it speaks is no easy matter to negotiate. But unless it is found, the patient will die without having lived” (135). I believe that Jean had

just begun to find such a voice – to live – in the very final moments of her life, and to know that it is true: There's no place like home.

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How to Make Your Students Cry : Lessons in Atrocity, Pedagogy, and Heightened Emotion

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Abstract: As the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor, I have witnessed how the memory of atrocity haunts her everyday life. As a teacher of Holocaust literature, I discovered that atrocity as part of the daily activity of the classroom was a challenge with surprising results. Students cried in my class, and their tears became a productive pedagogical tool. They began to understand the incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust. In this essay, which is a hybrid of personal reflection and scholarly analysis, I explore my teaching experience and juxtapose it with my personal experience as a member of what is being called the "Third Generation." I draw upon pedagogical methodologies, theories of rhetoric and psychoanalytic and literary interpretations of survivor testimony in my discussion of the intersection of the enormity of the Holocaust with the mundanity of teaching.

Part I: The Teacher

My grandmother is a Holocaust¹ survivor. She is a very active octogenarian: she maintains her own apartment, does all of her chores, bakes countless cookies, and avidly discusses politics. Each activity is structured as defense against memory – she combats the specter of atrocity every day. She has an arsenal of weapons to keep her memories at bay – daily rounds of laundry, cleaning, reading the paper – but sometimes even these are not enough to stave off the invasion of images that crowd into her head. So she talks.

Weekends, when I was younger, I would sit at her table, gorging myself on her delicious Hungarian pastry, and listen in horrified silence to her descriptions of Auschwitz, Grossrosen, Bergen-Belsen. Once she would begin her narrative, I became powerless to tell her, "Stop, you already told me this story," or "You know, Bubbie, I am in no mood to hear your morbid tales today." I am a captive audience, an unwilling student in a private seminar on pain and memory.

Sitting in her studio apartment, I never thought I would be in the role of the teacher myself; then, in the fall of 2001, shortly before the catastrophe of 9/11, which was another kind of holocaust, I became a teacher of Holocaust literature. I taught a two-semester literature and writing seminar for first-year students

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at Boston University titled, "Bearing Witness: Literature of the Holocaust." The title was something of a misnomer; while the works we read in class were, for the most part, written by Holocaust survivors, the idea of "bearing witness" was not the focus of the course. I was not myself "bearing witness," and the texts themselves are more or less effective in achieving that noble goal. In fact, the phrase "bearing witness" has become one of the most frequently used phrases connected with the Holocaust, and yet in its overuse, has been rendered inadequate at best, meaningless at worst. It is meant to summarize the supposed desires of the myriad Holocaust writers out there, desires that are, in real life, infinitely more complex than wanting to recount details of Holocaust atrocity. The texts and movies that claim to "bear witness" actually do more than that; they encapsulate individual histories and losses, and are laden with emotional, ethical, and philosophical questions, most of which remain unanswered. Primo Levi, in his brilliant work *The Drowned and the Saved*, questions the very efficacy of the idea of "bearing witness," something his text purportedly does simply by existing. He undermines the impulse of readers to assume that every Holocaust narrative must "bear witness" by claiming that the true witnesses are the dead:

I must repeat: we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses...We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it...They are the rule, we are the exception. (83-84)

If the Holocaust survivors like my grandmother are not the "true witnesses" in Levi's eyes, and are therefore inadequate to the task of "bearing witness," then their texts are also equally deficient. How, then, could I presume to teach the class I had designed? I realized, as I began teaching, that my class was not, and could not ever be, about witnessing atrocity or reading historical reports on it; rather, my class would have to be devised as a means of *dealing with* atrocity – of analyzing it, exploring its implications and reverberations, but not necessarily finding a way to reconcile it within myself or within my students. My concern was not to figure out what events led up to or caused the Holocaust, and it was also obviously not to describe what happened there. I was, and am, more concerned with what Geoffrey Hartman calls "the aftermath" (2). As a member of what is now being called "the Third Generation," I am interested in exploring how the Holocaust haunts us today. My goal was to "convert [the facts of the Holocaust] into a potent and thoughtful rather than simply an emotional and burdening part of education" (Hartman, 2).

The problem was that my own education in the Holocaust had been something of an emotional burden. If trauma is heritable, perhaps I suffer from a

trace of my grandmother's trauma. Cynthia Ozick would support this theory of heritability, since she has written that no Jew is "untouched by this knowledge, this memory, this sorrowful heritage of victimization, however attenuated in our constitutionally wise and pleasant land" (277). Specifically, I have inherited a certain attitude toward the Holocaust: it was not, as some deem it, a moment in time when the world was out of joint. I, like my grandmother, do not believe that it was Fate, or God, that controlled the destiny or actions of so many. My grandmother prefers to see the Holocaust as a direct result of human action – or, in some cases, inaction – and her own survival is, therefore, the outcome of many thousands of small steps she took to preserve herself. Growing up with her, learning at her tea-table, means that the Holocaust has become divested of any romantic notions for me. I do not see any "spots of goodness in the cruelty" (Ozick, 278). The trend in popular discourse about the Holocaust has been to focus on finding goodness, a mending or healing, an "urgency, in the direction of redemption" (Ozick, 278). This search for closure can often be found in the Holocaust memoirs themselves; many Holocaust narratives, such as Elie Wiesel's *Night* or Olga Lengyel's *Five Chimneys*, end with liberation, as if with liberation came a sense of a redemptive ending to human terror. Lengyel's work in particular suggests that a healing of self and of the world is possible after World War II; like Anne Frank, she believes in the inherent goodness of mankind. Readers of Anne Frank's diary continue to hold on to the hopeful ideal of goodness triumphing over evil; but for scholars, particularly Jewish scholars like Ozick, Hartman, and Irving Howe, there is little optimism to be found in Holocaust literature. Howe writes:

In the years after the Holocaust, there was a certain amount of speculation that human consciousness could no longer be what it had previously been (a consoling thought – but for the likelihood that it is not true)...For good or bad, we remain the commonplace human stock, and whatever it is that we may do about the Holocaust we shall have to do with the work historical consciousness received from mankind's past (198).

Despite the yearning for a happy ending to the Holocaust story, Howe suggests that the reality of human consciousness is that it does not change. I agree with Howe, as would my grandmother; for us, the Holocaust has ceased to be what it is for most people– an occasion to indulge in sentimental and self-righteous blather. *What happened was terrible. How could the world let it happen? Humanity lost its humanity back then. We must never forget.* Those kinds of thoughts are far too easy to summon up; they rise almost unbidden to people's lips, like cursory responses such as "I'm fine, thanks, how are you?" I, like my grandmother, live with a low-level outrage at such reactions. We have a sense

of anger that almost equals, in its strength, our sense of loss. Such sadness, such anger: these emotions are not easily neutralized. Momentary indulgences in facile, moralizing attitudes that make other people feel good are empty and unsatisfying signifiers.

In a classroom setting, however, I knew I would have to harness my outrage and try to be as neutral a listener and transmitter as possible, while also combating the impulse toward sentimentalization. My goal as a teacher was not to work out my own psychological knots, but to help my students think beyond the platitudes surrounding the Holocaust. I wanted to get them to see the moral complexities of atrocity, and to recognize the varied ways those thorny subjects have been represented in literature, to see the “links between representational techniques and ethical concerns” (Hartman, 2). While Hartman is opposed to burdening students with a purely emotional pedagogy (10), I discovered that the most powerful tool is the stimulation of emotional response – not one that is divorced from intellectual inquiry, but one that is encouraged by the pursuit of rigorous classroom discourse. I want to explore in this article the ways in which the emotional responses to the works we read in class worked as a productive pedagogical tool. I often felt as if the teaching of violent and powerful Holocaust prose and poetry was an act of violence in itself, and that I was inflicting pain on my students; yet the pain led, in many cases, to the students’ production of more thoughtful prose. My students’ emotions enabled better discussions of formal elements in literature, which led to better written expression in their own papers, and finally, to a deeper understanding of Holocaust narrative.

Getting students to study and write about the Holocaust without relying on cliché proved to be a Herculean task. First, I met with the ordinary obstacles of daily classroom activity. Discussing atrocity and violence became absurd in the class setting; the memoirs and stories of the Holocaust rested cheek-by-jowl with common realities such as taking attendance, learning grammar, and discussing papers. A conversation about Primo Levi’s suicide or Jean Amery’s torture might be followed up, for example, with the business of handing out a homework assignment. While such activity wasn’t exactly trivializing, it was strange and bewildering to me and the students; we were constantly shifting gears between the *univers concentrationnaire*² and our world at Boston University.

Furthermore, I was teaching a course that combined literature with the teaching of composition, a required course for first-year students. The students were asked, in effect, to take an emotionally difficult subject and write analytical essays about it. Anyone who has taught college composition, or any writing course, will know the challenges that multiply by simply asking people to write. Chaos and resistance can ensue in any writing class, but this class in particular was fraught with panic. Students dreaded writing about a difficult subject, and the teacher dreaded reading anemic student prose that would reduce the

Holocaust to its simplest form. I wanted to minimize that fear about writing, and I wanted them to get beyond the usual “neutral exposition” that I.A. Richards describes in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*.³

In class, we bandied about the terms so often applied to the Holocaust: atrocity, horror, violence, murder, death. I doubted, however, the power of these words, which were vague approximations of the realities behind them, and I wondered how I could get my students to use other, stronger words. As Richards writes, the word “means the missing part of its contexts and is a substitute for them, so the...intention may be the substitute for the kick, -- the missing part of its context” (40). I wanted my students to feel the “kick” of the prose they were writing. I often suspected that they were writing words and phrases that they thought I wanted to see, a common symptom of the writing style imposed on students by so many writing classes. My students in other composition classes had mastered the art of performing, but not really writing, by using a universalized public voice, one that masked whether or not they truly understood what they were reading (Miller, 93).⁴ I wanted my Holocaust literature students to give me their honest and creative expression, without the performance.

Finally, I came up against the obstacle of my own position as teacher. Northrop Frye writes of the teacher’s role:

The teacher, as has been recognized at least since Plato’s Meno, is not primarily someone who knows instructing someone who does not know. He is rather someone who attempts to re-create the subject in the student’s mind, and his strategy in doing this is first of all to get the student to recognize what he already potentially knows, which includes breaking up the powers of repression in his mind that keep him from knowing what he knows. (xv)⁵.

The teacher’s goal – to recreate the subject – is met by devising methods or wielding pedagogical tools in the classroom on a daily basis. These tools give the teacher his or her alleged position of power. The method Frye suggests – that of “breaking up” the powers of repression – works best when the teacher himself or herself has already succeeded in breaking through the walls of his or her own repression. But what happens when the teacher is still “repressing” something within herself? The kind of knowledge taught to me by my grandmother was almost too terrible to share with students. I often find myself wishing I did not know what I know, or I want to ignore it, make it disappear. Could I really think of myself as invested with pedagogical power if I was unwilling to face the inherited pain and trauma I associated with the Holocaust? How could I, with my insider/outside perspective, make my students comprehend the tip of the proverbial iceberg? Any reader of Holocaust narrative knows that to begin to explain the inexplicable, one must suspend what he or she recognizes

as “normal” or “real.” If the categories of “real” or “true” are questionable (as any good post-structuralist can tell us), then how was I, a teacher, supposed to “recreate” the Holocaust, with all of its atrocity, in a student’s mind? And why would anyone want to?

I thought about my grandmother’s lessons in Holocaust history, and what I could borrow from her pedagogy. What made my grandmother’s afternoon seminars so powerful was not *her own* outrage, but the emotion she was able to provoke *in me* through her words. I discovered, through teaching, that not only did I want to “recreate” the subject of the Holocaust in my students’ minds, but that I wanted to wield my outrage as a pedagogical tool. I wanted to transmit some of that anger and emotion to them. I wanted what Shoshanna Felman has called a “class in crisis” (47).

Felman describes a graduate seminar she taught at Yale that focused on literature of trauma; in addition to reading poetry and prose, the class also viewed videotapes of Holocaust testimony. Felman says that she was “taken by surprise” by the reaction of her students to the tapes: after the initial viewing, the students not only cried, but suddenly wanted to talk endlessly about the subject matter (48). As Felman writes, the desire to talk led the students to “break down the very framework of the class,” which constituted a trauma of its own (48-52). Having experienced the class as a trauma, the students were able to work through it and, as Felman states, submit written work at the end of the course that was articulate and reflective (52).

I knew that most of my undergraduates were not equipped with the same sophisticated analytic apparatuses as graduate students, and were perhaps incapable of breaking down the framework of the class in the same productive ways as Felman’s students. I was also, unlike Felman, a still inexperienced and young professor, and I was uncertain how to create a classroom atmosphere that would be conducive to an emotional analysis of the texts. After several weeks, however, my class, like Felman’s, was able to break down the framework of the class in small ways, and the outrage I was trying to stir up was beginning to destroy the repressive faculties in my students’ minds. The interesting phenomenon of such rupture was not entirely stimulated by me, however: the initial emotive response came from the students. Three times a week, for an entire semester (or two, for those dedicated students who suffered through an entire year of Holocaust readings), the students and I read and discussed memoirs, poetry, fiction and film. Students’ faces gradually changed from impassive, late-adolescent masks of boredom to mirrors of inner reflection. And then, they began to cry.

Part II: The Readings, the Students, and Their Essays

My students’ tears, instead of signifying a sentimentalized digestion of the Holocaust, proved to be a breakthrough in their comprehension of the texts we read. I was initially surprised and perplexed by their tears. In the college classroom, such discussion of affect seems distracting; in fact, any display of heightened emotion is seen as out of place. Even Felman’s graduate students, who cried during the viewing of the videotaped testimonies, did so in the private realm of someone’s apartment, and so were not subject to public scrutiny (Felman, 47). But when tears are shed in the company of other students, how does a teacher react? I responded, initially, by not responding; if a student cried, I would let a moment of silence go by, and then I would continue with the lesson as planned. I worried over this lack of responsiveness to the students’ tears; was I being cold? Neglectful? Insensitive? I later came to view them as an effective means of stimulating intellectual discussion. Education experts have been talking for years about “affective education.”⁶ Researchers claim that a classroom in which teachers are aware of their students’ feelings, and openly discuss the subject of emotions, leads to a facilitation in students’ “personal integration.”⁷ In such situations, the teacher becomes a kind of moral transmitter, teaching students what may not be taught to them in the home: how to make daily decisions about human action (John Miller, 27).

Throughout the literature of “affective education” runs a common theme: the teacher is meant to be a nurturant, a moral stimulator, and overall, a warm, compassionate, and supportive presence (John Miller, 26, 44). Since I am not trained as an affective educator, I had few strategies to rely on for responding to or using students’ tears effectively. Instead of becoming a more nurturing, supportive, affective educator, however, I did not discuss the emotional impact these texts might have on them. The ways that affective learning eventually crept into my classroom was that students confessed to being emotionally affected by what they were experiencing in the class, and the public voicing of their inner reactions forced me to deal with affect in the classroom.

The first instance of heightened emotion in the class came early in the fall semester. After the first few readings, which included Elie Wiesel’s famous and brief memoir, *Night*, my students would come to office hours to discuss their papers. Many reported that they were having nightmares. Some had been unable to finish *Night*, because they kept “bursting into tears.” These confessions only took place in the relatively private space of my office; no one dared to express strong emotion in class. Then, shortly after that, one student went to hear Elie Wiesel speak. While describing the lecture, she mentioned that she was struck by his very presence, even more than by what he said. She reported that while she watched him, she could only think about what he went through, and that this knowledge made his living, breathing form on the podium seem miraculous. “I’m choking up again thinking about it!” were her closing words, her eyes filled with tears and she had to stop talking.

I reacted with silence; I then turned to the students and asked them if they had anything to say. Surprisingly, the student's tears stimulated a spirited discussion of Wiesel's memoir, in which students began to publicly confess to having had difficulty reading *Night*. I was struck by how the text alone had not managed to elicit empathy from my students, but rather, the visual connection between author and text resulted in a display of public, collective empathy. It was not until this one young woman's outburst that students began to visualize Wiesel and his narrative as "real," and therefore as potentially moving. Reading a testimony like *Night* is a private, but detached, event. Students encountering Holocaust literature and history for the first time often do not know what to picture when reading; but viewing a film, for example, or hearing a survivor speak about his experience, suddenly and shockingly teaches the student an important lesson: *what you were imagining was tame, insufficient*. Students (and all readers of Holocaust testimony who are not survivors themselves) do not have the visual vocabulary to match the words they read, so that the word "crematorium" might not bring to mind the exact ovens at Auschwitz. It takes a documentary film, or a survivor's lecture, to paint a vivid picture of such realities in the students' minds. By proxy, it seemed, they were able to react to the text, and thereby, push the boundaries of typical classroom behavior.

Oral accounts, or visual artifacts are powerful because they offer the shock of the "real." They lack the familiar, comforting structure of literature, which creates a buffer between reader and event. But oral narratives – like the ones Felman showed her graduate students, or live lectures like Elie Wiesel's, or my grandmother's stories – are sometimes less effective means of communication because of the limitations of spoken language. Speeches and interviews also have little in common with regular oral discourse, and often fail to make the encounter between text and audience a comfortable one (Langer, 20). In fact, the result of hearing an oral testimony is usually the opposite of reading one :

Normal oral discourse – the speech, the lecture, the political address – assumes that the audience is no mystery and that competent presentation...will rouse and hold an audience's interest...But the first effect of many of these [Holocaust] testimonies is just the opposite, no matter how vivid the presentation: they induce fear, confusion, shame, horror, skepticism, even disbelief...Unlike the writer, the witness here lacks inclination and strategies to establish and maintain a viable bond between the participants and the encounter. (20)

Lawrence Langer suggests that written testimonies might be more effective ways of "holding" an audience's "interest" than an oral narrative. Written narratives are, as he says, shaped by various literary devices which might appeal more to a reader's sensibilities, while oral narratives are stripped of such writerly

accoutrements. Their bareness, their unmitigated energy, their lack of metaphor, is their strength, but also their weakness. Written accounts, as Langer explains, "prod the imagination in ways that speech cannot, striving for analogies to initiate readers into the particularities of their grim world" (18). Writers of Holocaust memoirs use various literary strategies, such as style, chronology, imagery, dialogue, to narrow the gap between author and reader, thereby "easing us" into an unfamiliar world (Langer 19). Even though the written narrative might prove to be, as Langer describes it, "an unsettling challenge" (17), the form of the narrative is familiar and therefore reassuring (17). This familiarity is, perhaps, what often leads readers to mistake the emotional and intellectual challenges presented by Holocaust narratives for pure sentiment.

That my students needed the author-text connection between Wiesel and *Night* in order to cry was not surprising; what surprised and pleased me more was when they began to respond publicly to works that were more difficult, and less familiar. I noticed that certain kinds of literature were more effective in evoking rage or sadness in students. Some students responded more strongly to poetry, others to prose; some reacted to fiction, others to memoirs. In an effort to increase the level of emotional response, I paid closer attention to the types of texts my students were crying about. Most students, particularly women, admitted to being especially moved by the writings of Charlotte Delbo. We read from her deceptively simple collections, *Auschwitz and After* and *Days and Memory*. After reading a section of *Days and Memory*, one girl raised her hand in class and confessed, "I haven't been as moved by anything we read in class so far. I'm getting teary right now thinking about it." This time, I was ready for her tears; I followed up her confession with a question: why did Delbo's prose affect her more than, for example, Wiesel's?

My student responded to Delbo's works because they seemed much closer to fiction or poetry than to historical memoir, but they were as naked and unmitigated as a visual image. All the students in the class believed, upon first readings, that her vignettes and prose sculptures must be fiction; this initial belief intrigued them and made the text seem more appealing. When I informed them that her pieces are based on her real-life experiences, the students were visibly impressed with her ability to turn oral history into poetry. While they had been moved by Wiesel's testimonies, they were not awed by his narrative honesty; they were seduced by Delbo's literary experimentalism. It was precisely this challenge to the students' idea of testimony that began our class discussions of Delbo. The student who admitted to being incredibly moved by Delbo, one of my most sophisticated students, said she liked reading Delbo better than Wiesel because Delbo's prose was uncluttered by narrative details, and focused more on the emotional, inner world of the author than did even Wiesel's confessions.

Not only Delbo's quality of prose, but her gender, seemed to play an important role in students' appreciation of Delbo. The majority of my students were women, and they empathized with Delbo; just as Delbo inhabited various

invented voices in her text, so did my students. Young women who had been touched, but not moved to tears, by Wiesel's account were suddenly crying over Delbo, particularly the poems where Delbo describes the ache of longing for her mother or husband. One student admitted that she was moved to tears by one of Delbo's "mother" poems precisely because she began thinking about her own relationship to her mother. Another student was affected by the poem "Kalavrita of the Thousand Antigones," a paean to the women of Greece who lost all the male members of their families one night during the German invasion. This student said that when she read the poem, she identified with it by imagining what would happen if "someone came at night to take away all the male members of [her] family." Clearly, Delbo's experience as a woman in the *univers concentrationnaire* led her to make connections between her pain and that of other women who suffered losses as a result of war. Her ability to translate her experience across borders, both physical and imagined, caught the attention of my women students, who then transferred some of Delbo's vision onto their own lives.

The students' personalized reactions enabled us to enter into a discussion about formal elements of Holocaust literature, as well as formal elements of a hypothetical essay that would analyze such literature. The students were quick to see the complexities of a writer like Delbo, and could also apply what we said about her flexible genres to other Holocaust narratives. We discussed her powerful use of the first-person voice, and how it blurred the lines between fiction and non-fiction. In examining the use of Delbo's narratorial "I," students raised the question of introducing the first-person into their own texts, the essays they were producing for class. They felt that Delbo's unconventional writing served her well; it was, they said, like reading someone's journal, and this kind of private/public writing was something they, too, wanted to experiment with in more unconventional academic essays. They were searching for a way to channel their emotional responses into their otherwise guarded and careful writing. In a final move to further personalize and humanize the classroom, they sought to break down the framework of the typical college essay, and I welcomed their eagerness to do so.

The resulting papers were of a much higher quality than I had expected. The introduction of the personal into an otherwise scholarly paper was not disruptive or antithetical to the paper's goals, but became integrated into the theme and structure of the essay. Some of the students began writing about their grandparents, who were also survivors; others wrote about the experience of reading Holocaust literature. Once the students saw that they could write using the first-person voice, they felt released to use more interesting language. Gone was the stultifying "neutral" tone of print culture; the students' papers were clear, precise, and often lyrical. Most importantly, they were interesting to read, and therefore easier to grade. Universities often balk at the teaching of personal or familiar essays in expository writing classes, claiming that students then

fail to learn how to write papers in their own discipline; my experience with integrating the personal into the classroom proved to be a successful, though unintentional, experiment.

Part III: The Teacher, Revisited

The vital goal – to get the students to understand the Holocaust as something that cannot or should not be sentimentalized – is a harder one to measure than the success of those final papers. It seems to me that, in becoming more well-informed readers and more experimental writers of texts, my students were able to face the ugliness and enormity of the Holocaust, and that some of them ceased to trivialize it by using the language of cliché when referring to it. The ability to put themselves into their essays, I hope, forced them to place themselves in the shoes of survivors, or survivors' children and grandchildren – in writing what it was like to read about the Holocaust, many of them suffered a kind of "trauma" that is almost like the terrible, inherited knowledge that I possess. I wanted them to go through that trauma, to become elective witnesses, rather than legatees by birth.⁸ I wish I could say that I successfully managed to use the tears of my students to turn each and every one of them into first-class essayists, as well as fine interpreters of Holocaust testimony. I have no real way of measuring to what extent these goals were achieved; while many of my students attained a level of skill that surpassed my expectations, many of them, I'm sure, still make grammatical errors, as well as the usual inane remarks about the atrocity of the Holocaust.

I also wish I could say that my anger, sadness, and other turbulent emotions regarding the Holocaust have diminished as a result of teaching. It would be a happy ending to my tale, a neat way to wrap things up: a teacher allows tears to dictate a new pedagogy in her classroom and – *abracadabra!* – her own inner demons are exorcised! I wish it were that simple, but the emotional damage sustained by my grandmother exerts its pressures on me even as I write this sentence. I also feel the weight of another kind of urgency; as a teacher who has been touched by the Holocaust, I have been cast in the sometimes ineluctable and undesirable goal of near-eyewitness. If the true witnesses are dead, and the secondary witnesses begin to die out, the memory of the Holocaust's atrocity threatens to wither. I am not afraid that it will be entirely replaced by denial, but rather, that it will shrink in power and be substituted by what Hartman calls "anti-memory – something that displays the colors of memory...but drifts toward the closure of forgetful ritualization" (10). A student's tears brought on by poetry might turn out to be the means of combating anti-memory; if that is the case, I am ready with the Kleenex.

Notes

¹ My use of the word “Holocaust” here is very specific – I use it to refer to the terrorizing, destruction and murder of European Jewry, and other minorities and political prisoners, at the hands of the Nazis during the period of 1933-1945.

² These words, meaning “concentrationary universe,” is an inclusive term that refers to the system of concentration camps, ghettos, and other prison-like or otherwise oppressive structures within the Nazi belt of authority; I borrow this term from Delbo, who uses it in almost all her works, including *Auschwitz and After* and *Days and Memory*.

³ In discussing print culture and the ways in which it has changed the nature of rhetoric, Richards writes: “But neutral exposition is a very special limited use of language, comparatively a late development to which we have not yet (outside some parts of the sciences) adapted.” See I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: Oxford UP, 1936), 40.

⁴ Susan Miller discusses the bifurcation of student writing as a split between expression of inner perceptions and abstract argument using a “universalized, public expert voice” (93). This split limits the range of appropriate student discourse (93).

⁵ See Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. New York: Harvest Harcourt Brace & Co., 1982.

⁶ The terms “affective education” and “humanistic education” or “psychological education” are used by education theorists interchangeably to signify a set of specific teaching approaches devised by various educators and psychologists to increase the level of emotional discourse in the classroom setting (John Miller, 5-8). These approaches range from discussing how the students feel about a particular problem in the world, to talking about tensions that exist within the classroom.

⁷ John Miller describes personal integration as an individual’s commitment to his or her own growth and development; the individual who seeks to become integrated must understand that such personal growth is processual and happens over time (5). Miller suggests that such personal integration can occur as a direct result of affective education, as long as the teacher and student work in earnest to achieve this together (5-8).

⁸ I borrow the idea of the elective witnesses from Hartman, who calls them “witnesses by adoption” or “those people who have adopted themselves into the family of victims” (8). I expand on Hartman’s meaning a bit; I believe there are those who seek to identify themselves not only with the victims, but with the storytellers and scholars as well, those who feel a moral or ethical imperative to learn about the Holocaust and pass on that information. This group of people includes students as well as teachers, non-Jews as well as Jews.

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Tragedy of the Common: Markedness and the Creation of Mundane Tragedy

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Abstract: This paper explores how the integration of images of tragedy and atrocity into daily life gradually move such events from highly marked occurrences to less visible occurrences. Through a process of repetition, the moral significance of the marked atrocity becomes unmarked as it is further integrated into the symbolic interactions of daily life. This paper also discusses how this process, although not defined by the medium of transmission, can be utilized in the generation of political motivation and in the reinforcement of social norms.

How can I sit here and eat my tea, with all that blood flowing from the television? At a quarter to six, I watch the news, eating, eating, all my food as I sit watching the red spot in the egg that looks like all the blood you don't see on the television.

-- Gang of Four, 5:45

Every day we are confronted with images of tragedy, suffering, and torment. These images, administered in regular doses and at set schedules, besiege our visions and concerns: famine in an impoverished African nation, fundamentalist-fueled religious violence in the Middle East, rampant inner-city gang violence, the drug-funded guerrillas in South America. The representations of atrocity multiply, yet they seem more and more invisible. Paradoxically, as violence and atrocity become more integrated symbolically into the imagery of daily life they are less visible in the conscious vision – they are everywhere, and they are nowhere – they are hidden in plain sight. How, and why, does this process occur? In a world where the information and images vastly outnumber amounts available to all heretofore-existing generations, why are we increasingly immune to the realities with which we are presented?

The nature of the presentation of tragedy through television, radio, and print determines whether it lies within the realm of concern and whether or not it is perceived as relevant. Whether or not the images of tragedy and suffering are held to be of consequence by those viewing them is not based upon the intrinsic qualities of what is being presented. Through the presentation

of tragedy runs the subtext of power: the power to determine what is within the sphere of moral relevance, what is of concern, what is within the realm of action, and even what is perceived by those who observe it. Conversely, how a tragedy is presented can render it unimportant, morally irrelevant, or cause it to be unnoticed and un-comprehended by those who are directly presented with the imagery and information.

Markedness, Moral Focusing, and Mundanity

That is to say, the presentation of tragedy determines whether something is marked or unmarked, and whether or not it falls within our sphere of moral concern. To illustrate the phenomenon oft-referred to in sociological literature as 'markedness' (a concept to which we shall return repeatedly), we can call to life the infamous Man on the Street. The Man on the Street goes to the coffee shop, reads the *Times*, and then goes to the park for an afternoon stroll. None of this is outside the realm of ordinary experience for the Man on the Street, and hence it is unmarked. But then the Man on the Street steps onto the highway, where he is struck by seven cars, an alien spaceship, and the entirety of the Christian Coalition. This is a highly unusual event even for the Man on the Street (who is subjected to a great many things), and hence it is 'marked' as such.

"Language," states Wayne Brekhus, "plays an key role in the social marking process. The very act of labeling a category simultaneously constructs and foregrounds that category" (35). Thus the word 'atrocities' is set up as a marked term defining a marked condition and assigning it a moral value; i.e., atrocities are bad. This distinguishes it from things that are positive, less egregiously negative, or which fall outside the realm of moral delineation. While the word atrocity has a moral value assigned to it, the word 'tragedy' tends to refer more to a disaster or negative events of a personal nature *without* the moral markings; that is to say, the word tragedy refers to happenings of an unfortunate nature without necessarily condemning it as an act against God, society, etc. Thus we can see the politics of the terminology: to say "this is an atrocity" compels one to action, or at least to seek and condemn the perpetrators of said atrocity, but to say "this is a tragedy" accentuates the unfortunate nature of the event without necessarily condemning anything or anyone. The same event, as we will discuss further, can often be presented as either a tragedy or as an atrocity - so while we use the terms almost interchangeably in the paper, it is important to keep in mind the political significance of such usage in everyday life.

As we are not surrounded in our day-to-day lives by mass starvation, genocide, and warfare it would follow that these things, were they to suddenly enter our lives, would be highly marked social situations. Similarly, accounts of atrocity tend to arouse our concern and occasionally our indignation; it would follow that all atrocities have the *potentiality*, by virtue of this markedness, to be noticed and therefore to be the object of our sociomoral concern. But we

collectively obsess over some atrocities while wholly ignoring others - thus we 'mark' them as within our conscious sight and cast the rest of the unattended atrocities to the mundanity of shadow. And even if the atrocity is not entirely overlooked, the manner of its presentation - whether it is presented as an affront to humanity or as grim statistics in the back pages of the newspaper - will affect our reaction to it; for example, we are much less likely to lose sleep at night after reading figures on world hunger than we are after watching a TV special on starving children.

But the reality of the situation is that not all tragedies - regardless of their gravity or consequence - are marked, despite the level of information and awareness that may exist about them. The reality of tragedy is the *perceived* reality of tragedy, which is socially constructed and defined by norms held by the institutional order of the perceiver. And as the perception of tragedy is socially constructed, the extent to which tragedies are deemed relevant is determined by norms and values existing within the overall cognitive social structure. The reality of everyday life requires the mental separation and sifting of that which is of concern from that which can be ignored. To borrow the words of Berger and Luckmann, "the reality of everyday life always appears as a zone of lucidity behind which there is a background of darkness. As some zones are illuminated, others are adumbrated, I cannot know everything there is to know about this reality" (44).

The volume of information available only increases and expedites this problem. One could scour every available news source, media outlet, or other avenue of information in a brave attempt to equitably cover every world event and determine 'that which is relevant,' but to attempt to do so would be simply overwhelming. And even if one were to presuppose a condition where there would exist equal coverage of world events, or even equal attention being paid to each item presented, particular items would emerge in the concerns of individuals as being more important and relevant. These would often be attributed to the individual's sympathy for the particular suffering of those involved or the scope or content of the event - Group A slaughtering Group B, for example - rather than other factors such as historical context (Group B having almost wiped out Group A twenty years ago). Furthermore, it is likely in a random discussion with the Man on the Street as he watches the news through a storefront window that one would hear him speak of the tragedy of the day (i.e., the tragedy presented that day) rather than any number of tragedies which closely resemble it.

Why are certain events within the designated realm of concern while others are thrown to the wastebasket of history? It would be easy to say that areas of concern are simply determined by their relevance, but this fails to elucidate the nature of how and why this process occurs. The key distinction here is how and why one image of tragedy lies within the realm of an individual's

concern and why another does not. Driving down the highway, the image of a dead sloth on the side of the road would elicit no significant reaction - the corpse of a child would. The cognitive process involved is much like the act of mental attending described by Eviatar Zerubavel as moral focusing, or the mental delineating of what is perceived to be of moral concern and what is not; for example, the previously mentioned sloth along the side of the road is an image "lying outside this circle . . . [it] is essentially considered morally irrelevant, as such does not arouse our moral concerns" (39). The sloth does not exist within the marked boundaries of "we-ness," the child does.

Presentations of Tragedy in Everyday Life

It is our contention that tragedy and violence have become increasingly invisible in the cognitive sense through the nature and manner of their presentation -- primarily through media outlets -- though the nature of this change in perception can easily affect other areas of social life. It is the nature of the presentation, perhaps even more than the reality of what is presented, that determines how the information and images are perceived, comprehended, and mentally attended to in the social process; the qualitative difference in presentation expedites the transition between images of tragedy being marked and within the moral sphere of concern, and those that are unmarked and outside this cognitive sphere.

This, however, is not intended to degenerate into yet another rant about the "evil media" and how it is destroying the nature of reality, taking us to hell in a satellite dish, etc . . . The television and print media are used as examples here for how they present tragedy and atrocity, not because they are being blamed as part of some insidious plot. In the consciousness of that mythical being known as the "average person," a great deal, if not all, of what they know about the world around them is filtered through the presentation of the subject by media outlets. Such a concept could also be explored through an analysis of historical texts or other avenues of information, as many of the same principles will apply.

Let us explore this concept through a few examples that demonstrate the process: consider, for example, the estimated between 800,000 and 1,000,000 people who died in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. When the media finally felt the carnage sufficient to warrant attention, it was virtually exclusively presented as a tribal conflict between two factions in some provincially anachronistic ancient feud. The situation was presented as a conflict between nameless and faceless blocks of people who had no descriptions or apparent motivations. Their existence was defined as an undemarcated block, notable perhaps only in how their particular catastrophe might rank among other massive tragedies in Africa.

Compare this to the media presentation of the victims of the World Trade Center tragedy, where each individual was distinctly portrayed as having a name, face, and a story. Some had only a brief paragraph, while other's names were attached to epics of drama and loss. These stories made it possible to relate to each victim and granted them an identity beyond that of their victimhood: in short, these stories allowed them to attain a state of moral relevance in the cognitive sphere of consideration. As described by Michael Albert:

They looked at a calamity and gave the human dimensions of it . . . the media looked into this horrible occurrence . . . and it gave the human dimensions of the suffering . . . Now what's wrong with that is not they did it, what's wrong with it is that Iraq has suffered the equivalent of a September 11th every week for about the last ten years in some total and they haven't done it [there] once.

Consider concurrently the style of presentation employed by charities urging us to donate money to alleviate suffering, disease, and hunger in Africa. Observe how instead of urging the TV viewer to donate money to a given community, they urge people to support the life of a given individual, which is made real to the contributor by providing a name, a face, and biographical information about the recipient of the charity. As the individual (more than likely a child, as we tend to find children more worthy of moral concern) moves from the realm of the abstract tragedy to personalized suffering, the individual tragedy shifts from the unmarked, morally invisible realm to the individualized realm which constitutes our moral concern - for that is when that with which we are presented becomes real tragedy, not merely an abstraction or an anonymous 'atrocious'.

Stalin ironically, and perhaps most fittingly, summed up this very concept when he said, "One death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." Historically and in fiction one finds that the tragedies which hold the greatest moral concern and resonate with the most compelling fervor are those that have been crystallized and cognitively assigned to the actions and death of an individual, not to the situation or framework of that individual's death. For many the Holocaust is recalled as the death of Anne Frank; for Parkinson's, Michael J. Fox; for the sacrifices of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., and so forth. The tragedy and its recollection are attended to as crystallized and embodied in the individual's tragedy and moved into the sphere of moral relevance.

These distinctions and demarcations are symbolic markers and divisions in the overall social structure of daily life. Symbolic markers do not exist exclusively in the mythic realm of grand cultural archetypes, but are integrated into the milieu of everyday life in such a way that binds together material realities through the aspects of meaning crystallized in symbolic forms. They

create what Pitirim Sorokin describes as “the interdependence of meaning that underlies the vehicles and agents uniting them into an interdependent whole” (18). They become what might be called the objective markers and dividers of the subjective experience.

“Even the most workaday, least dramatic forms of social action are also forms of symbolic production,” states David Graeber. “They play the main role in reproducing people’s most basic definitions of what humans are, the difference between men and women, and so on” (82). The most common form of symbolic interaction that typifies perception and creates intersubjectivity in everyday life is language. Demarcations of moral relevance (or lack thereof) frequently emerge in the language and the classifications created by language in everyday life. This principle also applies to how tragedy and atrocity are presented within everyday life. Do we show concern for ‘illegitimate bastard children’ or poor, ‘disadvantaged orphans’? On Veteran’s Day (or Remembrance Day) do we count the souls of the fallen heroes or those of ‘collateral damage’?

For instance, according to urban legend the term “handicapped” was originally a blatant reference to the economically disadvantaged nature of the disabled from their inability to find work. Literally, they were holding their cap in their hand and begging for change. The nature of their tragic, or at least gravely unfortunate, condition was reflected in the term used to describe them. Through repetition and use of such a description the term lost the meaning it originally held as it became increasingly common with the language and experience of daily life. The demarcated “otherness” of such a condition gradually diminished to the point where we no longer realize that what we regard as a common term or disability was actually a fairly insensitive reference to an individual’s debilitating condition. Though the urban legend has nothing to do with the actual origination of the word ‘handicapped,’ it illustrates rather nicely the process of change from a very highly stigmatized condition of which we were once acutely aware into a nicely prepackaged phrase which acknowledges the condition while simultaneously allowing one to ignore it.

We are finicky consumers when it comes to what we will attend and ignore in questions of tragedy. As all employed journalists know, “if it bleeds, it leads.” In the same way that we have in recent years gone into a moral panic over razorblades in Halloween candy, teenage motherhood, and presidential sex scandals, so too do we go through the latest trends in tragedy and shift our sphere of moral indignation to Rwanda, Bosnia, etc. For instance, it has been documented that for the past twenty years overall crime rates, and many categories of crime including juvenile crime, have been consistently declining. Yet for some reason, and at purely coincidentally occurring two and four years intervals, we are often faced with the impending specter of “fighting the crime problem” or “getting tough on wayward youth,” or some other such imminent catastrophe. Similar phenomenon also exist for such events as suffering caused

by a lack of health care, military aid and its relation to fighting the drugs that are killing Johnny (who still can’t read), and so forth. In short, we tend to go on compassion/indignation binges – every year or two one atrocity or another is the object of public indignation, charity, and large amounts of media scrutiny.

One can clearly see the effects of the presentation of tragedy in the public’s reaction to the World Trade Center tragedies. After September 11th the populace flew into a proper moral panic as described by Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, replete with scapegoats, hostility, tighter enforcement of laws, and changes of policy (156). All tragedy has the potential for markedness, but it was arguably the presentation of this tragedy that caused the populace to fly into a moral panic; one wonders if farmers in Wyoming would have trucked down to Wal-Mart to buy their American flags had the September 11th tragedy gone underreported. Similarly, the atrocious conditions under which the Afghani women live – conditions which, for a long time, had remained outside our moral focus – were suddenly and repeatedly thrust into our moral realm.

The Elementary Forms of Spectacular Atrocity

One of the eventual results of constantly being bombarded by images of atrocity and suffering is that our moral sentiments suffer from compassion burnout; the sense of caring for all living things that we may have felt as children is replaced by a harsher cynicism and a rather clear delineation of who we will care about and who lies outside our sphere of concern. The more we are presented with these images of suffering, the more we push them outside our sociomoral sphere of relevance. And so the levels get ratcheted up – the ratings demand it, after all – and daily life slowly becomes supersaturated with the images and suffering and atrocity. This process slowly unmarks the imagery presented; it passes through us, undigested and unfiltered, essentially because it has been designated as irrelevant.

One can go as far as to say that some sort of tragedy over which the public-at-large is indignant is part of everyday life. So long as we are doomed to remain spectators to atrocities and tragedies that are only half-real, we must keep switching our attention lest we be forced to dwell on something and be morally compelled to act on the conditions that produce it – for example, a large newspaper like the New York Daily News will occasionally report on the dreadful conditions of sweatshop workers, but will switch the news story of the week lest we start having godless ideas about boycotting the companies which use such labor. But even our memory of disasters, which usually lie outside the political or moral realm and hence would require no direct action against tectonic plates on the part of the spectator, is a mere two years (Clarke). In short, we can’t seem to concentrate on more than one major news story at a time; recall the media consternation over the joint deaths of Princess Diana and Mother Teresa.

To be sure, the repetition and ephemeral nature of the presentation of tragedy plays a role both in provoking our sensitivities and washing out the color of their effects. The first time we see the aforementioned crippled beggar, we most likely feel an acute mixture of pity and revulsion at the person's condition. Seen enough times, however, the beggar fades into the urban landscape and becomes just another part of walking in New York City. Through repetition we become desensitized to the images presented to us; the information grows less and less noticed in the moral sphere of the populace. Whereas before the image of an emaciated African child or a Holocaust victim might bring one to tears, now they are accepted almost as part of the milieu of common suffering, assuaged by occasional remarks on the regrettable nature of it all. We may claim to "feel their pain," but in reality much of it has shifted to a cognitive sphere lying beyond our scope of moral relevance.

Those unlucky enough to reside outside that scope merge into one big blob of humanity: 'nonpersons'. Zerubavel writes:

The fine line that helps us separate persons from nonpersons also keeps our moral concern confined to those we regard as being included within a certain 'circle of altruism' which it helps delineate. Anyone we see as lying beyond the limits of this circle is essentially considered morally irrelevant to us and, as such, does not arouse our moral 'instincts' at all. (404)

As we are faced with these repetitious and ever more heartrending images of tragedy, we consign yet more humanity into the realm of nonpersonhood. Our 'circle of altruism' shrinks, from the child's compassion towards every living and at times inanimate thing to only certain categories of people. We find our sphere of comfort and stay there, refusing to acknowledge our relation to the suffering of the world or the homeless on the street. By narrowing our focus we turn these people and their sufferings into nonpersons whose fate is 'not our problem.'

Bringing the spectacle closer to home, the presentation of atrocity also serves to reinforce social norms – for example, the solution to world hunger is never presented in the media as 'overthrow capitalism,' but rather 'donate money to Unicef.' Presenting atrocity in a manner which encourages one to be a spectator of nonpersons as opposed to an active agent in their liberation encourages people to be spectators as opposed to engaging in valiant or much more mundane struggles for better public transportation, working conditions, etc. Atrocity is also used to provide a sort of alternate universe from which the viewer can recoil in horror and bless the gods that, even if he is alienated from his species-being, at least there's still CNN.

Such is the cynicism bred by the spectacular, mundane atrocity and its falsely individuated or mendaciously lumped presentation. Through our roles of spectators and consumers of atrocity we become passive participants in a sociomental (Zerubavel 398) structure mediated and defined by the images presented to us. As described by Guy Debord, "the tangible world is replaced by a selection of images which exist above it, and which simultaneously impose themselves as the tangible par excellence" (59). As spectators we are conditioned to identify with images and the symbolic presentation which locates tragedy either within or outside of the realm of moral relevance.

The Unbearable Lightness of Passive Observation

And what of the moral and ethical implications of the presentation of tragedy – does it matter if the thought patterns and norms held by those with the power to influence these presentations sway the nature of their theoretically balanced presentation? Or, more bluntly, does it matter that "all the news fit to print" effectively means "all the news fit to print as designated by the standards and concerns set by the needs of the current institutional order?"

The rather predictable answer to these questions is yes; it does matter, for we have seen that the highlighting of or inattention to an atrocity can happen for a variety of personal or political reasons, all of which we would be wise to attend to. To quote Howard Zinn, "They say Dan Rather is an anchor man...what is he anchored to? He's anchored to the establishment – and that's the definition of an anchorperson" (Zinn). In addition, that which is put into our brains determines the outcome of our thoughts, and we cannot come to reasonable conclusions as to what should be the subject of our moral focusing based on skewed or incomplete data.

Also, by turning human suffering into a sensationalistic news story one commodifies it and turns it into that which can be sold back to us. The exchange of our human experience for ratings cheapens our existence to the point that we must put up for sale ever more exaggerated tragedy, which perpetuates a cycle that can only end in absurdity or worse.

Another consequence is perhaps less obvious: as the scope of moral focus is shifted, this newly delineated area of cognitive relevance can be used as a basis for creating political motivation and justifying or legitimizing political ideas. When images of tragedy and atrocity are presented in such a way as to locate them within our sphere of moral relevance, these tragedies or atrocities are tied to values and identity concepts held by the observer. Conversely, in a situation in which the tragedy is perpetrated by a group or power that has become marked with the status of "other," how the tragedy is attended to and whether or not it is perceived as relevant to us depends on whether or not it can be portrayed as intrinsically infringing upon the values and identity purported to be held by the perpetrators.

Control over the nature and degree of these designations can be harnessed to generate political motivation. Consider Theodor Geiger's conception of the community of pathos, or any grouping based around an ideal: "every union in collective pathos for a good, a value, take a hostile attitude toward those who espouse an opposite value conception . . . Common advocacy of a good enveloped by pathos is the unanimous negation of everything which contradicts this good. The nature of antagonism, the hostile rejection of other value conceptions is implicit in the value-idea itself" (211).

Thus if the tragedy or atrocity is portrayed in a way that appears to threaten the basic values or mores of the group, and particularly if it disrupts the flow of orderly life and injects a greater degree of uncertainty into it, the discontent with such a disruption and the perceived threat to the common value can be rallied into a political imperative based upon the antagonism inherent in the ideal itself. This is particularly effective if the tragedy is connected in some ways to symbols that resonate as the cognitive crystallizations of group values, which raises the distinction between the tragic and that which is outside of the realm of moral relevance to a level of antagonism.

Through the above we can see that the images of tragedy and suffering that bombard us daily do indeed have their effects. Through them, the tragedy that we would not have known about two hundred years ago (before the advent of widespread media) has been incorporated into our daily existence. To shield ourselves from the tragic overload, we learn to delineate what is within our sphere of concern and what is not; what does not fall into the realm of our concern we can look at as merely spectators of 'the news.'

Yet through our role of passive spectators we learn to become complacent with human suffering and with existing social structures. The tragedy which was so marked to us as children fades into the gray of everyday existence, where it ceases to cause us concern and goads us into inaction. It is time to recognize the role that the presentation of tragedy and atrocity plays in our mundane existence and to take responsibility for its role in redirecting our moral focus. And from there, who knows? Maybe we'll get a new Media of the Mundane.

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Police Use of Excessive Force against Black Males: Aberrations or Everyday Occurrences

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Abstract: This essay discusses the issue of police use of excessive force against black males while focusing on the recent cases of Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, Demetrius DuBose and Timothy Thomas. This essay argues that contrary to popular belief that what happened to these men and others like them are not isolated incidents but rather examples of a long line of black males who face the prospect of police brutality on an everyday basis.

Not since police clubbed and maced protestors at the 1968 National Democratic convention in Chicago had the issue of police use of excessive force been the focus of news coverage than when four Los Angeles police officers were videotaped savagely beating Rodney King on the side of the road. The officers delivered 56 crunching blows, fracturing King's eye socket, smashing his cheekbone, causing facial nerve damage and a broken leg. Police say they were provoked: King had supposedly resisted arrest and reached into his pocket, causing them to believe that he had a gun. Two of the four officers involved were eventually convicted and sentenced to jail.

Because of the publicity that the incident attracted and the jail time incurred by two of the officers, one would have thought that the attention would have made police officers more cautious about employing such force for fear of being videotaped and subsequently reprimanded. Still, some policemen continue to use excessive force, especially against black males. Criminal Justice Professor and former New York City police officer James Fyfe, a leading expert on policing, once asked whether white police officers have "two trigger fingers," one for whites and one for African Americans (Fyfe 1978).

The number of incidences of white police use of excessive force against black males since the Rodney King beating has seemingly shown little sign of decline (Amnesty International 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 1998). If this is so, such a pattern is not all that uncommon to African Americans. In the 1970s blacks were seven times more likely than whites to be killed by police (Pinkney 1984). By the 1980s blacks were nine times more likely than whites to be killed by police (Nelson 93). In a previous article published in 2001 this author found that from 1991 to 2001 there were at least twenty-two high profile¹ cases of white police use of excessive force against black males (Jeffries 2001).

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Recent Examples of White Police Use of Excessive Force

A year after the King atrocity, two white Detroit police officers bludgeoned Malice Green to death with their flashlights tearing off part of his scalp. Three years later, five foot five inch-one hundred forty five pound Johnny Gammage was pulled over while driving through a predominantly white Pittsburgh suburb, only to be choked and beaten to death after allegedly attacking five white police officers. In 1997, a New York City police officer rammed a stick from a toilet plunger six inches into the rectum of Abner Louima rupturing his intestines (Troutt 6). To make matters worse the officer stuck the soiled stick into the victim's mouth. Two years later, Amadou Diallo and former pro football player Demetrius DuBose were murdered by New York City and San Diego police respectively. Diallo was shot by four white plain-clothes officers while standing in the vestibule of his own Bronx apartment building. According to the officers upon approaching the building Diallo stepped back inside as if to hide. When Diallo reached into his pocket the officers fired a total of 41 shots, striking him 19 times. What the police thought was a gun turned out to be a wallet.

That summer, DuBose, previously of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and New York Jets was shot by two white San Diego police officers. The officers were investigating a burglary when they happened upon the multi-millionaire and Notre Dame graduate. An investigation by the family's attorney revealed that DuBose cooperated with the officers' investigation until they began to "harass and intimidate" him (Amnesty International 1999a). The officers claimed that DuBose charged at them with a pair of nunchakus sticks, a martial arts weapon that he allegedly wrestled away from one of them. Several onlookers said DuBose was shot in the back (Perry A3). To add insult to injury after shooting DuBose the officers stood over his body for more than ten minutes before calling an ambulance (Amnesty International 1999c). An autopsy report revealed that DuBose was shot twelve times, six in the back (Perry A3). When asked to explain how a young man of DuBose's stature could end up being killed in this manner San Diego's police chief called it an isolated incident--an aberration (Perry A3).

In 2001 Timothy Thomas was shot and killed by Cincinnati police making him the fifteenth black male killed by police there in the last six years. Some of those shootings may have been justified, but the fact that no whites were killed during this period raises serious questions. Recently, an Inglewood police officer was captured on videotape slamming a sixteen-year old boy on the trunk of a squad car and punching him in the face even though the youngster was handcuffed.

This paper is concerned with two questions: 1) Are acts of police use of excessive force by white officers against black males aberrations or common everyday occurrences? And 2) why has police use of excessive force against black males continued to persist?

Relevant Literature and Other Important Data

While research concerning police brutality increased after the uprisings of the late 1960s few contemporary articles have been published that focus on race as a factor in police use of excessive force (Human Rights Watch 1998). Moreover, researchers (Weisburd et al. 2000; Tonry 1995; Adams 1986) are *divided* as to whether racial differences in the use of excessive force exist and, if they do exist, whether such disparities can be attributed to race. The Christopher Commission (a panel headed by Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher), designed to provide Los Angeles with an independent study of the practices of the LAPD concluded that local policing was not applied in a fair and non discriminatory fashion for all city residents. More specifically, the Commission found that white officers often used excessive force, especially with African Americans (Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department 1991). By contrast Kenneth Adams (1996) argues that "the available data on the question of whether the rate of excessive force is higher among minorities is far from determinative." Similarly, Michael Tonry (1995) argues that little if any reliable data is available that demonstrates systematic racial discrimination in police use of force. For many blacks the relationship is not as ambiguous. On the whole, surveys show that blacks believe that white police are more likely to use excessive force against blacks than against whites (Weisburd et. al 2000). Data from a Harris survey in 2000 indicated that only 36% of blacks believed that police treat all races fairly as compared to 69% of whites (U.S. Department of Justice 2000).

Former Los Angeles Detective Don Jackson was so convinced of the relationship between being black and being the victim of white police use of excessive force that he set up an undercover sting to obtain visual evidence of it. The result: a white Long Beach police officer shoved his head through a plate glass window and charged him with resisting arrest and damaging property (Turque et al.1991). Jackson would later quit the force.

The lack of comprehensive systematic data showing a conclusive relationship between the race of the pedestrian/motorist and the use of excessive force by white police officers does not obscure the fact that blacks are treated differently² by white police, and are more likely than other segments of the population to be accosted by them during an encounter (Bureau of Justice 1997; Turque et al.1991). The absence of a national database has enabled many policy makers and those in law enforcement to deny that such a problem exists. The primary reason for the lack of data is that many incidents of brutality go unreported by the victim as well as by the officer for obvious but different reasons (Turque et al.1991). To some extent the experiences of blacks and the testimony of those in the law enforcement and legal community helps compensate for the lack of conclusive scientific data.

In a recent study more than 25 percent of white officers interviewed in Illinois and 15 percent in Ohio stated that they had observed an officer harassing a citizen "most likely" because of his or her race (Weisburd et al. 2000). District Attorney John L. Burris spoke of excessive force against blacks³ by white police in this manner: "In every city police force that I studied, I found examples of unchecked brutality" (Burris 1999). In Los Angeles such brutality appears to be the order of the day. Officer John Mitchell, who worked out of South Central's 77th division, said that most of the officers that he worked with were racist and moreover, "extremely eager to be in a shooting" (Dominick 1994). In light of this admission it is not surprising that during the 1980s black males were disproportionately subjected to the LAPD's use of the chokehold. More specifically, sixteen out of the eighteen citizens that died as a result of the chokehold were black males (Wallace 1982).

Los Angeles is not the only city where policing tactics have been called into question. Investigations of police departments in Buffalo, Charleston, West Virginia, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, New Orleans, Orange County, Florida, Philadelphia and Selma, Alabama have revealed that racism and brutality are widespread and often tolerated by department commanders (Burris 1999; Parenti 1995). In Selma, police harassment of black males had become so prevalent that black leaders installed a telephone hotline for people to report police use of excessive force (Benn 1996). While such findings and personal testimony may appear anecdotal and case specific to some, they still provide some insight into the dynamics of white police use of excessive force against black males throughout the United States.

Police Violence Against Black Males: A Common Occurrence

Whenever a highly publicized case involving the beating or murder of a black person by a white police officer occurs, police department's hurry to get out the message that it is an isolated incident. By calling it an isolated incident the department tries to give the public the impression that the incident was an atypical tragedy and that such behavior on the part of the officers involved was not sanctioned and therefore outside the norm of what is considered acceptable behavior by those in charge. After Haitian immigrant Abner Louima was tortured and sodomized inside a Brooklyn police station, the mayor and the Police Commissioner immediately held a press conference condemning the officers involved. However, they refused to give any merit to the theory that police use of excessive force was a commonly used practice against black males. Not surprisingly, the police commissioner called the Louima beating an isolated incident, an aberration. Approximately three years later, the mayor and a newly appointed Police Commissioner said the same of the Diallo murder.

Given the ignominious racist past between the police and the black community in the United States one is hard-pressed to find credence in the notion that the beatings and murders of Louima, DuBose, Abner and others are isolated incidents. Indeed in *An American Dilemma* Gunnar Myrdal (1944) argued that the U.S. has a history of using law enforcement to keep blacks subdued and subjugated, dating back to slavery. For generations the formal, officially approved role of police, both in the South and often in the Northern "free" states, was that of oppressor: keeping slaves in their place and capturing and returning runaways to their owners and, later, enforcing Jim Crow segregation laws (Murphy & Wood 1984). Murphy and Wood (1984) argue that traditionally, the relationship between blacks and the police has been an oppressive one. For example, between 1920 and 1932, white police officers were responsible for more than half of all the murders of black citizens in the South. White officers were also responsible for 68 percent of blacks killed outside of the southern region of the U.S. (Myrdal 1944).

It is this writer's contention that white police officers' use of excessive force against black males are not isolated incidents, but rather common everyday occurrences. That black men are more likely than others to be the victims of white police violence suggests that there is a pattern of behavior on the part of some white police officers throughout the United States (Weisburd et al. 2000). This gruesome reality apparently was not lost on one man who, while marching in protest of the Diallo verdict raised his infant son in the air and shouted in a display of perverse prophecy "shoot him now, you may as well shoot him now!" (Troutt 2000).

Why Police Use of Excessive Force Against Black Males Has Continued to Persist

The reactions of both whites and blacks to these horrific acts of excessive force go a long way in explaining why such behavior by law enforcement has persisted. I argue that while many whites believe that some beatings and murders of black males by white police officers is unethical they do not believe that such tragedies happen to black people with any frequency. Hence the reason many were shocked by the videotaped beating of Rodney King. Some of these individuals (due to no fault of their own) were so far removed from the daily atrocities of urban life that they were totally unaware that such things occurred regularly. For some whites whose lives were as mundane as the characters in the movie Pleasantville the graphic videotape of King being pummeled jolted them into reality. Unfortunately, this jolt was not enough to produce any kind of mass based mobilization campaign against police misconduct.

A second group of whites believe that black males are at fault. In other words, they believe that the victim brought on the beating or shooting by being combative, resisting arrest or by being disrespectful to the police. After all, the police would not use such force without a valid reason. Hence, in the minds

of some whites the person got what he deserved. A third group deems that the beating of Rodney King and other black males is barbaric, but rationalizes these beatings by convincing themselves that, while unfortunate, they are a necessary byproduct of the war on crime. This group of whites I would argue has bought into the rhetoric concerning the War on Crime/Drugs and the depiction of black males as criminals.

In the minds of some whites blacks are synonymous with deviance and criminality (Entman & Rojecki 2000). Indeed the black male was the centerpiece of George Bush's law and order campaign. In the closing weeks of the 1988 presidential election Bush ran a television ad that criticized his democratic opponent for being soft on crime. The voiceover said: "Governor Michael Dukakis granted this man a weekend furlough from prison. While on furlough this man escaped to Maryland where he raped a woman and tortured her fiancé in their home" (Edsall & Edsall 1991). The individual to whom the voiceover was referring was a brown-skinned African American man named William Horton. The Bush campaign made Horton darker in complexion and renamed him Willie. In short Horton's image in the ad was altered to look especially ominous. While the Bush campaign denied that there was any racial connection the ad undoubtedly played on the fears that many whites have about being the victims of black crime. Years later Ron Paul, a U.S. Congressman, reiterated this theme, writing in a report, "I think we can safely assume that 95 percent of the black males are semi-criminal or entirely criminal" (Kurtzman 1997).

Again the image of black men as criminals resonates with many whites. This is in large part the reason why whites can kill other whites, blame it on black males and initially not be considered suspects. Case in point: In 1989 Michael Stuart of Boston shot and killed his wife, but told police that while driving in a bad neighborhood he and his wife were confronted by a robber (Steinberg 1995). During the encounter, the assailant supposedly shot and killed Stuart's wife. The assailant also shot Stuart, but Stuart managed to get away. Five years later, in South Carolina, Susan Smith locked her two sons in a car and pushed the vehicle into a river, drowning the two boys. In both cases Smith and Stuart claimed that the assailant was a black male. The result: local law enforcement embarked on a manhunt in search of this black phantom killer, violating the rights of many in the process. The reason that Smith and Stuart figured that blaming black men would be a practical and viable alibi is because they were very much aware of the view that some whites have of black males. Indeed, research into the attitudes of whites bears this out. In a recent study of white jurors in capitol cases some whites were found to harbor bigoted feelings toward black defendants. Examples of comments made under anonymity in one capitol case include (Amnesty International 1999b; 1999c):

"He (the defendant) was a big black man who looked like a criminal."

"He was big and black and kind of ugly, so I guess I thought he fit the part."

Complicit in this depiction of black men as criminals is the American media. Black men have been unfairly, but in some instances intentionally depicted by some media as dangerous criminals (Entman & Rojecki 2000; Wilson & Gutierrez 1995). In his book *The Culture of Fear* Barry Glassner criticizes the media for stigmatizing black men. He says,

Thanks to the profuse coverage of violent crime on local TV news programs... night after night, Black men rob, rape, loot and pillage in the living room. The media do their part in influencing the attitudes of the white public so that such warlike measures against Black people by the police are tolerated (Glassner 1999).

Hence, some media have constructed black men as dangerous criminals who should be controlled and admonished. Some whites have undoubtedly bought into this erroneous depiction, and it manifests itself in their belief systems.

A fourth, albeit small group of whites genuinely believe that blacks should be kept in their place and as a result feel little sympathy for the Kings, Louimas and Diallos of the world. Some of them may have grown up during an era when hatred of blacks was commonplace and publicly acceptable. Indeed, the hatred of blacks has been so much a part of being a white American that many individuals do not feel personal guilt or responsibility for the oppression of black people. For example, when asked in an interview to explain the high percentage of black choke-hold deaths in Los Angeles, Police Chief Daryl Gates said, "the veins and arteries do not open up as fast in blacks as they do in normal people" (Wallace 1982). In their book, *Black Rage*, psychiatrists Grier and Cobbs (1968) assert that the nation has incorporated such racist thinking into its folkways and traditions leaving the individual free to shrug his shoulders and say: "That's our way of life."

The black community's response to incidents of police use of excessive force against black males is just as underwhelming and typical as whites. I would argue that unlike many whites most African Americans are not shocked by the beatings of black males like the one recently in Inglewood, California because nearly all blacks are aware that such incidents are common occurrences in the lives of black men. For many blacks, police use of excessive force against other African Americans is not news. Unfortunately, because such travesties happen frequently many blacks do not feel compelled to thwart this madness, as they believe based on past experience that any effort to address the issue will be ignored by those in power or be met with increased repression. It should be made clear that whites have a vested interest in the conservation and protection of the economic and social resources they currently hold. The police, through

differential enforcement and violence against blacks, play an important role in maintaining the status quo as whites see it (Fielding 1991).

A second and much smaller group of African Americans are indeed taken aback when they hear of instances or see videotapes of white police beating black men. They are surprised to learn that such a thing could still happen in this day and age. Individuals who make up this group are the ones most likely to participate in a march or protest as a way of demonstrating their displeasure with police treatment of blacks. Such protests are usually short-lived, because the participants know that no matter how long they march and protest police will continue to deal with blacks in a harsh and asymmetrical manner. In other words police use of excessive force against black males will persist because that is the manner in which white police have always dealt with black males.

There is a third group of African Americans (many of them affluent) who while they find police use of excessive force against black males disconcerting they tolerate police transgressions because like some whites they too have bought into the politicians' rhetoric on the war on crime and the depiction of black males as criminals. Charles Stewart, the press secretary to State senator Diane Watson of South Central and himself an African American, best summed up the attitude of LA's black politicians on the issue: "As long as you have this sort of fear, then the perception of law-abiding minorities is going to be that the police are not as bad as the gangs. When you have a state of war, civil rights are suspended for the duration of the combat" (Dominick 1994).

Conclusion

No driver or pedestrian welcomes being stopped by the police, but for blacks such incidents contain a potential for harm and abuse seldom experienced by whites except those who are actually wanted by the law (Bell). In the world in which black males live, the prospect of being accosted by a white police officer⁴ is a real everyday threat. Again, by calling the beatings and murders of black male motorists and pedestrians by white police officers isolated incidents or aberrations, the establishment tries to convince the public that such occurrences are rare and outside the norm of acceptable police protocol. In reality, though, the atrocities committed by whites against blacks have historically been carried out by a few, but with the silent assent of the majority. For the most part there is no outrage, no revulsion, no call to conscience; rather, there is a tacit agreement that such things happen because of a "few hotheads" – who are criticized but are nevertheless protected by the social body (Grier & Cobbs 1968).

The frequency with which white police officers employ excessive force against black males has led a new generation of black men to teach their sons "The Lesson—instructions on how to handle a police stop (Roddy 1995). The recent manhandling and beating of a black teenager by a white Inglewood police officer is but one example of an atrocious yet everyday common occurrence in the life of an African American male. That a bystander was there to videotape

this grotesque display of force is an aberration, but the attack on the youth by the officer was not. Given the environment in which we live it is reasonable to conclude that racism, indifference and the conspiracy of silence will continue to send a message to some white police officers that brutal acts against black males are acceptable (Davis 1993). Police use of excessive force against blacks is so mundane that it is no longer considered a pressing social ill. This state of affairs has contributed to an entrenched sense of inertia on the part of blacks and those whites that are concerned with the preservation of civil liberties. Because police use of excessive force against black males is not an issue of any significance the perpetrators of these dastardly deeds have not been held accountable by their victims, supervisors or the nation's lawmakers in any systematic fashion. Indeed there seems to be a feeling on the part of many that such things continue to occur to black males because they have always occurred.

NAACP President Kweisi Mfume put it best when he said, "The fact of the matter is, if you are a person of color living in the United States, the police often look at you differently and with a greater level of suspicion. They always have, and until something is done to raise the level of accountability, they will continue to do so" (*About... Time* 2000).

Notes

¹ High profile cases are defined as those that received coverage in the New York Times or Washington Post newspapers. The thinking here is that if the Post or Times covered an incident that occurred somewhere other than New York or the DC area then that incident should be considered national news.

² A 1997 household survey by the Justice Department found that Blacks were about 70 percent more likely to have had contact with the police than whites. The survey also revealed that at least one-half of all the people who reported having been hit, pushed, choked, threatened with a gun, or restrained by a dog were Black.

³ The words Black and African American are used interchangeably according to sound and context.

⁴ After reading this paper a white colleague commented unconvincingly that black males are increasingly being victimized by black police officers. When I asked the Professor to provide the source for this information my request went unanswered. It should be noted that none of the major surveys that have been conducted in the past or recently indicate that black pedestrians or motorists experience problems with black officers on any kind of consistent basis. In a fairly recent study Lersch and Feagin stated that of the 130 cases of police use of excessive that they found over a two year period 113 (86.9%) of the victims were black. In addition, of those 130 cases 104 (92.8%) of the officers involved were white while only 5 (4.5%) of the officers were black. For more detail see Kim Michelle Lersch and Joe R. Feagin. "Violent Police-Citizens Encounters: An Analysis of Major Newspaper Accounts." *Critical Sociology* 22 (1996): 29-49.

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Ordinary Atrocities: Toward a politics of outrage

Scott Schaffer

Managing Editor

Abstract: This article works to develop a twinned set of ideas: namely, that atrocity is a concept that should be extended to cover a wider variety of social problems, including poverty, homelessness, sexual violence, disease, and others, that impact on our daily lives; and that, following from the idea of "ordinary atrocities," a politics of outrage, one that mobilizes our sense of rage and helplessness, should be developed in order to prevent ordinary – and thereby extraordinary – atrocities from occurring at all.

It was our original idea when conceiving of this special issue to *not* have it be a commemoration of 9/11. After all, we thought, there are numerous horrible things that happen in the world on a daily basis that qualify as "atrocities" and should provoke a sense of outrage, so why focus only on one day, one set of attacks? Naomi Mandel's introduction to this issue has done a good job of highlighting the tensions between memory and forgetting, between protecting our own physical and psychic integrity, between feeling and not feeling for all of the bad things in the world. We find ourselves, in this the third year of the 21st century, stuck: the world can be a nasty place, but we live in Generica, that set of suburbs that looks like every other set of suburbs in North America, and it's a nice place. How do we reconcile the two?

The usual response, of course, is that we *do not* reconcile them. We ignore the nastiness of the world, live in our nice suburban homes with our nice suburban cars, and forget that outside the walls of our gated communities (whether actually or only metaphorically walled-off from the rest of the world), that nastiness remains. Much of urban sociology done since the mid-1960s – in other words, since the dramatic overdevelopment of suburban regions that resulted, in part, from the "white flight" from American cities – has shown that everything from the architecture of suburban homes (no front porch, entrances not visible from the street, cul-de-sacs instead of houses along high streets) to the tendencies of suburban folks to go home after work and stay home indicates a tendency that some call "nesting": of building some kind of safe place, a refuge from the world, where we go to have our lives.

There is a problem with this way of life, though – it pretends the rest of the world doesn't exist, except through the rude interruptions of TV programs that we call "the news." Wars, refugee crises, disease, malnutrition, poverty, *Journal of Mundane Behavior*, volume 3, number 3 (September 2002), pp. 415-425. © 2002, Scott Schaffer and *Journal of Mundane Behavior*. All rights reserved.

global bankruptcies, and all other sorts of large-scale horribleness make their way into our homes every day. How are we supposed to respond to this? If we care as much as it would appear that not only CNN, but also Sally Struthers and Angela Lansbury, want us to, what do we have left for ourselves and the people who *really* matter? But to not care at all would make us horrible people, the kinds of unfeeling people who make all these atrocities possible? So what do we do?

Mandel is absolutely correct when she says that we use our everydayness, our mundanity, to protect us from atrocity. We have jobs, bills, child care, personal hobbies, and all sorts of other things that we have to take care of; how could we possibly attend to the Yugoslavian civil war, the Rwandan genocide, the AIDS epidemic in Africa, global environmental degradation, the dramatic underproduction of food across Africa, or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict? There simply isn't time for it all, or even one key concern. So we privilege our safe, secure lives over those of peoples across the world who are killing each other/being killed by their neighbors/being ripped off by their political leaders/being oppressed by nasty people. Of course we do – that's how we have to get through our daily lives, the ones for which we are directly responsible.

I'm not saying here that we are responsible for Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Afghanistan, Israel or Palestine, at least not directly. Instead, my point is this: we take these things as facts in the world, other people's problems, sad situations indeed, and then most Americans go back to their stock portfolios, SUVs, and their obsession with work. We feel we can do nothing about these big problems, so that's what we do. And very often, we even forget these things happened or are happening at all. Ask a coworker, a fellow student, or someone who might be interested in world affairs about current events in Zimbabwe, and I would put money down that they don't know what's going on. In a world that's wired for sound, sight, and information wherever one goes, there's just no practical reason for not knowing what goes on the world – unless, of course, we simply don't want to. That is, sadly, the sense of people in other parts of the world – that the majority of people in countries that are wealthy, relatively safe, and secure simply don't care to know anything about anywhere else in the world. And when something on the order of 14 million Americans - out of over 200 million US citizens - have passports enabling them to leave the country, that perception gets intensified: Americans are primarily concerned with their own lives, their own country, their own way of doing things.

As my students remind me at the start of every semester – not intentionally, mind you – most Americans know very little about the world around them. Finding a place like the former Yugoslavia – or even Canada – on a map can be a challenge to them, and talking intelligently about what people might be like there or how they live their lives is simply inconceivable. And as

the evaluations tend to say at the end of the semester, they don't really care to – they don't need to know. This is troubling enough, of course. But many of the students who attend my small, pretty-much-rural public university know very little about their own country, their own state, or sometimes their own city. I am regularly amazed at how many of them have never been to Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Washington DC, despite the fact that these glorious cities are about two hours' drive from us. And if they have been there, it's only been to go “the cool parts” of town – in other words, those parts of town where the hip bars, cafés, and restaurants are. They've never been *in* those cities; they simply consume the parts they want to consume, and get the hell out as quickly as possible.

What do they miss by living these gloriously innocent consumptive lives? They miss the homeless people on the streets. They miss seeing people who sell drugs because that's the only possible income for them. They miss the run-down warehouses where illegal immigrants from all over the world work twelve hours a day for a pittance because they heard somewhere that America is the land of opportunity. They miss the ramshackle public housing projects – if they haven't been demolished yet so that condos for hipsters who love the city can be built – where people live within picket fences, constantly in fear of being bounced out because someone with a drug conviction could enter their house and jeopardize their lease. They miss what Pierre Bourdieu has called *la misère du monde* – the misery of the world. Leaving aside all the atrocities that happen outside of the US, there are countless atrocities at home that fly under our radar because of the particular lifestyle we choose to lead. I should restate that: we ignore these ordinary atrocities – these atrocious aspects of our everyday lives, ones that we see almost constantly – because we don't want to see them.

Bourdieu, a leading French sociologist until his death earlier this year, organized a collection of social scientists to document these various ordinary atrocities for compilation into the book *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. There, we find studies of structural racism, poverty, political disenfranchisement, anti-immigrant sentiment, but not run through the usual social-scientific paradigms of “these are structural phenomena that you never see” or “these are interesting objective facts.” Instead, interviews with a variety of people make up the bulk of the studies – white Frenchmen and Algerian immigrants living side by side; people whose jobs with the state have been turned into jobs begging for change on the Paris metro; people who have given up voting because no one listens to them anymore. None of these studies beat their readers over the head with the claim that “you should be angry about this;” however, the critical literature as well as newspaper reviews of the original French version all emphasized the fact that now, we could understand what the problems of society were and could begin to think of solutions to them.

You've never heard of this book? I'm not surprised. There are many other books like this, ones that show the plight of children living in public housing projects in Chicago, girls dealing with the oversexualization of women in American society, gang members and their reasons for joining gangs, and countless others. These don't ever hit the *New York Times* bestseller list – we don't want them there, and we don't want to read them. These books remind us of how bad other people have it – or rather, how lucky we might be to have what we do have (including the internet connection to read this essay); and the books that we do want to see – Oprah's book club – are individualized accounts of suffering, ones that prioritize individualized solutions to that suffering. We are rarely interested in seeing books about how The System or The Man screwed over someone; for when it comes right down to it, these books might compel us to question the state of American society, or – gasp – whether or not how we live our individual lives is the right way to live. They might, in other words, make us angry.

We can go even beyond what might be called “sympathetic scholarly work” – work that tries to evoke an emotional and eventually political response to the analysis of the social problems presented there to the *Wall Street Journal*, that bastion of capitalist news-making. (I often remind my students that if they want to know how the world works, they need a subscription to the *Wall Street Journal*.) Look at the last twelve months of American capitalism – the Enron, WorldCom, and Global Crossing scandals; the demise of the public surplus; the increase of consumer debt in order to “not let the terrorists win”; and layoffs in the airline industry, among others. Are these atrocities? Not according to the public mindset – they are the simple fact of doing business in America. People may have to be laid off. Businesses go bankrupt if they can't compete. It's too bad, but that's how the world works.

Yet, if one looks behind the curtain (or between the lines), one can see that there is an element of atrocity to these mere news stories. Before Enron went belly-up, its chief administrative officers all sold their stocks, making millions of dollars for themselves, before the stock value plummeted – and destroyed the retirement plans, and thereby the safety of the “golden years,” for the majority of their employees. The Bush Administration, in granting a tax reduction that went primarily to the wealthiest people in the US, set in motion a chain of events that ensures that programs that go to public welfare, including education, Social Security, and others, would have to be cut to fund “the war on terror.” As the economy began to flag in October 2001, the Bush Administration came out and reminded people that one of the ways to prevent “the terrorists” from winning was to keep buying stuff, so we did, despite the fact that preliminary numbers suggest that real wages declined 3 percent since that time (meaning less money to buy more stuff, and thereby more consumer debt). Recent studies show that the average American carries more than 100 percent of their annual salary in consumer debt, and that real wealth – houses, investments, savings, etc. – has

declined by staggering amounts over the last 20 years, while salaries and the net worth of CEOs continues to rise by astronomical rates. And even in periods where companies make amazing amounts of profit, layoffs are inevitable if the “shareholders” (more often than not, the administrators of these companies) are not making enough off their investment, so that at one point, General Motors made \$9 billion in profits in one year, but laid off 30,000 workers.

Why don't these count as atrocities? Mandel's discussion of the flexibility of the definition of atrocity comes into clear view here: these don't count as atrocities because we don't want them to. Imagine, though, losing your job through layoffs – and every other company in your sector of the economy laying off workers as well. Would that thirty, forty, fifty thousand dollar per year loss cause your life significant damage? Would your entire standard of living change because of it? Damn straight. Your life might be irrevocably ruined because a number-cruncher somewhere said the company wasn't making enough money. You and your family might be forced onto the street. You might be forced to beg for change from unsympathetic workers, tired of seeing panhandlers on their way to get a half-caf nonfat latté on their way to work. Would *this* count as an atrocity? Damn straight – for you; for mutual fund managers and corporate wonks, it's part of the perils and privileges of the capitalist system. And your unemployment, regardless of what these “why-bother” latté drinkers might think, isn't your fault. Isn't that the core characteristic of any atrocity – that it is some action caused by someone else that violates the safety and sanctity of your life?

Yet, as Mandel reminds us, the vagueness in what we consider an atrocity “puts the definition of atrocity firmly in our hands and makes us responsible for what we choose to be outraged by.” We don't *choose* to be outraged by corporate layoffs, excessive profiteering, declining wages, and increasing personal debt loads. We don't *choose* to be outraged by rising incarceration rates, declining educational standards and results, homelessness, the warehousing of poor people in public housing projects, ghettos, or prisons. We don't *choose* to be outraged by increasing costs for higher education, declining benefits from a bachelor's degree, or the inability of intelligent, worthy university graduates to get stable, good-paying jobs. And we don't *choose* to be outraged by increasing health care costs, decreasing resources for social safety nets, the unequal treatment of women and people of color in our society, or the harassment of anyone who might be “different” from us (and this in a society that sells itself to the world as the “melting pot,” the great immigrant society, where anyone is welcome so long as they're willing to work for their greatness). That is, we don't choose to be outraged by these things unless (or until) they directly affect us. Across town, or across the world, we see these as interesting facts – sad, yes, but merely interesting.

This, to my mind, is the second key characteristic of an atrocity – one has to be *outraged by its existence, by even its mere conceivability*. The fact that something like this could even happen must invoke a sense of rage and of fury, and must impel us to act to ensure that it can never happen again. That is, after all, the slogan (for lack of a better word) of those who would ask us to recall the Holocaust: always remember, so that it can never happen again. Atrocity compels outrage; if there's no outrage, there must be no atrocity there. And this is what prevents us from seeing all of the social problems that surround us as atrocities – we're not infuriated by their existence. Homeless people are obstacles to be stepped over on our way to the bank machine; poor people are to be pitied or reviled, depending on their willingness to get a job; people who live in the "projects" either deserve to live there or are too lazy to get real jobs and real housing; and people who can't get "real" jobs riding cubicles are either stupid or slothful. If there is an emotional response evoked by their presence – if we even notice them, if we even end up in areas of the country where we *could* notice them – it's not rage or fury; it's contempt.

Our daily experience, though, tells us exactly why these ordinary atrocities are never seen as atrocities – we're too immersed in our daily lives to feel anything for these people or their plight. In general, we don't care to know why the woman begging for change near a machine that only dispenses \$20s is there; we just ignore her because we have dinner reservations at 8. We don't want to understand what it feels like to see no future for oneself. We don't want to care about people who can't afford any other education than auto mechanic school; we just want our car back in 30 minutes or less so we can get to the next business meeting. Our mundanity does indeed insulate us from atrocity – but it also makes possible the perpetuation of these ordinary atrocities. Because we are so embedded in our own thing, we aren't generally willing to exert the time or energy to be pissed off when thousands of people lose their jobs so that ten people can make millions off them, to be angry when one thousand people living in a housing project are evicted so that luxury condominiums can be built, or even to be slightly miffed when for-profit corporations take over our public schools and convert the curriculum into mere job training.

So, if an atrocity can be characterized as an action that grievously harms a person or persons, and it can be characterized by the rage and fury of its mere conceivability, then why don't we see more atrocities in the world? Precisely because we protect ourselves with our own mundanity. We are right when we say that we have our own lives to worry about; we do, because we live in a world that makes our success, and even our very survival, dependent on what we do. But when we immunize ourselves to the ordinary atrocities going on around us by invoking our right to mundanity, when we say that the problems of homeless people, people who are uneducated or unemployed, or people who are raped are not our problems, we essentially try to absolve ourselves from any

responsibility for the world which allows these things to happen. And when doing that, we *become* responsible for them. In taking on the role of bystander, in not doing anything about these ordinary atrocities, we sit by while these decisions that negatively impact (and often destroy) the lives of people around us are made, and we say nothing. Scholars ranging from philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty to writers like Primo Levi see the bystander role as one of complicity – if something awful happens in the world and we say nothing, *we allowed it to happen, we took no stand against it*, and in some respect, we might as well have pulled the trigger ourselves. We may not have decided to fire 30,000 workers, cut resources to get people off the streets, reduce funding for K-12 education, or start the Rwandan genocide; but in not saying anything against these things, we might as well have sent out the pink slips, crossed out those lines in the budget, or picked up the first hatchet.

Responsibility, though, is a hard thing to handle, even in a society like the US that attributes everything to individual responsibility, and as Mandel points out, it is an even trickier thing to attribute. We don't like to know that we've hurt other people, so we try not to think about it. We don't look at the "Made in Cambodia" label in our Gap clothing. We avert our eyes when we drive past row after row of underpaid migrant farm workers, often surrounded by clouds of pesticides. We don't make eye contact with kids bouncing balls off the chain link fences surrounding their "home." We'll even go so far as to suffer through a horrible long-term relationship so that we don't cause our partner pain because we can't bear to know that we hurt someone. Yet, we cause these pains all the time: our desire for inexpensive clothing and food ensures that American workers lose wages and that foreign workers make infinitely less in atrocious working conditions; our desire to keep property values high ensures that poor people can only afford to live in blighted areas of cities without futures, and ensures that their kids, whose educations are supported by property taxes, don't get an education. In not seeing our responsibility, indirect or not, and in not having an emotional reaction to these problems, we allow them to continue and worsen.

So what do we do? Do we sacrifice our own lives and benefits and commit ourselves to improving the lives of others? Do we pursue absolutist altruism instead of the absolutist individual benefit we now commit ourselves to? Do we, in other words, give up ourselves for the sake of the Other?

None of these are what I am suggesting, nor am I suggesting that after reading this article and this issue we forget all we've learned. Instead, in an attempt to develop a politics of outrage, I propose the following recommendations for improving all our lives.

Inform ourselves. It is altogether too easy today to gain access to a variety of information and a diversity of perspectives on the problems of the world around us. Instant communication around the world, whether by telephone, television, or the Internet, has made it so that we can find out what's going on with a few punches of buttons or a few clicks of the mouse. Yet, Americans still tend to rely on American television for the majority of its information about the world; and given the major news networks' penchant for toeing the politically acceptable – or designed – line (in part because of fears of not being “patriotic,” in part because of their fear of losing advertising dollars), we find out what those in power want us to find out about the world.

But there are countless other avenues for gaining access to the kind of information we need to make up our own minds about what causes the problems around us and what we can and should do about them. A simple search of other global newspapers and a quick comparison of what they say with what our media tell us about anything from the drastic inequity of income distribution in the US to how other countries feel about America can speak volumes. Of course, every information source, be it a friend, a politician, or a news organization is going to have a bias; but if we find out enough about a situation, we can sort through the biases and come to some semblance of the truth.

That, though, takes a particular effort on our part. It's easy to rely on Headline News or Fox News to give us “what we need” to know about the world. We have to want to find out what's going on elsewhere. In order to do that, we have to care about what goes on elsewhere.

Care. Discussions such as those reported in the August 30/2002 *New York Times* about 9/11 curricula in schools focus in part about our emotional responses to the attacks and all the concomitant issues that are raised by them. Some curricula were criticized for being too concerned with children's emotions about the attacks; others, such as that implicit in Phyllis Schafly's criticisms, suggest that what's really needed is no discussion of emotion, but a focus on math and science instead. Neither of these options is wholly acceptable.

Instead, what we need to do is find a balance between care for ourselves and care for others. Currently, we care altogether too much only for ourselves – our interests (whether defined individually or in terms of family units) outweigh all other concerns, leading us to do things like purchase SUVs (increasing our dependence on foreign oil, our economic fragility, and pollution) and fight against any suggestion that educational funding be standardized across school districts in a state (because “why should I pay for some kid in Los Angeles to be educated when I don't see any benefit?”). This is, as I've suggested, a significant part of the problem. We need to begin to see that we benefit from being concerned about the well-being of others – education, for example, is something that travels across state, and even school district, lines, while environmental

policies impact everyone around the world thanks to the mechanism of wind – and we need to begin to obsess less with the prevention of sacrifice on our part. We are, after all, interconnected, not just with people in the next town who don't want the county landfill expanded to collect our trash, but also with people around the world, who depend on us as we depend on them through the economy, through the developing “global culture,” and through the decisions made by our politicians. Because of this, we need to act on that interconnectedness, to act with concern for others and the impact of our actions on them (and vice versa), and to make clear that we live in the world and not on its back.

We also need to begin to get angry when atrocities do happen – whether they are ordinary, like layoffs so that CEOs can make millions or the reduction of public health insurance, or extraordinary, like famines, epidemics, and wars. We need to learn to articulate that anger, so that instead of the implied “passivity and helplessness” Mandel attributes to outrage, we feel as if we must do something. Politicians, after all, rely upon what we (or at least those of us who are polled) say about their policy stances. If they continue to think that we don't care about either ordinary or extraordinary atrocities, they will do whatever they like.

Participate. Part of the reason that atrocities continue to happen, whether in the US or abroad, is that people simply do not participate, whether by structure or by choice. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Americans cheered when citizens of former Warsaw Pact countries went into the streets and said “no more,” commencing the transition from Stalinist political regimes to “democracies.” Yet, the US, that bastion of democracy, has electoral participation rates of only about 30%. American politics relies on our unwillingness to vote, to say what it is we think, what it is we want *our* delegates to do for us, and what kind of world we want to live in. As members of the Republican Party reminded us during the 2000 presidential scandal, the US isn't a democracy – despite the fact that we claim it is. Democracies require participation; politicians' power relies upon our power. By raising our voices and saying “we will no longer tolerate X,” perhaps politicians will no longer tolerate it either.

There are, of course, other means of participation, such as letter writing, membership in lobbying groups, and protests. I don't want to go so far as to recommend that everyone get out into the streets or sign up for interest group Y, but these are viable options, excellent ways to make clear what it is we want to see happen to our world. Voting is the most frequent way to stake our claim to power, but it is not always the one with the most clarity. Did the people who voted for Ralph Nader in 2000 really want to see Nader in power, or did they just not like Gush or Bore? We don't know. We need to find ways to make clear the kind of world we want to live in, the kinds of policies that we want our political delegates – and every elected individual, whether a mayor, a member

of Congress, or the President, *is* our delegate, the person to whom we have delegated the responsibility for managing our common affairs – to enact. Avail yourself of the opportunities that exist, and create new ones if need be.

Envision the world you want to live in. All of what I've said here is about enabling one element of the mission of *Journal of Mundane Behavior*, an element that has been implicit throughout our three years of existence: that to understand our everyday lives in a deeper and more sophisticated manner enables us to decide if those are the lives we want to live. In other words, awareness of what goes into producing "everydayness," "ordinariness," and "mundanity" enables a decision-making process about our future. If we begin to care about the future of our world, and we begin to think about whether or not that future is one we'd want to live in, then we can begin to envision what can be done about making the world a better place for all of us.

In order to do this, though, we have to begin to get angry – we have to feel the kind of outrage we insulate ourselves from. The world, for all intents and purposes, is not a pretty place – it's an amazing place that we tend to ruin through our actions and inertia, and it's a place that could become better for all of us. But *we* need to decide that something's wrong, figure out why it's wrong, and decide what we want to do about it. And in order to do that, we have to care. These steps toward a "politics of outrage," one that takes what may be a passive, helpless sense of fury and turns it into a motivation for action that can change the world, are designed for that purpose.

I was asked recently in Toronto, Canada, whether or not America had learned anything from 9/11. Did they learn that not everyone loves America? Did they learn that the American government often does nasty things behind its people's collective back, leaving them to shoulder the burden of anything ranging from personal anti-Americanism when abroad to terrorist attacks? Did they learn that they have to concern themselves with the welfare of the rest of the world? Did they learn *anything*?

Sadly, my answer had to be "No, I don't think America did learn anything." We still live the same lives, we still have the same self-interested concerns, and we still don't think we rely on anyone else in the world for the lives we lead. We still don't see that much of what we do reinforces the situations that allow more atrocities to occur, whether they are extraordinary attacks like those of 9/11 or ordinary atrocities like continued homelessness or racism. If there are lessons to be learned from 9/11, America hasn't learned them. And if they aren't learned soon, then *all of us* will be responsible for whatever happens.

About the Author: Scott Schaffer (scott.schaffer@millersville.edu) is Managing Editor of *Journal of Mundane Behavior* and assistant professor of sociology at Millersville University of Pennsylvania. His work - moving between social ethics, social change, and everyday life - works to further the kinds of issues discussed here. He has contributed chapters to Ed Wakin and James Cortada's *Betting on America: How the US Can Be Stronger After 9/11* (2002, PrenticeHall), as well as *The Anti-Capitalism Reader* (2002, Akashic Books), edited by Joel Schalit.

Mourning is not forgetting... It is an undoing. Every minute tie has to be untied and something permanent and valuable recovered and assimilated from the dust.

-- Margery Allingham

Sunrise

2000, colour photograph

Sol Bard

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